



The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXVI -- The Adventure of Final Problem

(The Demise of Sherlock Holmes)

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, December 1893; *McClure's Magazine*, December 1893

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

Begins on Friday, April 24, 1891 (stated clearly)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

After Watson's marriage and subsequent start in private practice, the very intimate relations which had existed between Holmes & Watson changed. Holmes still saw Watson from time to time, but these occasions grew more and more seldom, until in 1890 there were only three cases of which Watson kept any record.



Opening scene:

Holmes came to see Watson on the evening of April 24th. Watson's wife was away upon a visit. Holmes was looking even paler and thinner than usual. Two of his knuckles were burst and bleeding, and he was worried about air-guns. He closed the shutters and announced his intention to leave the house by scrambling over the back garden wall. Holmes proposed that Watson should come away with him for a week to the Continent.

Holmes told Watson of the arch-criminal, Professor Moriarty, who sat motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web, a deep organizing power which forever stood in the way of the law, and threw its

shield over the wrong-doer, and was the deep organizer of half the evil and of nearly all that was undetected in the great city. In appearance, Moriarty's face protruded forward and forever slowly oscillated from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. Not only that, but he had puckered eyes.

Client:

Holmes was acting in his own interests, and for the good of society as a whole.

Crime or concern:

Immediate concern was several potential murderous assaults made upon Holmes. Big picture concern was the large-scale organized crime empire run by Professor Moriarty.

Villain:

Professor Moriarty, the Napoleon of Crime.

Motive:

Holmes extensive investigation and evidence-gathering was about to bring down the Moriarty organization. Moriarty wanted to kill Holmes to prevent this, and was an especially dangerous foe.

Logic used to solve:

Holmes felt the presence of the force, and deduced its action in many of those undiscovered crimes in which he had not been personally consulted. For years he endeavoured to break through the veil which shrouded it, and at last the time came when he seized the thread and followed it, until it led, after a thousand cunning windings, to ex-Professor Moriarty. Holmes devoted his whole energy to exposing and breaking it up.

Policemen:

None mentioned except some who examined slates and bricks that had fallen near Holmes from a roof under repair, which they believed the wind had toppled over. Also some Swiss experts who examined the foot-marks near the falls and verified Watson's conclusions.

Holmes' fees:

N/A

Transport:

Holmes gave Watson instructions to take a hansom the next morning to the Lowther Arcade, and then quickly switch to a specific small brougham to reach Victoria in time for the Continental express. Holmes & Watson then departed by train to Dover, to catch the boat to Calais. Moriarty engaged a special to chase them, but Holmes & Watson got off at Canterbury. Moriarty sped through to Dover. Holmes & Watson then took train to Newhaven and made their way at leisure into Switzerland, via Luxembourg and Basle, encouraging the manufactures of the countries through which they traveled, since their luggage had gone on to Paris.

Food and Drink:

No mention.

Vices:

When he called upon Watson at the beginning, Holmes drew in the smoke of his cigarette as if the soothing influence was grateful to him.

Other cases mentioned:

STUD & NAVA. Also noted that Holmes was engaged by the French government in a matter of extreme importance, and had assisted the royal family of Scandinavia.

Notable Quotables:

“The air of London is the sweeter for my presence.” – Holmes

“Danger is part of my trade.” – Holmes

“Let me pay you (a complement) in return when I say that if I were assured of the former eventuality (Holmes’ destruction of Moriarty) I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter (Holmes’ own destruction).” – Holmes to Moriarty

“Of late I have been tempted to look into the problems furnished by nature rather than those more superficial ones to which our artificial state of society is responsible.” – Holmes

Other interestings:

A worthy sidelight to this case is Holmes' and Moriarty's decision-making logic on getting off the train to Canterbury and Calais. There is an article on this subject here on McMurdo's Camp web site. See "Decision on the Dover Train" in the sidebar on the right, under Trifling Monographs. Some classic but very simple mathematical reasoning is involved.

When all was said and done:

Once in Switzerland, S&H detoured to view the falls of Reichenbach. Watson was lured away by a phony message to help an English patient. Upon learning of the ruse, Watson returned to where he left Holmes. Two lines of footmarks were clearly marked along the farther end of the path near the cliff, both leading away. There were signs of a scuffle, and no tracks returning. The inevitable conclusion was that Moriarty had followed Holmes, they struggled, and both fell into the abyss. Holmes left a note before the scuffle, courtesy of Moriarty, who awaited the final discussion of those questions which lay between the two men. Any attempt at recovering the bodies was absolutely hopeless.

Watson regarded Holmes as the best and the wisest man whom he had ever known.

McMurdo's Camp