



## An Inquiry into: “The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter”

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“The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter” was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in August 28, 1904, and in *Collier’s Weekly* on November 26, 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

not disappoint, proving their inability to see eye to eye, even when stand nose to nose. The date in which this case takes place is far from being unanimously agreed to, mostly due to the Good Doctor’s faulty memory (“. . . a gloomy February morning some seven or eight years ago . . .”).

Because a majority looks to 1896 as the year in which this adventure took place, we will take that as a departure point.

In 1896, Sherlock Holmes was 42 years old and his friend and colleague Doctor John H. Watson 44.

### **Main Characters:**

Cyril Overton, captain of the Cambridge University rugby team. Godfrey Staunton, the missing three-quarter, the university’s invaluable star player. Lord

Mount-James, Staunton’s wealthy, penny-pinching uncle. Dr. Leslie Armstrong, renowned physician and polymath, close friend of Staunton. Pompey the draghound, a canine sniffer with a penchant for aniseed.

### **Notable Quotes:**

Things had indeed been very slow with us, and I had learned to dread such periods of inaction, for I knew by experience that my companion’s brain was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material upon which to work. For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career. Now I knew that under ordinary

As the table illustrates, once again our chronologists do

### *The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter*

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>February 1896 or 1897</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Tuesday, December 8, 1896</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>February 1897</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>February 1898</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>December 1897</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Tuesday, December 7, 1897</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>December 1897</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Tuesday, December 8, 1896</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>December 8, 1896</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, February 6, 1897</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1896</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Tuesday, December 8, 1896</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.*

conditions he no longer craved for this artificial stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead, but sleeping; and I have known that the sleep was a light one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes's ascetic face, and the brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes.

### *The Rehabilitated Sleuth*

At the opening of the case, Watson says that over the course of their relationship, he had, step by step, steered Holmes away from his use of drugs. The implication is there that there must have been a period during the Great Friendship when the Great Detective was, if not entirely addicted, at least considerably dependent upon the stimulation provided by the opioids that he used.



There is no cure for drug addiction—it will forever lurk within the hidden recesses of the mind lurking, like Satan, for the slightest occasion of sin. Much to his own uneasiness, Watson recognized this fact: “I was well aware that the fiend was not dead, but sleeping; and I have known that the sleep was a light one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes's ascetic face, and the brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes,” indicates that he dreaded a recurrence of the habit. This most definitely points to more than just “a seven-percent solution.”

It is not too farfetched to theorize that Holmes' success was due to two powerful factors working on his behalf. First, and above all, was the support of Watson's friendship. The Good Doctor agonized over the Great Detective's indulgence in

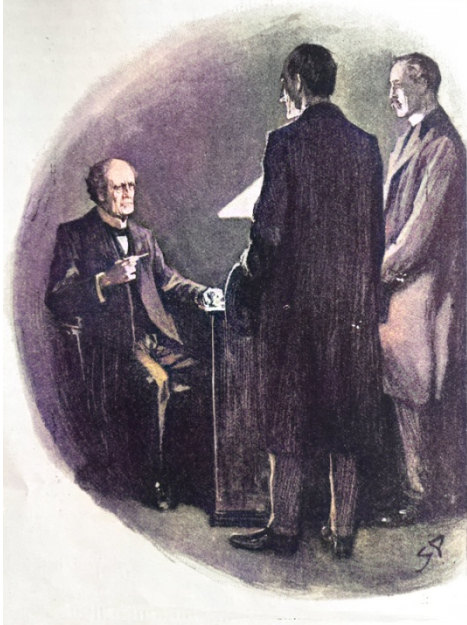
narcotics. He made this very clear in SIGN, when he could not contain himself any longer when

Holmes injected himself yet again: “Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon you. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed? Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable.”

The second factor working in his behalf was Holmes himself—his clear, sound reasoning and his logical mind, coupled to an iron will. He had to realize the risk for irreparable damage to mind and body. Eventually, he would have realized the need to give in to Watson's entreaties, given him both as a friend and doctor. Once he decided to abandon the use of drugs, arm-in-arm with his friend, he was able to force himself to walk that difficult path to the final goal.



