



## An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of the Red Circle"

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"The Adventure of the Red Circle" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in March 1911. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

The chronology for this case is not unanimous. The various estimates are shown on the table. If the case took

place in 1902, as the majority of our Canon chronologists state, then at the time Holmes was 48 years old and Watson 50.

### Main Characters:

Mrs. Warren, elderly, respectable landlady of the boarding house where Emilia Lucca was taken to hide. Gennaro Lucca, young Italian man who fled to New York, then to London with his wife. Emilia Lucca, Gennaro's wife. Giuseppe Gorgiano, a senior member of the Red Circle, a notorious Neapolitan criminal society. Inspector Tobias Gregson, Scotland Yard detective. Leverton, a skilled American private detective working for the Pinkerton National Detective Agency.

### Notable Quotes:

"Bleat, Watson—unmitigated bleat!"

Holmes was accessible upon the side of flattery, and also, to do him justice, upon the side of kindness.

"I had heard that you can read great things out of small ones."

"Ah, yes, Watson—severely practical, as usual!"

"Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last."

### The Adventure of the Red Circle

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	None given
Baring-Gould	Wednesday, September 24, 1902
Bell	January 1897
Blakeney	1881-1887
Brend	January 1896
Christ	January 1893
Dakin	1897, possibly February
Folsom	February 1902
Hall	Mid-February 1902
Keefauver	Tuesday, January 6, 1885
Klinger	1902
Zeisler	Winter 1895-1902

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.

“I’ll do you this justice, Mr. Holmes, that I was never in a case yet that I didn’t feel stronger for having you on my side.”

### *Once I Was Lost and Now I Am Found*

It seems a commonplace occurrence in the Canon that when one is desperate to escape from some nemesis and lose himself in England, regardless of whatever extreme measures and great exertions are taken in an effort to disappear these will do little to enable him or her to keep from being found by their foe. We have witnessed this in DANC, GLOR, and STUD.

In the present case, one cannot help but wonder how Gorgiano could have possibly tracked the Luccas—Emilia in this instance—to Mrs. Warren’s. Regardless of Gennaro’s efforts to secrete his wife away to a safe place, his instructions that she do not even peek through the window, and avoid human contact, she was located. When one adds to all this the fact that even if Gennaro had been found

and followed, he ensured that he would not be near his wife—not even write to her—and solely used the newspaper’s agony column to communicate with her. The fact that none of these measures worked seems to be rather improbable.

If someone is willing to leave everything behind and decides to disappear, it is possible to do it successfully, even



these days in which the concept of privacy is rapidly becoming a dim memory. Regardless of the expansion of digital tracking and intrusion, there are still many ways to obtain a valid new identity; more so back then, when official IDs were very rare.

While Gorgiano might have managed to track the Luccas’ moves all the way to the ship in which they left the United States, this would not be at all simple in London, a diverse city of a population of more than 4,000,000. In fact, they should have been practically impossible to find. Even if one limits the search to a smaller population, the matter would not have been easier. For example, the East End alone had some 900,000 inhabitants, which explains—conspiracy theories aside—why the Metropolitan Police was unable to put Saucy Jack, a.k.a. the Ripper behind bars.

The most paradoxical thing in this whole affair is how the evil Gorgiano and his minions could have been so capable and stupid at the same time. After a feat of detection worthy of the great Sherlock Holmes, they stupidly mistake Mr. Warren for Gennaro and kidnap him. It seems obvious that they knew Gennaro by sight, because poor Mr. Warren was so quickly returned to home and hearth.

If they only had spent two or three days surveilling the house they would have realized—from his comings and goings—that Mr. Warren was not their target.

### *A Gold-Plated Boarding House*

Mrs. Warren's rate of 50s (≈\$940) per week was a very expensive one for a boarding house of the time. On average, for such accommodations and services, these establishments charged in the neigh-



borhood of 40s (≈\$750). Regardless of all this, there can be no question that an offer of £5 (≈\$1,900) (more than double the asked-for rate), had to be extremely attractive to the landlady.

