



An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of the Three Gables"

Vol. XII No. 93 • June 23, 2022

"The Adventure of the Three Gables" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in October 1926. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

Unsurprisingly, as the table shows, there is little agreement among our chronologists regarding the date in

which this case is supposed to have taken place have different dates for its occurrence.

The year most agreed upon is 1903. If that is when the case took place, then at the time Sherlock Holmes would have been 49 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 51.

Main Characters:

Steve Dixie, prize fighter and thug, hired to threaten Holmes. Mrs. Mary Maberley, elderly widow, mother of the deceased Douglas Maberley. Douglas Maberley, rejected lover of Isadora Klein. Susan, Mrs. Maberley's servant. Mr. Sutro, Mrs. Maberley's solicitor. Isadora Klein, a wealthy South American widow, former lover of Douglas. Langdale Pike, London gossip-monger, with deep connections to society.

Notable Quotes:

"There are always some lunatics about. It would be a dull world without them."

Langdale Pike was his human book of reference upon all matters of social scandal.

The lady had come, I felt, to that time of life when even the proudest beauty finds the half light more welcome.

The Adventure of the Three Gables

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	Unspecified
Baring-Gould	Tuesday, May 26, 1903
Bell	Late May 1903
Blakeney	1903
Brend	Summer 1903
Christ	October (or later) 1902
Dakin	1903
Folsom	Late September 1902
Hall	Spring 1902
Keefauver	Wednesday, March 15, 1893
Klinger	1902
Zeisler	About June 1, 1896

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.

“Surely no man would take up my profession if it were not that danger attracts him.”

“I am not the law, but I represent justice so far as my feeble powers go.”

“I suppose I shall have to compound a felony as usual.”

A Case of Writer’s Block or Bad Pasticheitis?

One is not alone if one casts doubts upon this case’s authenticity. In fact, many Canon scholars have wondered whether this might not be a spurious case. Personally, I tend to seriously doubt that Watson was the author of this account. What immediately becomes obvious is that Sherlock Holmes is depicted behaving in a wholly atypical way. Although it cannot be said that the Great Detective lacked a sense of humor or that he did not appreciate a good joke, it is difficult to accept him cracking jokes such as “Paregoric is the stuff” or referring to his “scent-bottle.” In more than one instance we see him behaving in an ungentlemanly fashion that is diametrically opposed to what we have come to expect of him. His attitude towards Steve Dixie’s race is absolutely uncharacteristic of the man. One only need recall the event and his behavior in YELL to realize this.

Although one can find little, if anything, satisfactory in this case, the ending is especially a disappointment.

Although we know that Holmes often did not hesitate to “compound a felony,” the reasons for this action have always been impeccable. For example, in BOSC although he allows old John Turner, the real murderer of the elder McCarthy to go free, he does it to protect the innocence and future happiness of the accused young McCarthy, making it possible for him to marry the elder McCarthy’s daughter, whom he loves. He understands the reasons that led old John Turner to murder, and realizes that the man’s fragile health would soon out him before a much Higher Tribunal. In AB-BE his decision is prompted by almost the same situation. Holmes allows Captain Jack Croker get away with killing Sir Eustace Brackenstall. He reasoned that, after all, he had acted in self-defense and in protection of Mary, Sir Eustace’s severely abused wife, whom



Croker loved and would later marry. There was no reason to cause a scandal.

In the present case, however, Holmes’ reasons for letting Isadora go are less clear-cut. While unquestionably young Maberley, her ex-lover, did not accept being dumped becoming, by today’s standards, somewhat of a stalker, Isadora did not hesitate in instigating deadly violence against her former lover. While it is true that the argument could be made that there was abundant guilt on the part of both sides, it is exceedingly clear that she acted not so much out of a reaction of self-defense, as much as by her craving to make a profitable

marriage with a nobleman before her beauty faded any further. Considering that Isadora was already

extremely wealthy, the “punishment” that Holmes imposed upon her was to have her write a check to Mrs. Maberley, her dead former lover’s mother, a check for £5,000 (≈\$1,800,000) to enable her to travel the world seems more of a fine than anything else.

Holmes’ treatment of Isadora Klein is somewhat equivocal. A dispassionate look at the facts reveals that she was being stalked; then felt it necessary to take action to stop the publication of a novel with libelous undertones that would have wrecked her reputation and ruined her life.

It is here that I see the problem. If she had gone to Holmes for help ahead of Mrs. Maberly, he would have been quite willing to help her acting in ways similar to hers, at least where the manuscript was concerned. If this seems farfetched, it is well to remember that our sleuth saw no difficulties in representing the interests of a client who had hardly acted in a gentlemanly manner: Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismund von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia.

For me, the cork in the provenance bottle lies in the fact that Doctor John H. Watson was an educated man who had also seen a fair share of the world (“In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents . . .”). However, here he informs us, most illiterately, that Isadora Klein “is pure Spanish, the real blood of the masterful Conquistadors, and her people have been leaders in Pernambuco for generations.”

