

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

The Five Orange Pips

"Of All Our Cases We Have Had None More Fantastic Than This"

Annotated by Rod Mollise

When I glance over my notes and records of the Sherlock Holmes cases between the years '82 and '90, I am faced by so many which present strange and interesting features that it is no easy matter to know which to choose and which to leave. Some, however, have already gained publicity through the papers, and others have not offered a field for those peculiar qualities which my friend possessed in so high a degree, and which it is the object of these papers to illustrate. Some, too, have baffled his analytical skill, and would be, as narratives, beginnings without an ending, while others have been but partially cleared up, and have their explanations founded rather upon conjecture and surmise than on that absolute logical proof which was so dear to him. There is, however, one of these last which was so remarkable in its details and so startling in its results that I am tempted to give some account of it in spite of the fact that there are points in connection with it which never have been, and probably never will be, entirely cleared up.

The year '87 furnished us with a long series of cases of greater or less interest, of which I retain the records. Among my headings under this one twelve months I find an account of the adventure of the Paradol Chamber, of the Amateur Mendicant Society, who held a luxurious club in the lower vault of a furniture warehouse, of the facts connected with the loss of the British barque "Sophy Anderson", of the singular adventures of the Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and finally of the Camberwell poisoning case. In the latter, as may be remembered, Sherlock Holmes was able, by winding up the dead man's watch, to prove that it had been wound up two hours before, and that therefore the deceased had gone to bed within that time—a deduction which was of the greatest importance in clearing up the case. All these I may sketch out at some future date, but none of them present such singular features as the strange train of circumstances which I have now taken up my pen to describe.

It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales had set in with exceptional violence. All day the wind had screamed and the rain had beaten against the windows, so that even here in the heart of great, hand-made London we were forced to raise our minds for the instant from the routine of life and to recognise the presence of those great elemental



Comment [RM1]: It's a little curious that Watson says "82 and 90" instead of "81 and 90." After all, *STUD* is pretty well placed in 1881, both by Sherlockian scholars and by Watson himself. Some have suggested this is because Watson didn't have systematic records of any cases in 1881 other than [A Study in Scarlet](#), and therefore omitted 1881 from a list of years for which he had detailed notes. Maybe.

Comment [RM2]: This (apparently) sets the case in 1887, September 1887, as we'll find out shortly. If you want precision, William S. Baring-Gould rather convincingly assigned the case to "Thursday, September 29 to Friday, September 30, 1887." See his *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (which should be on every Sherlockian's shelves—it's quite inexpensive via Ebay if that is a consideration) for details.

Comment [RM3]: Watson, you tease! The good doctor's references to unrecorded/unreleased cases have provided plenty of fodder for pastiches, radio shows, and films over the years. Not a one has ever elicited a "YES!" from me, however.

Comment [RM4]: You may be unsurprised to learn there is no island of UFFA. There are two commonly accepted identifications for this mysterious place. First, and most widely supported, that the name "Uffa" is, as was suggested by Jay Finley Christ, a blending of the names of two actual islands, Staffa and Ulva, which are located off the western coast of Scotland ("James Boswell and the Island of Uffa," *Baker Street Journal* Volume 1, Number 1 (Old Series)). If this doesn't please, it has also been theorized that Uffa might not be an actual island at all, but merely a hill or mound that rises above the surrounding countryside.

Comment [RM5]: This is not quite as simple as Watson makes it sound. The watch would first have to have been wound up completely, and, by experiment, it would have had to have been determined how many turns of the stem were needed for two hours of operation.

Comment [RM6]: Possibly my favorite sort of "Baker Street weather." At any rate, while "gales" may take place around the time of the equinox—the time when the Sun crosses the Celestial Equator on its way south—the equinox, of course, doesn't cause the gales.

forces which shriek at mankind through the bars of his civilisation, like untamed beasts in a cage. As evening drew in, the storm grew higher and louder, and the wind cried and sobbed like a child in the chimney. Sherlock Holmes sat moodily at one side of the fireplace cross-indexing his records of crime, while I at the other was deep in one of Clark Russell's fine sea-stories until the howl of the gale from without seemed to blend with the text, and the splash of the rain to lengthen out into the long swash of the sea waves. My wife was on a visit to her mother's, and for a few days I was a dweller once more in my old quarters at Baker Street.

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. Who could come to-night? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage visitors."

"A client, then?"

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. He stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

"Come in!" said he.

The man who entered was young, some two-and-twenty at the outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of refinement and delicacy in his bearing.

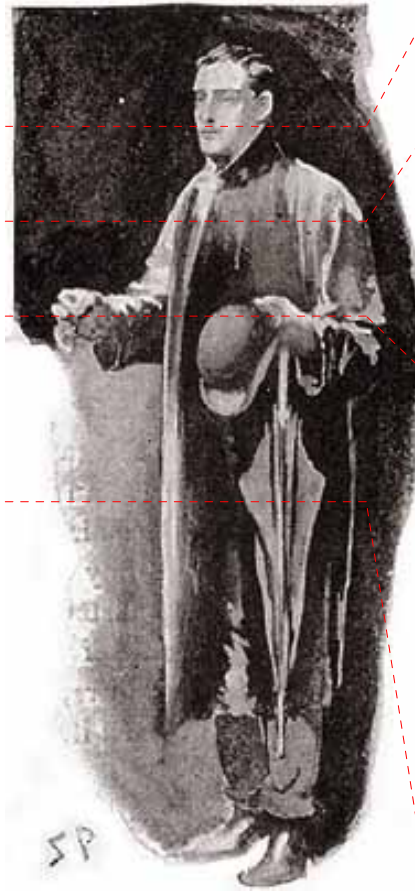
The streaming umbrella which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told of the fierce weather through which he had come. He looked about him anxiously in the glare of the lamp, and I could see that his face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is weighed down with some great anxiety.

"I owe you an apology," he said, raising his golden pince-nez to his eyes. "I trust that I am not intruding. I fear that I have brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug chamber."

