



*An Inquiry into:
"The Adventure of
The Devil's Foot"*

"The Adventure of the Devil's Foot" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1910. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

In this case, the chronology is certain and all our Canon experts unanimously agree, as can be seen on the table on the right.

If the case took place in 1897, as the Canon chronologists state, at the time Holmes was 43 years old and Watson 45.

Notable Quotes:

"I thought I knew my Watson."

"How do you know that?"

"I followed you."

"I saw no one."

"That is what you may expect to see when I follow you."

The Reticent Detective

As he often does throughout the Canon, Watson begins this case by telling us that we would have had far more than a mere sixty cases to enjoy hadn't it been for Sherlock Holmes' reticence at being the center of attention, which has lead to him forbidding the Good Doctor from publishing more cases without his approval. It is obvious that Watson was under this promise of silence when he received the telegram suggesting he write about the "Cornish horror."

I have always found it strange that Holmes, who was (to say the least) proud of his powers, and was not exactly averse to adulation (I call attention to his reaction to Lestrade's praise in SIXN) would have exacted from his redoubtable friend and colleague such an iron-clad promise not to reveal, as it turns out, most of his triumphs to the world.

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And if he was so set upon not being written about, why would he occasionally and out of the blue, suddenly allow Watson to publish the facts of some particular case?

Holmes' Indiscretions

We are told "that Holmes' iron constitution showed some symptoms of giving way in the face of constant hard work of a most exacting kind, aggravated, perhaps, by occasional indiscretions of his own."

<i>The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Spring 1897</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>March 1897</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Tuesday, March 16, 1897</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1897</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, April 17, 1897</i>

I always wonder what Watson meant by “occasional indiscretions.” We of course know of the Great Detective’s occasional indulging in cocaine (possibly even heroin) use.



However, Watson tells us in *MISS* that he has weaned Holmes “from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career.” He then adds that “I was well aware that the fiend was not dead but sleeping,” and that this 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.”

A possible awakening seems out of the question here, since Holmes is being forced to take a rest from his many activities. He has been so busy that at

least one doctor feared a breakdown. Thus, I think that this would leave drugs out of it.

So what could “occasional indiscretions” might have been? And I always wonder how our sleuth felt about his biographer revealing these little indiscretions” to his reading public.

The Deplorable Laws

Sterndale was right in telling Holmes that he and Brenda Tregennis could do nothing about their love for one another, because the “deplorable laws of England” did not permit him to divorce a wife who had abandoned him years before. Up to a point.

Surely, our lion hunter could not have felt any duty to such a wife. So here’s the puzzler. If they were both in love, but separated from one another by the necessity of a divorce (unobtainable in England), did it have to be a *British* divorce?

By the simple expedient of crossing the Channel, Sterndale could have easily obtained a divorce in France—as many of his compatriots did—which would have been legal in England. True, divorce was difficult in Victorian England because of societal disapproval, and a *French* divorce would have been frowned upon even more; certainly, there would have been many who would not have invited the Sterndales over for tea. However, it does not appear that the couple would have settled down in merrie olde England anyway, so what could have been the problem?

An Interesting Turn of Phrase

When he described his sensations under the effects of the devil’s foot, Watson wrote the following: “...my mind told me that in this cloud, unseen as yet, but about to spring out upon my appalled



senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in the universe. Vague shapes swirled and swam amid the dark cloud-bank, each a menace and a warning of something coming, the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold, whose very shadow would blast my soul.”

It is funny how the mind works. In all the years that I have studied the Sacred Writings the phrase, “...the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold” had eluded my notice. Perhaps I noticed it this time, because the night before I had been traveling alongside Lovecraft the dangerous path to Dunwich: “Yog-Sothoth knows the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the gate. Yog-Sothoth is the key and guardian of the gate.”

The concept of the Dweller upon the Threshold is a reference to a supposed invisible and possibly malevolent entity may attach itself to a human being. The theosophist, Helena Blavatsky wrote that she believed it to be “the discarded astral double of an individual in a previous incarnation that may have not fully disintegrated yet when that individual is reborn. Thus the dweller will be drawn to the new incarnated personality due to their affinity.”

