



# An Inquiry into: "The Yellow Face"

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

The chronology for this case is varied, depending on which Canon expert one consults, but unsatisfactory as well. As is the case whenever we review this adventure, I find it difficult to accept that dates posted by

most of our chronologists, principally because there is no date that emerges with a majority. Instead, I rely on D. Martin Dakin's estimate. 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.*

<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.

Therefore, if the case indeed took place in 1882, then Sherlock Holmes was 28 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 30.

### **Main Characters:**

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

### *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, 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 energy, 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.

### *Some Passing Observations*

There seems to have been a widespread affliction during Victorian times (possibly linked somehow to



that most mysterious of all diseases, brain-fever) that caused married ladies to misspeak their husband's first names. We have Mrs. Watson calling John her husband, "James" and Effie referring to her husband Grant as "Jack."

Although there can be no question that Grant Munro could have afforded Holmes' fee, regardless of the amount that Great Detective might have charged him for his services, I tend to think that in view of the results, which contradicted his mistaken (but nevertheless brilliant) deductions, our sleuth did not charge his client.

In this case, Holmes was made to sample humble pie but to his credit, he did not find the flavor distasteful: "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."

### *An Envidable Economic Position*

According to Watson, Munro stated that his wife's first husband left her very well off with a capital of about £4,500 (≈\$1,700,000). This amount, in turn, was so well-invested that it returned an annual average of 7%, or £315 (≈\$120,000).

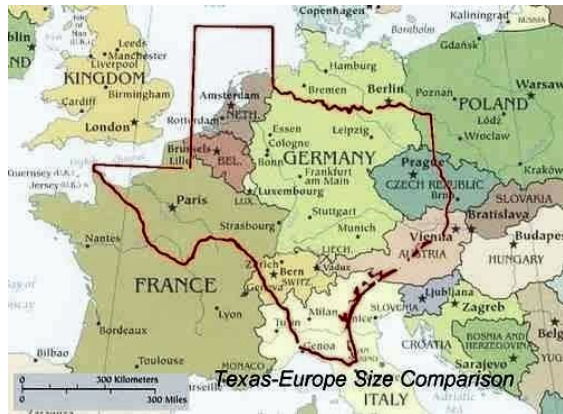
We also learn that Munro himself averaged £1,100 (≈\$410,000) annually which, when added to her income puts them at £1,415 (≈\$530,000). Obviously, it would not be at all penurious for them to pay £80 (≈\$30,000) a year for their Norbury villa.

Even so, regardless of how much Munro may have trusted Effie, it would seem that a request for a £100 (≈\$40,000) check would not have been so easily given met, absent a more complete explanation on Effie's part.

I base this upon the grim results which I am certain would ensue were I go to my wife and request a small, \$1,000 check, no questions asked.

### *Atlanta, Atlanta, Which Art Thou?*

Traditionally, many Canon scholars have tended to focus on the fact that, during the era in which these events took place, there would have been few—if any—places in the United States that would even have married them, much less tolerated an interracial couple as neighbors. They ponder how John Hebron, a black lawyer, could have met with any success in a post-bellum southern city of the importance and high profile as Atlanta, Georgia. Considering that the tragic and catastrophic Civil War was very much within living memory (painful memory at that) and that there was an abundance of embittered veterans, the point would appear to have been well taken.



**Most Europeans are unaware of how truly large the United States is. One American state would cover the boundaries of several European countries.**

brief reconnaissance reveals that, besides the capital city of Georgia, there is an Atlanta in Arkansas, California, Delaware, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Wisconsin.

Therefore, it is not farfetched to speculate that the Atlanta that Effie referred to may have been in an area more racially tolerant than what the state of Georgia was back then. That being said, it is sad to consider that wherever the couple would have settled, there would still have been a measure of prejudice. One should not wonder, therefore, at Effie's proud remark, "I cut myself off from my race in order to wed him, but never once while he lived did I for an instant regret it."

The biology regarding the genetic cocktail that produced Lucy Hebron has been discussed at great length here and elsewhere, and there is little need to revisit it. Suffice it to say that Watson's description of the little girl being "coal black" falls within the realm of exaggeration. The most logical explanation so far has been that Lucy probably was the child of Hebron's first marriage and that Effie, his second wife, came to love her little stepdaughter as if she were her own.

To play Devil's Advocate, however, it is well to consider Effie's two mentions of Atlanta: "My husband died at Atlanta," and "That is John Hebron, of Atlanta, and a nobler man never walked the earth."

Whenever my European relatives visit, although they have been here several times, have access to fine maps, and undoubtedly have seen photos of the Earth from space, they are always astonished at how large the United States truly is.

Possibly not having a true sense of the true size of America, one should not wonder, therefore, why Watson did not think of asking the lady, "Atlanta where?" Just a





## *What else happened in 1882:*

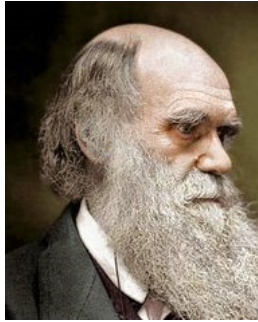
### *Empire*

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.

Women receive the right of separate property ownership after marriage.

◀ Charles Darwin dies.

Royal Courts of Justice in the Strand open.

Alhambra Theatre in Leicester Square burns down.

Tottenham Hotspur football team formed.

### *World*

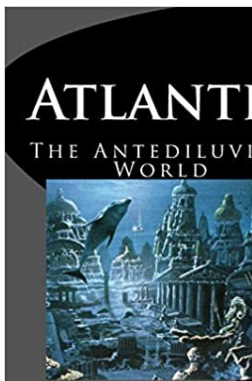
Italy, Germany, and Austria-Hungary form the Triple Alliance.

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.

Schuyler S. Wheeler invents the electric fan.

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).**

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