

A STUDY GUIDE TO SHERLOCK HOLMES



By William S. Dorn

Adventure II -- The Sign of Four

THE SIGN OF FOUR

DATE OF THE ADVENTURE*

(Date of the chase down the Thames)

CLUES:

1. Major John Sholto died April 28, 1882 (97)
2. “For weeks and for months (after Major Sholto’s death) we (the Sholto brothers) dug ... every part of the garden ...” (104)
3. Thaddeus Sholto says, “Yesterday ... the treasure (was) discovered.” (104)

4. Holmes says “... they (the Sholtos) were six years looking for it (the treasure).” (108)
5. Mary Morstan received first pearl on May 4, 1882 and received a pearl on the same date in succeeding years until she had acquired six pearls (95)
6. Watson says, “It was a little past seven before we .. found our launch awaiting us.” (135)
7. “It was twilight before we reached the Tower (of London)” (137)
8. The only days between early November 1887 and early May 1888 on which sunset occurred between 6:50 pm and 7:20 pm were April 12 to April 30.
9. The Aurora disappeared the day after Holmes and Watson met Mary Morstan and Bartholomew Sholto was found dead (123)
10. Sherlock Holmes’s advertisement referred to the Aurora disappearing at 3 am last Tuesday (131)
11. April 2, 1888 was on Monday.

*The story may contain other clues to the date of the adventure. However, use only the clues shown here. Your only goal should be to use logical reasoning to find a date based on the clues shown here.

12. Watson says that on the day he and Holmes met Mary Morstan, "The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air ... " (98)
13. According to the London Times, the warmest, humid day in April 1888 was April 16.
14. Watson returned to Pondicherry Lodge with Toby at 3 am on the morning after the meeting with Mary Morstan (117)
15. The Baker Street Irregulars started their search for the Aurora on the day following the day when Holmes and Watson followed Toby (126)
16. The day after the Baker Street Irregulars began their search, Holmes, Watson and Jones chased the Aurora down the Thames (134)

CONCLUSIONS:

- A. 1 and 2 imply the Sholtos started digging at the end of April or the beginning of May of 1882
- B. A, 3, and 4 imply the treasure was discovered 6 years after the search started, give or take three months, that is, between late January 1888 and early August 1888.
- C. 5 implies the sixth pearl was received May 4, 1887
- D. C implies the meeting with Mary Morstan took place before May 4, 1888 otherwise she would have received seven pearls.
- E. D, 6, 7, and 8 imply the date of the chase down the Thames was between April 12, 1888 and April 30, 1888.
- F. E, 9, 10, and 11 imply the meeting with Mary Morstan was Monday, April 16, 1888 or Monday, April 23, 1888
- G. F, 12, and 13 imply the meeting with Mary Morstan was Monday, April 16, 1888
- H. G, 14, 15, and 16 imply the chase down the Thames was Thursday, April 19, 1888

The chase down the Thames was on Thursday, April 19, 1888

THE SIGN OF FOUR VOCABULARY WORDS

- morocco (89) – **soft, fine leather of goatskin tanned with sumac**
sinewy (89) – **lean and muscular**
diffident (89) – **shy**
brusquely (89,132) – **abruptly and curtly**
abstruse (90) – **difficult to comprehend**
Euclid (90) – **Greek mathematician who developed a system of geometry (circa 300 B.C.)**
didactic (90) – **inclined to teach**
Celtic (90) – **Welsh, Irish, or Scottish**
coup-de-maitres (91) – **master strokes**
tours-de-force (91) – **feats of great ingenuity**
lunkah (91) – **strong Indian cigar**
slaters (91) – **stone workers**
cork-cutters (91) – **people who cut large pieces of cork into small objects such as bottle stoppers, etc.**
antecedents (91) – **ancestors**
dogmatic (92) – **authoritative; arrogant**
charlatanism (93) – **quackery, fakery**
dinted (93) – **dented**
guinea (93) – **1 £ plus 1 shilling i.e., 105% of a £**
dun-coloured (93) – **dull, dingy grayish-brown**
prosaic (93, 107) – **lacking in imagination; dull**
salver (93) – **tray for serving food or drinks**
languidly (96) – **listlessly**
treatise (97) – **extensive written discourse on a subject**
will-o'-the-wisp (97) – **thing that misleads by appearing and disappearing**
demeanour (99) – **conduct, bearing**
khitmutgar (100, 104, 156) – **a Persian or Hindu male servant**
writhed (100) – **twisted because of pain or embarrassment**
pendulous (100) – **hanging, suspended**