This brings us to an interesting conjecture. Why would a renter be willing to pay more rent than is asked for? The thought should have crossed Mrs. Warren's mind that perhaps something was not quite kosher. How could

she not suspect that something had to be amiss and that there might be a strong possibility that such largesse covered some illegality? Otherwise, why the larger sum?

Perhaps her going to Holmes mostly fueled by fear that she might be accused of being a not too unwilling accessory to some crime.

### *Gender and the Pen*

Although Holmes must doubtless have made a study of the matter, and one should therefore acknowledge his expertise without argument, and his deduction that, "The printed messages, as is now evident, were to prevent her sex being discovered by her writing," leaves me unconvinced. According to The British Institute of Graphology, *We were all taught to write in a specific way when we were children at school, but it is evident that no one continues to write exactly the way they were taught and everyone's handwriting looks different. In fact as soon as someone can write, he or she gradually alters the shapes and sizes of letters in accordance with individual likes and dislikes.*

Holmes' deduction that Mrs. Warren's mysterious lodger did not speak English well, based on the request for matches being printed as "match" (singular instead of plural, indicating that the English word for "match" had been looked up in a dictionary) was brilliant. Often, our sleuth's most interesting deductions have been based on minutiae like this.

As to gender determination through the analysis of a person's writing, I rather suspect that this would be easier today than it was back then, when it was essential to be able to write in a firm, clear hand. In school I caught the tail end of the requirement to master calligraphy, condemned to use an old-fashioned ink dip pen (blotches, blotches!). We learnt from exercise books intended for *both* boys and girls, not separate ones for each sex. The result was that the forming of the letters was the same for both sexes.

While eventually, of course, one developed a personal style, the result was far from resembling what is in fashion today, when cursive writing is considered obsolete and, on the rare occasions keyboards are not used, some ladies affect cutesy little curlicues over the letter "i" or write with colored, often odoriferous, inks.



## *Calling on the Police*

According to Emilia her husband “wished to be free that he might communicate with both the American and with the Italian police.” While this is perfectly understandable, considering the fact that the police of either country wanted to get a hold of Gorgiano, why would Gennaro not seek the assistance of the English police as well? Even if he could have revealed Gorgiano’s whereabouts to the



American and Italian cops it would have done him no good, because they would have been unable to intervene.

Had he instead gone to Scotland Yard, even if they did not believe him, as soon as they checked with their colleagues on both continents Gennaro’s story would have been confirmed and he would have had a considerably more substantial ally at his back. Regardless of the seemingly high regard in which the Scotland Yarder held the Pinketons, it seems obvious that Leverton must have

approached them first, even though had Gorgiano lived, he would have been arrested by British authorities, and it would have been unlikely that he would have been granted custody of the killer.

It is interesting to consider that it was not the American police that was officially after Gorgiano; instead, it was a private detective agency lacking in any official standing. This would seem to indicate that the Italian thug was just a thug—a run-of-the-mill murderer. Someone the American police would be very happy to collar, but would not exert an international effort to accomplish.

The Pinkertons (who had a motley, often dark history) acted only in behalf of clients with ready cash. If they were after for Gorgiano beyond the borders of the United States whoever was footing the bill, had to be an individual or group and not the government. Whoever it was the Pinkertons were acting for very likely had little concern for Gorgiano’s good health. It was probably an enemy or a rival criminal organization; the Pinkertons weren’t too choosy about their clients.

Which brings us to a puzzle within this conundrum: a Pinkerton agent in England would have had no authority; he would have been considered as just another private person—a foreigner (American!) at that. From what Watson tells us, it does not appear that Leverton had any authority or backing from any level or branch of the American government that any level of British authority might recognize. There was not even an outstanding warrant for Gorgiano’s arrest!

So why was Gregson so ready to cooperate with Leverton, including him in an official investigation? It seems unlikely that even an official member of the American police would have received such courtesy.

## *Gone and Not Missed*

After hearing what Emilia had to say about their struggle to get away from Gorgiano, the Pinkerton agent commented, “I don’t know what your British point of view may be, but I guess that in New



York this lady’s husband will receive a pretty general vote of thanks.” In which Inspector Gregson concurs, “She will have to come with me and see the chief. If what she says is corroborated, I do not think she or her husband has much to fear.”

