

# Francis Tumblety and the Yellow Press

By MIKE HAWLEY

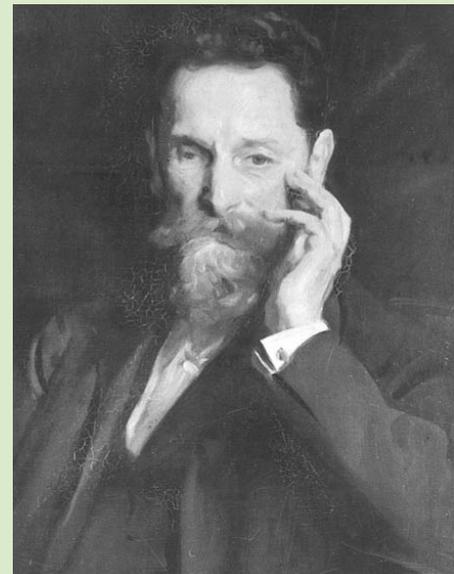
A counter argument to the proposition that Scotland Yard considered Francis Tumblety as a major Whitechapel murder suspect in 1888 is that the only evidence *from the time of the murders* to that effect stems from a singular, yet questionable source: American newspapers. These newspapers - especially Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* - are said to have practiced a type of deceptive sensationalism known as *yellow journalism* which seriously undermined the credibility of their reports. Furthermore, while the American newspapers pursued aggressively Tumblety's connection to the Whitechapel murders, the British newspapers remained silent on the issue. On the face of it, a cogent argument. Yet, if we investigate each of its particular elements, we may well reach a quite different conclusion.

First of all, we should ask ourselves a couple of questions. What was yellow journalism? Were American newspapers, especially the New York dailies, practicing yellow journalism at the time of the Whitechapel murders?

There were five major New York newspapers in 1888: the *Herald*, the *Sun*, the *World*, the *Times* and the *Tribune* - all of them vying for the same reader population. Just five years earlier, in 1883, Pulitzer had purchased the *New York World* and, in an attempt to increase the *World's* circulation and break into the newspaper market, had created a new style of journalism. His biographers, Martin Gitlin and Daniel Pfaff, state that Pulitzer brought 'a crusading style of journalism to the newspaper. Coverage mixed sensational stories with in-depth stories on serious issues.'<sup>1</sup>

It worked. By 1887 the *World* outsold the other New York newspapers with a daily circulation reaching 300,000. Gitlin and Pfaff point out, however, that, even as Pulitzer embraced sensationalism, he still held on to his journalistic standards, as he had in his earlier newspaper, the *St Louis Post-Dispatch*:

*Pulitzer is credited with creating a new style of journalism and with setting standards for fairness and accuracy that have influenced newspapers since.*<sup>2</sup>



Joseph Pulitzer

This set the stage for what would become known as *yellow journalism*, a practice of high-profile advertising, overstating the news, and embellishing and even exaggerating the truth in order to increase circulation.<sup>3</sup> But yellow journalism actually originated with William Randolph Hearst, who acquired the *New York Journal* in 1895. In *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, Defining the Legacies*, Joseph Campbell states:

*The stuff of American journalism's best-known legends comes from the time of the yellow journalism, a period bracketed by [William Randolph] Hearst's arrival in New York in 1895 - a seismic event in the city's journalism - and the undeniable fading of the genre's most flamboyant signature features by 1910.*<sup>4</sup>

1 Gitlin, M, Pfaff, D.: *Joseph Pulitzer: Historic Newspaper Publisher* (2010). Abdo Publishing Co.

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 Campbell, J.: *Yellow Journalism: Puncturing the Myths, defining the Legacies* (2003). Praeger Publishers.



William Randolph Hearst

Hearst understood Pulitzer's recipe for success and decided to use it at the *New York Journal*, immediately precipitating a circulation war with Pulitzer's *New York World*. As competition became fierce in the battle over the New York readership, both men brought sensationalism to an extreme. In *Yellow Journalism*, Jason Skog states:

*The main period of yellow journalism was from 1895 to 1898. The two papers that started the trend were the New York newspapers of Hearst and Pulitzer: the Journal and the World.*<sup>5</sup>

Skog points out that the term *yellow journalism* came specifically from *Hogan's Alley*, a popular comic strip published in the *New York World*.<sup>6</sup> A character in the strip, a young boy called Mickey Dugan, wore an oversized nightshirt. When *Hogan's Alley* started appearing in color in what was predominantly a black and white newspaper, the nightshirt was printed bright yellow and Mickey Dugan became known as the Yellow Kid. To

