



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

*An Inquiry into:
"The Adventure of the Empty House"*

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"The Adventure of the Empty House" was first published in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* in September 1903 and in *The Strand Magazine* in October 1903. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

While—not unusually so—our chronologists are not quite in accord regarding the date in which this case took place, as the table shows, they are all in agreement as to the year.

In 1894, Sherlock Holmes was 40 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 42.

Main Characters:

The Honourable Ronald Adair, second son of the Earl of Maynooth and Lady Maynooth, Ronald's mother; Hilda Maynooth, Ronald's sister; Colonel Sebastian Moran, Ronald's card partner and former associate of the late Professor James Moriarty; Mrs. Hudson, Holmes and Watson's landlady; Inspector Giles Lestrade, Scotland Yard detective.

Notable Quotes:

I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. When I turned again, Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across my study table. I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted for the first and the last time in my life.

"You'll come with me to-night?"

"When you like and where you like."

"I owe you many apologies, my dear Watson, but it was all-important that it should be thought I was dead, and it is quite certain that you would not have written so convincing an account of my unhappy end had you not yourself thought that it was true. Several times during the last three years I have

| <i>The Adventure of the Empty House</i> | |
|---|--|
| <i>Chronologist</i> | <i>Date of the Adventure</i> |
| <i>Canon</i> | <i>April 1894</i> |
| <i>Baring-Gould</i> | <i>Thursday, April 5, 1894</i> |
| <i>Bell</i> | <i>Early April 1894</i> |
| <i>Blakeney</i> | <i>April 1894</i> |
| <i>Brend</i> | <i>February 1894</i> |
| <i>Christ</i> | <i>Monday, April 2, 1894</i> |
| <i>Dakin</i> | <i>February 1894</i> |
| <i>Folsom</i> | <i>Thursday, April 5, 1894</i> |
| <i>Hall</i> | <i>April 1 (or slightly later), 1894</i> |
| <i>Keefauver</i> | <i>Thursday, April 3, 1894</i> |
| <i>Klinger</i> | <i>1894</i> |
| <i>Zeisler</i> | <i>Tuesday, April 3, 1894</i> |

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.

taken up my pen to write to you, but always I feared lest your affectionate regard for me should tempt you to some indiscretion which would betray my secret.”

“I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa, and spending some days with the head llama. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend. I then passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum, the results of which I have communicated to the Foreign Office. Returning to France, I spent some months in a research into the coal-tar derivatives, which I conducted in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the south of France.”

Three years had certainly not smoothed the asperities of his temper or his impatience with a less active intelligence than his own.

“Not so, Lestrade. I do not propose to appear in the matter at all. To you, and to you only, belongs the credit of the remarkable arrest which you have effected. Yes, Lestrade, I congratulate you! With your usual happy mixture of cunning and audacity, you have got him.”

On the margin was written, in Holmes’s precise hand: The second most dangerous man in London.

“There are some trees, Watson, which grow to a certain height, and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. You will see it often in humans. I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strong influence which came into the line of his pedigree. The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family.”

“Meanwhile, come what may, Colonel Moran will trouble us no more. The famous air-gun of Von Herder will embellish the Scotland Yard Museum, and once again Mr. Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents.”

A Death Wish?



Holmes told Watson that Moriarty “rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. He knew that his own game was up, and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me.” This is puzzling. Obviously, Moriarty had Holmes trapped—if not by his own devices, certainly by our sleuth’s wish to keep Watson away from the encounter.

In my mind the question always arises: Why attack Holmes in the way that he did? There were at least two members of his gang with him who could have very easily shot Holmes very coldly and efficiently. Had he done that, there would have been a choice of borders

over which he could have disappeared to leisurely and carefully begin the restoration of his smashed criminal empire. Instead, he chose to perish alongside Holmes.

