

he is unable to join us for the Musgrave Ritual picnic. (Newcastle, NSW)

**Philip Cornell:** While re-reading Dorothy L. Sayers' incisive examination of 'The Dates in the Red-Headed League', I noted an overlooked piece of evidence which tends to corroborate Michael Dukes' thesis concerning Dr Watson's sojourn in Australia [August '98 issue of 'The Log']. Dr Watson contradicts himself in describing a Saturday in the Autumn of 1890 and mentioning a date of April 27th. Miss Sayers ingeniously demonstrates how Dr Watson's notoriously bad handwriting led to August 4 being misread as April 27 - but puzzles how Dr Watson failed to notice the blatant inconsistency. Might not someone who spent his formative years in a hemisphere where April is indeed an Autumn month be much more likely to overlook the error? The point is merely circumstantial but is, I think, suggestive. (Sydney, NSW)

**David Lewis:** Having downloaded the Challenger Game, as mentioned in the last log, I note that the complete text of Challenger stories are part of the package. So, for Doyle fans, it may be a worthwhile acquisition. (Sydney, NSW)

**Laura Kuhn:** Loved the website! I don't do much surfing, but finally decided to get out and search for Holmes sites. And, in yours, I was not disappointed! Best Canonical Greetings from Michigan, USA.

**Brian W. Pugh:** [The Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Society]: Just a note to say how much I enjoyed Volume four of the Hounds' Collection and of course the previous three issues...Dixon Smith tells me that the Log is one of the best periodicals in print...I hope that your editor Rosane McNamara and her husband enjoyed their visit to London and the Sherlock Holmes Statue unveiling, I know I did. (Lewes, Sussex, UK)

**Philip Cornell:** Edwards S. Smith Jr, in 'The Reichenbach Plan, [last issue of The Log] has assembled a good deal more circumstantial evidence (tricky thing though it is) to support his contention that Sherlock Holmes' birthday falls on May 4th than the traditionalists have ever been able to adduce for January 6th. Since the Sydney Passengers have been in the habit of meeting to celebrate the Master's birthday, and since an early January date for this activity is often inconvenient due to its proximity to Christmas, New Year hangovers, absence on holidays, or post-Christmas poverty, could I float the notion that our observance of Holmes' natal day should be moved to May in future, in recognition of Mr Smith's ingenious research on the subject. What do other Passengers think? (Sydney, NSW)

**Admiral Lionel Fredman:** The Captain reported recently that a signal was received from Admiral Fredman from his flagship on station off Newcastle conveying his congratulations on the latest issue of 'The Log'. He was particularly pleased at the international flavour of the contributions. His health ebbs and flows at the moment - arthritis being the main problem. Due to a prior engagement,

## Some Observations Upon the Date of the Tragedy of Birlstone: The Evidence of Whitaker's Almanack, 1890 by Hugo Koch

### J. A Review of the Literature

Rarely in Holmesian chronology has so monumental an oversight been made as when Jay Finley Christ wrote, regarding the dating of "The Valley of Fear", that "The reference to the 'Almanac' is worthless. I have looked, and looked again."<sup>1</sup> The clear and incontrovertible evidence of Whitaker's *Almanack for the Year of Our Lord* for the all-inclusive period of 1881-1914 points to one year, and one year only: 1890.

By the descriptive criteria of the almanack set forth in "The Valley of Fear", the year of 1890 is the only year which fits. As we will see, the almanack for the previous year, 1889, does, indeed, contain the requisite words of the cipher pretty much as Dr. Watson recorded them: on page 412, column two, to be precise.

One does not have to accept the fanciful theory of Archibald G. Macdonell<sup>2</sup> that Holmes "invented" Moriarty, that he "selected a perfectly ordinary professor and fastened on to the unfortunate man the fearful reputation which has dogged him ever since", to cover up his own failures, to accept his judgement that "by far the most important date in the whole saga of 221B Baker Street is the year in which the stranger was killed in Birlstone Manor, Sussex."<sup>3</sup>

The dating of "The Valley of Fear" is a critically important problem which has divided Holmesian scholarship for over sixty years. Bell<sup>4</sup> assigns it to 1887. He cites Dr. Watson's statement that "those were the early days at the end of the 'eighties",<sup>5</sup> together with the affirmative reply of Barker to the question "This business dates back not less than eleven years at the least?"<sup>6</sup> The occurrences in Vermissa Valley took place from February to May, 1875.<sup>7</sup> Bell states, consistent with his overall chronology, "Any date earlier than 1887 is accordingly ruled out; and, as the episode took place before Watson's marriage, no later year is possible."<sup>8</sup>

Watson's reply of "Never" to Holmes' apparent question, "You have probably never heard of Professor Moriarty?" on April 24, 1891, in "The Final Problem"<sup>9</sup> Bell attributes to Watson's "poor memory" and probable absence of his notes."<sup>10</sup> The presence of Billy<sup>11</sup> is explained by Bell as follows: "Billy" was

<sup>1</sup> Jay Finley Christ, *An Irregular Chronology of Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street*. Chicago: The Fanlight House, 1947, p.62.

<sup>2</sup> A.G. Macdonell, "Mr. Moriarty" in *Baker Street Studies*, edited by H.W. Bell. London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1934, p.167.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.161.

<sup>4</sup> H.W. Bell, *Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson: The Chronology of Their Adventures*. London: Constable & Co. Ltd., 1932, p.33.

<sup>5</sup> John H. Watson, M.D., "The Valley of Fear" in *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, edited by William S. Baring-Gould. 2 vols New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1967, p.475 of Vol I ("Annotated").

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.498.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.521.

<sup>8</sup> Bell, p.34.

<sup>9</sup> *Annotated*, Vol. II, p.302.

<sup>10</sup> Bell, pp.34-35.