Pulitzer's dismay, the strip's author, Richard Outcault, was lured to the *Journal* by Hearst in 1896. To counter this, Pulitzer hired a new artist who continued *Hogan's Alley* with a new character similar to the Yellow Kid. Now both the *World* and the *Journal* had 'yellow kids' while the three other New York papers did not. According to Skog, the *World* and the *Journal* also 'began to overstate their news reports - or make them seem more interesting or exciting than they were - the practice became known as yellow journalism.'<sup>7</sup>

Campbell states that the difference between journalism and yellow journalism was an emphasis upon self-promotion, uncensored sensationalism, and typography, or the visual attractiveness of the article designed to immediately capture one's attention.<sup>8</sup> Generally, the embellished article would be on the front page with an emotionally sensitive banner headline running across multiple news columns. Furthermore, the article would contain three or more illustrations and feature the newspaper's name prominently for the purpose of self-promotion. Lastly, the sources cited tended to be anonymous. With these practices as a guide, Campbell also studied other contemporary newspapers and concluded that the *New York Times*, for instance, never participated in yellow journalism.<sup>9</sup>

Pulitzer was single-minded in his attempt to defeat his arch-rival Hearst. According to Gitlin and Pfaff:

*Pulitzer tossed away his journalistic principles, including his demand for accuracy. He ordered his staff to find wild stories even if they required exaggeration or complete fabrication. In the next several months, both papers [the Journal and the World] were accused of stealing each other's stories.*<sup>10</sup>

Which brings us to our second question: Were American newspapers, especially the New York dailies, practicing yellow journalism at the time of the Whitechapel murders? No. The battle between Hearst and Pulitzer had not yet started in 1888 and would not start until Hearst arrived in the scene in 1895 - seven years after the Whitechapel murders. The argument that New York newspapers, especially the *New York World*, were practicing yellow journalism with their coverage of Tumblety and his possible role in the Whitechapel murders is therefore just plain wrong.



Richard Outcault



The Yellow Kid

5 Skog, J.: *Yellow Journalism* (2007). Compass Point Books.

6 *Ibid.*

7 *Ibid.*

8 Campbell, J.: *op. cit.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Gitlin and Pfaff: *op. cit.*

Even if one concluded - incorrectly - that Pulitzer embraced a form of yellow journalism prior to Hearst's arrival in New York, the backbone of the argument still misses the mark. Campbell states:

*Yet another durable, widely held myth is that the yellow press was primarily an entertainment medium that frivolously discounted and even corrupted fact-based journalism in order merely to titillate and distract its readers. Hearst's best-known biographers have tended to support this impression. In reality, a defining characteristic of the yellow press - and, notably, of Hearst's Journal - was abundant spending on newsgathering, especially on news from afar.<sup>11</sup>*

Gitlin and Pfaff do suggest that Pulitzer promoted a level of deception, but not prior to Hearst's arrival in 1895. Furthermore, both Gitlin and Pfaff and Campbell assert that American newspaper articles in 1888 were grounded on factual information. We can test this. The very first report which connected Tumblety to the Whitechapel murders was the *San Francisco Chronicle* article of 18 November 1888, which was based on the *New York World* cable dispatch from London dated 17 November. If we evaluate this report we can see that the Tumblety piece is indeed grounded on factual information with little or no superfluous embellishment:

#### GOSSIP OF LONDON.

*A Heavy Swell Arrested in Whitechapel. A Score of Prisoners, but No Clew.  
Rothschild Offers a Reward for the Murderer*

[THE NEW YORK WORLD CABLE SERVICE; COPYRIGHTED, 1888 - SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE]

LONDON, November 17.--Just to think of one of the Prince of Wales' own exclusive set, a member of the household cavalry, and one of the best known of the many swells about town, who glory in the glamour of the Guelph going into custody on suspicion of being the Whitechapel murderer. It is the talk of clubdom tonight. Just now it is a fashionable fad to 'slum it' in Whitechapel. Every night scores of young men, who never have been in the East End before in their lives, prowl around the neighborhood of the murders, talking with frightened women and pushing their way into overcrowded lodging-houses. So long as two men keep together and do not make nuisances of themselves the police do not interfere with them, but if a man goes alone and tries to lure a woman of the street into a secluded street to talk to her, he is pretty sure to get into trouble.