sanctum (100) – **private place where one is free from intrusion**
hookah (100) – **smoking pipe where the smoke is filtered**

through a liquid (usually perfumed water)

mitral valve (100) – **heart valve between the left ventricle and the left auricle**

settee (101) – **sofa**

balsamic (101) – **odor of an aromatic resin**

Corot (101) – **Jean Baptiste Corot (1796 – 1875) French artist known for woodland scenes**

Savator Rosa (101) – **Italian artist (1615 – 1673) known for wild and romantic landscapes**

Borguereau (101) – **Adolphe William Bouguereau (1825 – 1905) French artist known for his religious and mythological scenes**

avarice (102) – **greed**

chaplet (102) – **a string of beads**

paroxysm(103) – **sudden outburst of emotion**

sahib (103, 147, 148) – **term of respect used by Indians when speaking to Europeans**

malevolence (103) – **hateful; exhibiting ill will**

sagacity (104, 112) – **keenness of judgment**

le mauvais goût mène au crime (104) – **French for ‘Bad taste leads to crime’**

befrogged (105) – **fastens by passing a button through a loop**

lappets (105) – **ear flaps**

valetudinarian (105) – **someone who is feeble or in delicate health**

nostrums (105) – **medicines recommended by their preparer**

girt (106) – **encircled**

inxorably (106) – **not being persuaded by pleas**

the fancy (106) – **boxing profession**

garret (107, 111, 120) – **part of the house just under the roof**

astrakhan (108) – **curly lambs wool**

retort (109, 130) – **laboratory vessel with an outlet tube, used for distillation, sublimation, or decomposition by heat**

The Novels

- carboys (109, 112) – **large glass bottles, usually encased in a protective crate**
- pungent (109, 112) – **penetrating, biting, or caustic**
- lath (109, 111) – **thin strip of wood**
- inscrutable (109) – **not understandable**
- querulous (110) – **habitually complaining**
- ejaculated (110, 143) – **exclaimed**
- snibbed (110) – **fastened or locked**
- pensively (111) – **thoughtfully**
- Senegambia (111) – **region in western Africa belonging to France; now the two republics of Senegal and Gambia**
- precept (111) – **rule prescribing a particular course of action**
- apex (111) – **vertex**
- sagacity (112, 131) – **soundness of judgment**
- creosote (112, 119, 121, 122) – **greenish-brown oily liquid used as a wood preservative and disinfectant**
- shire (112) – **an English county**
- rule of three (112) – **if three quantities of a proportion are known, then the fourth can be determined**
- Hippocratic smile (112) – **smile that is a medical symptom**
- ‘*risus sardonicus*’ (112) – **see Hippocratic smile above**
- alkaloid (113) – **a compound such as morphine, quinine or caffeine**
- portly (113) – **comfortably stout**
- plethoric (113) – **bombastic**
- palpitating (113) – **rapidly beating**
- rabbit-warren (113) – **colony of rabbits**
- Il n'y a pas des sots si incommodes que ceux qui ont de l'esprit* (114) –
French for ‘**There are no fools so troublesome as those who have some wit**’
- mare’s nest (115) – **something believed to be wonderful but that turns out to be a hoax**

