



An Inquiry into: "The Adventure of Black Peter"

Vol. XI No. 42 • November 19, 2020

"The Adventure of Black Peter" was first published in *Collier's Weekly Magazine* on February 27, 1904, and in *The Strand Magazine* in March 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

agreement regarding the year in which this case took place. In 1895, Sherlock Holmes was 41 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 43.

Main Characters:

Captain Peter Carey ("Black Peter"), a retired whaling captain; John Hopley Neligan, son of a disgraced banker; Patrick Cairns, skilled harpooner who once sailed under Carey; Stanley Hopkins, a promising young police inspector.

Notable Quotes:

I should be guilty of an indiscretion if I were even to hint at the identity of some of the illustrious clients who crossed our humble threshold in Baker Street. Holmes, however,

like all great artists, lived for his art's sake, and, save in the case of the Duke of Holderness, I have seldom known him claim any large reward for his inestimable services. So unworldly was he—or so capricious—that he frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies, while he would devote weeks of most intense application to the affairs of some humble client whose case presented those strange and dramatic qualities which appealed to his imagination and challenged his ingenuity.

Holmes was working somewhere under one of the numerous disguises and names with which he concealed his own formidable identity. He had at least five small refuges in different parts of London in which he was able to change his personality.

The Adventure of Black Peter

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	Wednesday of the first week of July 1895
Baring-Gould	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
Bell	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
Blakeney	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
Brend	July 1895
Christ	Wednesday, July 3, 1895
Dakin	Wednesday, July 10, 1895
Folsom	Wednesday, July 10, 1895
Hall	July 2, 1895
Keefauver	Wednesday, July 10, 1895
Klinger	1895
Zeisler	Wednesday, July 10, 1895

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.

“I have investigated many crimes, but I have never yet seen one which was committed by a flying creature. As long as the criminal remains upon two legs so long must there be some indentation, some abrasion, some trifling displacement which can be detected by the scientific searcher.”

“One should always look for a possible alternative and provide against it. It is the first rule of criminal investigation.”

“I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master.”

A Complex Case

It is always a treat to watch Sherlock Holmes unknot a tangled skein, showing his Scotland Yard apprentices how a real investigation is conducted.

This case is a complicated one, not so much because of the facts and details involved, but because of the loose ends about which our Boswell tells us little or nothing. The lack of detail most likely is the



Playstation 4 screenshot, *Sherlock Holmes, Crimes and Punishments*

result of Watson’s tactful nature. With his accustomed discretion, he probably skipped details he either considered unnecessarily burdensome to the narrative, or perhaps thought that there were some things best left unrevealed so as not to hurt innocent participants.

Briefly outlined, these are:

The Negotiable Securities. We are told that when Neligan Senior’s bank failed at a cost of £1,000,000, it ruined a large number of its investors. Then the disgraced banker took securities in his care and left, ostensibly with the honorable intention of converting them into cash to compensate those who had been harmed by the bank’s failure. This is fine as far as it goes; however, there seems to be an uncertainty as to whether Neligan Sr. had the authority to do so. As his son put it, “It has always been said that my father *stole [my italics]* all the securities and fled. It is not true. It was his belief that if he were given time in which to realize them all would be well and every creditor paid in full.” If the securities had belonged to his father, why would he have been accused of stealing them? If the securities belonged to the banker, he had a right to do with them as he wished, and turning over the remainder over to his son would have been the right thing to do.

It is well to remember we are not considering a trifling amount—£1,000,000 comes to some \$400,000,000 in today's currency.

The Disgraced Banker's Reaction. Why did Neligan Sr. decide to, in effect, engage in a getaway to try to cash the securities in another country? This seemed to have been eminently negotiable paper, which meant he could have easily cashed the securities in England, which, at the time, was at the center of the world's commerce. Even if the injured investors had gathered outside his house with pitchforks and burning torches, like the ending of almost all Frankenstein movies, all he had to do was tell them of his intentions. This would have made him a hero in their eyes, even if the bank's crash had been his fault.

Cairn's Intriguing Ignorance. It seems hard to believe that Cairns did not realize the true value of the securities he had taken from Captain Carey. He had to realize that these were the source of Black Peter's affluence. He may not have known how to go about converting such negotiable paper into money, but surely a discreet inquiry in the darker parts of the docks would lead him to someone with the knowledge of what to do. Even if the wharf rat demanded a large percentage, Cairn would still have come out ahead.