The Mystery of the Great Hiatus

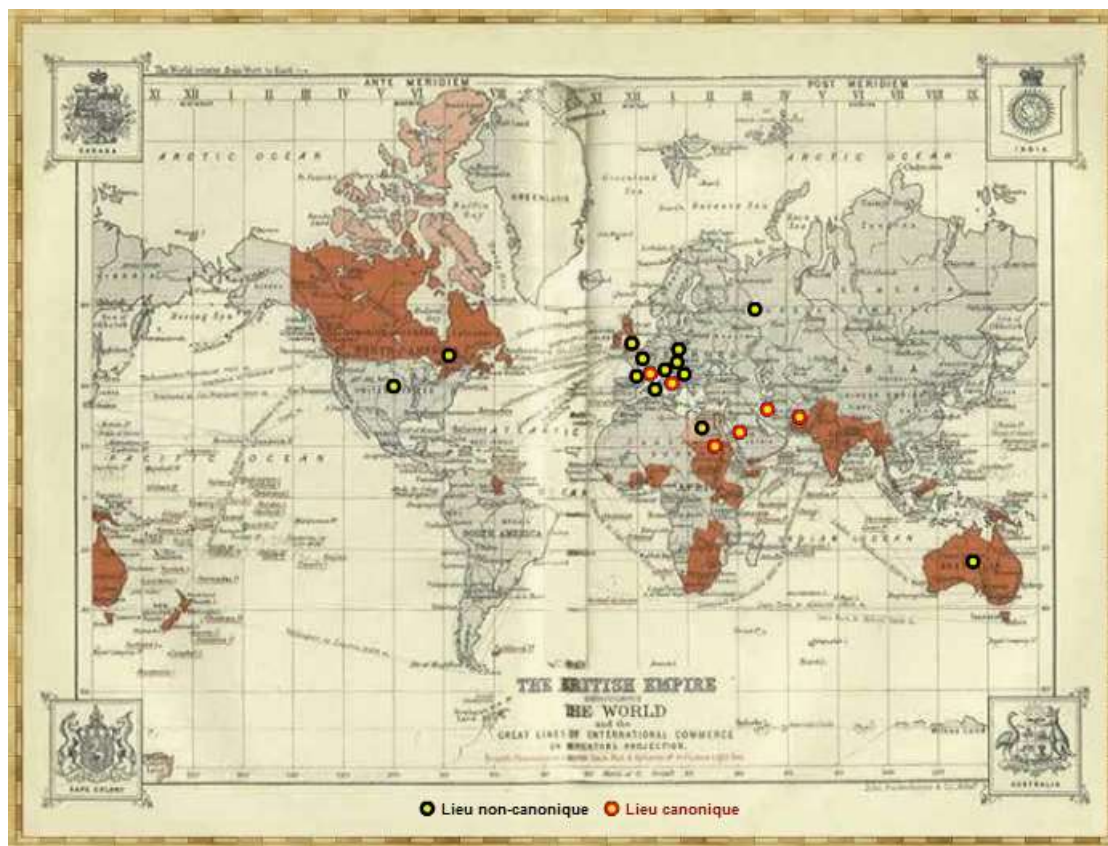
Regardless of how much we may admire and hold Sherlock Holmes in high regard, it must be admitted that at times he could be pretty thoughtless. While there is nothing wrong with having (and exhibiting) a flair for the dramatic, his sudden appearance at Watson’s surgery could have had dire effects on his friend. What if, for example, during those three years the Good Doctor had developed a heart condition and instead of only fainting had dropped dead? Surely he then could have done little

else but say, “Oops!” In NAVA he knew without a doubt that Percy Phelps, sensitive as he was and just barely recovering from a nearly deadly bout with brain-fever was not an ideal candidate for a shock, regardless of how welcomed it could be. (Then again, it would have been almost impossible to show any solicitude towards the delicate Mr. Phelps.)

There is also something about his somewhat remarkable tale regarding the reasons for his long absence. According to his story, although he had received a telegram from Scotland Yard informing him that all the followers of the criminal mastermind were in custody, the Great Detective’s supposed

principal reason behind his three-year disappearance was to escape the revenge of the surviving members of the Moriarty gang. “If all the world was convinced that I was dead,” he explained, “they would lay themselves open, and sooner or later I could destroy them!”