<sup>11</sup> *Annotated*, Vol. I, p.473, 475.



perhaps a generic name for pages at 221B.<sup>12</sup> It will be noted that the only other cases in which Billy is mentioned are "The Problem of Thor Bridge"<sup>13</sup>, dated by Bell as 1900,<sup>14</sup> the even later "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone"<sup>15</sup>, dated by Bell as 1903,<sup>16</sup> in which Billy is described as "the young but very wise and tactful page..." Starrett<sup>17</sup> mentions a similar, obvious possibility: "Unless, indeed, the earlier page was also called Billy..." Bell acknowledges "...the difficulty that Douglas is represented as knowing, in January, 1887, nearly a year before the publication of "A Study in Scarlet", that Watson was Holmes's biographer. The probable solution is that Watson was betrayed by the vanity of authorship into a characteristic piece of carelessness, when, twenty-seven years later, he prepared the story for the Strand."<sup>18</sup>

Mr. W. S. Baring-Gould<sup>19</sup> places VALL in the year 1888. Zeisler,<sup>20</sup> too, assigns it to that year, with an empirical, meteorological argument that, of the years 1887-1889, only in 1888 was the temperature above freezing, namely 32.5 degrees minimum, on the night of January 6, making it possible for Barker and Douglas to lower Baldwin's clothes into a moat,<sup>21</sup> which would not be frozen over, or even frozen solid, as it would be in 1887 (27 degrees) and in 1889 (19.8 to 29.5 degrees).<sup>22</sup>

Zeisler also states<sup>23</sup> that only 1888 was sufficiently dark - i.e. the night of January 6, when Ames and Barker said they looked out of the window, "but the night was dark and nothing could be seen or heard"<sup>24</sup> - the moon that year being at last quarter and not rising before midnight. In 1887, the moon was nearly full on the night of January 6, while in 1889, it was full on January 6 (though setting at 9:53pm)<sup>25</sup>

Despite this early setting of the moon on January 6, Zeisler says,<sup>26</sup> 1889 is still eliminated because the moon did not set until midnight on January 8, and so Holmes', Watson's and Inspector Macdonald's vigil of that night<sup>27</sup> would have been impossible. In 1888 the moon on January 8 did not rise before midnight.<sup>28</sup> Christ<sup>29</sup> dates VALL in 1889, pointing out that some items in "the time sequence in the odyssey of Birdy Edwards-Douglas...will not fit together..."<sup>30</sup> because Watson wishes us "...to journey back some twenty years in time..."<sup>31</sup> to 1875. Christ explains that "...the ten year sentence could not have applied to the men who chased Birdy from Chicago. These men must have been among those who got the very shortest of the 'various degrees of punishment'<sup>32</sup> ..."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bell, p.35.

<sup>13</sup> Annotated, Vol. II, p.591.

<sup>14</sup> Bell, p.107.

<sup>15</sup> Annotated, Vol. II, p.735, 736.

<sup>16</sup> Bell, p.118.

<sup>17</sup> Vincent Starrett, "The Singular Adventures of Martha Hudson" in Bell, *Baker Street Studies*, pp.104-105.

<sup>18</sup> Bell, p.34.

<sup>19</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.471: also see William S. Baring-Gould, *The Chronological Holmes*. New York: privately produced, 1955.

<sup>20</sup> Ernest Bloomfield Zeisler, *Baker Street Chronology*. Chicago: Alexander J. Isaacs, 1953, p.43.

<sup>21</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.519.

<sup>22</sup> Zeisler, p.13.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp.13-14.

<sup>24</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.496.

<sup>25</sup> Zeisler, p.44.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp.43-44.

<sup>27</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.514.

<sup>28</sup> Zeisler, p.44.

<sup>29</sup> Christ, p.61.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.62.

<sup>31</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.520.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.572.

<sup>33</sup> Christ, p.62.

Blakeney,<sup>34</sup> correctly, as evidence of Whitaker's Almanack reveals, assigns it to 1890. He calculates that a literal acceptance of VALL's text dates bring it to 1892,<sup>35</sup> i.e. 1875 plus Ted Baldwin's presumed ten years imprisonment,<sup>36</sup> plus the "nearer seven"<sup>37</sup> than six years that Douglas, after Baldwin's release, had already fled California. Blakeney sensibly rejects such a 1892 date as an impossibility<sup>38</sup> - unlike the post-Return chronologists, whose fanciful theories we will presently see. An 1892 dating of VALL fundamentally contradicts the canon, since in "The Final Problem" Moriarty perishes at Reichenbach on May 4, 1891.<sup>39</sup>

"...The justification for the date of January 1890 (and indeed any date other than 1892, which is itself impossible) requires that Baldwin got out before his full term of ten years, and there is nothing unlikely about that. If such a murderous villain could escape the death penalty, there would be nothing improbable in his managing to get out of prison before his time, whether by good conduct or by bribery. The latter course seems most likely, since the police in America were evidently no less corrupt then than now."<sup>40</sup>

G.B. Newton<sup>41</sup> is among the few correctly to date VALL in 1890. He argues, reasonably, that Watson's "Never" in "The Final Problem" was merely a "rhetorical device",<sup>42</sup> and that Billy was "the boy in buttons" mentioned in A Case of Identity (1889),<sup>43</sup> not the Billy of MAZA and THOR. His analysis is rendered very flawed, however, in that he argues that the 1875 date in VALL is "...likely to be an error or misprint for 1865..."<sup>44</sup> and that Watson "...wrote 1875 when he meant 1865, the error subsequently remaining unnoticed".<sup>45</sup> The extra-canonical, historical date of May, 1876 for the Molly Maguires trials<sup>46</sup> definitively destroys that argument.

Boucher<sup>47</sup> places VALL in 1897, more than five years later than Moriarty's death as given in FINA, and contends that the events at Birlstone "did not involve Moriarty..." but that Watson simply wrote him into the story because "the public likes Moriarty". One suspects that Boucher himself may not have intended to be taken entirely seriously, for this great calumny against the veracity ("I could not tamper with the facts.")<sup>48</sup> of Watson, "the one fixed point in a changing age."<sup>49</sup> Zeisler, in an article<sup>50</sup> refuting Boucher, concedes to him that 1897 had, at least, the moon and temperature conditions required by the VALL text, while, Zeisler says, 1898 and 1899 clearly did not.

