

Tumblety and Colonel James Sothern

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On November 26, 1888, the *New York World* reported on American Jack the Ripper suspect Francis Tumblety who was recently arrested in London. A number of modern-day ripperology experts on Francis Tumblety have presented an argument that this particular report should be considered suspect, specifically because of a man mentioned in the article named 'Colonel James L. Sothern'. Wolf Vanderlinden even states that all articles printed by the *New York World* on Francis Tumblety should be taken with 'extreme caution'. He summed it up in a Casebook thread on January 25, 2010. He states:

"I should also point out that extreme caution should be taken when attempting to theorize using articles printed by the World on the subject of Tumblety. That "Colonel" Dunham obviously faked the information found in his interview of the 1st of December, 1888, should not be news to anyone interested in the quack doctor. However, it should also be noted that Tim Riordan, author of the excellent Tumblety biography, Prince of Quacks, has been unable to find any evidence that the "Col. James L. Sothern, of Chicago, the well known lawyer..." interviewed in the 26th of November, 1888, World article ever actually existed. He appears in no Chicago census records, city directories or newspaper stories. Tim's conclusion, and I have to agree with him, is that Sothern is just another of Dunham's lies made up to cash in on Tumblety's newsworthy name. There are probably other examples of this deception by Dunham which have yet to be uncovered."

<http://forum.casebook.org/showthread.php?t=3914&page=2>

In light of new information, I am going to present an alternative argument - one that fits the context and timing of the article. First, the following is the November 26, 1888, *New York World* article in its entirety:

Articles from the New York World, 26 November 1888, HE IS A MYSTERY TO ALL WHO AND WHAT IS "DR" TWOMBLETY, THE WHITECHAPEL SUSPECT?

Among the scores of men arrested by the London police, suspected of having had something to do with the Whitechapel horrors, only one is still regarded with suspicion. He is said to be an American and his name has come over the cables as Kumberty, Twomberty and Tumberty, but the description which accompanied the various names was the same all the time, and it told of a man who, once seen, was not likely to be forgotten. He is known from one end of the country to the other, but, strange to say, while scores of people can give the most minute particulars as to his dress, carriage and personal appearance, from the color of his scarf to the size of his boot, no one appears to have the least idea of his home life, his business, his associates or his friends.

Men who have known him by sight for thirty years never saw him greet any one as a friend, never saw him in company with any one, and never knew just what his business was. It

seems impossible that a man whose appearance is so striking as to attract universal attention on a crowded street should be able to throw about his movements an air of such impenetrable mystery. He has been seen in almost every city of the country from San Francisco to Bangor, Ma., yet no one knows where he was born, where he was raised, whether he is married or single, childless or with a family, or a hundred other little details which ordinary men are so fond of talking about.

*"Dr." Twomblety, for that is the name by which he is known in New York, is a man who evidently has some strong reason for keeping his life buried in profound obscurity. **The World a week ago published something of his career in this city.***

"I have known Dr. Twomblety by sight for thirty years," said William H Carr, the veteran clerk of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, last night, "and I can tell you absolutely nothing about the man's habits, except what clothes he wore and how he looked. It was along in the fifties when I first saw him. I was then living in Boston, and I believe he lived somewhere in the North End. There was a vague rumor that he had an office somewhere and sold patent medicine, but I never saw any one who knew where the shop was or what he sold. Every one noticed him in those days, as is the case now, on account of his peculiar dressing. He would appear on the street in the most outlandish garments, fancy colored vests, gorgeous jewelry, and flashy coats and trousers.

"When I came to New York early in the sixties I saw the 'doctor' perambulating Broadway with his enormous greyhound following after him. In those days he used to wear a velvet coat, a blood red tie, a flowered vest, white trousers and flashy gloves, and he always carried a riding whip in his hand. He came into the Fifth Avenue Hotel often and would walk through the lobby in pompous style, with his chest thrown out and his shoulders well squared; but I never in my life saw him speak to any one, I never saw him accompanied by a friend and I never knew him to inquire for any one. I have often speculated about his means of living. I never saw any one who could tell anything about him, though hundreds of people knew his name and had seen him in cities all over the country. I have not seen him for several years and the last time he came into the hotel I noticed that he was aging rapidly. He is a singular character."

"Did you ever hear that he had an aversion to women?" Mr. Carr was asked.