"Give me your coat and umbrella," said Holmes. "They may rest here on the hook and will be dry presently. You have come up from the south-west, I see."

"Yes, from Horsham."

"That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is quite distinctive."



Comment [RM7]: There seems to be a little bit of confusion surrounding this phrase, but it's just a simile. The noise of the wind in the chimney sounds like a sobbing child.

Comment [RM8]: William Clark Russell (1844 – 1911) was a popular American novelist known for his nautical tales. Russell's books are based on his actual experience of eight years as a sailor. Works include: *John Holdsworth* (1874), *The Wreck of the Grosvenor* (1880), *The Sea Queen* (1884), *The Frozen Pirate* (1887), *The Golden Hope* (1887), *Marooned* (1892), *Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea* (1892), many others.

Comment [RM9]: This clearly cannot be Mary Morstan. She was an orphan, and Watson did not meet her until 1888, anyway. A "first" Watson wife or a spurious comment by Watson writing several years after the fact? You be the judge. In any event, assuming this original Mrs. Watson existed, we know absolutely nothing about her—not even her name.

My guess as to the reason for this wife's presence? This reference to a wife was inserted by The Literary Agent because Watson (or the Agent probably) later mentions *The Sign of Four* (merely to promote the novel). A.C.D. figured the public would wonder where Mary was, and the actual sequence of the cases be damned. The "mother" business was a quickly thought-up excuse by the Agent, who apparently didn't remember that Mary Morstan did not have a living mother.

Comment [RM10]: That's what Holmes says, and, indeed, throughout the entire canon we have little indication that there was anyone Holmes was even marginally close to with the exception of Watson and, to a lesser extent, brother Mycroft and landlady Martha Hudson. It would be well to remember, though, that we have a very incomplete picture of Holmes. As Holmes himself noted, Watson was prone to exaggeration in the name of producing his effects and moods for his stories. Also, Holmes was incredibly secretive about his private life. It was an amazingly long time—seven years—for example, before Watson learned Holmes had a brother.

Comment [RM11]: Horsham is a market town in West Sussex in southern England with a population of about 50,000. In addition to being famous due to its role in FIVE, the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley was born near Horsham.

Comment [RM12]: Alas, there does not appear to be an abundance of "clay and chalk" in the Horsham area.



“I have come for advice.”

“That is easily got.”

“And help.”

“That is not always so easy.”

“I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I heard from Major Prendergast how you saved him in the Tankerville Club scandal.”

“Ah, of course. He was wrongfully accused of cheating at cards.”

“He said that you could solve anything.”

“He said too much.”

“That you are never beaten.”

“I have been beaten four times—three times by men, and once by a woman.”

“But what is that compared with the number of your successes?”

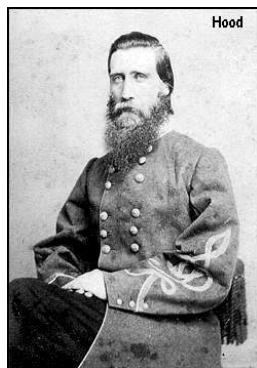
“It is true that I have been generally successful.”

“Then you may be so with me.”

“I beg that you will draw your chair up to the fire and favour me with some details as to your case.”

“It is no ordinary one.”

“None of those which come to me are. I am the last court of appeal.”



“And yet I question, sir, whether, in all your experience, you have ever listened to a more mysterious and inexplicable chain of events than those which have happened in my own family.”

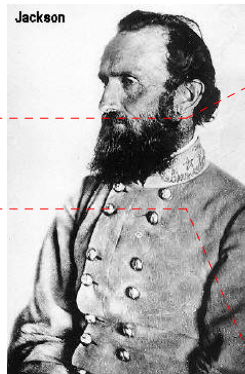
“You fill me with interest,” said Holmes. “Pray give us the essential facts from the commencement, and I can afterwards question you as to those details which seem to me to be most important.”

The young man pulled his chair up and pushed his wet feet out towards the blaze.

“My name,” said he, “is John Openshaw, but my own affairs have, as far as I can understand, little to do with this awful business. It is a hereditary matter; so in order to give you an idea of the facts, I must go back to the commencement of the affair.

“You must know that my grandfather had two sons—my uncle Elias and my father Joseph. My father had a small factory at Coventry, which he enlarged at the time of the invention of bicycling. He was a patentee of the Openshaw unbreakable tire, and his business met with such success that he was able to sell it and to retire upon a handsome competence.

“My uncle Elias emigrated to America when he was a young man and became a planter in Florida, where he was reported to have done very well. At the time of the war he fought in Jackson’s army, and afterwards under Hood, where he rose to be a colonel. When Lee laid down his arms my uncle



Comment [RM13]: Michael Harrison identifies the club in question as The Walsingham and the officer involved as one Colonel Takeley. See Harrison’s *The World of Sherlock Holmes* for a rewarding discussion of this case, other club scandals, and the Victorian club in general.

Comment [RM14]: “Who was ‘Irene Adler,’ Alex?” BEEEEEP. Sorry, but we have some nice parting gifts for you. Who was this woman? Certainly not Irene. If we accept the date of this case as 1887, as Watson says, and SCAN as 1888, again, as Watson says, this cannot be Irene. Who then is this other “scandalous” woman? That evil Spider Woman, so fetchingly portrayed by Gale Sondergaard in the Universal film of the same name, perhaps?

Comment [RM15]: Which is fairly modest for Holmes, who was seldom adverse to tooting his own horn: “I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues...” (GREE).

Comment [RM16]: Which is often true, in that Holmes certainly has a propensity for taking the law into his own hands and determining the fate of the guilty without the aid of judge or jury (in BOSCH, for instance). In truth, Holmes’ interest is in problems, in WORK, and not in justice. That he is a moral man is sure, and his justice is almost invariably just that, though it is usually a secondary feature of the cases for him.

Comment [RM17]: The West Midlands industrial city. It’s most famous for its role in the British automobile industry and as the site of Lady Godiva’s legendary ride.

Comment [RM18]: “Puncture proof,” that is.