That was the case with Sir George Arthur of the Prince of Wales set. He put on an old shooting coat and a slouch hat and went to Whitechapel for a little fun. He got it. It occurred to two policemen that Sir George answered very much to the popular description of Jack the Ripper. They watched him, and when they saw him talking with a woman they collared him. He protested, expostulated and threatened them with the royal wrath, but in vain. Finally a chance was given him to send to a fashionable West End club to prove his identity, and he was released with profuse apologies for the mistake. The affair was kept out of the newspapers, but the jolly young Baronets at Brookes Club consider the joke too good to keep quiet.

Sir George is quite a figure in London. He is a son of the late Sir Frederick N Arthur, who was an influential man in his day. Sir George was conspicuous on the turf a few years ago and intimately associated with the Duchess of Montrose. Then he turned his attention to the theaters, and when Bancroft produced 'Theodora' he let Sir George appear as the corpse. The report is to-night that he is going to Monte Carlo for a few weeks.

Another arrest was a man who gave the name of Dr Kumblety of New York. The police could not hold him on suspicion of the Whitechapel crimes, but he will be committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court under the special law passed soon after the Modern Babylon exposures. The police say this is the man's right name, as proved by letters in his possession; that he is from New York, and that he has been in the habit of crossing the ocean twice a year for several years.



Sir George Arthur

11 Campbell: *op. cit.*

*A score of other men have been arrested by the police this week on suspicion of being the murderer, but the right man still roams at large. Everybody is momentarily expecting to hear of another victim. The large sums offered as private rewards have induced hundreds of amateur detectives to take a hand in the chase, but to no avail. Leon Rothschild has offered an income of £2 a week for life to the man who gives information that leads to the arrest and conviction of the assassin.*

Dr Kumblety was, of course, Tumblety. The part of the dispatch concerning him has at least nine verifiable factoids presented with no embellishing modifiers. Furthermore, contrary to a sensationalist agenda, it did not take top billing with a banner headline, but was buried among other stories. The arrest of Sir George Arthur was in fact the top story in the dispatch.

Did Pulitzer present the Tumblety story in yellow journalistic fashion in the *New York World*? On 18 November, the *World* published the dispatch concerning the arrest of Sir George Arthur, but did not mention Tumblety.<sup>12</sup> The next day it did report that Tumblety was implicated in the Whitechapel murders. By not being the first to publish this information, it had neither broken the story nor seized an excellent opportunity for self-promotion. But it is clear from the contents of the article that before publishing the news concerning Tumblety the *World* had collected additional facts from local sources:

#### *HE IS 'ECCENTRIC' DR TWOMBLETY*

*The American 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.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*For twenty years he has been widely known as the manufacturer of Twomblety's pimple banisher, from which he professes to gain a livelihood.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*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.*

It seems that the *World*, aware that Tumblety came from New York, had decided to check local newspaper, court and police records before publishing the information concerning him. This emphasis on collecting corroborating evidence reinforces Gitlin and Pfaff's conclusion that Pulitzer adhered to the principle of accuracy in reporting. He wanted a richer and deeper story, but he also wanted it to be factual.

On 19 November, another Pulitzer newspaper, the *Evening World*, ran a two-page article on the Whitechapel murders which actually began on the front page.<sup>13</sup> This might indicate an element of sensationalism, but, interestingly, the long article made no mention of Tumblety. It focused instead on a comparison between American and British detectives and discussed a number of past Ripper-like murder sprees in the States, especially the Austin, Texas, murders of 1885.

Those who argue that Tumblety was not considered as a serious suspect by Scotland Yard also point out that, while the American newspapers were pushing his story, the British newspapers - despite having better access to local sources - ignored it entirely. For clarity, the issue will be broken down into two different questions: 'Why did the American newspapers give the Tumblety story so much press?' and 'Why did the British newspapers give the Tumblety story so little press?'

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<sup>12</sup> *New York World*, November 18, 1888.

<sup>13</sup> *Evening World*, November 19, 1888.

First, although the Tumblety story was never a front-page sensationalized story with banner headlines dominating the newspapers, the American press certainly did report on it. Yet it was not because the American newspapers were sensationalist; it was because Francis Tumblety was a notorious character who had lived and worked in most major cities in North America and was now involved in the most dramatic murder investigation of the day.

