

# The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's

## The Man With the Twisted Lip

*"I have seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman may be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical reasoner."*

Annotated by Rod Mollise

Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium. The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man.

One night—it was in June, '89—there came a ring to my bell, about the hour when a man gives his first yawn and glances at the clock. I sat up in my chair, and my wife laid her needle-work down in her lap and made a little face of disappointment.

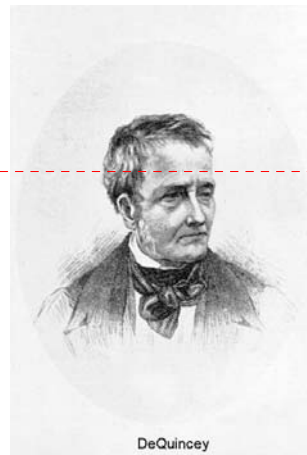
"A patient!" said she. "You'll have to go out."

I groaned, for I was newly come back from a weary day.

We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps upon the linoleum. Our own door flew open, and a lady, clad in some dark-coloured stuff, with a black veil, entered the room.

"You will excuse my calling so late," she began, and then, suddenly losing her self-control, she ran forward, threw her arms about my wife's neck, and sobbed upon her shoulder. "Oh, I'm in such trouble!" she cried; "I do so want a little help."

"Why," said my wife, pulling up her veil, "it is Kate Whitney. How you startled me, Kate! I had not an idea who you were when you came in."



**Comment [RM1]:** Do I have to tell you there isn't a "Theological College of St. George's"? You can't really fault Watson for this, though. It would be natural for him to endeavor to conceal his patient's background. And it would also be natural for Watson, with his (somewhat stodgy) aversion to even a hint of opprobrium in matters such as these, to be reluctant to name the school whose Principal's brother was "much addicted" to opium.

Both W.S. Baring-Gould and Leslie Klinger identify "St. Georges" with the (Foreign) Missionary College of St. Joseph, a large seminary at Mill Hill Park about 9 miles northwest of Charing Cross. Founded by Herbert Cardinal Vaughan and opened in 1869, this institution as the name implies was dedicated to the training of young priests as foreign missionaries.

**Comment [RM2]:** Opium, a powerful narcotic, is produced from the unripe seeds of the opium poppy. Both Morphine and Codeine are contained in opium, and heroin is produced by chemically refining the substance.

The history of opium is one that involves power politics on the highest levels. The political history of the opium trade ... [1]

**Comment [RM3]:** Thomas DeQuincey (1785-1859) was a British intellectual and author whose considerable literary gifts are, today, overshadowed by his association with opium. What we'd now call an "alienated loner," he began taking the drug while at Worcester Collage (Oxford), and, for this and other reasons, eventually left ... [2]

**Comment [RM4]:** A common trait of opium and its derivatives is that while not highly addictive when prescribed for pain, they most certainly are strongly addictive when used as euphorics.

**Comment [RM5]:** Opium and its related drugs all constrict the eyes' pupils. In the parlance of the addicts, "your pupils are pinned."

**Comment [RM6]:** For once, we are given the date of a case, and there seems little reason to doubt it. Well, this applies to everybody except Baring-Gould, who places TWIS in 1887. Why? He doesn't want to identify the Watson-wife in this story as Mary Morstan.

**Comment [RM7]:** Curiously restrained for Watson. While Holmes may accuse Watson of seeing but not observing, the good Doc is usually very observant when it comes to ladies' clothes, and his detailed description of dresses and materials recur throughout the canon. Not this time, though.

“I didn’t know what to do, so I came straight to you.” That was always the way. Folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds to a light-house.

“It was very sweet of you to come. Now, you must have some wine and water, and sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. Or should you rather that I sent James off to bed?”

“Oh, no, no! I want the doctor’s advice and help, too. It’s about Isa. He has not been home for two days. I am so frightened about him!”

It was not the first time that she had spoken to us of her husband’s trouble, to me as a doctor, to my wife as an old friend and school companion. We soothed and comforted her by such words as we could find. Did she know where her husband was? Was it possible that we could bring him back to her?

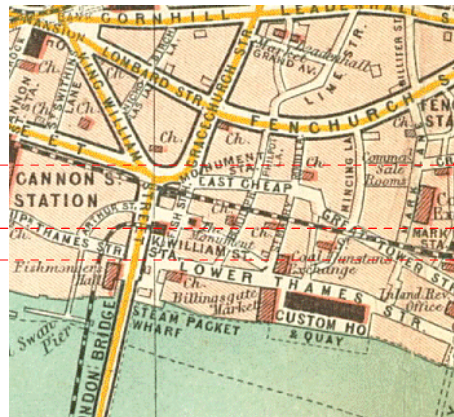


It seems that it was. She had the surest information that of late he had, when the fit was on him, made use of an opium den in the farthest east of the City. Hitherto his orgies had always been confined to one day, and he had come back, twitching and shattered, in the evening. But now the spell had been upon him eight-and-forty hours, and he lay there, doubtless among the dregs of the docks, breathing in the poison or sleeping off the effects. There he was to be

found, she was sure of it, at the Bar of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane. But what was she to do? How could she, a young and timid woman, make her way into such a place and pluck her husband out from among the ruffians who surrounded him?

There was the case, and of course there was but one way out of it. Might I not escort her to this place? And then, as a second thought, why should she come at all? I was Isa Whitney’s medical adviser, and as such I had influence over him. I could manage it better if I were alone. I promised her on my word that I would send him home in a cab within two hours if he were indeed at the address which she had given me. And so in ten minutes I had left my armchair and cheery sitting-room behind me, and was speeding eastward in a hansom on a strange errand, as it seemed to me at the time, though the future only could show how strange it was to be.

But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my adventure. Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search. Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in the centre by the ceaseless



**Comment [RM8]:** Both Baring-Gould and Klinger are troubled by this statement, observing that there is no indication of Mary Morstan having this sort of character either in *The Sign of Four* or the other tales. That may be true, but it’s also true that we hardly get a complete picture of Mary in *SIGN*, and she’s a mere cipher in the other stories in which she appears. I am not willing to say this is out of character for her, or, much less, to, like Baring-Gould, decide this can’t be Mary Morstan.

**Comment [RM9]:** Aye, here’s the rub. Mary (if I may be so bold) refers to her husband John as “James.” What in the hell is up with that? I’ll offer you some of the “explanations” that have been put forward over the years and my opinions of them.  
•Watson’s middle name was Hamish, the Scottish version of “James.” This is possible, but strains my credulity. My middle name is “Frank,” and I’d find it a little ODD if my wife suddenly began referring to me as “Francisco.” ... [3]

**Comment [RM10]:** A place where opium is smoked. Commonly portrayed as a site of all sorts of iniquities, these places, the “crack houses” of their day, certainly existed, but were probably less common than the Victorians liked to imagine they were. In large part, ... [4]

**Comment [RM11]:** That is, the actual City of London, the small (about one square mile) area in the heart of Greater London. Technically, everything outside this small area, “without the walls,” is the City of Westminster.

**Comment [RM12]:** Sigh. No Upper Swandam Lane, despite its evocative name, is to be found on any map of London. From the bare description given, “east of London Bridge” (the old London Bridge that now resides in the state of Arizona, of course), many Sherlock ... [5]

**Comment [RM13]:** I must assume that “vile alley” was hyperbole; that the street where the Bar of Gold was located was a street rather than an actual alley.

**Comment [RM14]:** Which seems to fit Lower Thames Street.

**Comment [RM15]:** A seller of cheap and usually shoddy clothing; especially loose work clothes for seamen and laborers.

**Comment [RM16]:** “Drunk for a penny/Dead drunk for twopence” as Hogarth noted. Not for nothing is the most popular style of gin still referred to as “London dry;” the abuse of gin, a cheap concoction that does not have to be aged, was rampant amongst the lo ... [6]

tread of drunken feet; and by the light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the forecabin of an emigrant ship.

