



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

**An Inquiry into:
"The Valley of Fear"**

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The Valley of Fear was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 1914-May 1915. It is one of the four Canonical novels.

According to our set of experts, as shown by the table, the chronology for this case varies somewhat. If, as the majority of our chronologists state, the case took place in 1888, then Holmes was 34 years old and Watson 36.

Main Characters:

John Douglas, Inspector Mac-Donald, Professor James Moriarty, Cecil Barker, Mrs. Douglas, Hargrave, Ted Baldwin, "Bodymaster" McGinty, John McMurdo, Ettie Shafter, "Birdy" Edwards.

Notable Quotes:

"You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself."

"[I]n calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law—and there lie the glory and the wonder of it! The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of every devilry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain

which might have made or marred the destiny of nations—that's the man! But so aloof is he from general suspicion, so immune from criticism, so admirable in his management and self-effacement, that for those very words that you have uttered he could hale you to a court and emerge with your year's pension as a solatium for his wounded character. Is he not the celebrated author of *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it? Is this a man to traduce? Foul-mouthed doctor and slandered professor—such would be your respective roles! That's genius, Watson. But if I am spared by lesser men, our day will surely come."

"Your native shrewdness, my dear Watson, that innate cunning which is the delight of your friends, would surely prevent you from inclosing cipher and message in the same envelope."

<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Late 1880s, or January 7, 1895</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 18</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Friday, January 7, 1887</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Tuesday, January 7, 1890</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>January 1900</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Monday, January 7, 1889</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>January 7, 1889</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1888</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, January 7, 1888</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.

“There is an appalling directness about your questions, Watson. They come at me like bullets.”



Watson's Undeserved Burden

Not uniquely, the story opens with an irritable Sherlock Holmes blasting his long-suffering companion over a perfectly innocent remark. Watson is right in referring to himself as “one of the most long-suffering of mortals.” He does get a bit of his back though, when let Holmes have it about Moriarty's fame. Even the Great Detective had to admit it had been “a distinct touch.” Good for you, Doctor!

Watson's retort that our sleuth is a “little trying at times” was orders of magnitude milder than it ought to have been. Nevertheless, much to our amusement, the Good Doctor has a chance to “get back a little of my own,” as Eliza Doolittle might have put it, when he tweaks the Great Detective's pride:

“You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?”

“The famous scientific criminal, as famous among crooks as—”

“My blushes, Watson!”

“I was about to say, as he is unknown to the public.”

“A touch! A distinct touch! You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself.”

Congratulations, Doctor!

The Undecipherable Porlock

Of the many peculiar personages that we encounter in the Canon, Porlock shines with an intensity all of his own. From the very beginning of the Great Game, Sherlockians and Holmesians have expended considerable amounts of brainpower attempting to determine who Fred Porlock really was. According to Holmes, he is a rare weak link in Moriarty's otherwise strong and invisible mighty chain of crime, who prompted by either greed or conscience is prepared to risk double-crossing the age's greatest criminal mastermind.

Holmes tells Watson that “Moriarty rules with a rod of iron over his people. His discipline is tremendous. There is only one punishment in his code. It is death.” This clearly means that if you are useful and loyal to the Professor you will be extremely well rewarded, whereas if you cross him you are cat meat. One is thus left to wonder what could have induced Porlock to cross Moriarty.

Our sleuth mentions that Porlock, “Led on by some rudimentary aspirations towards right, and encouraged by the judicious stimulation of an occasional ten-pound note sent to him by devious methods, he has once or twice given me advance information which has been of value—that highest value which anticipates and prevents rather than avenges crime.”



As one of my *beaux idéals*, Mister Spock, would have commented, “Highly illogical.” One might understand this if Porlock acted solely out of conscience or out of greed. However, neither appears to be the case.

