



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

place sometime in 1907.

If this case did indeed take place in 1907, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 53 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 55.

Main Characters:

Harold Stackhurst, a good friend of the retired Holmes and headmaster of the Gables coaching establishment. Fitzroy McPherson, science master at the college. Ian Murdoch, mathematics master at the same institution. Maud Bellamy, "the beauty of the neighborhood." Tom and William Bellamy, Maud's father and brother respectively. Inspector Bardle, Sussex policeman.

Notable Quotes:

"At this period of my life the good Watson had passed almost beyond my ken. An occasional week-end visit was the most that I ever saw of him. Thus I must act as my own chronicler. Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty!"

He and I were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation.

"I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles."

An Inquiry into:
"The Adventure of the Lion's Mane"

Vol. XIV No. 56 • October 24, 2024

"The Adventure of the Lion's Mane" first appeared in *Liberty Magazine* on November 27, 1926 and it was published in *The Strand Magazine* on December of that same year. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

Our chronologists are not unanimous, but as the table shows a majority of them place this story as having taken

<i>The Adventure of the Lion's Mane</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	A Tuesday in late July 1907
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	Tuesday, July 27, 1909
<i>Bell</i>	Tuesday, July 21, 1907
<i>Blakeney</i>	1903-1912
<i>Brend</i>	July 1907
<i>Christ</i>	Tuesday, June 25, 1907
<i>Dakin</i>	1907, probably July
<i>Folsom</i>	Tuesday, July 27, 1909
<i>Hall</i>	The end of July 1907
<i>Keefauver</i>	Tuesday, July 30, 1907
<i>Klinger</i>	1907
<i>Zeisler</i>	Tuesday, July 27, 1909

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.



Of Questionable Provenance and Relationship

This is one of two stories (BLAN being the other) which noted Holmesian scholar D. Martin Dakin—as well as other Canon scholars and students—very much doubt was actually written by Holmes. In his scholarly canonical opus, *A Sherlock Holmes Commentary*, he strongly protests that the two stories supposedly authored by Holmes himself are rather awkwardly written and that their muddled prose is unworthy of our sleuth, who has always been “lucid, powerful and clear in every detail.”

“I conclude that these two are pseudonymous stories,” he wrote, acerbically adding that, “In addition, Holmes’s comparison of his mind to an attic stored with an unsystematic mass of out-of-the-way information is in direct contradiction to what he told Watson of his mental habits in *A Study in Scarlet*—that he dismissed from his mind all knowledge not of service to his work.”



Holmes’ lament over Watson’s absence in this story has always had a leaden ring for me. His comment that the Good Doctor now only visits him on “an occasional week-end” does not ring true, especially considering what they went through during the course of their association before our sleuth finally retired. In view of their years-long deep friendship, it is not surprising that years after, he and Watson would readily again team together in defense of the Realm,

to neutralize von Bork. Certainly not what one would have expected of two people who have drifted apart.

Also peculiar is Holmes’ complaint regarding Watson’s “occasional week-end” visits. He makes it seem as if he expected these occasional reunions to travel upon a one-way road. Are we to think that he did not visit the Good Doctor in turn? The South Downs is 58 miles from London, and trains back then averaged between 40 to 50 mph. This would have meant a trip of roughly an hour—hardly an exhausting journey of excessive duration. While this is a relatively short and not uncomfortable trip by train, it is not something one would undertake regularly; especially if Watson, unlike Holmes, was still in harness, attending to patients.

The logical expectation would have been that upon retirement he would have shut himself off from all human contact and monastically devote himself to profound chemical studies, writings about crime, and the life of bees. Obviously this does not seem to have been the case.

Personal experience has shown me that although retirement does not fully remove you from the Hamster Wheel of Life, being freed from the need to daily arise to don armor and gallop off to face the hideous, many-headed Making a Living dragon one does find oneself with more time to pursue different interests.

This gift does indeed have a life-changing effect.

Regardless of all this, however, we *are* witnessing here a disturbingly changed Holmes.

His statement that he holds “a vast store of out-of-the-way knowledge, without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-room with packets of all sorts stowed away within—so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what was there” borders on the unbelievable! What became of the Sherlock Holmes who was so chary in limiting his knowledge intake of knowledge exclusively to those matters he could use in his work? Solely information he could immediately lay a hand on.

The Master Sleuth was never a social butterfly. All uninvited visits to his residence were unwelcomed, unless they were made by desperate clients. On more than one occasion Watson made mention of his friend’s aversion to useless exertion; yet we now learn that he goes out swimming with friends and acquaintances. Also, that he has acquired new, more sociable habits, which make him accepting of evening visitations without invitation.

Instead, we are to believe (supposedly from him directly) that Stackhurst and he “were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that *we [italics added]* could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation”!



