

THE VALLEY OF FEAR

[Saturday, January 7, to Sunday, January 8, 1888]

PART I

The Tragedy of Birlstone

I ♦ THE WARNING

'I am inclined to think——' said I. 1

'I should do so,' Sherlock Holmes remarked, impatiently. 2

I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals, but I admit that I was annoyed at the sardonic interruption.

'Really, Holmes,' said I, severely, 'you are a little trying at times.'

He was too much absorbed with his own thoughts to give any immediate answer to my remonstrance. He leaned upon his hand, with his untasted breakfast before him, and he stared at the slip of paper which he had just drawn from its envelope. Then he took the envelope itself, held it up to the light, and very carefully studied both the exterior and the flap.

'It is Porlock's writing,' said he, thoughtfully. 'I can hardly 3 doubt that it is Porlock's writing, though I have only seen it twice before. The Greek "e" with the peculiar top flourish is distinctive. But if it is from Porlock, then it must be something of the very first importance.'

He was speaking to himself rather than to me, but my vexation disappeared in the interest which the words awakened.

'Who, then, is Porlock?' I asked.

'Porlock, Watson, is a *nom de plume*, a mere identification 4 mark, but behind it lies a shifty and evasive personality. In 5 a former letter he frankly informed me that the name was not his own, and defied me ever to trace him among the teeming millions of this great city. Porlock is important, not for himself, but for the great man with whom he is in touch. Picture to yourself the pilot-fish with the shark, the jackal with the lion—anything that is insignificant in companionship with what is formidable. Not only formidable, Watson, but sinister—in the highest degree sinister. That is where he comes within my purview. You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?'

'The famous scientific criminal, as famous among crooks as——'

'My blushes, Watson,' Holmes murmured, in a deprecating voice.

'I was about to say "as he is unknown to the public."'

1 'I am inclined to think——' said I. Conan Doyle did not, at first, have any intention of making Dr. Watson the narrator of this adventure. The original manuscript (176 folio pages with many deletions, corrections, and additions in the author's hand) shows that such expressions as "said Dr. Watson" and "said he" are crossed out and the direct "said I" substituted. The manuscript was auctioned in New York City on January 30, 1923, bringing \$275. It was later listed in Scribner's Sherlock Holmes Catalogue at \$900. Except for its short "Epilogue" (which is lost or missing), it is owned today by old Irregular J. Bliss Austin of Pittsburgh.

2 Sherlock Holmes remarked, impatiently. Mr. Anthony Boucher has written, in his Introduction to *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, Volume I, "This is a ripe, mature Holmes, free from external eccentricities, his hand unburdened by either the cocaine needle or the violin's bow. Here is Holmes as the perfect thinking mind, in cryptanalysis, in observation, in deduction. And here, more than in any other Canonical story that comes to mind, is Holmes at his most completely charming, whether playfully dangling the cryptically obvious before his colleagues (whom for once he respects) or ruefully admitting 'a distinct touch' from Watson's pawky humor. There is, in fact, more overt humor here than is usual in the Canon; there is a certain fey quality in this Holmes, 'his eyes sparkling with mischief.' Like the superb episodes from the memoirs of Etienne Gerard, the story manages at once to be deftly amusing and intensely exciting; and . . . we can only be deeply grateful to Dr. Watson for having served it up so magnificently." For these and other reasons, as we shall shortly see, many commentators prefer to place *The Valley of Fear* late in Holmes' career.

3 *'It is Porlock's writing.'* "A person on business from Porlock' interrupted forever the highest flight of the genius of Samuel Taylor Coleridge; a letter from Porlock provoked one of the greatest displays of the genius of Sherlock Holmes," Mr. Boucher continued in his Introduction. "I feel that some deeper meaning is latent here, but cannot define it—any more than I can understand how the comparison was omitted from the charming essay, 'Persons from Porlock,' by that noblest Holmesian of them all, Vincent Starrett [in *Bookman's Holiday*; New York: Random House, 1942]."

4 *a nom de plume.* French: a pen name; a writer's assumed name.