The evidence of Whitaker's Almanack, as we shall see, eliminates 1897, 1898 and 1899 as well. Zeisler elucidates that Boucher is compelled to such a late date because he makes the understandable, but mistaken, assumption, that Edwards flees from Chicago only at the end of the assumed ten years imprisonment of Baldwin, i.e. in or about 1885, or 1886. Then, the additional "...not less than eleven

<sup>34</sup> T.S. Blakeney, *Sherlock Holmes: Fact or Fiction?*. London: John Murray, 1932, p.73.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.74.

<sup>36</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.572.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.498.

<sup>38</sup> Blakeney, p.74.

<sup>39</sup> Annotated, Vol. II, p.312 et. seq.

<sup>40</sup> Blakeney, p.75-76.

<sup>41</sup> G.B. Newton, "The Date of The Valley of Fear", *Sherlock Holmes Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 4 (Winter 1955), pp.38-42.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.42.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.40.

<sup>46</sup> Allan Pinkerton. *The Molly Maguires and The Detectives*. New York: G.W. DillinghamCo., 1905, p.507.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Boucher. "Introduction" to *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. New York: The Limited Editions Club, 1952, p.v-xviii.

<sup>48</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.611.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p.803.

<sup>50</sup> Ernest B. Zeisler, "Concerning The Valley of Fear", *Baker Street Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1954), pp.144-147.



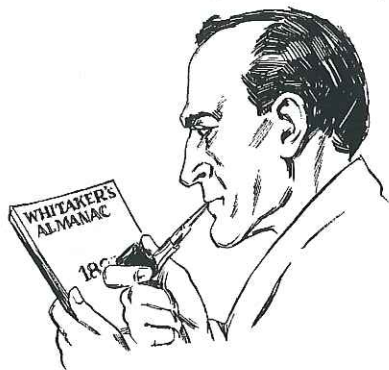
years...<sup>51</sup> would bring us to 1897. Superficially, the text does seem to imply this,<sup>52</sup> but perhaps it is not really so. If Edwards was chased from Chicago soon after he got there by one of the lesser Scowlers, then a pre-1891 date is eminently possible. Indeed, from the evidence of FINA, we know this must be so, for Moriarty perished on May 4, 1891. Zeisler cogently points out that "for the first American edition Watson divided the final paragraph into *two* paragraphs, the second beginning with 'From Chicago he was chased...'...for...the first version was misleading."<sup>53</sup>

Macdonell places VALL in 1899 or "...even later..."<sup>54</sup> on the basis of similar assumptions of a full ten years imprisonment of Baldwin,<sup>55</sup> and Birdy Edwards' flight from Chicago only at the conclusion of such a ten year term.<sup>56</sup> He concludes that Watson "...meant the end of the 'nineties and not the end of the 'eighties. It is much easier to suppose that the worthy doctor made a slip of the pen, rather than that Ted Baldwin got off scot-free."<sup>57</sup> Of course, as we have seen, if Edwards was chased from Chicago by some of the lesser Scowlers soon after he arrived there, then Baldwin could have received and served a very substantial portion of his ten year sentence, though perhaps not the full ten years, and a pre-1891 date would still be possible.

The presence of Moriarty in 1899 or later is explained by Macdonell in the bizarre fashion already noted: Holmes "...in 1887 was very seriously ill. He had been working never less than fifteen hours a day for over two months,<sup>58</sup> and on one occasion had worked for five days at a stretch...on April 14th of that year Watson was summoned to his sickbed in Lyons...from this time for several years the great detective was but a shadow of his former self...The story (of Moriarty, on April 24, 1891 in FINA) in effect, was this: that the long series of failures was due not to Holmes' mental decline since his nervous breakdown, but to the existence of a super-criminal, a brain of the first order, sitting 'motionless, like a spider in the center of its web'...(after Reichenbach) the great detective was free to regain his health by travelling in Tibet, passing through Persia...

"Feeling himself fully restored in 1894, he returned to London and resumed his practice. Between '94 and '99 it must have occurred to Holmes that the occasion might arise a second time in which he would have need of an excuse for covering up failures, and he decided to resuscitate Moriarty. The explanation of how Moriarty survived...would be simple. Just as Holmes clung to one rock, so Moriarty might be presumed to have clung to another. And by 1899, when the old crowd at the Yard, who had been deceived by the first bluff, had all retired, and been succeeded by men like MacDonald, the opportunity was right for working the bluff again..."<sup>59</sup>

These nonsensical fancies of Macdonell's which he concedes (boasts?) "throw a somewhat lurid light upon the character of the great detective"<sup>60</sup> need concern us no further. There is not the slightest canonical basis for them. That section of his essay which discussed the problems involved in VALL's chronology, though the solution offered was patently wrong, remains an important, early contribution to Holmesian scholarship.



<sup>51</sup> Annotated, Vol. I, p.498.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., pp.572-573.

<sup>53</sup> Zeisler, BSJ, p.146.

<sup>54</sup> Macdonell, p.164.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.162.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p.166.

<sup>58</sup> Annotated, Vol.I, p.331.

<sup>59</sup> Macdonell, pp.167-174.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.175.

Gavin Brend, perhaps the latest of the post-Return chronologists, places VALL in 1900.<sup>61</sup> It could, says Brend, "...of course be later than 1900...But one is reluctant to travel further down the years...Already we have a discrepancy of at least ten years. Surely that is quite enough."<sup>62</sup> Brend, too, of course, makes the same assumptions about a full ten years imprisonment of Baldwin and Edwards' flight from Chicago only at its conclusion, that caused Macdonell and Boucher also to assign very late post-Return dates to the events at Birlstone. Brend points to the presence of Billy, whom we "meet...again in the summer of 1903 in *The Mazarin Stone*..."<sup>63</sup> to support his position. This, though, as we have already seen, is far from conclusive.

