



An Inquiry into: "The Hound of the Baskervilles"

Vol. XII No. 65 • December 2, 2021

The Hound of the Baskervilles was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in August 1901 and April 1902, and in *The Strand Magazine* in New York from September 1901 to May 1902. It first appeared in book form in 1902. It is one of the four Canonical novels.

As the table shows, our chronologists are far from being in accord with each other, as to when this case took place. However, by a small majority, our experts place the year of the case as being 1889. Were that to be the correct estimate, then Sherlock Holmes would have been 35 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 37.

Main Characters:

Mr. James Mortimer, executor of Sir Charles' will and family friend of the Baskervilles. Sir Charles Baskerville, squire of Baskerville Hall, recently deceased. Sir Henry Baskerville, inheritor of the Baskerville estate, newly arrived from Canada. Cartwright, district messenger boy hired by Holmes to supply him while he hid out in the moor. John Barrymore, the butler of Baskerville Hall. Eliza Barrymore, the butler's wife and housekeeper at Baskerville Hall. Jack Stapleton, a naturalist, neighbor of the Baskervilles. Beryl Stapleton, Costa Rican beauty ostensibly Jack's sister, but in reality his wife. Selden, Eliza's brother and escaped convict. Mr. Frankland, eccentric, litigious neighbor of the Baskervilles. Laura Lyons, disinherited daughter of Frankland, duped by Stapleton in Sir Charles' murder. Rodger Baskerville, younger brother of Sir Charles, father of Jack. Inspector Lestrade, Scotland Yard detective. The Hound, legendary supernatural nemesis of the Baskervilles.

The Hound of the Baskervilles

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	October 1889
Baring-Gould	Tuesday, September 25, 1888
Bell	Tuesday, September 28, 1886
Blakeney	Early October 1889
Brend	October 1899
Christ	Tuesday, September 28, 1897
Dakin	Tuesday, September 25, 1900
Folsom	Tuesday, September 25, 1900
Hall	Autumn 1889
Keefauver	Tuesday, October 1, 1889
Klinger	Published 1901
Zeisler	Tuesday, September 25, 1900

Please note that Canon chronologists may differ on pivotal dates and comparative periods between cases, thus a simple majority is not necessarily correct. Most Canon scholars settle on a single chronologist's results for their research framework.

Notable Quotes:

“I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt.”



“You know my methods. Apply them!”

“Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or for ill.”

“You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked supra-orbital development. Would you have any objection to my running my finger along your parietal fissure? A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull.”

. . . forbear from crossing the moor in those dark hours when the powers of evil are exalted.

“Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!”

“I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world. In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task.”

“A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing.”

I knew that seclusion and solitude were very necessary for my friend in those hours of intense mental concentration during which he weighed every particle of evidence, constructed alternative theories, balanced one against the other, and made up his mind as to which points were essential and which immaterial.

“It is at the hour of action that I turn to you for aid.”

I have not heard him laugh often, and it has always boded ill to somebody.

Evil indeed is the man who has not one woman to mourn him.

The Luminous Wheelbarrow

To the uninitiated, Holmes’ remark to Watson that, “It may be that you are not yourself luminous but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it,” seems to be a backhanded compliment at best and highly offending at worst. It could be easily interpreted to mean, “Your dumbness stimulates me to genius.” Then, seemingly affirming this interpretation, a foolish Watson is doggishly pleased by the comment.

Of course, to students of the Canon, this is far from being the correct interpretation. We know that the Great Friendship is an extremely complex relationship as, indeed, are all relationships that extend across the years.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

On more than one occasion, Holmes has sought Watson's company—and support—in his cases. “I am lost without my Boswell,” he confesses in SCAN when he urges the Good Doctor to remain with him. Then, again in TWIS, “You have a grand gift of silence, Watson. It makes you quite invaluable as a companion.” In EMPT, he warns Watson, “Now, my dear fellow, in the matter of these explanations we have, if I may ask for your co-operation, a hard and dangerous night's work in front of us.” He then asks, “You'll come with me to-night?” and Watson replies, “When you like and where you like.”