5 *a shifty and evasive personality.* "Although the thing cannot be proved, I am strongly of the opinion that Mycroft [Holmes, Sherlock's elder brother] was in fact the 'Fred Porlock' who acted as his brother's informer in *The Valley of Fear*," Monsignor Ronald A. Knox wrote in "The Mystery of Mycroft." There are, as shall see, many mysteries about Mycroft.

6 *libel in the eyes of the law.* "If we wonder why Watson forebore to publish *The Valley of Fear* at the time of the occurrence, the answer is found in the chronicle itself: 'In calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law.' After Moriarty's death [in 1891] and when Holmes' return had released Watson from his vow of silence, the matter could finally be made public. And Watson, being Watson, waited a good long time."—Dr. John Dardess, "On the Dating of *The Valley of Fear*."

7 *solatium.* In law, compensation for injury to the feelings, as distinguished from compensation for pecuniary loss or physical injury. As always, when it is a question of the law, Holmes chooses the precise word.

8 *apocrypha.* From the Greek: hidden things; secrets.

'A touch—a distinct touch!' cried Holmes. 'You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself. But in calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes **6** of the law, and there lies 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 **7** 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 rôles. That's genius, Watson. But if I am spared by lesser men our day will surely come.'

'May I be there to see!' I exclaimed, devoutly. 'But you were speaking of this man Porlock.'

'Ah, yes—the so-called Porlock is a link in the chain some little way from its great attachment. Porlock is not quite a sound link, between ourselves. He is the only flaw in that chain so far as I have been able to test it.'

'But no chain is stronger than its weakest link.'

'Exactly, my dear Watson. Hence the extreme importance of 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. I cannot doubt that if we had the cipher we should find that this communication is of the nature that I indicate.'

Again Holmes flattened out the paper upon his unused plate. I rose and, leaning over him, stared down at the curious inscription, which ran as follows:

534 C2 13 127 36 31 4 17 21 41
DOUGLAS 109 293 5 37 BIRLSTONE
26 BIRLSTONE 9 127 171

'What do you make of it, Holmes?'

'It is obviously an attempt to convey secret information.'

'But what is the use of a cipher message without the cipher?'

'In this instance, none at all.'

'Why do you say "in this instance"?''

'Because there are many ciphers which I would read as **8** easily as I do the apocrypha of the agony column. Such crude devices amuse the intelligence without fatiguing it. But this is different. It is clearly a reference to the words in a page of some book. Until I am told which page and which book I am powerless.'

'But why "Douglas" and "Birlstone"?''

'Clearly because those are words which were not contained in the page in question.'

'Then why has he not indicated the book?'

'Your native shrewdness, my dear Watson, that innate cun-

ning which is the delight of your friends, would surely prevent you from enclosing cipher and message in the same envelope. Should it miscarry you are undone. As it is, both have to go wrong before any harm comes from it. Our second post is now overdue, and I shall be surprised if it does not bring us either a further letter of explanation or, as is more probable, the very volume to which these figures refer.'

Holmes's calculation was fulfilled within a very few minutes by the appearance of Billy, the page, with the very letter which we were expecting.

'The same writing,' remarked Holmes, as he opened the envelope, 'and actually signed,' he added, in an exultant voice, as he unfolded the epistle. 'Come, we are getting on, Watson.'

His browclouded, however, as he glanced over the contents.

'Dear me, this is very disappointing! I fear, Watson, that all our expectations come to nothing. I trust that the man Porlock will come to no harm.'

'"Dear Mr Holmes," he says, "I will go no further in this matter. It is too dangerous. He suspects me. I can see that he suspects me. He came to me quite unexpectedly after I had actually addressed this envelope with the intention of sending you the key to the cipher. I was able to cover it up. If he had seen it, it would have gone hard with me. But I read suspicion in his eyes. Please burn the cipher message, which can now be of no use to you.—FRED PORLOCK."'

Holmes sat for some little time twisting this letter between his fingers, and frowning, as he stared into the fire.

'After all,' he said at last, 'there may be nothing in it. It may be only his guilty conscience. Knowing himself to be a traitor, he may have read the accusation in the other's eyes.'