His explanation of the presence of Moriarty in 1900 is complex, admittedly ingenious, but, while it does not cast the aspersions on Holmes' "...character, moral sense, intellectual integrity, and the devotion to truth..."<sup>64</sup> that Macdonell's does, is equally fanciful and entirely lacking in canonical basis. Furthermore, like Boucher's, it is a great calumny against Watson's veracity, for it asserts that the good doctor caused the publication of both "The Adventure of the Empty House" and VALL when he knew their contents to be substantially false.<sup>65</sup>

Brend's theory is one which posits the existence of a deutero-Moriarty: The Moriarty involved in the affairs at Birlstone, though he is called the "Professor" in VALL, was really Colonel James Moriarty, the brother of the deceased Professor; "a new leader (who) had arisen to replace Professor Moriarty, a new Napoleon in the world of crime, who was to prove even more elusive than his predecessor."<sup>66</sup> Watson, at Holmes' insistence, made this change to "avoid the law of libel."<sup>67</sup> "But so aloof is he from general suspicion, so immune from criticism – so admirable in his management and self effacement, that for the 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."<sup>68</sup>

Brend does not believe Holmes' account of his travels in Tibet, Mecca and Khartoum during the Great Hiatus. "Probably Holmes realized right from the moment that the Professor toppled into the Reichenbach Falls that the gang would continue to operate under his brother, the Colonel. Far from burying himself in Tibet, the obvious course was to disguise himself, to mix with the gang and to fight them from the inside. We know that Holmes could never resist a disguise. At different times, we find him masquerading as a plumber with rising business, a loafer, an old salt, a drunken groom, an amiable and simple-minded nonconformist Clergyman, an opium addict, a venerable Italian priest, a crippled bookseller, an unshaven French *ouvrier* in a blue blouse, a workman looking for a job, and an old woman. Clearly therefore this would be the course he would adopt."<sup>69</sup> This undercover strategy was successful, for, in April, 1894, as recorded in EMPT,<sup>70</sup> "...the gang soon collapsed as an organization...Holmes decided that the period of the underground war could come to an end, and that the time was now ripe for him to resume life once more in Baker Street."<sup>71</sup> Colonel Moriarty himself had, however, not been brought to justice, for he "bore a charmed life."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Gavin Brend. *My Dear Holmes: A Study in Sherlock*. London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1951, p.112.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Macdonell, p.161.

<sup>65</sup> Brend, p.121; p.122; p.126.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p.114.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p.124.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp.114-115.

<sup>70</sup> Annotated, Vol.II, p.337.

<sup>71</sup> Brend, p.120.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.120.



Brend admits Watson really believed Holmes dead when he wrote FINA. He also believes EMPT was *written* when Watson entirely believed its contents, including the account of the travels in Tibet, etc.<sup>73</sup> Brend is of the opinion that Watson learned the truth concerning how Holmes had really spent those three years only in later years, "but it is clear that Watson knew the facts by 1900..."<sup>74</sup> EMPT was finally published in 1903 "without any amendment."<sup>75</sup> Thus, it must be noted, Brend's fanciful speculations are a serious calumny against Watson's truthfulness, a calumny rendered all the more unjust by the fact that Brend, of course, makes similar accusations about Watson's publication of VALL. Brend explains that by 1900, his date for VALL, "...the gang had been reorganized, and it was operating as efficiently as in the days of the Professor."<sup>76</sup>

This mosaic of the deuterio-Moriarty is woven together into a whole by Brend from the four separate facts (admittedly interesting, though all are capable of being explained in far simpler ways than Brend's sensationalist theory) that: (a) Colonel Sebastian Moran was still alive in September 1902 in "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client"<sup>77</sup>; (b) Professor Moriarty's Christian name is given in EMPT as "James"<sup>78</sup> while in FINA<sup>79</sup> we are told this also is the name of the Professor's brother; the Colonel<sup>80</sup>; (c) there are references in Watson's writings to no less than three, apparently distinct, cases of "The Second Stain". Since, says Brend, there could not really have been three of them, and since two are referred to in cases published during the Great Hiatus ("The Yellow Face",<sup>81</sup> February, 1893, and "The Naval Treaty"<sup>82</sup>, October, 1893), "second stain" must have been a signal for the presence of a coded message from Mycroft to Holmes during the latter's underground struggle against the Moriarty gang;<sup>83</sup> (d) Watson's "Never" in FINA, contrasted with his knowledge of Moriarty in VALL,<sup>84</sup> a point we have already treated.

A date of 1900 or later for VALL is absurd, on the canonical evidence of FINA. But, in absolute fairness to Brend, while the evidence of Whitaker's Almanack, analyzed in the next section, *does* eliminate the year 1900, a single other year besides 1890 – 1904 – is also not eliminated. 1890 and 1904 are the *only* two years the empirical examination of the almanack does not eliminate, for the all-inclusive period of 1881-1914.

1890 is the *only possible year prior to 1892*, 1891 itself also having been eliminated. As we shall now see, 1890 is the date of the tragedy of Birlstone, according to the evidence of Whitaker's Almanack.

### *¶¶ The Evidence of Whitaker's Almanack*

"Pshaw! They did not know how to look." These words, true of the burglars of Irene Adler's house, are perhaps even more true of those who have concluded, like Jay Finley Christ, that "The reference to the 'Almanack' is worthless. I have looked and looked again."

It is true that the "page 534" cited in VALL is a fictionalized number. Perhaps Watson chose such a number rather than giving the real page number, 412, subtly to convey to the careful reader that the

73 Ibid., p.121.

74 Ibid., p.123.

75 Ibid., p.122.

76 Ibid., p.124.

77 Ibid., p.110; see Annotated, Vol.II, p.672.

78 Annotated, Vol.II, p.346.

79 Ibid., Vol.II, p.346.

80 Brend, p.110.

81 Annotated, Vol.I, p.575.

82 Annotated, Vol.II, p.167.

83 Brend, p.116 et seq.

84 Ibid., p.111.

case could not have occurred before 1888, since 1887 is the first year Whitaker's Almanack contained that many pages (632, as opposed to 488 in 1886 and fewer each preceding year) and we are told that both the current almanack and the previous year's edition had a page 534. But why Watson chose to fictionalize the actual number of the page is only of peripheral interest to our enquiry.