All this makes the retired Holmes appear to echo Marley’s ghost’s regret when he urges Ebenezer Scrooge to reform and go out into the world and participate in the lives of his fellow creatures: “Business? Business? Mankind was my business—their welfare was my business!”

Ineffable twaddle, say I!



The Lethal Paroxysm

McPherson’s agonizing death is described in all its facets. Having had an unfortunate experience with a cousin of the murderous *Cyanea capillata* as a boy, I do not doubt that the pain and agony started immediately after contact with the animal’s tentacles—it feels as if you are being burned with strong acid.

That being said, why was it immediately assumed that he was murdered? From McPherson’s final seemingly cryptic utterance, “the Lion’s Mane” and the peculiar marks on his body there seems to have been no apparent reason to conclude that he had been the victim of foul play. It should have been immediately clear that the marks that were observed could not have been produced by a

flogging.

Although it is quite possible to whip someone to death, using a thin wire for this does not sound too plausible, unless it were part of an arrangement such as the one would find in something like a cat o' nine tails—several knotted cords (wires in this case) attached to some sort of a handle. This does not seem to have been the case because there is mention of his having “been terribly flogged by a thin wire scourge.”

According to his acquaintances, McPherson “was a natural athlete . . . and excelled in every game which did not throw too great a strain upon him.” Even Maud believed a single person could not have done this to him:

“Bring them to justice, Mr. Holmes. You have my sympathy and my help, whoever they may be.” It seemed to me that she glanced defiantly at her father and brother as she spoke.

“Thank you,” said I. “I value a woman’s instinct in such matters. You use the word ‘they.’ You think that more than one was concerned?”

“I knew Mr. McPherson well enough to be aware that he was a brave and a strong man. No single person could ever have inflicted such an outrage upon him.”

It also stands to reason that regardless of a compromised heart someone being whipped almost to death would surely have put up some sort of determined struggle. That not being the case, then he



would have had to be tied down spread-eagle, like a sailor condemned to be flogged in the old British Royal Navy. However, there were no ligature signs on the body.

The history of Nelson’s navy being one of my pursuits, I find it difficult to accept that the marks on McPherson’s body which were caused by what essentially was a chemical burn, could have been mistaken for the welts raised by *any* whip, much less specifically “a very stiff cat-o’-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it.”

Until well into the 19th century, flogging was a common punishment for various offenses. Sailors could be flogged for drunkenness, insolence, neglect of duty, or minor theft. The severity of the punishment varied, with minor infractions typically resulting in a dozen lashes, while more serious offenses could lead to up to 36 strokes; the results of such punishment were severe wounds and later unmistakable scars.

Flogging was a punishment very much still in living memory back then. The effect of just one stroke of a cat-o’-nine tails should have been sufficient to dismiss such a cause. Properly wielded, a knotted cat-o’-nine-tails could tear pieces of flesh at the first stroke.

It is therefore unlikely that what were in reality chemical burns could have been mistaken for whip welts. Although someone like Sherlock Holmes, who keenly researched the effect of beatings on cadavers, should have been acquainted with the cat-o’-nine-tails’ signature, it was the local policeman got closer to the truth:

“It is, of course, an absurd idea,” said the policeman, “but if a red-hot net of wire had been laid across the back, then these better marked points would represent where the meshes crossed each other.”

“A most ingenious comparison. Or shall we say a very stiff cat-o’-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it?”

There are other aspects one wishes Holmes had either left out or had provided a little more detail. The Old Queen being hardly cold in her grave yet, one may safely assume that the era’s proprieties were still in force. In other words, McPherson would not have been skinny-dipping. Therefore, if he was properly attired in a bathing suit why would he trouble in his agony to put on pants, shoes, and an overcoat before seeking help? After all, he was in agony, not insane.