The solution I think lies in Holmes' statement: “I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities.” Regardless of all this, however, the fact remains that although our biographer is far from being a fool, he invariably appears to come out second-best in the reasoning department; something, of course which can also be said of all of us.

It is not farfetched to think that this assessment by Holmes is very close to the truth. In his writings, Watson *does* habitually underrate his own abilities, which of course makes the Great Detective seem to be, well, greater. Few of us could match Holmes' reason abilities and well-trained rational mind. If we cannot identify with someone of his calibre of genius, we certainly can with Watson (or the Watson character, as created by the Good Doctor). The latter—like us—is astonished by Holmes' deductions, allowing us to participate with him if not Holmes, in the adventures.

The Sleuth and the Doctor's Deductions

While undeniably Watson's deductions about Dr. Mortimer's walking stick fell on the far side of the Moon, it seems to me that Holmes himself left the firm ground of deductive reasoning and ventured into the morass of guesswork.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

His statement that Mortimer lacked ambition because he quit his position in the hospital and moved to the country was entirely without foundation. Mortimer's statement alone shatters the truth of that deduction: “I married, and so left the hospital, and with it all hopes of a consulting practice. It was necessary to make a home of my own.” Even Holmes had to admit his error.

Going by that the *Medical Directory*, revealed, Mortimer enough ambition to tackle the work and research required to win a prestigious prize with a learned essay, he was a contributor to the general medical literature of the time, a corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society, and the Medical Officer for three parishes. On top of all of this, he was involved in research of his own—not exactly the description of a laggard!

The Unsophisticated Connoisseur

This is, I think, the only time in the entire Canon in which Watson says something truly disparaging about Sherlock Holmes. He tells us how they spent two hours “entirely absorbed in the pictures of the modern Belgian masters,” and that Holmes talked “of nothing but art, of which he had the crudest ideas.”

One must wonder whether Watson was ever fully capable of gauging Holmes' abilities and education. There appears to be a contradiction to Holmes' “crudest ideas” of art when he later, in Baskerville Hall, He unerringly identifies paintings by Sir Godfrey Kneller and Sir Joshua Reynolds with but a mere glance: “I know what is good when I see it,” he comments, “and I see it now. That's a Kneller, I'll swear, that lady in the blue silk over yonder, and the stout gentleman with the wig ought to be a Reynolds.” In VALL, we witness him lecturing Inspector MacDonald that the painting hanging in

Professor Moriarty's study was done by Jean Baptiste Greuze: "Jean Baptiste Greuze was a French



artist who flourished between the years 1750 and 1800. I allude, of course to his working career. Modern criticism has more than indorsed the high opinion formed of him by his contemporaries."

However, it may have been that, unlike Watson, Holmes with his penchant for precision may have had low tolerance for impressionism, which at the time appeared to be the rage, and probably had a preference for the Renaissance masters, such as da Vinci and Rafael.

We later learn from the man himself that he and Watson had quite different tastes in art, and frequently disagreed on the subject.

requently disagreed on the subject.

The Supposedly Clever Stapleton

Stapleton is viewed as having been clever in the way he went about stalking of Sir Henry. This is something that is most certainly open to discussion.

Starting with the matter of the boots, while it made perfect sense to take one of Sir Henry's boots to obtain something with his scent for the hellish hound to track, once he realized that the item had not been worn, why go back to return to return said boot? Then, instead of stealing some other part of the heir's clothing (a hat, gloves a hairbrush) he nicks a second boot, which calls further attention to the matter of footwear. Surely any other item of clothing would have fulfilled the purpose just as well; it was a lesson that dearly cost Selden.

There is the possibility, however, that the thief might not have been Stapleton himself. Some Canon scholars have suggested that it was some unidentified ally at the hotel—a maid or such—who did the dirty work.

The Baskerville Riches

The newspaper account of Sir Charles Baskerville's death indicated that he had made large sums of money in South African speculation. In this he was not alone.

