



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes Adventure LVI – The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

The story is narrated by Holmes. Watson is married and does not appear in the story.

James and Godfrey campaigned together during the Boer war and became fast friends. Godfrey was wounded by a round from an elephant gun. He survived but was discharged to his family home, Tuxbury Old Park. Tuxbury Old Park is a large place with a spacious old manor house and a vast park with numerous out-buildings and cottages.

James received letters from Godfrey every few months until the war ended and he too was discharged, about a year later. James returned to London and resumed his profession of stockbroker. The letters from Godfrey stopped.

James wrote to Godfrey three times at Tuxbury. The first two letters were unanswered; the third received a terse reply from the Colonel saying Godfrey had gone on a tour around the world and would not be back for at least a year.



James then wrote Godfrey's mother. This letter received a prompt reply which warmly invited him to visit Tuxbury and reminisce about Godfrey. Naturally, he accepted.

He was given a room on the ground floor and late in the night, while reading, he saw Godfrey with his face pressed against the window. Godfrey's face was fish-belly white. When he got up from his chair, Godfrey ran away. James tried to follow him but lost him in the darkness.

The next night, James went exploring and came upon a snug cottage. He peered in the window and saw a little man with a beard reading a paper and a large man who had his back to the window. He was sure

this large man was Godfrey, although he did not see his face. At this point the colonel clapped him on the shoulder, upbraided him for snooping into private affairs and ordered him from the property.

James consulted Holmes who immediately solved the case.

Holmes returned to Tuxbury with James and Mr. Saunders. They persuaded the colonel to allow Saunders to examine Godfrey.

Immediately after he was wounded, Godfrey wandered about and after night-fall, came upon a large house where he spent the night. In the morning he learned he had spent the night in a leper colony. Soon after he began to get blotches on his face.

Saunders proclaimed Godfrey's illness to be Ichthiosis and not leprosy as all had feared. Ichthiosis is disfiguring but neither infectious nor fatal.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

January 1903, at Baker Street, James M. Dodd sees Holmes about a missing friend, Godfrey Emsworth. Dodd and Emsworth served in the Imperial Yeomanry in South Africa during the recent Second Boer War. Emsworth was wounded. Dodd has not seen him since the report of his injury, leading Dodd to believe something is amiss.

Dodd wrote to Colonel Emsworth, Godfrey's father, and was told Godfrey went off to sea, but Dodd was not satisfied with this answer. Next, Dodd went to the Emsworth family home, Tuxbury Old Park, near Bedford. There were four people there—the Colonel and his wife, and an old butler and his wife. The Colonel was less than gracious. He repeated the story about his son's world voyage, implied Dodd was lying about knowing Godfrey, and seemed irritated at Dodd's suggestion he provide information so he could send a letter to Godfrey.

Dodd determined to ascertain Godfrey's fate. That evening, in the ground-floor bedroom, Dodd talked to the butler, Ralph. After Ralph mentioned Godfrey in the past tense, Dodd suspected his friend was dead. Ralph indicated no, but dead might be better.

The mystery was complicated after Dodd observed Godfrey's face in his window, proving he was on the grounds and not at sea as the colonel claimed. Dodd chased him, but quit after hearing a closing door nearby.

Dodd contrived to stay another day at Tuxbury Old Park, and went looking about the property. He saw a well-dressed man leaving an outbuilding, whose suspicion was aroused because Dodd was aware he was watching him. Dodd was convinced Godfrey must be in this outbuilding.

Dodd went back to the outbuilding at night, and observed the well-dressed man and another, who he assumed was Godfrey, through the window.

Before he could investigate, Colonel Emsworth appeared. Upset about Dodd violating the family's privacy, he insisted Dodd leave immediately.

Dodd went straight to Holmes to relate the story. Holmes needs only to ask about the publication the man with Godfrey was reading, and although Dodd cannot be certain, Holmes seems satisfied with the answer.

Upon his arrival at Tuxbury Old Park, Holmes observes a tarry smell coming from the leather gloves Ralph removed. The Colonel threatens to summon the police if Dodd and Holmes do not leave, but Holmes points out that would cause the catastrophe the Colonel wants to avoid.

Convincing the colonel he knows the secret, Holmes receives permission to visit the outbuilding; he and Dodd hear Godfrey's story right from his lips. The night he was wounded in South Africa, he went to a house and slept in a bed. After he woke, he realized he was surrounded by lepers. A doctor there told him he was in a leper hospital, and would likely contract the disease after sleeping in a leper's bed. The doctor helped heal his wounds; after Godfrey returned to England, the dreaded symptoms appeared. His family's fear of their son getting institutionalized and the stigma attached to leprosy forced them to conceal his presence.

The story ends happily. Holmes brings Sir James Saunders, a famous dermatologist from London. Dr. Saunders determines Emsworth has ichthyosis, or pseudo-leprosy, a treatable disease.