



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into:

"The Adventure of the Illustrious Client"

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"The Adventure of the Illustrious Client" first appeared in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* on November 8, 1924. It ran *The Strand Magazine* on February/March 1925. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

Although the chronology for this case varies, depending on which Canon expert one consults, thanks to Watson's atypical clear dating, none of our chronologists dispute the

year in which this case took place as shown in the table.

That being so, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 48 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 50.

Main Characters:

Colonel Sir James Damery, a well-known discreet high society go-between who tactfully smoothes out delicate problems, now acting in behalf of an anonymous, possibly Royal, client. Baron Adelbert Grüner, infamous Austrian nobleman, suspected murderer, and sadistic womanizer. Violet de Merville, Baron Grüner's fiancée and next victim. Shinwell Johnson, former criminal and Holmes' spy in the London underworld. Kitty Winter, former mistress and victim of Grüner's. Sir Leslie Oakshott, surgeon.

Notable Quotes:

"It can't hurt now," was Mr. Sherlock Holmes's comment when, for the tenth time in as many years, I asked his leave to reveal the following narrative. So it was that at last I obtained permission to put on record what was, in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend's career.

"Woman's heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle."

Some people's affability is more deadly than the violence of coarser souls.

<i>The Adventure of the Illustrious Client</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Saturday, September 13, 1902</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>September 1902</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 3, 1902</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>October 3, 1902</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Wednesday September 3rd 1902</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1902</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, September 13, 1902</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.

You may have noticed how extremes call to each other, the spiritual to the animal, the cave-man to the angel.

There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be. He pushed to an extreme the axiom that the only safe plotter was he who plotted alone. I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between.

The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered, was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.



The Improbable Supreme Moment

Watson opens this story by telling us that this “was, in some ways, the supreme moment” of Sherlock Holmes’ career.

This is absolutely absurd, considering the overwhelmingly greater importance of some of his other cases—some of possible serious international repercussions that might have even led to war. BRUC, NAVA, SECO, and others easily come to mind. How, then, can our Biographer suggest, even in jest, that this (albeit successful) effort on our sleuth’s part to prevent a thoughtless, foolish headstrong girl’s marriage to a highly undesirable man does not only appear to reach the same level of those others, but perhaps even surpass them.

The argument could be made that the Good Doctor once again may not be telling us everything about this case; for example, it seems quite obvious that the Illustrious Client was no simple nobleman, but very likely a Royal—perhaps even King Edward VII himself.



From the exchange between him and Sir James, it is clear that Holmes immediately deduced the identity of this august personage:

“I have no doubt, Mr. Holmes, with your great powers you could easily trace my client back through me, but I must ask you, as a point of honour, to refrain from doing so, and not to break in upon his incognito.”

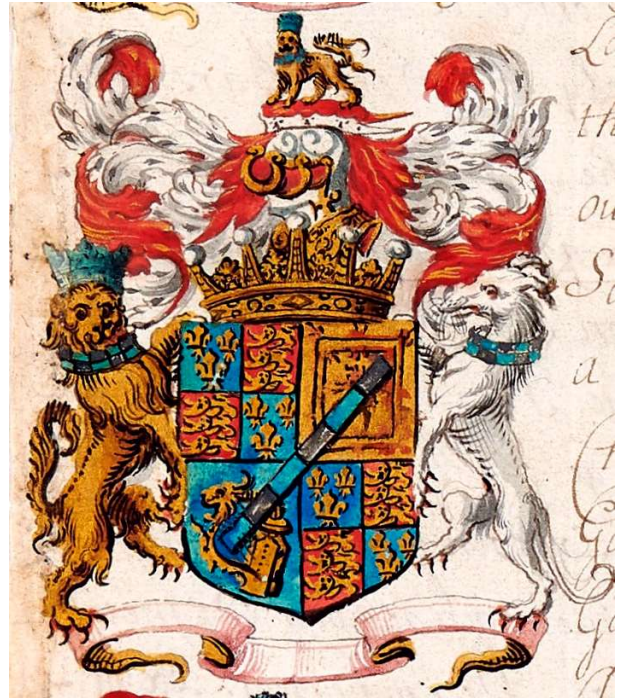
Holmes gave a whimsical smile. “I think I may safely promise that.”

