



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into:

"The Adventure of the Dying Detective"

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"The Adventure of the Dying Detective" first appeared in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* on November 22, 1913, and in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1904. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

Surprisingly, our chronologists are almost in agreement as to the year in which this case took place. The chronology is shown on the table.

Main Characters:

Mrs. Martha Hudson, Sherlock Holmes' landlady. Culverton Smith, the murderer of his nephew, who also attempted to kill Holmes. Victor Savage, Smith's nephew, murdered over a reversion. Inspector Morton, Scotland Yarder assigned to solve Smith's murder.

Notable Quotes:

Mrs. Hudson, the landlady of Sherlock Holmes, was a long-suffering woman. Not only was her first-floor flat invaded at all hours by throngs of singular and often undesirable characters but her remarkable lodger showed an eccentricity and irregularity in his life which must have sorely tried her patience. His incredible untidiness, his addiction to music at strange hours, his occasional revolver practice within doors, his weird and often malodorous

scientific experiments, and the atmosphere of violence and danger which hung around him made him the very worst tenant in London. On the other hand, his payments were princely. I have no doubt that the house might have been purchased at the price which Holmes paid for his rooms during the years that I was with him.

The landlady stood in the deepest awe of him and never dared to interfere with him, however outrageous his proceedings might seem. She was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and

The Adventure of the Dying Detective

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	A Saturday in November
Baring-Gould	Saturday, November 19, 1887
Bell	November 1888
Blakeney	November 1890
Brend	November 1889
Christ	Sunday, November 30, 1890
Dakin	Saturday, November 29, 1890
Folsom	Wednesday, November 5, 1890
Hall	November 1889
Keefauver	Sunday, November 8, 1903
Klinger	1890
Zeisler	Saturday, November 29, 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.

courtesy in his dealings with women. He disliked and distrusted the sex, but he was always a chivalrous opponent.

“If I am to have a doctor whether I will or not, let me at least have someone in whom I have confidence,” said he.

“Then you have none in me?”

“In your friendship, certainly. But facts are facts, Watson, and, after all, you are only a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications. It is painful to have to say these things, but you leave me no choice.”

I was bitterly hurt.

Of all ruins, that of a noble mind is the most deplorable.

“But why would you not let me near you, since there was in truth no infection?”

“Can you ask, my dear Watson? Do you imagine that I have no respect for your medical talents? Could I fancy that your astute judgment would pass a dying man who, however weak, had no rise of pulse or temperature? At four yards, I could deceive you.”



In Praise of Mrs. Hudson



Watson’s description of Mrs. Hudson as a “long suffering woman,” may have been somewhat of an exaggeration. Some have suggested that originally she may have tolerated Holmes’ idiosyncrasies, untidiness, erratic habits and behavior (including indoor pistol target practice), as well as his often bizarre and objectionable clientele, because of the considerable rent that he paid.

While that may have been true during the early days there can be no question that over time she developed a sincere liking and affection for her eccentric tenant. This is amply indicated by her reaction to our sleuth’s supposed deadly illness, as well as by her willingness to put herself in danger to help him, as demonstrated in EMPT when she went on her elbows and knees on the floor to shift the position of Holmes’ bust in front of the window every few minutes.

Watson observes that: *She was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women. He disliked and distrusted the sex, but he was always a chivalrous opponent.*

This leads me to a small, but ever-puzzling, issue—during the Great Hiatus could she have been aware that Holmes was still alive somewhere? Although the

lady was doubtless discreet and kept her thoughts to herself, she had to have wondered why Mycroft would have continued paying the rent over those three years, to have his supposedly deceased brother's rooms at 221B left intact.

Did Mrs. Hudson know that Holmes was alive, and was his description of how she went into hysterics at his reappearance a fib that he told Watson to assuage his hurt feelings at not having been told of our sleuth's survival?

The Mediocre Medico

In this case, we witness Holmes accusing his poor, long-suffering friend (besides of being a mediocre writer, in other instances) of also being "a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications." Harsh, hurting words, indeed! But of course, everything is set right in the end when the Great Detective tells Watson that it wasn't that he thought of him as an inferior doctor. Instead, he feared that his superior professional capabilities would strip him of his deception.



There can be no doubt that Sherlock Holmes had the greatest regard for John H. Watson. Particularly when courage was needed, we know that the Great Detective never hesitated to count on the Good Doctor. However,



whether this regard equally extended to his friend's medical abilities is something we will very likely never fully know, but it is very likely.

After all, Watson kept Holmes from wasting his life through a needle.

And Watson was certainly no barber surgeon! He graduated from the University of London's School of Medicine, and took additional studies to become an Army surgeon. His medical studies never stopped which is proven by the fact that he continued to read medical publications, including some which one would consider outside of his specialization, such as Dr. Trevelyan's monograph upon obscure nervous lesions, in RESI.