If he acted out of conscience, why then would his scruples have to be fueled by “the occasional ten-pound (\approx \$4,000 today) note”? And if he acted out of greed, then doesn’t such an “occasional” amount seem quite paltry considering the risk to life and limb? Let us remember exactly *who* it is he is crossing!

I have theorized that Porlock’s his position within Moriarty’s organization, although far from being managerial, had to have been one of a sufficiently confidential nature to allow him an unusual insight into the workings of the business. Had he have been a low-level minion with very limited access to information, it is unlikely that he would have been able to pass intelligence of interest and—most importantly—of value to the Great Detective. In my mind, I compare him to one of Al Capone’s accountants who, although not actively involved in the gang’s criminal activities, were very well informed of the goings-on of Big Al’s various “business” interests. Let us remember that the notorious gangster’s downfall did not originate from his countless crimes, but from dodgy tax returns.

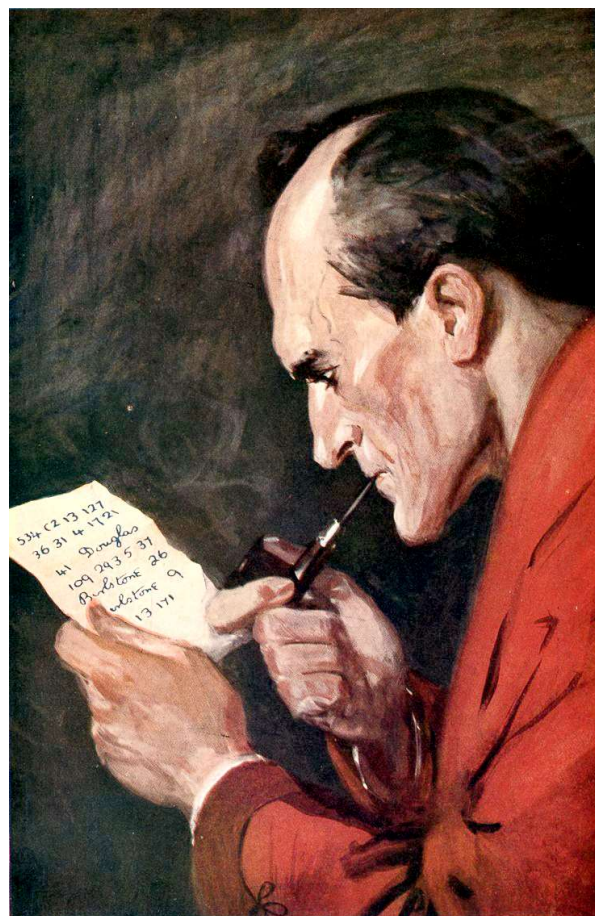
That would explain how Porlock might come across some of the Professor’s plans in the making. That being the case, it is unlikely that he would be tempted by an occasional £10 note. As Holmes noted, Moriarty’s “employees” are well paid—Moran alone makes £6,000 (\approx \$2,400,000)! Surely those pay rates at different levels apply to all members of the organization.

Some have posited that Porlock could have been a Mycroft Holmes agent, or even Professor Moriarty himself, acting the cat to Holmes’ mouse—possible, but unlikely.

Would an occasional \$4,000 tempt us sufficiently to be willing to risk what would surely be an unpleasant death at the hands of a boss we already fear? Doubtful. So what could possibly have prompted him to act in such a reckless manner? It certainly was not the money; his salary must have been well above the average for the age. It must have been, then, a matter of conscience; after all, it was he who contacted Holmes and not the other way round, and the money—although not his prime reason—was accepted when offered.

It is obvious that Porlock rose to a position within Moriarty’s criminal organization that allowed him catch at least a glimpse of the Professor’s terrible plans. Maybe behind that sense of justice was a strong inclination towards revenge. Perhaps one of Moriarty’s organization’s crimes was responsible for some painful or humiliating collateral damage that affected Porlock himself or someone close to him.