This would shed light on some of Sir James’ remarks: the client who is the possessor of an “honoured name has been in no way dragged into the matter. “His motives are, to the last degree, honourable and chivalrous, but he prefers to remain unknown.” Then he adds that this mysterious client “is an old friend, one who has known the General (Violet’s father) intimately for many years and taken a paternal interest in this young girl since she wore short frock.” and “cannot see this tragedy consummated without some attempt to stop it.”

I think that the main clue here is the word “paternal.” It was an open secret that first as Prince of Wales and afterwards as King-Emperor, Victoria’s son had been the indulgent possessor of a roving eye. One need not stretch the imagination too far to consider the very solid possibility that one of the results of this proclivity might have been the birth of one Miss Violet de Merville. Had that been the case, Holmes would then have been involved in the rescue of someone who, under somewhat different social circumstances would have been a Princess Royal.

Royal bastards have never been unusual. Accommodations have always been made for these individuals born on the wrong side of a noble blanket. For instance, the Anglo-Norman surname “Fitzroy” means “son of a king” and was used by various illegitimate royal offspring and others who with considerable pride claimed to be such. This also spilled over to the escutcheons; in medieval England a bastard’s coat of arms was marked with a baton sinister, proudly proclaiming that the bearer of such a charge was noble-born although his father’s name was denied to him.

Having researched the matter, I have formed the hypothesis that Watson’s pronouncement that this case represented the zenith of Holmes’ career went deeper than that. The fact is that saving a twit like Violet de Merville from her own idiotic obstinacy would have been light-years away from what he accomplished in several other vitally more important investigations. There is nothing about this particular absurd, seemingly minor case dealing with misplaced *mal de coeur* to justify the importance that Watson assigned it.



Escutcheon bearing the baton sinister.

Let us examine a little closer the facts that are presented to us. When Holmes tells Damery that he knows all about Grüner and wonders if it is one of his old crimes that have resurfaced, Damery’s reply is quite revealing:

“No, it is more serious than that. To revenge crime is important, but to prevent it is more so. It is a terrible thing, Mr. Holmes, to see a dreadful event, an atrocious situation, preparing itself before your eyes, to clearly understand whither it will lead and yet to be utterly unable to avert it. Can a human being be placed in a more trying position?”



Damery is what we would call today a “fixer.” He obviously was someone adept at confidentially resolving for those in power, in one way or another, potentially embarrassing issues. While this whole affair would have naturally been most painful for the de Merville family, the headstrong behavior of a twit of a girl most definitely would not rise to the level of “a dreadful event, an atrocious situation” much beyond the family hearth.

In view of all this, I have concluded that Holmes did indeed save a woman for

whom King Edward VII had a powerful emotional attachment: his legitimate daughter, Princess Victoria Alexandra Olga Mary. She was the king's fourth child and second daughter, the younger sister of the future George V.

Although Baron Grüner was eliminated as a dangerous liaison, it would seem that she never recovered from whatever spell he had held her under. Even though she had a number of noble suitors, the most famous of them being King Carlos I of Portugal, unlike the rest of her siblings Princess Victoria never married and had no children. For a Royal, she led a retiring life, choosing to dedicate her life to her parents, becoming her mother's constant companion.

When Queen Alexandra died in 1925, Princess Victoria withdrew to a house she had at Coppins, Iver, in Buckinghamshire, and devoted herself to the village's life, becoming the honorary president of the local horticultural society.



Princess Victoria Alexandra Olga Mary.

If these are indeed the facts, then Holmes most definitely did shine by preventing what at best would have been at best a scandal and at worse the intrusion of an Austrian blackguard into the very heart of the King-Emperor's family.

The Detective and the Satanic Baron

From whatever perspective one considers the situation, it is impossible not to question Holmes' judgment when he decided to cross swords with Baron Grüner, particularly considering that he had not yet heard from Shinwell Johnson. It would have hurt nothing to wait; in fact, there was a possibility that Johnson might have unearthed a valuable piece of information that our sleuth might have used against the Baron. Why the Great Detective chose to deliver this superfluous and dangerous shot across the bows to the villain is not immediately obvious.

As it was, Johnson located Kitty Winter, who in the end permanently halted the notorious Austrian's



career, although not as envisioned. Holmes' decision to confront the man smacks more of hubris than planning, even if it was obvious that the Grüner would naturally expect that he would be consulted on the matter. As it turned out, tickling the dragons' tail resulted in almost fatal consequences for Holmes and solved nothing.