"I heard several stories about that," he replied, "and the general impression among those who knew about his habits was that he avoided women. I never heard of his offering them any violence, and, indeed, he was the very last man I would think likely to be guilty of such crimes as those in Whitechapel."

Col. James L. Sothern, of Chicago, the well known lawyer, was talking to a group of friends in the Hoffman House when some one mentioned Twomblety's name. "I have met that fellow all over America and Europe," said Col. Sothern. "The first time I saw him was in London. It was along about 1870, I believe, and he was dressed up in the most startling fashion. I never saw anything quite equal to it. He had an enormous Russian shako on his head, an overcoat, the front of which was covered with decorations; earrings in his ears and

by his side a very black negro fantastically got up in a parti colored dress that appeared to be a blending of the flags of all nations. A great crowd followed him, but he didn't appear to notice them. I saw him afterwards in San Francisco, and I have seen him a hundred times in Chicago. Once I met him in Cincinnati parading through the Burnet House, and I asked the clerk who he was. He told me the fellow's name was Twomblety, but he said he nothing about him, except that he didn't live there, and appeared to know no one. He said that he was kind of patent medicine man, he believed, who sold some off color medicine."

James Pryor, the detective of the Fifth Avenue Hotel, appeared to know more of the mysterious Twomblety than any one else. "It must be about twenty years ago since I first saw him," said Pryor, "and I can see him now just like he was then. He had an army officer's cap, a big cape and light colored trousers. He was a dandy then, I tell you. You couldn't find a finer made man in this town. He had a big black mustache, one of the backing brush kind, black eyes, a good complexion, and a walk like he had just been elected Alderman. He had a kind of a fake medicine shop down on Grand Street, where he sold his patent medicine. They chased him away from there and he opened up his place in Jersey City. I don't know how he made his money, but he always appeared to have plenty of it.

"Wherever he went he was followed by a thickset young man who kept about twenty paces behind him. They never spoke to each other; and when the 'doctor' would come into the hotel his shadow would lounge in after him. They got to telling tough stories about the 'doctor,' and the guests complained about him - the gentlemen, I mean - and said they didn't care to have him so near them, so I determined to bounce him. I remember that day very well, because I fired another fellow just before I did the 'doctor' and what happened afterwards made me remember that other fellow.

"The other chap was a wild faced little fellow, who used to be 'strung up' by the Republican National Committee in the daytime. They would get him to make speeches for them, and tell him they were going to give him a consulship. I said to them, 'You had better let that fellow alone. He will hurt somebody one day.' One morning I went into the reading room and there he was writing a speech in his bare feet. He had taken his shoes off and thrown them aside. I had a tough time getting him out, because he didn't want to go. The little fellow's name was Guiteau, and three months afterwards he killed President Garfield.

"But I never had that trouble with the 'doctor.' He was very quiet and as soon as he tumbled to the fact that I knew him he went right out. I saw him a year afterwards passing the hotel. He never came in, though. I have spent the best part of twenty years on Broadway and I have seen a great many curious characters, but Twomblety is one of the oddest fish I ever saw. He always had plenty of money, he appeared to dress regardless of expense and paid his bills, but I never could find out where the money came from or where the fellow lived."

"Do you think he is the Whitechapel murderer?" "I certainly do not," the detective replied emphatically. "If I were to search New York for a man less likely to be guilty than the 'doctor' I wouldn't find him. Why, he hasn't the nerve of a chicken. He just had enough nerve to put some molasses and water together and label it a medicine - the biggest nerve

being in the label - and sell it."

"Did he have an antipathy for women?" "He seemed indifferent to them. I never saw him in all his walks up and down Broadway look at a woman. He never appeared to care for them, and many a time I have seen women look after him, for he was a very handsome fellow. He had the smallest hand and foot I ever saw. During the later years of his residence here he wore fewer diamonds and appeared to be getting a little toned down in his dress. He used to go abroad often and what he went for nobody ever knew. I never heard the sound of his voice in all the years I saw him."

However impressed with the belief in the 'doctor's' harmlessness those to whom he was a familiar figure here may be, the London police evidently do not share it. Although nothing tangible was produced connecting the eccentric wanderer with the Whitechapel crimes, the English authorities have evidently not abandoned their suspicions. Only a few days ago the London Chief of Police telegraphed to San Francisco requesting that specimens of Twomblety's handwriting in possession of the Hibernia bank there be forwarded to him. When these are compared with the chirography of "Jack the Ripper" another chapter may be added to the life story of this man of mystery.

