



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XI – The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb

Publishing History

11 of 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, March, 1892 Part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* collection by George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1892
In the US by Harper Bros., New York, 1892

BRIT ILLUS – Sidney Paget

Chronology

Baring-Gould places the date of the story at Saturday, September 7 to Sunday, September 8, 1889 which makes it the 26th of the 60. This means that Holmes was 35 and Watson 47.



Christopher Morley Says

“One of the railway men at Paddington Station brought this case to Dr. Watson, and the good doctor after treating the wounded engineer referred the mystery to Holmes. (This was the story that so excited Stevenson’s overseer in Samoa.) By the time he reached the scene of the outrage there was nothing Holmes could do, but Watson always felt a special pride in having started the investigation.”

Dummies Short Summary

“One of the grisliest Holmes stories relates Victor Heatherley’s unfortunate encounter with a meat cleaver.”

How Many Words

At 8,342 words ENGR has the 34th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is one of forgery where Holmes provided the correct solution but the forgers successfully fled the police.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

Never a very popular story. Too “dark” for a lot of readers.

- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars vote in 42nd of the 56 short stories
- 1999 – Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 50th of 56 short stories

What Else Happened That Year (1889)

- British South Africa Company Charter awarded.
- Great London Dock Strike; the "Dockers' Tanner"; growth of unskilled workers unions; New Unionism; Gasworkers' Union formed.
- March 30, Early used of photographs in newspaper: Illustrated London News runs Cambridge and Oxford boat crews.
- Act to prevent cruelty to children.
- Establishment of telephone company.
- Italy takes Somalia and Ethiopia.
- October 6--The Moulin Rouge first opens its doors.
- Treaty of Acciali: Ethiopia made Italian protectorate.
- End of Portuguese Empire in Brazil; republic proclaimed.
- Work on Panama Canal stopped; French company bankrupt.
- Bismarck introduces Old Age Insurance in Germany.
- Erection of Tacoma Building in Chicago. First skyscraper, 13 stories high.
- Conan Doyle publishes A Sign of Four.
- Mark Twain publishes A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.
- Renoir paints Girls Picking Flowers.

- Eiffel Tower completed, 985 feet high, taller than the Great Pyramid, become highest structure on earth.
- Eastman's Kodak camera comes into production, using photographic film.
- First linotype machine in use.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Watson is practicing medicine and living with his wife. Watson continually visited Holmes and “occasionally even persuaded him to forgo his Bohemian habits so far as to come and visit us” (Watson and wife).

Dramatis Personae

These are the cast members of this dramatically “pressing” story.” (sorry)

- **Victor Hatherly**, a hydraulic engineer of Victoria St.
- **Railway Guard**, patient of Watson who brought the engineer to him.
- **Colonel Lysander Stark aka Fritz**, counterfeiter and attempted murderer.
- **Dr. Becher aka Mr. Ferguson**, accomplice of Stark who owned the mansion where the press was located.
- **Elsie**, countrywoman of Stark
- **Jeremiah Hayling**, another hydraulic engineer who had disappeared one year before without a trace.
- **Inspector Bradstreet**, of the yard who accompanied Holmes *et al* to Eyford in Berkshire.
- **Plainclothesman**, assistant to Bradstreet.
- **Venner & Matheson**, firm to which Hatherley had been apprenticed.

Quotable Sherlock

For whatever reason, Sherlock made no really memorable comments.

- "Experience," said Holmes, laughing. "Indirectly it may be of value, you know; you have only to put it into words to gain the reputation of being excellent company for the remainder of your existence."

Holmes' Fee

Holmes' client was broke and had no money. This balances out some of the really big paydays from rich clients.

Unrecorded Cases

Just one here, but a lot of Sherlockians have tried to write this story.

- Colonel Warburton's madness

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

ENGR has only been done 3 times and none are very good.

- 1923 The Engineer's Thumb with Eille Norwood was one of the last of Norwood's 47 movies. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1986 The Twentieth Century Approaches (with SECO) with Vasily Livanov in the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson.
- 2001 The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb in the 2001 Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century (Animated TV series)

Fainting In The Canon

Victor Hatherley definitely faints as well as almost Faints in this tale.

Annotated Sherlock

- **"carbolic acid"** bandaged impregnated with carbolic acid or phenol. The compound's use as an antiseptic was popularized by Joseph Lister.
- **"rashers"** thin slices of bacon or ham, broiled or fried.
- **"chinchilla beard"** A beard gathered into tufts, resembling the fur of an animal. While the origin of the phrase is unknown, this limerick has achieved popularity:

When the catch a chinchilla in Chile,
They cut off its beard, willy-nilly,
With a small razor blade,
Just to say that they've made,
A Chilean chinchilla's chin chilly.

- **"indiarubber"** natural rubber.
- **"coiners"** forging coins was a large criminal industry in Victorian England
- **"amalgam"** any alloy of mercury and some other metal

Weapons

Only 2 weapons mentioned and of vary different sizes.

- **Butcher's Cleaver** (or weapon like it) which Col. Lysander Stark used to attack Victor Hatherley, who had just escaped being crushed to death underneath Stark's hydraulic press and with which he succeeded in cutting off the unfortunate engineer's thumb, thus giving rise to the story's title
- **Hydraulic Press** - In which Col. Lysander Stark tried to crush Victor Hatherley, the overly inquisitive engineer.

Frank Mentzel