## *Watson's Professional Unawareness*

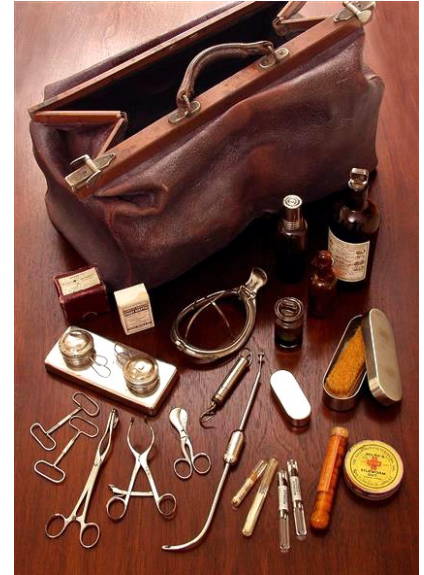


The Good Doctor states that, “It argues the degree in which I had lost touch with my profession that the name of Leslie Armstrong was unknown to me. Now I am aware that he is not only one of the heads of the medical school of the University, but a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science.”

Watson seems to be telling us here that he has so distanced himself from his profession, that he is unaware of the existence of its luminaries. This is difficult to swallow. More than once we have seen our medico keeping up with developments in his profession. For example, we witness him perusing the latest medical journals and in RESI he recognized Dr. Trevelyan as the specialist who had written a

monograph upon obscure nervous lesions, although as a surgeon that had not been his specialty.

It is difficult to believe that our biographer distanced himself so far from his chosen profession, that he did not know who those doing important breakthrough work were. While it is true that thanks to Holmes he no longer needed to engage in practice I find it impossible not to think of him as always being the consummate physician at heart.



## *Scotland Yard's Unimportant Case*



Perpetually, I am puzzled by Inspector Hopkins' incomprehensible lack of interest in Staunton's seeming disappearance. According to Overton, Hopkins declined to look into the case because, according to him, the circumstances of Staunton's disappearance might not merit the Yard's attention, although might be the kind of case in which Sherlock Holmes would be interested.

Let us consider the case that Hopkins inexplicably decided was not worthy of the Yard.

To begin with, this was no simple missing person's report, where foul play is not necessarily suspected, and there is usually a waiting period before any investigation begins. Here, the person in question was a young man belonging to an important and very wealthy noble family who, although not wealthy himself, is the heir to a fortune. Before disappearing he was witnessed falling “back in a chair as if he had been pole-axed” immediately after reading a mysterious note brought to him by a “rough-looking man with a beard.” His reaction is so extreme that a perfect strange—the porter—was sufficiently alarmed to attempt to go for help.

Staunton then disappears and is not be found in any of the places he usually frequents. Added to this, his disappearance takes place just before an important game in which he is his team's key player. No great stretch of the imagination is required to suspect that a criminal element might be in play, considering that substantial betting is probably taking place, making kidnapping possible.

It seems inconceivable that, considering the different circumstances pointing at a very strong possibility of foul play, the official police would have still thought that it was unnecessary to immediately start inquiries to determine what may have happened to him. Instead, obviously disinterested, Hopkins sends Overton to Holmes.

### *Not the Most Intriguing of the Sixty*

Few would question that most of the 140 or so unpublished cases that we know about, would very likely have been of more interest than that of Godfrey Staunton's apparent disappearance. Although this is not to say that the case had a few—very few—points of interest, it really was not what one hoped for: a showcase for Holmes' investigative powers. The truth is that in this instance he came out looking somewhat ineffectual and lackluster.

This is not to say that a case without a crime cannot be compelling—witness NOBL and TWIS! In the matter of Staunton's disappearance, however, the Great Detective and his results were not particularly brilliant. The nadir was reached when, apparently unable to remain undetected during a simple pursuit he was easily spotted by Dr. Armstrong. Almost painfully, one wonders what became of his proud assertion regarding his invisibility, "That is what you may expect to see when I follow you." In this instance, however, it was Dr. Armstrong who figuratively tweaked his nose twice.

Cyril Overton can easily be described as a nonentity. Even Watson was short on charity when he described him as a "man who is more accustomed to using his muscles than his wits." The bloke truly came across as 224 pounds of gristle and two ounces of gray matter. Even his apparent concern over Staunton's disappearance did not originate from concern



over a friend's wellbeing or even a thirst for justice, but from anxiety over the possibility of losing a game. Although the word "jock" was yet to be invented back then, it would have fit perfectly.



