



## Adventure XLVIII -- The Valley of Fear

### Note:

In addition to the 56 short stories about Sherlock Holmes, Doyle wrote 4 Holmes novels. This is one of them. It consists of Part 1, a Holmes detective case in England, and Part 2, a flashback in America involving the earlier life one of the characters in Part 1.

### First published:

As a serial in *The Strand Magazine*, September 1914 through May 1915; and *Associated Sunday Magazines*, September 20 through November 22, 1914.

### Time frame of story (stated):

The English part of the story began on January 7, 1888, the American flashback on February 4, 1875.

### Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Together at 221B

### Opening scene:

Holmes told Watson of Professor Moriarty, got a note from Porlock the snitch, and cleverly cracked a “book code”. Inspector Alec MacDonald then came and said that the person at the location mentioned in the coded message had been horribly murdered the previous evening, and asked Holmes to accompany him to the scene of the crime, Birlstone, in (East) Sussex.



**Client:**

Scotland Yard (Insp. MacDonald) consulted Holmes.

**Crime or concern:**

Apparent murder by sawed-off shotgun of John Douglas, owner-occupant of Birlstone Manor, by unknown assailant.

**Villain:**

The Scowrers, a gang of murderous thugs operating as a labor union and social lodge in a mining district in the USA.

**Motive:**

In his previous life in the USA Douglas had been a Pinkerton undercover agent who broke up the Scowrers, and got them hung or jailed. When the remaining Scowrers got out of jail, they hunted him down.

**Logic used to solve:**

Mrs. Douglas' behavior when told her husband was killed. Holmes said of his hypothetical wife, "Should I ever marry, Watson, I should hope to inspire my wife with some feeling which would prevent her from being walked off by a housekeeper when my corpse was lying within a few yards of her." . . . "Even the rawest investigators must be struck by the absence of the usual feminine ululation."

Odd circumstance that the presumed invader and killer had abandoned his bicycle, which was the very first thing he needed in order to facilitate his escape.

A single missing dumb-bell. "When water is near and a weight is missing it is not a very far-fetched supposition that something has been sunk in the water."

Observation by Watson of the victim's widow and Mr. Barker alone together in the garden, laughing together behind a concealing hedge. Their solemn masks of the tragedy had seemingly disappeared.

No wedding ring on the dead man's hand, although a second ring, normally worn above the wedding band was present.

A bloody footprint upon the window-sill that appeared to match the slipper of Cecil Barker, an old friend of Douglas, a suspect, and a guest at the house.

**Holmes' conclusion:**

"A lie, Watson — a great, big, thumping, obtrusive, uncompromising lie — that's what meets us on the threshold! There is our starting point. The whole story told by Barker is a lie. But Barker's story is corroborated by Mrs. Douglas. Therefore she is lying also. They are both lying, and in a conspiracy. It was obvious the assassin was alone with the dead man for some time with the lamp lit."

**Policemen:**

Insp. Alec MacDonald, of Scotland Yard. White Mason, a very live man and a personal friend of MacDonald. He was the local officer in Birlstone.

**Holmes' fees:**

No mention. This case is another example of the Yard calling in Holmes. It was never explained in the stories, but we believe there was a retainer arrangement in place so Holmes could be paid. Holmes did not seem to be working for the victim's family, but Mrs. Douglas did tell Holmes and the police to make every possible effort and to spare no money.

**Transport:**

Holmes & Watson plus MacDonald took train from Victoria Station to Birlstone.

**Food:**

In the opening scene, Holmes left his untasted breakfast before him as he pondered Porlock's note.

**Drink:**

In his early morning visit to 221B, Insp. MacDonald mentioned that a wee nip would keep out the raw morning chill. (For information on the smoking and drinking habits of The Scowlers in the USA, go to S&D in VALL.)

**Vices:**

After pushing away his untasted breakfast, Holmes lit the unsavoury pipe which was the companion of his deepest meditations.

Insp. MacDonald declined to smoke with his wee nip.

### **Other cases mentioned:**

Two cases in which Holmes had helped MacDonald attain success, already in his career.

A case of trespassing in which Holmes had been in Moriarty's rooms in circumstances about which he could hardly tell an official detective.

That of Jonathan Wild, a master criminal, from 1750 or thereabouts. Wild was the hidden force of the London criminals, to whom he sold his brains and his organization on a fifteen per cent commission.

Those of a hundred broken fighting men, pickpockets, blackmailers, and card sharpers, with every sort of crime in between, associated with Prof. Moriarty.

### **Notable Quotables:**

"I said it was a snorter! And a real snorter it is!" – White Mason

"One dumb-bell, Watson! Consider an athlete with one dumb-bell! Picture to yourself the unilateral development, the imminent danger of a spinal curvature. Shocking, Watson, shocking!" – Holmes

"I am not a whole-souled admirer of womankind." – Holmes

### **Other interesting:**

Billy the page is on the job at 221B in this story. He kind of comes and goes.

### **When all was said and done:**

Ted Baldwin, one of the Scowrers, hunted down Douglas to kill him, but in the struggle, Baldwin got his head blown to pieces by the truncated fowling-piece (sawed-off shotgun), rendering him unrecognizable. Then his intended victim switched places and clothing, etc., and hid in the house, hoping to trick his pursuers into believing the assassin had succeeded. Holmes figured it all out, and found Baldwin's effects which had been sunk in the moat. Mrs. Douglas and Barker were in on the deception, but had not broken the law except perhaps in reporting the death. Douglas was acquitted as having acted in self-defense.

There's more to this story. Read Part 2, The Scowrers. Go to the sidebar on the right, Sherlockian Links, Doyle's works. Open *The Valley of Fear*.

Douglas' hiding place in Birlstone Manor had also been used by King Charles I. The King had been chased around a bit during the troubles leading to the civil war. He also used a hiding spot at the Manor House of Hurlstone and left his crown there, as noted in *The Musgrave Ritual* (MUSG). None of this saved his neck.

**McMurdo's Camp**