



*An Inquiry into:
 “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”*

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“The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” was first published in *Collier’s Weekly Magazine* on March 26, 1904, and in *The Strand Magazine* in April 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

There is no complete agreement among our Canon experts regarding this adventure’s chronology.

The table displays their conclusions. If one goes by the majority opinion and assumes that the case did indeed take place in 1899, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 45 years old and Dr. James H. Watson 47.

Main Characters:

Charles Augustus Milverton, probably the most successful professional society black-mailer of his age, “the worst man in London,” according to Holmes. Lady Eva Blackwell, a young, beautiful former débutante being black-mailed by Milverton. The Earl of Dovercourt, the Lady Eva’s very proper fiancé.

Agatha, Milverton’s housemaid, who is seduced by Holmes. An unidentified very grand lady, a widow who is a victim of Milverton. Inspector Giles Lestrade, Scotland Yard Detective.

Notable Quotes:

“Do you feel a creeping, shrinking sensation, Watson, when you stand before the serpents in the Zoo and see the slithery, gliding, venomous creatures, with their deadly eyes and wicked, flattened faces? Well, that’s how Milverton impresses me. I’ve had to do with fifty murderers in my career, but the worst of them never gave me the repulsion which I have for this fellow.”

“Heaven help the man, and still more the woman, whose secret and reputation come into the power of Milverton. With a smiling face and a heart of marble he will squeeze and squeeze until he has drained them dry.”

| <i>The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton</i> | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Chronologist</i> | <i>Date of the Adventure</i> |
| <i>Canon</i> | <i>Winter</i> |
| <i>Baring-Gould</i> | <i>Thursday, January 5, 1899</i> |
| <i>Bell</i> | <i>Monday, February 4, 1884</i> |
| <i>Blakeney</i> | <i>1895 or after</i> |
| <i>Brend</i> | <i>December 1882</i> |
| <i>Christ</i> | <i>Monday, February 4, 1889</i> |
| <i>Dakin</i> | <i>Friday, January 13, 1899</i> |
| <i>Folsom</i> | <i>Thursday, January 5, 1899</i> |
| <i>Hall</i> | <i>January 5, 1899</i> |
| <i>Keefauver</i> | <i>Monday, January 12, 1891</i> |
| <i>Klinger</i> | <i>1899</i> |
| <i>Zeisler</i> | <i>Wednesday, January 6, 1886</i> |
| <p><i>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.</i></p> | |

“Since it is morally justifiable I have only to consider the question of personal risk. Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon this when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?”

“I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal.”

“I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge.”

The Blackmailer and the Detective's Reward

When one reviews this case, it seems very likely that Holmes would have been able to claim a healthy fee from Lady Eva Blackwell and the illustrious client (another one?) who “placed her piteous case” in his hands.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

Holmes made Milverton a £2,000 counteroffer which, according to the Great Detective, was all that the lady was able to afford; considering that that sum would be equivalent to some \$750,000 one would think that our sleuth's client was not exactly in a penurious situation. However, this might have been all that she had, inherited from a dead father or mother truly making it all she could raise.

Although we are told that Milverton had a superior intellect and great patience, his attitude towards Lady Eva would seem to belie these qualities. One has to believe that the man did his homework before approaching a prospective victim; therefore, it is puzzling why he would have been so adamant about demanding £7,000 (≈\$2,600,000) from Lady Eva when he had to know that she was good for only about £2,000. Had she gone to relatives and friends for the rest, her secret would soon have been revealed, socially destroying her and ending any possibility that she might make a good marriage. Had he waited until the lady was married, he might have had a better chance to get the money.

One can only deduce that Milverton had to know that Lady Eva would be unable to pay. If that were so, then his main purpose was to destroy her as an example to his other “clients” and would-be victims—having her wedding scandalously cancelled would admirably serve the purpose. As he himself put it, “An exposure would profit me indirectly to a considerable extent. I have eight or ten similar cases maturing. If it was circulated among them that I had made a severe example of the Lady Eva I should find all of them much more open to reason.”

Any way one looks at this, the fact remains that goodly sums of money would have been available for Holmes' fee. After all, this was not a simple open-and-shut case. Holmes ran a serious personal risk masquerading as a plumber and seducing a member of Milverton's domestic staff to learn about the layout of the house and its master's schedule. Finally, he and Watson risked the very serious consequences that would have befallen them, had they been captured at their burglary.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

It is undeniable that the risks undertaken by our two friends were well-worth it. After all, they lifted a tremendous burden from the shoulders of all those tortured souls who Milverton bled dry when they burned all his dark evidence; however, the fact remains that had they been caught, the law would not

have dealt very kindly with them, especially in view of the aggravating matter of the blackmailer's murder.