The critically central point is that, while the page number may have been fictionalized, Watson's seemingly casual narrative of Holmes' reference to the two almanacks is anything but fictionalized. It is an uncannily accurate, precise and detailed account – indeed, it is a formula, the key by means of which all doors are unlocked, and the heart of the puzzle – the date of the events at Birlstone – is effortlessly fathomed.

A caution, however: Like all formulae it must be followed precisely and in its entirety in order to yield the desired result. Let us call the real page "534" page "X". Now, page "X" has the following characteristics:

- (a) in the current almanack IN COLUMN TWO, there must be "a substantial block of print...dealing with the trade and resources of British India.
- (b) ALSO, and IN COLUMN TWO, there must appear the key word "Mahratta" ("pig's-bristles" we can safely ignore).
- (c) ALSO, in the previous year's almanack, ON THAT SAME PAGE NUMBER AND ALSO IN COLUMN TWO, there must appear substantially those words employed in Porlock's cipher message ("There...is...danger...may...come...very...soon...one...rich...country..." etc.)

Whitaker's Almanacks, from 1880 to 1914, each year contained a section, "The British Empire in India". This section contained only one place where the key word "Mahratta" appears. We designate that as the "The Mahrattas" paragraph (refer illustrations p.43) and it does deal with the trade and resources of British India. It transpires, most fascinatingly, that the place WHERE THE WORDS OF PORLOCK'S CIPHER APPEAR IS ALSO IN THE "THE MAHRATTAS" PARAGRAPH. It contains the words "dangerous", "very soon", "country", many of the other minor words, and more than adequate other language to complete the sense of the cipher message (refer to illustrations p.43).

It is important to keep in mind that we are not told that column two of the same page in the previous year's almanack is not also "a substantial block of print dealing ... with the trade and resources of British India" which contains the word "Mahratta". We are told nothing about the content of the page in the previous year's almanack. We are only told that this is its content in the current year's almanack.

Neither are we told that the page in the current year's edition did not also contain the words of Porlock's cipher and could have equally served to convey the message, had Porlock chosen to use it instead and altered his word numbers accordingly. We are merely told that the page in the previous year's edition did contain these words, and that it was it that Porlock did use. We must also bear in mind that the words of the cipher message must appear, in the previous year's almanack, on the same page number as the "substantial block of print" in the current one, and must also appear in column two.

The practice in the printing of Whitaker's Almanacks was that, from year to year, the pagination of "The British Empire in India" section and thus also of the "The Mahrattas" paragraph was very similar. The paragraph, for example, might be on a certain page in column one in one year; and on that same page but (with a minor alteration) in column two in the previous year. In some pairs of years, it would not be on exactly the same page number. Occasionally, the "The Mahrattas" page would be exactly identical in every respect (same page, same layout, literally word for word).

An examination of these apparently minor differences in editions from year to year constitute in actuality a most remarkably efficient mechanism for eliminating most years. As the following chart containing this



data from the Whitaker's Almanack for the years 1880 to 1914 demonstrates, the precise and strict application of Watson's formula results in the elimination of every year during that period except for 1890, the years of The Great Hiatus (1892 to 1894), and 1904 (by 1903 the words "very soon" had been expunged from the "The Mahrattas" paragraph, and so its potential for conveying the cipher message is thus greatly reduced.

1890 is, indeed, quite literally "...at the end of the 'eighties".

As is recorded in the Gospel of Luke, "... seek and you shall find".

Explanatory Key

Reason:

A: Almanack of year being considered has an insufficient number of pages, i.e. fewer than 534 pages.

B: The year being considered is fundamentally irreconcilable with the most basic chronology of the canon, e.g. 1880, because the Battle of Maiwand had not yet occurred and Watson was still in Afghanistan; 1892-1894, because of The Great Hiatus, during which, wherever Holmes was, he was, with a certainty, not practicing in Baker Street. Of course, any year after 1891 is irreconcilable with the canon, but, since there are post-Return chronologists for VALL, and since the purpose of this study is to investigate their claims empirically by the evidence of Whitaker's Almanacks, this reason will not be employed as a basis for elimination, except for 1892-1894, the years of The Great Hiatus. No one, to our knowledge, has ever argued that VALL somehow occurred during these years.

C: The almanack of the year being considered AND/OR the previous year's almanack has the "The Mahrattas" paragraph in Column One instead of the required Column Two.

D: The "The Mahrattas" paragraph in the previous year's almanack contains no "very soon". This reason, by itself, is not, strictly speaking, an absolute elimination, but it does greatly reduce the potential to convey the cipher message, and so greatly reduce also the probability of the year considered being the correct one.

E: In the almanack of the year under consideration, the "The Mahrattas" paragraph page (i.e. the only page therein fulfilling the requirement of having both "a substantial block of print dealing...with the trade and resources of British India" and the word "Mahratta") is not in the previous year's almanack the same page number as that containing the "The Mahrattas" paragraph (i.e. the only page therein fulfilling the requirement of containing substantially those words employed in Porlock's cipher, e.g. "dangerous", "very soon", "country", etc.)

F: The "The Mahrattas" paragraph page is exactly identical in the almanack of the year under consideration and in the previous year's almanack. Thus, the year being considered must be eliminated, since the message, would have been yielded up equally by reference to the current year's almanack, and Holmes would not have needed to have recourse to the previous year's edition.

The 1880 Almanack contains 384 pages. The "British Empire in India" section comprises pp.236-248. Its "The Mahrattas" paragraph is on page 237, in column 1. The "The Mahrattas" paragraph lacks the words "very soon" (which began to appear in said paragraph in 1887 and continued through 1893; their absence is hereinafter designated as \*). Can this year be eliminated? Yes, for reasons A and B.