The coverage of Tumblety, Whitechapel murder suspect, in the American newspapers can be broken into two reporting waves. The first wave was launched in response to the *New York World* cable dispatch of 17 November 1888. Since all major cities in North America received daily news via the telegraph wire service through association with either a major east coast newspaper or the New York Associated Press network, the Tumblety story went rapidly viral.<sup>14</sup> Once investigative reporters in many American and Canadian cities realized that Tumblety had spent time in their own city, they wrote up their own stories. This gave the first reporting wave staying power in the press. The *Boston Herald*, for example, reported on 25 November 1888:

*A WHITECHAPEL SUSPECT.*

*Dr Tumblety, Once a Banisher of Pimples in Boston.*

*A Peculiar Genius Who Has Been the Wonder of Several Cities - Blue Nose.*

*New Yorker and Bostonian by Turns*

*The Latest "Guess" of the London Police.*

*One of the Whitechapel murder suspects is a curious character known as Dr Tumblety, who 15 years or more ago was considered an eccentric person of Boston. He was seen quite frequently on the streets and never without attraction. He did not live here permanently for any great length of time, but was a frequent sojourner, and subsequently too up his residence in New York. When the London police arrested him the other day no suspicion of being the murderer he said that he belonged in New York. The police found that they could not get enough evidence against him to hold him for trial, but they succeeded in getting some sort of a charge sufficient to hold him under one of the special laws passed after the "modern Babylon" exposures, which created so much excitement a couple of years ago. The doctor's identity was for a time concealed after his arrest, but the police, who took the liberty of hunting up his lodgings and ransacking his private effects, discovered easily who he was, and they say that he has been in the habit of making two trips yearly to this side of the water.*

When Tumblety jumped bail, sneaked out of Britain and made his way back across the Atlantic to New York City on 2 December 1888, he inspired a second wave of articles which lasted well into the next year. The *New York Times*, for example, reported on 4 December 1888:

*"Watching Dr Tumblety"*

*"Dr" Francis Tumblety, who left his bondsmen in London in the lurch, arrived by La Bretagne of the Transatlantic Line Sunday. Chief Inspector Byrnes had no charge whatever against him, but he had him followed so as to secure his temporary address, and will keep him in view as a matter of ordinary police precaution. Mr. Byrnes does not believe that he will have to interfere with Tumblety for anything he may have done in Europe, and laughs at the suggestion that he was the Whitechapel murderer or his abettor or accomplice. The man who is supposed to be Tumblety came over on the steamship as "Frank Townsend," and kept in his stateroom, under the plea of sickness. [author's emphasis]*

The *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* made its own contribution to the story on 28 January 1889:

*TWOMBLEY WAS IN BROOKLYN.*

*In England He Was Suspected of Being "Jack the Ripper."*

*Dr Twombley, the American doctor who in England was suspected of being "Jack the Ripper," the Whitechapel murderer, says to-day's Evening Sun, has turned up in Brooklyn under the alias of common, every day Smith. He first appeared in Brooklyn some ten days ago at the boarding house of Mrs. Helen Lamb, at 204 Washington street. There he engaged rooms and took his meals. Apparently he did not work, and informed the landlady that he was no ordinary citizen with plenty of money which he had made years ago from a patent medicine.*

14 Blondheim, M.: *News Over the Wires* (1994). Harvard Business College.

The beginning of this second wave alerted Americans that a Whitechapel murder suspect had slipped through the grip of Scotland Yard and made his way to America. Just imagine: a Jack the Ripper suspect roaming through American neighborhoods immune from prosecution! How could this not be newsworthy? Since Tumblety was already headline news across America in connection with the Ripper case, major reporting of the story was a virtual certainty. Of course, if Tumblety had been merely an unknown suspect in the Whitechapel murder case with ties to only one or two American cities and had been far away in Britain, he would not have been half as prominent in news reporting in America.

