



An Inquiry into:  
*“The Adventure of the  
 Illustrious Client”*

Vol. XII No. 92 • June 16, 2022

“The Adventure of the Illustrious Client” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on November 8, 1924. It ran *The Strand Magazine* on February/March 1925. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

As may be seen, thanks to Watson’s clear dating, none of our chronologists dispute the year in which this case took place.

That being so, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 48 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 50.

**Main Characters:**

Colonel Sir James Damery, a well-known discreet high society go-between who tactfully smooths out delicate problems, now acting in behalf of an anonymous, possibly Royal, client. Baron Adelbert Gruner, infamous Austrian nobleman, suspected murderer, and sadistic womanizer. Violet de Merville, Baron Gruner’s fiancée and next victim. Shinwell Johnson, former criminal and Holmes’ spy in the London underworld. Kitty Winter, former mistress and victim of Gruner’s. Sir Leslie Oakshott, surgeon.

**Notable Quotes:**

“It can’t hurt now,” was Mr. Sherlock Holmes’s comment when, for the tenth time in as many years, I asked his leave to reveal the following narrative. So it was that at last I obtained permission to put on record what was, in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend’s career.

“Woman’s heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle.”

Some people’s affability is more deadly than the violence of coarser souls.

<i>The Adventure of the Illustrious Client</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Saturday, September 13, 1902</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>September 1902</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 3, 1902</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 3, 1902</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>October 3, 1902</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Wednesday September 3rd 1902</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1902</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, September 13, 1902</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.

You may have noticed how extremes call to each other, the spiritual to the animal, the cave-man to the angel.

There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be. He pushed to an extreme the axiom that the only safe plotter was he who plotted alone. I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between.

The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered, was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.

### *The Peculiar Supreme Moment*

At the opening of this case, Watson begins by telling us that this “was, in some ways, the supreme moment” of Holmes’ career. To anyone with just a superficial acquaintance with the Canon, the question immediately arises: “The supreme moment—in what way?”

Just a partial review of the importance of some of the Great Detective’s other cases (some of which

might have been of possible international repercussions leading to war), our sleuth’s success in preventing a stupid headstrong girl’s marriage to a gold-plated serial killer does not appear to even slightly approach a similar importance level. Consider, for example, BRUC, NAVA, SECO and others.

It might be concluded that possibly Watson was once again displaying his annoying discretion in clouding some of the more important (scandalous?) facts of the case. For example, it is quite obvious that the Illustrious Client is not



simply a nobleman, but someone occupying a much higher sphere of society—possibly even King Edward VII himself.

From the exchange with Sir James, it is obvious that Holmes deduced the identity of this personage:

*“I have no doubt, Mr. Holmes, with your great powers you could easily trace my client back through me, but I must ask you, as a point of honour, to refrain from doing so, and not to break in upon his incognito.”*

*Holmes gave a whimsical smile. “I think I may safely promise that.”*

This theory explains some of Sir James’ remarks. He speaks of a client who is the possessor of an “honoured name” who must in no way be dragged into the sordid matter, adding that “His motives are, to the last degree, honourable and chivalrous, but he prefers to remain unknown.” He then

vaguely explains that the mysterious client “is an old friend, one who has known the General intimately for many years and taken a paternal interest in this young girl since she wore short frocks. He cannot see this tragedy consummated without some attempt to stop it.”

In my consideration, the key to the client’s identity is the word “paternal.” It was a public secret that, first as Prince of Wales and afterwards as King-Emperor, Queen Victoria’s son had an exceedingly roving eye. It would not have been the first (or last) time that a Royal might have consorted with someone else’s wife, with the husband’s knowledge and tacit consent. A result of this proclivity might have been the birth of one Miss Violet de Merville. Had that been the case, Holmes would then have been involved in the rescue of someone who, under somewhat different, more acceptable social circumstances would have been a Princess Royal.