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each



Gin Lane  
William Hogarth

mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour. At the farther end was a small brazier of burning charcoal, beside which on a three-legged wooden stool there sat a tall, thin old man, with his jaw resting upon his two fists, and his elbows upon his knees, staring into the fire.

As I entered, a sallow Malay attendant had hurried up with a pipe for me and a supply of the drug, beckoning me to an empty berth.

“Thank you. I have not come to stay,” said I. “There is a friend of mine here, Mr. Isa Whitney, and I wish to speak with him.”

There was a movement and an exclamation from my right, and peering through the gloom, I saw

Whitney, pale, haggard, and unkempt, staring out at me.

“My God! It’s Watson,” said he. He was in a pitiable state of reaction, with every nerve in a twitter. “I say, Watson, what o’clock is it?”

“Nearly eleven.”

“Of what day?”

“Of Friday, June 19<sup>th</sup>.”

“Good heavens! I thought it was Wednesday. It is Wednesday. What d’you want to frighten a chap for?” He sank his face onto his arms and began to sob in a high treble key.

“I tell you that it is Friday, man. Your wife has been waiting this two days for you. You should be ashamed of yourself!”

**Comment [RM17]:** Actually, there would have probably been more than one, as the high temperature of the charcoal would have been needed to light all the pipes.

**Comment [RM18]:** The Victorians seemed to think these inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula in Southeast Asia were even more “evil” than other Asians.

**Comment [RM19]:** Did Watson develop a “contact high”? He’s confused at any rate. Isa is correct. June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1889 was a WEDNESDAY. What shall we say about this? All we can do is ascribe it to yet another typographical error or to the Doctor’s feeble memory.

“So I am. But you’ve got mixed, Watson, for I have only been here a few hours, three pipes, four pipes—I forget how many. But I’ll go home with you. I wouldn’t frighten Kate—poor little Kate. Give me your hand! Have you a cab?”

“Yes, I have one waiting.”

“Then I shall go in it. But I must owe something. Find what I owe, Watson. I am all off colour. I can do nothing for myself.”

I walked down the narrow passage between the double row of sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying fumes of the drug, and looking about for the manager. As I passed the tall man who sat by the brazier I felt a sudden pluck at my skirt, and a low voice whispered, “Walk past me, and then look back at me.” The words fell quite distinctly upon my ear. I glanced down. They could only have come from the old man at my side, and yet he sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had



**Comment [RM20]:** Morally speaking, perhaps. The actual scent of opium is described as “incense-like,” and not at all “vile.”



dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. He had turned his back so that none could see him but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes. He made a slight motion to

me to approach him, and instantly, as he turned his face half round to the company once more, subsided into a doddering, loose-lipped senility.

“Holmes!” I whispered, “what on earth are you doing in this den?”

“As low as you can,” he answered; “I have excellent ears. If you would have the great kindness to get rid of that sottish friend of yours I should be exceedingly glad to have a little talk with you.”

“I have a cab outside.”

“Then pray send him home in it. You may safely trust him, for he appears to be too limp to get into any mischief. I should recommend you also to send a note by the cabman to



your wife to say that you have thrown in your lot with me. If you will wait outside, I shall be with you in five minutes.”

It was difficult to refuse any of Sherlock Holmes' requests, for they were always so exceedingly definite, and put forward with such a quiet air of mastery. I felt, however, that when Whitney was once confined in the cab my mission was practically accomplished; and for the rest, I could not wish anything better than to be associated with my friend in one of those singular adventures which were the normal condition of his existence. In a few minutes I had written my

**Comment [RM21]:** Which, as many Sherlockians have noted—those who ascribe Watson's changing marital/living arrangements to divorce or separation rather than death—was probably the first nail in the coffin of the Watson-Morstan marriage.

note, paid Whitney's bill, led him out to the cab, and seen him driven through the darkness. In a very short time a decrepit figure had emerged from the opium den, and I was walking down the street with Sherlock Holmes. For two streets he shuffled along with a bent back and an uncertain foot. Then, glancing quickly round, he straightened himself out and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

“I suppose, Watson,” said he, “that you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections, and all the other little weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical views.”

**Comment [RM22]:** Could Watson seriously have considered this? It would seem ridiculous to assume that Holmes, whatever his vices, would resort to an opium den like the pathetic Whitney, but Watson's “What on earth are you doing in this den?” seems to indicate that may have at least considered that possibility

“I was certainly surprised to find you there.”

“But not more so than I to find you.”

“I came to find a friend.”

“And I to find an enemy.”

“An enemy?”

“Yes; one of my natural enemies, or, shall I say, my natural prey. Briefly, Watson, I am in the midst of a very remarkable inquiry, and I have hoped to find a clue in the incoherent ramblings of these sots, as I have done before now. Had I been recognised in that den my life would not have been worth an hour's purchase; for I have used it before

now for my own purposes, and the rascally Lascar who runs it has sworn to have vengeance upon me. There is a trap-door at the back of that building, near the corner of Paul's Wharf, which could tell some strange tales of what has passed through it upon the moonless nights."



"What! You do not mean bodies?"

"Ay, bodies, Watson. We should be rich men if we had 1000 pounds for every poor devil who has been done to death in that den. It is the vilest murder-trap on the whole riverside, and I fear that Neville St. Clair has entered it never to leave it more. But our trap should be here." He put his two forefingers between his teeth

**Comment [RM23]:** Silly Watson. What did you think Holmes meant?

and whistled shrilly—a signal which was answered by a similar whistle from the distance, followed shortly by the rattle of wheels and the clink of horses' hoofs.

"Now, Watson," said Holmes, as a tall dog-cart dashed up through the gloom, throwing out two golden tunnels of yellow light from its side lanterns. "You'll come with me, won't you?"

"If I can be of use."

"Oh, a trusty comrade is always of use; and a chronicler still more so. My room at The Cedars is a double-bedded one."

"The Cedars?"

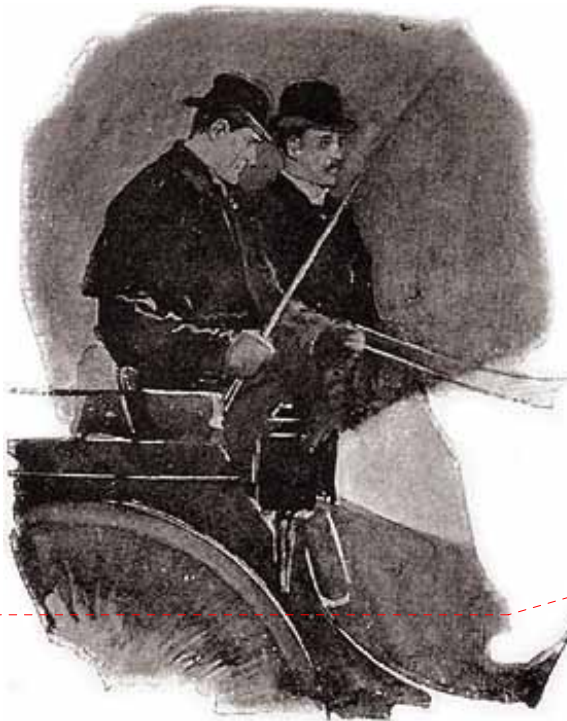
"Yes; that is Mr. St. Clair's house. I am staying there while I conduct the inquiry."

"Where is it, then?"

"Near Lee, in Kent. We have a seven-mile drive before us."

"But I am all in the dark."

"Of course you are. You'll know all about it presently. Jump up here. All right, John; we shall not need you. Here's half a crown. Look out for me to-morrow, about eleven. Give her her head. So long, then!" He flicked the horse with his whip, and we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets, which widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad balustraded bridge, with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us. Beyond lay another dull



**Comment [RM24]:** As Henry Potter noted in his "Reflections on Canonical Vehicles and Something on the Horse" (*Baker Street Journal*, New Series, Volume 21, Number 4, page 204), a dog cart, with its huge wheels (five feet or more in diameter) would have been an exceedingly rare sight in London (well, outside Hyde Park, anyway), and would have been so novel as to draw crowds in the East End at any time of the day or night.

