



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into:
"The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist"

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The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist" first appeared in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* on December 26, 1903, and in *The Strand Magazine* in January 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

Although this is one of the rare instances in which Doctor Watson provides us with the exact date in which it took place—Saturday, April 23, 1895—he was in error because

April 23, 1895 was a Tuesday. It may have been that he meant to refer to the day in which Violet Smith went home, which was a Saturday. The table shows what our chronologists calculate the actual date to be

In 1895 Sherlock Holmes was 41 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 43.

Main Characters:

Violet Smith, an impoverished young lady working as a governess and Sherlock Holmes' client. Bob Carruthers, the solitary cyclist of Charlington, former prospector in South Africa and a widower with a daughter, Sarah. Jack Woodley,

blackguard, partner in crime with Carruthers, recently returned from South Africa. Mr. Williamson, a disgraced unfrocked clergyman. Cyril Morton, Violet's fiancée and electrical engineer.

<i>The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Saturday [sic] April 23, 1895</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Saturday, April 13, 1895</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>April 1895</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Saturday, April 13, 1895</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>April 1895</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Saturday, March 23, 1895</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Saturday, April 13, 1895</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Saturday, April 13, 1895</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>April 13, 1895</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, April 20, 1895</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1895</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, April 23, 1895</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.

Notable Quotes:

"It is part of the settled order of Nature that such a girl should have followers."

"Who are you, then?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes."

"Good Lord!"



Spirituality and the Face

If ever one of the Sherlock Holmes' deductions was built upon sand, it has to be the one derived from Violet Smith's "spatulate finger-ends." Our sleuth unhesitatingly stated that such a shape, although common to musicians and typists, in her case argued for the lady being the former, because "there is a spirituality about the face which the typewriter does not generate." This has always—simultaneously—both enchanted and irritated me. His reaching out to turn her face towards the light to better observe it and then concluding that music was involved because "there is a spirituality" (whatever *that* may be) about her face could not be a more Victorian conclusion; our detective was indeed a man of his time!



However, my discomfort with his deduction is why is it that a typist cannot possess a spiritual expression? Such an expression, one would imagine, would originate from what the person is like and feels within, not the means which is used to give it expression. Let us assume, for the sake of argument, that although Miss Smith's spatulate fingers were the result of operating a typewriter she employed the machine to write the most exquisite, heavenly poetry—surely, that would be just as spiritual an endeavor (or perhaps even more) than simply tickling the ivories.

We are, as an audience, acquainted with various musicians and the music business. The undeniable charm of heavy metal bands such as Behemoth, Gorguts, and Overkill come to mind; however, although some have accomplished musicians performing in their groups, somehow none of them appears to be overly spiritual. Even in 1895, spirituality was not exactly thickly spread over musicians—the basic human model hasn't changed too much in 129 years. Among others, Johann Strauss II—waltz king and serial philanderer—comes to mind.

Having earned my bread and cheese in front of a non-musical keyboard for all of my adult life, I have had the fortune of meeting others similarly engaged who were truly spiritual people. This is why I differ with Holmes' deduction: Why cannot a typist have a spiritual expression?

All this makes me wonder whether Watson exercised poetic license when he exaggerated Holmes' unfeeling attitude towards the fair sex simply to make him appear more aloof. There are some instances in the Canon in which the Great Detective exhibits a definite un-Holmesian reaction triggered by some sweet-looking creature. I am always inclined to stagger a little over his deduction of Violet Smith's



artistic and spiritual inclinations while he examines her hand, irrespective of Watson's comment that he "took the lady's ungloved hand and examined it with as close an attention and as little sentiment as a scientist would show to a specimen." It is useful to note that the Good Doctor did not specify the kind of specimen he was alluding to. Our sleuth then gently turns her head to read her spirituality on her face.

Was all this simply an excuse on the Great Detective's part to hold her hand and touch her face? Then there is his somewhat atypical—and rather unsettling, considering the source—comment about "the settled order of Nature. . . ."

The Sedentary Physician and the Pugilistic Detective

When our friends go after Violet's trap, Watson states that "we hastened onward at such a pace that my sedentary life began to tell upon me, and I was compelled to fall behind. Holmes, however, was always in training, for he had inexhaustible stores of nervous energy upon which to draw. His springy step never slowed. . . ."

This is one canonical discussion that has extended to several instances. Although we have discussed this matter on other occasions, as someone who had led a relatively sedentary existence, it always



astonishes me that Holmes who at best led a somewhat irregular life, could have always been in such excellent shape. He not only sprints off after the carriage, but is—literally—in fighting trim, as he demonstrates by his knockout of the obnoxious Mr. Woodley: "The next few minutes were delicious. It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. I emerged as you see me. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart."

In Watson's case, doubtless much of his "sedentary life" was a consequence of his war wounds; however, we witness that he was up to jumping over fences. As he puts it, in CHAS:

"The whole garden was alive with people, and one fellow raised a view-halloa . . . and followed hard at our heels. Holmes seemed to know the grounds perfectly, and he threaded his way swiftly . . . I close at his heels, and our foremost pursuer panting behind us. It was a six-foot wall which barred our path, but he sprang to the top and over. As I did the same I felt the hand of the man behind me grab at my ankle, but I kicked myself free and scrambled over a grass-strewn coping."