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that we hear about Porlock but once, briefly, and never again; this might indicate that he was discovered and subjected to the consequences of his treachery. I prefer to hope that, for whatever reason, his decision to abandon his deadly game came in time.



Professor Moriarty

Holmes instructs MacDonald by pointing out that, “All knowledge comes useful to the detective. Even the trivial fact that in the year 1865 a picture by Greuze entitled *La Jeune Fille a l’Agneau* fetched one million two hundred thousand francs—more than forty thousand pounds—at the Portalis sale may start a train of reflection in your mind.”



La Jeune Fille a l’Agneau.

For whatever reason, Holmes is being imprecise here. Back then, the exchange rate was £1 = 25 francs; so the painting sold for £48,000, which in modern currency would amount to ≈\$18,000,000. The Master Sleuth quite correctly called this to the attention of his Scotland Yard apprentice—surely Professor Moriarty’s salary, £700 (≈\$300,000) per annum, although extremely adequate for someone ostensibly in his docent position, it would have been hardly sufficient to pay for such extravagant tastes.

Of course, it remains to be discovered whether Holmes’ reptilian-like nemesis did not obtain that work art at a criminal “discount.”

When it comes to Professor James Moriarty, there (unheard of!) appears to be a fissure in the Canon’s timeline. Going by Baring-Gould’s reckoning, Holmes commented to Watson in 1888 that “You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?” and

our medico replied in the affirmative. However, in FINA, which takes place in 1891, Watson seems

to have no idea who Moriarty is. Was the Good Doctor having a senior moment?

Adding to the problem is that everything we know about the late Professor Moriarty is so very sketchy. We all would have liked an opportunity to learn more about the man and his life. It seems quite evident that in many respects our criminal academician could have been considered Holmes’ mirror image. He is an exceptionally intelligent, extremely well-educated (even by the much higher standards of the Victorian Age) man who shows appreciation for the finer things in life. Holmes has his music and for Moriarty, I would guess, there is art.

Then there is also a recognizable trace of hubris, i.e., arrogance, in his behavior, as shown by his keeping such a valuable painting in his study, where anyone entering it can see it. It appears very likely that the £700 (≈\$280,000) that he received as a professor must have been much like Watson’s wound pension in later years—pin money.



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Then there is the matter of the true subject of Moriarty's book. If the subject was astronomical (as one would infer from its title) there can be nothing rarefied about its mathematics. The problem that it seemingly addresses, *The Dynamics of an Asteroid*, had already been definitely solved by Sir Isaac Newton quite a few years before, when he postulated his laws of motion and gave us what essentially is a working definition of gravity. Perhaps the title referred to a solution to the notorious Three-Body Problem.

Or he may have raised a small corner of the vast, puzzling carpet of relativity. It is well to recall that one of the early proofs of Einstein's theory was that it enabled the accurate plotting of Mercury's orbit around the Sun, which could not be precisely calculated solely using Newton's postulates.

Much is revealed about Moriarty's outlook of others by his decision to openly hang a £48,000 painting in his study. It might be argued that it almost seems as if his pleasure was not derived so much from the artwork itself, but rather from what it said about him. This is an expression of contempt for everyone else; in effect, he is thumbing his nose at the world: mere mortals do not recognize the painting's value and those who do, do not matter because they are either helplessly on the palm of his hand or are not sufficiently superior to pose a threat.

Holmes seems to have been the single exception. As Moriarty himself confessed in FINA: "It has been an intellectual treat to me to see the way in which you have grappled with this affair, and I say, unaffectedly, that it would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure."

The Envied American Efficiency

When Holmes tells MacDonald that Colonel Sebastian Moran, Professor Moriarty's chief of staff, is paid a yearly salary of £6,000 (\approx \$2,500,000), he comments, "That's paying for brains, you see—the American business principle." Whenever I read this, I always get the impression that Holmes is wistfully jealous of America's criminal efficiency which, if transplanted to London, would have made for more entertaining and challenging game.

