



An Inquiry into: *The Valley of Fear*

The Valley of Fear was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 1914-May 1915.

The chronology for this case varies, depending on which Canon scholar one consults. However, in this case, most of the experts cited almost unanimously agree on the

date, as can be seen on the table. If, as the majority of our chronologists state, the case took place in 1888, then Holmes was 34 years old and Watson 36.

Notable Quotes:

“You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself.”

“Is he not the celebrated author of *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it?”

“There is an appalling directness about your questions, Watson. They come at me like bullets.”

Watson Zings Back

The story begins with an impatient Holmes zapping Watson over a perfectly innocent remark. Watson is right in referring to himself as “one of the most long-suffering of mortals.” He does get a bit of his back though, when let Holmes have it about Moriarty’s fame. Even the Great Detective had to admit it had been “a distinct touch.” Good for you, Doctor!

I am always struck in this case by Inspector Hopkins’ inexplicable lack of interest in Staunton’s seeming disappearance.

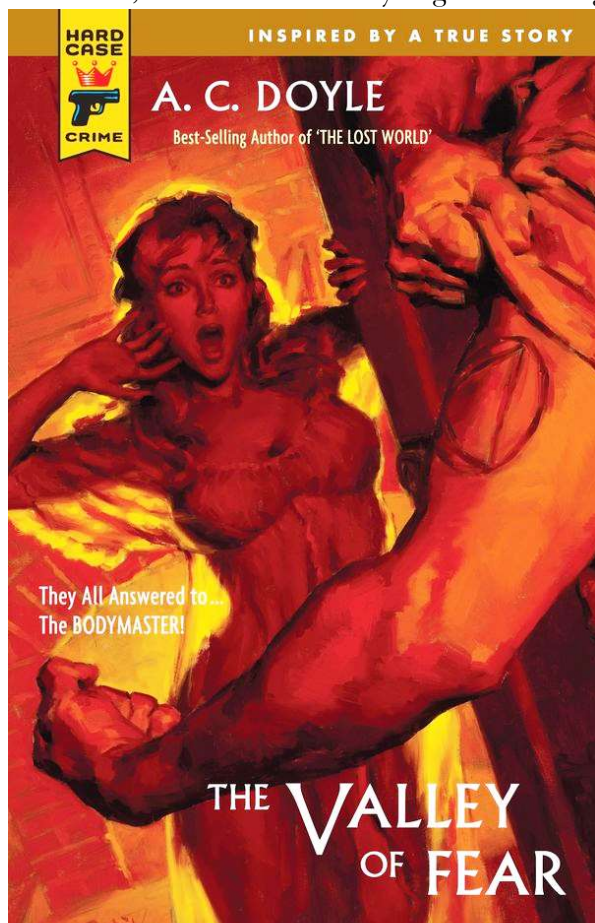
The Mysterious Porlock

Ever since the beginning of the Great Game, Sherlockians and Holmesians have agonized over who Fred Porlock really was. Holmes suggests that he is a weak link in Moriarty’s otherwise strong and invisible mighty chain of crime, which out of greed or conscience is willing to double-cross the age’s greatest criminal mastermind.

The Valley of Fear Chronology

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Late 1880s, or January 7, 1895</i>
<i>Baring-Gold</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Friday, January 7, 1887</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Tuesday, January 7, 1890</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>January 1900</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Monday, January 7, 1889</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>January 7, 1889</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1888</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>

Somehow, this seems to defy logic. One might understand this if Porlock acted solely out of conscience. The same thing holds true if he acted out of greed. However, neither appears to be the case.



Couldn't resist using this old cover. I rather suspect that the uninitiated who bought this pocket book may have been disappointed when they discovered that the Bodymaster did not take care of *that* kind of body!

himself, acting the cat to Holmes' mouse. Any theories, Hounds?

Professor Moriarty

There seems to be (O, horrors!) a fracture in the Canon's timeline. If we go by Baring-Gould's reckoning, Holmes comments to Watson, in 1888, "You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?" and Watson replies in the affirmative. Yet, in FINA, which takes place in 1891, Watson seems to have no idea who Moriarty is. How can one explain this discrepancy? Was the Good Doctor having a senior moment?

