An Inquiry into: "A Study in Scarlet"

Vol. XIII No. 1 • August 4, 2022

A Study in Scarlet first appeared in November 1887's *Beeton's Christmas Annual*. It was never published in *The Strand Magazine*. It is the first of the four Canonical novels.

Uncharacteristically, the overwhelming majority of our chronologists agree regarding the year in which these happenings took place, with most even concurring on a specific date!

If the case took place in 1881, as the majority of these Canon chronologists state, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 27 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 29.

A Study in Scarlet

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	March 4, 1881
Baring-Gould	Friday, March 4, 1881
Bell	Friday, March 4, 1881
Blakeney	1881
Brend	March 1881
Christ	Friday, March 3, 1882
Dakin	Friday, March 4, 1881
Folsom	Friday, March 4, 1885
Hall	March 4, 1881
Keefauver	Tuesday March 4, 1884
Klinger	1881
Zeisler	Friday, March 4, 1881

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.

Main Characters:

Stamford, Watson's former dresser at Bart's. Inspectors Lestrade and Gregson, two of Scotland Yard's best detectives. Enoch J. Drebber, an Elder of the Mormon Church in Salt Lake. Joseph Stangerson, Mormon Elder and Drebber's secretary. Jefferson Hope, the man wronged by Drebber and Stangerson. Constable John Rance, a beat policeman. Wiggins, leader of the Baker Street Irregulars, a gang of street Arabs. Madame Charpentier, Drebber's landlady. Arthur Charpentier, a naval officer, son of Madame Charpentier. Alice Charpentier, Madame Charpentier's young daughter. John Ferrier, wanderer rescued by the Mormons. Lucy Ferrier, John Ferrier's adopted daughter. Brigham Young, leader of the Mormon Church.

Notable Quotes:

I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. 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, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

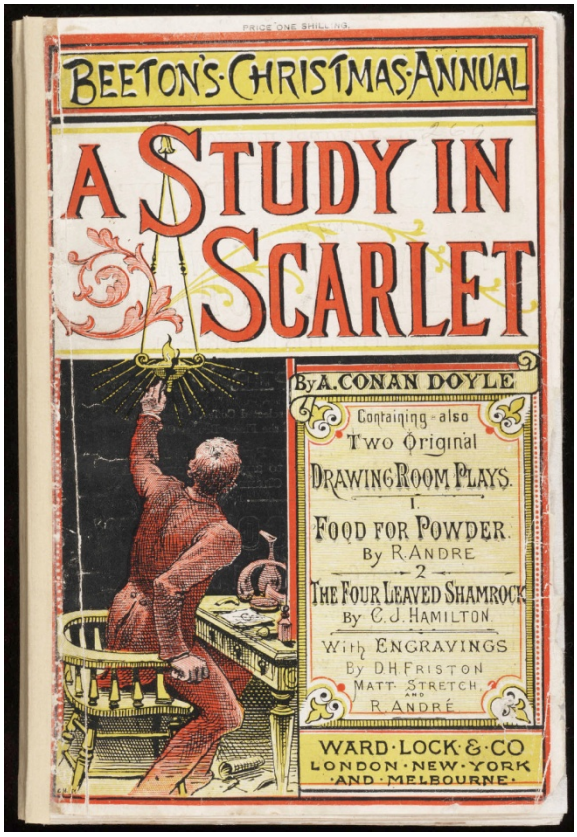
I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air—or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances, I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained.

"You don't know Sherlock Holmes yet, perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion."

"Dr.Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Stamford, introducing us.

"How are you?" he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should hardly have given him credit. "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive."

Sherlock Holmes—his limits.



1. Knowledge of Literature.—Nil.
2. Philosophy.—Nil.
3. Astronomy.—Nil.
4. Politics.—Feeble.
5. Botany.—Variable. Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.
6. Geology.—Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.
7. Chemistry.—Profound.
8. Anatomy.—Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. Sensational Literature.—Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century.
10. Plays the violin well.
11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman.
12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law.

"Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first."

