



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into:
"The Problem of Thor Bridge"

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"The Problem of Thor Bridge" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in February-March 1922 and in *Collier's Weekly* in November 1904. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

A majority of our chronologists agree that the case took place in 1901, which is reflected by the table. If the case took place in 1901, as the majority indicates, then Sherlock

Holmes was 47 years old and Dr. John H. Watson 49.

Main Characters:

Neil Gibson, American gold magnate, millionaire, and former senator of a Western state. Mrs. Gibson, Neil's Brazilian volcanic jealous wife. Miss Grace Dunbar, Governess to the Gibson's children and the object of Neil's affections. Marlow Bates, manager of Gibson's estate. Sergeant Coventry, the local policeman.

Notable Quotes:

Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered

tin dispatch-box with my name, John H. Watson, M.D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid. It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr. Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine. Some, and not the least interesting, were complete failures, and as such will hardly bear narrating, since no final explanation is forthcoming. A problem without a solution may interest the student, but can hardly fail to annoy the casual reader. Among these unfinished tales is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world. No less remarkable is that of the cutter Alicia, which sailed one spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew. A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science.

<i>The Problem of Thor Bridge</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>October 4</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Thursday, October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>October 4, 1896-1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>October 1900</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1901</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1890</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.

“The faculty of deduction is certainly contagious.”

“I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them.”

“I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backwards.”

“My professional charges are upon a fixed scale. I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.”

“I guess most men have a little private reserve of their own in some corner of their souls where they don't welcome intruders.”

“Now, I make no pretence to be more moral than my neighbours, and I will admit to you that I could not live under the same roof with such a woman and in daily contact with her without feeling a passionate regard for her. Do you blame me, Mr. Holmes?”

“I do not blame you for feeling it. I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection.”

“It is only for the young lady's sake that I touch your case at all. I don't know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences.”

“We must look for consistency. Where there is a want of it we must suspect deception.”

“When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so damning becomes a clue to the truth.”

“I have been sluggish in mind and wanting in that mixture of imagination and reality which is the basis of my art.”



A Heartrending Beginning



This is the first time in the Canon that Watson tantalizingly mentions the “travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box with my name,” buried within the entrails of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, which bombs shattered into oblivion during the Blitz. It was crammed full of the unpublished cases of Sherlock Holmes and heaven knows what other memorabilia.

What an indescribable loss for all students of the Sacred Writings, all those lost cases.

Alas...

The Sinisterly Happy Sherlock Holmes

The adventure opens with the Good Doctor telling us that as he descended to breakfast (is this still 221B?), he found Holmes full of what he describes as “that somewhat sinister cheerfulness which was characteristic of his lighter moments.”

Although like all living languages still evolving, the Queen's (alas, now the King's) English has not changed so much since 1901 that the word “sinister” had another, less ominous connotation than it does to-



and why would he surrender such a potentially powerful position? Finally, why did he abandon the United States for England?

While today, someone of his fortune who did that wouldn't raise an eyebrow, back then things were very different. Traveling took time—regardless of your fortune. Rapid communications (important for a man running a financial empire) were pretty much restricted to the telegraph; news to the daily newspapers. Surely Wall Street offered him whatever resources he needed to carry on with his business, as well as the necessary infrastructure (telegraph and telephone); plus, he would have been closer to Washington and his former Congressional colleagues.

Although it is undeniable that in 1901 London was the world's hub of the great wheel of industry and business, the fact remains that Englishmen—especially those with whom Gibson would have dealt—were not extraordinarily fond of their American cousins. At that time it had become abundantly clear that America was taking over as the world leader in manufacturing and development and resentment was rampant.

Concurrently, there still existed a strong anti-British feeling in America. This was best reflected by the anti-British attitudes of gold speculator and multimillionaire George Hearst (possibly ACD's model for Gibson) and later his son, William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper magnate who brought "yellow journalism" to its shabby zenith and boasted of having created the Spanish-American War.

Another point deserving of further consideration is that regardless of how ruthless and violent he is described to us by Doctor Watson it is quite evident that he was capable of tender feelings and love. He married for love and remained married for two decades. Then there were his feelings for Grace. Although at first he offered her the disgraceful status of mistress, when he thought he might lose her he instantly curbed (very likely with considerable difficulty) his carnal inclinations towards the lady.

He was also inclined to accept her guidance and moderate his ruthlessness in his business dealings. He comes through, in a way, as a Scrooge on his way to reformation.

The Comely, Unassailable Miss Grace Dunbar



It is a certainty that Miss Dunbar had to have been quite an extraordinary creature.

This assumption is reinforced by the fact that she easily (apparently without even trying) and equally affected three men who could not have been more different from each other. There is no doubt that she shook Gibson to the core. Not too unexpectedly so, so was Watson who enthusiastically describes her feminine pulchritude in his usual fervent manner. Sherlock Holmes, however, is another matter.