The body of the article can be broken down into three interviews following the intro; two in the Fifth Avenue Hotel and one in the Hoffman House, which was located walking distance from the Fifth Avenue Hotel in Broadway. I suggest that instead of this article being written by Charles A. Dunham, it was merely a *New York World* investigative reporter following up on a *New York World* report printed one week prior. Notice that the reporter mentioned in his intro a *New York World* article published a week prior. Here it is:

***New York World, 19 November 1888, HE IS "ECCENTRIC" DR. TWOMBLETY
The Amercian Suspected of the Whitechapel Crimes Well Known Here.***

A special London despatch to THE WORLD yesterday morning announced the arrest of a man in connection with the Whitechapel crimes, who gave his name as Dr. Kumblety, of New York. He could not be held on suspicion, but the police succeeded in getting him held under the special law passed soon after the "Modern Babylon" exposures.

Dr. Kumblety is well known in this city. His name however is Twomblety, not Kumblety. Twenty-four years ago he made his advent in this city and was since then known only as "Dr. Twomblety" a most eccentric character. He formerly resided in Nova Scotia, where he practiced medicine under the name of Dr. Sullivan. About the time of his appearance in this city he was a fugitive from justice, having fled his Nova Scotian home to escape punishment for malpractice.

Ever since his identity became known here he has been under surveillance of Inspector Byrnes's officers, who rarely lose sight of him or knowledge of his whereabouts. For twenty years he has been widely known as the manufacturer of Twomblety's pimple banisher, from which he professes to gain a livelihood. His own face is covered with pimples, and although

his features are otherwise regular, his appearance on this account is somewhat repulsive. He is a large and heavily built man, standing fully six feet in his stockings. The doctor's dress and appearance upon the street were remarkably eccentric. He had an office on Broadway, near Eighth street, and another in Jersey City, but he spent most of his time in this city.

*Every afternoon, for years, he was seen with a huge button-hole bouquet in the lapel of his coat, **walking up Broadway and later in the day promenading up and down in front of the Fifth Avenue Hotel.** On all these occasions he would be followed at a distance of about ten feet by a valet, a short and stocky built fellow, who led by their collars two monster greyhounds. The doctor also drove a gorgeously equipped turnout.*

*One day a brief history of the man appeared in Frank Leslie's paper, showing him up in his true colors. A few evenings later Editor Ralston, of the journal, was enjoying a tete-a-tete with a friend in the **Fifth Avenue Hotel cafe**, when in popped Dr. Twomblety. The latter immediately accused the editor of writing his history and followed up the abuse by assaulting Mr. Ralston. The doctor was arrested, but discharged the next morning, as Editor Ralston refused to prosecute.*

During the past few years Twomblety has opened a branch office in London and has been making regular trips across the ocean at intervals of five or six months. He was last seen here about five months ago, when he appeared on Broadway, just as he did twenty years ago, with his leather-peaked cap, white over-gaiters and button-hole bouquet.

Notice that the reporter interviewed veteran workers at the Fifth Avenue Hotel; ones that might have been around during the Fifth Avenue story that was printed in the November 19 report. Did the November 26 reporter read the article printed on November 19? He said he did. He stated, "*The World a week ago published something of his career in this city*". It seems quite plausible that the *New York World* reporter merely went to the wealthy Fifth Avenue Hotel in his capacity as an investigative reporter and asked the old clerk, William Carr, and the detective, James Pryor, if they remembered Tumblety. Luckily for the reporter, the two had lots to say. The reporter then could have easily walked the Broadway area –an area frequently by Tumblety–, made his way into the Hoffman House, and then began to ask questions about Tumblety. A so called 'James Sothern' spoke up.