This data for each of the following years is thus:

Table with 4 columns: Year, Pages, 'British Empire in India' section of the 'The Mahrattas' paragraph Eliminated?, Reasons. Rows for 1881 and 1888.

Table with 4 columns: Year, Pages, Yes/No, A, C, D, E. Rows for years 1882 through 1890.

412 The British Empire in India. at the head of a mighty host, and captured and sacked Delhi in 1556; he left behind him Khir Khan, who thenceforward held the reins of power. A period of internecine, tyranny, and anarchy ensued, and fittingly paved the way for the total conquest of the country by the Mogul emperors. The Mogul Empire.—The Mongols, or Moghuls, a Mohammedan Power, after overrunning Central and Western Asia, arrived in 1519, under Genghis Khan, on the frontiers of India, and, as has been stated, again and again invaded that country. In 1526, during the invasion of Timur-lane, or Taimur, a great part of Hindustan was laid waste. In 1526 Sultan Babur, a descendant of both these Tartar chiefs, overthrew the last of the Afghan kings at Panipat, and founded the Mogul Empire. Humayun (1530-56) lost the whole of the territory conquered by Babur, but recovered a portion of it shortly before his death. Akbar, his son (1556-1605), being a minor, the Government was for five years under a regency, but it was a much longer time before his numerous opponents were subdued and an Empire firmly established, embracing Cabul, Candahar, all Hindustan, and a portion of the Deccan. Akbar followed up his conquests by important financial reforms; he was tolerant in religion, and just to all classes of his subjects. Among the great men whom he drew around him were Raja Todā Mal, his able finance minister; Abul Fazl, the historian of his reign; and Faiz, the poet; nor should we overlook Bairam Khan, Akbar's faithful guardian in his youth. Jehangir (1603-27) received in 1615 an embassy despatched by James I., under the conduct of Sir Thomas Roe, the first European ambassador to the Mogul Empire. Under Shah Jahan (1627-58) the Mogul Empire reached its zenith. Many public works and grand buildings testify to his magnificence and taste, amongst others the Taj Mahal at Agra, which is said to have been the work of a French architect—Austin de Bordeaux. The close of Shah Jahan's reign was embittered by the rivalries of his four sons. Aurangzeb (1658-1707) defeated his brothers and put them to death; his father he kept a prisoner for the rest of his life. Aurangzeb had great ability and courage, and was a master of dissimulation; but bigotry and distrust were the basis of his policy, and the decline of the Mogul Empire dates from his reign. Four sons disputed the right of succession: at last Bahadur Shah gained the coveted crown, but only for five years. Dying in 1712, he was succeeded by his son, Jahandar Shah, who was cruelly murdered by one Farokhizar in a great-grandson of the famous Aurangzeb, who seized on the crown. He in turn was himself put to death six years later, and Muhammad Shah, grandson of Bahadur, came to the throne. The viceregal of his own appointments grew more and more palatial, and all unconsciously aided in the growth of the Mahratta power. One of them refused himself to his sovereign, and the Mahrattas in consequence subdued the Deccan. In 1741, to avenge an alleged insult, Nadir Shah of Persia invaded India, captured Delhi, and gave the city over to the mercy of his terrible followers, who are said to have slain more than 100,000 of the inhabitants, and to have looted as contributions and carried off as plunder treasure equal to more than £20,000,000 sterling. In spite of this, however, the Mahrattas, peace was only obtained by giving up to the conqueror all the country west of the Indus. On the death of Muhammad, in 1748, the country was fast going to decay—it was, in fact, only waiting for a fresh conqueror. The Mahrattas were there ready for the work to be done. About 1724 the Deccan, Oudh, and Bengal became practically independent under the rule of Shikhar (ancestor of the present Nizam), Sadat Khan, and Alivardi Khan respectively. The Mahrattas.—Simultaneously with the decline of the Mogul Empire, the power of the Mahrattas, who were Hindoos, and the country from which they came may be roughly described by drawing two lines from Nagpur to Bhus and Goa on the west coast. The founder of their power was Sivaji (1672-1680), a chieftain of the family of Bhoonslah, Baisaji Viharnab (1712-1750), Petalwa, or Prime Minister, succeeded in making that office of paramount importance and hereditary in his family; Sivaji's descendants thenceforth holding a merely nominal position as Rajas of Satara. Under the Petalwas, aided by Scindia, Holkar, and the Gaekwar, who forced independent States about this time, the Mahrattas rapidly extended their territory and influence. In 1762 Delhi was in their hands, and though they suffered a disastrous defeat at Panipat in 1761, as the hands of Ahmed Shah, the Afghan invader, they remained for some time the first Power in India, and were the most dangerous opponents of the English. Like the Pindaris, a horde of freebooters who followed in their train, they were a scourge to the country, and it was fortunate for India that the empire at which they had but too successfully aimed was nothing more than a shadow of its former self. The various native states within its bounds were fated very soon to bend before the superior arms of European adventurers, who, either from love of adventure or thoughts of gain, were journeying towards its shores. It was not until the Pindaris and Mahrattas were overthrown, in 1818, that India enjoyed the blessings of internal peace. EUROPEAN ADVENTURE.—Before the discovery of the route to India round the Cape of Good Hope, the trade of India and of the Indian Ocean, organized by the Phoenicians, was being successfully carried on by their successors the Arabs, the chief centres of trade being Calicut, Ormuz, Aden, and Malacca. Vasco di Gama anchored before Calicut on 20th May, 1498, and from that time until they lost their naval supremacy, the Portuguese may be considered to have enjoyed the monopoly of Indian trade. The first Portuguese viceroy, Francis of Almeida (1505-1509), established numerous factories and fortresses, and took possession of Ceylon and the Maldiva Islands; while his successor, Alfonso de Albuquerque, captured Goa (1510), and extended in various places the Portuguese dominion, but notably on the Malabar and Malacca coasts. This dominion had, in 1542, practically amounted to an entire renunciation of the Asiatic coast trade with Europe from the Persian Gulf to Japan, and for nearly sixty years afterwards the Portuguese were the sole masters of the southern coast of Asia. When the Portuguese crown fell into weak hands the power in the Eastern sea began to decline, and it was almost nullified in 1570, when the emperor Philip II. and the Asiatic interests of Spain and Portugal were united under Philip II., and the Asiatic interests of Spain. When the Portuguese had brought the commerce of India to London they were well