**Comment [RM25]:** London Bridge, we assume.

wilderness of bricks and mortar, its silence broken only by the heavy, regular footfall of the policeman, or the songs and shouts of some belated party of revellers. A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of the clouds. Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought, while I sat beside him, curious to learn what this new quest might be which seemed to tax his powers so sorely, and yet afraid to break in upon the current of his thoughts. We had driven several miles, and were beginning to get to the fringe of the belt of suburban villas, when he shook himself, shrugged his shoulders, and lit up his pipe with the air of a man who has satisfied himself that he is acting for the best.

**Comment [RM26]:** Clouds being driven by a strong wind.

**Comment [RM27]:** The bright stars Deneb, Vega, and Altair, which form the "Summer Triangle," or the prominent Arcturus would have been the stars most likely to be visible through haze/clouds at this time.

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said he. "It makes you quite invaluable as a companion. 'Pon my word, it is a great thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are not over-pleasant. I was wondering what I should say to this dear little woman to-night when she meets me at the door."

"You forget that I know nothing about it."

"I shall just have time to tell you the facts of the case before we get to Lee. It seems absurdly simple, and yet, somehow I can get nothing to go upon. There's plenty of thread, no doubt, but I can't get the end of it into my hand. Now, I'll state the case clearly and concisely to you, Watson, and maybe you can see a spark where all is dark to me."

**Comment [RM28]:** A residential suburb of London. As Baring-Gould notes in his *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, it is no longer in Kent, but in Lewisham.

"Proceed, then."

"Some years ago—to be definite, in May, 1884--there came to Lee a gentleman, Neville St. Clair by name, who appeared to have plenty of money. He took a large villa, laid out the grounds very nicely, and lived generally in good style. By degrees he made friends in the neighbourhood, and in 1887 he married the daughter of a local brewer, by whom he now has two children. He had no occupation, but was interested in several companies and went into town as a rule in the morning, returning by the 5:14 from Cannon Street every night. Mr. St. Clair is now thirty-seven years of age, is a man of temperate habits, a good husband, a very affectionate father, and a man who is popular with all who know him. I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far as we have been able to ascertain, amount to 88 pounds 10s., while he has 220 pounds standing to his credit in the Capital and Counties Bank. There is no reason, therefore, to think that money troubles have been weighing upon his mind.

**Comment [RM29]:** Cannon Street Station is located conveniently near Threadneedle Street, the favored haunt of Hugh Boone.

**Comment [RM30]:** At the very least, 15,000 pounds in today's money, and depending how you judge "equivalencies," as much as ten times that.

"Last Monday Mr. Neville St. Clair went into town rather earlier than usual, remarking before he started that he had two important commissions to perform, and that he would bring his little boy home a box of bricks. Now, by the merest chance, his wife received a telegram upon this same Monday, very shortly after his departure, to the effect that a small



parcel of considerable value which she had been expecting was waiting for her at the offices of the **Aberdeen Shipping Company**. Now, if you are well up in your London, you will know that the office of the company is in **Fresno Street**, which branches out of Upper Swandam Lane, where you found me to-night. Mrs. St. Clair had her lunch, started for the City, did some shopping, proceeded to the company's office, got her packet, and found herself at exactly 4:35 **walking through Swandam Lane** on her way back to the station. Have you followed me so far?"

"It is very clear."

"If you remember, **Monday was an exceedingly hot day**, and Mrs. St. Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the hope of seeing a cab, **as she did not like the neighbourhood** in which she found herself. While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she suddenly heard an ejaculation or cry, and was struck cold to see her husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning to her from a second-floor window. The window was open, and she distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being terribly agitated. He waved his hands frantically to her, and then vanished from the window so suddenly that it seemed to her that he had been plucked back by some irresistible force from behind. One singular point which struck her quick feminine eye was that although he wore some dark coat, such as he had started to town in, he had on neither collar nor necktie.

"Convinced that something was amiss with him, she rushed down the steps—for the house was none other than the opium den in which you found me to-night—and running through the front room she attempted to ascend the stairs which led to the first floor. At the foot of the stairs, however, she met this **Lascar** scoundrel of whom I have spoken, who thrust her back and, aided by a **Dane**, who acts as assistant there, pushed her out into the street. Filled with the most maddening doubts and fears, she rushed down the lane and, by rare good-fortune, met in Fresno Street a number of constables with an inspector, all on their way to their beat. The inspector and two men accompanied her back, and in



spite of the continued resistance of the proprietor, they made their way to the room in which Mr. St. Clair had last been seen. There was no sign of him there. In fact, in the whole of that floor there was no one to be found save a crippled wretch of hideous aspect, who, it seems, made his home there. Both he and the Lascar stoutly swore that no one else had been in the front room during the afternoon. So determined was their denial that the inspector was staggered, and had almost come to believe that Mrs. St. Clair had been deluded when, with a cry, she sprang at a small **deal box** which lay upon the table and tore the lid from it. Out there fell a cascade of children's bricks. It was the toy which he had promised to bring home.

"This discovery, and the evident confusion which the cripple showed, made the inspector realise that the matter was serious. The rooms were carefully examined, and results all pointed to an abominable

**Comment [RM31]:** There was an Aberdeen *Coal* and Shipping Company, but it didn't come into being until 1902. At the time of the story, what we have is the Aberdeen Steam Navigation Company, but its location, to the east at the Isle of Dogs seems all wrong

**Comment [RM32]:** "Well, we're fairly well up on London, but we can't find a Fresno Street, Holmes." Like "Upper Swandam Lane," "Fresno Street" is a fictitious/disguised name. Baring-Gould identifies this as Bennett's Hill Road, but, unfortunately, that leads into UPPER rather than LOWER Thames Street.

**Comment [RM33]:** Am I the only one who finds it a bit strange that this charming middle class woman would walk through Upper Swandam Lane/Lower Thames Street?

**Comment [RM34]:** Alas, according to Baring-Gould, there was no exceedingly hot June Monday in 1889.

**Comment [RM35]:** I'd guess not. One of the worthies at the Shipping Company wouldn't procure a cab for her?

**Comment [RM36]:** An East Indian sailor.

**Comment [RM37]:** Pardon me, but this seems a strange place/occupation for a Dane!

**Comment [RM38]:** Fir or pine.



crime. The front room was plainly furnished as a sitting-room and led into a small bedroom, which looked out upon the back of one of the wharves. Between the wharf and the bedroom window is a narrow strip, which is dry at low tide but is covered at high tide with at least four and a half feet of water. The bedroom window was a broad one and opened from below. On examination traces of blood were to be seen upon the windowsill, and several scattered drops were visible upon the wooden floor of the bedroom. Thrust away behind a curtain in the front room were all the clothes of Mr. Neville St. Clair, with the exception of his coat. His boots, his socks, his hat, and his watch—all were there. There were no signs of violence upon any of these garments, and there were no other traces of Mr. Neville St. Clair. Out of the window he must apparently have gone for no other exit could be discovered, and the ominous bloodstains upon the sill gave little promise that he could save himself by swimming, for the tide was at its very highest at the moment of the tragedy.

**Comment [RM39]:** It stretches my credibility to believe that the police and Mrs. St. Clair believed the rascals would have taken time to strip the corpse under the circumstances.

**Comment [RM40]:** Pretty much. According to Leslie Klinger in his *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, the tide was at its highest at 4:30pm on 17 June 1889, and we're told Ms. St. Clair was in the area at 4:35pm.