Is Riordan correct that there is no evidence of a James Sothern in Chicago in any census records? Well, yes and no. There is no James Sothern, but in genealogy name spellings are not a huge issue. For example, as stated in a number of other threads, census material and directories in the case of Tumblety also spelled his last name Tumilty, Tumialty, Tumathy, Tumuelty, and Tumelty. In view of this, I found one, but it's under 'Suthern':

United States Census, 1860 for James Suthern

Name: James Suthern

Residence: , Cook, Illinois

Ward: 10th Ward City Chicago

Age: 26 years
Estimated Birth Year: 1834
Birthplace: England
Gender: Male
Page: 725
Family Number: 3687
Film Number: 803168
DGS Number: 4213434
Image Number: 00731
NARA Number: M653

Is this the man? Maybe, probably not, but James L. Sothern in the article does claim to be a frequenter of places in the US and England, and this Suthern's birthplace was England. Regardless, my point is that one should not discount the reporter's reporting merely because a Colonel James L. Sothern by that exact name cannot be found in the Chicago census material. It should be noted that the reporter was correct with the other two interviewed, William Carr and James Pryor. Notice how the census material supports this:

William Carr mentions meeting Tumblety in Boston and that's where I find him as a clerk:

Massachusetts State Census, 1865 for William H Carr
Name: William H Carr (Clerk)
Age: 25 years
Estimated Birth Year: 1840
Gender: Male
Race: White
Birthplace: Massachusetts
Marital Status: Single
Residence: Charlestown, Ward 01, Middlesex, Massachusetts
Family Number: 132
Line Number: 21
Film Number: 0954568
Digital Folder Number: 4287708
Image Number: 00031

James H. Pryor was mentioned as detective and this is what I found:

United States Census, 1880 for James H. Pryor
Name: James H. Pryor (Detective)
Residence: New York, New York, New York
Birthdate: 1849

Birthplace: New York, United States
Relationship to Head: Brother-in-law
Spouse's Name:
Spouse's Birthplace:
Father's Name:
Father's Birthplace: New York, United States
Mother's Name:
Mother's Birthplace: New York, United States
Race or Color (Expanded): White
Ethnicity (Standardized): American
Gender: Male
Martial Status: Married
Age (Expanded): 31 years
Occupation: Detective
NARA Film Number: T9-0889
Page: 491
Page Character: A
Entry Number: 4128
Film number: 1254889

If Dunham did fabricate this story, then why would he fabricate the 'Sothern' interview and then spend the time to interview Carr and Pryor, especially when the Sothern interview is the least informative of the three specific to intriguing Whitechapel killer issues of hating women and prostitutes and having a propensity to kill? Sothern merely discussed Tumblety's quirkiness.

In view of the above information, it seems much more plausible that an investigative *New York World* reporter questioning people in the Broadway district wrote the November 26, 1888, article and not Charles Dunham. Besides, it does not match Dunham's agenda. In the Dunham interview reported on December 1, 1888, he told the reporter he believed Francis Tumblety could very likely be the Whitechapel killer, yet when Carr and Pryor were asked their opinion they stated just the opposite. Why would Dunham contradict himself?

If we now recognize that the November 26, 1888, article was written by an actual *New York World* reporter, who might it be? Well, I didn't have to research this because it was already done. Notice the following JTR Forums thread created by Joe Chetcuti.

<http://www.jtrforums.com/showthread.php?t=8463> Joseph Pulitzer's top criminal reporter was a man named Isaac White and White would have been the logical choice for this type of news.

I will also argue that *New York World* articles written on the subject of Francis Tumblety need not be taken with 'extreme' caution –or any different than other newspaper organizations- since the justification for this is no longer valid. It's true that there was

sensationalism in nineteenth century newspaper reporting, but in this case we can conclude the opposite. Just as Chetcuti states, there is evidence that this article is contrary to sensationalism, since those interviewed (Carr and Pryor) were reported to believe Tumblety could not have been the killer. –How boring.

Since it can be plausibly argued that the author of the November 26, 1888, *New York World* Tumblety article was a respected investigative journalist by the name of Isaac White, we can safely assume he actually did interview someone at the Hoffman House claiming to be a 'Colonel James L. Sothern'. An intriguing possibility now arises of who this man was, even if we accept Riodan's and Vanderlinden's contention that there never was a Colonel James L. Sothern. There is evidence that a man named 'Sothern' actually was in the Hoffman House when the *New York World* reporter was asking questions to patrons about Francis Tumblety, but he was the Shakesporean actor Edward H. Sothern. Sothern was in New York City for much of 1888, and in November 1888 he was playing in 'Sweet Lavender' at the Lyceum Theatre just a fraction of a mile (.3) away from the Hoffman House. Both were in the Broadway district. Notice what it says in a David Belasco biography:

The Life of David Belasco, Volume 1

By about July 1 (1888) they had practically completed a new play, entitled "Lord Chumley," and they returned to New York in order that Belasco might put it into rehearsal...the rehearsals were carried on with diligence and, on August 21, 1888, "Lord Chumley" was produced, for the first time anywhere, at the Lyceum Theatre...it held the stage till November 11 (1888). On November 13 Pinero's "Sweet Lavender" succeeded...