Which brings us to our next question: Why were the British newspapers silent about Tumblety's arrest in their own backyard? First, they were not entirely silent. On 3 December 1888, the *Echo* published the following report:

*There is a reference by a New York Correspondent to the reported sailing from Havre to New York of a 'certain person' who is famous for his hatred of women. His name is said to be known. Do the Whitechapel police know it?*

Tumblety is not mentioned by name, but he is clearly the subject of the report. Its source was a New York correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, the British newspaper, who obtained the information from a cable dispatch destined to the American press. The *Sheffield and Rotterdam Independent* of 5 December 1888 reported the same event:

**AN IMITATOR OF THE WHITECHAPEL FIEND.**

*In Boston, says the American correspondent of the Daily Telegraph, the Whitechapel fiend has been imitated by a man who hides in dark corners and darts out at women, brandishing a knife and muttering threats. He is undoubtedly insane, and the police are "arresting him numerously."*

\* \* \* \* \*

*It is reported by cable from Europe that a certain person, whose name is known, has sailed from Havre for New York, who is famous for his hatred of women, and who has repeatedly made threats against females of dissolute character. Whether this will throw any light on the Whitechapel tragedies I must leave the London detectives to decide. [author's emphasis]*

The British newspapers reported again on Tumblety at the end of December and through early January 1889. They did not obtain the story from British sources but from a *Daily Telegraph* correspondent across the Atlantic. The *Pall Mall Gazette* of 31 December 1888 stated:

*The supposed inaction of the Whitechapel murderer for a considerable period and the fact that a man suspected of knowing a good deal about this series of crimes left England for this side of the Atlantic three weeks ago, has, says the Telegraph correspondent, produced the impression that Jack the Ripper is in that country.*

Although Tumblety is not named here either, this article refers to him just as clearly as the earlier one did. It is worth noting that both stories came from a foreign correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*, quite possibly the same person. According to the later article, the correspondent obtained the story from the *New York World* of 21 December 1888. The British newspapers which received the story through the cable service and printed it included the *Pall Mall Gazette* (31 December 1889), the *Eastern Morning News* (2 January 1889), the *Belfast News Letter* (3 January 1889), the *Ipswich Journal* (4 January 1889) and the *Thanet Advisor* (5 January 1889).<sup>15</sup>

The Tumblety story spread to multiple British newspapers on two separate occasions, albeit not to the same extent as in American newspapers. But Tumblety was a notorious American known in most major cities in North America, was suspected of the most famous murder spree of the day, was a fugitive from justice and was living amongst Americans. Had it not been for all this, his coverage in the American and the British press might not have varied that much.

British reporting on Tumblety resulted from the same event that caused the second reporting wave in America, namely, his jumping bail and fleeing Britain. Why did the British newspapers not report on his initial arrest and subsequent court case in the same manner as the American newspapers did?

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15 Hubbard, G.: Letter to the Postmaster General on the European and American Systems of Telegraph, with Remedy for the Present High Rates (1868). Western Union Telegraph Company.

At the time the Tumblety story first broke, British reporters might not have been aware that he had been arrested. It was a London correspondent of the *New York World* who broke the story. Since Scotland Yard did not keep the press abreast of progress in the Ripper case, there is little reason to believe that British reporters would have had knowledge of the Tumblety story unless they discovered it for themselves. Besides, Tumblety was arrested for gross indecency, which would not have flagged any reporter, American or British, that he was a Ripper suspect.

Furthermore, the story was cabled overseas through the *New York World* and *New York Associated Press* cable service, in which the British papers did not participate. They used a different cable service and would not have picked up the story on the wire.<sup>16</sup> The first time the British newspapers would have known about the Tumblety story would have been on 19 or 20 November, when a correspondent stationed in the United States read the cables or the daily American newspapers (as in the case of the above British articles dealing with Tumblety's flight to America).

But if Tumblety was a serious Ripper suspect, why did the British newspapers not report the story at this time? One answer points to the manner in which nineteenth-century British newspapers operated. We have a small window into the workings of the British press at the exact time of the murders.

The chief London correspondent for the *New York World* from 1886 to August 1888 was T C Crawford.<sup>17, 18</sup> He was not in London at the time of Tumblety's arrest, but he had trained E Tracy Greaves, who was. Greaves became a London correspondent for the *New York World* in January 1888 and took over as Chief London Correspondent after Crawford's departure.<sup>19</sup> He may not have been the person who broke the Tumblety story but, in his capacity as manager, he was responsible for sending the related cable to America.