Baron Grüner is surely one of the Canon's worst criminals. Aside from the fact that through his actions and behavior he gleefully and purposefully charted a course that left nothing but a wake of misery and death behind

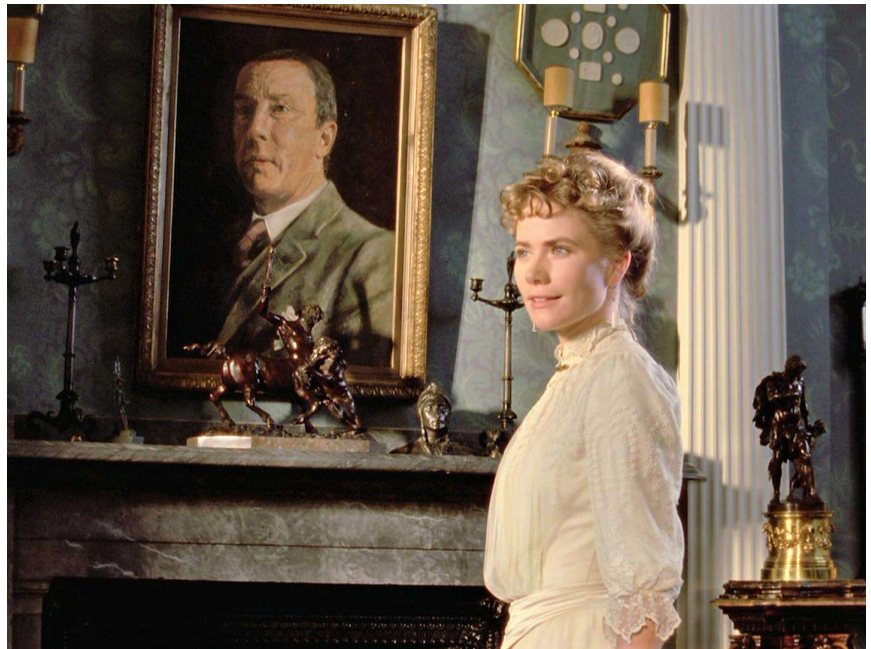
him; despite of the fact that he was an extremely well-educated man who was sensitive to the finer things in life he acted as a devil's spawn. One would have thought that an intellectual of the first water who had written a definitive and scholarly work about a complex subject, which must have re-

quired considerable research and much thought, would have deported himself in a more ethical and moral fashion. Although he certainly well understood what love was, albeit through a mirror darkly, he chose to degrade others by using it as a weapon.

Grüner sneeringly tells Holmes that one of the reasons—if not the main one—behind Violet de Merville’s unbreakable attachment to him is the result of a post-hypnotic suggestion. One must wonder why Holmes did not look more deeply into this. While Watson was not an alienist, he surely would have had at least a passing acquaintance with some of the renowned Jean-Martin Charcot’s work. By 1887, 15 years before this case, the French neurologist and professor of anatomical pathology had already done considerable work on the application of hypnosis in the treatment of mental problems, and there was no shortage of experts in the field. Sigmund Freud had also contributed to the field. The Good Doctor could have told his friend that in such a case what is done can be undone.

Once beyond Grüner’s routine influence, in time at least part of her feelings for him would have faded. Regardless of what is depicted in *The Manchurian Candidate*, post-hypnotic suggestions tend to dissipate over time; they must be periodically reinforced or they tend to weaken. With all the resources available to the Illustrious Client, obtaining expert professional help would not have proven difficult.

In any case, Grüner’s romantic and hypnotic bond on Miss de Merville had resulted in her utter refusal to face facts. At this point, it is possible that even if she were to read his “Lust Book,” this would not have had the desired effect—a simple protestation on Grüner’s part that it had been manufactured imitating his handwriting would have seemed perfectly plausible to her. It should not be forgotten that he had already “forgiven” him many things that took place in his past—including a possible murder.



With such a vague moral compass, regardless of the fact she had come of age, here could have been other solutions. It would have been a relatively simple matter for her father, with the help of a doctor recommended by perhaps the Illustrious Client, to place her out of danger. All that would have been required would have been to discreetly commit her to some private hospital as a patient suffering from one of the many “hysterical” disorders that proper young ladies of the time often had to endure.