Comment [RM19]: Confederate Lieutenant General Thomas J. “Stonewall” Jackson (1824 – 1863): “There stands Jackson like a stone wall!”

Comment [RM20]: Confederate General John Bell Hood (1831 – 1879). A gifted tactical commander, but one known for his recklessness.

returned to his plantation, where he remained for three or four years. About 1869 or 1870 he came back to Europe and took a small estate in Sussex, near Horsham. He had made a very considerable fortune in the States, and his reason for leaving them was his aversion to the negroes, and his dislike of the Republican policy in extending the franchise to them. He was a singular man, fierce and quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring disposition. During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town. He had a garden and two or three fields round his house, and there he would take his exercise, though very often for weeks on end he would never leave his room. He drank a great deal of brandy and smoked very heavily, but he would see no society and did not want any friends, not even his own brother.

“He didn’t mind me; in fact, he took a fancy to me, for at the time when he saw me first I was a youngster of twelve or so. This would be in the year 1878, after he had been eight or nine years in England. He begged my father to let me live with him and he was very kind to me in his way. When he was sober he used to be fond of playing backgammon and draughts with me, and he would make me his representative both with the servants and with the tradespeople, so that by the time that I was sixteen I was quite master of the house. I kept all the keys and could go where I liked and do what I liked, so long as I did not disturb him in his privacy. There was one singular exception, however, for he had a single room, a lumber-room up among the attics, which was invariably locked, and which he would never permit either me or anyone else to enter. With a boy’s curiosity I have peeped through the keyhole, but I was never able to see more than such a collection of old trunks and bundles as would be expected in such a room.

“One day—it was in March, 1883—a letter with a foreign stamp lay upon the table in front of the colonel’s plate. It was not a common thing for him to receive letters, for his bills were all paid in ready money, and he had no friends of any sort. ‘From India!’ said he as he took it up, ‘Pondicherry postmark! What can this be?’ Opening it hurriedly, out there jumped five little dried orange pips, which pattered down upon his plate. I began to laugh at this, but the laugh was struck from my lips at the sight of his face. His lip had fallen, his eyes were protruding, his skin the colour of putty, and he glared at the envelope which he still held in his trembling hand, ‘K. K. K.!’ he shrieked, and then, ‘My God, my God, my sins have overtaken me!’

“‘What is it, uncle?’ I cried.

“‘Death,’ said he, and rising from the table he retired to his room, leaving me palpitating with horror. I took up the envelope and saw scrawled in red ink upon the inner flap, just above the gum, the letter K three times repeated. There was nothing else save the five dried pips. What could be the reason of his overpowering terror? I left the breakfast-table, and as I ascended the stair I met him coming down with an old rusty key, which must have belonged to the attic, in one hand, and a small brass box, like a cashbox, in the other.

“‘They may do what they like, but I’ll checkmate them still,’ said he with an oath. ‘Tell Mary that I shall want a fire in my room to-day, and send down to Fordham, the Horsham lawyer.’

“I did as he ordered, and when the lawyer arrived I was asked to step up to the room. The fire was burning brightly, and in the grate there was a mass of black, fluffy ashes, as of burned paper, while



Comment [RM21]: Still, this was not much of a life for a young man. We assume that Openshaw acceded to this plan in order to guarantee his inheritance—perhaps at his father’s urging.

Comment [RM22]: The game that became “checkers.”

Comment [RM23]: Now renamed “Puduchery,” Pondicherry was a French possession on India’s southeastern coast.

Comment [RM24]: “Ku Klux Klan,” of course. The Klan actually gained most of its notoriety long after the events of this story, reaching a height of power and viciousness in the 1920s, and remaining a real source of terror in the southern United States throughout the years of the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

Comment [RM25]: Seeds.

the brass box stood open and empty beside it. As I glanced at the box I noticed, with a start, that upon the lid was printed the treble K which I had read in the morning upon the envelope.

“I wish you, John,’ said my uncle, ‘to witness my will. I leave my estate, with all its advantages and all its disadvantages, to my brother, your father, whence it will, no doubt, descend to you. If you can enjoy it in peace, well and good! If you find you cannot, take my advice, my boy, and leave it to your deadliest enemy. I am sorry to give you such a two-edged thing, but I can’t say what turn things are going to take. Kindly sign the paper where Mr. Fordham shows you.’

“I signed the paper as directed, and the lawyer took it away with him. The singular incident made, as you may think, the deepest impression upon me, and I pondered over it and turned it every way in my mind without being able to make anything of it. Yet I could not shake off the vague feeling of dread which it left behind, though the sensation grew less keen as the weeks passed and nothing happened to disturb the usual routine of our lives. I could see a change in my uncle, however. He drank more than ever, and he was less inclined for any sort of society. Most of his time he would spend in his room, with the door locked upon the inside, but sometimes he would emerge in a sort of drunken frenzy and would burst out of the house and tear about the garden with a revolver in his hand, screaming out that he was afraid of no man, and that he was not to be cooped up, like a sheep

in a pen, by man or devil. When these hot fits were over, however, he would rush tumultuously in at the door and lock and bar it behind him, like a man who can brazen it out no longer against the terror which lies at the roots of his soul. At such times I have seen his face, even on a cold day, glisten with moisture, as though it were new raised from a basin.

“Well, to come to an end of the matter, Mr. Holmes, and not to abuse your patience, there came a night when he made one of those drunken sallies from which he never came back. We found him, when we went to search for him, face



downward in a little green-scummed pool, which lay at the foot of the garden. There was no sign of any violence, and the water was but two feet deep, so that the jury, having regard to his known eccentricity, brought in a verdict of ‘suicide.’ But I, who knew how he winced from the very thought of death, had much ado to persuade myself that he had gone out of his way to meet it. The matter passed, however, and my father entered into possession of the estate, and of some 14,000 pounds, which lay to his credit at the bank.”

“One moment,” Holmes interposed, “your statement is, I foresee, one of the most remarkable to which I have ever listened. Let me have the date of the reception by your uncle of the letter, and the date of his supposed suicide.”