412 The British Empire in India. at the head of a mighty host, and captured and sacked Delhi in 1556; he left behind him Khir Khan, who thenceforward held the reins of power. A period of internecine, tyranny, and anarchy ensued, and fittingly paved the way for the total conquest of the country by the Mogul emperors. The Mogul Empire.—The Mongols, or Moghuls, a Mohammedan Power, after overrunning Central and Western Asia, arrived in 1519, under Genghis Khan, on the frontiers of India, and, as has been stated, again and again invaded that country. In 1526, during the invasion of Timur-lane, or Taimur, a great part of Hindustan was laid waste. In 1526 Sultan Babur, a descendant of both these Tartar chiefs, overthrew the last of the Afghan kings at Panipat, and founded the Mogul Empire. Humayun (1530-56) lost the whole of the territory conquered by Babur, but recovered a portion of it shortly before his death. Akbar, his son (1556-1605), being a minor, the Government was for five years under a regency, but it was a much longer time before his numerous opponents were subdued and an Empire firmly established, embracing Cabul, Candahar, all Hindustan, and a portion of the Deccan. Akbar followed up his conquests by important financial reforms; he was tolerant in religion, and just to all classes of his subjects. Among the great men whom he drew around him were Raja Todā Mal, his able finance minister; Abul Fazl, the historian of his reign; and Faiz, the poet; nor should we overlook Bairam Khan, Akbar's faithful guardian in his youth. Jehangir (1603-27) received in 1615 an embassy despatched by James I., under the conduct of Sir Thomas Roe, the first European ambassador to the Mogul Empire. Under Shah Jahan (1627-58) the Mogul Empire reached its zenith. Many public works and grand buildings testify to his magnificence and taste, amongst others the Taj Mahal at Agra, which is said to have been the work of a French architect—Austin de Bordeaux. The close of Shah Jahan's reign was embittered by the rivalries of his four sons. Aurangzeb (1658-1707) defeated his brothers and put them to death; his father he kept a prisoner for the rest of his life. Aurangzeb had great ability and courage, and was a master of dissimulation; but bigotry and distrust were the basis of his policy, and the decline of the Mogul Empire dates from his reign. Four sons disputed the right of succession: at last Bahadur Shah gained the coveted crown, but only for five years. Dying in 1712, he was succeeded by his son, Jahandar Shah, who was cruelly murdered by one Farokhizar in a great-grandson of the famous Aurangzeb, who seized on the crown. He in turn was himself put to death six years later, and Muhammad Shah, grandson of Bahadur, came to the throne. The viceregal of his own appointments grew more and more palatial, and all unconsciously aided in the growth of the Mahratta power. One of them refused himself to his sovereign, and the Mahrattas in consequence subdued the Deccan. In 1741, to avenge an alleged insult, Nadir Shah of Persia invaded India, captured Delhi, and gave the city over to the mercy of his terrible followers, who are said to have slain more than 100,000 of the inhabitants, and to have looted as contributions and carried off as plunder treasure equal to more than £20,000,000 sterling. In spite of this, however, the Mahrattas, peace was only obtained by giving up to the conqueror all the country west of the Indus. On the death of Muhammad, in 1748, the country was fast going to decay—it was, in fact, only waiting for a fresh conqueror. The Mahrattas were there ready for the work to be done. About 1724 the Deccan, Oudh, and Bengal became practically independent under the rule of Shikhar (ancestor of the present Nizam), Sadat Khan, and Alivardi Khan respectively. The Mahrattas.—Simultaneously with the decline of the Mogul Empire, the power of the Mahrattas, who were Hindoos, and the country from which they came may be roughly described by drawing two lines from Nagpur to Bhus and Goa on the west coast. The founder of their power was Sivaji (1672-1680), a chieftain of the family of Bhoonslah, Baisaji Viharnab (1712-1750), Petalwa, or Prime Minister, succeeded in making that office of paramount importance and hereditary in his family; Sivaji's descendants thenceforth holding a merely nominal position as Rajas of Satara. Under the Petalwas, aided by Scindia, Holkar, and the Gaekwar, who forced independent States about this time, the Mahrattas rapidly extended their territory and influence. In 1762 Delhi was in their hands, and though they suffered a disastrous defeat at Panipat in 1761, as the hands of Ahmed Shah, the Afghan invader, they remained for some time the first Power in India, and were the most dangerous opponents of the English. Like the Pindaris, a horde of freebooters who followed in their train, they were a scourge to the country, and it was fortunate for India that the empire at which they had but too successfully aimed was nothing more than a shadow of its former self. The various native states within its bounds were fated very soon to bend before the superior arms of European adventurers, who, either from love of adventure or thoughts of gain, were journeying towards its shores. It was not until the Pindaris and Mahrattas were overthrown, in 1818, that India enjoyed the blessings of internal peace. EUROPEAN ADVENTURE.—Before the discovery of the route to India round the Cape of Good Hope, the trade of India and of the Indian Ocean, organized by the Phoenicians, was being successfully carried on by their successors the Arabs, the chief centres of trade being Calicut, Ormuz, Aden, and Malacca. Vasco di Gama anchored before Calicut on 20th May, 1498, and from that time until they lost their naval supremacy, the Portuguese may be considered to have enjoyed the monopoly of Indian trade. The first Portuguese viceroy, Francis of Almeida (1505-1509), established numerous factories and fortresses, and took possession of Ceylon and the Maldiva Islands; while his successor, Alfonso de Albuquerque, captured Goa (1510), and extended in various places the Portuguese dominion, but notably on the Malabar and Malacca coasts. This dominion had, in 1542, practically amounted to an entire renunciation of the Asiatic coast trade with Europe from the Persian Gulf to Japan, and for nearly sixty years afterwards the Portuguese were the virtual masters of the southern coast of Asia. When the Portuguese crown fell into weak hands the power in the Eastern sea began to decline, and it was almost nullified in 1570, when the emperor Philip II. and the Asiatic interests of Spain and Portugal were united under Philip II., and the Asiatic interests of Spain. When the Portuguese had brought the commerce of India to London they were well

WHITAKER'S ALMANACK, 1889. Page 412 of Whitaker's Almanack, 1889. Column 2 contains substantially the words employed in Porlock's cipher: "...there...its...dangerous...may...come...very soon...country..." There is additionally quite adequate language to complete its sense, eg "considered...ready..."