Wir sind gewohnt dass die Menschen verhöhnen was sie nicht verstehen

(115) – **German for ‘We are used to seeing that Man despises what he never comprehends’ from Faust, Part I**

stair-rods (116) – **brass rods at the base of each step to keep the stair carpet in place**

labyrinth (116, 124) – **highly intricate and convoluted series of events**

singularly (116) – **in a way that is beyond the ordinary or usual; remarkably**

wiper (116, 117) – **viper**

stoat (117) – **ermine when in its brown color phase**

slowworm (117) – **small, harmless lizard; also called the blind-worm**

guyed (117) – **made fun of**

cranny (117) – **small opening**

lop-eared (117) – **having bent or drooping ears**

lurcher (117) – **cross-breed between a collie or sheepdog and a greyhound**

bull’s eye (117) – **lantern using a lens of short focus to concentrate the beam of light**

glow-worm (118) – **larvae of the female firefly**

Martini bullet (118) – **bullet fired from a Martini-Henry rifle, a rifle use by British armed forces prior to 1889**

connoisseur (119) – **person of informed and discriminating taste**

culpable (119) – **deserving of blame for making a mistake**

palpable (119) – **easily perceived; obvious**

hypothesis (120) – **tentative explanation that accounts for a set of facts**

Jean Paul (121) – **Johann Paul Friedrich Richter (1763 – 1825)
German author of romances and humorous
works as well as philosophical treatises**

Carlyle (121) – **Thomas Carlyle (1795 – 1881) British man of letters**

Richter (121) – **See Jean Paul above**

The Novels

- public-houses (121) – **drinking establishments; pubs**
wet (121) – **alcoholic drink**
the Oval (122) – **cricket ground in the south of London**
sawyers (122) – **people who saw timber into planks or boards**
lolling (122) – **hanging or drooping laxly**
punts (123) – **flat-bottomed, mastless boats**
skiffs (123) – **boats with oars**
coke (123) – **residue from bituminous coal after the coal has been distilled**
jetty (123) – **structure that projects into a body of water to protect a harbor from storms**
preconcerted (123) – **planned or arranged in advance**
wherry (124) – **a long, light rowboat, sharply pointed at both ends**
sheets (124) – **the rear most seats in a boat**
wharfingers (125) – **managers or owners of wharfs**
hansom (125) – **two-wheeled, one horse carriage seating two with the driver mounted behind and reins going over the roof of the hood; invented by J. A. Hansom, a Yorkshire architect who patented the cab in 1834**
ubiquitous (125) – **seeming to be everywhere at the same time**
miscreants (126) – **villains**
bob (126) – **slang for a shilling**
tanner (126) – **slang for sixpence = 1/2 shilling**
shilling (127) – **one 20th of a £**
mace (127) – **ceremonial staff used as the symbol of authority**
aborigines (127) – **earliest known population of a region**
Terra del Fuegians (127) – **residents of an archipelago south of South America separated from the mainland by the Strait of Magellan**
morose (128, 130) – **melancholy; gloomy**
gaunt (128) – **emaciated and haggard**
half-sovereign (129) – **coin worth one-half of a pound**
knight-errands (129) – **men given to adventurous or quixotic conduct**
knocking yourself up (130) – **tiring yourself**
scuttled (130, 135) – **sank a boat by cutting a hole in its hull**

- inquest (130) – **judicial inquiry usually held before a jury**
abstruse (130) – **difficult to understand**
pea-jacket (130, 132) – **sailor's short overcoat made of coarse woolen cloth**
outré (132) – **unusual, weird**
cudgel (133) – **short, heavy stick**
side-whiskers (133) – **side burns**
petulant (133) – **unreasonably irritable or ill-tempered**
miracle plays (134) – **medieval drama portraying events in the lives of saints and martyrs**
bon vivant (134) – **a lover of good living; a gourmet**
bumper (135) – **a glass or cup filled to the brim**
lair (135) – **hideaway**
the City (137) – **financial district of London**
lighters (137) – **barges used in loading and unloading ships**
stokers (137) – **men who feed fuel to a furnace on a steamship**
a priori (137) – **Latin for ‘from the first’**
have the heels of us (137) – **get away from us; leave us behind**
tiller (138) – **lever used to turn a rudder and steer a boat**
coursed (138) – **hunted by pursuit; pursued game with greyhounds**
strident (138) – **shrill; discordant**
ulster (138) – **long, loose fitting, rough overcoat usually belted**
bestiality (138) – **marked by depravity or brutality**
unhallowed (139) – **not conforming to accepted ethical standards**
singular (139) – **beyond what is ordinary or usual; remarkable**
swing (140, 144) – **hang**
welted (140) – **beat severely; flogged**
lagged (140) – **be punished**
drawing-room (141) – **living room**
diaphanous (141) – **transparent**
annuity (142) – **annual income**