“And now as to the villains who seemed to be immediately implicated in the matter. The Lascar was known to be a man of the vilest antecedents, but as, by Mrs. St. Clair’s story, he was known to have been at the foot of the stair within a very few seconds of her husband’s appearance at the window, he could hardly have been more than an accessory to the crime. His defence was one of absolute ignorance, and he protested that he had no knowledge as to the doings of Hugh Boone, his lodger, and that he could not account in any way for the presence of the missing gentleman’s clothes.

“So much for the Lascar manager. Now for the sinister cripple who lives upon the second floor of the opium den, and who was certainly the last human being whose eyes rested upon Neville St. Clair. His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. He is a professional beggar, though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas. Some little distance down Threadneedle Street, upon the left-hand side, there is, as you may have remarked, a small angle in the wall. Here it is that this creature takes his daily seat, cross-legged with his tiny stock of matches on his lap, and as he is a piteous spectacle a small rain of charity descends into the greasy leather cap which lies upon the pavement beside him. I have watched the fellow more than once before ever I thought



**Comment [RM41]:** At the time of the story, there were still thousands of men in London who could be described as “professional beggars” (that is, they had no other employment, as opposed to amateur mendicants, I suppose).

**Comment [RM42]:** Finally. There most certainly is a Threadneedle Street. Once a street of tailors, it is and has long been a street of bankers, being home to the Bank of England (The Old Lady of Threadneedle Street).

**Comment [RM43]:** There actually is just such a place; just as Watson says, there’s a little nook formed by the angle between two buildings.

of making his professional acquaintance, and I have been surprised at the harvest which he has reaped in a short time. His appearance, you see, is so remarkable that no one can pass him without observing him. A shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar, which, by its contraction, has turned up the outer edge of his upper lip, a bulldog chin, and a pair of very penetrating dark eyes, which present a singular contrast to the colour of his hair, all mark him out from amid the common crowd of mendicants and so, too, does his wit, for he is ever ready with a reply to any piece of chaff which may be thrown at him by the passers-by. This is the man whom we now learn to have been the lodger at the opium den, and to have been the last man to see the gentleman of whom we are in quest.”

“But a cripple!” said I. “What could he have done single-handed against a man in the prime of life?”

“He is a cripple in the sense that he walks with a limp; but in other respects he appears to be a powerful and well-nurtured man. Surely your medical experience would tell you, Watson, that weakness in one limb is often compensated for by exceptional strength in the others.”

“Pray continue your narrative.”

“Mrs. St. Clair had fainted at the sight of the blood upon the window, and she was escorted home in a cab by the police, as her presence could be of no help to them in their investigations. Inspector Barton, who had charge of the case, made a very careful examination of the premises, but without finding anything which threw any light upon the matter. One mistake had been made in not arresting Boone instantly, as he was allowed some few minutes during which he might have communicated with his friend the Lascar, but this fault was soon remedied, and he was seized and searched, without anything being found which could incriminate him. There were, it is true, some blood-stains upon his right shirt-sleeve, but he pointed to his ring-finger, which had been cut near the nail, and explained that the bleeding came from there, adding that he had been to the window not long before, and that the stains which had been observed there came doubtless from the same source. He denied strenuously having ever seen Mr. Neville St. Clair and swore that



the presence of the clothes in his room was as much a mystery to him as to the police. As to Mrs. St. Clair’s assertion that she had actually seen her husband at the window, he declared that she must have been either mad or dreaming. He was removed, loudly protesting, to the police-station, while the inspector remained upon the premises in the hope that the ebbing tide might afford some fresh clue.

**Comment [RM44]:** The nearby Bow Street Police (Magistrates) Court.

“And it did, though they hardly found upon the mud-bank what

they had feared to find. It was Neville St. Clair's coat, and not Neville St. Clair, which lay uncovered as the tide receded. And what do you think they found in the pockets?"

"I cannot imagine."

"No, I don't think you would guess. Every pocket stuffed with pennies and half-pennies--421 pennies and 270 half-pennies. It was no wonder that it had not been swept away by the tide. But a human body is a different matter. There is a fierce eddy between the wharf and the house. It seemed likely enough that the weighted coat had remained when the stripped body had been sucked away into the river."



"But I understand that all the other clothes were found in the room. Would the body be dressed in a coat alone?"

"No, sir, but the facts might be met speciously enough. Suppose that this man Boone had thrust Neville St. Clair through the window, there is no human eye which could have seen the deed. What would he do then? It would of course instantly strike him that he must get rid of the tell-tale garments. He would seize the coat, then, and be in the act of throwing it out, when it would occur to him that it would swim and not sink. He has little time, for he has heard the scuffle downstairs when the wife tried to force her way up, and perhaps he has already heard from his Lascar confederate that the police are hurrying up the street. There is not an instant to be lost. He rushes to some secret hoard, where he has accumulated the fruits of his beggary, and he stuffs

all the coins upon which he can lay his hands into the pockets to make sure of the coat's sinking. He throws it out, and would have done the same with the other garments had not he heard the rush of steps below, and only just had time to close the window when the police appeared."

"It certainly sounds feasible."

"Well, we will take it as a working hypothesis for want of a better. Boone, as I have told you, was arrested and taken to the station, but it could not be shown that there had ever before been anything against him. He had for years been known as a professional beggar, but his life appeared to have been a very quiet and innocent one. There the matter stands

**Comment [RM45]:** Somehow this expression seems a bit out of character for Holmes...or is it just me?

**Comment [RM46]:** That is, having the ring of truth but actually being fallacious. Is this really what Holmes means to say, however, given that he approves this speculation as a "working hypothesis"?

**Comment [RM47]:** Given the circumstances, however, would Boone have been able to do this without scattering pennies everywhere? Specious indeed, Holmes.

at present, and the questions which have to be solved—what Neville St. Clair was doing in the opium den, what happened to him when there, where is he now, and what Hugh Boone had to do with his disappearance—are all as far from a solution as ever. I confess that I cannot recall any case within my experience which looked at the first glance so simple and yet which presented such difficulties.”

While Sherlock Holmes had been detailing this singular series of events, we had been whirling through the outskirts of the great town until the last straggling houses had been left behind, and we rattled along with a country hedge upon either side of us. Just as he finished, however, we drove through two scattered villages, where a few lights still glimmered in the windows.



“We are on the outskirts of Lee,” said my companion. “We have touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent. See that light among the trees? That is The Cedars, and beside that lamp sits a woman whose anxious ears have already, I have little doubt, caught the clink of our horse’s feet.”

“But why are you not conducting the case from Baker Street?” I asked.

“Because there are many inquiries which must be made out here. Mrs. St. Clair has most kindly put two rooms at my disposal, and you may rest assured that she will have nothing but a welcome for my friend and colleague. I hate to meet her, Watson, when I have no news of her husband. Here we are. Whoa, there, whoa!”

We had pulled up in front of a large villa which stood within its own grounds. A stable-boy had run out to the horse’s head, and springing down, I followed Holmes up the small, winding gravel-drive which led to the house. As we approached, the door flew open, and a little blonde woman stood in the opening, clad in some sort of light mousseline de soie, with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists. She stood with her figure outlined against the flood of light, one hand upon the door, one half-raised in her eagerness, her body slightly bent, her head and face protruded, with eager eyes and parted lips, a standing question.

“Well?” she cried, “well?” And then, seeing that there were two of us, she gave a cry of hope which sank into a groan as she saw that my companion shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

“No good news?”

“None.”

“No bad?”

“No.”

“Thank God for that. But come in. You must be weary, for you have had a long day.”

**Comment [RM48]:** As Holmes commented in BOS: “The More Featureless And Commonplace A Crime Is, The More Difficult It Is To Bring It Home.”

**Comment [RM49]:** This throwaway comment of Holmes’ has given many Sherlockians fits over the years. Looking at a present day--or even Victorian--map of this part of the country, it is more than obvious that there is no way in hell that Holmes and Watson could have been in three English counties in the course of their seven mile drive.

