



"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches"

Vol. XIV No. 15 • December 28, 2023

"The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in June 1892. It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

This case completes *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, the first volume of Canonical cases.

Even though our chronologists have not arrived at a unanimous conclusion regarding the year in which this case took place as the table shows there is a majority.

If the majority of our Canon scholars are correct regarding which year this adventure took place in, then in 1890 Sherlock Holmes was 36 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 38.

Main Characters:

Violet Hunter, a young governess who appeals to Holmes for advice and protection when offered a position with unusual requirements. Jephro Rucastle, middle-aged landowner who ostensibly wants Violet as governess for his only son, but asks her to perform duties beyond those of a governess. Mrs. Rucastle, Jethro's submissive second wife. Alice Rucastle, Jethro's daughter by his first wife. Mr. and Mrs. Toller, the Rucastles' servants.

Little Edward, the disgusting young son of Mr. Rucastle. Mr. Fowler, Alice's fiancé. Carlo the mastiff.

Notable Quotes:

"To the man who loves art for its own sake it is frequently in its least important and lowliest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived."

"Crime is common. Logic is rare."

The Adventure of the Copper Beeches

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	Early Spring
Baring-Gould	Friday, April 5, 1889
Bell	Late April 1890
Blakeney	Early Spring 1896 to 1903
Brend	March 1890
Christ	Sunday, April 19, 1891
Dakin	April 1885
Folsom	Late March 1890
Hall	Early Spring 1890
Keefauver	Tuesday, March 18, 1890
Klinger	1890
Zeisler	Monday, April 7, 1890

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist's results for their research framework.

“You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.”

“What do the public, the great unobservant public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of analysis and deduction?”

“Data! data! data! I can’t make bricks without clay.”

“It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful country-side.”

“I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children.”



The Unfair Critic

Here we witness yet another instance of Holmes deep in a bad mood originated by a combination of bad weather and zero cases, indulging his foulness by chastising Watson over his way of documenting some of the cases.

I think that, although occasionally annoyed by his companion’s rather monumental ego, Watson is



not overly disturbed by this undeserved criticism. He had to have realized that if Holmes really despised his efforts, he would not have been so readily prepared to have him (sometimes insisting upon it) along in his cases, discuss them with him or, as with GLOR, tell him about his first efforts, before the Good Doctor glorified him with pen and paper.

As we have often discussed, it is not farfetched to assume that Holmes’ professional success was in no small part a result of Watson’s serialization of some of his cases. Had he truly been so upset by his Boswell’s output, he certainly would have refused him permission to write

about his investigations, much less suggest some of the cases he would like him to dramatize. For example, in DEVI, Watson transcribes for us the telegram that Holmes sent him: *Why not tell them of the Cornish horror—strangest case I have handled.*

The Governess’ Unhappy Life

Governessing was rarely a pleasant occupation. Sadly, this was practically the only occupation that a well-brought-up lady could respectably engage in when obligated by her limited means to earn her way in the workplace. When forced by economic circumstances these well-bred ladies (and, overwhelmingly they *were* ladies!) had little choice but to enter what invariably was almost the life of an indentured servant.

While it is true that most governesses willingly entered into this state of subjugation, instead of earning their daily bread by sewing or other some similar badly paid labor, the zeitgeist of the age did not allow it—Victorian England had a caste system almost as rigid as India's. Unlike, a man, a woman of a certain class could not take a position that was below her social status and then progress to better things. Once having taken that step down, she would never socially recover. For many women, governessing was the only way of preserving at least an appearance of well-bred living, which made them endure the indignities that such a positions so often entailed.

The governess existed in a social twilight zone—not quite a servant she was not a full member of the household, either. With few exceptions, governesses were hired or let go with about as much difficulty as would a scullery maid. The lady who had to earn her own living this way was ensnared in the limbo between the Upstairs and Downstairs. Hers was a lonely life that often culminated in spinsterhood and, none too rarely, attempted abuse by one of the males in the household.

Salaries were proportionate to the position's social importance. At the time, the salary range for governesses was within the £30 to £40 (≈\$11,250 to ≈\$15,000) range. The salary that Violet Hunter earned at her last position was at the higher end: £48 (≈\$18,000). This was equivalent to the earnings of a house steward or valet. Members of the middle class, such as clerks, head teachers, journalists, and shopkeepers earned from £300 to £800 (≈\$112,500 ≈\$300,000). In view of her diminished resources, Rucastle's offer of £100 and then £120 (≈\$38,000 and ≈\$45,000 per annum) had to have been tremendously tempting for Violet; consider that in IDEN, Holmes remarked of Marty Sutherland that, "I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely upon an income of about £60 (≈\$23,000)."

