



An Inquiry into:
“The Adventure of the Six Napoleons”

Vol. XII No. 74 • February 3, 2022

“The Adventure of the Six Napoleons” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on April 30, 1904, and in *The Strand Magazine* in May 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

Our chronologists differ as to when this case took place. Their estimates appear on the table.

Assuming that the majority of our experts are correct, then in 1900 Sherlock Holmes was 46 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 48.

Main Characters:

Inspector Giles Lestrade, Scotland Yard Inspector. Morse Hudson, shop

owner, buyer of three of the six busts. Horace Harker, elderly journalist working for the Central Press Syndicate, owner of one of the busts. Beppo, an Italian craftsman. Manager of Gelder & Co., Beppo’s former employer. Pietro Venucci, powerful Mafioso of Neapolitan descent. Josiah Brown, owner of the fifth bust. Mr. Sanderford, owner of the sixth bust, which he sold to Holmes, giving him possession of the priceless black pearl of the Borgias.

Notable Quotes:

In rapid succession we passed through the fringe of fashionable London, hotel London, theatrical London, literary London, commercial London, and, finally, maritime London, till we came to a riverside city of a hundred thousand souls, where the tenement houses swelter and reek with the outcasts of Europe.

“The Press, Watson is a most valuable institution, if you only know how to use it.”

“Well, I’ve seen you handle a good many cases, Mr. Holmes, but I don’t know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. We’re not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. No, sir, we are very

<i>The Adventure of the Six Napoleons</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>May 20</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Friday, June 8, 1900</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>July 1900</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>1895 (or after)</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>Late Summer 1900</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Friday, August 29, 1902</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>July 1900</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Late June 1900</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Late June 1900</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Wednesday, June 4, 1902</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1900</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Monday, June 11, 1900</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.



proud of you, and if you come down to-morrow there's not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn't be glad to shake you by the hand."

A Sociable Truce

By this time, according to Watson, the relationship between Holmes and Lestrade had attained a level at which it was not unusual for the latter to drop in during an evening to discuss police business, doubtless giving Holmes a very welcome update on the goings-on at Scotland Yard.

From the perspective of the time, there existed an uncrossable social gap between Lestrade and Holmes, so it is quite remarkable that that Scotland Yarder felt comfortable enough to regularly drop by 221B unannounced. Although this is no longer a common situation in our increasingly classless society, there are few of us who would not understand this. In most of Europe some of this still persists, particularly in the way in which people address others and are, in turn, addressed by others.



Mrs. Hudson, for example, was firmly established as a member of at least the lower middle class and therefore owed a higher level of respect than would a mere servant. Had that not been the case, she would have been addressed as just plain "Hudson." Brunton, the butler at Hurlston Manor would have been "Brunton" to his betters and "Mr. Brunton to the staff laboring under him.

Even after World War I, much of this attitude still persisted. Witness the mild scandal caused by Inspector Charles Parker's wedding to Lord Peter Whimsy's sister!

The Borgia Pearl's Worth

It would seem that the Borgia pearl was a fabulous jewel nothing short of legendary. It is not unusual that one's next thought would be as to its value, which would have been commensurate to its reputation.



After all we are told that it was an "enormously valuable" jewel.

Therefore the obvious question arises, just how much was the Borgia pearl worth?

Black pearls are not common. Chances are that whatever black pearl we run across in a jewelry store will

have been dyed that color. Genuine black pearls are produced by the *Pinctada margaritifera cumingii* oyster, known as the black-lip oyster, and are indigenous to French Polynesia, Fiji, the Sea of Cortez,

and the Cook Islands. These rare Borgia-type pearls are called Tahitian pearls or black South Sea pearls.

Generally speaking, a faultless pearl is perfectly shaped, with a flawless surface, excellent coloration, and sharp luster. Most top-grade pearls average 10.0 mm and larger, and retail in the \$1,000+ range. Some high-end large round white or pink freshwater pearls can retail at over \$5,000 to \$10,000. Richard Burton paid somewhat over \$37,000 for a rose-colored tear-shaped pearl he gave Elizabeth Taylor. However, this was not a black pearl, and therefore much cheaper, considering that it is not unusual for a perfect black pearl to exceed that amount.

