



An Inquiry into:
*"The Adventure of
 The Sussex Vampire"*

"The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* on January 1924. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

As may be seen on the table, most of our chronologists agree on the year this case takes place as having been 1896. If this is accurate, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 42 years old and Dr. John H. Watson 44.

Main Characters:

Robert Ferguson, tea broker and father of two. Mrs. Ferguson, Peruvian wife of Robert, mother of a baby boy and stepmother to Jack. Jack Ferguson, Robert's seemingly disabled elder 15-year-old son. Dolores, long-time friend and servant of Mrs. Ferguson. Mrs. Mason, devoted nurse to baby Ferguson.

Notable Quotes:

"Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson. It was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared."

"The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply."

"I never get your limits, Watson. There are unexplored possibilities about you."

"The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. Such things do not happen in criminal practice in England."

The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>November 19</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, November 19, 1896</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Friday, November 19, 1897</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>November 19, 1896 (or 1902)</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>Late November 1896</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Friday, November 20, 1896</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Thursday, November 19, 1896</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Thursday, November 19, 1896</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>November 19, 1896</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Tuesday November 19, 1901</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1896</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>November 19, 1896 (or 1901)</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.

“One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them.”

Story for an Unprepared World

Beyond all reasonable doubt one may safely say that the story behind Holmes casual mention of the giant rat of Sumatra (“a story for which the world is not yet prepared”) is certainly the most famous of the missing cases.

Many Canon scholars have identified the reputedly humongous rodent as probably being the large



bamboo rat, Sumatran rat, or Indomalayan rat (*Rhizomys sumatrensis*), that is a member of the family *Spalacidae* which is found frolicking in Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. It can reach lengths of nearly 20 inches, with an 8-inch tail, and can weigh as much as 9 pounds. A vegetarian delighting in

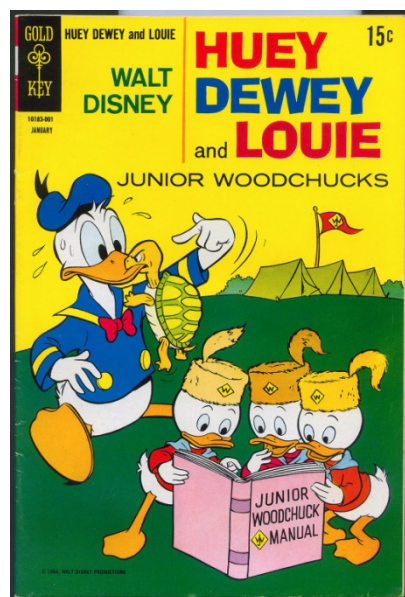
bamboo roots as well as cultivated tapioca and sugarcane it is, in turn, hunted as the main ingredient for a popular dish of those localities.

It is true that in the ratty universe the Sumatran variety would score on the giant side of the scale. However, the reason why such an otherwise seemingly inoffensive critter, about the size of a small dog, would be connected with such an unrevealed apparently dreadful story is unfortunately something we will never know unless the vanished Tin Box is finally recovered.

Holmes' Universal Reference

It is probably true that there are few of us involved in the Great Game who would not be willing to engage in dark and dastardly deeds in order to obtain Holmes' reference volumes. Aside from the fact that they probably would shed some light on some of the lost stories (including that of the giant you-know-what), their content and indexing protocol would make for a fascinating study. The scope of the “good old index” is also an awe-inspiring matter: consider that the Great Detective has, scattered over several volumes, varied references which provide information on sundry matters such as vampirism, Rabbis, venomous reptiles, yeggmen, and Irene Adler. Also, these volumes also seem to double as a casual diary that reminds our sleuth of some of the details (people, objects, etc.) of past adventures.

Sherlock Holmes is the physical representation of rationality and logic. We would not see his like again until the appearance of Mister Spock who, through his Earth-born mother, claims a direct family relationship with the Great Detective. This makes the universality of the subjects contained in Holmes' indices delightfully puzzling and intriguing. Whenever I consider their extent, I am reminded of Donald Duck's nephews, Huey, Dewey, and Louie, who were the proud possessors of the *Junior Woodchuck Manual*, a small tome which contained information on practically everything in the universe.



Courtesy, Walt Disney Productions

By no means should this be considered a criticism of our sleuth's reference files; to a certain extent we all squirrel away facts. Apropos enough, while going through my notes in preparation for this case, I came across a factoid I had set down in years past, which revealed that vampire bats have a special enzyme in their saliva that prevents blood from clotting, helping them to keep the flow going while feeding.

Appropriately enough, its discoverer named it "Draculin."