"After seeing you I am prepared to accept Mr. Gibson's statement both as to the influence which you had over him and as to the innocence of your relations with him," he tells her shortly after having met her for the first time. What possibly could have led our sleuth to such a seemingly hasty conclusion? While nobody can deny that Holmes was a singular deductive genius, this pronouncement, given with such aplomb and certainty, appears to rest on somewhat shaky ground.



Of course, although our sleuth was made of sterner stuff, he was not cold, lifeless marble. There seem to have been times when he most definitely felt that at least some women were to be entirely trusted.

The Murder Weapon

Holmes told Watson that a revolver of the same caliber as the weapon that killed Gibson's wife, with a discharged chamber, had been found on the floor of Grace Dunbar's closet, which the police considered as damning evidence. Back then there was no such thing as a well-developed science of ballistics.

Although the first successful case of forensic firearm examination took place in London in 1835, the science of forensic ballistics did not really come into its own until the 20th century, with the invention of the comparison microscope which allowed the simultaneous examination of the striations on two different bullets for matches.

One of the first true tests of this new technology was a consequence of the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre in Chicago in 1929. The investigation had stalled until officers searching a minor criminal's home found an arsenal of weapons that included two Thompson submachine guns. The weapons were compared with the evidence recovered at the killing, which proved that those were the weapons used to kill the members of the North Side Gang. This absolved the police department of all involvement; they had been under suspicion because the killers had dressed up like policemen.



Seething Passionate Blood



The trio of Bates, Gibson, and Dunbar separately described Gibson's deceased wife as having been "Tropical by birth and tropical by nature. A child of the sun and of passion" so ruled by her physical passions that she was unable to "understand the mental, and even spiritual tie" which held Grace Dunbar to her husband, or, as she claimed, be able to "imagine that it was only my desire to influence his power to good ends which kept me under his roof."

The question is, of course, how many wives would? It is doubtful whether any middle-aged married man could be

found amongst us who is convinced that under similar circumstances his wife would nod understandingly at such daily close relationship with an attractive—*younger*—creature: "But dearest, all we do is discuss how to best benefit mankind!"

The soundest advice to that man would be to shout, "Incoming!"

However, the Sacred Writings seem to assert that Englishwomen operated at far lower temperatures than members of their sex born in foreign climes. From what Watson has set down, his observations appear to indicate that passionate aggressive women belong to the "excitable races," whether Welsh



or Latin. I can only think of two exceptions: Kitty Winter in *ILLU* and Miss Burnett in *WIST*, because Miss Violet de Merville in *ILLU* having been hypnotized by Baron Gruner was not really operating on all eight cylinders.

It might be argued that the case of Miss Burnett (a.k.a. *Señora* Victor Durando) in *WIST* is excusable. After all, the poor woman not only lived in a fiery Latin country for years, surrounded by members of one of those “excitable races,” but was also married to a Latin man. For years she had been surrounded by nothing but bad examples; almost like contracting a loathsome infection.

Holmes, the Quintessential Victorian Gentleman

Personally, one of the things that most attracts me to Canon study are the occasional glimpses that it offers into that long-gone paradoxical era. A time during which poverty and brutality coexisted not



too uneasily with the placid existence of the middle and upper middle classes, culturally overlaid by a strong personal urge to overcome the baser self and aspire to the attainment of an ideal conduct.

As Holmes put it as he berated Gibson: “I do not blame you for feeling it. I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection.” And, “It is only for the young lady’s sake that I touch your case at all. I don’t know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences.”

Quite the Victorian paladin, *sans peur et sans reproche!*

It is also very pleasing, from what Watson writes about Holmes at this time, to find that at that point in his career, Holmes was in an enviable economic and professional position.

When Gibson discussed the matter of his fee, our sleuth’s response smacked of contempt for the American multimillionaire: “My professional charges are upon a fixed scale.

I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.”

Then when Gibson indicated that if he was indifferent to the fee money that a successful end to the case would enhance the Great Detective’s reputation in England and America He replied, “Thank

you, Mr. Gibson, I do not think that I am in need of booming. It may surprise you to know that I prefer to work anonymously, and that it is the problem itself which attracts me.”

A Brilliant Deduction

Whatever reasoning led Holmes to imagine what might have happened with the missing deadly weapon on Thor Bridge was absolutely dazzling. The way that Watson describes how Holmes arrived at his conclusion would make an excellent description today of the workings of the subconscious mind. It seems obvious that from the time the Great Detective accepted the case, his brain began nonstop spinning facts into theory and soon afterwards, proof.

Pausing the Great Game for a Moment

THOR is not only an imaginative story, but a showcase for Sherlock Holmes’ powers and insights—it is the Great Detective at his best. It shows even the casual reader why it is that he has continued attracting a wide readership over almost six generations.