'The other being, I presume, Professor Moriarty?'

'No less. When any of that party talk about "he," you know whom they mean. There is one predominant "he" for all of them.'

'But what can he do?'

'Hum! That's a large question. When you have one of the first brains of Europe up against you and all the powers of darkness at his back, there are infinite possibilities. Anyhow, friend Porlock is evidently scared out of his senses. Kindly compare the writing in the note with that upon its envelope, which was done, he tells us, before this ill-omened visit. The one is clear and firm; the other hardly legible.'

'Why did he write at all? Why did he not simply drop it?'

'Because he feared I would make some inquiry after him in that case, and possibly bring trouble on him.'

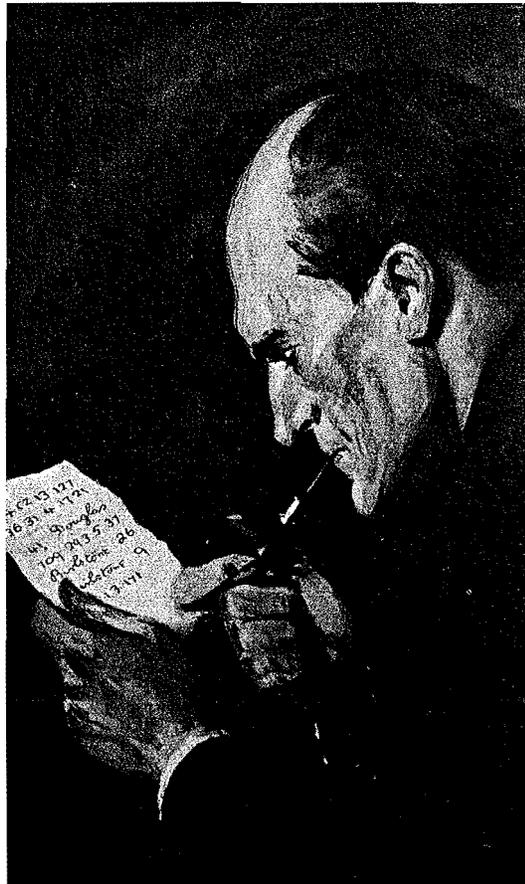
'No doubt,' said I. 'Of course'—I had picked up the original cipher message and was bending my brows over it—it's pretty maddening to think that an important secret may lie here on this slip of paper, and that it is beyond human power to penetrate it.'

Sherlock Holmes had pushed away his untasted breakfast and lit the unsavoury pipe which was the companion of his deepest meditations.

'I wonder!' said he, leaning back and staring at the ceiling. 'Perhaps there are points which have escaped your Machiavellian intellect. Let us consider the problem in the light of pure reason. This man's reference is to a book. That is our point of departure.'

'A somewhat vague one.'

9 *Machiavellian*. Holmes refers to Niccolò Machiavelli, 1469–1527, Italian author and statesman. His most famous book, *The Prince*, was the first objective, scientific analysis of the methods by which political power is obtained and kept.



"WHAT DO YOU MAKE OF IT, HOLMES?"

This illustration by Frank Wiles, captioned "The Cipher—and the man who solved it," appeared as the frontispiece to the first installment of *The Valley of Fear* when it appeared in the *Strand Magazine*, September, 1914. Of this illustration, the late James Montgomery wrote (*A Study in Pictures*): "This striking close-up of the Master surely ranks with the best and most famous of all his portrayals, from Paget to Steele." And he added: "Wiles of course adheres to the accepted authentic mood, but without sacrificing any of that magic he develops a wealth of detail far exceeding any previous artist." And Walter Klinefelter has written of this frontispiece (*Sherlock Holmes in Portrait and Profile*): "If Wiles had not made another drawing for *The Valley of Fear*, he would still have to be given credit for a notable contribution to the portraiture of Sherlock Holmes."

