



*An Inquiry into:
"The Final Problem"*

"The Final Problem" was first published in the December 1893 issue of *The Strand Magazine*; it is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

This is a rare instance in which our esteemed biographer, Doctor John H. Watson, is clear regarding the

time during which this case took place. He sets down that Holmes had been engaged by the French government upon a matter of supreme importance during the early spring of 1891, and that he walked into his surgery on the evening of April 24th.

Unsurprisingly, then, as may be seen from the table, all our chronologists agree on the year—if not the exact date—in which this case took place.

In 1891, Sherlock Holmes was 37 years old, and Doctor John H. Watson was 39.

Main Characters:

Professor James Moriarty, criminal mastermind and former mathematics professor—Holmes' archenemy and would-be nemesis. Mycroft Holmes, elder brother of the Great Detective. Peter Steiler, landlord of the *Englischer Hof* hotel in Meiringen, Switzerland.

Notable Quotes:

"He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless, like a spider in the center of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them."

"He is extremely tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic-looking, retaining something of the profes-

<i>The Final Problem</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Bell</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Blakeney</i>	Spring of 1891
<i>Brend</i>	April 1891
<i>Christ</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Dakin</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Folsom</i>	Sunday, January 4, 1891
<i>Hall</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Keefauver</i>	Friday, April 24, 1891
<i>Klinger</i>	1891
<i>Zeisler</i>	Zeisler: Friday, April 24, 1891

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist's results for their research framework.

sor in his features. His shoulders are rounded from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion.”

“I think that I may go as far as to say, Watson, that I have not lived wholly in vain. If my record were closed to-night I could still survey it with equanimity. The air of London is the sweeter for my presence. In over a thousand cases I am not aware that I have ever used my powers upon the wrong side.”

“If I have now been compelled to make a clear statement of his career, it is due to those injudicious champions who have endeavoured to clear his memory by attacks upon him whom I shall ever regard as the best and wisest man whom I have ever known.”

Watson's Quest

Watson tells us that he decided to publish the facts of what took place between Holmes and Professor Moriarty as a result of the letters which were written by the Professor's brother, Colonel James Moriarty, in an effort to clear his departed sibling's memory.

Our biographer's decision is quite understandable. However, Watson then states that, “I alone know the absolute truth of the matter, and I am satisfied that the time has come when no good purpose is to be served by its suppression. As far as I know, there have been only three accounts in the public



Courtesy of ITV Granada

press: that in the *Journal de Genève* on May 6th, 1891, the Reuter's despatch in the English papers on May 7th, and finally the recent letters to which I have alluded.”

This raises a number of issues, all of them unfortunately left unanswered. First and foremost is how can it be possible that there was so little press coverage of all the events that took place during the time alluded to by Watson? If we are to believe Holmes (and there is no reason not to), he had woven his web around Moriarty's organization with such genius that the official police and courts, were able to arrest its members and end that criminal enterprise. The fact that Moriarty and at least his right hand, Colonel Sebastian Moran, managed

to escape capture did not keep the rest of the criminals from being arrested and charged.

The destruction of such a formidable international criminal organization, with tentacles spreading throughout the Continent and even to America, would certainly have led to more than just one “trial of the century.” The press back then was as hungry for sensational and lurid details (of which there had to have been many), and would have closely covered the resulting trials down to the very last minor detail. For those of you old enough to remember, the coverage would have been akin to that which Senator Kefauver's committee's investigations into the activities of organized crime—i.e., the Mafia—received during the early 1950s.

What Watson tells us about these trials is extremely puzzling: “Of their terrible chief few details came out during the proceeding.” How could that have been? It is true that by then Moriarty was dead and presenting the kind of thorough evidence about his crimes originally collected for the purpose of having him convicted would have been pointless, considering that he was beyond the reach of mortal law. However, the evidence that Holmes had gathered to use against the rest of the gang could not possibly have been free of any mention about the mastermind behind the organization; after all, the accused had carried out crimes planned and ordered by Moriarty. In view of all of this one must wonder what sort of a defense could have been attempted by the Professor's brother.

That being the case, to what was Watson alluding when he stated that “the time has come when no good purpose is to be served by its suppression”? What had been suppressed?

To theorize, one must step into murky corridors. Did Holmes succeed in getting actionable evidence about the Professor’s misdeeds or only against his minions? If the latter were true, then perhaps that would partly explain the lack of specific coverage about Moriarty’s misdeeds.

This then leads us to places we might not want to go to. Let us recapitulate. When Moriarty pays his notorious visit to Holmes at 221B, he warns him, “You hope to beat me. I tell you that you will never beat me. If you are clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.” To which our sleuth replies with utter *sang froid*, “You have paid me several compliments, Mr. Moriarty. Let me pay you one in return when I say that if I were assured of the former eventuality I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter.”



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Perhaps, just perhaps, it might have been possible that Holmes’ evidence although ample to bring down Moriarty’s organization by charging its members, was insufficient to implicate the Professor. If that had been the case, how far would Sherlock Holmes have gone to rid the world of Moriarty? Would he have been prepared to accept that threatened destruction in order to take Moriarty with him?

Deep waters indeed...

