



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXIV – The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

Publishing History

34 of the 60 stories

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, April, 1904

In the US *Collier's Weekly*, March 26, 1904

Part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* collection by

George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1905

McClure Phillip & Co., New York, 1905

British illustrator – Sidney Paget

American illustrator – Frederick Dorr Steele

Chronology

Baring-Gould placed the dating of the story as Thursday, January 5 to

Saturday, January 14, 1899 making it 46th of the 60. This means that

Holmes is 45 and Watson 47.

Christopher Morley Says

“Charles Augustus Milverton was “the worst man in London,” a trader in scandal and blackmail. Holmes considered him a poisonous reptile and threw Milverton’s calling card with disgust. In this brilliantly told story Holmes and Watson do a little housebreaking n their own account, and Watson is almost grabbed by the police. His wounded heel is better than in the old days, for he achieves a two-mile run across Hampstead Heath.”



Dummies Short Summary

“In an effort to save the reputation of an innocent woman, Sherlock resorts to housebreaking as he battles the *king of the blackmailers*. Prepare yourself for the shocking climax!”

How Many Words

At 6,775 words CHAS has the 11th most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701)

Classifying This Case

This case is the one actual case of blackmail. And murder too, of course.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle did not have it on the list of his 12 favorites.
- 1959 – The Baker Street Irregulars did not list it in their top 10.
- 1999 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it 19th of the 56 short stories.
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it 14th of the 56 short stories.

What Else Happened That Year (1899)

- 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.
- First public motor bus (Kensington to Victoria).
- 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.
- Boxer Rebellion begins, culminating in the May 1900 siege of foreign legations.
- Nicholas II ends independence of Finland.
- Russian persecution of Armenians in Caucasus.
- Russian universities closed due to student disorders.
- Coleridge-Taylor writes *The Death of Minnehaha*.
- Gauguin paints *Two Tahitian Women*.

- Jean Sibelius composes *Finlandia*.
- Toulouse-Lautrec draws *At the Circus*, a series of 39 drawings, mainly in crayon.
- Zeppelin invents his airship.
- Wireless telegraphy from England to France.

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

221B Baker Street was home sweet home to both at this time.

Dramatis Personae

- **Lady Eva Blackwell**, the most beautiful debutant of the season, soon to be married to ...
- **Earl Of Dovercourt**, a fiercely proud man with a quick temper.
- **Charles Augustus Milverton**, “King of the blackmailers ... the worst man in London.”
- **Miss Miles**, Milverton broke up her marriage to ...
- **Colonel Dorking**
- **Escott**, Holmes assumed name under which he became engaged to...
- **Agatha**, Milverton’s maid.
- **Countess D’albert**, The “anonymous noblewoman” pretends to have letters compromising her.
- **anonymous noblewoman**, she murdered Milverton because he had destroyed her husband’s reputation which led to his death.

Quotable Sherlock

- “I’ve had to do with fifty murders 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."
- “Dr. Watson is my friend and partner.”
- You must play your cards as best as you can when such a stake is on the table.”
- “I give you my word of honour — and I never broke it in my life — that I will take a cab straight to the police-station and give you away, unless you let me share this adventure with you.”
- “I don’t mind confessing to you that I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal. This is the chance of my lifetime in that direction.”

- Watson, on the thrill of committing the burglary: “My first feeling of fear had passed away, and I thrilled now with a keener zest than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defiers. The high object of our mission, the consciousness that it was unselfish and chivalrous, the villainous character of our opponent, all added to the sporting interest of the adventure. Far from feeling guilty, I rejoiced and exulted in our dangers.”
- “You’ve done me.” – The last words Milverton ever spoke on this earth.
- “I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge.”

Holmes’ Fee

Not stated, but it was known that £2000 would have been a drain upon Lady Eva’s resources, and that Milverton’s price was utterly beyond her power. Presumably, Holmes was more reasonable.

Disguises

Holmes adopted the guise of a plumber named Escott and romanced the maid to reconnoiter the place.

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

- 1922 *Charles Augustus Milverton* with Eille Norwood as one of his 47 film. The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1932 *The Missing Rembrandt* with Arthur Wontner in a very loose adaptation
- 1965 *Charles Augustus Milverton* with Douglas Wilmer in an episode in his Sherlock Holmes series.
- 1980 *The Master Blackmailer* with Vasily Livanov as an episode in the *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* which had elements of both CHAS and GREE
- 1991 *The Master Blackmailer* with Jeremy Brett in the Granada/BBC series

Newspapers

- **Morning Post** - The oldest London newspaper. It was strongly Conservative and heavily influenced fashions of the day.

Annotated Sherlock

- **“portière”** a heavy curtain hung over the doorway of a room

Holmes The Author

Not a word on Holmes' scholarly writings

Weapons

- **Large Revolver** - Which Charles Augustus Milverton carried with him for protective purposes, the barrel of which he displayed to Holmes and Watson when they rather clumsily tried to divest him of his blackmailing notes.
- **Pistol** - Which a victim of Milverton's blackmailing pursuits used to pump shell after shell into the blackguard's carcass, after which she fittingly ground her heel into his face.
- **Large Watchdog** - Of Charles Augustus Milverton.
- **Letters** - Of prominent people, used by Charles Augustus Milverton in his blackmailing business.
- **Indiscreet Letters** - Of Lady Eva Blackwell, written to an impecunious country squire, which Milverton used to blackmail her.
- **Letters** - Of an unnamed noblewoman, which Milverton used in an attempt to blackmail her and which he handed over to her husband when she didn't pay, thereby causing his death, at the same time sealing Millerton's doom.
- **Chair** - In the sitting room of 221B, which Watson picked up, presumably to smash over the head of Charles Augustus Milverton.

Frank Mentzel