In his book, *The Great Boer War*, ACD mentions the British investment and speculation resulting from the profits of South African natural resources, to which he referred to as one of the "great treasure chests in the world." Towards the end of the 19th century vast fortunes were generated by these kinds of investments. Cecil Rhodes' De Beers Mining Company (1880), the De Beers Consolidated Mines (1888), and the British South Africa Company, organized in 1889 are but a few examples of this. It seems obvious that Sir Charles participated in these profitable activities.



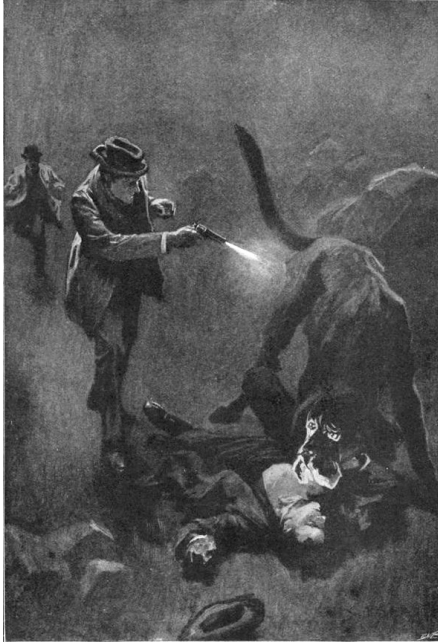
Mortimer admitted that, "Sir Charles had the reputation of being rich, but we did not know how very rich he was until we came to examine his securities." "Rich" is clearly a profound understatement in

this case. By the terms of his will, Mortimer received £1,000, (≈\$380,000), the Barrymores £500 (≈\$188,000) each, with the cash remainder of £740,000 (≈\$280M) going to Sir Henry. He must have known how Croesus felt when he found out that his part of the estate came to about £1,000,000 (≈\$380M)! It was not strange that Holmes remarked, “Dear me! It is a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game.”

One must wonder with wonder, what the Great Detective’s fee was. In this case it could not have been a matter of it being “upon a fixed scale,” or remitted altogether.

The Jewel of the Canon

I wrote this some time ago, but I thought in this case it bears repeating.



Undoubtedly, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the premier Canonical case. In 1999, it was listed as the top Holmes novel, receiving a 100 perfect rating from Sherlockian and Holmesian scholars, and it probably is the adventure that the uninitiated most identify with Holmes; just about everyone can quote its key, sinister line, “Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!”

Curiously enough, although Holmes is central to solving the mystery, it is the one case in which he appears to be marginally involved. Instead, it is Watson who carries on for most of the story.

HOUN offers everything and more than what the fiercest Canon *aficionado* might demand in the way of brilliant deductions, such as the Great Detective’s conclusion that the warning letter sent to Sir Henry urging him to keep away was prepared in a hotel, based on the condition of the pen and the inkwell. Every character in the story, including the lesser ones, is fully

fleshed and developed. Although none of the Canonical novels can be considered disappointing, HOUN is the only one of the four that is unburdened by a sizeable portion dealing with events that took place well before the case itself.

It also offers the reader a unique cast of characters. One expects some tragic characters in a story such as this, and they are present, Barrymore and his wife burdened with the terrible fate of her brother Seldon. Then there is the somewhat absurd Frankland, living in the past and wasting his resources on endless litigation, while his disinherited daughter leads the harsh life of genteel poverty. We have all met a Mortimer who, although capable, is hampered by his many interests, which lead him to pretty much live in a world of his own.

HOUN is a product of its time. Towards the end of the 19th century, Gothic literature experienced a revival. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, are some of the more outstanding examples of the rebirth of the genre. This was a time when the placid Victorian expectation of continued unlimited progress began to show a few cracks. Although it had been



widely accepted by society, Darwin's theory of evolution nevertheless had an unsettling effect that led some to think in terms of the possibilities of devolution—a dread that mankind might be cursed by genetic demons able to leap from one generation to the next, making us all physically weaker and morally decadent. Shakespeare's expostulation, "O, what may man within him hide, though angel on the outward side!" seemed increasingly appropriate.