Paradoxically, there is little that can be said about the star around which all of this orbited—young Godfrey Staunton. We are afforded no chance to get to know him better. We see him briefly, as he grieves over his dead wife. And even then he remains an insubstantial puzzle. It is difficult to understand the decisions he took regarding her condition; in other words, why he did not seek better care for her. While back then (and still within living memory) a diagnosis of tuberculosis was almost always the equivalent of a death sentence (it was not

called the "White Plague" for nothing), some people managed to survive it with adequate care. Staunton's wife would have received far better care in a hospital. A private clinic would have done as well—or better—and it would have ensured the privacy that was necessary to keep the marriage secret and the possibility of inheritance intact.

Although it has been argued that the reason Staunton did not select that route was a lack of means. This seems highly unlikely considering that he was able to pay Dr. Armstrong's bill for 16 guineas

(≈\$6,300 today). Also, if he had been truly economically strapped, it is unlikely that the eminent scientist, who considered him “an intimate friend,” would have charged him for his services; especially knowing that he would eventually be the heir to a mighty fortune. Did the prospect of being disinherited outweigh any concern and love he may have held for her?

The less said about Staunton’s uncle, Lord Mount-James, the better. He would not be someone one would ordinarily befriend—a miserly, dry creature with morals bordering on the clownish. Certainly—as in the other nine cases in which the Great Detective was not paid—Holmes derived no fee from him!

Dr. Leslie Armstrong is an entirely different story. It is lamentable that Watson did not tell us more about this eminent man beyond describing him as “a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science.” Holmes himself was sufficiently impressed to comment somewhat wistfully that he was someone with enough intelligence and education to make him a suitable replacement for the much-lamented late Professor Moriarty. High compliment indeed!

### *What else happened in 1896:*

#### *Empire*



Jameson Raid failure in South Africa provokes crisis; British negotiations with Boers (to 1899) fail.

Kaiser Wilhelm’s telegram to Kruger, congratulating him on the defeat of the Jameson Raid.

Matabele Revolt suppressed (1896-97).

Protectorate established in Sierra Leone and East Africa.

◀ Conquest of the Sudan begins with the start of Kitchener’s campaign against the Madhi (1896-99).

Anglo-French treaty settles boundaries in Siam.

Sudanese railway extended to Wadi Haifa.

Widespread famine in India, to 1897.

#### *Britain*

Hotel Cecil, the Strand, built.

National Portrait Gallery moves to present site in Trafalgar Square.

Beginning of period of rising prices and falling wages (until 1914).

Conciliation Act: boards can settle industrial disputes if both sides are willing.

First all-steel English building erected at West Hartlepool.

Royal Victorian Order founded as Personal Order of Sovereign.

#### *World*

First modern Olympic Games are held at Athens.

Klondike Gold Rush in Canada.

France annexes Madagascar.

Van Houten’s Franchise Bill extends the Dutch franchise.

French Tunisian protectorate recognized by Italy.

Italians are defeated by Menelek of Abyssinia at Battle of Adwa, resulting in Treaty of Addis-Ababa.

Massacre of Armenians by Kurds and Circassians supported by the Sultan.

Insurrection in Crete against Turkish rule.

Foundation of Russo-Chinese Bank.

Cassini Treaty: China gives Russia the right to build a railway through Manchuria to Port Arthur.

Russian newspapers granted temporary licenses; imported books and newspapers strictly censored.

First public film exhibition, in U.S.

### *Art*

Gilbert and Sullivan debut *The Grand Duke*.

Giacomo Puccini débuts *La Bohème* at Turin.

Wells publishes *Island of Dr. Moreau*.

Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Maxime Dethomas*.

R. Strauss debuts *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

### *Science and Technology*

Antoine Henri Becquerel, observes radiation from uranium affects photographic plates; discovery of radioactivity.

Nobel Prizes started, for physics, physiology or medicine, chemistry, literature, furtherance of the cause of peace.

Guglielmo Marconi demonstrates on Salisbury Plain the practicability of wireless telegraphy.

Samuel Langley (U.S.A.) successfully flies a steam-driven model aircraft.

J.J. Thompson identifies the electron, though not by name.

Emile Achard first describes paratyphoid fever.

Rehn, of Frankfort, sutures a heart wound; beginning of heart surgery.

Zeeman observes that light emitted by a substance placed in a magnetic field undergoes changes.

Earliest record of water chlorination, during typhoid outbreak in Italy.

Respectfully submitted,

*Next week's case: ABBE.*

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](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com).**

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