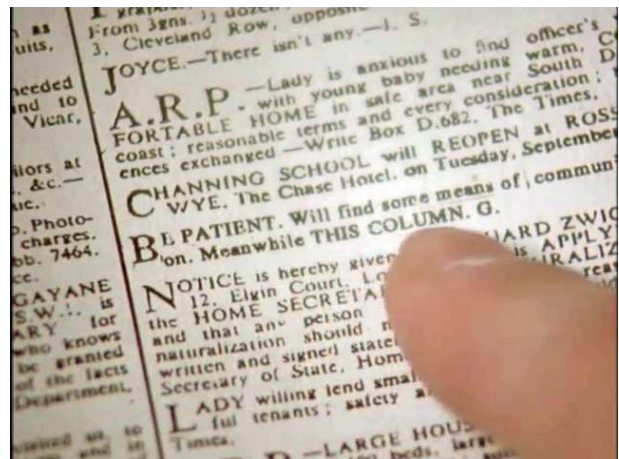
While unquestionably Gennaro killed Gorgiano in self-defense, this would have to be proven to the law’s satisfaction. It seems likely that there would have to be a little more than simply explaining things to Gregson’s chief. Although Gorgiano’s antecedents seemed to have

been well known on both sides of the Atlantic, Gennaro was unknown. A check with American, and possibly Italian, authorities would have been necessary, and the fact that he had belonged to the same criminal organization that Gorgiano did, would have complicated things.

## *Another Brilliant Holmes Triumph*

Although in the scheme of things this could be considered a minor and unimportant case, our sleuth and his methods shine. His deductions that not only the lodger was a different person than the one who ostensible rented the rooms and that English was a second language for him or her were absolutely brilliant. The manner in which he unerringly deduced which were the messages to read in the newspaper’s agony column, and how he located the house from where Gennaro was going to signal Emilia equally add to his credit.

On a curmudgeonly aside, however, not everything seems to fit so neatly. Perennially, whenever we study this case, I must wonder how Holmes could dismiss a message that reads, “Beware! Danger!” as being something that “may bear some more innocent interpretation”!



## *What else happened in 1889:*

### *Empire*

First celebration of Empire Day (renamed “Commonwealth Day” in 1959).

Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

Anglo-German fleet seizes Venezuelan fleet to recover debts and reparations.

Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.

### *Britain*

Salisbury resigns, succeeded as PM by Arthur Balfour.



Anglo-Japanese Treaty for mutual defense and to maintain status quo in Far East.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

◀ Institution of the Order of Merit for distinguished service to the state; limited to 24 holders at one time.

Education Act abolishes School Board system. Local control goes to town and county councils.

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

British Academy granted Royal Charter.

Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

### *World*

Franco-Italian secret treaty; Italy to remain neutral if France were attacked by a third power.

Failure of second Belgian General Strike.

Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy) renewed to 1914.



Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.

◀ F.A. Krupp takes over Germania shipbuilding yard at Kiel; great armaments firm develops.

Russo-Japanese Convention, Russia agrees to evacuate Manchuria in 18 months.

French work day reduced to 9½ hours.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.

Abdul Hamid gives Germany concessions to build railway to Baghdad; rail system to stretch from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf.

Tientsin Sanitary Police established; first Chinese public health measure.

### *Art*

Conan Doyle publishes *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Kipling publishes *Just So Stories*.

Arthur Edward Woodley Mason publishes *The Four Feathers*.

Beatrix Potter publishes *Peter Rabbit*.

Enrico Caruso makes his first gramophone record—154 recordings in all.

Gauguin paints *The Call*.

Debussy composes *Pelléas et Mélisandé*.

Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.

Elgar composes *Coronation Ode*.

### ***Science and Technology***

Wireless telegraphy applied to ships.

Trans-Pacific Cable laid.

Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

### ***Next week's case: Lady***

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.*

**If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at [CourageousMurray@aol.com](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com).**

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