There is a very strong hint of this in Holmes' discovery of the connection between Stapleton and Sir Henry through the painting of Hugo Baskerville, which is reminiscent of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Here Dorian, the main character, while wandering through his house's picture gallery as he contemplates engaging in an in-

creasingly debauched life studies "the various portraits of those whose blood flowed in his veins." As he considers his ancestors' corrupt lives he ponders whether "some strange poisonous germ crept from body to body till it had reached his own," damning him. In HOUN it is precisely this concept of hereditary traits—curses—being passed from generation to generation that plays a crucial role in solving the mystery, as evidenced by the strong resemblance between Sir Hugo and his descendant Stapleton.

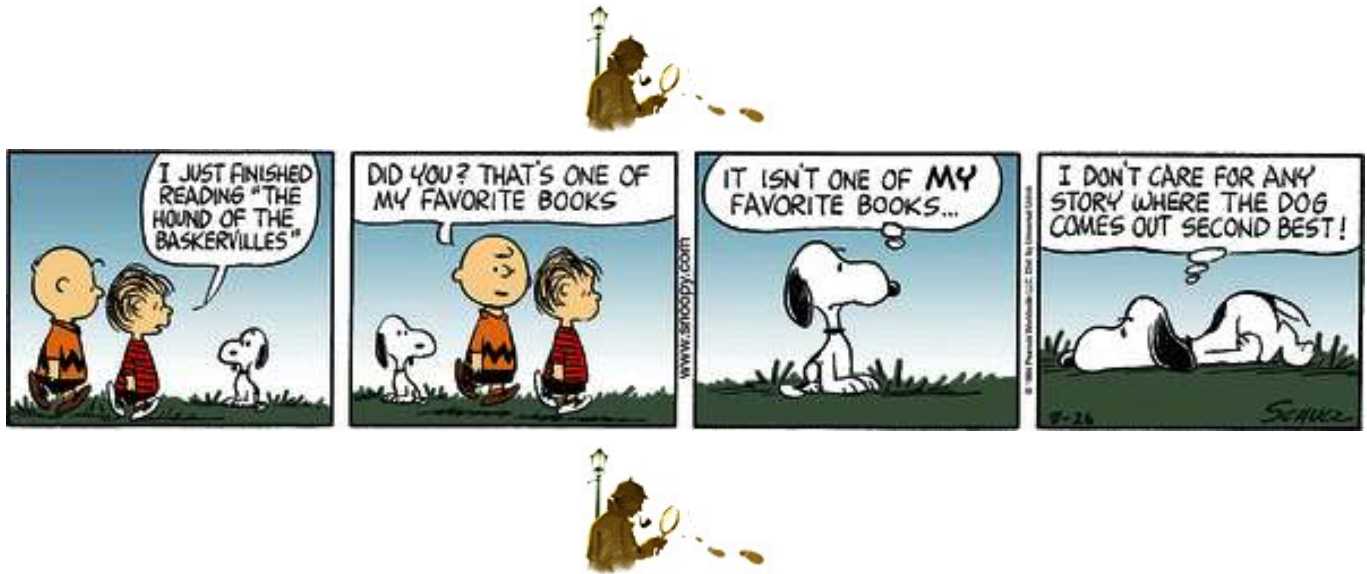
Watson's description of Baskerville Hall and its surroundings has brooding echoes of *The Fall of the House of Usher*: "The whole front was draped in ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat-of-arms broke through the dark veil. From this central block rose the twin towers, ancient, crenellated and pierced with many loopholes. To right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite. A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a single black column of smoke."



Who better to combat and defeat all this dark uncertainty than Sherlock Holmes, the very personification of reason and the scientific method? We see how, over the development of the case his mind and methods dissipate the miasma of the curse of the Baskervilles, his rationality exorcises the supernaturalism of the region, and he finally deals personally with the representative of evil itself when he kills the dreaded hellhound. Of all the rest, Holmes is the only one whose intellectual grip was not loosened by the surroundings of that desolate area. All the others experienced at least a brief moment of terrifying doubt as to whether there might not be something unnatural about this seeming hellish scourge. Sir Henry put it best when he heard the hound baying across the moor: "And yet it was one thing to laugh about it in London, and it is another to stand out here in the darkness of the moor and to hear such a cry as that."