A few Loose Threads

Why was Holmes so set on taking down *all* of Moriarty’s organization? After having narrowly escaped



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Moriarty, on the train Watson advises Holmes to have the professor arrested. Holmes’ reply is somewhat puzzling: “We should get the big fish, but the smaller would dart right and left out of the net.” So what is wrong with that? Chop off the head and the whole body dies. He could have netted the small fry later. Senator Kefauver went after the dons, the heads of the various crime families, not the “soldiers” and enforcers. This crippled and practically destroyed the Mafia; what remained was far from being able to wield the criminal power that it once did. Was this all-or-nothing decision arrogance on the part of the Great Detective? Or, getting back to what was mentioned above did he foresee that the only way to destroy the organization was through the elimination of Moriarty himself?

On Moriarty’s side, why would he have hesitated to get rid of Holmes well before he had him “absolutely hampered” in his plans? Long before that time he surely must have been aware that the Great Detective was engaged on a crusade to destroy him. Moriarty, being the criminal mastermind that he was and head of a mighty organization had to have assessed our sleuth’s capabilities and realized that radical measures were called for.

In *ILLU*, Baron Adelbert Gruner acted in a far more logical (and direct) fashion against Holmes than did Moriarty, although his life did not depend on it. Just as Holmes did not underestimate Moriarty, it is highly unlikely that Moriarty would have underestimated Holmes—so why the reticence on the professor's side? If he had not wanted to kill Holmes, he could have had Watson or even Mycroft attacked as a warning.

Another enigma is why would Holmes have put Watson in the line of fire, by asking him to travel with him? He travels best who travels alone. In this case, although Holmes was a master of disguise, it would have been problematical to camouflage Watson. In fact, by now Watson was well-known through *The Strand* as the chronicler of the Great Detective's cases. Italian priest or not, the Good Doctor had to have stood out like a sore thumb.

Then again, perhaps Holmes wanted Watson as a witness when he disposed of Moriarty.

What else happened in 1891:

Empire

Australian demands for trade protection and unification.

Anglo-Portuguese Convention on East Africa.

Nyasaland becomes British Protectorate.

Behring Sea Arbitration Treaty signed.

Anglo-Italian Agreement; spheres of influence defined in Northeast Africa.

Indian Mint closed to silver.

British South Africa Company granted use of port of Beira by Portugal.

Britain

First half-tone newspaper picture published in *Daily Graphic*: that of George Lambert, Liberal parliamentary candidate.

Waterlow Park, gifted by Sir Sydney Waterlow, opens.

Palace Theatre, Cambridge Circus, opens.

Steam trams discontinued.

James Keir Hardie elected MP, first Independent Labour Party Member.

Brooklands Agreement. Basis for wage negotiations in cotton industry.

Independent Labour Party newspaper, *The Clarion*, published.

All elementary education to be free.

Factory Act: no child under 11 to work in factories.

Small Holdings Act, County Councils are empowered to purchase land for letting as small holdings under 50 acres.

Serbastian Z. de Ferranti builds Deptford power station for the London Electricity Supply Corporation.

World

Germany develops first pension scheme.

Boulangier commits suicide in Brussels.

French Labor Department formed; Labor Exchanges projected.
French fleet pays official visit to Kronstadt; Franco-Russian entente.
Massacre of Europeans following Arab revolt in Belgian Congo.
Plan to introduce universal military service in Holland Fails.
Triple Alliance, Germany, Austria, Italy renewed to 1902.
Law for Protection of Workers, restricted hours for German workers.
Republican uprising in Oporto fails.
Formation of Young Turk Movement to secure liberal reforms. Committee established at Geneva.
Maxim Gorky urges class war in Russia.
Bank failures in the U.S.A. and Australia.
Bank of Portugal suspends payments for 60 days.
Widespread famine in Russia.
Building of Trans-Siberian Railway commenced.

Art

Gaughin travels to Tahiti.
The Little Minister, Barrie.
The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Arthur Conan Doyle.
Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Hardy.
Lyra Heroica, Henley.
The Light That Failed, Kipling.
Quintessence of Ibsenism, G. B. Shaw.
Lord Arthur Saville's Crime, *Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde.
Le Jardin de Bérenice, Maurice Barrès.
Les Cahiers d'Andre Walter, André Gide.
Là-bas, Huysmans.
Einsame Menschen, Frühlings, Frank Wedekind.
Gösta Berling, Selma Lagerlöf.
Man with Pipe, *Card Players*, Cézanne.
Women on the Beach, *Vahini with Gardenia*, Paul Gauguin.
Caisse-Noisette, incidental music for i Peter Tschaikowsky.

Science and Technology

Dewar liquefies oxygen in quantity.
Beginnings of wireless telegraphy based on work of Clark Maxwell and Hertz.
René Panhard, French, produces his car chassis.
Tesla further develops his high-tension induction coil—one million volts.

American astronomer George Hale and Deslandris independently invent the spectroheliograph.

Tuffier, of Paris, performs early lung operation for tuberculosis.

Eugene Dubois discovers *Pithecanthropus erectus*.

W.L. Hudson, American, invents zipper. First practical design in 1913.

Next week's case: HOUN

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands
of the murderous Ghazis had it not
been for the devotion and courage
shown by Murray, my orderly..."

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

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