The Novels

- tenner (143) – **ten pound banknote**
stolidly (143) – **showing little emotion**
kith or kin (143) – **friends or relatives**
ague (144, 149) – **malaria**
stoicism (144) – **indifference to pleasure or pain**
bracelets (144) – **handcuffs**
Queen's shilling (144) – **the money (one shilling) given to a soldier when he enlisted**
goose-step (144) – **marking time by raising the feet alternately without moving forward**
indigo (145) – **plant used to produce blue vegetable dye**
veranda (145) – **roofed porch extending along the outside of a building**
whisky-pegs (145) – **Anglo-Indian slang for whisky or brandy with soda**
cheroots (145, 153) – **cigars with square-cut ends**
nullah (145) – **Hindu word for ravine or valley**
sepoy (145) – **native British soldiers**
paddy-fields (146) – **rice fields**
Sikhs (146, 152) – **Indian religious sect who worship one invisible God**
bang (147) – **hashish; marijuana**
Feringhee (148) – **Indian term for a European**
raja (148) – **Hindu prince who rules a territory**
sidepostern (148) – **side gate to a fort**
moidores (148) – **gold coins worth approximately 27 shillings**
Punjabees (149) – **residents of the province of Punjab in the north of India**
cummerbund (149) – **a loin-cloth or sash worn around the waist**
carbuncles (151) – **garnets**
agates (151) – **chalcedonies; translucent grayish quartz with microscopic crystals arranged in slender fibers in parallel bands**

- cat's eye (151) – **precious gem that reflects a band of light that shifts position as the gem is turned**
- beryls (151) – **transparent white, green, blue, yellow, or pink gems**
- coronet (151) – **small crown worn by princes and princesses and by other nobles**
- deposed (152) – **removed from power**
- commuted (152) – **changed a penalty to a less severe one**
- jack-in-office (152) – **insolent fellow in authority**
- facer (153) – **sudden setback**
- chokey (155) – **Anglo-Indian slang for jail or prison**
- Goethe (157) – **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)**
German writer who wrote poetry, drama, and novels including the dramatic poem *Faust*
- waterman (156) – **man working on a boat or among boats**
Schade dass die Natur nur einen Mensch aus dir schuf, Denn zum wüdigen Mann was und zum Schelmen der stoff(158) – **German for 'Nature, alas, made only one being out of you although there was material for a good man and a rogue'**
- surmised (158) – **inferred something without sufficiently conclusive evidence**

THE SIGN OF FOUR OPEN QUESTIONS

1. Watson says of himself, "In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents ... " (94). Which three continents were they?

Probably Europe, Asia (India), and perhaps Australia.

2. When he is about to start on his trip over the roof, Holmes says to Watson. "... look out for Blondin." (118) Who or what was Blondin?

Charles Blondin (1824-1897), whose real name was Jean Francois Gravelet, was a French acrobat who crossed Niagara Falls on a tightrope three times, 1855, 1859 and 1860.

3. One of the Baker Street Irregulars waved a white handkerchief to signal the Aurora's departure from Jacobson's Yard. (137) Where would a street urchin get a white handkerchief?

Holmes probably lent him the handkerchief.

4. Altheney Jones suggested sending police to trap Small and Tonga when they went to Jacobson's Yard to board the Aurora. If the police were effectively disguised that would appear to be a sound plan. Why did Holmes reject it?

Holmes wanted to make the capture himself.