Were it not for the existence of the Scotland Yard telegram one could understand this argument. Certainly, had not all members of the



Tracking the Great Hiatus. Map courtesy of *I Hear of Sherlock Everywhere*.

gang been captured and those still free who were seeking vengeance thought that he was dead he could then indeed take them by surprise. But Moriarty’s second-in-command, Colonel Moran, not only immediately knew that Holmes had survived the Reichenbach Falls, but immediately after attempted, unsuccessfully, to murder him. It is impossible to theorize that Moran, for whatever reason, would not have passed on his knowledge of Holmes’ survival to whoever of his cohorts still remained at liberty. Let us remember that 221B had been under constant surveillance for all of that time.

So we are confronted with the paradox that the only logical reason for Holmes’ disappearance did not exist. In fact, our sleuth might have made his position worse because the would-be murderers would have felt safer going after him because he was considered officially dead—one cannot attempt against the life of a dead man.

Even harder still is to understand his treatment of poor Watson. It was supremely unkind to have kept him ignorant of his survival for those three years. To allow him to endure for all that time the deep grief and distress which his belief in his friend’s death caused him, seemingly for a very problematical reason can be easily considered a cruel and heartless action. It is hard to believe this of our sleuth, especially as we know with certainty that he was genuinely fond of the Good Doctor.

One of the most surprising aspects of all this is that Watson did not seem to harbor any resentment over Holmes' seeming lack of trust, accepting without questions his descriptions of where he had been.

Holmes' not exactly startling revelation that he "spent some months in a research into the coal-tar derivatives, which I conducted in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the South of France," tells Watson (and us) nothing about what he did during the rest of all that time.

The timeline is also problematical. Would it really have taken Sherlock Holmes three years to round



CAPTAIN BURTON AS "SHAYKH ABDULLAH," TRAVELLING IN ARABIA.

up the gang members who had escaped the original dragnet? And, even if this had been the case, why would it require a journey literally to the other side of the globe before this could be accomplished?

There are more arguments against the genuineness of Holmes' story. These originate in what was the shape of the world back then. For example, regardless of his mastery of disguises, it would have been exceedingly difficult and dangerous for an Englishman to get into Mecca or Lhasa, let alone converse with the Grand Lama (whom Watson mistook for a South American camel). In what language would they have communicated? As for his meeting with the Khalifa at Khartoum, it could not possibly have taken place at that time, considering that worthy had left for Omdurman in 1885.

Interestingly, all these places were worrisome for the British Empire. It should be noted that the only other man known to have been capable of going to these trouble spots in quest of information had been Sir Richard Francis Burton; however, he had died of a heart attack five years before. One would have to assume, then, that Holmes was as familiar with the customs and languages of those regions as Sir Richard had been; his capacity for observation and talent for disguise would have made him an

ideal replacement. "Sigerson's" explorations very likely resulted in several hand-drawn maps of places of strategic interest.

Holmes tells us that he had only one confidant: his brother. Considering the true government position held by Mycroft Holmes, it is not too farfetched to theorize that he may have approached his younger brother to ask to carry out a reconnaissance mission into all those trouble spots. Let us recall that it was his brother on whom Mycroft called when important plans went missing. There was no reason this could not happen again; supposing that in truth Holmes needed to disappear for some time why not use this to the best advantage? More likely, the Great Detective really did not need to disappear, but had to because he was the best-suited to undertake such an intelligence mission for the Empire.

If Holmes was indeed playing the Great Game during those years, that would afford a more reasonable explanation for his keeping Watson in the dark about his survival.

He seems to have briefly hinted about this when he told our Biographer that he paid “a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum, *the results of which I have communicated to the Foreign Office*” [Italics mine].

So, should we refer to this blank period as the Great Hiatus or the Great Game?

Deep waters indeed!