Did Holmes Blunder?

Holmes once more displayed his brilliance when he located the book Porlock used as the cipher for his message. This is what we have grown to always expect from our Master of Deduction; it is for



me, one of the reason why one never tires of the Canon. It is impossible not to admire that sort of inspired reasoning! However, in the present case this seems to have been his single best moment.

Certainly, the Great Detective is not at his best throughout the development of the case. He missed an important clue, and arrived at a seemingly unexplainable conclusion.

Regarding the missing wedding ring supposedly was torn out of the dead man's finger, while leaving the larger nugget ring, it should have been obvious to Holmes that a ring supposedly continually worn for five years would have left some sort of a mark upon the finger I resided on—Holmes missed this.

I realize that over the years I have repeated myself over this, but I am eternally puzzled by Holmes' justification regarding the unusual general deafness that appears to have afflicted everyone in Douglas's household: "the sound from a shotgun is to some extent muffled when the discharge is at very close range. . . . It would not be very loud."

I completely disagree with this. Had the two barrels of a shotgun been fired simultaneously, the detonation of the 56 grains of gunpowder in both shells would have resonated across the house like one of Quasimodo's bells. Although I have never fired a sawed-off shotgun, I have experience with double-barreled weapons. Once (and only once) being used to single-trigger guns, I mistakenly fired both barrels of a shotgun simultaneously. Besides providing a lucid example of the kick of a mule, the result was not the sound of a gun's detonation, but that of an explosion nothing short of deafening. Everybody in the field, including those far off, turned to look at me.

It is extremely difficult to believe that in this case the weapon's detonation could have been that muffled, regardless of where it was in the house. Even if the barrels had been in direct contact with, say, the abdomen the resultant sound would still approach that of an explosion.



Although no one questions the fact that Moriarty was a criminal mastermind of the first water, where it comes to his activities there is a tendency on the part of Canon students to endow him with an almost supernatural talent. This would appear to be justified when considering this case, considering that in the end the Professor got his man: Douglas perished under extremely suspicious conditions.

Some, however, view this sad ending as directly having been Holmes' fault. Considering his reaction to the guilt of Captain Crocker and Dr. Sterndale, why would he have been so forcefully in favor of having Douglas reveal all to the authorities? Why force police intervention, considering the attention that such an event would attract? There could have been no doubt in anybody's mind that the man acted out of self-defense; this was later officially confirmed when he was not charged with a crime.

Had Holmes allowed Douglas to carry out his plan to disappear and let the world assume that the corpse was his and not Baldwin's, in all likelihood he could have been able to end the pursuit that haunted him so, enabling him to escape with his life.

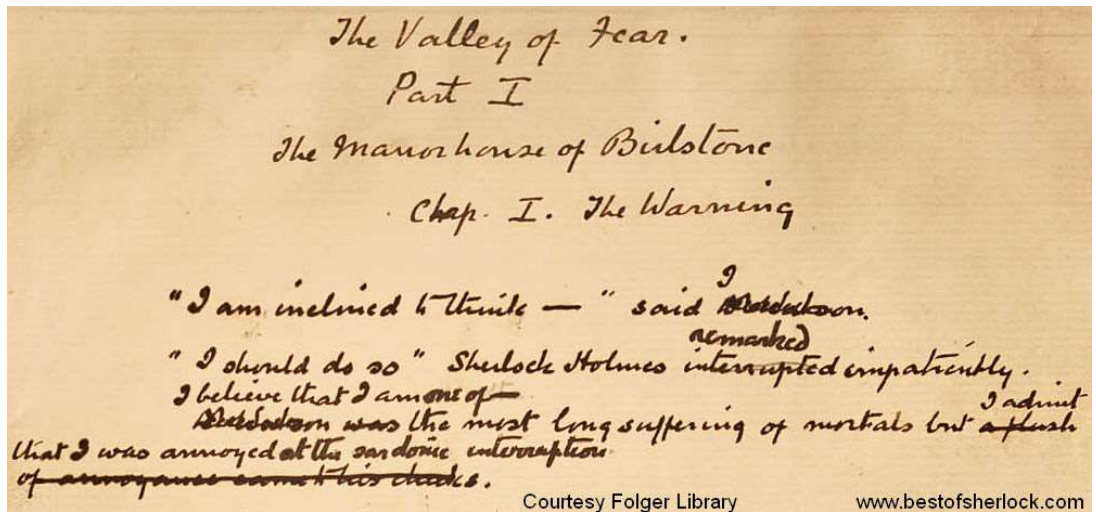
In this case, Holmes deserved Moriarty's very sarcastic note.