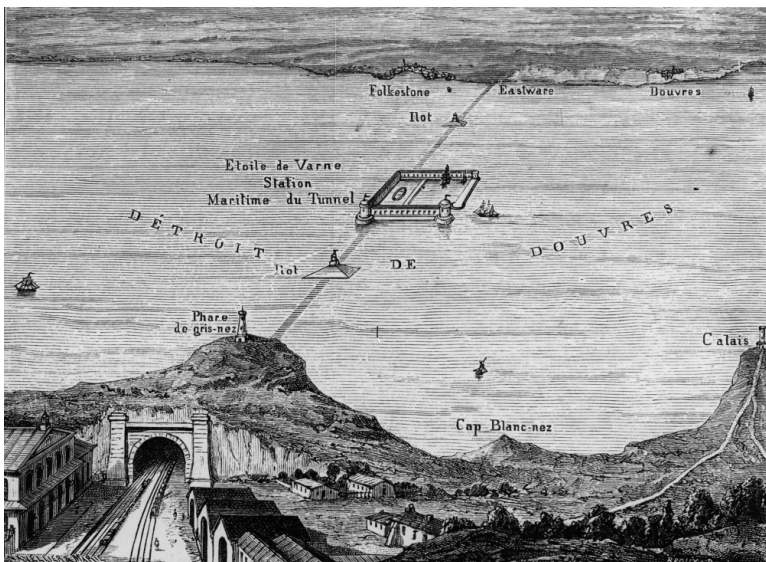
According to Holmes’ observations, as he was trying to climb back McPherson fell more than once; however, although it had been simply thrown around his shoulders in capelike fashion, he somehow managed to keep his overcoat on. It is difficult to believe that in his painful agony and urgent attempt to seek help, McPherson would not have paused to dry himself. Logically, would have meant that he or at least his coat and pants should have been wet, so how could Holmes conclude from the dry towel that he hadn’t been in the water? Surely he did not expect that poor bloke to stop to dry himself on the towel whilst going through the torments of the damned.

Another question that arises (albeit a minor one) is whether a dog, which is covered in fur, would be sufficiently vulnerable to the tentacle stings of a Lion’s Mane for the encounter to cause its death?



What else happened in 1907:

Empire



New Zealand receives Dominion status.

King Edward VII visits Tsar Nicholas II; Anglo-Russian differences settled; the Dual Entente becomes the Triple Entente with Russia joining Britain and France.

◀ Channel Tunnel Scheme rejected by Parliament.

Responsible government granted to Orange River Colony.

Imperial College of Science and Technology, part of London University, created by amalgamating the Royal College of Science, City and Guilds Technical College, and the Royal School of Mines.

Opening of Northern Line of London Underground Railway.

Brooklands Motor Racing Circuit opened.

Formation of Joint Committee of Oxford and Workers' Educational Association.

Britain

Women allowed to serve on Local Government Councils.

Territorial Army introduced into Britain by War Minister Haldane.

Railway Conciliation Boards established.

Taxicabs are first legally recognized.

United Methodist Church established.

Guaranteeing Treaty between Britain, Russia, Germany, and France.

Companies Act: limited-liability principle applied to private companies.

World

Anarchy in Morocco; murder of French workmen at Casablanca.

General League of German Trade Unions formed.

Oklahoma admitted as state in the U.S.A.

Revolt of Heroes crushed by German troops.



Meeting of Second Russian Duma; Stolypin becomes chief minister; Duma is dissolved, Third Duma is elected.

Parliamentary rule suppressed in Portugal by Carlos I.

◀ Pope Pius X orders Benedictine Order to revise the Vulgate. Italian bishops are urged to suppress Modernist teachings in schools and the press.

The Hague Peace Conference to limit armaments fails; ban on aerial bombing in war rejected.

Germany refuses armament limitations proposed by Hague Peace Conference.

Art

Rousseau paints *The Snake Charmer*.

Singé writes *Playboy of the Western World*, a drama that provokes riots in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin.

Science and Technology

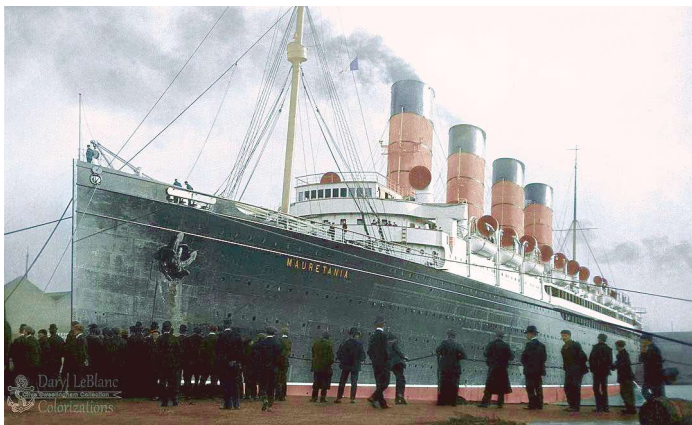
Henri Farman makes a successful biplane.

◀ RMS *Mauretania* launched; 30,700 tons, 26 knots.

Jannsky discovers the four principal blood groups (O, A, B, AB) in humans; it leads to successful blood transfusions.

G. Urbain separates rare metals ytterbium and lutetium.

Electric washing machine invented by Hurley Machine Co., of the U.S.A.



First airship flies over London.

First attempts at preservation of fruit by freezing.

August von Wassermann develops his test for syphilis, determining the seriousness of the infection.

William Willett proposes “daylight saving”; adopted in 1916.

Introduction of medical inspection of schoolchildren.

Next week's case: RETI.

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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