Had this happened, being the kind of men that our two friends were, neither one would have mentioned the mysterious veiled lady, whom Holmes had probably immediately recognized.

Things could have turned out very bleak indeed.

In view of all this, Holmes had every right to a hefty fee. Certainly, the Lady Eva could not have hesitated to turn over to Sherlock Holmes the £2,000 that she was desperate for Milverton to accept in exchange for his silence; after all, our sleuth *did* give her life back to her. It is also likely that the illustrious client himself would have been willing to contribute to the Great Detective's reward.

The Scotland Yarders

Lestrade is the Scotland Yard officer who figures in more of Holmes' recorded cases than any other—13, as opposed to four each for Tobias Gregson and Stanley Hopkins. The Great Detective thought him the best of the professionals and admired his tenacity and thoroughness, while having a poor opinion of his intelligence.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

On the other hand, Lestrade's own attitude towards Holmes varied from rudeness and scorn—as in *BOSC* and *NOBL*—through a fast change of sentiment in *NORW*, to generous admiration in *SIXN* and *HOUN*.

I always wonder just how interested Lestrade really was in solving Milverton's murder. His deduction that the crime was committed by probably "men of good position, whose sole object was to prevent social exposure," was not too far from the truth. It certainly revealed Lestrade's awareness of Milverton as a high-society blackmailer. Knowing all this,

how devoted would he have been to solve the murder of such a criminal and in doing so possibly revealing the identity of very important and influential people as the perpetrators?

A Brief Query

How did Milverton's murderess escape? We are told that the whole household was aroused (unsurprisingly so after six pistol shots!) and that the alarm was given within minutes and the garden was soon full of excited domestics in full cry. In fact, Holmes and Watson barely managed a very narrow escape, which involved scaling over a six-foot wall while under heated pursuit.

That, of course, was an escape route that no lady in full Victorian regalia, complete with mantle and veil, could have successfully taken. So how did she escape? All that Watson tells us is that "The night air blew into the heated room, and the avenger was gone."



Courtesy of ITV Granada

From there, one must step into the quicksand of supposition. Did Holmes know that the mysterious titled lady intended to settle final accounts with Milverton through the means of a six-shooter? It

would not have been the only time we know of that the Great Detective, like Lord Nelson, turned a blind eye when a killing was done; BOSCH and ABBE quickly come to mind.

As he himself put it, "I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge."

What else happened in 1899:

Empire

Boer War (1899 - 1902). Boers invade Natal; British defeated at Magersfontein, Stormberg, Colenso. Siege of Ladysmith.

Anglo-Egyptian condominium over Sudan established.

Anglo-French Convention settles spheres of influence in West Africa.

Further famine in India.

Britain

Last fishing fleet sails from Barking.

First public motor bus (Kensington to Victoria).



London County Council established; lasts until 1965.

◀ Founding of Ruskin College, Oxford (not part of the university), by American Walter Vrooman, for socialistic education.

General Federation of Trade Unions formed.

First Royal Navy turbine ships, destroyers *Cobra* and *Viper* built.

SS *Oceanic*, White Star Line, launched. First large luxury liner of line culminating with RMS *Titanic*

in 1912.

Establishment of Board of Education

World

Boxer Rebellion begins, culminating in the May 1900 siege of foreign legations.

Permanent Court of Arbitration set up at the Hague.

Macedonian Committee formed at Sofia.

Nicholas II ends independence of Finland.

Russian persecution of Armenians in Caucasus.

Migration of Russian peasants made easier by State Council.

Organization of Board of Labor in France.

Russian universities closed due to student disorders.

Art

Ernest W. Hornung writes *The Amateur Cracksmen*, adventures of Raffles.



Kipling writes *Stalky and Co.*

Yeats writes *The Wind Among the Reeds.*

Tolstoi writes *Resurrection.*

Ibsen writes *When We Dead Awake.*

◀ Coleridge-Taylor writes *The Death of Minnehaha.*

Gauguin paints *Two Tahitian Women.*

Sir William Elgar composes the *Enigma Variations.*

Jean Sibelius composes *Finlandia.*

Toulouse-Lautrec draws *At the Circus*, a series of 39 drawings, mainly in crayon.

Science and Technology

Zeppelin invents his airship.

A.L. Debierne discovers actinium.

Parson's turbo-alternator developed.

Lummer and Pringsheim study blackbody radiation.

Wireless telegraphy from England to France.

D. Hilbert publishes *Grundlagen der Geometrie*, modern German axiomatic research based on Greek geometry.

Next week's case: SIXN

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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