



Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Final Case of Sherlock Holmes"

After the "Second Stain" affair, the last one I presented to the public, Sherlock Holmes retired to his home in Sussex, expressing the wish—which I have respected until now—that I no longer publish my notes about his investigations. Undoubtedly he despised the popularity that made him into a sort of public figure and thereby intricately interfering in his work, but I tend to believe that this is not the reason why my friend retired. The reason, above all, should be sought in the profanation of crime which, as time has passed, has fallen to the level of a purely technical deed, calculated and cold-blooded, almost professional, bereft of any romantic element whatsoever. However, something else is also afoot. I hope that the memory of Sherlock Holmes will not be tarnished by the admission that a significant role in his decision to withdraw was played by the case of "The Maniacal Cyclist," to my knowledge the only case Sherlock Holmes never managed to solve.

It was the spring of 1898. Inspector Lestrade, as was his custom, had dropped by our room in Baker Street in the evening. We lit the gaslight and chatted over coffee. Sherlock inquired of the inspector if he were working on any interesting cases.

"You see, Mr. Holmes," said the inspector. "I do have one case, but I believe it's more a case for Mr. Watson than for myself. A masked bicyclist appeared in Trafalgar Square seven days ago, making one round and then pulling out a revolver—he shot a clock in the window of 'James and Sons' watchmakers, and then he sped away. It caused quite a stir."

"Yes," said Holmes, "I read about it in the paper."

"But that was not the end of it," inspector Lestrade continued. "That same cyclist appeared again two days later in a different place and shot at a city clock in plain sight of a police officer."

"I read about that in the paper, too."

"Yes, after that there were no more articles in the newspapers, but the bicyclist carried on with his dastardly deeds. The journalists have agreed with our suggestion not to write about it until the case has been thoroughly investigated. You know, because of the panic. Because, if he shoots at clocks, by God, the maniac might begin to shoot at people as well. He's destroyed three clocks so far, and I don't have enough men to place a guard in front of every clock in London, which must number . . ."

"Exactly 3,874," said Holmes, smiling at his friend.

After Lestrade had left, Holmes asked me to bring him a map of London. He compared the map with the list of places where the maniacal cyclist had appeared. Then he stood up abruptly, took his violin and, deep in thought, began to play as he always did when confronted with a difficult problem to solve. Nothing unusual in that, except for the fact that there was no problem.

"Ah, my dear Watson," he said a bit later, "you have fallen for the same deception as our friend Lestrade. I know it already: you're convinced that the maniacal cyclist is a mentally disturbed individual."

"Of course. All the indications are there. The acts he's committing are absolutely nonsensical. Neither does he have any use of them, nor do they cause any real harm to anyone. Doubtlessly, we have a mentally ill person here who is attempting to attract attention to himself."

"Wrong, my dear Watson. The bicyclist does want to attract attention, but not to himself, rather to his movements. Take a look at the map of London where I have dotted in the places where he appeared and connected them."



I have to admit that nothing was clear to me. No matter where he went it was possible to connect the dots. And what of that? I told Holmes that, no matter how much I appreciated his brilliant insight, this time there was no crime behind the acts of the maniacal cyclist.

"You are wrong," Holmes said. "Look more closely. The circle around Trafalgar Square, what is that if not the front, large wheel of a bicycle; this was followed by the incident in Carnaby Street, that's the steering column; the next incident—that's the beginning of the bicycle frame. My dear Watson, our cyclist wishes to draw an enormous bicycle with his movements and his shooting."

At that moment, someone rang at the door. It was one of Lestrade's men, who handed Holmes a letter.

Dear Holmes,

The cyclist has struck again. This time in Abbey Road. He shot at a clock and vanished in an undertermined direction. This case is becoming serious.

—Lestrade ■