Our biographer would certainly have had sufficient geography and history to know that Pernambuco is a state in Brazil, and that that country was colonized and dominated by Portugal, not Spain, so no “masterful Conquistadors.”

Were this case to be genuine, then it certainly would rank very low in the adventures chronicling the Great Detective’s successes. If this case is genuine, overall this is not one of his better ones—he shines with an opaque minimum of luster. Although the so-called “crime” that he investigates, like a good—but dull—equation, balances out with equal guilt on both sides—Isadora and Douglas’—its conclusion is unsatisfactory.

Langdale Pike

In my case, I wish that this adventure were canonical mostly because of Langdale Pike. He is described as Sherlock Holmes’ “human



book of reference upon all matters of social scandal.” We are further told that, “This strange, languid creature spent his waking hours in the bow window of a St. James’s Street club and was the receiving-station as well as the transmitter for all the gossip of the metropolis. He made, it was said, a four-figure income by the paragraphs which he contributed every week to the garbage papers which cater to an inquisitive public. If ever, far down in the turbid depths of London life, there was some strange swirl or eddy, it was marked with automatic exactness by this human dial upon the surface. Holmes discreetly

helped Langdale to knowledge, and on occasion was helped in turn.” An eccentric, with an equally as eccentric *nom de guerre*.

It seems quite obvious that their means of exchange was not represented by pounds and shillings, but by something far more valuable to both: information. My favorite Canon scholar, the practically legendary William S. Baring-Gould's claimed in his biography of Holmes, *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*, that Pike was a college acquaintance of the Great Detective who encouraged a young Holmes to try acting. Baring-Gould identifies Pike by his real name, "Lord Peter." In the Granada Television adaptation of the Canon, Pike is also presented as old university chum of Holmes', and is depicted as the mirror image of the notorious blackmailer Charles Augustus Milverton, in that he suppresses more information than he exposes. Watson is rather scathing about Pike, but Holmes sympathetically suggests that Pike is as isolated as he is.

It is reasonable that Holmes would know and keep in touch with someone like Pike. His relationship with Shinwell Johnson, whom Watson tells us in *ILLU* had become "a valuable assistant" in keeping our sleuth abreast of the goings-on of "the huge criminal underworld of London and obtaining information which often proved to be of vital importance." Both Shinwell and Pike (and perhaps others left unmentioned), would have served similar useful purposes— one concentrated on crime, the other on high society.

Little difference there. . .

What else happened in 1903:

Empire

Britain and France agree to settle disputes through International Court at The Hague.

Coronation Durbar for Edward III, King-Emperor, at Delhi.

British expeditionary force sent to Tibet.

Alaskan frontier question between Canada and U.S. settled by arbitration.

Exchange of visits between London and Paris; Arbitration Treaty establishes Entente Cordiale.

Britain



Women's Social and Political Union formed to demand votes for women.

Foundation of universities at Liverpool and Manchester.

◀ Joseph Chamberlain begins Tariff Reform Campaign.

Establishment of Workers' Educational Association.

GRW introduces early motor-bus service from Helston to the Lizard; the initiation of bus services largely originates from railway companies.

Wyndham's Act--Irish landlords to be bought out; peasant ownership; repayments over 68-and-a-half years.

Road speed limit in England increased to 20 mph.

World

Dutch Democratic Labor Party formed; general strike suppressed by troops.

Russian massacre of Jews at Kishinyov.

Mursteig Program—Austro-Russian proposals to solve Macedonian problems fails.

Russia refuses to evacuate Manchuria under terms of Russo-Japanese Convention.

Belgium introduces Old Age Pension plan.

Foundation Bank of Persia loans with large Russian interests.

Alexander Obrenovitch and Queen Draga of Serbia assassinated; Peter Karageorgevitch elected king.

Art

Barrie writes his play, *The Admirable Critchon*.

Degas, *Dancers in Yellow Skirts*.

First recording of an opera, Verdi's *Ermani*.

Elgar, *The Apostles*, an oratorio.

Jack London, *The Call of the Wild*.

German, *A Princess of Kensington*, operetta.

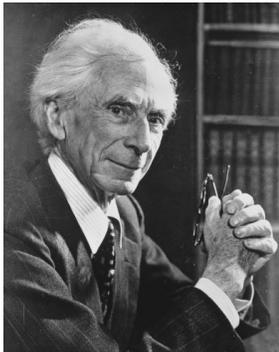
Pisarro, *Bridge at Bruges*.

Butler's *The Way of All Flesh*, a semi-autobiographical novel of middle-class life is published posthumously.

Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands*, a novel.

Shaw, *Man and Superman*.

Science and Technology



First radio press messages published by *The Times*.

Tsiolkovski publishes paper on astronautics.

Orville and Wilbur Wright make their first flight in a heavier-than-air machine.

Henry Ford founds his motor company.

◀ Bertrand Russell publishes *Principia Mathematica*.

Wilhelm Einthoven invents the electro-cardiograph.

J.J. Thomson publishes *Conduction of Electricity through Gases*.

Phenobarbitone, a long lasting sedative, developed.

Next week's case: BLAN.

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.

Copyright © 2022 Alexander E. Braun