Strangely enough, THOR did not make it to the list of what are considered as the 12 best stories that ran in *The Baker Street Journal* in 1999.

Proof, perhaps, that these matters heavily depend upon the eye of the beholder.



What else happened in 1901:

Empire



◀ Queen Victoria dies at 6:30 a.m. on January 22, aged 82. She lived through many changes and died well-loved by her people. She presided over her vast empire for nearly 64 years—the longest reign in British history until Elizabeth II. Born in 1819, the only child of George III’s fourth son, Victoria was crowned queen in 1838. In 1840, she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. Although the match was a political one, the two were devoted to each other, having nine children before Albert’s death in 1861. Through dynastic marriages, Victoria’s descendants are connected to almost all 20th-century Europe’s royal houses. During her long reign the monarchy lost much of its political power to Parliament, but she was the beloved symbol of the Victorian Era—a golden age of British history. By the

end of her reign London’s population had reached 6.6 million. Upon her death, she was succeeded by her son, Edward VII, who was crowned King-Emperor.

Northern Nigeria becomes British protectorate.

Creation of the North Western Frontier Province in India.

Britain and Germany agree on boundary between German East Africa (later Tanganyika, Rwanda and Burundi) and Nyasaland (later Malawi).

Uganda railway reaches Lake Victoria.

Cook Islands were annexed and proclaimed a part of New Zealand.

Robert Falcon Scott commands the Discovery on Antarctic expedition.

The Commonwealth of Australia was proclaimed. Although independent it still recognized Britain's royalty as its head of state. The governor-general, the representative of the Sovereign, is nominated by the prime minister and appointed by the British monarch.

Britain

Wigmore Hall opens.

First electric trams from Shepherds Bush to Acton and Kew Bridge.

First British submarine launched at Barrow-in-Furness.

Boxing is recognized as a legal sport in England.

Taff Vale case: Trade unions in Britain liable for actions of tort, stimulates Trade Union Congress to create the Labour Party.

World



U.S. President McKinley assassinated; succeeded by Theodore Roosevelt.

Law of Associations: gives French Roman Catholics the right to form associations if neither secret nor illegal.

◀ Peace Protocol with China after Boxer Rebellion. Boxer Rebellion leaders Chi-Hsin (Chi-hsui) and Hsu-Cheng-Yu are publicly executed in Peking.

Labor Councils in France to settle disputes between masters and men.

Franco-Italian agreement defines spheres of interest in the Mediterranean.

Anti-Semitic riot in Budapest.

Compulsory military service established in Sweden and Norway.

New constitution in Serbia issued by Alexander.

Japan proclaims that it is determined to keep Russia from encroaching on Korea.

First female intern was accepted at a Paris hospital.

U.S. Steel Corporation organized under J.P. Morgan and Company, bankers.

Opening of Trans-Siberian railway.

Hay-Pauncefort Treaty gives U.S. power to build and police the Panama Canal if it remains open to shipping in peace or war.

Art

Kipling writes *Kim*.

Richard D'Oyly Carte, promoter (Gilbert and Sullivan operas), dies.

Chekhov's *Three Sisters* opens at Moscow Art Theater.

Frank Norris, U.S., writes *The Octopus*.

Matisse paints *The Japanese Woman*.

Picasso paints *Woman with a Cap*, *Casagemas in His Coffin*, and *The Absinthe Drinker*.

Van Gogh's painting *Sunflowers* is presented by art teacher Claude-Emile Schuffenecker at a Paris exhibition.

Walt Disney is born in Chicago.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, French painter, dies at 36.

Science and Technology



Marconi transmits Morse wireless signals from Poldhu, Cornwall to St. John's, Newfoundland.

Becquerel discovers dangerous effects of radioactivity on humans.

◀ Walter Reed leads Yellow Fever Commission, a four-man team, to Cuba to search for the cause of the disease. More than 200 American soldiers died from the disease over the previous 18 months. Aristides Agramonte, pathologist, James Carroll, bacteriologist, and Jesse W. Lazear, entomologist, were team members. Cuban Dr. Carlos Finlay theorized that yellow fever was spread by mosquitoes.

U.S. Congress creates the National Bureau of Standards as part of the Department of Commerce.

Alberto Santos-Dumont successfully circles Eiffel Tower in his Santos-Dumont No. 6 dirigible within a half hour and won a 100,000-franc prize. An initial ruling stated he failed by 40 seconds because the race wasn't finished until he touched ground. A second vote granted him the win. This proved the airship maneuverable.

Rene Dubos, French-American microbiologist who developed the first commercial antibiotic, was born in France.

Freud publishes *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

First isolation of the hormone adrenalin.

Peter Cooper-Hewitt produces mercury vapor lamp; invented by Arons in 1892.

Next week's case: CREE.

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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