Comment [RM26]: Eccentric or not, the idea that a man could commit suicide by lying in a two foot deep mud puddle strains credulity to the breaking point. Now, accidental death, death by misadventure, I can accept, assuming Elias got drunk and passed out in the puddle, but SUICIDE? How could they suggest such a thing? I would guess because there was no evidence of a second person’s involvement—nobody saw anything, and there were no other clues—footprints or other evidence—this (bumbling) crew could discern. It’s still astonishing they chose “suicide” rather than “accident.” I assume, of course, that young Openshaw is telling the truth about the jury’s ruling, and I would guess that he would since he would know this would be something Holmes could check and verify.

Comment [RM27]: At least 1,000,000 pounds in terms of buying power in today’s money.

“The letter arrived on March 10, 1883. His death was seven weeks later, upon the night of May 2nd.”

“Thank you. Pray proceed.”

“When my father took over the Horsham property, he, at my request, made a careful examination of the attic, which had been always locked up. We found the brass box there, although its contents had been destroyed. On the inside of the cover was a paper label, with the initials of K. K. K. repeated upon it, and ‘Letters, memoranda, receipts, and a register’ written beneath. These, we presume, indicated the nature of the papers which had been destroyed by Colonel Openshaw. For the rest, there was nothing of much importance in the attic save a great many scattered papers and note-books bearing upon my uncle’s life in America. Some of them were of the war time and showed that he had done his duty well and had borne the repute of a brave soldier. Others were of a date during the reconstruction of the Southern states, and were mostly concerned with politics, for he had evidently taken a strong part in opposing the carpet-bag politicians who had been sent down from the North.

“Well, it was the beginning of ‘84 when my father came to live at Horsham, and all went as well as possible with us until the January of ‘85. On the fourth day after the new year I heard my father give a sharp cry of surprise as we sat together at the breakfast-table. There he was, sitting with a newly opened envelope in one hand and five dried orange pips in the outstretched palm of the other one. He had always laughed at what he called my cock-and-bull story about the colonel, but he looked very scared and puzzled now that the same thing had come upon himself.

“‘Why, what on earth does this mean, John?’ he stammered.

“‘My heart had turned to lead. ‘It is K. K. K.,’ said I.

“‘He looked inside the envelope. ‘So it is,’ he cried. ‘Here are the very letters. But what is this written above them?’

“‘Put the papers on the sundial,’ I read, peeping over his shoulder.

“‘What papers? What sundial?’ he asked.

“‘The sundial in the garden. There is no other,’ said I; ‘but the papers must be those that are destroyed.’

“‘Pooh!’ said he, gripping hard at his courage. ‘We are in a civilised land here, and we can’t have tomfoolery of this kind. Where does the thing come from?’

“‘From Dundee,’ I answered, glancing at the postmark.

“‘Some preposterous practical joke,’ said he. ‘What have I to do with sundials and papers? I shall take no notice of such nonsense.’

“‘I should certainly speak to the police,’ I said.



Comment [RM28]: And what was the purpose behind Elias taking these papers in the first place? Blackmail? Insurance against actions against him by the Klan in the future? In any case, taking the papers (assuming they actually existed) seems to have backfired.

Comment [RM29]: He’s initially scared, but quickly dismisses this as a practical joke. This is unconvincing. It seems likely or at least possible that Joseph knows more about the affair than he admits.

“And be laughed at for my pains. Nothing of the sort.”

“Then let me do so?”

“No, I forbid you. I won’t have a fuss made about such nonsense.”

“It was in vain to argue with him, for he was a very obstinate man. I went about, however, with a heart which was full of forebodings.



“On the third day after the coming of the letter my father went from home to visit an old friend of his, Major Freebody, who is in command of one of the forts upon Portsdown Hill. I was glad that he should go, for it seemed to me that he was farther from danger when he was away from home. In that, however, I was in error. Upon the second day of his absence I received a telegram from the major, imploring me to come at once. My father had fallen over one of the deep chalk-pits which abound in the neighbourhood, and was lying senseless, with a

shattered skull. I hurried to him, but he passed away without having ever recovered his consciousness. He had, as it appears, been returning from Fareham in the twilight, and as the country was unknown to him, and the chalk-pit unfenced, the jury had no hesitation in bringing in a verdict of ‘death from accidental causes.’ Carefully as I examined every fact connected with his death, I was unable to find anything which could suggest the idea of murder. There were no signs of violence, no footmarks, no robbery, no record of strangers having been seen upon the roads. And yet I need not tell you that my mind was far from at ease, and that I was well-nigh certain that some foul plot had been woven round him.

“In this sinister way I came into my inheritance. You will ask me why I did not dispose of it? I answer, because I was well convinced that our troubles were in some way dependent upon an incident in my uncle’s life, and that the danger would be as pressing in one house as in another.

“It was in January, ‘85, that my poor father met his end, and two years and eight months have elapsed since then. During that time I have lived happily at Horsham, and I had begun to hope that this curse had passed away from the family, and that it had ended with the last generation. I had begun to take comfort too soon, however; yesterday morning the blow fell in the very shape in which it had come upon my father.”

The young man took from his waistcoat a crumpled envelope, and turning to the table he shook out upon it five little dried orange pips.

“This is the envelope,” he continued. “The postmark is London—eastern division. Within are the very words which were upon my father’s last message: ‘K. K. K.’; and then ‘Put the papers on the sundial.’”

“What have you done?” asked Holmes.

Comment [RM30]: I would doubt that a police force that would at least participate in ruling that a man committed suicide by mud puddle would be much help anyway.

Comment [RM31]: This is a very real place in Hampshire, Portsdown Hill, located north of Portsmouth, UK. The Hill overlooks the sea and provides a spectacular view across to the Isle of Wight.

Comment [RM32]: Coastal town close at hand to The Hill.

Comment [RM33]: One must wonder how diligently Openshaw—or anybody else—looked into the matter



“Nothing.”

“Nothing?”

