



An Inquiry into:
“The Problem of Thor Bridge”

“The Problem of Thor Bridge” was first published in *The Strand Magazine* on February/March 1922. It is part of *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*.

Although there is no unanimous agreement as the table

blow shows, a majority of our chronologists date this case as having taken place in 1901. If this is so, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 47 years old and Dr. John H. Watson 49.

Main Characters:

Neil Gibson, American gold magnate, millionaire, and former senator of a Western state. Mrs. Gibson, Neil’s Brazilian jealous wife. Miss Grace Dunbar, Governess to the Gibson’s children and the object of Neil’s affections. Marlow Bates, manager of Gibson’s estate. Sergeant Coventry, the local policeman.

Notable Quotes:

Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box with my name, John H. Watson, M.D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid. It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr. Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine. Some, and not the least interesting, were complete failures, and as such will hardly bear narrating, since no final explanation is forthcoming. A problem without a solution may interest the student, but can hardly fail to annoy the casual reader. Among these unfinished tales is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world. No less remarkable is that of the cutter Alicia, which sailed one spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew. A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science.

<i>The Problem of Thor Bridge</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>October 4</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Thursday, October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>October 4, 1896-1902</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>October 1900</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>October 4, 1901</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday October 4, 1900</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1901</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Friday, October 4, 1890</i>

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 faculty of deduction is certainly contagious.”

“I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them.”

“I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backwards.”

“My professional charges are upon a fixed scale. I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.”

“No man has ever crossed me and was the better for it.”

“So many have said so, and yet here I am.”

“I guess most men have a little private reserve of their own in some corner of their souls where they don't welcome intruders.”

“Now, I make no pretence to be more moral than my neighbours, and I will admit to you that I could not live under the same roof with such a woman and in daily contact with her without feeling a passionate regard for her. Do you blame me, Mr. Holmes?”

“I do not blame you for feeling it. I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection.”

“It is only for the young lady's sake that I touch your case at all. I don't know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences.”

“We must look for consistency. Where there is a want of it we must suspect deception.”

“When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so damning becomes a clue to the truth.”

“I have been sluggish in mind and wanting in that mixture of imagination and reality which is the basis of my art.”



A Well-Off Holmes

From what Watson writes about Holmes in this case, it seems quite clear that by this time in his career, the Great Detective was in an enviable economic and professional position.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

When Gibson approached the matter of his fee, our sleuth response smacked of contempt for the American multimillionaire: “My professional charges are upon a fixed scale. I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether.”

The when Gibson indicated that if he was indifferent to the fee money that could have been his that a successful end to the case would enhance the Great Detective's reputation in England and America His reply, “Thank you, Mr. Gibson, I do not think that I am in need of booming. It may surprise you to know that I prefer to work anon-

ymously, and that it is the problem itself which attracts me.”

Then he proceeds to put the multimillionaire in his place by berating him for his advances towards Grace Dunbar: "It is only for the young lady's sake that I touch your case at all. I don't know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences."

Quite the Victorian gentleman, *sans peur et sans reproche!*

All of this also makes the beginning to this case, in which Watson briefly mentions the contents of his travel-worn and battered tin dispatch-box even sadder for all of us. If it is true, as some Canon scholars allege, that the box and its contents were lost in the blitz during the Second World War when the bank of Cox and Co. was bombed to rubble, we are given yet another reason for repudiating war.

The Ruthless Millionaire

Gibson is one of those interesting Canonical characters who would have deserved further development. What were his origins? How came he to hunt for gold in Brazil? How did he parlay his fortune and position to such an apex of riches and power? What made him decide to run for the Senate? Why did he leave the United States for England?



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Regardless of how ruthless and violent he is described to us by our Biographer, it is quite obvious that he was capable of tender feelings and love. He married for love and remained married for two decades. Then there were his feelings for Grace. While at first he offered her the dubious status of mistress, when he thought he might lose her he curbed (very likely with considerable difficulty) his more carnal inclinations towards the lady.

He was also inclined to accept her guidance and moderate his ruthlessness in his business dealings. He comes through, in a way, as a Scrooge on his way to reformation.

A Brilliant Deduction

Whatever the reasoning was that led Holmes to imagine what might have happened with the missing deadly weapon on Thor Bridge, it was absolutely dazzling. The way that Watson describes how Holmes arrived at his conclusion would make an excellent description today of the workings of the subconscious mind. It seems obvious that from the time the Great Detective accepted the case, his brain began spinning facts nonstop into theory and soon afterwards proof.

Grace Dunbar



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Undoubtedly, Miss Dunbar must have quite an extraordinary creature. It is interesting to see how she equally affected three men who could not have been more different from each other. Certainly Gibson was shaken to the core by her. Not too unexpectedly so, so was Watson who unsurprisingly so describes her feminine pulchritude in his usual enthusiastic manner. Holmes, however, is another matter.

"After seeing you I am prepared to accept Mr. Gibson's statement both as to the influence which you had over him and as to the innocence of your relations with him," he tells her shortly after having met her for the first time. What could have led the Great Detective to so

rapidly arrive at that conclusion? Holmes was nothing short of a deductive genius, but this pronouncement, given with such certainty would appear to sit on somewhat shaky ground.