Because it is possible to have a bit too much caviar, there are some who consider a few of the stories in the Canon as being disappointing. This, however, cannot be said of the novels, particularly HOUN.

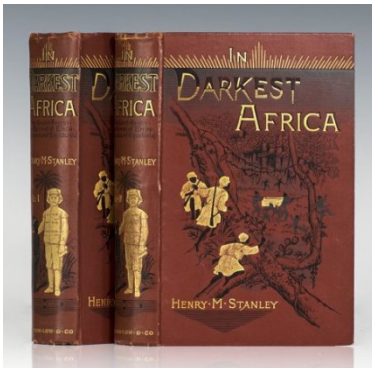
It is at this point that Sherlock Holmes left the ambits of the short story pulp mill and stepped into the pantheon of true literature.



What else happened in 1889:

Empire

Great Seal of the United Kingdom is affixed to the charter of the British South Africa Company. Company is assigned trading and other rights over a vast territory, with the express reservation to the Crown to take over at any time the works and buildings of the Company.



Transvaal claimed to be “encircled” by Rhodes’ concessions in East Africa. Rhodesia established.

◀ At Cairo, Henry Stanley ends his three-year African expedition. He is knighted upon his return to England. Writes *In Darkest Africa*.

Colonel Woodehouse defeats Dervish horde in Sudan. General Grenfell, commanding British troops on the Nile attacks and defeats Dervish troops, with 500 killed and wounded, and as many taken prisoner.

The Canadian Pacific Railway is completed from coast to coast.

Britain

Great London Dockers’ Strike; the “Dockers’ Tanner”; growth of unskilled workers’ unions; New Unionism; Gasworkers’ Union formed. Strike is finally arbitrated in the workers’ favor by the popular Catholic Cardinal Henry Manning.

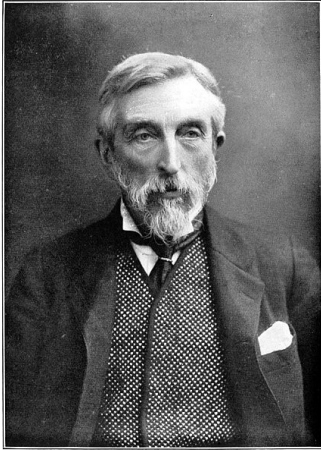
Parnell vindicated as all charges are revealed as false. *The London Times* apologizes.

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, opens.

Technical Education Act: County Councils to levy 1d for technical and manual education.

Establishment of the telephone company.

John Bright, orator and politician, leading spirit in the Anti-Corn Law League, dies.



Board of Agriculture becomes government department with minister.

Metropolitan Board of Works replaced by London County Council.

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington, opens.

◀ General Booth publishes *Survey of London Life and Labour*.

Early used of photographs in newspaper: *Illustrated London News* runs Cambridge and Oxford boat crews competition.

Woolwich Ferry starts.

White Hart Inn, Borough High Street, one of the last coaching inns, demolished.

Act to prevent cruelty to children.

Board of Agriculture becomes government department with minister.

World

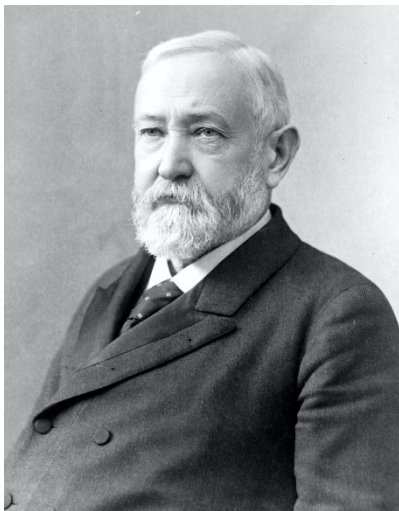
Japan's Meiji constitution. Arinori Mori, minister of education assassinated by Shinto fanatic.

Wall Street Journal begins publishing.

Italy takes Somalia and Ethiopia. Yohannes IV (Kasa) Emperor of Ethiopia dies in battle.

Moulin Rouge opens in Paris.

North and South Dakota, Montana and Washington admitted as U.S.A. states.



