



*An Inquiry into:
“The Disappearance of
Lady Frances Carfax”*

“The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax,” was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1911. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

The chronology for this case is far from being unanimous. Our scholarly chronologists’ estimates are shown

on the table on the right.

As there is little agreement amongst our experts, I shall default to Baring-Gould’s estimate. Therefore, if we assume that the case took place in 1902, then Mr. Sherlock Holmes was 48 years old and Dr. John H. Watson 50.

Main Characters:

Lady Frances Carfax, a solitary noble woman of modest means; the Honorable Philip Green, an Englishman whose love was refused by Lady Frances, and left to make his fortune in South Africa; Dr. Shlessinger, dangerous confidence man posing as a convalescent missionary recently returned from South America; Mrs.

Shlessinger, his wife; Marie Devine, Lady Frances’ maid; Jules Vibart, Devine’s fiancé.

<i>The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>1890 or later</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Tuesday, July 1, 1902</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Summer 1895</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Spring 1896</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>Summer 1899</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Wednesday, September 2, 1903</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Summer 1897</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>July 1901</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Summer 1901</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, July 26, 1902</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1901</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>August 1895 or 1897-1901</i>

Notable Quotes:

“One of the most dangerous classes in the world is the drifting and friendless woman. She is the most harmless and often the most useful of mortals, but she is the inevitable inciter of crime in others. She is helpless. She is migratory. She has sufficient means to take her from country to country and from hotel to hotel. She is lost, as often as not, in a maze of obscure pensions and boardinghouses. She is a stray chicken in a world of foxes. When she is gobbled up she is hardly missed.”

“Single ladies must live, and their passbooks are compressed diaries.”

“You know that I cannot possibly leave London while old Abrahams is in such mortal terror of his life. Besides, on general principles it is best that I should not leave the country. Scotland Yard feels lonely without me, and it causes an unhealthy excitement among the criminal classes.”

“And a singularly consistent investigation you have made, my dear Watson. I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. The total effect of your proceeding has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing.”

Not at His Best

Starting at the very beginning of this case, Holmes does not seem to shine with his customary brilliance. For example, his deduction of Watson’s visit to the Turkish bath, based on the unaccustomed manner in which his boots had been tied although accurate, could have borne different explanations; he might have been trying on new shoes. The same goes for his lucky conclusion that Watson had company in his hansom ride because of splashes on the left sleeve and shoulder of his coat he sat at one side instead of the middle. In such a conveyance—which clearly lacks shock absorbers—one does not sit in the middle, but gravitates to the side for comfort.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

The Great Detective’s unexpected appearance in the Continent is also a bit puzzling. Consider that he first sent Watson to investigate alone because he had to keep an eye on old Abrahams who feared for his life. Even assuming that whatever made his client fearful had been taken care of by our sleuth, why leave London at this time? By then, the Good Doctor had already informed him that Lady Frances Carfax had left for London with the Shlessingers. And regardless of his unkind remarks to Watson, his amanuensis had already uncovered enough facts to point Holmes in the right direction towards Holy Peters and wife.

And finally, why the disguise? It seems superfluous for Holmes to have disguised himself as a French workman—to what purpose? Surely it could not have been out of concern to keep the criminal classes unexcited, because immediately after he openly resumed his own, respectable persona.

The Lonesome Lady

It is somewhat strange that Lady Frances could have been so alone. We are told by Holmes that she is “a beautiful woman, still in middle age.” One cannot assume that her loneliness stems from some sort of falling out with her family that separated her from them, because when nothing was heard from her in a few weeks, as Holmes stated, “The family are anxious, and as they are exceedingly wealthy no sum will be spared if we can clear the matter up.”



Courtesy of ITV Granada

How it, then that such an attractive woman of gentle birth is so utterly friendless? Even if one were to assume that her supposedly traumatizing experience with Green left her with an abhorrence of men, she still could have formed some close relationships with other women of her class and not be left with only one

person close to her, Miss Dobney, her old retired governess.