“To tell the truth”—he sank his face into his thin, white hands—“I have felt helpless. I have felt like one of those poor rabbits when the snake is writhing towards it. I seem to be in the grasp of some resistless, inexorable evil, which no foresight and no precautions can guard against.”

“Tut! tut!” cried Sherlock Holmes. “You must act, man, or you are lost. Nothing but energy can save you. This is no time for despair.”

“I have seen the police.”

“Ah!”

“But they listened to my story with a smile. I am convinced that the inspector has formed the opinion that the letters are all practical jokes, and that the deaths of my relations were really accidents, as the jury stated, and were not to be connected with the warnings.”

Comment [RM34]: Let's see. Two men receive the pips. Two men die shortly thereafter. Suspicious? Naw!

Holmes shook his clenched hands in the air. “Incredible imbecility!” he cried.

“They have, however, allowed me a policeman, who may remain in the house with me.”

“Has he come with you to-night?”

“No. His orders were to stay in the house.”

Again Holmes raved in the air.

“Why did you come to me,” he cried, “and, above all, why did you not come at once?”

Comment [RM35]: I assume that what Holmes means is: “Why didn't you stay where you were in safety with the police guard if you weren't going to come to me until things had gone this far?” But it's also possible this is a misprint.

“I did not know. It was only to-day that I spoke to Major Prendergast about my troubles and was advised by him to come to you.”

“It is really two days since you had the letter. We should have acted before this. You have no further evidence, I suppose, than that which you have placed before us—no suggestive detail which might help us?”

“There is one thing,” said John Openshaw. He rummaged in his coat pocket, and, drawing out a piece of discoloured, blue-tinted paper, he laid it out upon the table. “I have some remembrance,” said he, “that on the day when my uncle burned the papers I observed that the small, unburned margins which lay amid the ashes were of this particular colour. I found this single sheet upon the floor of his room, and I am inclined to think that it may be one of the papers which has, perhaps, fluttered out from among the others, and in that way has escaped destruction. Beyond the mention of pips, I do not see that it helps us much. I think myself that it is a page from some private diary. The writing is undoubtedly my uncle's.”

Holmes moved the lamp, and we both bent over the sheet of paper, which showed by its ragged edge that it had indeed been torn from a book. It was headed, “March, 1869,” and beneath were the following enigmatical notices:

“4th. Hudson came. Same old platform.”

Comment [RM36]: It's impossible to know what this means, exactly. Railway platform? Political platform? KKK policies?

“7th. Set the pips on McCauley, Paramore, and John Swain, of St. Augustine.”

Comment [RM37]: Florida east coast town. “The Oldest City in America.”

“9th. McCauley cleared.

“10th. John Swain cleared.

“12th. Visited Paramore. All well.”

“Thank you!” said Holmes, folding up the paper and returning it to our visitor. “And now you must on no account lose another instant. We cannot spare time even to discuss what you have told me. You must get home instantly and act.”

“What shall I do?”

“There is but one thing to do. It must be done at once. You must put this piece of paper which you have shown us into the brass box which you have described. You must also put in a note to say that all the other papers were burned by your uncle, and that this is the only one which remains. You must assert that in such words as will carry conviction with them. Having done this, you must at once put the box out upon the sundial, as directed. Do you understand?”

“Entirely.”

“Do not think of revenge, or anything of the sort, at present. I think that we may gain that by means of the law; but we have our web to weave, while theirs is already woven. The first consideration is to remove the pressing danger which threatens you. The second is to clear up the mystery and to punish the guilty parties.”

“I thank you,” said the young man, rising and pulling on his overcoat. “You have given me fresh life and hope. I shall certainly do as you advise.”

“Do not lose an instant. And, above all, take care of yourself in the meanwhile, for I do not think that there can be a doubt that you are threatened by a very real and imminent danger. How do you go back?”

“By train from **Waterloo**.”

“It is not yet nine. The streets will be crowded, so I trust that you may be in safety. And yet you cannot guard yourself too closely.”

“I am armed.”

“That is well. To-morrow I shall set to work upon your case.”

“I shall see you at Horsham, then?”

“No, your secret lies in London. It is there that I shall seek it.”

“Then I shall call upon you in a day, or in two days, with news as to the box and the papers. I shall take your advice in every particular.” He shook hands with us and took his leave. Outside the wind still screamed and the rain splashed and pattered against the windows. This strange, wild story seemed to have come to us from amid the mad elements—blown in upon us like a sheet of sea-weed in a gale—and now to have been reabsorbed by them once more.



Comment [RM38]: Waterloo Station, the largest railway station in the UK, opened in 1848 by the London and South Western Railway. Located in Lambeth, the original station was rebuilt circa 1900 and little remains of the original structure.

Sherlock Holmes sat for some time in silence, with his head sunk forward and his eyes bent upon the red glow of the fire. Then he lit his pipe, and leaning back in his chair he watched the blue smoke-rings as they chased each other up to the ceiling.

“I think, Watson,” he remarked at last, “that of all our cases we have had none more fantastic than this.”

“Save, perhaps, the Sign of Four.”

“Well, yes. Save, perhaps, that. And yet this John Openshaw seems to me to be walking amid even greater perils than did the Sholtos.”

“But have you,” I asked, “formed any definite conception as to what these perils are?”



“There can be no question as to their nature,” he answered.

“Then what are they? Who is this K. K. K., and why does he pursue this unhappy family?”

Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his elbows upon the arms of his chair, with his finger-tips together. “The ideal reasoner,” he remarked, “would, when he had once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which led up to it but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier

could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after. We have not yet grasped the results which the reason alone can attain to. Problems may be solved in the study which have baffled all those who have sought a solution by the aid of their senses. To carry the art, however, to its highest pitch, it is necessary that the reasoner should be able to utilise all the facts which have come to his knowledge; and this in itself implies, as you will readily see, a possession of all knowledge, which, even in these days of free education and encyclopaedias, is a somewhat rare accomplishment. It is not so impossible, however, that a man should possess all knowledge which is likely to be useful to him in his work, and this I have endeavoured in my case to do. If I remember rightly, you on one occasion, in the early days of our friendship, defined my limits in a very precise fashion.”