U.S.A. Senate, in secret session, passes resolution declaring against European control of the Panama Canal.

Congress of French Revolutionary Labor Party at Bordeaux.

◀ President Harrison, of the U.S.A., closes Bering Sea to all nations; issues proclamation prohibiting the killing of fur animals within Alaska without a special government permit.

Crown Prince Archduke Rudolph of Austria-Hungary and Baroness Maria Vetsera are found dead at the hunting lodge of Mayerling, outside Vienna, allegedly a murder-suicide. (In 1983, former Austrian empress Zita claimed it was an assassination by two conspirators when Rudolf refused to take part in a plot to oust his father Emperor Franz Josef.)

Treaty of Acciali: Ethiopia made Italian protectorate.

Ivory Coast is declared a protectorate of France.

Part of Oklahoma Indian lands open to homesteading.

Portuguese under Pinto try to extend influence in Zambesi Valley; Anglo-Portuguese dispute.

End of Portuguese Empire in Brazil; republic proclaimed and Dom Pedro, the emperor, exiled.

Abdication of King Milan of Serbia; accession of Alexander.

Uprising in the island of Crete. Turkish authorities expelled and public archives destroyed. Turkey calls up 80,000 reservists, but promises to inquire into legitimate grievances.

Russian jurors to be nominated by government.

King Ferdinand II of Portugal dies at age 73.

Stanley's expedition reaches Bagamoyo in Indian Ocean.

Aristocratic "Land Captains" replace elected JPs in Russia.

Father Damien, worker among lepers in Molokai, Hawaii, dies of the disease.

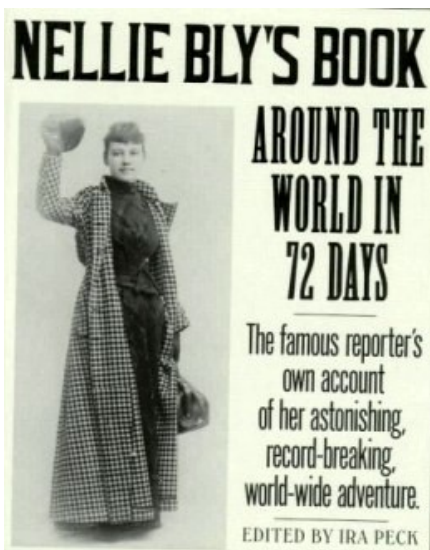
Influenza reaches Europe and America from Siberia.

General Boulanger, former French War Minister leaves country, addresses manifesto to his party that he left the country to avoid arrest, French Chambers authorize the Senate to try Boulanger and others in absentia, for high treason. The general and his staff are found guilty and condemned to life imprisonment.

Jefferson Davis dies in Mississippi.

Paris Exhibition: proof of industrial development in France. Continental monarchies abstain from all official representation. English and American ambassadors attend. Eiffel Tower built for the event is dedicated in a ceremony presided over by Gustave Eiffel, the designer, and attended by French Prime Minister Pierre Tirard. At 985 feet high, taller than the Great Pyramid, the Eiffel Tower becomes highest structure on Earth.

Lectures at Dorpat University to be in Russian; German forbidden in schools.



Brunner-Mond Salt Union formed; combine of 64 firms.

Private tolls abolished on French Canals.

◀ New York World's Nellie Bly (Liz Cochrane) begins world trip to beat Jules Verne's Phileas Fogg (*Around the World in 80 Days*). Takes 72 days.

The Pemberton Medicine Company (later the Coca-Cola Company), is incorporated in Atlanta, Georgia.

Work on Panama Canal stopped; French company bankrupt, U.S.A. takes over, finishes canal.

Johnstown flood kills more than 6,000, losses climb to \$40,000,000.

Civil war in Haiti ends. General Légitime defeated by General Hippolyte, who becomes president.

Bismarck introduces Old Age Insurance in Germany.

Erection of Tacoma Building in Chicago. First skyscraper, 13 storeys high.

Mirza Ghulam Ahmad establishes the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, a reform sect of Islam.

Conference at Berlin guarantees an autonomous government to the Samoan Islands under the joint control of the United States, Great Britain, and Germany.