10 Even if I accepted the compliment for myself. "Surely . . . Holmes had a copy of the Bible—not of any inferior edition, either, but, aware as we are of his philological interest and his pre-occupation with 'Chaldee' ["The Adventure of the Devil's Foot"], of none other than the celebrated Complutensian Polyglot Bible edited under the auspices of Cardinal Ximenes between 1514 and 1517, and printed in Hebrew, Chaldee, Greek and Latin—the earliest, indeed, of the great Polyglots. Yes, Holmes had probably acquired a treasure . . . [but a treasure which would] have proved of no aid in deciphering Porlock's message."—Madeleine B. Stern, "Sherlock Holmes: Rare Book Collector."

11 "Bradshaw"! Bradshaw's, now, alas, no more, was the guide to British railways conceived by George Bradshaw, 1801–1853, an engraver of maps and plans of towns. The first issues of a northern and southern Bradshaw were published on October 19, 1839, followed in January, 1840, by a uniting of the two. Of Bradshaw, R. J. Cruikshank wrote in *Roaring Century*: ". . . the creation of a Quaker who offered it as a piece of much-needed public service. For at least a hundred years it was to follow the Quaker custom of naming the months, First Month for January, Second Month for February and so on. At a time when scores of independent [railway] lines were sprouting, with great gaps between connections, the production of a guide was a miracle of patience. . . . The humorous journalists could not have taken greater delight in its obscurity of style and its esoteric allusiveness. . . . The hands, daggers and other printing devices in which Bradshaw indulged suggested the warnings of a secret society. . . . Comic Bradshaws were brought out to the further confusion of innocent minds. The gentle philanthropist must have been mildly puzzled at the Press he got—but Bradshaw survived to be an honoured British institution."

12 inadmissible for the same reason. Mr. Robert Winthrop Adams has suggested ("John H. Watson, M.D., Characterologist") that this "British Webster" was the *Comprehensive English Dictionary*; London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, 1868, by John Ogilvie, LL.D., Scottish lexicographer. But it is surprising, as Mr. Howard R. Schorin pointed out in his essay on "Cryptography in the Canon," that Holmes eliminated the dictionary: "it is precisely this book which has been used for such messages since the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, when the numbered-source code was most popular and in use. Fletcher Pratt, in *Secret and Urgent*, sums up the matter: 'Theoretically, any book will do, but as one must have access immediately to any word he wishes to use, only the dictionary will serve his purpose.'"

'Let us see, then, if we can narrow it down. As I focus my mind upon it, it seems rather less impenetrable. What indications have we as to this book?'

'None.'

'Well, well, it is surely not quite so bad as that. The cipher message begins with a large 534, does it not? We may take it as a working hypothesis that 534 is the particular page to which the cipher refers. So our book has already become a large book, which is surely something gained. What other indications have we as to the nature of this large book? The next sign is C2. What do you make of that, Watson?'

'Chapter the second, no doubt.'

'Hardly that, Watson. You will, I am sure, agree with me that if the page be given the number of the chapter is immaterial. Also that if page 534 only finds us in the second chapter, the length of the first one must have been really intolerable.'

'Column!' I cried.

'Brilliant, Watson. You are scintillating this morning. If it is not column, then I am very much deceived. So now, you see, we begin to visualize a large book, printed in double columns, which are each of a considerable length, since one of the words is numbered in the document as the two hundred and ninety-third. Have we reached the limits of what reason can supply?'

'I fear that we have.'

'Surely you do yourself an injustice. One more coruscation, my dear Watson. Yet another brain-wave. Had the volume been an unusual one he would have sent it to me. Instead of that he had intended, before his plans were nipped, to send me the clue in this envelope. He says so in his note. This would seem to indicate that the book is one which he thought that I would have no difficulty in finding for myself. He had it, and he imagined that I would have it too. In short, Watson, it is a very common book.'

'What you say certainly sounds plausible.'

'So we have contracted our field of search to a large book, printed in double columns and in common use.'

'The Bible!' I cried, triumphantly.

'Good, Watson, good! But not, if I may say so, quite good enough. Even if I accepted the compliment for myself, I could hardly name any volume which would be less likely to lie at the elbow of one of Moriarty's associates. Besides, the editions of Holy Writ are so numerous that he could hardly suppose that two copies would have the same pagination. This is clearly a book which is standardized. He knows for certain that his page 534 will exactly agree with my page 534.'