It is a pity that what we know about Professor Moriarty is so sketchy. There isn't one of us who wouldn't want to learn more about the man and his life! I am light-years away from being the first Canon student to note that, in some respects, our criminal academician seems to be the Great Detective's mirror image. He is an extremely intelligent, well-educated (even by the much higher standards of the Victorian Age) man who appreciates the finer things in the world. With Holmes we have his music and with Moriarty, I would guess, art.

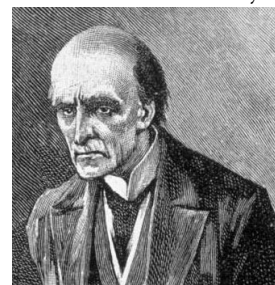
Then there is also a familiar trace of hubris (arrogance?) in his behavior, as shown by his keeping a £40,000+ (≈\$16,000,000 in today's currency) painting in his study, where anyone visiting him (or sneaking in) can see it. One gets the impression that the £700 (≈\$280,000) that he received as a professor must have been much like Watson's wound pension in later years—pin money.

If he acted out of conscience, why then "the occasional ten-pound (≈\$4,000 today) note"? And if he is acting out of greed, then doesn't such an "occasional" amount seem quite paltry considering risk to life and limb? Let us remember exactly *who* it is he is crossing!

If he had sufficient access to the professor's plans to warn Holmes of what was to come, Porlock could not have been just a street thug, or even a hit-man. The former would know nothing about his leader's plans (or that the leader even existed!), and the latter would only know about the target assigned to him and very likely be ignorant of the reason for his assignment.

So that would make Porlock more of a desk man, someone handling details of Moriarty's organization, much in the position of the modern-day accountant who works for the Mafia. That would explain how he might come across some of the Professor's plans in the making. That being the case, it is unlikely that he would be tempted by an occasional £10 note. As Holmes noted, Moriarty's "employees" are well paid—Moran alone makes £6,000 (≈\$2,400,000)! Surely those pay rates scale to all members of the organization.

Some have posited that Porlock could have been a Mycroft Holmes agent, or even Professor Moriarty



Finally, I've always wondered—and continue doing so—about the true subject of Moriarty's book. If the subject was astronomical (as one would infer) there is nothing rarefied about its mathematics, the problem having been definitely solved by Sir Isaac Newton quite a few years before, when he postulated his laws of motion and gave us what essentially is a working definition of gravity. It could be that he managed to solve the notorious Three-Body Problem.

He may have even raised a small corner of the carpet of relativity. We must recall that one of the proofs of Einstein's theory was that it provided an explanation (and accurate plotting) of Mercury's orbit around the sun, which could not be precisely calculated by only using Newton's postulates. Perhaps some of the more scientifically inclined Barkers might want to briefly discourse on this.

Brilliant, Holmes!

Holmes' method to determine which book Porlock had to have used as the cipher to his message is, to me, one of the reasons why one never tires of the Canon. One can only admire that type of deduction!

The Wandering Wedding Ring

Supposedly, the missing wedding ring was torn off the dead man's finger, leaving the larger nugget ring. With all his powers of observation, shouldn't it have been obvious to Holmes that on the finger where the ring was supposed to have been, there was no mark such as that which would have been left upon by a ring constantly worn on it for over five years?