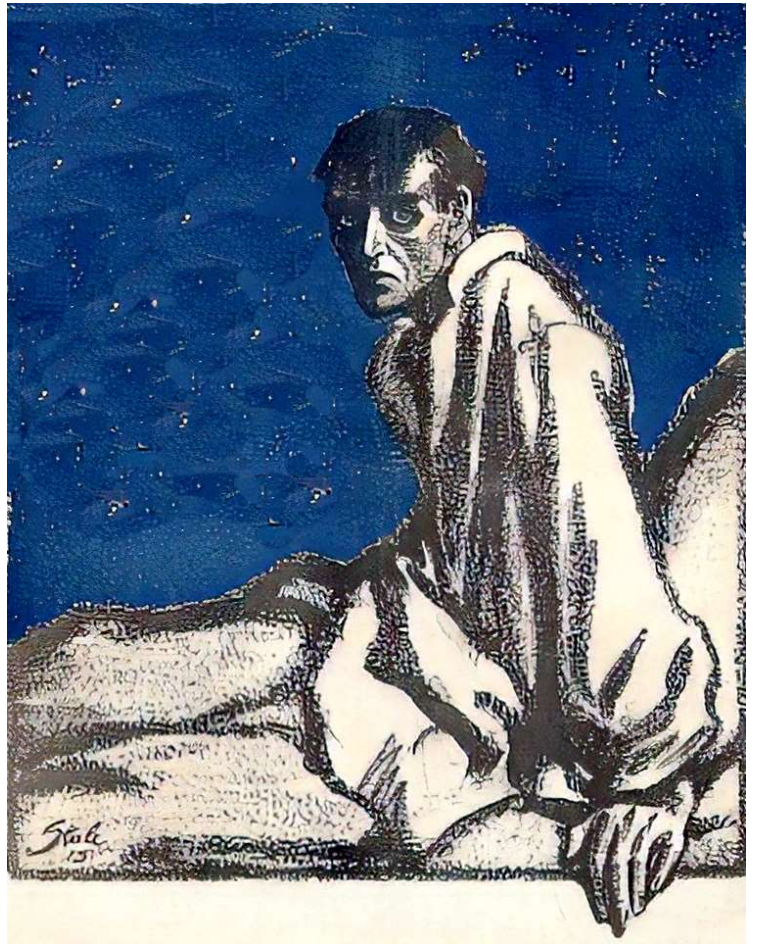
If one considers that Watson was able to establish more than one successful medical practice to the point he could not only live well from his earnings but also support at least a couple of wives (in suc-

cession, of course, not simultaneously) proves that he was no ordinary, mediocre medico! On top of everything else, his experience as an Army surgeon put him on a completely different level than that of his civilian colleagues.

I am convinced that Holmes' explanation for such an offensive refusal of Watson's services was absolutely genuine. It was not solely an apology, but a candid clarification of his reasons to deceive his friend to the point of offending him. I think that whatever bitterness our biographer may have felt over the Great Detective's remarks was instantly transmuted into warm satisfaction by his friend's confession that he could not have hoped to deceive him a close range and after even a cursory examination.

Regardless of all this, however, I view Watson's docility in following Holmes' supposedly delirious orders as being completely unmedical. It should not have mattered a bit how "masterful" Holmes was; he gave every sign and impression of being moribund and having very little time left. Because he wasn't able to examine him or even come close, Watson became convinced that his friend was in *articulo mortis*; thus, following his "fevered" instructions to the letter the way he did made little sense. One must attribute this atypical behavior to his deep affection and friendship towards the man.

As a reasonable person *and* competent doctor believing that his friend had very little time left, Watson would have disregarded all sickbed instructions and leave, urgently, to procure without any further delay the assistance of one of those specialists he mentioned. His reasoning that Holmes had become so delirious that it seem dangerous to leave him alone also seems contradictory, as he had already accepted that as a doctor there was nothing he could do for his "dying" friend and therefore his continued presence was unnecessary.



Had it been me, I would have brought the Good Doctor into my confidence. Mostly due to my regard for him, and partly because I could not have been certain that he would have so closely followed the instructions of an apparently delirious man, who is practically *in extremis*; especially when it came to asking that he hide behind the bed. One must wonder why at that point Holmes did not reveal everything to him, having him hide behind the bed while still unnecessarily believing him to be ill. It would seem that sometimes Holmes' flair for the dramatic got the better of him.

Regarding Holmes' supposed opinion of our biographer's literary output is concerned, like the Bard, I tend to doubt it: "The detective doth protest too much, methinks." Nobody doubts that Watson's success with *The Strand* did much to further Holmes' career. We have a solid, quotable body of work by Watson; despite of how good and scholarly his monographs may have been, the same cannot be said of Holmes, except for limited and poor attempts to emulate Watson's storytelling.

The Black Formosa Corruption



Typhus. Courtesy of *The Lancet*.

The knowledge and effects of ghastly diseases such as plague (caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*), cholera, and typhoid were very much present in England's consciousness. These diseases regularly made deadly appearances in some of the unhealthier of the Empire's outposts—sometime in Imperial London itself. Thus, Holmes' question to Watson, "What do you know, pray, of Tapanuli fever? What do you know of the black Formosa corruption?" had to have stimulated a shudder of morbid fascination in the readers of the time who were well-aware that such diseases existed. The fact that Watson had to admit his ignorance about these conditions rendered them even more fear-worthy.