'But very few books would correspond with that.'

'Exactly. Therein lies our salvation. Our search is narrowed down to standardized books which anyone may be supposed to possess.'

11 "Bradshaw"!

'There are difficulties, Watson. The vocabulary of "Bradshaw" is nervous and terse, but limited. The selection of words would hardly lend itself to the sending of general messages. We will eliminate "Bradshaw." The dictionary is,

12 I fear, inadmissible for the same reason. What, then, is left? 'An almanack.'

'Excellent, Watson! I am very much mistaken if you have not touched the spot. An almanack! Let us consider the claims of *Whitaker's Almanack*. It is in common use. It has the requisite number of pages. It is in double column. Though reserved in its earlier vocabulary, it becomes, if I remember right, quite garrulous towards the end.' He picked the volume from his desk. 'Here is page 534, column two, a substantial block of print dealing, I perceive, with the trade and resources of British India. Jot down the words, Watson. Number thirteen is "Mahratta." Not, I fear, a very auspicious beginning. **14** Number one hundred and twenty-seven is "Government," which at least makes sense, though somewhat irrelevant to ourselves and Professor Moriarty. Now let us try again. What does the Mahratta Government do? Alas! the next word is "pigs'-bristles." We are undone, my good Watson! It is finished.'

He had spoken in jesting vein, but the twitching of his bushy eyebrows bespoke his disappointment and irritation. **15** I sat helpless and unhappy, staring into the fire. A long silence was broken by a sudden exclamation from Holmes, who dashed at a cupboard, from which he emerged with a second yellow-covered volume in his hand.

'We pay the price, Watson, for being too up-to-date,' he cried. 'We are before our time, and suffer the usual penalties. Being the seventh of January, we have very properly laid in the new almanack. It is more than likely that Porlock took his message from the old one. No doubt he would have told us so had his letter of explanation been written. Now let us see what page 534 has in store for us. Number thirteen is "There," which is much more promising. Number one hundred and twenty-seven is "is"—"There is"—Holmes's eyes were gleaming with excitement, and his thin, nervous fingers twitched as he counted the words—"danger." Ha! ha! Capital! Put that down, Watson. "There is danger—may—come—very—soon—one." Then we have the name "Douglas"—"rich—country—now—at—Birlstone—House—Birlstone—confidence—is—pressing." There, Watson! what do you think of pure reason and its fruits? If the greengrocer had such a thing as a laurel-wreath I should send Billy round for it.'

I was staring at the strange message which I had scrawled, as he deciphered it, upon a sheet of foolscap on my knee.

'What a queer, scrambling way of expressing his meaning!' said I.

'On the contrary, he has done quite remarkably well,' said Holmes. 'When you search a single column for words with which to express your meaning, you can hardly expect to get everything you want. You are bound to leave something to the intelligence of your correspondent. The purport is perfectly clear. Some devilry is intended against one Douglas, whoever he may be, residing as stated, a rich country gentleman. He is sure—"confidence" was as near as he could get to "confident"—that it is pressing. There is our result, and a very workmanlike little bit of analysis it was.'

Holmes had the impersonal joy of the true artist in his better work, even as he mourned darkly when it fell below the high level to which he aspired. He was still chuckling over his success when Billy swung open the door and Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard was ushered into the room.

Those were the early days at the end of the 'eighties, when **17**

13 Whitaker's Almanack. Britain's best-known almanac, similar to the *World Almanac* in the United States, originally compiled by Joseph Whitaker, 1820-1895.

14 "Mahratta." A confederation of chieftains in central India, broken up by the British in 1818.

15 *his bushy eyebrows*. A detail which adds to our picture of Holmes.

16 *the seventh of January*. A Saturday in 1888, our year for the adventure of *The Valley of Fear*.

17 *Those were the early days at the end of the 'eighties*. Eighteen-eighty-nine would appear to be the latest possible date for the adventure, if we are to credit Watson's statement. Of the chronologists who do accept it (and we shall see that there is a school which does not) Bell, Smith, and Starrett say 1887; Baring-Gould, Folsom, Patrick, Stephens, and Zeisler say 1888; Christ and Morley say 1889.