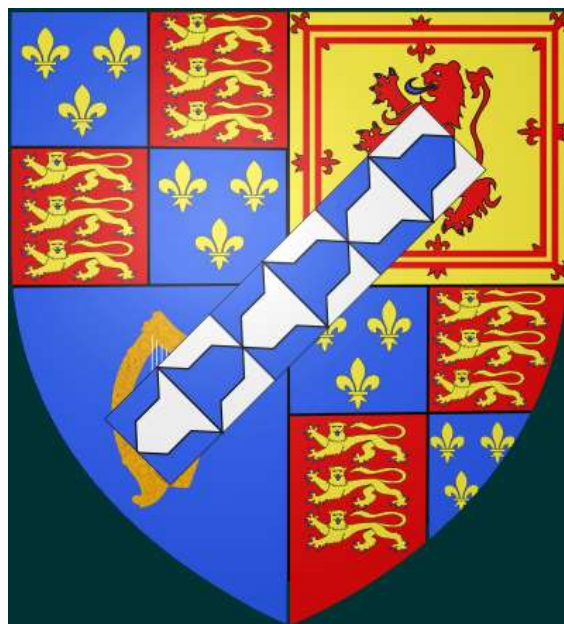
Unsurprisingly, Royal bastards were not at all unusual, and accommodations were made for them. For example, the Anglo-Norman surname “Fitzroy” means “son of a king” and was used by various illegitimate royal offspring and others who claimed to be such. This also spilled over to the escutcheons; in medieval England a bastard's coat of arms was marked with a *baton sinister*, proudly proclaiming that the bearer of such a charge was born on the wrong side of a noble bed.

### *The Baron and the Detective*

One must wonder what could have been the purpose behind Holmes’ decision to meet with Baron Gruner, particularly considering that he had not heard from Shinwell Johnson. There was every possibility that Shinwell might have come up with information that the Great Detective might have used against the murderous baron. As it was, Johnson located Kitty, who became an important instrument in halting the Austrian’s notorious career, although not in the envisioned manner. Holmes’ decision to confront the man smacks more of hubris than planning, even if it was obvious that the baron would naturally expect that he would be consulted on the matter. As it turned out, kicking the wasps’ nest had almost fatal consequences for our sleuth and solved nothing.



unbreakable attachment to him was the result of post-hypnotic suggestion; surprisingly our sleuth did look into this more deeply. It is a certainty that Watson, regardless of his medical knowledge, probably had very little experience with hypnosis; however, he would have known that in such cases a post-hypnotic suggestion can be undone. With all the resources available to the Illustrious Client, getting expert professional health should not have proven difficult. In 1887, Jean-Martin Charcot,



*The baton sinister across a Royal Escutcheon.*

As Gruner sneeringly informed Holmes, one of the reasons for Violet de Merville’s

the renowned French neurologist and professor of anatomical pathology had already done considerable work on the application of hypnosis in the treatment of mental problems, and there was no shortage of experts in the field.

In any case, Gruner's romantic and hypnotic bond on Miss de Merville resulted in her utter refusal to face facts; it might be argued that her reading his "Lust Book," would not have had the desired effect—a simple protestation on Gruner's part that it had been manufactured imitating his handwriting would have seemed perfectly plausible to her. It should not be forgotten that he had already "forgiven" him many things that took place in his past—including a possible murder.

With such an uncertain moral compass, regardless of her coming of age, in those days it would have posed no problem for her father—with the assistance of a doctor perhaps instructed by the Illustrious Client—to discreetly place her out of danger. There were many private hospitals for patients suffering from one of the many "hysterical" disorders that proper young ladies of the time were often subject to.

In time, beyond Gruner's hypnotic powers, at least part of her feelings for him would have faded. Unlike what is depicted in *The Manchurian Candidate*, post-hypnotic suggestions even when expertly and professionally implanted fade over time; they must be periodically reinforced.

### *A Reasonable Alternate Solution*

Back then and now, certain matters could be arranged discreetly and secretly. Because of this, one must wonder why the Illustrious Client would not have given Sir James the equivalent of King Henry II's "Will no one rid me of this troublesome priest?" and have someone tactfully arrange a deadly "accident" for the baron. Such an action would have been straightforward and would have considerably simplified matters. It may have been that something like that was being planned and Gruner suspected it; hence his sudden decision to leave for the United States aboard the SS *Ruritania*.

