



An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier"

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"The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in November 1926. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

The Canon being uniquely specific in this instance, all

our chronologists look upon 1903 as the year in which the case took place.

In 1903, Sherlock Holmes was 49 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 47.

Main Characters:

James M. Dodd, young veteran of the Boer War. Godfrey Emsworth, another veteran of the same war and close friend of Dodd's. Colonel Emsworth, retired distinguished army colonel and Godfrey's father. Mrs. Emsworth, Godfrey's mother. Ralph and wife, long-serving butler and housekeeper respectively, of the Emsworth family. Sir James Saunders, eminent specialist in skin diseases.

Notable Quotes:

The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious. For a long time he

has worried me to write an experience of my own. Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures.

Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would like to take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquires it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances.

He has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances. A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each de-

The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>A Wednesday in January 1903</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Wednesday, January 7, 1903</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>January 1903</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>January 1903</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>January 1903</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, January 7, 1903</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>January(?) 1903</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>A Wednesday in January 1903</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>January 1903</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Wednesday, January 21, 1903</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1903</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Wednesday, January 7, 1903</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.

velopment comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.

The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone.

I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power.

“I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see.”

“It is my business to know things.”

“When you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.”

Canonicity, Canonicity...

Every so often—and especially in a case like this one—it is useful to refresh one’s memory regarding some Canon story statistics. Scholars are generally in agreement that two of cases, LION and BLAN, were written by Sherlock Holmes himself. Two others, MUSG and GLOR, were authored by Watson from notes directly provided to him by the Great Detective. And yet another two, MAZA and LAST, are the product of some unidentified “third-person” narrator. The vast bulk remaining has doubtlessly been penned by Doctor Watson.

The present case’s provenance is entangled in controversy. Although we are given to believe that this was written by Holmes himself, several Canon scholars differ. The arguments upon which they base



this disbelief are substantial. For example, they cite Holmes’ seeming confusion when he refers to the case of the “Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved.” While it might be possible that our sleuth referred to a startlingly parallel, unpublished case involving a different school and another duke, one would have to conclude that his memory had mysteriously become unreliable.

A more apt explanation—a better fit under the circum-

stances—is that this case was chronicled by someone unsure of the chronology of the cases of Sherlock Holmes. Another equally major objection to this story’s Canonical authorship lies in Holmes blaming Watson’s marriage as the reason that the Good Doctor did not do the writing. This, of course, stirred yet another controversy: was Holmes so careless with his own dates or did Watson marry a second time?

On this scale’s other platter, however, Holmes’ comments regarding the manner in which Watson tells a story and his other “meretricious” ways sound solidly Holmesian—we’ve heard such comments before. Also his jeremiad about the difficulties in writing one’s own story also rings true.

And yet, considering the clarity with which he related to Watson his experiences with Reginald Musgrave and Victor Trevor, it appears inconsistent that Holmes would have written such a muddled account.

On the basis of much of this Canon scholars such as Dakin have concluded that this story as well as LION, had to have been written by someone else, possibly using facts provided by Holmes, and attributed his more famous name to them.

To be perfectly candid, my Canonical scholarship is a few parsecs behind that of scholars such as Dakin, but I must differ—somewhat—from their conclusion.

There is enough of Holmes here to convince me that he did write this account of the case. His comment that he “found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power” rings true, as does his

remark, “I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see.” We see here a Holmes lacking a Watson who paints himself as being denser than he really is, just to convince us of how nearly supernatural the Great Detective’s sleuthing abilities are, while discreetly toning down some of his friend’s more conceited attitudes towards clients.

In the present case Sherlock Holmes still emerges as Sherlock Holmes, but in a more human version. His regrets about what he calls Watson’s sole act of selfishness shows how much he misses his friend and biographer, and how lonely he feels.

The False Leprosy



Ichthyosis vulgaris

I am perennially puzzled by the fact that poor Godfrey was given a diagnosis of leprosy. Regardless of his harrowing story of waking up on the bed of a leper, even a cursory exam by a competent physician should have indicated otherwise. Kent’s statement that he only had “the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man” where it came to leprosy would have been sufficient, if true. Even if Kent had persisted in his diagnosis, eventually the lack of progression of the malady would have been sufficient to show that his patient was not afflicted by the disease.

In the Bible’s Leviticus 13 we read of a plethora of varied instructions on how to identify the disease, including a period of quarantine to see what develops. From all this, it would seem that some 3,400 years ago the ancient Hebrews’ grasp of leprosy handily surpassed “the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man” in Edwardian England.

This is particularly puzzling, because Imperial Britain was serviced by multitudes of people who served as soldiers and civil servants in all parts of the Empire, in many of which the disease commonly existed, such as India, Africa, and some parts of the Caribbean. Some



returned with the disease. While leprosy most certainly was not an everyday occurrence in the British Isles, it was common enough for it to be familiar to the physicians of the time—it is well to remember that leprosariums also existed in England.