18 *Aberdonian*. Relating to or characteristic of Aberdeen, Scotland.

19 *helped him to attain success*. It is a great pity that Watson did not see fit to chronicle either of these cases. Perhaps they included some of the unrecorded cases mentioned by Watson—the Camberwell poisoning case (“The Five Orange Pips”), for example; Porlock posted his cipher message to Holmes from Camberwell.

20 *this morning*. Although Inspector MacDonald states that Douglas was murdered “this morning” (that is, on the morning of the seventh of January), we are told in the next chapter that the first alarm of murder went out “at eleven-forty-five” on the preceding night, the sixth.

Alec MacDonald was far from having attained the national fame which he has now achieved. He was a young but trusted member of the detective force, who had distinguished himself in several cases which had been entrusted to him. His tall, bony figure gave promise of exceptional physical strength, while his great cranium and deep-set, lustrous eyes spoke no less clearly of the keen intelligence which twinkled out from behind his bushy eyebrows. He was a silent, precise man, with

18 a dour nature and a hard Aberdonian accent. Twice already

19 in his career had Holmes helped him to attain success, his own sole reward being the intellectual joy of the problem. For this reason the affection and respect of the Scotchman for his amateur colleague were profound, and he showed them by the frankness with which he consulted Holmes in every difficulty. Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself, but talent instantly recognizes genius, and MacDonald had talent enough for his profession to enable him to perceive that there was no humiliation in seeking the assistance of one who already stood alone in Europe, both in his gifts and in his experience. Holmes was not prone to friendship, but he was tolerant of the big Scotchman, and smiled at the sight of him.

‘You are an early bird, Mr Mac,’ said he. ‘I wish you luck with your worm. I fear this means that there is some mischief afoot.’

‘If you said “hope” instead of “fear” it would be nearer the truth, I’m thinking, Mr Holmes,’ the inspector answered, with a knowing grin. ‘Well, maybe a wee nip would keep out the raw morning chill. No, I won’t smoke, I thank you. I’ll have to be pushing on my way, for the early hours of a case are the precious ones, as no man knows better than your own self. But—but—’

The inspector had stopped suddenly, and was staring with a look of absolute amazement at a paper upon the table. It was the sheet upon which I had scrawled the enigmatic message.

‘Douglas!’ he stammered. ‘Birlstone! What’s this, Mr Holmes? Man, it’s witchcraft! Where in the name of all that is wonderful did you get those names?’

‘It is a cipher that Dr Watson and I have had occasion to solve. But why—what’s amiss with the names?’

The inspector looked from one to the other of us in dazed astonishment.

‘Just this,’ said he, ‘that Mr Douglas, of Birlstone Manor **20** House, was horribly murdered this morning.’

“WHAT’S THIS, MR. HOLMES? MAN, IT’S WITCHCRAFT!”

This is one of the twelve illustrations drawn by Arthur I. Keller for Associated Sunday Magazines, in which *The Valley of Fear* appeared in the United States between September 20 and November 22, 1914. Keller here exaggerates Watson’s slowness of mentality (as compared to the swiftness of mentality of Holmes) into almost moronic proportions—aptly described by the late Edmund Pearson as “boobus Britannicus” (“Sherlock Holmes Among the Illustrators”). The late James Montgomery wrote of Keller (*A Study in Pictures*): His “pictures vary in quality, some being excellent, although none of the five depicting the English phase of the tale succeed in capturing the subtle Sherlockian mood. It is when the story shifts to America that he is most successful. There he is not hampered by the need for English flavor, and his portrayal of the rough men and primitive conditions in Vermissa Valley becomes very realistic indeed.” Frank Wiles illustrated this same scene for the *Strand Magazine*, September, 1914.



The
ANNOTATED®
Sherlock Holmes

VOLUME I

THE FOUR NOVELS AND THE
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BY SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

Edited, with an Introduction, Notes, and Bibliography by

WILLIAM S. BARING-GOULD

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