In 1889, Crawford reminisced about his 1886-1888 experience in *English Life*.<sup>20</sup> In particular, he explained why the London papers would not have been interested in a story about Tumblety being a Ripper suspect. He also clarified that correspondents of British newspapers stationed in America had little latitude concerning the stories they were allowed to cover:

*I do not think that enough importance has been given to the difference between English and American reporters.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*The English system of news management, too, is discouraging. The members of the staff of these papers keep strictly to the performance of their regular duties. I could not better illustrate this than by giving a personal experience. One evening I was in the company of a night editor of a prominent English newspaper. I mentioned to him an interesting piece of news much more interesting to London than to New York people. I told him he could use it if he wished. He said: 'I don't want it.' 'Why don't you,' said I. 'Is it not a good piece of news?' 'Oh, very good, indeed! But I am not paid to write news for the paper. I am merely paid to edit it. If I should hand in a piece of news to the paper it would be misunderstood and I should get no thanks for it.'*

*In all well-regulated American newspaper offices every man in it from the editor-in-chief down to the office-boy is taught to regard news as of first importance, and the man who should hear of a piece of news and who should not give it promptly to his paper, no matter whether he was paid to do that special thing or not, would be considered wholly unworthy of being in that paper's service.*

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16 Winseck, D., Pike, R.: *Communications and Empire: Media, Markets, and Globalization, 1860 - 1930* (2007). Duke University.

17 *Tioga County Record*, 11 October 1888.

18 *Evening World*, 10 August 1888.

19 *Hartford Times Supplement*, 27 December 1888.

20 Crawford T.C.: *English Life* (1889). Frank F. Lovell & Company (Princeton University).

*Since Scotland Yard did not keep the press abreast of progress in the Ripper case, there is little reason to believe that British reporters would have had knowledge of the Tumblety story unless they discovered it for themselves.*

***The managers of the London newspapers spend no money upon news-collecting because they are not obliged to.***

*The London Times has nearly every day an editorial upon American affairs, speaking of our growth with the greatest respect and with the greatest admiration for the United States. All of the papers have spoken in the most agreeable terms of the centennial celebration at Philadelphia. Nearly all of them have printed very long cable reports of the celebration itself. Ordinarily the English papers do not spend money in cable despatches from the United States, but they have been very liberal in their reports of the Philadelphia event.<sup>21</sup> [author's emphasis]*

Crawford was writing about his experience in the year of the Whitechapel murders. If the London correspondents of the *World* had passed on the Tumblety story to their British counterparts, or if the latter had been somehow privy to the story, they might not have wanted it. A foreign correspondent of a British newspaper stationed in America who heard the story of Tumblety's arrest would have had little incentive to report on it and might even have felt some concern about a backlash for wasting money on cable despatches.

Tumblety's escape from Britain was important enough to be reported in the British press, as evidenced by the above mentioned British articles. Yet they purposely omitted his name, even though they wanted the reader to understand they knew who he was. An example may be found in the *Sheffield and Rotterdam Independent* of 5 December 1888:

*It is reported by cable from Europe that a certain person, whose name is known, has sailed from Havre for New York. [author's emphasis]*

This was a deliberate omission which hints at another reason why Tumblety's name did not appear in the British press. It is clear that printing his name would have been quite newsworthy. It is also clear that not printing it would have been considered as a sacrifice. Yet, if the possibility existed that printing his name could cause more detriment to the newspaper than benefit, they would have opted not to print it. Such a possibility did indeed exist in the late nineteenth century in the form of a legal action for libel.<sup>22</sup>

British newspapers were very aware of the libel laws in their country. The following article in the *Bristol Times and Mirror* of 11 February 1891 furnishes an example of a reporter who chose not to name a Ripper suspect and the reason why:

*I give a curious story for what it is worth. There is a West of England member who in private declares that he has solved the mystery of 'Jack the Ripper.' His theory - and he repeats it with so much emphasis that it might almost be called his doctrine - is that 'Jack the Ripper' committed suicide on the night of his last murder. I can't give details, for fear of a libel action... [author's emphasis]*

In the late nineteenth century, libel laws favored the plaintiffs much more in Britain than in America.<sup>23</sup> At the time, in America, the plaintiff bore the burden of proof, which in Britain rested upon the defendant. We know of two cases where Ripper suspects whose names were published in the press announced their intention to sue the tabloids. One was John 'Leather Apron' Pizer<sup>24</sup> and the other one, Tom Sadler.<sup>25</sup> Both Pizer and Sadler fit into the lower class of British society, which was not the case of the wealthy Francis Tumblety. This American 'gentleman' possessed the financial resources to fight a court battle and had a history of suing for defamation of character.<sup>26</sup>

Equally curious is the fact that the British reports made no mention of the reason why 'a certain person, whose name is known' had left Britain. It seems a little farfetched for the British foreign correspondent out of New York to know so much about Tumblety's trip - including his vessel's points of departure and arrival - but not to know that Tumblety had jumped bail and escaped the grasp of Scotland Yard. More likely, the British newspapers purposely omitted this information just as they did his name. Yet - provided that Tumblety's name were not given - the printing of this particular piece of information would have been a plus for the press with little fear of a libel action.