Abandoning the Great Game for a Moment

VALL depicts Holmes's best qualities (his deciphering of Porlock's message is nothing short of brilliant, as is his deduction that what the hard-of-hearing housekeeper heard was not the slamming of a door, but the shot itself), and the banter between him and Watson show how well their friendship had developed.

However, it is fairly obvious that when Sir Arthur wrote *The Valley of Fear* he had become exceedingly fed up with Holmes. A glaring example of this is his careless anachronistic depiction of Watson as knowing about Professor Moriarty's existence before his first acquaintance with him in FINA.

Worst of all, Holmes and Watson—the main reason why we love and study the Canon—are absent for most of the book. The novel itself was produced as two separate portions with what looks as a hastily written unsatisfactorily contrived epilogue to quickly bring together the two parts, in which ACD conveniently invokes Moriarty for the last time to use him as the glue to attain this and bring the work to its conclusion.



In its December 1999 issue, *The Baker Street Journal* ran a piece entitled, “Rating Sherlock Holmes,” in which the stories were ranked by eminent Sherlockians and Holmesians. VALL consistently ranked as the least favorite of the four novels.

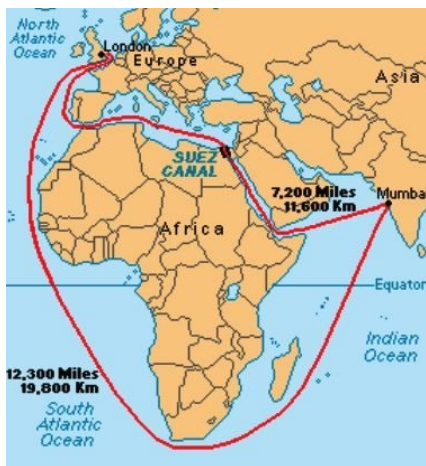
With good reason.



What else happened in 1888:

Empire

Mashonaland and Matabeleland declared British sphere of influence.



◀ Suez Canal Convention signed: Suez Canal declared open to ships of all nations and free from blockade.

Sarawak and Brunei placed under British protection.

British East Africa Company founded.

Britain

County Councils' Act establishes representative county-based authorities.

Jack the Ripper has murder spree in Whitechapel.

Annie Besant leads the London match factory girls on strike.

Commission to examine charges against Parnell.

General Buller founds RASC (Royal Army Service Corps).

County Councils Act: elects councils to take over administrative duties of JPs.

Miners Federation of Great Britain formed; demand for minimum wage.

Foundation of Scottish Labour Party.

Final report on Commission on Elementary Education Acts in England.

English Priory of Knights Hospitalers authorized by Royal Charter.

Foundation of London General Omnibus Company.

World

French Indochina formed.

Slavery abolished in Brazil.



Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany dies; Frederick III becomes Emperor from March to June, dies, and is succeeded by Wilhelm II.

◀ Benjamin Harrison elected President of United States; even though Cleveland received more popular votes, the Electoral College gives the election to Harrison.

Unemployment demonstration in Rome suppressed by the military.

Marshal Bazaine, French officer in charge of the Foreign Legion in Mexico during Emperor Maximilian's rule, died.