At least by the standards of our overweight age, it is difficult to accept that Watson could have been in such poor shape, especially considering that everyone walked more in those days. His mention in HOUN, "It was a pleasant walk of four miles along the edge of the moor, leading me at last to a small gray hamlet. . . ." reflects this. Today, a "pleasant walk of four miles" would not be that pleasant especially considering the additional four miles involved in walking back!

Long-Suffering Watson

One tends to wonder why Holmes kept sending Watson to acquire information and reconnoiter places important to whatever investigation was at hand (especially considering all the dubious suc-

cesses that his long-suffering companion had with similar past assignments). I tend to attribute it to Watson's poetic license in that he chose to put himself down to make his friend seem more brilliant.

However, he often had the tendency of overgilding the lily. In this case, he records Holmes admonishing him: "Your hiding-place, my dear Watson, was very faulty. You should have been behind the hedge; then you would have had a close view of this interesting person. As it is you were some hundreds of yards away, and can tell me even less than Miss Smith."

This truly sounds peculiar. Hundreds of yards? This would have to assume that Watson had to have been lurking no less than three or four hundred yards from where he should have been. Because a city block averages 88 yards, this would have meant that Watson chose to keep watch three-and-a-half to four-and-a-half city blocks away from where he expected the action to take place. No even that beloved *Boobus britannicus*, Nigel Bruce would have done such a thing!



We know that Watson was nothing of the sort and that he was an intelligent, resourceful man—physician and soldier. The only way to reconcile is to once more consider it as exaggeration on the part of our biographer, aimed at making his friend appear superior.

The Puzzling Mock Marriage

It is not necessary to be a practitioner before the bar to realize that any marriage performed while one of the two parties is under duress is *per se* illegal and non-binding, even if it were to be performed by a practicing cleric. Here we see both—duress and Williamson, an unfrocked cleric. Obviously, his claim, "Once a clergyman, always a clergyman," is completely baseless.



Even if Williamson had not been unfrocked that mockery of a marriage still would have had no legal force; in fact, no legal existence whatsoever. Unquestionably the license if they had bothered to get one would have been obtained under false pretenses, which would have left it without effect or force. Even if all the legalities (license and cleric) were fulfilled, a marriage in which the bride has been coerced to agree would be illegal. How much more then, than one in which she is physically forced and her mouth tied with a handkerchief, which would not have allowed her to make the necessary responses.

It is difficult to surmise what was going through Williamson's mind. He had to know that such a marriage to Violet would not have even attained the level of a sham. How could he think that the lady would submit herself, even had she believed that the marriage was legal, to someone whom she so

utterly despised? Violet was not stupid either and had she resorted to even a lowly constable the scheme would have been derailed.

Representing the Local Police

When Holmes identifies himself to Carruthers he declares, "I will represent the local police until their arrival." In short, he is essentially performing what we know as today as a citizen's arrest, which is a detention made by someone who is not a peace officer; such an action, performed without due cause, can bring an endless plethora of problems to the one carrying it out such as charges of kidnapping and sundry other offenses. In this case, however, Holmes was on firm ground because he had ample reason for his actions, and was engaging in a practice dating back to medieval England and English common law which encouraged ordinary subjects to help sheriffs to apprehend law breakers.



What else happened in 1895:

Empire



Freetown, Sierra Leone, granted municipal status and privileges.

Anglo-French interests begin to conflict in Nile Valley.

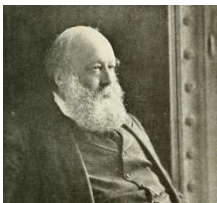
◀ Jameson Raid in South Africa in 1895--failed attempt to overthrow the Afrikaans government.

U.S. intervenes in Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute, arbitration in Britain's favor.

Construction of Uganda railway commenced.

British East Africa Company surrenders Kenya as British protectorate.

Britain



Compulsory retirement of aged Duke of Cambridge as C-in-C of British Army.

◀ Liberals are defeated at general election, Salisbury forms his third Unionist ministry.

London School of Economics and Political Science founded.

First automobile exhibition in London.

Electrification of first mainline railway.

World



Japan takes Formosa (now Taiwan).

Germany, France, and Russia unite to compel Japan to return Liaotung peninsula to China.

◀ Alfred Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.

Treaty of Simonoseki, end of Sino-Japanese war.

Cuban rebellions begin, U.S.A. protests brutal suppression.

National League founded in Poland; aimed at autonomy under Russian suzerainty.

Nyssens Law extended to Belgian provinces and communes.

Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians.

Frontiers of Pamirs fixed by commission of Russians, Afghans, and British.

Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.

Completion of Kiel Canal (61 miles) makes Germany North Sea power.

Volleyball invented.

French troops capture Antananarivo in Madagascar.

Abyssinia defeats Italy in the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1885-1896).

Art



Corelli publishes *The Sorrows of Satan*.

◀ Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, Wilde is imprisoned.

H.G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*.

Science and Technology



Ramsey obtains helium, first identified by its spectrum in the sun, in 1868.

◀ Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen, German physicist, experiments with Crooke's tubes and discovers X-rays.

On December 28th, in the Hotel Scribe, in Paris, the first public cinema show takes place.

Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.

King Gillette (U.S.) invents safety razor.

Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian electrical engineer, transmits the first wireless signal.

Next week's case: PRIO.

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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