21 Crawford T.C.: *English Life* (1889). Frank F. Lovell & Company (Princeton University).

22 *New York Times*, 10 December 2009, *Britain, Long a Libel Mecca*, Reviews Laws.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Echo*, 24 September 1888.

25 *Daily Gleaner*, 3 April 1891.

26 *Rochester Democrat and Republican*, 3 December 1888.

Do we have any evidence that sometimes outside forces influenced what was printed by the British press? We need to look no farther than the original *New York World* cable dispatch of 17 November; not the Tumblety story, though, but the Sir George Arthur story:

*That was the case with Sir George Arthur of the Prince of Wales set. He put on an old shooting coat and a slouch hat and went to Whitechapel for a little fun. He got it. It occurred to two policemen that Sir George answered very much to the popular description of Jack the Ripper. They watched him, and when they saw him talking with a woman they collared him. He protested, expostulated and threatened them with the royal wrath, but in vain. Finally a chance was given him to send to a fashionable West End club to prove his identity, and he was released with profuse apologies for the mistake. **The affair was kept out of the newspapers, but the jolly young Baronets at Brookes Club consider the joke too good to keep quiet.** [author's emphasis]*

The affair was apparently kept out of the newspapers to prevent embarrassment to the Royal family. A search through contemporary British newspapers does indeed show that the story was not published. It is worth noting that the cable does not say 'The affair was kept FROM the newspapers', but 'The affair was kept OUT of the newspapers'. This suggests that the newspapers knew about the story but were under pressure to ignore it. This implies that there was a mechanism in place in Britain which allowed important people to influence not just one newspaper but the press as a whole. It is remarkable that those who deny that Tumblety was a serious suspect because of the silence of the British press are, however, convinced of the reality of the Sir George Arthur incident, even though the British press was equally silent in that regard.

While the Tumblety affair was not directly embarrassing for the Royals, there might have been reasons why important people pressured the press not to print his name. One possibility is that government officials - perhaps the secretive Special Branch - intervened. There are indeed a number of reasons to believe the Special Branch was interested in Tumblety. Its primary mission was to combat illegal Irish Nationalist activities in England and even in America and Tumblety was a wealthy Irish-American whose sympathies for the Irish Nationalist cause possibly dated back as early as 1871. At this time, Tumblety roomed at the Northern Hotel at the corner of Cortlandt and West Streets in New York, directly by the Hudson River piers. The Northern was managed by the Irish Nationalist and Fenian sympathizer Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, the *Brooklyn Eagle* of 27 April 1890 states:

*He [Tumblety] was last heard of a couple of years ago in New York, where for a time he was under suspicion on account of his supposed connection with the advance branch of the Irish national party.*

Coincidentally, Chief Inspector John Littlechild, the man who stated that Tumblety was 'a very likely suspect', was Head of the Special Branch at the time of the Whitechapel murders. It was he who said that the Tumblety 'dossier' was large - the kind of remark that the custodian of a dossier would be in a position to make.

The time has come to scrutinize the argument that Tumblety's position as a major suspect was based entirely upon faulty evidence, namely, highly questionable American newspapers, and that he should therefore be considered instead as merely a minor suspect.

The American newspapers were not engaged in deceptive reporting in 1888 but based themselves on fact. The British newspapers did cover the Tumblety story; they merely covered it differently from the American newspapers. First, because they did not break the story and were initially not privy to it; secondly, because neither was Tumblety as notorious in Britain as in America nor was he coming to a British neighborhood free from prosecution; thirdly, because the British newspapers feared a libel action; and lastly, because they most likely were under pressure from people in high places in a society to which they were unavoidably bound. In conclusion, to recognize that Scotland Yard did consider Tumblety as an important suspect at the time of the murders renders no longer anomalous the comment by Chief Inspector Littlechild in 1903 that Francis Tumblety was 'a very likely suspect'.



Chief Inspector Littlechild

<sup>27</sup> San Francisco *Chronicle*, 20 November 1888; Simon Wood, *Casebook Jack the Ripper* ([forum.casebook.org/showthread.php?t=6927](http://forum.casebook.org/showthread.php?t=6927)).