5. Why weren't Holmes and Watson indicted for killing Tonga? They probably would have been acquitted on grounds of self-defense, but they did kill him.

Holmes and Watson as members of the privileged class and auxiliaries of the official police force would be given special consideration from Scotland Yard.

6. Holmes and Watson seem to feel that the treasure belonged to Mary Morstan and Thaddeus Sholto. On what grounds - legal or moral - would they own the treasure?

Only on the grounds that Mary and Thaddeus were from the upper class of society while the members of the Sign of Four and certainly Tonga were decidedly not.

7. Where did Jonathan Small get the money to pay Mordecai Smith so well? Smith spent lavishly (136) yet Tonga worked for pennies (156)

Small must have had some money and kept it back from Tonga who wouldn't know what to do with the money anyhow.

THE SIGN OF FOUR SIMPLE QUIZ*

1. Why did the Sholto brothers dig up their garden?
 - a. to find a buried treasure
 - b. to find a missing corpse
 - c. to create an escape route
 - d. none of the above

2. What did Tonga use to kill Bartholomew Sholto?
 - a. a native spear
 - b. an aborigine axe
 - c. a poison dart
 - d. none of the above

3. What was unusual about Jonathan Small's legs?
 - a. one was shorter than the other
 - b. the feet were of quite different sizes
 - c. one was wooden
 - d. none of the above

* The Simple Quiz is designed to determine if the student has read the story. Anyone who has read the story through should have no trouble in completing this quiz. The Intermediate and Advanced Quizzes are more challenging.

THE SIGN OF FOUR INTERMEDIATE QUIZ[#]

1. What percent solution of cocaine did Sherlock Holmes recommend to Dr. Watson?
 - a. 3%
 - b. 7%
 - c. 10%
 - d. none of the above
2. Which one of the following people was NOT a member of ‘The Four’?
 - a. Dost Akbar
 - b. Abdullah Khan
 - c. Daulat Ras
 - d. Mahomet Singh
3. What kind of pipe did Thaddeus Sholto smoke?
 - a. a calabash
 - b. a hookah
 - c. a Meerschaum
 - d. none of the above
4. Thaddeus Sholto says, “I am compelled to be a valetudinarian.” What does ‘valetudinarian’ mean in this sentence?
 - a. in delicate health
 - b. first in everything
 - c. a student of tobacco
 - d. none of the above

[#] The Intermediate Quiz is designed to test whether the student has read the story with reasonable attention to detail. The Simple Quiz is an easier test while the Advanced Quiz is much more challenging.

THE SIGN OF FOUR ADVANCED QUIZ[&]

1. Jonathan Small planned to sail on the Esmerelda to what country?
 - a. Brazil
 - b. India
 - c. Portugal
 - d. none of the above

2. Where did Toby live?
 - a. under the Thames dockyards
 - b. Pondicherry Lodge
 - c. Pinchin Lane
 - d. none of the above

3. What was the name of Mordecai Smith's launch?
 - a. the Aurora
 - b. the Hotspur
 - c. the May Day
 - d. none of the above

4. Which French detective did Holmes say had consulted him?
 - a. Auguste Dupin
 - b. Emile le Coq
 - c. Francois le Villard
 - d. none of the above

[&] The Advanced Quiz is designed for aficionados of the Canon. The questions are quite challenging. The Intermediate and Simple Quizzes are designed for the more casual reader of the stories.

ANSWERS TO QUIZZES

| QUESTION | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|----|
| Study in Scarlet | | | | |
| Simple | b | c | b | xx |
| Intermediate | a | b | a | b |
| Advanced | c | b | b | a |
| Sign of Four | | | | |
| Simple | a | c | c | xx |
| Intermediate | b | c | b | a |
| Advanced | a | c | a | c |
| Hound of the Baskervilles | | | | |
| Simple | c | c | a | xx |
| Intermediate | b | b | c | c |
| Advanced | b | a | b | d |
| Valley of Fear | | | | |
| Simple | c | b | c | xx |
| Intermediate | b | a | b | c |
| Advanced | a | c | b | a |