“Yes,” I answered, laughing. “It was a singular document. Philosophy, astronomy, and politics were marked at zero, I remember. Botany variable, geology profound as regards the mud-stains from any region within fifty miles of town, chemistry eccentric, anatomy unsystematic, sensational literature and crime records unique, violin-player, boxer, swordsman, lawyer, and self-

Comment [RM39]: The Sign of Four?! WHAT THE--? The Sign of Four has been reliably placed in 1888, and there doesn't seem to be any doubt as to the correctness of that date. And there seems little reason to doubt 1887 as the date of this case. So, what's the deal? This was inserted as a gratuitous “commercial” for the novel when this story was published in 1891. That's the only explanation I have to offer, anyway.

Comment [RM40]: Georges Cuvier (1769 – 1832). Renowned French scientist. As Holmes states, he could reputedly reconstruct a complete skeleton from a single bone. While this seems amazing to the point of unbelievability, he was without doubt a titan of 18th century science, and his contributions are difficult to overemphasize.



Comment [RM41]: As the Canon proceeds, we find out that Watson was seriously in error regarding Holmes' knowledge in these areas. Holmes eventually speaks on all these subjects, and usually with some erudition and insight.

poisoner by cocaine and tobacco. Those, I think, were the main points of my analysis.”

Holmes grinned at the last item. “Well,” he said, “I say now, as I said then, that a man should keep his little brain-attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he can get it if he wants it. Now, for such a case as the one which has been submitted to us to-night, we need certainly to muster all our resources. Kindly hand me down the letter K of the American Encyclopaedia which stands upon the shelf beside you. Thank you. Now let us consider the situation and see what may be deduced from it. In the first place, we may start with a strong presumption that Colonel Openshaw had some very strong reason for leaving America. Men at his time of life do not change all their habits and exchange willingly the charming climate of Florida for the lonely life of an English provincial town. His extreme love of solitude in England suggests the idea that he was in fear of someone or something, so we may assume as a working hypothesis that it was fear of someone or something which drove him from America. As to what it was he feared, we can only deduce that by considering the formidable letters which were received by himself and his successors. Did you remark the postmarks of those letters?”

Comment [RM42]: Apparently not The American Encyclopedia, but “the American encyclopedia,” which Baring-Gould identifies as The International Encyclopedia (New York, 1885).

“The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the third from London.”

“From East London. What do you deduce from that?”

“They are all seaports. That the writer was on board of a ship.”

“Excellent. We have already a clue. There can be no doubt that the probability—the strong probability—is that the writer was on board of a ship. And now let us consider another point. In the case of Pondicherry, seven weeks elapsed between the threat and its fulfilment, in Dundee it was only some three or four days. Does that suggest anything?”

“A greater distance to travel.”

“But the letter had also a greater distance to come.”

“Then I do not see the point.”

“There is at least a presumption that the vessel in which the man or men are is a sailing-ship. It looks as if they always send their singular warning or token before them when starting upon their mission. You see how quickly the deed followed the sign when it came from Dundee. If they had come from Pondicherry in a steamer they would have arrived almost as soon as their letter. But, as a matter of fact, seven weeks elapsed. I think that those seven weeks represented the difference between the mail-boat which brought the letter and the sailing vessel which brought the writer.”

“It is possible.”

“More than that. It is probable. And now you see the deadly urgency of this new case, and why I urged young Openshaw to caution. The blow has always fallen at the end of the time which it would take the senders to travel the distance. But this one comes from London, and therefore we cannot count upon delay.”

“Good God!” I cried. “What can it mean, this relentless persecution?”

“The papers which Openshaw carried are obviously of vital importance to the person or persons in the sailing-ship. I think that it is quite clear that there must be more than one of them. A single man could not have carried out two deaths in such a way as to deceive a coroner’s jury. There must have been several in it, and they must have been men of resource and determination. Their papers they

Comment [RM43]: The question is not so much how three men could have carried out the murders—though they must have been expert to avoid notice—but WHY. Why focus on murdering the three Openshaws if the goal is the recovery of incriminating documents? The evidence we have from Watson indicates that no attempts were made to recover the papers, only to dispose of the three family members. And, again, I’d maintain that in the case of Elias, at least, the Coroner’s Jury was very easily deceived. Indeed.

mean to have, be the holder of them who it may. In this way you see K. K. K. ceases to be the initials of an individual and becomes the badge of a society.”

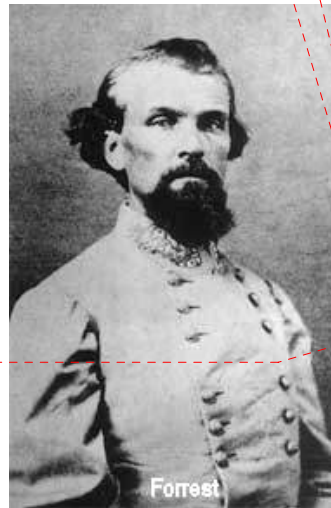
“But of what society?”

“Have you never—“ said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and sinking his voice—“have you never heard of the **Ku Klux Klan**?”

“I never have.”

Holmes turned over the leaves of the book upon his knee. “Here it is,” said he presently:

“**Ku Klux Klan**. A name derived from the fanciful resemblance to the **sound produced by cocking a rifle**. This terrible secret society was formed by some ex-Confederate soldiers in the Southern states after the Civil War, and it rapidly formed local branches in different parts of the country, notably in Tennessee, Louisiana, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Its power was used for political purposes, principally for the terrorising of the negro voters and the murdering and driving from the country of those who were opposed to its views. Its outrages were usually preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic but generally recognised shape—a sprig of oak-leaves in some parts, melon seeds or orange pips in others. On receiving this the victim might either openly abjure his former ways, or might fly from the country. If he braved the matter out, death would unfailingly come upon him, and usually in some strange and unforeseen manner. **So perfect was the organisation of the society, and so systematic its methods, that there is hardly a case upon record where any man succeeded in braving it with impunity, or in which any of its outrages were traced home to the perpetrators.** For some years the organisation flourished in spite of the efforts of the United States government and of the better classes of the community in the South. Eventually, in the year 1869, the movement rather suddenly collapsed, although there have been sporadic outbreaks of the same sort since that date.’



