



Adventure XLVIII – The Valley of Fear

Like *A Study in Scarlet*, *The Valley of Fear* doesn't merely fill in the motive for the present-day crime: it makes a novel within a novel out of past history. I'm not a big fan of the *Study* digression, but I found the story of Birdy Edwards to be quite exciting and enjoyable for its own sake, and I easily suspended my knowledge of history and my pride in my Irish ancestry while I was reading it. But I certainly understand those who find the Vermissa Valley tale to be a bit off the mark as far as pure

Sherlockian enjoyment is concerned. Having said that, I wonder if we might ask ourselves the question in this way: Would Valley be a better Sherlock Holmes story if the Birdy Edwards segment had been much more compressed, like the story of the Sir Hugo Baskerville, or Jonathan Small's past history?

In his years with Sherlock Holmes, I can imagine that Watson got his hands on manuscripts from more than a few people who wanted their stories made known to the public. Obviously, the good doctor could not publish them all, but instead had to exercise his powers of selection. Why were Jefferson Hope and John Douglas the two whose long histories made the cut? Are there any Canonical characters whose past history would interest us even more? For instance, would it be fun to know more about Irene Adler and the King of Bohemia? Anyone else?

This is the last of the four Sherlock Holmes novels, and like *Study* and *Hound*, a very large percentage of Valley is devoted to the doings of characters other than Sherlock Holmes. And now I wonder: Would it have been possible to write a completely satisfying novel where the focus was almost entirely upon Sherlock Holmes? Is there any way that Valley could have been stretched to novel length with more about Holmes and less about Birdy Edwards? Would *Hound* have been an even better novel if we had followed Holmes onto the moor instead of staying almost exclusively with Watson's point of view?



Some questions: Why did Porlock send his note to Sherlock Holmes in code? Wouldn't Moriarty have been able to figure out the gist of it anyway, merely from the names that weren't in code?

How could Moriarty come upon Porlock by surprise while Porlock was writing his message? Did they live in the same house? And if Porlock was a part of Moriarty's high-paying organization, why did he make so little money that a ten-pound note from Sherlock Holmes was a significant inducement to betrayal?

Holmes said the key to the Birlstone mystery was the missing dumb-bell. When I read the story, however, I thought it was the missing wedding ring that provided the essential clue to the solution of the problem. Holmes also took note of the missing ring, but for him the case really seemed to come together over the question of that dumb-bell. For what reasons might Holmes have been more inclined to focus on this piece of evidence more so than the ring?

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