The Harpooner's Fate



One wishes that Watson would have taken the time to tell us what became of Patrick Cairns. He claimed being innocent of murder, having killed in self-defense when Captain Carey attacked him. If what he told our two friends and Inspector Hopkins was true, then had he gone to trial it is very unlikely that a jury would have convicted him of murder for what clearly was an act of self-defense. However, considering that Cairns was engaged in a criminal activity at the time of the killing—blackmail—it is possible that he would have been charged with manslaughter.

Then there are the other two other harpooners, Lancaster and Pattins, who were interested in the berth offered by Holmes in his Captain Basil *persona*. Had they, as well, been former crewmen from the *Sea Unicorn*? They may have known each other, considering that even if Holmes had specified a time, unusually so, they arrived at Baker Street simultaneously.

Once again, Holmes revealed his penchant for the theatrical. It seems quite obvious that he had arranged with Mrs. Hudson to show Cairns in last.

The Discriminating Detective

By this time, 1895, and a few years later after having deposited the Duke of Holderness's check for £6,000 (or was it £12,000?), Holmes was certainly above any possible financial worry. Watson tells us that, "His increasing fame had brought with it an immense practice." He adds that, "Holmes, however, like all great artists, lived for his art's sake." He also tells us that had "seldom known him to claim any large reward for his inestimable service."

While Holmes may have never consciously sought riches—like the saying about the better mousetrap—these came to him. This was a result of his genius, his single-mindedness of purpose and, above all, his basic kindness and decency, which he usually concealed under a rather pompous and forbidding exterior. All this brought him the material rewards which guaranteed his independence, fearlessness, and incorruptibility in the cause of his clients.

Uncounted times, his invaluable services were gratuitously placed at the disposal of the official police who, more often than not and with his acquiescence, took the credit they all too seldom deserved.

There is, however, another side to this Good Samaritan's coin.

At our first meeting with Holmes in *STUD*, we learn that Lestrade frequently called for guidance—as much as “three or four times in a single week.” This served the Great Detective well, because these and other visits kept him “in touch with what was going on at the police headquarters” and on more than one occasion opened the door to the introduction of new clients who would be charged a fee in the normal way.

There at least nine cases in which Holmes participated solely in order to aid the police: *ABBE*, *BLAC*, *CARD*, *DYIN*, *GOLD*, *REIG*, *SIXN*, *STUD*, and *VALL*. In fact, aside from the reward in terms of acquired experience, Holmes had the privilege of paying from his own pocket whatever expenses he incurred during his *pro bono publico* pursuit of solutions.

Then there are those cases which, unfortunately for us, although probably recorded and put away in that Tin Box, were never published. These most certainly had to have resulted in fees of a considerable magnitude. Of these, Watson mentions only a few: “the case of the papers of ex-President Murillo,” the “Smith-Mortimer succession case,” the “famous investigation of the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca,” and the “very abstruse and complicated problem concerning the peculiar persecution to which John Vincent Harden, the well-known tobacco millionaire, had been subjected.”

All of these plus many others had to have added a comfortable amount of zeroes to the funds already in Holmes' checking account.

What else happened in 1895:

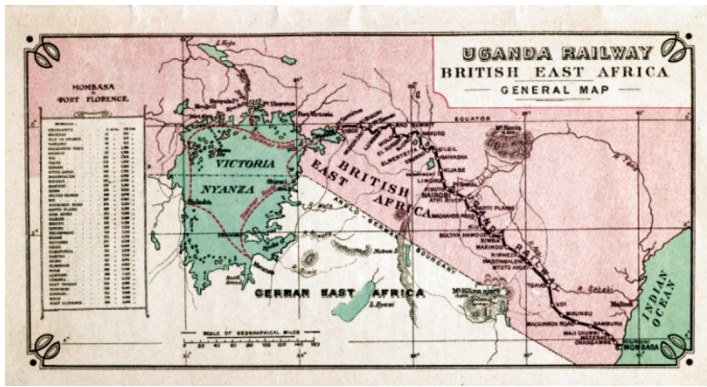
Empire

Freetown, Sierra Leone, granted municipal status and privileges.