The Insane Tropics

Although Watson records and describes what he considers as the peculiar behavior of exotic foreigners, such as Mrs. Ferguson, a Peruvian in this instance, he does not seem to think twice about the remarks in Ferguson's letter such as, "The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion..." How alien could it all have been to Ferguson? After all, when he married the

lady he must have been well-aware of her beliefs—after all Roman Catholics do not masquerade as Church of England!



It must be granted, however, that the lady did act somewhat illogically by keeping from her husband the fact that his son was trying to murder their son. Had she been more forthcoming, much pain (especially on her part) could have been avoided. However, has been pointed out that as far as Canonical damsels go, her reaction and behavior need not be considered particularly tropical; consider Mrs. Cubitt's in *DANC*, for example. Had she acted differently, it is very likely that she would not have lost her husband and saved herself a shot through the head.

In view of all this, perhaps focus should have shifted instead to Mrs. Ferguson's husband, who in his letter refers to his wife in the following way:

The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion always caused a separation of interests and of feelings between husband and wife, so that after a time his love may have cooled towards her and he may have come to regard their union as a mistake. He felt there were sides of her character which he could never explore or understand. This was the more painful as she was as loving a wife as a man could have—to all appearance absolutely devoted.

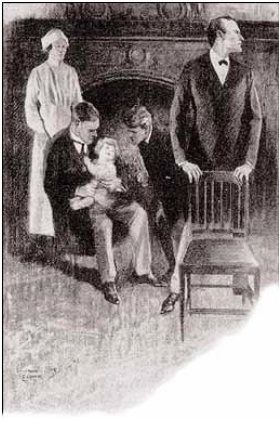
Rather than a "separation of interests and of feelings" Ferguson appears to have taken a remarkably apathetic attitude towards the feelings and needs of the young woman he wooed and married, wrongly judging her instead of being supportive and really finding out what was behind her actions. Unlike the pathetic Mrs. Gibson (also of a wild tropical nature!) in *THOR*, the lady was not older than her husband and there was no governess. On top of everything else, her husband conceded that she was, "as loving a wife as a man could have—to all appearance absolutely devoted."

Where were his feelings? Had he shown her a fraction of the consideration and interest that he showered upon his murderous son, it is unlikely that things would have deteriorated to the point at which an intervention by Sherlock Holmes himself was required.

Ferguson should bear the heaviest portion of the blame in this matter, both for his attitude towards his wife whom he left abandoned and defenseless, and his compliance with "poor little Jack's" whims.

The Peculiar 15-year-old

"Little Jacky's" behavior towards his father would have been anathema for a teenager in any time, but particularly during the Victorian Era. A 15-year-old boy was looked upon as an adult and expected to act like one. Boys of that age were midshipmen in the Royal Navy and served in the ranks of the Army or were studying to acquire a profession or already working.



By allowing this behavior, Ferguson proved himself to be as good a father as he was a husband. According to Watson, the boy would embrace his father with “the abandon of a loving girl,” coo and nest his head on his father’s breast. One would have expected Ferguson to have done something to better channel his behavior long before the happenings described in the story. If in reality the boy was crippled, the army or navy would have been out of bounds; instead, a good boy’s school would have done wonders, attuning his behavior to his chronological age and teaching him discipline.

In view of the boy’s physical condition, Holmes’ suggestion of “a year at sea” might sound heartless at first. However, it may be that Jack was exaggerating his condition to better keep his father under his thumb and the Great Detective—who, after all, was sufficiently acquainted with malingering to write a

monograph on the subject—realized the true nature of the problem and therefore suggested some time before the mast.

What else happened in 1896:

Empire

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



Kaiser’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.

◀ Start of Kitchener’s campaign against the Madhi in the Sudan (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).

Truck Act: regulates deductions from wages or fines for bad workmanship.

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

First all-steel English building erected at West Hartlepool.

Locomotives Act: repeal of “Red Flag” restriction; maximum speed raised to 14 mph.

Royal Victorian Order founded as Personal Order of Sovereign.

World

First modern Olympic Games are held at Athens.

Utah admitted as state in the U.S.

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 Adowa, resulting in Treaty of Addis-Ababa and end of Italian protectorate.



◀ State visit of Tsar Nicholas to France (Paris).

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

Insurrection in Crete against Turkish rule.

Beginning of the Klondike Gold Rush.

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 are strictly censored.

First public film exhibition, in U.S.

Art

Wells publishes *Island of Dr. Moreau*.

Gilbert and Sullivan debut *The Grand Duke*.

Giacomo Puccini débuts *La Bohème* at Turin.

Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Maxime Dethomas*.

R. Strauss debuts *Also Sprach Zarathustra*.

Science and Technology



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

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

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

Emile Achard first describes paratyphoid fever.

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

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.

Next week's case: 3GAR

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..."

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