A Peculiar Comment

Regarding Holmes’ telegram of inquiry about Shlessinger’s ear Watson comments, not without a good ladleful of asperity, that “Holmes’s ideas of humour are strange and occasionally offensive, so I took no notice of his ill-timed jest.” Where, in all of the Sacred Writings, do we encounter Sherlock

Holmes' offensive humor? To what could Watson have been referring to? A simple answer might be that he never cared to set down examples of the Great Detective's offensive humor, and that therefore these are lost to us.

Or could it have simply been Watson in a surly mood?

The Unforgivable Coarseness

Whatever could have poor Philip Green done to have so outraged of Lady Frances' delicacy? He confesses to our two friends that as a young man he "led a wild life," a description very much left wide open to interpretation. Just what did he mean by it? Gambling and womanizing? That hardly would have been that shocking, especially when the highest in the land (HRH the Prince of Wales, for instance) were well-known for such indulgences, often to scandalous levels.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

It is nevertheless true that pointing to the bad conduct of one's betters to excuse one's own bad behavior is an unacceptable justification. However, although the mind of a Victorian lady was expected to be "...as pure as snow," for the most part this tended to be a not-too-thick coat of paint over the reality of things. If, indeed, "She could not bear a shadow of coarseness" and "when she came to hear of things that I had done, she would have no more to say to me," then this can only be the result of one of two things. First, whatever Green did was indeed indescribably coarse, vulgar, and behaved dreadfully all of

which forced him to escape to South Africa; second, the lady exaggerated her feelings of delicacy to an almost psychotic level. Otherwise, what could have moved her to refuse him, yet still love him to the point of never marrying someone else?

The Miraculous Recovery

According to Watson, when they opened the coffin Lady Frances had her head "all wreathed in cotton-wool, which had been soaked in the narcotic," yet, after artificial respiration and an injection of ether our Aesculapius managed to bring her back from the brink. Truly a miraculous recovery! I once queried a forensic doctor (who was a rabid Holmesian) about this, and he slowly shook his head. "Ether does not act instantaneously," he said. "All those instances in literature or the movies where someone is attacked from behind and a cloth saturated in ether is put over the face and he immediately becomes unconscious are sheer nonsense. It takes a good five or more minutes for the stuff to work, and you must keep pouring more of it on the cloth. In Lady Frances' case, considering she was placed in a hermetic coffin practically floating on ether, she couldn't possibly have lasted more than a very few minutes. Of course," he added judiciously, "she should thank her lucky stars that Watson was such an exceptional physician."

From Mrs. Hudson's Kitchen

Curried Chicken

"Mrs. Hudson has risen to the occasion," said Holmes, uncovering a dish of curried chicken. "Her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotch-woman."

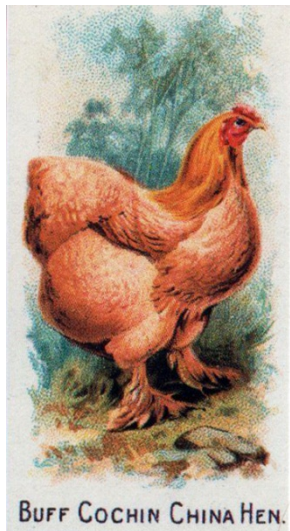
This, I have found, is one of Mr. Sherlock Holmes's favourite winter breakfast dishes. It is of simple preparation, requiring at most a half hour, and its cost is reasonable, 6d, exclusive of the fowl, of course.



The ingredients are the remains of cold roast fowls, 2 large onions, 1 apple, 2 oz of butter, 1 dessert-spoonful of curry-powder, 1 teaspoonful of flour, ½ pint of gravy, and 1 tablespoonful of lemon-juice.