Comment [RM44]: By the 1880s there was essentially NO Klu Klux Klan. The original national organization had been disbanded by its first “Grand Wizard,” former Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest. While the Klan continued on for a few years thereafter—largely as a means of masking non-political crime—by the 1870s and the passage of the Ku Klux Klan Act in 1871, the organization was essentially dead. While it would rear its head again in the 1920s, this “second” Klan was a wholly different and new group unrelated to the first in any meaningful way.

Comment [RM45]: Not surprising considering the Klan’s demise nearly two decades before.

Comment [RM46]: A common explanation, but an incorrect one. “Ku Klux” is derived from the Greek “kyklos” (“circle”).

Comment [RM47]: While the Klan did have considerable power during Reconstruction, its grip was far from universal and its organization far from “perfect.” In many areas it was easily countered by “Union Leagues.” More than anything else, it was a creature of early Reconstruction and a means for bitter veterans to express their discontent. As tempers began to cool and memories fade—in both the north and south—the Klan’s precipitous decline began, and barely two years after its founding in 1866 (while it began with a meeting of veterans in 1865, it did not assume the character of a terrorist/resistance organization until the following year) it was moribund.

Comment [RM48]: “May have” been, but was not. The reason for its decline was that influential southern Democrats were beginning to see the Klan as a liability, an excuse for the Federal government to retain its power over the South

“You will observe,” said Holmes, laying down the volume, “that the sudden breaking up of the society was coincident with the disappearance of Openshaw from America with their papers. **It may well have been cause and effect. It is no wonder that he and his family have some of the more implacable spirits upon their track.** You can understand that this register and diary may implicate some of the first men in the South, and that there may be many who will not sleep easy at night until it is recovered.”

“Then the page we have seen—“

“Is such as we might expect. It ran, if I remember right, ‘sent the pips to A, B, and C’—that is, sent the society’s warning to them. Then there are successive entries that A and B cleared, or left the country, and finally that C was visited, with, I fear, a sinister result for C. Well, I think, Doctor, that we may let some light into this dark place, and I believe that the only chance young Openshaw has in the meantime is to do what I have told him. There is nothing more to be said or to be done to-night, so hand me over my violin and let us try to forget for half an hour the miserable weather and the still more miserable ways of our fellow-men.”

It had cleared in the morning, and the sun was shining with a subdued brightness through the dim veil which hangs over the great city. Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came down.

“You will excuse me for not waiting for you,” said he; “I have, I foresee, a very busy day before me in looking into this case of young Openshaw’s.”

“What steps will you take?” I asked.

“It will very much depend upon the results of my first inquiries.

I may have to go down to Horsham, after all.”

“You will not go there first?”

“No, I shall commence with the City. Just ring the bell and the maid will bring up your coffee.”

As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and glanced my eye over it. It rested upon a heading which sent a chill to my heart.

“Holmes,” I cried, “you are too late.”

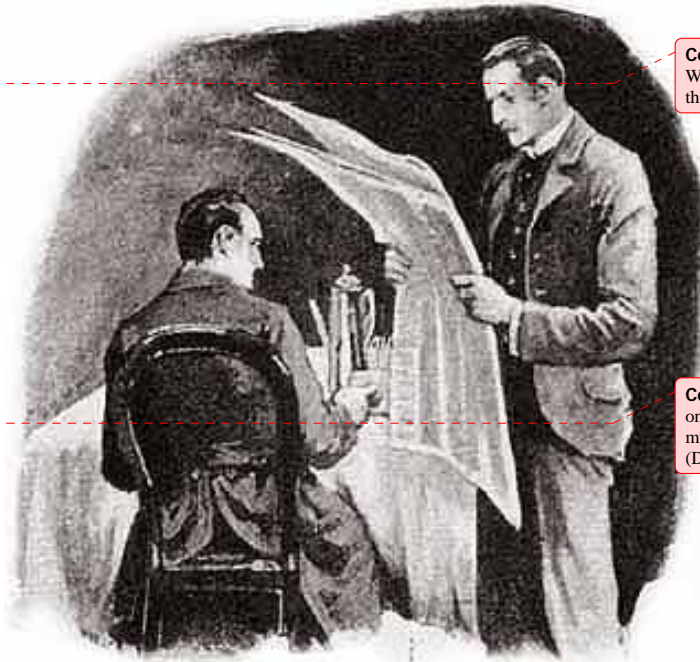
“Ah!” said he, laying down his cup, “I feared as much. How was it done?” He spoke calmly, but I could see that he was deeply moved.

“My eye caught the name of Openshaw, and the heading ‘Tragedy Near Waterloo Bridge.’ Here is the account:

“Between nine and ten last night Police-Constable Cook, of the H Division, on duty near Waterloo Bridge, heard a cry for help and a splash in the water. The night, however, was extremely dark and stormy, so that, in spite of the help of several passers-by, it was quite impossible to effect a rescue. The alarm, however, was given, and, by the aid of the water-police, the body was eventually recovered. It proved to be that of a young gentleman whose name, as it appears from an envelope which was found in his pocket, was John Openshaw, and whose residence is near Horsham. It is conjectured that he may have been hurrying down to catch the last train from Waterloo Station, and that in his haste and the extreme darkness he missed his path and walked over the edge of one of the small landing-places for river steamboats. The body exhibited no traces of violence, and there can be no doubt that the deceased had been the victim of an unfortunate accident, which should have the effect of calling the attention of the authorities to the condition of the riverside landing-stages.”

We sat in silence for some minutes, Holmes more depressed and shaken than I had ever seen him.

