



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

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

As may be seen from the table, none of our chronologists dispute the year in which this case took place. That being so, then at the time Holmes was 48 years old and Watson 50.

**Main Characters:**

Colonel Sir James Damery, discreet high society go-between who tactfully smoothes out delicate problems, now acting in behalf of an anonymous 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 (possibly) criminal and Holmes’ spy in the London underworld. Kitty Winter, former mistress and victim of Gruner’s. Sir Leslie Oakshott, surgeon.

**Notable Quotes:**

“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.

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.

<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>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Bell</i>	Saturday, September 13, 1902
<i>Blakeney</i>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Brend</i>	September 1902
<i>Christ</i>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Dakin</i>	Wednesday, September 3, 1902
<i>Folsom</i>	Friday, October 3, 1902
<i>Hall</i>	October 3, 1902
<i>Keefauver</i>	Wednesday September 3rd 1902
<i>Klinger</i>	1902
<i>Zeisler</i>	Saturday, September 13, 1902

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.

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 Supreme Moment?*

Watson's statement at the beginning of this case that it "was, in some ways, the supreme moment" of Holmes' career has been disputed by most students of the Canon. Even a cursory examination of the Sacred Writings indisputably shows that the Great Detective was involved in and solved much more important cases—cases of national and international impact, such as BRUC, NAVA, SECO and others.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Particularly in SECO, Holmes' timely intervention resulted in his preventing a catastrophic war! And there must have been other instances of similar—or even greater—importance that we know nothing about, because he prevented Watson from revealing them in his accounts. So why would the Good Doctor place stopping a stupid, stubborn girl from marrying a man of Gruner's notoriety and antecedents at the same level of Holmes' obviously far more important accomplishments?

An explanation (albeit a weak one) might be that the illustrious client, who Canon scholars generally identify as having been King Edward VII, was not trying to protect a friend's daughter but was, instead, trying to shield someone much higher up in the social pyramid; possibly even a member of the Royal Family.

### *Kitty Winter—All Fire, No Ice*

Miss Kitty Winter is one of the more interesting women of the Canon. She did not need the stimulus of a Welsh personality or a tropical origin to react to being hurt with raw, powerful feelings with which one cannot help but identify. Emotionally wronged in the worst way that a woman could be, her intense hatred towards Gruner is not only normal, but justified.

We do not know exactly what the nature of the baron's wrongdoing towards her was, because Watson, with his usual delicacy and tact, does not really mention it. However, there seems to be a hint that he did not abuse her solely in his abominable treatment of her, but that there may have also been abuse of a brutal physical nature.

Consider the Good Doctor's description of her when he first met her that she 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 later 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. It is unlikely that her appearance had resulted from only a year of penury. It



Courtesy of ITV Granada

is far more likely that Gruner and his treatment of her—both emotional and physical—resulted in her sorry looks.

All of this leads me to wonder whether Holmes brought Kitty with him not so much 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 enchantment with Gruner. It is difficult for me to believe that Holmes would not have considered the possibility of her attacking the baron—not with vitriol perhaps, but with a knife or a gun.

### *Some Loose Threads*

It would appear that although Holmes gave Watson permission to write about this case, he may have had him restrict some of the facts. There are some questions that are left unanswered, some contradictions.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

For example, Shinwell Johnson had been commissioned with an investigation of Gruner because, as the Great Detective himself put it, “He may pick up some garbage in the darker recesses of the underworld, for it is down there, amid the black roots of crime, that we must hunt for this man’s secrets.” That being the idea, it seems illogical that Holmes would have been so anxious to meet the baron face to face, that he did not mind confirming the latter’s suspicions that he was on the case. At the time, Holmes did not know whether Shinwell might not be able to come up with something that could really be used against Gruner. As it developed, he did locate Kitty, who was an important instrument in halting the Austrian’s notorious career,

although not in the manner envisioned.

Then there is Violet de Merville’s strong attachment to Gruner, which the baron reveals to Holmes has been reinforced through post-hypnotic suggestion. Even assuming that he knew what the term meant, why didn’t Holmes consult Watson on the matter? As a practicing physician and surgeon he would have been far better acquainted what hypnosis can and cannot do. At the time the practice of hypnotism was very much in vogue—much like spiritualism—and there were authorities on the subject that would have known far more about it than Gruner could possibly have. What he did to Violet could have been undone.

Another option would have been for Violet’s father, with the cooperation of the illustrious client whose influence extended to the point of bending the law for Kitty and Holmes as Watson tells us at the end of his story, to put her out of danger. This could have been done by discreetly committing her to a private hospital in care of an alienist, as a patient that suffered from one of the several “hysterical” disorders that young ladies of that time often endured. If, however, my suspicions are correct and, as I point out above Violet de Merville was not who we were told she was but someone of far lofty rank, this would not have been a viable choice.

Finally, why hire Holmes and let two more people into the problem? Sir James was well aware of Gruner’s trajectory, as shown by his comment when Holmes identified him as “the Austrian murderer.” Why the compunction? It most certainly would have been a simpler (and more discreet) action to have the Baron to suffer a deadly “accident.”

Perhaps something that may have occurred to Holmes, when he brought Kitty along with him?

## What else happened in 1902:

### Empire

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

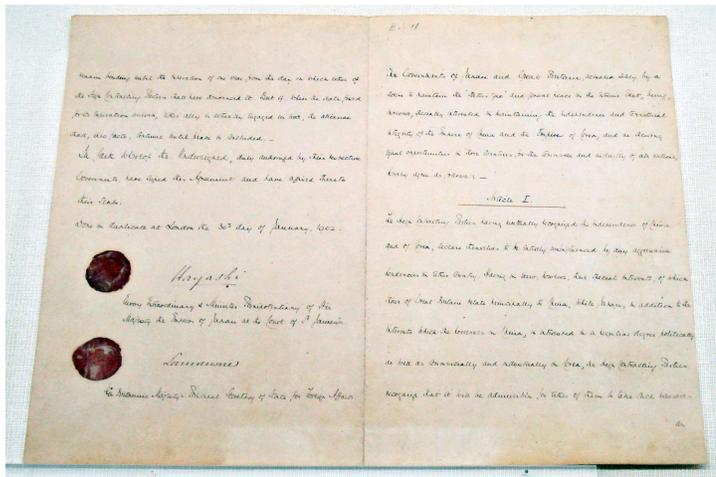
Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

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.



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.

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

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

Secondary Education authorized out of rates.

British Academy granted Royal Charter.

Esperanto introduced to England.

Establishment of Metropolitan Water Board, supplying London.

Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

### World

#### 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, Italy) renewed to 1914.

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

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.

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

French work day reduced to 9½ hours.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

St. Pierre, Martinique, destroyed by earthquake.

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...”

Email: [CourageousMurray@aol.com](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com)