



An Inquiry into:  
*“The Adventure of  
 The Noble Bachelor”*

“The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor” was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in April 1892. It is part of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.

As can be seen on the table below, the chronology for this case varies, depending on the Canon expert. If the

case took place in 1888, as the majority states, at the time Holmes was 34 years old and Watson 36.

**Main Characters:**

Lord Robert St. Simon, Hatty Doran, Flora Miller, Francis Hay Moulton, Mrs. Francis Hay Moulton, Inspector Lestrade.

**Notable Quotes:**

“My correspondence certainly has the charm of variety.”

“I assure you, Watson, without affectation, that the status of my client is a matter of less moment to me than the interest of his case.”

“It is always a joy to meet an American . . . for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes.”

<i>The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Early October 1887</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Friday, October 8, 1886</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Tuesday, October 6, 1887</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>October 1888</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>Early October 1887</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Tuesday, October 9, 1888</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Friday, October 12, 1888</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 12, 1888</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Early Autumn 1887</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday, October 6, 1887</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1888</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, December 7, 1888</i>

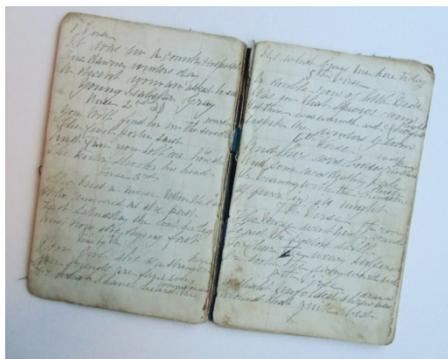
**The Remarkable Episode**

It is in situations like these that I tend to despair of Watson. Like in other similar instances in the Canon, he is giving us lead for gold. At the beginning of this case he tells us that “no memoir of [Holmes] would be complete without some little sketch of this remarkable episode.”

“Remarkable”? In some very minor instances perhaps. But one must question why our biographer would focus on recording this minor memoir about this somewhat bland episode. He gives us this story, which essentially is an easy-chair crimeless case in which Holmes hardly budges out of 221B, and no deep conundrum or tangled skein is involved or solved. My dear Doctor, why didn’t you shed some light for us upon the cases of the Notorious Canary Trainer, the Aluminium Crutch, etc.?

## *The Detective's Note-Book*

Holmes tells Watson that he solved the case as soon as Lord Robert told him the details, because “I have notes of several similar cases . . . There was a parallel instance in Aberdeen some years back, and something on very much the same lines at Munich the year after the Franco-Prussian War.”



Obviously, well before meeting Watson Holmes had already made a study of crime—both national and international—revealed by his reference to past crimes in *STUD*, to the extent that Stamford suggested, “You seem to be a walking calendar of crime. You might start a paper on those lines. Call it the ‘Police News of the Past.’”

It would seem that the notes referenced by Holmes are separate from “the good old index.” That being the case, his notebooks must have been voluminous. It makes one wonder how Holmes got his information. He could have been subscribed to a number of newspapers—both British and Continental—which would have to include the American press as well, as he seemed to be well-acquainted with criminal activities in the U.S., as well as with the crime fighters; some of the Pinkertons, for example. Nevertheless, would these have provided him with the necessary in-depth details that he could then use to untangle other crimes? We complain today about not-too-accurate press coverage—back then, journalists would give their imaginations even more free rein.

## *The Untidy Nest*

Every so often, throughout the Canon, we get an indication of what that poor, long-suffering woman, Mrs. Hudson, had to go through and endure from her famous lodgers, aside from target practice on her walls and the invasion of her house by dubious characters at all hours of the day.

When Holmes requires additional information about the news of St. Simon’s wedding, he asks Watson to arrange chronologically the newspapers carrying the details. Watson does so, by beginning with the personal column of the *Morning Post* of “*some weeks back*” [italics mine]. We know that Holmes had several daily newspapers delivered to their rooms.

On top of correspondence transixed by a jack knife on the mantle, and piles of documents and papers scattered throughout, one can only imagine what several weeks of daily newspapers must have looked like—the Giant Rat of Sumatra’s nest would have been a model of neatness by comparison!

## *A Quiet Marriage?*

St. Simon confessed to Holmes that he had his marriage celebrated quietly because he wanted to avoid a possible scandal caused by Flora Miller. This barely makes sense, when one considers that Lord Robert St. Simon is the heir of one of the great noble families of the Realm—for heaven’s sake, Richard the Lionheart’s blood flowed through the man’s flaccid bluish veins!

A member of such a noble house would be expected to wed on a grand scale. Paradoxically, such a quiet, unostentatious wedding would have elicited scandalous rumors that would have been far worse and far more embarrassing than anything that could arise from an upset former mistress making a fuss; such ladies were not uncommon in the life of noble bachelors and married men.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

One should also recall that Flora Miller's claim to fame was having been a chorus girl at the Allegro. As such, her social standing was well into negative numbers, and she would have been disdained and ridiculed by all those who count. The press might have run a few column-inches about another poor girl seduced, abused, and abandoned by a heartless nobleman, but most classes considered nearly every one of those in the acting professions (particularly dancing girls) social lepers.

