



The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure IV – The Red-Headed League

Publishing History

4 of the 60 stories written

First published in *The Strand Magazine*, August 1891

Part of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes collection by George Newnes, Ltd., London, 1892

In the US by Harper Bros., New York, 1892

The British illustrator was Sidney Paget

Chronology

William Baring-Gould places the date of the story at Saturday, October 29 to Sunday, October 30, 1887, which makes it the 13th of the 60 stories. This means that Holmes is 33 and Watson 35.

Christopher Morley Says

“A red-headed pawnbroker spends eight weeks copying the Encyclopaedia Britannica with a quill pen, but in the meantime what was his assistant doing in the cellar? This was a “three-pipe problem,” but the knees on a pair of trousers gave Holmes the clue.”



Dummies Short Summary

“This story begins with high comedy but ends with a dangerous vigil in a darkened bank vault full of French gold.”

How Many Words

At 8,189 words REDH has the 33rd most words (#1 is VEIL – 4,499, #56 if NAVL – 12,701).

Classifying This Case

This case is one of 3 classified as a theft of money. The others were STOC, and 3GAR.

The Best Of Sherlock Holmes

Always near the top of every favorites. Holmes and Watson laughed at their client.

- 1927 – Arthur Conan Doyle named it # 2 on his list of 12 favorite stories
- 1944 – The Baker Street Irregulars voted it as #3 on their top 12 favorites
- 1959 –The Baker Street Irregulars voted it # 2 on list of 10 favorites
- 1999 – The Sherlock Holmes Society of London voted it #2 of 56 short stories

What Else Happened That Year (1887)

The year 1887 kept Holmes and Watson busy. We covered 1887 with SCAN so we will try not to repeat too many.

- Anglo-Russian treaty fixes Russo-Persian frontier along the Oxus River.
- Charing Cross Road opens.
- Allotments Act, Local authorities empowered to acquire land compulsorily for allotments.
- Kilburn Park opens after being acquired by the City of London.
- China recognizes Portugal right to the island of Macao.
- German Reichstag dissolved; alliance of Imperialists, Conservatives, some National Liberals--the Kartel--gave Bismarck majority in the new Reichstag; military grants renewed.
- France advances Russia 350 million francs.
- Union of Indo-China formed by France.
- Work begins on Kiel Canal.
- Conan Doyle's A Study in Scarlet, first Sherlock Holmes story, published.

- Thomas Hardy publishes *The Woodlanders*, a novel.
- Emile Zola publishes *La Terre*, bitter novel about peasant life.
- Cezanne paints *The Blue Vase*.
- Claude A. Debussy debuts *Le Printemps*.
- Verdi debuts *Othello*.
- Bauxite, source of aluminum, is discovered in Georgia.
- Mach defines the Mach Number, now used in supersonic flight.
- Goodwin invents celluloid film.
- Svante A. Arrhenius proposes ion theory of electrolysis.
- Construction of first British torpedo cruiser

Holmes And Watson – Personal Information

Watson not living with Holmes at 221B, instead residing at his house in Kensington.

Dramatis Personae

A small cast of characters but both Wilson and Clay are memorable.

- **Jabez Wilson**, a pawnbroker with flaming red hair.
- **John Clay aka Vincent Spaulding**, murderer, thief, smasher, and forger. A brilliant criminal, he has attended Eaton and Oxford and his grandfather was a Royal Duke.
- **Duncan Ross aka William Morris**, confederate of Clay and director (?) of the Red-headed League.
- **EZEKIAH HOPKINS**, fictional millionaire created by Clay who supposedly founded the Red-headed League.
- **Peter Jones**, official police agent.
- **Mr. Merriweather**, bank official

Quotable Sherlock

- "As a rule, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events, I am able to guide myself by the thousands of other similar cases which occur to my memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."
- "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

- "As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify."
- "It is quite a three pipe problem . . . "
- "He is in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be the third."
- "It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London."
- "There may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket."
- "I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see."
- "My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so."

Holmes' Fee

Again, we continue to be amazed at Holmes' wide variety of his fees. Some were free, some would make a man rich for life, an everything in between. Remarkably, Holmes prevented the loss of £30,000, but when the bank-director offered to pay Holmes, the reply was, "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

Sherlock Holmes On The Big And The Little Screen

A popular story with several presentations, seven in number.

- 1921 *The Red-Headed League* with Eille Norwood was #5 of the 47 20 minute movies based on the canon The National Film and Television Archive at the BFI has viewing copies of this film but it has not been released
- 1954 *The Case of the Red Headed League* with Ronald Howard as the first and only canonical tale in his 39 episode *Sherlock Holmes* series.
- 1965 *The Red-Headed League* with Douglas Wilmer in his *Sherlock Holmes* Series
- 1967 *Die Liga der Rothaarigen* episode of Eric Schellow's *Sherlock Holmes* series for German TV. Not available with English captions or any way to play in the US.
- 1985 *The Red-Headed League* with Jeremy Brett as the 12th episode of his 41 episode series.
- 2000 *The Red-Headed League* as part of the *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century* (Animated TV series)

Newspapers

A newspaper notice played a major role in this story. After all, anything printed in a newspaper must be true.

Two papers in the story are:

- **Daily Chronicle** - A morning paper established in 1877. Liberal and one of the most popular.
- **Morning Chronicle** - One of the more esteemed papers started in 1769. Was touted for its journalistic and literary integrity. Entered bankruptcy in 1862.

Annotated Sherlock

- **“Omne ignotum pro magnifico”** Latin translated as *“Everything unknown passes for something splendid.”* From Tacitus. This is only time Holmes ever used a full quote from a Roman author.
- **“a coster’s”** Short for costermonger: an apple seller; a hawker of fruit or vegetables from a street stand, barrow, or cart.
- **“press”** A copy of the E.B. was kept in one. An upright case or cupboard for the keeping of articles.
- **“a solicitor”** One who represents a client in a court of justice; an attorney; formerly in England, a practitioner in chancery only. In England solicitors prepare cases for barristers but have not the right to appear as advocates before the higher courts
- **“a partie carrée”** French for a “square party” or party of four, usually 2 men and 2 women
- **“smasher”** John Clay was also one who passes bad coins or forged notes.
- **“L’homme c’est rien-l’oeuvre c’est tout”** Correctly *“L’homme n’est rien, l’oeuvre tout”* “The Man is nothing, the work is everything.”

Weapons

We actually have no violence, just a few guns if needed.

- **Revolver** - John Clay (alias Vincent Spaulding) had with him while breaking into the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, and which Holmes knocked out of his hand.
- **Service Revolver** - Dr. Watson’s and is mentioned in 13 cases.
- **Heavy Hunting Crop** - Of Sherlock Holmes, used to knock the gun out of John Clay’s hand.

Another Interesting Fact / Or Whatever?

Leslie Klinger, in the *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, tells us that on January 20th, 1920, the Stoll Film Company placed this ad in the *Times*:

"On account of circumstances not unconnected with the bequest of the late Hezekiah [sic] Hopkins of Lebanon, Penn. USA, lucrative employment for One Day Only is now available for twenty CURLY, RED-HEADED MEN who are sound in mind and body. Those who have served in HM Forces and have some knowledge of acting preferred.' Forty curly, red-haired ex-servicemen applied to the Cricklewood Studio and the producer decided to engage them all." (Klinger, Vol. 1, p.45)

Klinger does not tell us the reaction.

Frank Mentzel