



*An Inquiry into:  
"The Yellow Face"*

"The Yellow Face" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in February 1893. It is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

In this instance, I am disinclined to agree with most of our chronologists, particularly because there is no date

that emerges with a majority. Instead, I find D. Martin Dakin's estimate to be more likely. He writes, in *A Sherlock Holmes Commentary*:

*It was early spring when the elm-tree shoots and chestnut buds were just coming out, so this must mean some time in April. There is no indication of the year, except that it is before the Watson marriage; but in April 1883 Holmes and Watson were busy with Helen Stoner and Dr. Roylott, and in April 1887 with the Reigate squires; and as they are said to have known each other intimately, 1885 or 1886 seems more suitable than 1882 or even 1884. On the other hand, if the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 was that in which Hebron, Effie's first husband, died, then, as the Munros had been married three years, the case would have to be in 1882.*

If the case took place in 1882, as Dakin thinks, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 28 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 30.

**Main Characters:**

Grant "Jack" Munro, husband of Effie, a hop merchant residing in Norbury. Effie Munro, Grant's wife, who was previously married in Atlanta, Georgia. John Hebron, Effie's deceased husband, an American Lawyer. Lucy Hebron, Effie and John Hebron's daughter.

<i>The Yellow Face</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>A Thursday in early Spring</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Saturday, April 7, 1888</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Saturday, April 8, 1882</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>1881 or 1887</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>March 1882</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Saturday, April 7, 1883</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Possibly April 1886</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Saturday in April 1888</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Early Spring 1886</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, March 29, 1884</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1888</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, early April 1885 or 1886</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.

## *Notable Quotes:*

In publishing these short sketches based upon the numerous cases in which my companion's singular gifts have made us the listeners to, and eventually the actors in, some strange drama, it is only natural that I should dwell rather upon his successes than upon his failures. And this not so much for the sake of his reputation—for, indeed, it was when he was at his wit's end that his energy and his versatility were most admirable—but because where he failed it happened too often that no one else succeeded,



Courtesy of ITV Granada

and that the tale was left forever without a conclusion. Now and again, however, it chanced that even when he erred the truth was still discovered.

Sherlock Holmes was a man who seldom took exercise for exercise's sake. Few men were capable of greater muscular effort, and he was undoubtedly one of the finest boxers of his weight that I have ever seen; but he looked upon aimless bodily

exertion as a waste of ener-

gy, and he seldom bestirred himself save where there was some professional object to be served. Then he was absolutely untiring and indefatigable. That he should have kept himself in training under such circumstances is remarkable, but his diet was usually of the sparest, and his habits were simple to the verge of austerity. Save for the occasional use of cocaine, he had no vices, and he only turned to the drug as a protest against the monotony of existence when cases were scanty and the papers uninteresting.

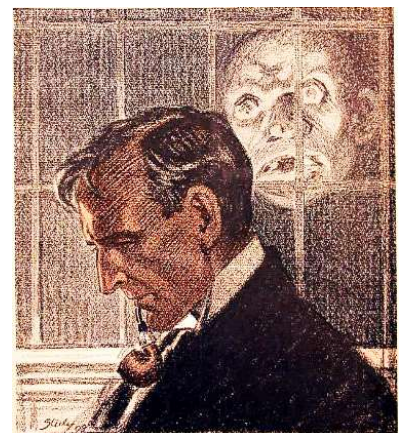
For two hours we rambled about together, in silence for the most part, as befits two men who know each other intimately.

“Watson, if it should ever strike you that I am getting a little over-confident in my powers, or giving less pains to a case than it deserves, kindly whisper ‘Norbury’ in my ear, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you.”

## *Deductions Gone Awry*

This case has a somewhat unsatisfactory ending insofar as the Great Detective's investigative results are concerned. There was no crime or criminals involved, and he most definitely did not solve the actual mystery behind it.

However, I can see why Watson would chose to preserve and write it down for us. Regardless of the fact that he just not only missed the target—there was not even a target to begin with—it still shows Holmes at his deductive best. It may have been that the Good Doctor's intention here was not to show us the “reasoning machine,” but a very human side of his companion—that there were times when Sherlock Holmes could be utterly wrong about something; that unlike his elder brother, omniscience was not his specialism, and he made no pretense to it.