Much worse would have been the practically inescapable suggestion that the reason behind such a private wedding was that the bride had been unable to dodge the stork.

Finally, we have Hatty's father. Why would he have agreed to such an arrangement? (Let us recall that he would have been the one paying for the wedding.) After all, here he has bought for himself and his daughter a very expensive distinguished son-in-law and husband. He would have wanted the nuptials to be sumptuous well above the level of vulgarity.

### *A Canonical Aside...*

#### *Milord's Loss*

When Watson protests that St. Simon's conduct fell short from being gracious, Holmes smiles, "Ah, Watson, perhaps you would not be very gracious either, if, after all the trouble of wooing and wedding, you found yourself deprived in an instant of wife and of fortune. I think that we may judge Lord St. Simon very mercifully."

Just how very much deprived was our nobleman? A short and concise answer would be, "Extremely."

We tend to think of money-strapped nobility like St. Simon as spendthrifts and wastrels, who squandered fortunes on women, horses, and cards. While that may have been mostly true back during the



Courtesy of ITV Granada

days of the Regency, for the most part at this time when the lords of great estates found themselves practically penniless it wasn't their fault. The invention of refrigeration and faster ships, added to the all-encompassing web of railroads, enabled the importation and distribution of foreign products on a grand scale. It was now cheaper to bring in great quantities of cereals and meats from places like America and New Zealand than to buy the national product. This caused an agricultural crisis that put local profits in free fall. The great houses could no longer be sustained solely on the earnings of what was raised on the estate. Added to this, more and more people were abandoning the

country for better paid jobs in urban industries. Those who remained at the plow or with the sheep expected better returns for their labor, exacerbating the situation.

Then, like a life preserver tossed at a drowning man, American heiresses began making an appearance on the scene. It is impossible to overstate the impact that these—as the newspaper Watson read to Holmes called them—"charming invaders" had upon those impoverished aristocrats who had little to offer beyond debts and coronets.

The heiresses' parents, although obscenely rich, were "new money," socially uncertain and therefore devoted to making their daughters acceptable in any society, sparing no effort or expense towards

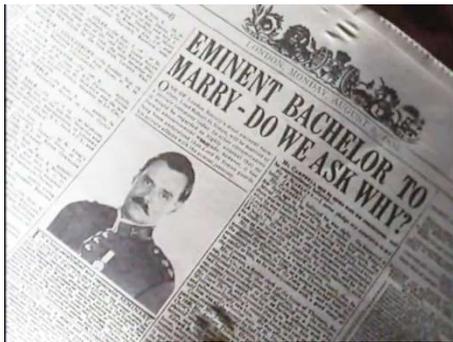
this goal. The result was that on average the American ladies were far better educated than their British counterparts. They fluently spoke other languages, were well-traveled, up on history and current events, and in conversation and attitude had not been raised to be shrinking violets as most English girls had. They dressed better and charmed the men like the sirens did poor Ulysses. Bertie, a.k.a. the Prince of Wales, was particularly attracted by some of these “fair American cousins from across the Atlantic,” much to the indignation and amusement of some members of the Court.

Oscar Wilde probably put it best in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, when Lord Henry is asked by his brother about the American heiress a common acquaintance is to marry:

“Is she pretty?”

“She behaves as if she was beautiful. Most American women do. It is the secret of their charm.”

Then, of course, there was the matter of the dowry.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Although these considerations are still common (albeit very private) these days when members of rich and powerful families marry, back in Victoria’s day the arrangements almost inevitably saw the light of day and Fleet Street would gleefully disseminate all the sordid details. Dowries as high as £200,000 (≈\$75,000,000 today) and often more were not unusual, and were not the sole monetary arrangement. More often than not, the bride’s parents would settle real estate, trusts, and other financial instruments upon the daughter, to provide her with

an income of her own. Sometimes laughingly referred to as “pin money,” the pins that those yearly sums could buy would have easily transfixed Moby Dick.

Small wonder that, to great societal chagrin, in one year alone nine of the noblest peers of the land were netted by Uncle Sam’s irresistibly moneyed daughters. As Tennyson put it,

*A simple maiden in her flower  
Is worth a hundred coats of arms.*

### *What else happened in 1888:*

#### ***Empire***

Mashonaland and Matabeleland declared British sphere of influence.

Suez Canal Convention signed: Suez Canal declared open to ships of all nations and free from blockade.

Sarawak and Brunei placed under British protection.

British East Africa Company founded.

#### ***Britain***

County Councils’ Act establishes representative county-based authorities.

Jack the Ripper has murder spree in Whitechapel.

Annie Besant leads the London match factory girls on strike.

Commission to examine charges against Parnell.

General Buller founds RASC (Royal Army Service Corps).