While it is true that the matter ended satisfactorily, it was not because of Holmes intervention in the case—it was Kitty's vitriol-tossing that brought the situation to a satisfactory ending.

### *Kitty Winter's Retribution*



Miss Kitty Winter is one of the more interesting women of all the women who populate the Canon. No need for the stimulus of a Welsh personality or a tropical origin to react against her torturer and disfigurer with raw, powerful feelings with which one can easily identify. Emotionally wronged in the worst way that a woman could be, her intense loathing of Gruner is not only normal, but justified.

Watson does not exactly tell us anything about the nature of the baron's transgressions against her. However, there seems to be a hint of not only abominable emotional abuse, but also cruelty of a brutal physical

nature. Consider the Good Doctor's description of her as someone who had "a pale, intense face,



youthful, and yet so worn with sin and sorrow that one read the terrible years which had left their leprous mark upon her.” We then learn from her that Gruner ruined and discarded her somewhat over a year before forcing her into the life that she now led, which Watson implied was what had marked her. Although possible, it is unlikely that her appearance resulted from a single year of penury. It is far more likely that Gruner and his treatment of her—both emotional and physical—resulted in her wretched looks.

From what Watson tells us, there seems to have been no reason for Holmes to take Kitty with him to the Baron’s house. After she told him where she had seen Gruner keep the book he was after there was nothing further she could have done. Had Gruner changed the place where he had kept it after Kitty left, she would have not known anything about it and been of no use.

Even if she could have suggested where else it could have been hidden, the lady was obviously a ticking time bomb of hatred. Holmes had to consider the very tangible possibility that her unpredictable behavior could seriously endanger the mission that he and Watson were engaged on.



All this makes me wonder whether Holmes did not bring Kitty with him solely for the purpose of locating Gruner’s “lust book,” but as a possible “Plan B” in case he was unable to obtain it to break Violet’s fascination with the baron. Can anyone of us think that Holmes did not consider the possibility that she might attack the pervert—not with vitriol perhaps, but with a knife or a gun?

The fact remains that he did show remarkable little interest in the small package that she carried.

As Watson explained:

*The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered, was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.*

## ***What else happened in 1902:***

### ***Empire***

First celebration of Empire Day (renamed “Commonwealth Day” in 1959).

Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

Anglo-German fleet seizes Venezuelan fleet to recover debts and reparations.

Peace of Vereeniging, ends Boer War.

### ***Britain***

Salisbury resigns, succeeded as PM by Arthur Balfour.



Anglo-Japanese Treaty for mutual defense and to maintain status quo in Far East.

Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

Institution of the Order of Merit for distinguished service to the state; limited to 24 holders at one time.

Education Act abolishes School Board system. Local control goes to town and county councils.

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

◀ Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

British Academy granted Royal Charter.

Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

### *World*

Franco-Italian secret treaty; Italy to remain neutral if France were attacked by a third power.

Failure of second Belgian General Strike.

Triple Alliance (Germany, Austria, and Italy) renewed to 1914.

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.



F.A. Krupp takes over Germania shipbuilding yard at Kiel; great armaments firm develops.

Russo-Japanese Convention, Russia agrees to evacuate Manchuria in 18 months.

◀ St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.

French work day reduced to 9½ hours.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

Abdul Hamid gives Germany concessions to build railway to Baghdad; rail system to stretch from Hamburg to the Persian Gulf.

Tientsin Sanitary Police established; first Chinese public health measure.

### *Art*

Conan Doyle publishes *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Kipling publishes *Just So Stories*.

Arthur Edward Woodley Mason publishes *The Four Feathers*.

Beatrix Potter publishes *Peter Rabbit*.

Enrico Caruso makes his first gramophone record—154 recordings in all.

Gauguin paints *The Call*.

Debussy composes *Pelléas et Mélisandé*.

Picasso paints *Nude, Back View*.

Elgar composes *Coronation Ode*.

### ***Science and Technology***

Wireless telegraphy applied to ships.

Trans-Pacific Cable laid.

Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

### ***Next week's case: 3GAB***

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

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