Agricultural depression causes Sweden to abandon free trade.

Phil Sheridan, who fought as a Union General against the South during the American Civil War dies.

Clashes in Paris between Radicals and Monarchists. Anarchists riot in favor of weavers of Lille and glass blowers of Lion. Paris stone masons and waiters strike for higher wages and shorter work schedules.

More liberal constitution granted to Serbia by Milan.

Use of Danish language forbidden in schools in German N. Schleswig.



Founding of the Dutch shipping line Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM). It supports the unification and development of the colonial economy.

Reconstructed free port of Hamburg opens.

Revolution in Haiti culminates in the destruction of public buildings and the flight of President Salomon.

◀ Ferdinand de Lesseps attempts to issue a fresh series of 1,000,000 bonds "to finish the Panama Canal." Proposal is withdrawn, de Lesseps resigns his directorship.

Italians near Alite relieved by the withdrawal of the Abyssinians.

Dr. Fitz, Boston surgeon, advocated the removal of the vermiform appendix in certain intestinal disorders, after several post-mortem operations. His advice is followed.

New York State establishes electric chair for method of death penalty.

Boulangier supported by Monarchists in France; popularity threatens Third Republic.

Main portion of Bremen incorporated into German Customs Union; parts of Wesser estuary remain free port.

Art

Van Gogh in Arles, Holland, paints *Sunflowers*, *Portrait of Armand Roulin*, *La Mousme*, and *Drawbridge at Arles*.



Oscar Wilde publishes *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

Casey at the Bat is recited publicly for the first time.

◀ John Phillip Sousa composes the military march *Semper Fidelis* for the U.S. Marine Corp.

Tchaikovsky performs *Symphony No. 5 in E Minor* at St. Petersburg.

George Moore publishes *Confessions of a Young Man*.

Cézanne paints *Peasant in a Blue Smock*.

Gilbert and Sullivan debut *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

Iannis Psichari, one of the creators of modern Greek literary language, publishes *My Journey* in demotic Greek.

Morris publishes *Dream of John Bull*, on a socialist commonwealth.

Matthew Arnold, critic, essayist, and poet dies.

Fontane publishes *Irrungen, Wirungen*.

Monet paints *Cap d'Antibes*.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch publishes *Troy Town*, a novel about Cornwall.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Trace Horse of the Bus Line, Place Clichy*.

Stevenson publishes *The Black Arrow*, a novel about the War of the Roses.

Rimsky-Korsakov composes *Scheherazade*.

Charles Doughty publishes travels in *Arabia Deserta*.

Seurat paints *Fishing Fleet at Port-en-Bessin*.

Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Tales*.

Kipling publishes *Soldiers Three*, and *Plain Tales from the Hills*; short stories of India.

Science and Technology



Dunlop's pneumatic tyre developed, principle still unproven.

Clinton Merriam establishes the National Geographical Society and they release their first magazine.

◀ Nichola Tesla makes first AC motor.

Drinking straws are invented.

George Eastman perfects the "Kodak" box camera, which uses photographic paper roll-film.

Emile Berliner improves the gramophone.

Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian explorer, crosses the Greenland icefield.

Hudson and Sclater publish *Argentine Ornithology*.

Mercerizing process introduced into cotton manufacture; facilitates later development of the artificial silk industry.

Incubators are first used for premature infants.

Institut Pasteur for the treatment of hydrophobia founded.

Sir J. Dewar and Sir F. Abel invent cordite.

William Burroughs patents the adding machine.

Louis Le Prince films the Roundhay Garden Scene, the earliest surviving film.

Heinrich Hertz produces electromagnetic waves, proves light and heat are both forms of electromagnetic radiation. Sir Oliver Lodge makes same discovery independently. Hertz used an induction coil; Lodge Leyden jars.

Next week's case: LAST

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..."

All Sherlock Holmes photos have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

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