The solution to this riddle was given quite some time back by the late, great Edgar Smith of the BSI and Gavin Brend of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London. Holmes is speaking of “geographical counties,” the arrangement of which stretches far back into history, rather than of the newly laid-out *administrative counties* created in Victorian times. For complete details see Smith’s “Editor’s Commonplace Book” in the *Baker Street Journal* Volume 8, Number 1 (New Series, 1958). For a well-written if wrong-headed outline of this supposed “county problem,” see John D. Beierle’s “The Curious Incident of the Drive Through Middlesex and Surrey” in *BSJ* Volume 7, Number 4 (New Series, 1957).

**Comment [RM50]:** Many people wonder the same thing.

**Comment [RM51]:** That’s what Holmes says, anyway. But we have little evidence that he makes or had made many inquiries in the neighborhood. ON THE OTHER HAND...if Holmes did indeed do a complete investigation in the area, interviewing neighbors, etc., it is likely that he spent several days at the task, and numerous Sherlockians have commented on the propriety of Holmes taking up residence at the villa with its charming resident.

**Comment [RM52]:** Two notables here. First, Watson again astonishes with his in-depth knowledge of womens’ garments. Secondly, “*mousseline de soie*” is a material best described as “diaphanous.” Does this mean she greets Holmes and Watson wearing a negligee as some commentators have only half jokingly suggested? No. Probably not, anyway. Does this sound like an ... [7]

**Comment [RM53]:** Whether Miss had on a negligee or not, it sounds as if Holmes and Watson got an *eyeful*. And how about the “parted lips”? For me, that suggests desire, not anticipation or anxiety.

**Comment [RM54]:** Which sounds like wifely concern.

“This is my friend, Dr. Watson. He has been of most vital use to me in several of my cases, and a lucky chance has made it possible for me to bring him out and associate him with this investigation.”

“I am delighted to see you,” said she, pressing my hand warmly. “You will, I am sure, forgive anything that may be wanting in our arrangements, when you consider the blow which has come so suddenly upon us.”

**Comment [RM55]:** Which, if Watson is reporting the scene accurately, argues against a Holmes – St. Clair sexual escapade. If she were waiting for Holmes to return home with more on her mind that the investigation of her supposedly late husband’s demise, I doubt she’d have taken Watson’s presence with such equanimity.

“My dear madam,” said I, “I am an old campaigner, and if I were not I can very well see that no apology is needed. If I can be of any assistance, either to you or to my friend here, I shall be indeed happy.”

**Comment [RM56]:** Maybe not in the military—he wasn’t in uniform long enough for many campaigns—but certainly at Holmes’ side.

“Now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes,” said the lady as we entered a well-lit dining-room, upon the table of which a cold supper had been laid out, “I should very much like to ask you one or two plain questions, to which I beg that you will give a plain answer.”

**Comment [RM57]:** If nothing else, this is a self possessed, self-assured, and intelligent woman.

“Certainly, madam.”

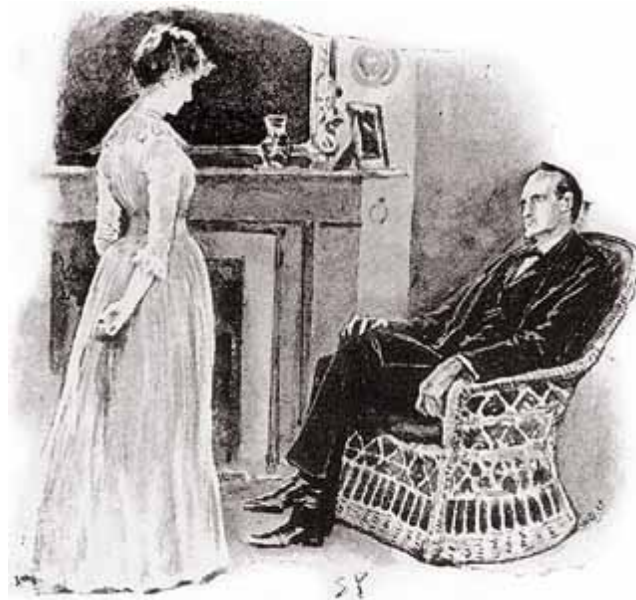
“Do not trouble about my feelings. I am not hysterical, nor given to fainting. I simply wish to hear your real, real opinion.”

**Comment [RM58]:** Maybe not, but as has frequently been observed, she fainted at the sight of what she believed to be her husband’s blood.

“Upon what point?”

“In your heart of hearts, do you think that Neville is alive?”

Sherlock Holmes seemed to be embarrassed by the question. “Frankly, now!” she repeated, standing upon the rug and looking keenly down at him as he leaned back in a basket-chair.



“Frankly, then, madam, I do not.”

“You think that he is dead?”

“I do.”

“Murdered?”

“I don’t say that. Perhaps.”

“And on what day did he meet his death?”

“On Monday.”

“Then perhaps, Mr. Holmes, you will be good enough to explain how it is that I have received a letter from him to-day.”

Sherlock Holmes sprang out of his chair as if he had been galvanised.

“What!” he roared.

“Yes, to-day.” She stood smiling, holding up a little slip of paper in the air.

“May I see it?”

“Certainly.”

He snatched it from her in his eagerness, and smoothing it out upon the table he drew over the lamp and examined it intently. I had left my chair and was gazing at it over his shoulder. The envelope was a very coarse one and was stamped with the Gravesend postmark and with the date of that very day, or rather of the day before, for it was considerably after midnight.

“Coarse writing,” murmured Holmes. “Surely this is not your husband’s writing, madam.”

“No, but the enclosure is.”

“I perceive also that whoever addressed the envelope had to go and inquire as to the address.”

“How can you tell that?”

“The name, you see, is in perfectly black ink, which has dried itself. The rest is of the greyish colour, which shows that blotting-paper has been used. If it had been written straight off, and then blotted, none would be of a deep black shade. This man has written the name, and there has then been a pause before he wrote the address, which can only mean that he was not familiar with it. It is, of course, a trifle, but there is nothing so important as trifles. Let us now see the letter. Ha! there has been an enclosure here!”

“Yes, there was a ring. His signet-ring.”

“And you are sure that this is your husband’s hand?”

“One of his hands.”

“One?”

“His hand when he wrote hurriedly. It is very unlike his usual writing, and yet I know it well.”

“Dearest do not be frightened. All will come well. There is a huge error which it may take some little time to rectify. Wait in patience.—NEVILLE.’ Written in pencil upon the fly-leaf of a book, octavo size, no water-mark. Hum! Posted to-day in Gravesend by a man with a dirty thumb. Ha! And the flap has been gummed, if I am not very much in error, by a person who had been chewing tobacco. And you have no doubt that it is your husband’s hand, madam?”

“None. Neville wrote those words.”

“And they were posted to-day at Gravesend. Well, Mrs. St. Clair, the clouds lighten, though I should not venture to say that the danger is over.”

“But he must be alive, Mr. Holmes.”

“Unless this is a clever forgery to put us on the wrong scent. The ring, after all, proves nothing. It may have been taken from him.”

“No, no; it is, it is his very own writing!”

**Comment [RM59]:** I suppose the Victorians, being letter writers, were more familiar with handwriting styles. But still...this seems a bit much to me. I might recognize my wife’s hand, but tell whether she’d written it hurriedly or not? I doubt it.

**Comment [RM60]:** Approximately 5-inches by 8-inches.

**Comment [RM61]:** An important shipping town at the mouth of the Thames river. Legend has it that the name “Gravesend” refers to the supposed fact that victims of the 14<sup>th</sup> century Black Death were buried at sea near here. That’s an interesting story, but the truth is that “Gravesend” is probably merely a corruption of the original name “Gravesham.”

“Very well. It may, however, have been written on Monday and only posted to-day.”

“That is possible.”

“If so, much may have happened between.”