WHITAKER'S ALMANACK, 1890. Page 412 of Whitaker's Almanack, 1890. This page is actually that described as "page 534" in Watson's account. Column 2 is indeed "...a substantial block of print dealing...with the trade and resources of British India..." and contains the word "Mahratta". It was from this same page 412, column 2, in the 1889 edition that Porlock drew his cipher message.



No

This is the year of the Birlstone tragedy.

Please note, that as the illustrations show, p.412 is not exactly identical in its column 2 in the 1889 and 1890 editions. If they were identical, of course, Holmes would have found the cipher message in the 1890 one as well, and would not have had to refer to the previous year's edition. We will see that, in some of the following pairs of years, the "The Mahrattas" paragraph page will be exactly identical in column 2, a factor assisting the process of elimination.

1891	728p.	pp.441-461, p.444 col.2	Yes	E
1892	728p.	pp.441-462, p.444 col.2 This year fell during the Great Hiatus.	Yes	B
1893	728p.	pp.441-463, p.444 col.2 and continuing on p.445 col.1: p.445 has "very soon" This year fell during the Great Hiatus.	Yes	B
1894	744p.	pp.441-470, p.445 col.1 (*) The January of this year fell during the Great Hiatus. The previous year's edition <u>does</u> have a "very soon" but it is in column 1 of the following page, 445. This amounts, effectively, to Reason D.	Yes	B, C, D
1895	744p.	pp.441-472, p.445 col.1 (*) Please note that here the "The Mahrattas" paragraph page, p.445, is exactly identical in the 1895 and 1894 editions. This eliminates 1895, as otherwise Holmes would have just as readily found the cipher in the current year's (1895's) and would not have had to refer to the previous year's edition. We will encounter this situation (Reason F) again occasionally in future years.	Yes	C, D, F
1896	744p.	pp.441-473, p.445 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D
1897	760p.	pp.441-474, p.445 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D
1898	776p.	pp.441-476, p.445 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D
1899	776p.	pp.441-476, p.445 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, F
1900	776p.	pp.441-476, p.445 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, F
1901	776p.	pp.457-490, p.461 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, E
1902	776p.	pp.473-510, p.476 col.2 and continuing on p.477 col.1: p.477 has "dangerous" (*)	Yes	C, D, E
1903	792p.	pp.475-510, p.478 col.2 (*) While the previous year's edition <u>does</u> have the "The Mahrattas" paragraph in column 2 of p.476, the paragraph continues into column 1 of p.477, and it is on p.477, column 1, that the most important word, "dangerous", is found. This amounts, effectively to Reasons C, D, E.	Yes	C
1904	792p.	pp.475-508, p.478 col.2 (*) Though Reason D is present, such absence of the words "very soon" in the "The Mahrattas" paragraph of the previous year's edition, while rendering that paragraph much <u>less like</u> the words of Porlock's cipher message and, therefore, much <u>less probable</u> , by itself is, strictly speaking, <u>not</u> an elimination. Since p478, column 2, is <u>not identical</u> in the 1904 and 1903 editions, 1904 is, by the evidence of the almanacks, theoretically possible.	No	See below
1905	792p.	pp.473-505, p.476 col.2 (*)	Yes	D, E

1906	792p.#	pp.473-505, p.478 col.1 (*) # (with ads, 950p; these began to be numbered). Please note that hereinafter the number of pages with ads will no longer be given, as without ads the pages exceed 534p. and so this new pagination practice is entirely irrelevant to our enquiry. This matter is here mentioned only to avoid confusion to those consulting the almanacks themselves.	Yes	C, D, E
1907	792p.	pp.473-505, p.478 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, F
1908	792p.	pp.473-505, p.478 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, F
1909	792p.	pp.505-537, p.510 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, E
1910	792p.	pp.505-537, p.510 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, F
1911	792p.	pp.505-537, p.510 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, F
1912	858p.	pp.539-571, p.544 col.1 (*)	Yes	C, D, E
1913	858p.	pp.539-571, p.543 col.2 (*)	Yes	C, D, E
1914	890p.	pp.571-603, p.575 col.2 and continuing on p.476 col.1 (*)	Yes	D, E

## SOCIETY NEWS

*Congratulations* to The Sydney Passengers' own Irene Adler, *Joslyn Rechter*, on her recent operatic triumph as the lead in Handel's "Orlando" for the Melbourne Festival!

*Antipodean Holmesian Society:* In the early 1970's there was a short-lived Sherlockian society in Auckland, New Zealand called The Missing Three-Quarters. Although there are scattered individuals over there who "keep green the memory", there has been no other organised body until now. The Captain heard with pleasure of a new group in Dunedin and wrote to them receiving the following reply: "Many thanks for your encouraging letter. The club only started about four months ago and, somewhat to my surprise, we assembled nine members at our first meeting after a minimum of advance publicity. Among our members is a university assistant vice-chancellor; a musician, a city bureaucrat, a physician, a couple of students, and some other university-connected people. One project next year will be to have a display in the City Library..." We wish the new society all the best. They can be contacted as follows: Ted Nye, 51 Irvine Rd, The Cove, Dunedin, New Zealand. E-mail <ted.nye@stonebow.otago.ac.nz>.