Art

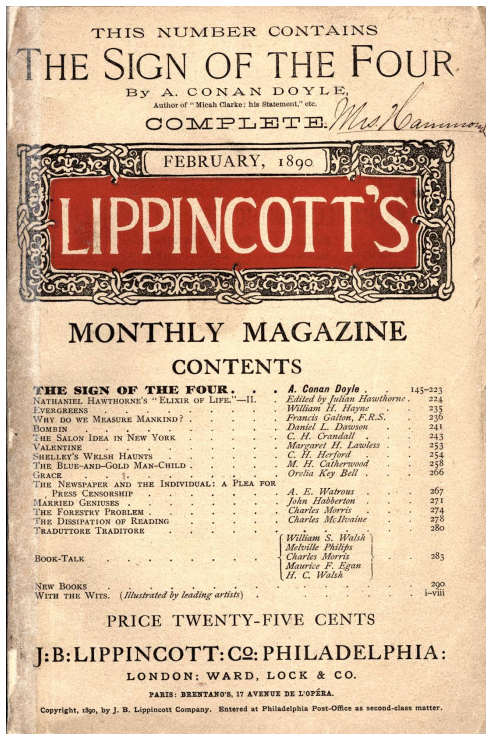
Sir James Barrie's *A Window in Thrums*, sketches of Scottish village life.

Robert Browning publishes *Asolando*, a poem. Dies later in the year.

Jerome K. Jerome publishes stories, *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*, *Three Men in a Boat*.

Mark Twain publishes *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

Robert Louis Stevenson publishes *Master of Ballantrae*.



William Butler Yeats publishes *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

Paul Bourget publishes *Le Disciple*, a psychological novel.

◀ Sir Arthur Conan Doyle publishes *The Sign of the Four*.

Gerhart J. Hauptmann publishes *Vor Sonnenaufgang*, German realistic play.

Sudermann publishes *Die Ehre*, a German play.

Dvorak presents *Symphony No. 4 in G Major*.

Gilbert and Sullivan present *The Gondoliers*.

Renoir paints *Girls Picking Flowers*.

Seurat paints *The Side Show*.

Van Gogh paints *Man with a Pipe* (self-portrait), *The Olive Grove*, and *Starry Night*.

Cézanne paints *Harlequin*.

Tchaikovsky introduces *The Sleeping Princess* ballet.

Richard Strauss introduces *Tod und Verklärung*, tone poem.

Science and Technology

Hollerith's punched-card system widely used in industry.

First ship-to-shore wireless message is received in the U.S., at San Francisco.

The first General Conference on Weights and Measures (CGPM) defines the length of a meter as the distance between two lines on a standard bar of an alloy of platinum with ten percent iridium, measured at the melting point of ice.

Eastman's Kodak camera comes into production, using photographic film.

Astronomical Society of Pacific holds first meeting in San Francisco, California.

Ferdinand von Zeppelin patents his "Navigable Balloon."

The first jukebox makes its debut at the Palais Royale Saloon in San Francisco, California. For a nickel, one can listen to a few minutes of music through a tube of an Edison tinfoil phonograph.



In Potsdam, Germany, Ernst von Rebeur-Paschwitz makes the first known recordings of a distant earthquake, taken place in Tokyo, Japan, an hour earlier.

◀ William Gray patents coin-operated telephone.

The brassiere is invented.

First dishwashing machine marketed in Chicago.

Mering and Minkowski show that the pancreas prevents diabetes.

Daniel Stover and William Hance patent bicycle with back pedal brake.

First linotype machine in use.

Thomas Edison shows his first motion picture.

Aspirin patented in Germany by Bayer Laboratories, first introduced in powder form.

Panhard and Levassor begin using Daimler's engines in French cars, using modern layout.

Next week's case: EMPT.

Respectfully submitted,

Murray, the Courageous Orderly

(a.k.a. Alexander E. Braun)

"I should have fallen into the hands
of the murderous Ghazis had it not
been for the devotion and courage
shown by Murray, my orderly..."

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

© 2021 Alexander E. Braun