Anglo-French interests begin to conflict in Nile Valley.

U.S.A. intervenes in Anglo-Venezuelan border dispute, arbitration in Britain's favor.





British East Africa Company surrenders Kenya as British protectorate.

◀ Construction of Uganda railway commenced.

Jameson Raid in South Africa in 1895—failed attempt to overthrow the Afrikaans government.

Britain

Liberals defeated at general election, Salisbury forms his third Unionist ministry.

Compulsory retirement of aged Duke of Cambridge as C-in-C of British Army.

London School of Economics and Political Science founded.

First automobile exhibition in London.

Electrification of first mainline railway.

Cardinal Vaughan lays foundation stone of Westminster Cathedral.

World

Chinese defeated by Japanese at Wei-hai-Wei; end of the Chinese-Japanese war. Formosa (now Taiwan) and Port Arthur ceded to Japan, but returned to China in exchange for indemnity.



Germany, France, and Russia unite to compel Japan to return Liaotung peninsula to China.

◀ Treaty of Simonoseki, end of Sino-Japanese war.

Cuban rebellions begin, U.S.A. protests brutal suppression.

Dreyfus refused new trial by French President Faure.

National League founded in Poland;

aimed at autonomy under Russian suzerainty.

Nyssens Law extended to Belgian provinces and communes.

Armenian demonstration in Constantinople leads to massacre of 50,000 Armenians by order of the government. Britain sends squadron to Dardanelles, Austria recommends international naval action against Turkey, Russia prepares plans to seize Istanbul, but France's unwillingness to risk a general war hold back military action. Sultan Abdul Hamid II promises reforms in Turkey.

Frontiers of Pamirs fixed by commission of Russians, Afghans, and British.

Jack Dempsey, future U.S. boxing champion, is born.

Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*.

Completion of Kiel Canal (61 miles) makes Germany North Sea power.

In France, socialist Léon Bourgeois defeats Alexandre Ribot and forms a cabinet.

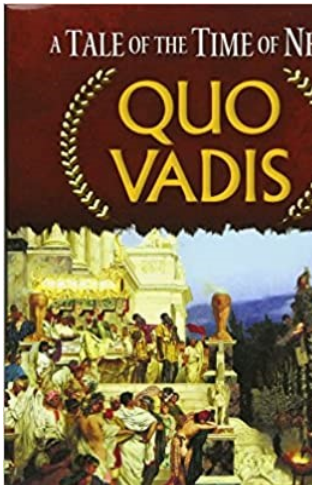
Queen of Korea is assassinated; the King is imprisoned, all under Japanese encouragement.

Volleyball invented.

French troops capture Antananarivo in Madagascar.

Abyssinia defeats Italy in the First Italo-Ethiopian War (1885-1896).

Art



Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* debuts. Later that year, he unsuccessfully sues the Marquis of Queensbury for libel and is imprisoned.

Tchaikovsky, first complete performance of *Swan Lake*.

Joseph Conrad, *Alayer's Folly*.

◀ Sienkiewicz, *Quo Vadis*.

W.B. Yeats, *Poems*.

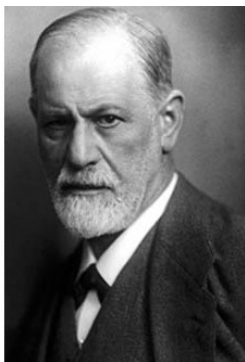
Corelli publishes *The Sorrows of Satan*.

H.G. Wells publishes *The Time Machine*.

Science and Technology

Wilhelm Konrad Röntgen, German physicist, experiments with Crooke's tubes and discovers X-rays.

Ramsay obtains helium, first identified by its spectrum in the sun in 1868.



Pasteur dies.

Konstantin Tsiolkovski formulates the principle of rocket reaction propulsion.

◀ Sigmund Freud, *Studien über Hysterie*.

On December 28th, in the Hôtel Scribe, in Paris, the first public cinema show takes place.

Introduction of diphtheria antitoxin.

Thomas Armat, of Washington, develops modern cinema projection.

King Gillette (U.S.A.) invents safety razor.

C. von Linde devices apparatus to liquefy air.

Guglielmo Marconi, an Italian electrical engineer, transmits the first wireless signal.

Next week's case: CHAS

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.