Sometimes called the Guardian of the Threshold, this theosophical concept must have been well known by the Literary Agent who doubtless must have mentioned it to Doctor Watson.

What else happened in 1897:

Empire

Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee.

Benin Expedition, a punitive expedition with a force of 1,200 under Admiral Sir Harry Rawson captures, burns, and loots Benin City, bringing to an end the west African Kingdom of Benin. Much of the country’s art, including the Benin Bronzes, was either destroyed, looted or dispersed.

Uprising on India’s Northwest Frontier.

First Women’s Institute in the world; established at Stoney Creek, Canada.

Britain

Sir Henry Tate presents the Tate Gallery to the nation.

Northern Polytechnic, Holloway Road, opens.

Blackwall Tunnel opens.

Report of Royal Commission (Eversley) on agricultural depression.

Employers’ Liability Act: responsibility for injuries to and compensation of employees injured at work.

Royal Automobile Club, London.

Trunk telephone lines transferred to control of the GPO.

Trained nurses only to be employed in hospitals.

World

Mathieu Dreyfus discovers that the document on which his brother, Alfred, was convicted was actually written by Major M.C. Esterhazy..



Visit of French President Faure to St. Petersburg cements Franco-Russian Alliance.

William McKinley inaugurated as U.S. president.

◀ Gojong proclaims himself Emperor Gwangmu and announced the creation of the Korean Empire, which lasts until 1910.

Russia occupies Port Arthur.

Two German missionaries murdered in Shantung; German occupies Kiao-chow, in north China.

Universal suffrage introduced in Austria.

Crete proclaims union with Greece; Turkey declares war on Greece and is defeated in Thessaly. Austro-Russian treaty on Balkans relaxes tensions created by this 30-day war between Greece and Turkey in Macedonia.

Art

Conrad publishes *Nigger of the Narcissus*.

Henry Havelock Ellis publishes *Studies in Psychology of Sex*.



H.G. Wells publishes *The Invisible Man*.

Kipling, *Captains Courageous*.

Rostand publishes *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

◀ Paul Dukas debuts *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*.

Gauguin paints *Girls Bathing in Tahiti*.

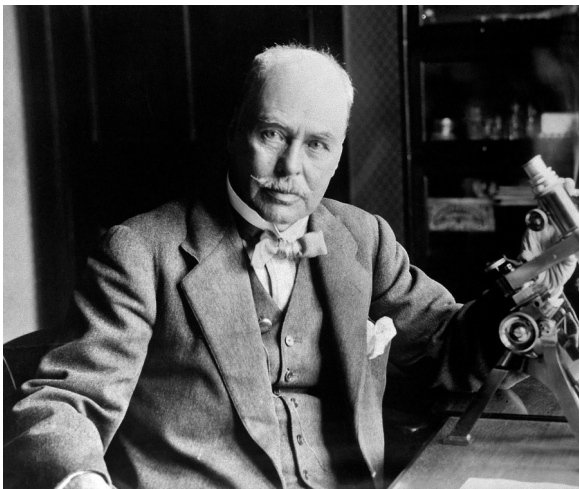
Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Marcelle*.

Bram Stoker writes *Dracula*.

Science and Technology

Sir J.J. Thomson discovers the electron.

Ramsay discovers the inert atmospheric gases xenon, krypton, and neon.



Aspirin marketed.

J. McCreary patents an air-washer intended to purify air in a building; beginning of air-conditioning.

Diesel engine invented.

◀ Sir Ronald Ross, bacteriologist, identifies the causes of malaria and studies the disease.

Photographs first taken using artificial light.

Paris Métro opens.

Barthelot publishes *Thermochemie*, extending his *Mécanique chimique* (1878).

Beginning of Monotype system of typesetting.

S.A. Andrée is killed attempting to explore the Polar regions in a free-flying balloon.

Next week's case: REDC

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..."

Email: CourageousMurray@aol.com