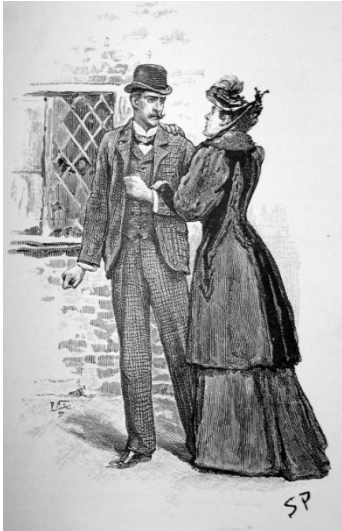


Also (and perhaps even more important), his request to Watson to remind him about his humanity whenever his hat size grew too large, showed that our sleuth was no stranger to humility.

### *The Actual Events*

Watson's story appears to be redolent of lacunæ. The redoubtable Leslie S. Klinger, in his invaluable *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, cites several.

In the past when studying this case, considering what the racial situation was in the former Confederate States, with the Civil War and Reconstruction very much still in living memory, it seems highly unlikely that in the Deep South there would have been a black attorney, much less one with a successful law practice.



A mixed marriage, such as that of John Hebron and Effie would have had to take place in another state (or perhaps even country), and as Klinger correctly cites, “their marriage upon their return to Atlanta, would have come to an abrupt and sanguinary end.”

Generations of Sherlockian and Holmesians have argued over Watson's description of Lucy as being “coal black.” Some have stated that genetics would dictate that the offspring of John and Effie's marriage would have to have been lighter skinned than her father, dominant/recessive possibilities aside.

However, some of the scholars cited in *TNASH*, put forth two very interesting theories. One is that Effie herself might have been the product of a similar mixed marriage, and therefore carried the genes for dark skin, which would have made the results genetically possible.

Yet another intriguing posited possibility is that Lucy may have been the offspring of an earlier marriage on Hebron's part, which would have then made Lucy Effie's stepdaughter, bypassing the problematical genetics of the matter.

Finally, there are the economic circumstances of the Munros. For Hebron to have been able to leave his wife with a capital of £4,500 (≈\$1,700,000 today), he must indeed have been successful. To have invested it in such a way as to get a 7% annual return (≈\$120,000) would have been nothing short of extraordinary, proving Watson's observation that the man had an “intelligent-looking” face. Added to Munro's yearly £800 (≈\$300,000) the two must have truly have had an extremely comfortable existence, especially when considering the miniscule income tax of the time.

### *What else happened in 1882:*

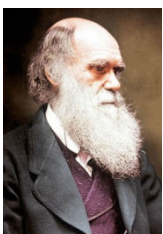
#### *Empire*

Occupation of Egypt—British bombard Alexandria and capture Cairo.

Queen Victoria gives Epping Forest to the nation.

London Chamber of Commerce established.

#### *Britain*



Phoenix Park murders.

Fenians murder British Secretary Cavendish.

Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand open.

◀ Charles Darwin dies.

Women receive the right of separate property ownership after marriage.

Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square burns down.

Tottenham Hotspur football team formed.

### *World*

Italy, Germany, and Austria-Hungary form the Triple Alliance.

The first Labor Day in the U.S.A., later becomes a national holiday.

Knights of Columbus is founded in New Haven.

Three-mile limit for territorial waters agreed upon at Hague Convention.

### *Art*

English novelist, Anthony Trollope dies.



Dante Rossetti of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood dies.

Ignatius Donnelly publishes *Atlantis* claiming the lost continent actually existed.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow dies.

Ralph Waldo Emerson dies.

◀ Cézanne paints *Self-portrait*.

Ibsen publishes *An Enemy of the People*.

Wagner completes his final work, *The Parsifal*.

### *Science and Technology*

Edison designs first hydroelectric station in U.S.

Hiram Maxim patents recoil-operated machine gun.

Nicholas Tesla develops theory of alternating current (AC).

Thomas Edison patents the three-wire electrical system still in use.

Joseph Breuer begins hypnosis treatments and begins psychoanalysis.

Koch isolates the bacterium responsible for tuberculosis.

First motion picture used in France.

### *Next week's case: STOC*

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](mailto:CourageousMurray@aol.com).**