“That hurts my pride, Watson,” he said at last. “It is a petty feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride. It becomes a personal matter with me now, and, if God sends me health, I shall set my hand upon this gang. That he should come to me for help, and that I should send him away to his death--!” He



Comment [RM49]: Holmes and Watson will later travel to Horsham on the trail of a Sussex vampire.

Comment [RM50]: Openshaw was one of two clients Holmes “lost” to murder, the other being Hilton Cubitt (DANC).

sprang from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable agitation, with a flush upon his sallow cheeks and a nervous clasping and unclasping of his long thin hands.

“They must be cunning devils,” he exclaimed at last. “How could they have decoyed him down there? The Embankment is not on the direct line to the station. The bridge, no doubt, was too crowded, even on such a night, for their purpose. Well, Watson, we shall see who will win in the long run. I am going out now!”

“To the police?”

“No; I shall be my own police. When I have spun the web they may take the flies, but not before.”

All day I was engaged in my professional work, and it was late in the evening before I returned to Baker Street. Sherlock Holmes had not come back yet. It was nearly ten o'clock before he entered, looking pale and worn. He walked up to the sideboard, and tearing a piece from the loaf he devoured it voraciously, washing it down with a long draught of water.

“You are hungry,” I remarked.

“Starving. It had escaped my memory. I have had nothing since breakfast.”

“Nothing?”

“Not a bite. I had no time to think of it.”

“And how have you succeeded?”

“Well.”

“You have a clue?”

“I have them in the hollow of my hand. Young Openshaw shall not long remain unavenged. Why, Watson, let us put their own devilish trade-mark upon them. It is well thought of!”

“What do you mean?”

He took an orange from the cupboard, and tearing it to pieces he squeezed out the pips upon the table. Of these he took five and thrust them into an envelope. On the inside of the flap he wrote “S. H. for J. O.” Then he sealed it and addressed it to “Captain James Calhoun, Barque ‘Lone Star,’ Savannah, Georgia.”

“That will await him when he enters port,” said he, chuckling. “It may give him a sleepless night. He will find it as sure a precursor of his fate as Openshaw did before him.”

“And who is this Captain Calhoun?”

“The leader of the gang. I shall have the others, but he first.”

“How did you trace it, then?”

He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all covered with dates and names.



“I have spent the whole day,” said he, “over Lloyd’s registers and files of the old papers, following the future career of every vessel which touched at Pondicherry in January and February in ‘83. There were thirty-six ships of fair tonnage which were reported there during those months. Of these, one, the ‘Lone Star,’ instantly attracted my attention, since, although it was reported as having cleared from London, the name is that which is given to one of the states of the Union.”

“Texas, I think.”

“I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the ship must have an American origin.”

“What then?”

“I searched the Dundee records, and when I found that the barque ‘Lone Star’ was there in January, ‘85, my suspicion became a certainty. I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at present in the port of London.”

“Yes?”

“The ‘Lone Star’ had arrived here last week. I went down to the Albert Dock and found that she had been taken down the river by the early tide this morning, homeward bound to Savannah. I wired to Gravesend and learned that she had passed some time ago, and as the wind is easterly I have no doubt that she is now past the Goodwins and not very far from the Isle of Wight.”

“What will you do, then?”

“Oh, I have my hand upon him. He and the two mates, are as I learn, the only native-born Americans in the ship. The others are Finns and Germans. I know, also, that they were all three away from the ship last night. I had it from the stevedore who has been loading their cargo. By the time that their sailing-ship reaches Savannah the mail-boat will have carried this letter, and the cable will have informed the police of Savannah that these three gentlemen are badly wanted here upon a charge of murder.”

There is ever a flaw, however, in the best laid of human plans, and the murderers of John Openshaw were never to receive the orange pips which would show them that another, as cunning and as resolute as themselves, was upon their track. Very long and very severe were the equinoctial gales that year. We waited long for news of the “Lone Star” of Savannah, but none ever reached us. We did at last hear that somewhere far out in the Atlantic a shattered stern-post of a boat was seen swinging in the trough of a wave, with the letters “L. S.” carved upon it, and that is all which we shall ever know of the fate of the “Lone Star.”

Comment [RM51]: Evidently a fictitious name for the vessel. A “barque,” by the way, is a sailing ship with three or more masts with fore and aft sails on the rearmost mast and “square” sails on the others.

Comment [RM52]: This puts some doubt on the supposed in-depth knowledge of America some Sherlockians have theorized for Holmes. On the other hand, if his knowledge of the U.S. were gained as a Shakespearian actor in a traveling troupe as has sometimes been suggested, such knowledge likely would be spotty.

Comment [RM53]: The ten mile long sand bank/bar in the English Channel ten miles east of Deal. Literally thousands of ships have been wrecked on these shifting sands.

Comment [RM54]: This is, all in all, an abrupt and rather unsatisfying end for what seemed an intriguing case (and which certainly made an intriguing story—if one that possesses all the logic of a dream). Unfortunately, there are just too many questions left unanswered. Why the evidently overriding need by the Klan to kill Joseph and John in addition to Elias? Why the Klan’s lack of interest in actually retrieving those supposedly incriminating papers? Why would a remnant Klan care overmuch about what had gone on twenty years previously, anyway?

As Baring-Gould points out in *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, John Lister, one of the founders of the Klan, published a revealing history of the group in 1881, but he was not molested—or even much criticized, apparently, by his fellows. One may theorize that the papers in question involved prominent members of southern society and their connections to murders committed after The War. But, if so, why was no effort made to recover the documents after Openshaw and his relatives were so expertly tracked to and in the UK?

Could all three Openshaws have been engaged in blackmail? Again, however, we are stymied by this excellent gang’s (they avoided notice in rural areas where people with Southern American accents would have stood out like the proverbial sore thumb) failure to do anything to recover the documents.

What can we finally conclude? Not much. We simply do not have that data that we, like Holmes, need to make a case. About all that can be said is that the documents referred to are evidently spurious—a red herring perhaps—and that all three Openshaws were marked for death by a person or persons who may have d... [1]

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