So how much can an unusual pearly be worth? The Roman Gaius Plinius Secundus was an author, naturalist and natural philosopher who wrote the formidable encyclopedic *Naturalis Historia*, tells us about Cleopatra's pearl earrings.

Disgusted with her lover Antony's gluttony and very un-Roman devotion to luxury and extravagance, the Serpent of the Nile bet him she could spend 10,000,000 sesterces (\approx \$500,000) for one dinner. Antony promptly agreed disbelieving that would be possible to spend that much for only one meal, regardless of how sumptuous. When he arrived at the banquet hall, he was surprised to see that while everything was set to host a feast, there was no food.



He asked Cleopatra about this and as a reply she removed one of her pearl earrings consisting "of the largest pearls of all time" which had been left to her by oriental kings, and placed it in a glass of vinegar leaving it there until it dissolved. She then drank it. As she reached for the second pearl, Lucius Plancus, a friend of Antony's who was refereeing the bet stopped her declaring her the winner. Later, Octavian (later known as Augustus Cæsar) took the second pearl, had it cut in two, and had each half placed on the ears of the statue of Venus in the Parthenon at Rome.

So, if we consider Cleo's pearl earrings as a benchmark and value the Borgia pearl accordingly, we could be looking at a jewel worth as much as \approx \$250,000 in today's money. In Holmes' time, this would have amounted to some £800.

Lestrade, True to Form

Regardless of class or education, our Scotland Yard friend seems unable to retain any of the many lessons given him by Sherlock Holmes.

While it is true that Lestrade recognized the fact that someone who makes a point of smashing busts of Napoleon makes for an unusual case, his lack of perception defies understanding.

The investigation revealed that this “maniac” smashes only one type of Napoleonic memorabilia: a bust of the Emperor—and a very specific one at that. Lestrade himself made the observation that Dr. Barnicot, “is an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon, and his house is full of books, pictures, and relics of the French Emperor.” However, he missed the conclusion that if, indeed, they were dealing with a monomaniac criminal who has an *idée fixe* about destroying things connected with Napoleon, why did he not destroy of *all* of Barnicot’s collection? This should have been a fact very much in evidence.

Our friend Lestrade appears to have been unable to accept one of Holmes’ central dicta: “It is an error to argue in front of your data. You find yourself insensibly twisting them round to fit your theories.”

And What Was Gained?

Of all the recorded Canonical cases, at least nine, ABBE, BLAC, CARD, DYIN, GOLD, REIG, STUD, VALL, and SIXN are ones in which Holmes appears to have participated in a *pro bono* fashion—solely to help the authorities. This absence of a fee would seem to indicate that the Great Detective kept to his claim that his professional charges are upon a fixed scale, and that the only variation is when he remits them altogether.

Although nowhere in Watson’s retelling of the case does it seem that Holmes was rewarded in any way, it seems very likely that he may have managed to recoup something for his recovery of the “famous black pearl of the Borgias.” It would seem logical to assume that such a trinket would have been insured for a small fortune. When Holmes looked “up the dates in the old files of the paper,”



to refresh himself on the facts of the case, it is not farfetched to think that he might also have looked for the insurance company’s advertised request for information on the stolen jewel and the offer of a reward for its return.

His meticulous care in producing a documented transfer signed in the presence of two witnesses (which included a member of the official police) would have made little sense otherwise. While it is true that Mr. Sandeford could not have legally claimed any right of ownership regarding the stolen pearl, later on he might have claimed some right over the insurance company’s reward.

Assuming that was a standard 10% finder’s fee was offered by the insurers (and not considering an additional recompense to Holmes from the grateful Prince of Colonna) our sleuth most certainly would have come ahead. The £10 (≈\$3,300) he paid for all rights to the bust would have been more than offset by the insurance company’s finder’s fee of £80 (≈\$26,000). Not a bad return for less than three days’ work!

Lestrade's Tribute

Lestrade's praise of Holmes' abilities is unique in the Sacred Writings, because unlike so many others, it does not originate from someone's passing surprise at one of his deductions, but from sincere heartfelt admiration, out of respect and acknowledgement for a superior mind. Good for Lestrade!



The Scotland Yarder's frank recognition of Holmes' sleuthing superiority proves him to be



considerably less of a fool as he has been depicted, as well as an extremely honest man. It is even more notable because it is originated out of sincere admiration and respect. It shows that, in his own way, the inspector was a gentleman.