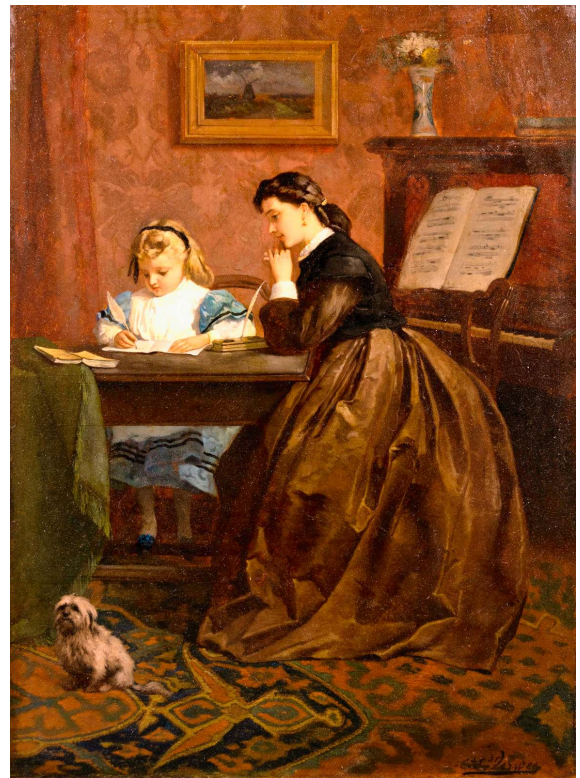
Although it is true that food and lodging were included, with the need for keeping up appearances and other minor expenses, regardless of how thrifty she may have been, a governess could not save enough to eventually free herself from the work. In fact, too many governesses drifted into a destitute old age.

Miss Violet Hunter's Accomplishments



Whenever we study this case, I always get the sneaking suspicion that either Watson did not tell us everything or Miss Hunter was not all that she seemed. Although she is quoted as telling Rucastle that, "My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine. A little French, a little German, music and drawing," at the end of the case we learn that "she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe she has met with considerable success."

Since Violet headed it, it must have been a school for young ladies. Although within the context of the time this would have meant relatively undemanding educational requirements, nonetheless, for that kind of position



she would have had to have an ampler educational background than what she revealed to Rucastle. The way she put it, her accomplishments did leave much to be desired, considering that a governess was also expected to instruct her charge in arithmetic, history, natural philosophy (science), and so forth.

Also, from Watson's phrasing it would seem that she entered upon this post not too long after the case; this would have made her one of the youngest school headmistresses around. This either points to a lady with considerably more accomplishments than we were led to believe, or she had (or somehow obtained) access to sufficient funds to start her own establishment—had that been the case, why would she have been so desperate to work for Rucastle?

The Peculiar Requirements

Although it was not unusual for a governess to have other duties, particularly in one-child households, Rucastle's requirements to have her wear a certain dress, sit where she was told, and cut off her hair were not only unusual—they went well beyond the pale. Although in those days an employer would have been entitled to tell a female (and male) household employee to wear a certain kind of apparel such as a uniform of some sort, as in the case of a chambermaid or a footman this not only would not have applied to Violet. A governess was a lady who worked, not a servant; she would have been considered these requirements to be well beyond peculiar into the realm of the offensive.

In these days when some women choose to shave their hair by shaving their pates, we have forgotten how egregious such an outlandish requirement that would have been. During the High Victorian Era (and well into the 20th century) ladies of any age wore their hair long, the exceptions being those created by disease or accident and not so much later by war.



Unless she resorted to a wig, it would have been difficult for Violet to show herself in society until her hair regrew to a proper acceptable length, which brings us to Miss Stoper. It should not have been necessary for Violet to initially decline Rucastle's demand for shorter hair. The head of the recruitment firm herself should have vigorously objected to such unusual and suspicious demands. After all, the firm was supposed to be in the business of providing qualified *respectable* young ladies for equally as respectable households. A casual acceptance of the Rucastle's terms, together with the outrageously high salary that he offered should have raised all

sorts of warning flags and alarums for Miss Stoper forcing her to outright reject Rucastle's demands; after all, she would not want her agency to acquire a ripe reputation for providing more than simple governesses!

In view of all this, it is not strange that Violet would have decided to consult Holmes about the offered position. Being all alone, able to count on someone (especially as formidable) like Holmes to call upon if needed had to be a source of comfort.

One must wonder, however, exactly what it was that Violet had in mind when she consulted Holmes, particularly if, as she herself declared, she had already decided to accept. She not only wasted the Great Detective's time, but persisted over his qualms: "I confess that it is not a situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for."