The Odd Prohibition

It is not unusual for Watson to open one of his stories telling us that he is finally publishing the facts of a years' old case, because he had finally received Holmes's permission to do so. In almost all these



instances, the Great Detective's reasons for withholding his permission and later granting it, seemingly capriciously, to Watson remain unclear.

It remains unclear why our sleuth would have imposed a decade-long hold on the facts of the murder of the Hon. Ronald Adair. Had Watson published shortly after the resolution of the matter—say after Colonel Moran's trial for Adair's murder—this would not have compromised the family's reputation. In fact, it would have added to it considering that when Ronald Adair was killed he was involved in the very honorable action of attempting to calculate how much money was wrongfully won by

his cheating card partner Moran, to enable him to return it to the various gentlemen he played with.

Because Holmes could not have been concerned about Moran's reputation, his ten-year delay in allowing Watson to publish might have been connected to the intelligence (a.k.a. spying) work he carried out for Mycroft.

We are told that Adair was a cautious player, that during a regular card game he might lose £5 (\$1,900) but not more, and that his fortune was so substantial that such a loss could not affect him in any way. Being such a cautious player, as well as being untroubled by the trifling sums he might have lost, practically every time he usually arose as a winner.

It is not surprising that Adair locked the sitting-room's door when he sat down to clear up the gaming accounts; aside from the potential stain on his reputation, the amounts were anything but petty.



In the murder room the police found £37 10s (≈\$14,000): two bank-notes for £10 each and £17, 10s in silver and gold. Although we were told that generally Adair rarely lost more than £5, in one instance, he and his partner rose from the table with £480 (≈\$180,000). Unsurprisingly, Moran was unprepared to surrender that abundant source of income.

Mrs. Hudson

As Watson remarked more than once, Mrs. Hudson was a long-suffering woman to put up with Holmes' untidy and often troublesome habits and the invasion of the house by all sorts of queer people, not forgetting the Baker Street Irregulars. Although Watson insists that Holmes "had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women," and Mrs. Hudson usually had the benefit of this, on at least one occasion he was very brusque with her when her anxiety over his health led her to suggest medicine. Her concern on a later occasion brought in Watson; and in fact she was sincerely attached to Holmes, even to the extent of being willing to help him in his work, and at considerable personal risk.



"I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhasa and spending some days with the head Llama."

Courtesy of fellow Hound Phil Cornell.

What else happened in 1894:

Empire

Jameson occupies Matabeleland.

British troops occupy Ilorin, Gold Coast.

British and Belgian secret accord on dividing Central Africa.

Premier Roseberry declares Uganda a British protectorate

Britain

Gladstone retires; Rosebery becomes prime minister with its minority Liberal government.

Tower Bridge opens.

First Lyon's tea shop.

Big wheel erected at Earl's Court.

St. Bride's Institute opens.

London taxi driver George Smith becomes first person to be fined for drunk driving.

Harcourt's Budget raises death duties.



Parish Councils Act: Parish, Rural, and Urban Districts established.

Thirlmere Dam completed; for Manchester water supply, aqueduct 96 miles long.

Water tube boilers fitted in HMS *Hornet* and HMS *Sharpshooter*.

◀ *Turbinia*, first steam-turbine ship launched.

Merchant Shipping Act: Masters, mates, and engineers to hold Board of Trade certificates.

Railway and Canal Traffic Act; fixes existing rates as maxima.

Official opening of the Manchester Ship Canal (begun 1887).

Blackpool Tower opens, 518 ft. high.

Death duties first introduced in Britain.

World

War breaks out between Japan and China. Japanese naval victory at Yalu River; Japanese capture of Port Arthur. After the First Sino-Japanese War, China cedes Formosa (Taiwan now) to Japan and grants Japan a free hand in Korea (1894-1895).



French take Madagascar.

French officer Alfred Dreyfus court-martialed for treason, triggers worldwide charges of anti-Semitism (Dreyfus is later vindicated).

President Carnot of France assassinated by Italian anarchist.