At this point, it seems obligatory to pay tribute not to Holmes, but to Jeremy Brett. His portrayal of Sherlock Holmes' surprised and tearful reaction when Lestrade tells him what he and his Scotland Yard colleagues think of him, gives one the uncanny feeling that at that moment during the filming he *became* Holmes.

It is to be deeply regretted that he was unable to film the complete Canon. It may be a very long time before we see another such superb incarnation of the Great Detective.

An Exceptional Case

This is another case in which we see a Sherlock Holmes who is absolutely brilliant in his deductions and conclusions, and dexterous use of the (tabloid?) press. Even though none of us can aspire to even approach his skills and insights, we should count ourselves extremely fortunate that we can participate by looking over Doctor Watson's shoulder.

What else happened in 1900:

Empire

Tonga placed under British protection.

Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act; establishes federalism.

Roberts replaces Buller in South Africa; relief of Ladysmith, Mafeking, Kimberly; Boer leader Kronje surrenders at Paardeberg; Transvaal and Orange Free State annexed by Britain.

Royal Niger Company's territories are taken over by the British government.

Yangtze Convention: Britain and Germany guarantee freedom of trade to uphold Chinese integrity.

Britain

Wallace collection displayed in current location in Manchester Square

Mount Pleasant postal sorting office opens.

Passmore Edwards Museum in Stratford opens.



Russell Hotel opens.

Birmingham University founded.

Central London Railway (Central Line) opens; London's tubes electrified.

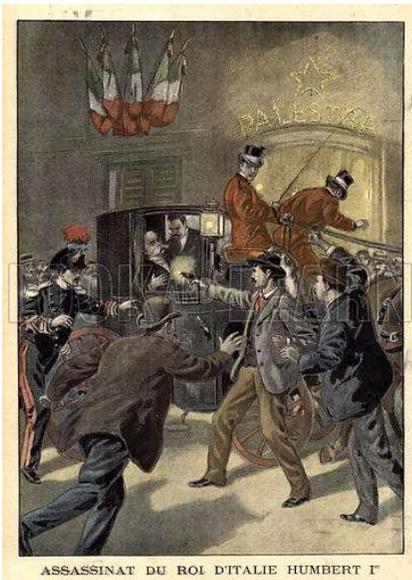
◀ Davis Cup presented for men's international lawn tennis.

Labour Representation Committee, beginning of the Labour Party.

National Brass Band contests instituted at the Crystal Palace.

School made obligatory until age 14.

World



Boxer Rebellion ended by military relief of besieged foreign legations.

Franco-Italian Treaty concerning North African colonies.

Proportionate Representation in Belgium.

Tirpitz induces German Reichstag to pass Navy Act, to double the navy by 1920.

◀ Assassination of King Humberto of Italy, accessions of Victor Emmanuel III.

Socialist Revolutionary Party formed in Russia, advocates terrorism.

Russia occupies Manchuria, massacres 45,000 Chinese.

Working day in France is limited to 10 hours.

Since 1876, 2,000 km of new canals are completed in France.

Witte brings 60% of Russian railways under state control.

Art

Conrad publishes *Lord Jim*.

Theodore Dreiser publishes *Sister Carrie*.

Shaw debuts *Three Plays for Puritans: The Devil's Disciple, Caesar and Cleopatra, Captain Brassbound's Conversion*.

Puccini debuts *La Tosca*.

Science and Technology

G. Ricci and T. Levi-Civita develop the absolute differential calculus from earlier concept of tensors.

Max Planck proposed quantum theory.

Piotr Lebedev demonstrates the existence of the pressure of light.

J.E. Brandenburger invents cellophane.

First Zeppelin is built.

Escalator, invented in the U.S.A., exhibited in Paris Exhibition.

Hugo de Vries publishes *The Mutation Theory*, leading to the modern evolution theory.

F.E. Dorn discovers radon, a heavy gas.

Benjamin Holt invents the caterpillar tractor.

Sigmund Freud publishes *Traumdeutung*, the interpretation of dreams.

Next week's case: 3STU.

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 illustrations have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

Image from Cleopatra courtesy of 20th Century Fox.

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

Copyright © 2022 Alexander E. Braun