“Oh, you must not discourage me, Mr. Holmes. I know that all is well with him. There is so keen a sympathy between us that I should know if evil came upon him. On the very day that I saw him last he cut himself in the bedroom, and yet I in the dining-room rushed upstairs instantly with the utmost certainty that something had happened. Do you think that I would respond to such a trifle and yet be ignorant of his death?”

“I have seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman may be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical reasoner. And in this letter you certainly have a very strong piece of evidence to corroborate your view. But if your husband is alive and able to write letters, why should he remain away from you?”

**Comment [RM62]:** This from Sherlock Holmes?! That Adler woman must have added him.

“I cannot imagine. It is unthinkable.”

“And on Monday he made no remarks before leaving you?”

“No.”

“And you were surprised to see him in Swandam Lane?”

“Very much so.”

“Was the window open?”

“Yes.”

“Then he might have called to you?”

“He might.”

“He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate cry?”

“Yes.”

“A call for help, you thought?”

“Yes. He waved his hands.”

“But it might have been a cry of surprise. Astonishment at the unexpected sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?”

“It is possible.”

“And you thought he was pulled back?”

“He disappeared so suddenly.”

“He might have leaped back. You did not see anyone else in the room?”

“No, but this horrible man confessed to having been there, and the Lascar was at the foot of the stairs.”

“Quite so. Your husband, as far as you could see, had his ordinary clothes on?”

“But without his collar or tie. I distinctly saw his bare throat.”

“Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?”

“Never.”

“Had he ever showed any signs of having taken opium?”

“Never.”

“Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. Those are the principal points about which I wished to be absolutely clear. We shall now have a little supper and then retire, for we may have a very busy day to-morrow.”

A large and comfortable double-bedded room had been placed at our disposal, and I was quickly between the sheets, for I was weary after my night of adventure. Sherlock Holmes was a man, however, who, when he had an unsolved problem upon his mind,



would go for days, and even for a week, without rest, turning it over, rearranging his facts, looking at it from every point of view until he had either fathomed it or convinced himself that his data were insufficient.

It was soon evident to me that he was now preparing for an all-night sitting. He took off his coat and waistcoat, put on a large blue dressing-gown, and then wandered about the room collecting pillows from his bed and cushions from the sofa and armchairs. With these he constructed a sort of Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged,

with an ounce of shag tobacco and a box of matches laid out in front of him. In the dim light of the lamp I saw him sitting there, an old briar pipe between his lips, his eyes fixed vacantly upon the corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling up from him, silent, motionless, with the light shining upon his strong-set aquiline features. So he sat as I dropped off to sleep, and so he sat when a sudden ejaculation caused me to wake up, and I found the summer sun shining into the apartment. The pipe was still between his lips, the smoke still curled upward, and the room was full of a dense tobacco haze, but nothing remained of the heap of shag which I had seen upon the previous night.

“Awake, Watson?” he asked.

**Comment [RM63]:** That or something else that did not involve “sitting”?

**Comment [RM64]:** Wait...I thought it was “mouse colored” or maybe blue? I enjoy picking apart the Canon and rummaging through minutiae as much as the next Sherlockian, but it always amuses me how many people refuse to allow Holmes to own more than one dressing gown.

**Comment [RM65]:** In Victorian times, “shag” was a very coarsely cut (usually strong) tobacco. Strangely, today, it mainly refers to finely cut tobaccos, especially those used in cigarettes.



“Yes.”

“Game for a morning drive?”

“Certainly.”

“Then dress. No one is stirring yet, but I know where the stable-boy sleeps, and we shall soon have the trap out.” He chuckled to himself as he spoke, his eyes twinkled, and he seemed a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous night.

As I dressed I glanced at my watch. It was no wonder that no one was stirring. It was twenty-five minutes past four. I had hardly finished when Holmes returned with the news that the boy was putting in the horse.

“I want to test a little theory of mine,” said he, pulling on his boots. “I think, Watson, that you are now standing in the presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. I deserve to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. But I think I have the key of the affair now.”

**Comment [RM66]:** While Holmes is sometimes (and justifiably) described as “arrogant,” there several instances such as this one where he seems unnecessarily hard on himself.

“And where is it?” I asked, smiling.

“In the bathroom,” he answered. “Oh, yes, I am not joking,” he continued, seeing my look of incredulity. “I have just been there, and I have taken it out, and I have got it in this Gladstone bag. Come on, my boy, and we shall see whether it will not fit the lock.”

We made our way downstairs as quietly as possible, and out into the bright morning sunshine. In the road stood our horse and trap, with the half-clad stable-boy waiting at the head. We both sprang in, and away we dashed down the London Road. A few country carts were stirring, bearing in vegetables to the metropolis, but the lines of villas on either side were as silent and lifeless as some city in a dream.

**Comment [RM67]:** This road in Newington is, appropriately, intersected by a Doyle Street.

“It has been in some points a singular case,” said Holmes, flicking the horse on into a gallop. “I confess that I have been as blind as a mole, but it is better to learn wisdom late than never to learn it at all.”

In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey side. Passing down the Waterloo Bridge Road we crossed over the river, and dashing up Wellington Street wheeled sharply to the right and found ourselves in Bow Street. Sherlock Holmes was well known to the force, and the two constables at the door saluted him. One of them held the horse’s head while the other led us in.

**Comment [RM68]:** Waterloo Road, which crosses the Thames at, naturally, Waterloo bridge, and terminates at The Strand.

**Comment [RM69]:** Site of the first and most famous London police station. For an interesting history of Bow Street, see: [http://www.met.police.uk/history/bow\\_street.htm](http://www.met.police.uk/history/bow_street.htm)

“Who is on duty?” asked Holmes.

“Inspector Bradstreet, sir.”

**Comment [RM70]:** We’ll meet him again in “The Blue Carbuncle” and “The Engineer’s Thumb.”

“Ah, Bradstreet, how are you?” A tall, stout official had come down the stone-flagged passage, in a peaked cap and frogged jacket. “I wish to have a quiet word with you, Bradstreet.” “Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Step into my room here.” It was a small, office-like room, with a huge ledger upon the table, and a telephone projecting from the wall. The inspector sat down at his desk.

**Comment [RM71]:** According to Jack Tracy in his wonderful *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana*, “frogs” are spindle shaped buttons secured with loops of braid.

“What can I do for you, Mr. Holmes?”

**Comment [RM72]:** As Dr. Kohki Naganuma notes in his excellent, “Holmes and Communication” (*Baker Street Journal* Volume 21, Number 1, New Series, p. 20), this is the first of the telephone’s infrequent appearances in the Canon.

“I called about that beggarman, Boone—the one who was charged with being concerned in the disappearance of Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee.”

“Yes. He was brought up and remanded for further inquiries.”

Comment [RM73]: Sent back to custody.

“So I heard. You have him here?”

“In the cells.”

“Is he quiet?”

“Oh, he gives no trouble. But he is a dirty scoundrel.”

“Dirty?”

“Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his face is as black as a tinker’s. Well, when once his case has been settled, he will have a regular prison bath; and I think, if you saw him, you would agree with me that he needed it.”

“I should like to see him very much.”

“Would you? That is easily done. Come this way. You can leave your bag.”

“No, I think that I’ll take it.”

“Very good. Come this way, if you please.” He led us down a passage, opened a barred door, passed down a winding stair, and brought us to a whitewashed corridor with a line of doors on each side.

“The third on the right is his,” said the inspector. “Here it is!” He quietly shot back a panel in the upper part of the door and glanced through.

“He is asleep,” said he. “You can see him very well.”

We both put our eyes to the grating. The prisoner lay with his face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and heavily. He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive ugliness. A broad wheal from an old scar ran right across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead.

“He’s a beauty, isn’t he?” said the inspector.

“He certainly needs a wash,” remarked Holmes. “I had an idea that he might, and I took the liberty of bringing the tools with me.” He opened the Gladstone bag as he spoke, and took out, to my astonishment, a very large bath-sponge.