County Councils Act: elects councils to take over administrative duties of JPs.

Miners Federation of Great Britain formed; demand for minimum wage.

Foundation of Scottish Labour Party.

◀ English Priory of Knights Hospitalers authorized by Royal Charter.

Final report on Commission on Elementary Education Acts in England.

Foundation of London General Omnibus Company.

## *World*

French Indochina formed.

Slavery abolished in Brazil.

Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany dies; Frederick III becomes Emperor from March to June, dies, and is succeeded by Wilhelm II.

Benjamin Harrison elected President of United States; even though Cleveland received more popular votes, the electoral college gives the election to Harrison.

Unemployment demonstration in Rome suppressed by the military.

Marshal Bazaine, French officer in charge of the Foreign Legion in Mexico during Emperor Maximilian's rule, dies.

Agricultural depression causes Sweden to abandon free trade.

Phil Sheridan, who fought as a Union General against the South during the American Civil War dies.



Clashes in Paris between Radicals and Monarchists. Anarchists riot in favor of weavers of Lille and glass blowers of Lion. Paris stone masons and waiters strike for higher wages and shorter work schedules.

◀ Ferdinand de Lesseps attempts to issue a fresh series of 1,000,000 bonds "to finish the Panama Canal." Proposal is withdrawn, de Lesseps resigns his directorship.

More liberal constitution granted to Serbia by Milan.

Use of Danish language forbidden in schools in German N. Schleswig.

Founding of the Dutch shipping line Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM). It supports the unification and development of the colonial economy.

Reconstructed free port of Hamburg opens.

Revolution in Haiti culminates in the destruction of public buildings and the flight of President Salomon.

Italians near Alite relieved by the withdrawal of the Abyssinians.

Dr. Fitz, Boston surgeon, advocated the removal of the vermiform appendix in certain intestinal disorders, after several post-mortem operations. His advice is followed.

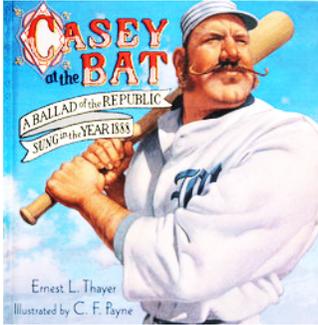
New York State establishes electric chair for method of death penalty.

Boulangier supported by Monarchists in France; popularity threatens Third Republic.

Main portion of Bremen incorporated into German Customs Union; parts of Wesser estuary remain free port.

## Art

Van Gogh in Arles, Holland, paints *Sunflowers*, *Portrait of Armand Roulin*, *La Mousme*, and *Drawbridge at Arles*.



Oscar Wilde publishes *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

◀ *Casey at the Bat* is recited publicly for the first time.

John Phillip Sousa composes the military march *Semper Fidelis* for the U.S. Marine Corp.

Tchaikovsky performs *Symphony No. 5 in E Minor* at St. Petersburg.

George Moore publishes *Confessions of a Young Man*.

Cézanne paints *Peasant in a Blue Smock*.

Guilbert and Sullivan debut *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

Iannis Psichari, one of the creators of modern Greek literary language, publishes *My Journey* in demotic Greek.

Morris publishes *Dream of John Bull*, on a socialist commonwealth.

Matthew Arnold, critic, essayist, and poet dies.

Fontane publishes *Irrungen, Wirrungen*.

Monet paints *Cap d'Antibes*.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch publishes *Troy Town*, a novel about Cornwall.



Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Trace Horse of the Bus Line, Place Clichy*.

Stevenson publishes *The Black Arrow*, a novel about the War of the Roses.

◀ Rimsky-Korsakov composes *Scheherazade*.

Charles Doughty publishes *Travels in Arabia Deserta*.

Seurat paints *Fishing Fleet at Port-en-Bessin*.

Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Tales*.

Kipling publishes *Soldiers Three*, and *Plain Tales from the Hills*; short stories of India.

## Science and Technology

Dunlop's pneumatic tyre developed, principle still unproven.

Clinton Merriam establishes the National Geographical Society and they release their first magazine.

Drinking straws are invented.

George Eastman perfects the "Kodak" box camera, which uses photographic paper roll-film.

Emile Berliner improves the gramophone.

Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian explorer, crosses the Greenland icefield.

Hudson and Sclater publish *Argentine Ornithology*.

Mercerizing process introduced into cotton manufacture; facilitates later development of the artificial silk industry.

Nichola Tesla makes first AC motor.

Incubators are first used for premature infants.

Institut Pasteur for the treatment of hydrophobia founded.

Sir J. Dewar and Sir F. Abel invent cordite.

William Burroughs patents the adding machine.

Louis Le Prince films the *Roundhay Garden Scene*, the earliest surviving film.

Heinrich Hertz produces electromagnetic waves, proves light and heat are both forms of electromagnetic radiation. Sir Oliver Lodge makes same discovery independently. Hertz used an induction coil; Lodge Leyden jars.

*Next week's case: BERY*

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..."

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