One can only conclude that although our sleuth was made of sterner stuff, he was not cold, lifeless marble. There were times when he most definitely felt that at least some women were to be entirely trusted.

What else happened in 1901:

Empire



◀ Queen Victoria dies at 6.30 a.m. on January 22, aged 82. She lived through many changes and died well-loved by her people, presiding over her vast empire for nearly 64 years. Born in 1819, the only child of George III's fourth son, Victoria became queen in 1837. In 1840, she married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and had nine children before his death in 1861. Through dynastic marriages, Victoria's descendants were connected to almost all of Europe's royal houses. During her long reign the monarchy lost much of its political power to Parliament, but she was the beloved symbol of the Victorian Era—a golden age of British history. By the end of her reign London's population had reached 6.6 million and her empire extended over pine and palm. She was succeeded by her son, Edward VII, who was crowned King-Emperor.

Northern Nigeria becomes British protectorate.

Creation of North Western Frontier Province in India.

Britain and Germany agree on boundary between German East Africa (later Tanganyika, Rwanda and Burundi) and Nyasaland (later Malawi).

The Commonwealth of Australia is proclaimed. Although independent it still recognizes Britain's royalty as its head of state. The governor-general, the representative of the King, is nominated by the prime minister and appointed by the British monarch.

Uganda railway reaches Lake Victoria.

Cook Islands were annexed and proclaimed a part of New Zealand.

Britain



Wigmore Hall opens.

First electric trams from Shepherds Bush to Acton and Kew Bridge.

◀ Robert Falcon Scott commands the *Discovery* on Antarctic expedition.

First British submarine launched at Barrow-in-Furness.

Boxing is recognized as a legal sport in England.

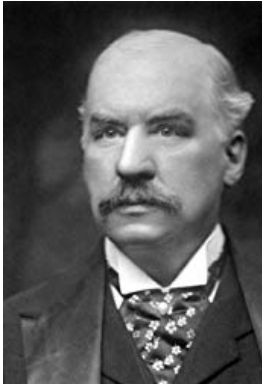
Taff Vale case: Trade unions in Britain liable for actions of tort, stimulates Trade Union Congress to create the Labour Party.

World

Peace Protocol with China after Boxer Rebellion. Rebellion leaders Chi-Hsin (Chi-hsui) and Hsu-Cheng-Yu are publicly executed in Peking.

U.S. President McKinley assassinated; succeeded by Theodore Roosevelt.

Law of Associations: gives French Roman Catholics the right to form associations if neither secret nor illegal.



Labor Councils in France to settle disputes between masters and men.

Opening of Trans-Siberian railway.

Franco-Italian agreement defines spheres of interest in the Mediterranean.

◀ U.S. Steel Corporation organized under J.P. Morgan and Company, bankers.

Anti-Semitic riot in Budapest.

Compulsory military service established in Sweden and Norway.

New constitution in Serbia issued by Alexander.

Japan proclaims that it is determined to keep Russia from encroaching on Korea.

First female intern was accepted at a Paris hospital.

Hay-Pauncefort Treaty gives U.S. power to build and police the Panama Canal if it remains open to shipping in peace or war.

Art

Kipling writes *Kim*.



Richard D'Oyly Carte, promoter (Gilbert and Sullivan operas), dies.

Chekhov's *Three Sisters* opens at Moscow Art Theater.

Frank Norris, U.S., writes *The Octopus*.

◀ Matisse paints *The Japanese Woman*.

Picasso paints *Woman with a Cap*, *Casagemas in His Coffin*, and *The Absinthe Drinker*.

Van Gogh's painting *Sunflowers* is presented by art teacher Claude-Emile Schuffenecker at a Paris exhibition.

Walt Disney is born in Chicago.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, French painter, dies at 36.

Science and Technology

Marconi transmits Morse wireless signals from Poldhu, Cornwall to St. John's, Newfoundland.

Becquerel discovers dangerous effects of radioactivity on humans.

Alberto Santos-Dumont successfully circles Eiffel Tower in his Santos-Dumont No. 6 dirigible within a half hour and won a 100,000-franc prize. An initial ruling stated he failed by 40 seconds because the race wasn't finished until he touched ground. A second vote granted him the win. This proved the airship maneuverable.

Rene Dubos, French-American microbiologist who developed the first commercial antibiotic, was born in France.

Walter Reed leads Yellow Fever Commission, a four-man team, to Cuba to search for the cause of the disease. More than 200 American soldiers died from the disease over the previous 18 months. Aristides Agramonte, pathologist, James Carroll, bacteriologist, and Jesse W. Lazear, entomologist, were team members. Cuban Dr. Carlos Finlay theorized that yellow fever was spread by mosquitoes.

U.S. Congress creates the National Bureau of Standards as part of the Department of Commerce.

Freud publishes *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.

First isolation of the hormone adrenalin.

Peter Cooper-Hewitt produces mercury vapor lamp; invented by Arons in 1892.

Next week's case: CREE

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...”

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.