“He! he! You are a funny one,” chuckled the inspector.

“Now, if you will have the great goodness to open that door very quietly, we will soon make him cut a much more respectable figure.”

“Well, I don’t know why not,” said the inspector. “He doesn’t look a credit to the Bow Street cells, does he?” He slipped his key into the lock, and we all very quietly entered the cell. The sleeper half turned, and then settled down once more into a deep slumber.

Holmes stooped to the water-jug, moistened his sponge, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner's face.

"Let me introduce you," he shouted, "to Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee, in the county of Kent."

Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment. Then suddenly realising the exposure, he broke into a scream and threw himself down with his face to the pillow.

"Great heavens!" cried the inspector, "it is, indeed, the missing man. I know him from the photograph."

The prisoner turned with the reckless air of a man who abandons himself to his destiny. "Be it so," said he. "And pray what am I charged with?"

"With making away with Mr. Neville St.—Oh, come, you can't be charged with that unless they make a case of attempted suicide of it," said the inspector with a grin. "Well, I have been twenty-seven years in the force, but this really takes the cake."

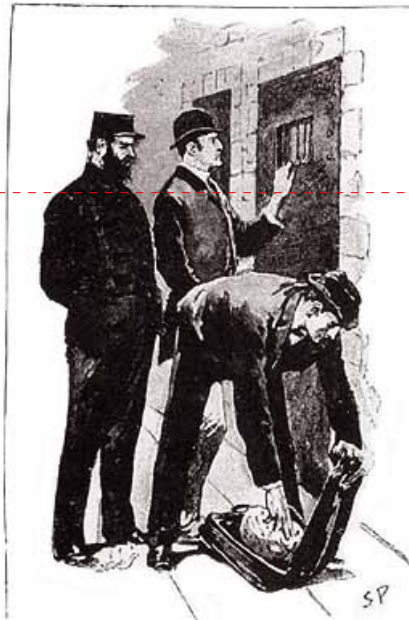
"If I am Mr. Neville St. Clair, then it is obvious that no crime has been committed, and that, therefore, I am illegally detained."



"No crime, but a very great error has been committed," said Holmes. "You would have done better to have trusted your wife."

"It was not the wife; it was the children," groaned the prisoner. "God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. My God! What an exposure! What can I do?"

Sherlock Holmes sat down beside him on the couch and

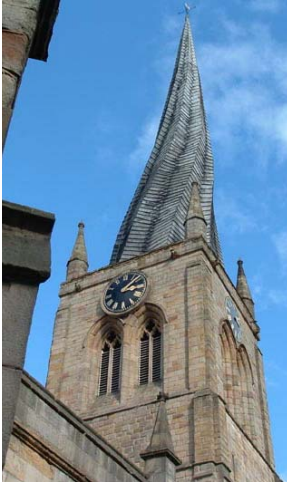


**Comment [RM74]:** Frankly, I'm amazed this elaborate makeup lasted as long as it did, and that it was good enough to withstand close scrutiny when St. Clair was brought in. We can only assume that he was so hideous in appearance that nobody looked at him very closely.

patted him kindly on the shoulder.

“If you leave it to a court of law to clear the matter up,” said he, “of course you can hardly avoid publicity. On the other hand, if you convince the police authorities that there is no possible case against you, I do not know that there is any reason that the details should find their way into the papers. Inspector Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which you might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. The case would then never go into court at all.”

“God bless you!” cried the prisoner passionately. “I would have endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left my miserable secret as a family blot to my children.



“You are the first who have ever heard my story. My father was a schoolmaster in **Chesterfield**, where I received an excellent education. I travelled in my youth, took to the stage, and finally became a reporter on an **evening paper in London**. One day my editor wished to have a series of articles upon begging in the metropolis, and I volunteered to supply them. There was the point from which all my adventures started. It was only by trying begging as an amateur that I could get the facts upon which to base my articles. When an actor I had, of course, learned all the secrets of making up, and had been famous in **the green-room** for my skill. I took advantage now of my attainments. I painted my face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a small slip of flesh-coloured. Then with a red head of hair, and an appropriate dress, I took my station in the business part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a beggar. For seven hours I plied my trade, and when I returned home in the evening I found to my surprise that I had received no less than **26s. 4d.**

**Comment [RM75]:** Prominent city probably best known as being the home of the Church of St. Mary with its weirdly twisted spire.

**Comment [RM76]:** London was possessed of **seven** evening papers in Victorian times.

**Comment [RM77]:** Then and now, the actors' waiting room and lounge in a theatre.

**Comment [RM78]:** Nearly 100 pounds in today's money.

“I wrote my articles and thought little more of the matter until, some time later, I backed a bill for a friend and had a writ served upon me for **25 pounds**. I was at my wit's end where to get the money, but a sudden idea came to me. I begged a fortnight's grace from the creditor, asked for a holiday from my employers, and spent the time in begging in the City under my disguise. In ten days I had the money and had paid the debt.

**Comment [RM79]:** Today, the not inconsiderable sum of 1800 pounds.

“Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at **2 pounds** a week when I knew that I could earn as much in a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my cap on the ground, and sitting still. It was a long fight between my pride and the money, but the dollars won at last, and I threw up reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first chosen, inspiring pity by my ghastly face and filling my pockets with coppers. Only one man knew my secret. He was the keeper of a low den in which I used to lodge in Swandam Lane, where I could every morning emerge as a squalid beggar and in the evenings transform myself into a well-dressed man about town. This fellow, a Lascar, was well paid by me for his rooms, so that I knew that my secret was safe in his possession.

**Comment [RM80]:** About 150 pounds today (as always, depending on how you calculate the equivalency of things like wages, cost of living, etc.).

“Well, very soon I found that I was saving considerable sums of money. I do not mean that any beggar in the streets of London could earn 700 pounds a year—which is less than my average takings—but I had exceptional advantages in my power of making up, and also in a facility of repartee, which improved by practice and made me quite a recognised character in the City. All day a stream of pennies, varied by silver, poured in upon me, and it was a very bad day in which I failed to take 2 pounds.

**Comment [RM81]:** Equivalent to 51,000 2005 pounds. No wonder he could afford that sweet wife and villa.

“As I grew richer I grew more ambitious, took a house in the country, and eventually married, without anyone having a suspicion as to my real occupation. My dear wife knew that I had business in the City. She little knew what.

“Last Monday I had finished for the day and was dressing in my room above the opium den when I looked out of my window and saw, to my horror and astonishment, that my wife was standing in the street, with her eyes fixed full upon me. I gave a cry of surprise, threw up my arms to cover my face, and, rushing to my confidant, the Lascar, entreated him to prevent anyone from coming up to me. I heard her voice downstairs, but I knew that she could not ascend. Swiftly I threw off my clothes, pulled on those of a beggar, and put on my pigments and wig. Even a wife’s eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise. But then it occurred to me that there might be a search in the room, and that the clothes might betray me. I threw open the window, reopening by my violence a small cut which I had inflicted upon myself in the bedroom that morning. Then I seized my coat, which was weighted by the coppers which I had just transferred to it from the leather bag in which I carried my takings. I hurled it out of the window, and it disappeared into the Thames. The other clothes would have followed, but at that moment there was a rush of constables up the stair, and a few minutes after I found, rather, I confess, to my relief, that instead of being identified as Mr. Neville St. Clair, I was arrested as his murderer.

“I do not know that there is anything else for me to explain. I was determined to preserve my disguise as long as possible, and hence my preference for a dirty face. Knowing that my wife would be terribly anxious, I slipped off my ring and confided it to the Lascar at a moment when no constable was watching me, together with a hurried scrawl, telling her that she had no cause to fear.”

“That note only reached her yesterday,” said Holmes.

“Good God! What a week she must have spent!”