The mode of preparation is as follows: Slice the onions, peel, core, and chop the apple, and cut the fowl into neat joints; fry these in the butter of a nice brown; then add the curry-powder, flour, and gravy, and stew for about 20 minutes. Put in the lemon juice, and serve with boiled rice, either placed on a ridge round the dish or separately. Two or three shallots or a little garlic may be added, if approved.

As a girl, when first learning the preparation of this dish, I remember my mother telling me about the introduction of the distinguished Asiatic Cochin-China poultry. The first pair that ever made their appearance here were natives of Shanghai, and were presented to the Queen in 1818. This



marked the beginning of the “Cochin” *furor*. As soon as it was discovered, despite the most strenuous endeavours to keep the tremendous secret that a certain dealer was possessed of a pair of these birds, straightaway the avenues to that dealer’s shop were blocked by broughams, and chariots and hack cabs, until the shy poulturer had been tempted by a sufficiently high sum to part with his treasure. Bank-notes were exchanged for Cochin chicks, and Cochin eggs were in as great demand as though they had been laid by the fabled golden goose.

The reign of the Cochin China was, however, of inconsiderable duration. The bird that, in 1847, would fetch thirty guineas is now counted but ordinary chicken-meat, and its price is regulated according to its weight when ready for the spit. As for the precious buff eggs, against which, one time of day, guineas were weighed—send for

sixpenn’orth at the cheesemonger’s, and you will get at least five; which is just as it should be.

For elegance of shape or quality, the Cochin cannot for a moment stand comparison with our own handsome British dung-hill. Neither can the indescribably mixture of growling and braying, peculiar to the former, vie with the musical trumpeting of our own morning herald; yet our poultry-breeders have been immense gainers by the introduction of the ungainly celestial, inasmuch as new blood has been infused into the English chicken family. Of this incalculable advantage we may be sure; while, as to the Cochin’s defects, they are certain to be lost in the process of “cross and cross” breeding.



What else happened in 1902:

Empire

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

First meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence in London.

Joseph Chamberlain advocates return to Protection and Imperial Preference.

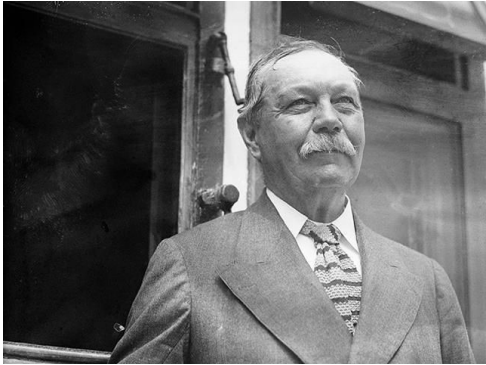
Anglo-German fleet seizes Venezuelan fleet to recover debts and reparations.

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, recognizes the independence of China and Korea.



Sir Giles Gilbert Scott designs Liverpool Cathedral.

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

◀ Arthur Conan Doyle is knighted.

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.

Boer War casualties: 5,774 British and 4,000 Boers killed.

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.

Italian designs on Tripoli conditionally approved by France and Austria.

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

◀ Leon Trotsky escapes from Siberia, settles in London.

Martinique volcanic eruption destroys town of St. Pierre.

Coal strike in U.S.A.

National bankruptcy declared in Portugal.

French work day reduced to 9 1/2 hours.

U.S.A. acquires perpetual control over Panama Canal. Control is held until 1977, when President Jimmy Carter turned the canal over to Panama, which assumed final control in 1999.

Public Health Act in France improves artisan living conditions.

White settlement of Kenya begins.

Aswan Dam opened.

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.

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

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.

Elgar composes the first of his *Pomp and Circumstance* marches.

Monet, *Waterloo Bridge*.

Gauguin, *Riders by the Sea*.

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.

Oliver Heaviside, English physicist, reveals the existence of an atmospheric layer which aids the conduction of radio waves.

Trans-Pacific Cable laid.

Completion of Aswan Dam in Egypt.

Next week's case: DYIN.

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