The Great Detective's attitude is also puzzling. After all his concern over her fate, when she afterwards tells him that regardless of her foolish risk-taking in Rucastle's empty rooms and being threatened with serious or even deadly bodily harm, she has decided to remain in the power of the man who has threatened her. She tells Holmes that, "Of course I might have fled from the house, but my curiosity was almost as strong as my fears," to which Holmes incredibly replied that, "You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter." Then in the next breath, he urges her to once again sail into harm's way. What could have been our sleuth's reasoning? Was the case so appealing, that he thought nothing of putting a foolish girl in danger of her life?



Greedy but Legal?

The evil stepfather or stepmother attempting to keep or gain control over a helpless girl's fortune is not an uncommon theme. The late, unlamented Doctor Roylott is a good example of the tribe. However, because of the number of sensational stories in the press of the time, it could be concluded that



this did not happen too often because when it did, it became news. Thus, it would seem certain that Alice Rucastle must not have been of age while she was being detained. In such a case, then her father might have been legally entitled to forbid her to marry and keep her in his house against her will. However, by 1890, laws had freed women from the dependence and dominance that men of the household could legally enforce upon them. Nevertheless, as was almost the case here, had the lady been forced to sign over her rights there would not have been much that could have been done unless duress could be proven. This, too, was the last year in which Rucastle might have kept his

daughter locked up under the pretense that she was *non compos mentis*.

The problem, then, is that Jephro Rucastle may have committed no crime, while Holmes, Watson, and Violet Hunter could have found themselves in a far more fragile situation.

Holmes himself admitted this when he said, "I think, Watson, that we had best escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester, as it seems to me that our *locus standi* now is rather a questionable one." In their

case, charges such as assault and battery, breaking and entering, attempted burglary, and kidnapping (locking up Mrs. Toller) might have been brought against all three. A court might have even decided that they were the proximate cause of Rucastle's injuries because the latter released the dog in an attempt to protect himself and his property from intruders.



What else happened in 1890:

Empire



per Nile; British Protectorate over Zanzibar.

Helgoland ceded to Germans.

◀ Work of Rhodes Pioneers begun in Southern Rhodesia.

Britain annexes Uganda.

Britain recognizes French Protectorate over Madagascar.

Treaty of Busah: improved Franco-British relations in West Africa.

Zanzibar Settlement: Tanganyika becomes Imperial Germany Colony; Germany excluded from Up-

Britain

Parnell vindicated of Phoenix Park murder charges; ruined by O'Shea divorce petition; rejected as leader of Irish Nationalists in Commons, resigns.



Omnibus strike in London settled on basis of 12-hour day.

Cardinal John Henry Newman dies. He was one of the founders of the Oxford movement, leading the propaganda effort for High Church doctrines.

January 4, *Daily Graphic* launched, first daily illustrated paper. Merged with *Daily Sketch* in 1926.

◀ Horniman Museum opens.

First part of Rosebery Avenue opened.

Dulwich Park, gifted by Dulwich College, opens.

Vauxhall Park opens.

City and South London Railway from Stockwell to William Street, first deep level tube railway.

London-Paris telephone line opened.

Financial panic in London and in Paris.

Lunacy Act gives management of asylums to visiting committees.

Housing of Working Classes Act.

Sir B. Baker and Sir J. Fowler complete cantilever Forth Bridge (for railway) at Queensferry, near Edinburgh; length 1.3 miles.

Charles Booth writes, *In Darkest England*.

Sir Richard Burton dies at Trieste. Famous for his visits to Mecca and Medina disguised as a Muslim pilgrim, the explorer served in the Crimean War and, with Captain Speke, discovered Lake Tanganyika. Renowned also for his books of travel and magnificent *History of the Sword*. He is best remembered as the translator of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

Caine writes, *Bondman*, a novel.

Sir James George Frazer writes, *The Golden Bough*.

Morris writes *News from Nowhere*.

Sir William Watson writes, *Wordsworth's Grave*.

World

Africa is repartitioned among the European powers. England receives the sultanate of Zanzibar and an extensive strip of territory to the north of the German West Africa possessions. France is placated by dominion over all the oases of the Sahara and the northwest portion of the Sudan extending as far as Lake Tschad. In return for German concessions, Heligoland is ceded to that country.



Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota. Last battle in the American Indian Wars. This event represents the end of the American Old West.

◀ German Dowager Empress Augusta dies at the Royal Palace at Berlin. The Queen, later Empress, devoted her time and energies to the reorganization of guilds of women under the Red Cross. Under her guidance, 677 general hospitals, 286 private lazarettos were established.