◀ French under Joffre capture Timbuktu.

French Captain Henri Decoeurs' troops reach Nikki West Africa. Frederick Lugard's expedition reaches Nikki, Nigeria, signs accord with King Lafia Absalamu of Nikki

Great fire in Shanghai; over 1,000 buildings destroyed.

First newspaper Sunday color comic section published (*New York World*).

Sicilian bread riots lead to martial law and suppression of Italian socialist societies.

Italians defeat the Dervishes at Kassala.

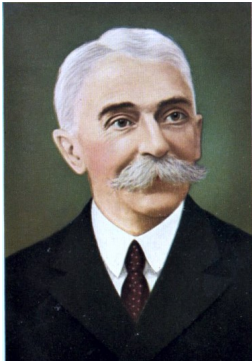
Kurds massacre Armenians at Sassoun.

National Society founded in Greece to extend Greek authority in the Balkans.

Alexander III of Russia dies; Nicholas II (last Romanov tsar) accedes to the Throne.

Sergius Witte becomes minister of finance in Russia.

Alexander Obrenovitch annuls liberal constitution of 1889.



Sale of spirits resumed in Russia as state monopoly.

Formation of French Agricultural Mutual Loan Society.

◀ Baron Pierre de Coubertin initiates congress reviving the Olympic Games.

Beginning of car racing Paris to Rouen.

France and the Russian Empire form a military alliance.

Belgium Princess Josephine marries Prince Karl von Hohenzollern.

Lombok War. The Dutch loot and destroy the Cakranegara palace of Mataram. J.

L. A. Brandes, a Dutch philologist discovers and secures the Nagarakretagama manuscript in Lombok royal library.

Denmark adopts Mid-European time.

U.S. flag fired on in Rio; prompt satisfaction exacted by Admiral Benham.

First U.S. poliomyelitis epidemic breaks out, Rutland, Vermont.

German emperor Wilhelm II fires Chancellor Leo von Caprivi and premier Botho zu Eulenburg.

Nicaragua captures Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

U.S. Congress passes Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act, which includes a graduated income tax. It was later struck down by the Supreme Court.

Columbus World's Fair in Chicago destroyed by fire.

Balinese troops assault Dutch army, 97 killed.

Republic of Hawaii proclaimed, with Sanford B. Dole as president.

New York passes first state dog license law.

Korea declares independence from China, asks for Japanese aid.

Six thousand Armenians massacred by Turks in Kurdistan.

Roman Catholics win Parliamentary election in Belgium.

Art

Debussy, *L'Après Midi d'un Faun*.

Toulouse-Lautrec, *Les Deux Amis*.

Degas, *Femme à sa Toilette*.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, premieres in London.

Strauss' first opera, *Guntram*, produced at Weimer.

Monet, *Rouen Cathedral*.

Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.

George du Maurier, *Trilby*.

Anthony Hope, *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

Science and Technology

Escalators introduced (U.S.).

Halstead (U.S.) details his operation for breast cancer (mastectomy).

Sir William Ramsey and Lord Rayleigh discover existence of zero valences.

Flagstaff (Lowell) Observatory erected.



Oliver and Schäfer discover the nature of insulin.

J.H. Northrop (U.S.A.) invents automatic loom.

Louis Lumière invents the cinematograph.

Pneumatic hammer patented by Charles King of Detroit.

◀ Edison Kinetoscopic *Record of a Sneeze* released in movie theaters.

J.L. Johnstone of England invents horse racing starting gate.

Elwood Haynes successfully tests one of the first American automobiles at 6 mph.

Daniel Cooper patents time clock.

Vaccine for diphtheria announced by Dr Roux of Paris.

First commercial film release by Jean Aimé Le Roy.

Berliner modifies earlier work on the gramophone by using a horizontal disk instead of a cylinder, leads to the first gramophone record. Not fully satisfactory until 1897.

Guaranty Building, Buffalo erected. Metal-framed building.

Karl Elsener invents the Swiss Army knife.

Next week's case: NORW.

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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