== A Nemesis Called Kitty ==

Some have viewed Watson’s interesting comment about Kitty Winter, that “There was an intensity of hatred in her white, set face and her blazing eyes such as a woman seldom and man never can attain,” as a reflection of the “deadlier than the male” Victorian concept. If that was the case, this may not have been too far from the mark.

Undoubtedly, both sexes are equally as capable of deep hatred; however, the kind of deceit and outrage that sometimes can be inflicted upon a woman is like nothing that a male could ever experience. Thus, in her sad case Kitty truly was capable of a hatred that no man could have matched.



Kitty is one of the more interesting women in the Canon. One wishes that Watson had told us a little more about her. We know little about her past; that is, what happened to her once she was dumped by Grüner. An easy assumption is that she took to the streets and became a prostitute, but that might not have necessarily been the case. It is highly unlikely that she was someone that Grüner had picked from the streets to begin with—she certainly had not been a

prostitute something that is revealed by her claim that the Baron had seduced her. As she put it, “What I am Adelbert Grüner made me.”

Watson’s introduction of her describes someone who, at first glance would be attractive: “a slim, flame-like young woman with a pale, intense face.” I imagine her as a petite redhead. Then the Good Doctor painfully—almost in a heartless or perhaps unfeeling clinical manner—amends this by adding that the years of sin and sorrow that she had spent since had left a “leprous mark upon her.” He is describing someone—possibly consumed with TB—who might be facing a perhaps short life, were it not for her “fierce energy,” energy which we are left without a doubt regarding its powerful dark source: pure distilled hatred.

It has been speculated, particularly by the scholarly Christopher Redmond, that Grüner may have not just indulged his sexual proclivities with Kitty, but might have also enjoyed physically abusing her, possibly by whipping her.

Unlike what was pictured in the Granada version of the story, Watson gives no indication that she bore any permanent bodily marks as a result of that mistreatment. However, it is often the case that the mental anguish that inevitably results from such treatment surpasses any physical damage.



Whenever I read Watson's account of this case, I fail to understand why Holmes would have brought her with him to the Baron's house. She had already told him where she had seen Grüner keep the "Lust Book" he was after. Had he changed the place where he had kept it during Kitty's time, she would have known nothing about it and would have been of no use.

It may be that I read too much into this, but I have always been unable to shake off the gnawing suspicion that realizing that as far as Violet de Merville was concerned the game was lost, Holmes—perhaps out of a subconscious hope—brought Kitty along. The lady was clearly a ticking time bomb. One would think that Holmes would have realized that her unpredictable behavior might seriously endanger the mission that he and Watson were upon.

Deep inside, I've always harbored the possibly baseless suspicion that our sleuth expected her to attack Grüner in some way, perhaps not with vitriol, but possibly with a revolver or a dagger, bringing the situation to its sole certain solution. After all, he did observe the little package that she was carrying, and made no inquiry about it.

He would have also deduced that, whatever she did, Damery would see to it that she was protected from the legal consequences of her act.

And he would have been correct, as Watson explained:

The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered, was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.

A Reasonable Alternative

Just as is the case now, back then those in power could arrange certain matters discreetly and secretly. One must wonder why the Illustrious Client would not have given Sir James a version of King Henry II's "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?" and have someone tactfully arrange a deadly "accident" for the Baron. Such an action would have been straightforward and would have considerably simplified matters. It may have been that something like that was being planned and Grüner suspected it; hence his sudden decision to leave for the United States aboard the SS *Ruritania*.



While it is true that the matter ended satisfactorily regardless, it was Miss Winter's unerring vitriol-tossing that

brought the situation to a satisfactory conclusion, not Sherlock Holmes.

A Short Aside

One of the things that always strike me as odd is why, under the circumstances—i.e., they are going to confront the evil baron—Watson would have been carrying his medical bag. Yet, when the moment arose he was able to very quickly (and one might add expertly) attend to the injured man. Certainly, while it is true that the oil and cotton-wool with which he treated Grüner could have been items available in Grüner's household, whence came the morphia hypodermic?

Did he take it away from Holmes and just dropped it into his pocket? Whatever the circumstances, it certainly came in quite handy



What else happened in 1902:

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.

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.



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

◀ British Academy granted Royal Charter.

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

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

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.

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

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.

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.