Notice the following *New York Times* article commenting upon the local theater actors in the Broadway district congregating at the Hoffman House:

The New York Times, April 14, 1887

ONE OF RAYMOND'S TRAITS –HIS FRIENDS TALKING OF HIS PRACTICAL JOKES.

Little Episodes in his life of which they did not tire of telling or others of hearing.

*The death of John T. Raymond has been one of the chief topics of conversation in theatrical circles this week. At the Gilsey, **the Hoffman**, the Union-Square, the Morton, and all other places where the profession are wont to congregate, there has been constantly repeated over the lemonades and the punches, in the little ...*

...and this.

THE PRINT OF MY REMEMBRANCE BY AUGUSTUS THOMAS, MEMBER OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND LETTERS, CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, 1922

*...Into that **old Hoffman House cafe** from the IV Square, the Fifth Avenue, the Lyceum, three*

within a radius of two blocks, **actors easily drifted.**

The following report even states that Edward's British father (who died in 1887) stayed at the Hoffman House:

The New York Times, May 31, 1880

ARRIVALS AT THE HOTELS.

E. A. Sothern is at the Hoffman House [father of E. H. Sothern].

Capt. Perry, of the steam-ship Britannic, is at the Westminster Hotel.

Gen. Frederick Townsend, of Gov. Cornell's Staff, is at the Hotel Brunswick.

Gen. J.R. Andersn, of Virginia, and Burton C. Cook, of Chicago, are at the Windsor Hotel.

Congressman George B. Loring, of Massachusetts; the Hon. L.S. Huntington, of Montreal;

John V. Farwell, of Chicago, and and D. L. Moody are at the Fifth-Avenue Hotel.

In June of 1888, E.H. Sothern even enjoyed a concert at the Hoffman House.

The Sun, June 12, 1888

*...Mile de Nogueiras has been resolved to adopt music as a profession, and the concert at the **Hoffman House** yesterday was...Among those present were...E.H. Sothern...*

The manager of the Lyceum Theatre, Daniel Frohman, and his brother Charles stayed at the Hoffman House and frequently invited the actors there:

CharlesFrohman: Manager and Man, by IsaacF. Marcossan and Daniel Frohman (1916)

*...It was Frohman's custom in those days to have after-theater suppers on Saturday nights at his rooms in the **old Hoffman House**, and sometimes a friendly game of cards... [Daniel Frohman took over the old Lyceum Theatre where Sothern played in 1885].*

In the article, the 'Colonel James Sothern' mentioned he met Tumblety in Cincinnati around 1870 and E.H. Sothern and his father certainly did play in Cincinnati around this time and earlier. The following is an example of this and comes from the New York Times, January 23, 1881:

MR. SOTHERN'S CAREER [father of E.H. Sothern].

CINCINNATI, Jan. 22. – It is stated here that it was an accident which occurred to Sothern in Cincinnati that shaped his career of success as Lord Dundreary. He was playing in Wood's Theatre, where now the Gazette Building stands, about the year 1856, when, in making a leap from a ...

The 'Colonel' also mentioned he met Tumblety in Chicago. E.H. Sothern had worked in Chicago on numerous occasions as the following excerpt in the *New York Times* (Feb 1,

1891) suggests:

THE CHICAGO PLAYHOUSES.

CHICAGO, Jan. 31. – Although four new plays were presented in Chicago during the week,...
Mr. E.H. Sothern concluded to-night the most successful engagement he has ever played in Chicago,...

Would the actor E.H. Sothern have played a trick on the reporter claiming to be a 'Colonel James Sothern' to the reporter? Sothern certainly was a practical joker, especially in the presence of his friends (which the Colonel was when being interviewed by the reporter). Notice again the above *NY Times* article (April 14, 1887) where one of Sothern's close friends, John T. Raymond, was a fellow practical joker. The particular practical joke the article referred to was on E.H. Sothern himself, who then followed with his own practical joke. The fact that a man claiming to be Colonel James 'Sothern' was interviewed at the same time a Sothern lived and worked in the same area as where this interview occurred may be too much of a coincidence, especially when the actor Sothern may have easily crossed paths with Tumblety.