“The police have watched this Lascar,” said Inspector Bradstreet, “and I can quite understand that he might find it difficult to post a letter unobserved. Probably he handed it to some sailor customer of his, who forgot all about it for some days.”

“That was it,” said Holmes, nodding approvingly; “I have no doubt of it. But have you never been prosecuted for begging?”

“Many times; but what was a fine to me?”

“It must stop here, however,” said Bradstreet. “If the police are to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone.”

“I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take.”

“In that case I think that it is probable that no further steps may be taken. But if you are found again, then all must come out. I am sure, Mr. Holmes, that we are very much

**Comment [RM82]:** Some Sherlockians have commented that this is astonishing, that a matter like this could just be “hushed up.” However, policing and the court system were, even as late as Victorian times, a far more informal affair than they are today. Local police officials exercised more in the way of summary and discretionary justice than would be allowed now. Also, this probably sounded like a case that would turn out to be far more trouble than it would be worth—and possibly turn out to be an embarrassing one for the official force. Prosecution may be declined by the state even today for such reasons.

indebted to you for having cleared the matter up. I wish I knew how you reach your results.”

“I reached this one,” said my friend, “by sitting upon five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag. I think, Watson, that if we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast.”

**Comment [RM83]:** A charming, cozy way to end TWIS, but, as is almost always the case, the thing seems far more complex than it at first appears. Leaving aside questions about a sexual liaison by Holmes and Ms. St. Clair for the moment, there are still some interesting and puzzling aspects beyond what Watson explicitly gives us. For instance... How did St. Clair deceive his wife for so long? As noted earlier, she was obviously a perceptive and intelligent woman. How was she satisfied by Neville's vague tales of a job in The City? Though making a high wage, he never brought work home, obviously. Nor did he, also obviously, bring any of his work colleagues home for dinner. Did she know? Was she in denial? Had she made up her mind to (finally) learn the truth?

If the this is the case, it would explain her lack of reluctance to pick up a package in what was one of the worst parts of London. The package was a fiction; she'd set out to track her husband and see what he was really up to. Did she more than suspect he was alive? Perhaps even have an idea of what his game was? Was sex with Holmes her way of punishing Neville? Alas, we've no data work on, and shall never have the truth now.



Opium, a powerful narcotic, is produced from the unripe seeds of the opium poppy. Both Morphine and Codeine are contained in opium, and heroin is produced by chemically refining the substance.

The history of opium is one that involves power politics on the highest levels. The political history of the opium trade begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Opium Wars, which basically involved Britain asserting its right to continue the opium trade (from India to China). Today, opium makes its presence felt as the catalyst of at least some of the chaos in Afghanistan.

While opium can be smoked by mixing it with tobacco, proper smoking of the drug requires higher temperatures, and it was commonly smoked in long pipes with porcelain bowls. The gummy opium is heated (often with the aid of a charcoal brazier) until it begins to vaporize. The powerful vapors are then inhaled by the user. While opium is undoubtedly still smoked in some parts of the world, most “opium abuse” now involves its derivatives: morphine, codeine, and, especially, heroin.

Thomas DeQuincey (1785-1859) was a British intellectual and author whose considerable literary gifts are, today, overshadowed by his association with opium. What we’d now call an “alienated loner,” he began taking the drug while at Worcester Collage (Oxford), and, for this and other reasons, eventually left without taking a degree. His famous Confessions of an English Opium Eater was originally published in London Magazine in 1821. DeQuincey spent the rest of his life as a magazine writer in Edinburgh and had considerable influence on both Poe and Baudelaire.

Confessions was both popular and controversial, and details DeQuincey’s experiences with Laudanum, a mixture of opium and alcohol sometimes referred to as “opium wine.” This being his drug of choice, his magnum opus should more properly have been called “Confessions of an English Opium Drinker.” It’s no wonder that quite a few people became addicted to laudanum in the Victorian period, as it was cheaper than gin and freely prescribed for everything from minor pain to menstrual cramps.

Aye, here’s the rub. Mary (if I may be so bold) refers to her husband John as “James.” What in the hell is up with that? I’ll offer you some of the “explanations” that have been put forward over the years and my opinions of them.

- *Watson’s middle name was Hamish, the Scottish version of “James.”* This is possible, but strains my credulity. My middle name is “Frank,” and I’d find it a little ODD if my wife suddenly began referring to me as “Francisco.”
- *Mary was actually referring to a servant, James, who was in the room.* Clever, but it’s clear to me that she’s addressing her husband.
- *There were two Watsons; John, and his brother James. John died, and James continued on with the Holmes partnership (and the Morstan partnership).* Puh-leeze.
- *Mary had been married before, to a James, and this was a slip of the tongue.* Possible—I once accidentally referred to my wife by my ex-wife’s name. Once. The thing is, though, there is zero evidence for a prior Morstan marriage.
- *Mary had a lover named James.* What? Our little Mary? I find this an intriguing hypothesis; that Mary was on her own (sexual) “adventures” when John was off with Holmes. Unfortunately, there is no evidence for this whatsoever—other than what we deduce was a strained and possibly off-again, on-again marriage.
- *Watson inserted James instead of John to avoid some sort of libel action.* This wouldn’t have been much of a defense and just sounds silly if you ask me.
- *This is a typesetter’s mistake or some sort of mischief by the Literary Agent.* This is the most common and pedestrian explanation, and possibly still the best one, as there is zero, zip, zilch evidence for any other conclusion.

A place where opium is smoked. Commonly portrayed as a site of all sorts of iniquities, these places, the “crack houses” of their day, certainly existed, but were probably less common than the Victorians liked to imagine they were. In large part, Victorian fantasies about opium dens, helpless Caucasian females, and evil Chinese were an expression of anti-Chinese racism rather than a mere expression of popular sensationalist culture.

Sigh. No Upper Swandam Lane, despite its evocative name, is to be found on any map of London. From the bare description given, “east of London Bridge” (the old London Bridge that now resides in the state of Arizona, of course), many Sherlockians accept Lower Thames Street as the site of the Bar of Gold. It’s in the right spot, on the river and east of the bridge (west of Tower Bridge and the Tower of London). In Holmes day, this area, occupied by Billingsgate Fish Market, was evidently a fairly nasty one. There’s also an UPPER Thames Street, but despite the “upper,” it cannot be “Upper Swandam Lane,” as it’s west of the bridge.

“Drunk for a penny/Dead drunk for twopence” as Hogarth noted. Not for nothing is the most popular style of gin still referred to as “London dry;” the abuse of gin, a cheap concoction that does not have to be aged, was rampant amongst the lower classes of London. And no wonder: the thousands of people packed into dirty crowded quarters, leading hopeless existences were desperate for a cheap escape, and gin provided just that.

Charles Dickens, as you might expect, provides an apt description of the London slums: “The filthy and miserable appearance of this part of London can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it. Wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper: every room let out to a different family, and in many instances to two or even three - fruit and ‘sweet-stuff’ manufacturers in the cellars, barbers and red-herring vendors in the front parlours, cobblers in the back; a bird-fancier in the first floor, three families on the second, starvation in the attics, Irishmen in the passage, a ‘musician’ in the front kitchen, and a charwoman and five hungry children in the back one - filth everywhere - a gutter before the houses and a drain behind - clothes drying and slops emptying, from the windows; girls of fourteen or fifteen, with matted hair, walking about barefoot, and in white great-coats, almost their only covering; boys of all ages, in coats of all sizes and no coats at all; men and women, in every variety of scanty and dirty apparel, lounging, scolding, drinking, smoking, squabbling, fighting, and swearing.”

Two notables here. First, Watson again astonishes with his in-depth knowledge of womens’ garments. Secondly, “*mousseline de soie*” is a material best described as “diaphanous.” Does this mean she greets Holmes and Watson wearing a negligee as some commentators have only half jokingly suggested? No. Probably not, anyway. Does this sound like an appropriate outfit for a grieving, distressed Victorian lady to be wearing, though? No.