The Singular Affair of the Quiet Shotgun

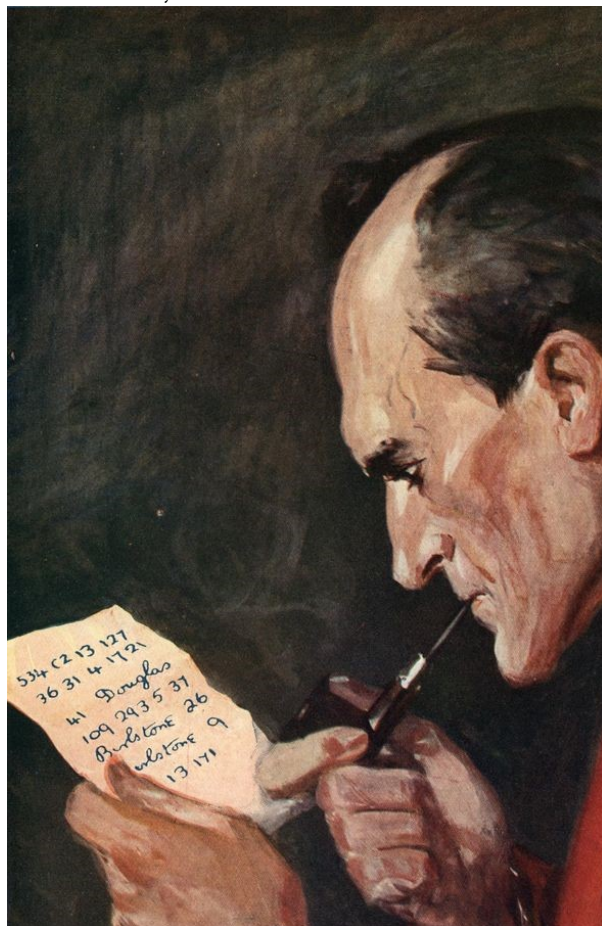
The question of the deafness that seems to have afflicted the household is one I find extremely puzzling. According to Holmes, "the sound from a shotgun is to some extent muffled when the discharge is at very close range It would not be very loud."

I must beg to differ. The sound of both barrels of a shotgun being fired simultaneously would have resonated across the house like a bell being struck by its clapper. I haven't fired a sawed-off shotgun, but I have experience with double-barreled weapons. Much to my chagrin, used to single-trigger guns, I once did that—mistakenly fired both barrels simultaneously. Besides giving me a sore shoulder, the result did not sound like a gun's detonation, it sounded like an explosion. Everybody in the field, including those at a distance, turned around to look at me.

Leaving the Great Game for a Moment

== Leaving the Great Game for a Moment ==

ACD did not do well when he tried his hand at a story within the story. I find the whole Scowrers section, like *The Country of the Saints* in *STUD*, to be hard going and distracting from the prowess of our sleuth. Moriarty here plays a sort of *deus ex machina* to get rid of Douglas aboard the ship headed for South Africa. Just as with *FIVE*, his death could have resulted from the secret organization taking its vengeance. Moriarty's omniscience seems to have been an easier way to end the tale.



What else happened in 1888:

Empire

Mashonaland and Matabeleland declared British sphere of influence.



◀ Suez Canal Convention signed: Suez Canal declared open to ships of all nations and free from blockade.

Sarawak and Brunei placed under British protection.

British East Africa Company founded.

Britain

County Councils' Act establishes representative county-based authorities.

Jack the Ripper has murder spree in Whitechapel.

Annie Besant leads the London match factory girls on strike.

Commission to examine charges against Parnell.

General Buller founds RASC (Royal Army Service Corps).

County Councils Act: elects councils to take over administrative duties of JPs.

Miners Federation of Great Britain formed; demand for minimum wage.

Foundation of Scottish Labour Party.

Final report on Commission on Elementary Education Acts in England.

English Priory of Knights Hospitalers authorized by Royal Charter.

Foundation of London General Omnibus Company.

World

French Indochina formed.

Slavery abolished in Brazil.



Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany dies; Frederick III becomes Emperor from March to June, dies, and is succeeded by Wilhelm II.

◀ Benjamin Harrison elected President of United States; even though Cleveland received more popular votes, the Electoral College gives the election to Harrison.

Unemployment demonstration in Rome suppressed by the military.

Marshal Bazaine, French officer in charge of the Foreign Legion in Mexico during Emperor Maximilian's rule, died.

Agricultural depression causes Sweden to abandon free trade.

Phil Sheridan, who fought as a Union General against the South during the American Civil War dies.

Clashes in Paris between Radicals and Monarchists. Anarchists riot in favor of weavers of Lille and glass blowers of Lion. Paris stone masons and waiters strike for higher wages and shorter work schedules.

More liberal constitution granted to Serbia by Milan.