Consulting my *Oxford*, I learned that Tapanuli is on the northwest coast of Sumatra. Formosa (Taiwan today), on the other hand, was a recognized unhealthy place with a formidable reputation for mortality.

It has been suggested that the condition faked by Holmes could have

been tsutsugamushi fever or scrub typhus (*Orientia tsutsugamushi*), which exhibit an ulcer with a striking black crust.

The Contradictory Sleuth

Like all great minds, at times Sherlock Holmes appears to be inconsistent. In this case he deceived Watson about his true condition because he did not think that his friend could muster the necessary acting ability to appear truly disturbed and thus deceive Culverton Smith into believing that he was dying.

Yet, in *ILLU*, he showed no compunction whatsoever in sending his friend to deceive a dangerous man like Gruner into believing that he was a collector of fine ancient porcelain with certain unique pieces to offer. Not only that, but he had him learn overnight the expertise he would need for such a deception.

Sometimes, Holmes puts me in mind of Walt Whitman:

*Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)*

Schadenfreude?

From what Watson wrote, it seems that Inspectors Morton (who never again haunted the Canon) and Smith showed signs of delight over Holmes' supposedly terminal illness. In Smith's case, it is understandable. However, in Morton's case, if there was any elation, it probably was over the anticipation of being close to capturing a murderer, and not over our sleuth's supposed demise. Which brings us to an interesting conclusion, which is that Morton must have known what Watson didn't—that Holmes was faking.

It would be interesting to speculate what would have been Scotland Yard's reaction to Holmes' death. In *SIXN*, Lestrade tells Holmes that all the Scotland Yarders down to constable level are proud of him.

So, would the Master's passing have been celebrated or lamented by the Yard? I always think back to a scene in one of the Rathbone Holmes movies—loosely based on "The Final Problem"—in which a profoundly saddened Lestrade by Holmes' supposed demise, begs Watson to give him have one of the sleuth's pipes. Would this have been closer to the truth? We will never know...

A Complicated Friendship

No Canon student exists who has not gone back and forth in his consideration of the Holmes/Watson relationship. We know that on more than one occasion Holmes revealed his deep friendship with Watson, a good example of this being when the Good Doctor was shot in 3GAR:

"You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"

And then,

His face set like flint as he glared at our prisoner, who was sitting up with a dazed face. "By the Lord, it is as well for you. If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive."



He has also referred to Watson as being a good man to have at his back.

Strangely enough, however, there have been occasions when it seems as if our sleuth did not fully trust his companion. The most notorious example of this is his decision to keep Watson in the dark regarding his having survived the deadly encounter with Professor Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls. For three full years he allowed his friend to believe him dead and deeply grieve for him. There is a further example of this in HOUN, in which he sets up Watson to believe that he is investigating and gathering facts for an absent Holmes, when in reality he has been at the scene all the time, very likely watching the Good Doctor's earnest efforts with some amusement.

Then there are the many times in which Holmes has somewhat acerbically criticized Watson's investigative and literary efforts; LADY, RETI, and COPP ("You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales.") immediately come to mind.

In the present instance, one can accept the necessity for deceiving Mrs. Hudson, but why Watson as well? Holmes' excuse that he wanted his friend to sound and appear genuine when appealing to Culverton Smith for help has the crystalline ring of a lead bell; it is similar to his excuse for his not telling him about his escape from the falls.



What else happened in 1890:

Empire

Helgoland ceded to Germans.

Work of Rhodes Pioneers begun in Southern Rhodesia.

Britain annexes Uganda.

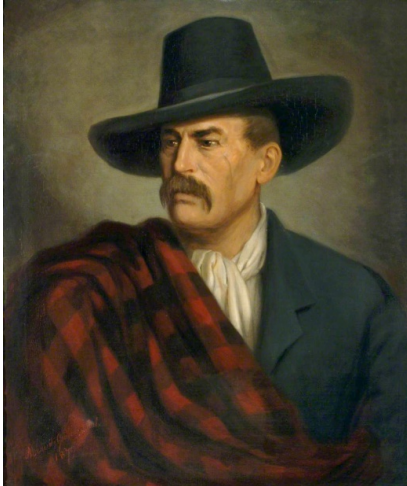
Britain recognizes French Protectorate over Madagascar.

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

Zanzibar Settlement: Tanganyika becomes Imperial Germany Colony; Germany excluded from Upper Nile; British Protectorate over Zanzibar.

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.

◀ 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*.

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.

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

First part of Rosebery Avenue opened.

Dulwich Park, gifted by Dulwich College, opens.

Vauxhall Park opens.

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*.

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.

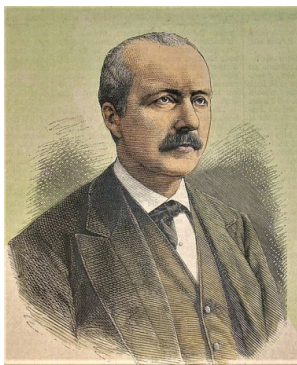
North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana and Washington are admitted into the Union.

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.

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

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.

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 Holtz 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Lockyer's theory of stellar evolution.

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: VALL.

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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