North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Washington are admitted into the Union.

Fall of Bismarck; the Prussian Prime Minister is made to resign. General von Caprivi de Caprera de Montecuculi is appointed as successor to Prince Bismarck. This event marks the beginning of William II's disastrous personal rule.

The five republics of Central America unite under one president with a five-member cabinet and diet of 15.

Workmen in France allowed compensation for contracts broken by employers.

William III of Holland dies; Luxembourg passes to Duke of Nassau.

Zemstva Law in Russia; limited franchise in local government; excluded intellectual professions.

Revolution in Argentina, President Celman ousted.

Russia attempts to limit Finnish Control over customs and money.

First meeting of Japanese Legislature under new Constitution. First great national election to the new Parliament in Japan and the provincial assemblies are held. Nearly 85% of eligible voters cast

ballots. Results show that almost all the candidates that received some sort of government employment had been repudiated by the people.



Italy annexes Eritrea.

French miners to elect delegates to supervise safety while working.

◀ Numerous arrests made at Paris in anticipation of expected Socialist demonstrations. Among them, the Marquis de Mores, a French Royalist of American cowboy fame on charge of inciting soldiers to revolt and of furnishing funds to Socialist organs. In May several labor riots occur.

Workers' agitation in London, as result of the goings-on in Paris. More than 20,000 workmen attend a mass meeting in Hyde Park.

In Chicago, the first entirely steel-framed building erected. The city is chosen as the site of the 1892 World's Fair.

U.S. signs extradition treaty with Great Britain.

Cholera again strikes pilgrims at Mecca.

French Explorer Monteil's journey Niger-Kano-Tchad-Tripoli; completed 1892.

First Chinese cotton mill constructed.

Students of the University of St. Petersburg University and the Academy of Agriculture demand the reestablishment of the more liberal regulations of 1863. Five hundred are imprisoned. This results in the police closing of the University and Technological Institute of St. Petersburg.

The Tsar issues imperial edicts against the Jews. They are forbidden to hold land, are directed to reside in towns, and are excluded from certain cities where until then they had been unmolested.

Olderbank Clubs in Italy suppressed.

Political revolts in Switzerland over the government's refusal to submit to the people the question of a revision of the constitution.

Turkish outrages reported from Armenia. Atrocities committed by the Kurd against the Armenians, half of Salonica burned down.

Heinrich Schliemann German archaeologist, discoverer of Troy, died at Naples.

Art

Franck, Belgian organ composer dies.

Cézanne paints *Mme. Cézanne in the Conservatory*.

Degas paints *Dancers in Blue*.

Gilbert writes, *Original Comic Operas*.

Barry writes, *My Lady Nicotine*.

Pietro Mascagni writes *Cavalleria Rusticana*.

Van Gogh paints *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, *Street in Anvers*, dies.

Prince Igor, commenced by Borodin (dies 1887), completed by Glazunov and Rimsky-Korsakov.

Tschaikovsky composes *Queen of Spades*.

Whistler writes, *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies*.

Paul Claudel presents *Tête d'Or*.

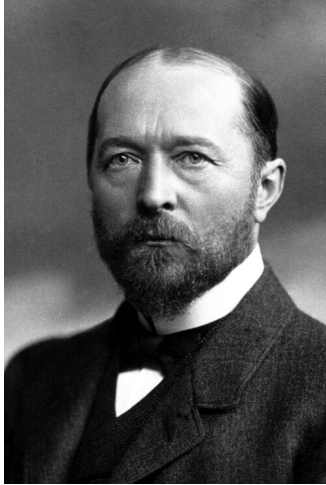
Stefan George writes, *Hymnen*.

Arno Holz writes, *Die Familie Selicke*.

Ibsen writes, *Hedda Gabler*.

Zola writes, *La Bête humaine*.

Science and Technology



Bertillon publishes *La photographie judiciaire*, in which he explains his anthropometry.

Halstead, at John Hopkins Hospital, first to use rubber gloves in surgery.

Moving-picture films, precursor of cinematography shown in New York.

◀ Emil von Behring, German bacteriologist, discovers immunity to tetanus can be given by use of serum; introduces name “antitoxin.”

Cyanide process of preparation of gold from crude ore developed in South Africa.

Lockyer’s theory of stellar evolution.

Application of pneumatic tires to bicycles makes popular craze of that sport.

P. Rudolph’s anastigmatic camera lens.

Discovery of Cleopatra’s tomb.

First use of the electric chair as a method of execution.

The cardboard box is invented.

Next week’s case: SILV.

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

“I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly...”

All Sherlock Holmes photos have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

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