Ichthyosis, Sir James' diagnosis of Godfrey's condition, manifests itself in widespread and persistent thick, dry, "fish-scale" skin. There are some 20 different variants of the condition—inherited or acquired during adulthood. Symptoms of the inherited version appear at birth or within the first year of life.

Acquired ichthyosis generally develops in adulthood and is usually associated with other conditions, such as an underactive thyroid, kidney disease, or Hodgkin's lymphoma. Because we are not told whether Godfrey had exhibited any of these symptoms before, it is not fully certain that this was what was truly ailing him.

In all the sources I consulted, there was no reference to the disease causing white blotches or in any way mimicking leprosy. Sir James' revelation that Godfrey's affliction was, "A well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scale-like affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly noninfective," was quite extraordinary, considering that this would have meant that his dermatological abilities surpassed even those of professionals of our own time, because still today ichthyosis has no known cure.

Godfrey Emsworth's Wound

Godfrey Emsworth told Dodd that he "was hit with a bullet from an elephant gun in the action near Diamond Hill outside Pretoria."

This is not at all unlikely, particularly because most of the Boer forces essentially were militia, and they often fought with their personal weapons, not standard-issue guns as is usual in the regular military. At that time, big game hunting was acceptable and various shotgun/rifle types were used to



bring down the larger land mammals. However, considering that the Boer War was not one of traditional encounters, but more akin to fast-moving guerilla warfare, an elephant gun does not seem to have been an ideal weapon. Many were essentially shotguns with rifled barrels. Some of the double-barreled versions were more cannon than gun weighing, on average, 20 or more pounds (≈ 9

kilograms). Although they fired shotgun-style shells, instead of regular buckshot the shells were loaded with a single, ping-pong-sized lead projectile. The recoil of such a weapon was terrific and may be seen in the attached video file.

Photos and footage showing an unfortunate pachyderm being struck by such a round invariably show an aura of dust around the poor critter, shaken off its body by the sheer force of the shell's impact. It literally would stop a charging elephant on its tracks.

How possible, then, is it that after having been shot on the shoulder by such a weapon, Godfrey would not only have been able to remain mounted on his horse, but *gallop* "several miles" before he finally fainted and rolled off the saddle?

Extrapolating from the effects of a much lighter .45 caliber handgun, Godfrey's upper torso should have been instantly turned into ground beef, instantly resulting in shock and bleeding at a hæmorrhagic level, all of which would have been enough to kill him practically instantly. So, although Godfrey was very specific to the kind of rifle, he had to have been mistaken in identifying it as "an elephant gun."

This story always brings to mind a somewhat whimsical treatment of the hunt for *truly* large land animals with a solid discussion of powerful hunting weapons. I refer to the 1956 science-fiction story, "A Gun for Dinosaur" by American writer L. Sprague de Camp. It tells the story of four men who time-travel to the distant past to hunt a *T. rex*.

A Gentleman Ranker?

Dodd says that, "When I joined up in January, 1901—just two years ago—young Godfrey Emsworth had joined the same squadron. He was Colonel Emsworth's only son—Emsworth, the Crimean V. C.—and he had the fighting blood in him, so it is no wonder he volunteered. There was not a finer lad in the regiment. We formed a friendship—the sort of friendship which can only be made when one lives the same life and shares the same joys and sorrows. He was my mate—and that means a



good deal in the Army. We took the rough and the smooth together for a year of hard fighting."

From the above it would seem Dodd and Godfrey must have enlisted as plain soldiers, not officers. It seems strange that men of their class and education did not have had some sort of a commission; especially in Godfrey's case, who was the son of such a distinguished officer.

This prompts several questions regarding Godfrey. For example, did he join against his father's wishes, and that is why his father did not wrangle a commission for his son? Did Godfrey reject a commission because he wanted no special treatment and joined purely out of patriotism, not to emulate his father? Although by the time of the Boer War officers' commissions were no longer for sale in the British Army, just as we did in both World Wars, England had its version of the "90-day wonder"; that is, educated young men who went through an accelerated course in some sort of an Officer Candidate School and hatched out as lieutenants.

There seems to be little doubt, from all his efforts to shield his son that the elder Emsworth loved his son, yet it seems he might have intervened on his behalf when Godfrey decided to go and fight in the Boer War.

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

Joseph Chamberlain begins Tariff Reform Campaign.

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

Foundation of universities at Liverpool and Manchester.

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.

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

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.

Art

Barrie writes his play, *The Admirable Critchon*.

Degas, *Dancers in Yellow Skirts*.

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

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*.

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

◀ Tsiolkovski publishes paper on astronautics.

Henry Ford founds his motor company.

Wilhelm Einthoven invents the electro-cardiograph.

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

Bertrand Russell publishes *Principia Mathematica*.

Phenobarbitone, a long lasting sedative, developed.

Next week's case: LION.

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..."

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

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