Use of Danish language forbidden in schools in German N. Schleswig.



Founding of the Dutch shipping line Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM). It supports the unification and development of the colonial economy.

Reconstructed free port of Hamburg opens.

Revolution in Haiti culminates in the destruction of public buildings and the flight of President Salomon.

◀ Ferdinand de Lesseps attempts to issue a fresh series of 1,000,000 bonds “to finish the Panama Canal.” Proposal is withdrawn, de Lesseps resigns his directorship.

Italians near Alite relieved by the withdrawal of the Abyssinians.

Dr. Fitz, Boston surgeon, advocated the removal of the vermiform appendix in certain intestinal disorders, after several post-mortem operations. His advice is followed.

New York State establishes electric chair for method of death penalty.

Boulangier supported by Monarchists in France; popularity threatens Third Republic.

Main portion of Bremen incorporated into German Customs Union; parts of Wesser estuary remain free port.

Art

Van Gogh in Arles, Holland, paints *Sunflowers*, *Portrait of Armand Roulin*, *La Mousme*, and *Drawbridge at Arles*.



Oscar Wilde publishes *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

Casey at the Bat is recited publicly for the first time.

◀ John Phillip Sousa composes the military march *Semper Fidelis* for the U.S. Marine Corp.

Tchaikovsky performs *Symphony No. 5 in E Minor* at St. Petersburg.

George Moore publishes *Confessions of a Young Man*.

Cézanne paints *Peasant in a Blue Smock*.

Gilbert and Sullivan debut *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

Iannis Psichari, one of the creators of modern Greek literary language, publishes *My Journey* in demotic Greek.

Morris publishes *Dream of John Bull*, on a socialist commonwealth.

Matthew Arnold, critic, essayist, and poet dies.

Fontane publishes *Irrungen, Wirungen*.

Monet paints *Cap d'Antibes*.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch publishes *Troy Town*, a novel about Cornwall.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Trace Horse of the Bus Line, Place Clichy*.

Stevenson publishes *The Black Arrow*, a novel about the War of the Roses.

Rimsky-Korsakov composes *Scheherazade*.

Charles Doughty publishes travels in *Arabia Deserta*.

Seurat paints *Fishing Fleet at Port-en-Bessin*.

Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Tales*.

Kipling publishes *Soldiers Three*, and *Plain Tales from the Hills*; short stories of India.

Science and Technology

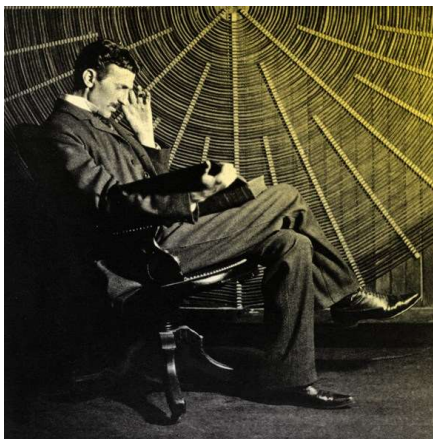
Dunlop's pneumatic tyre developed, principle still unproven.

Clinton Merriam establishes the National Geographical Society and they release their first magazine.

Drinking straws are invented.

George Eastman perfects the "Kodak" box camera, which uses photographic paper roll-film.

Emile Berliner improves the gramophone.



Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian explorer, crosses the Greenland icefield.

Hudson and Sclater publish *Argentine Ornithology*.

Mercerizing process introduced into cotton manufacture; facilitates later development of the artificial silk industry.

◀ Nichola Tesla makes first AC motor.

Incubators are first used for premature infants.

Institut Pasteur for the treatment of hydrophobia founded.

Sir J. Dewar and Sir F. Abel invent cordite.

William Burroughs patents the adding machine.

Louis Le Prince films the Roundhay Garden Scene, the earliest surviving film.

Heinrich Hertz produces electromagnetic waves, proves light and heat are both forms of electromagnetic radiation. Sir Oliver Lodge makes same discovery independently. Hertz used an induction coil; Lodge Leyden jars.

Next week's case: LAST

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..."

Email: CourageousMurray@aol.com