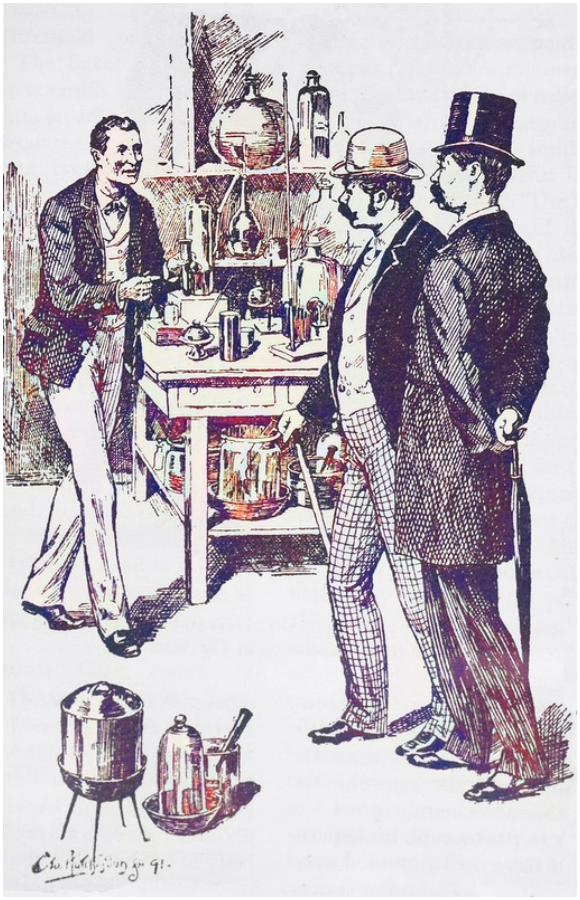
"It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

I had already observed that he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty.

"There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it."

A Personal Disappointment

Besides teaching a writing class, I have been tutoring a few calculus-challenged students. I make a good teacher, because at their age I was an utter jackass as far as calculus was concerned and I therefore (painfully) recall which potholes I had to get over before mastering it.



The point to this is that I have become re-accustomed to thinking in numbers. So, when I reread STUD, I realized something nobody else has: our sleuth was way off when he informed Watson and Stamford that "the Sherlock Holmes' test" for hemoglobin was accurate to one part in a million.

Basing my calculation on the basis that a drop of blood would roughly be the same volume as a drop of water (0.05 grams to a liter in this case), my result came to one part in 50,000, not one part in a 1,000,000! Aha! Not so accurate, Mr. Holmes!

Not only that, my calculation resulted in something completely original to contribute to canonical literature! Visions of BSI leaders gratefully granting me the much-yearned-for Shilling danced in my mind.

My dreams were roughly shattered. Fortunately, I ran cursory check before crowing my triumph and discovered that legendary science and science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov (himself a noted Sherlockian) had reached the same conclusion—in 1980! The fact that I reached the exact same result did little to alleviate my disappointment.

Upon further research, I found in James O'Brien's excellent book, *The Scientific Sherlock Holmes,* that the author concluded that Holmes' calculation, quickly done in his head 141 years ago, was not as inaccurate as Asimov (and I) contended because, as he explained, "in Europe, quantities were, and still are, calculated in terms of weight rather than volume."

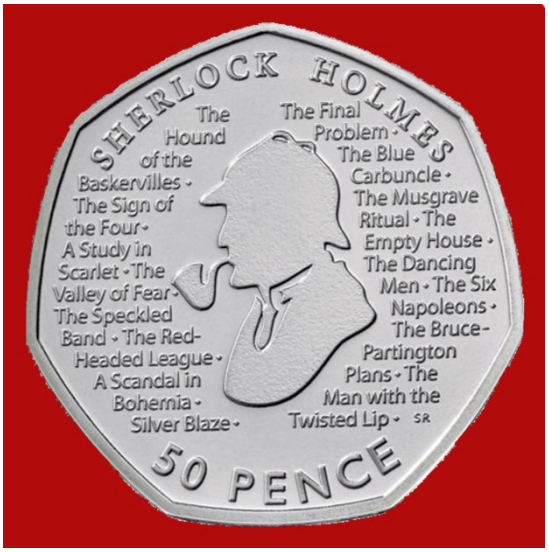
Nihil novi sub sole…

In Pursuit of the Great Game

We again initiate the Great Cycle to once more engage in the profound and scholarly study of The Canon of Sherlock Holmes.

In Sherlock Holmes Sir Arthur Conan Doyle gave us one of the most enduring characters in the history of fiction. Surveys regularly show that he is more readily recognizable across the globe than Superman, Mickey Mouse, or any world leader. Those who thrive on detective fiction may be able to tell you who Mrs. Marple and Nick Charles are, or even Raffles and Lord Peter; yet even someone who has never read a detective story will immediately recognize the aquiline profile, the deerstalker and Meerschaum pipe.

According to a survey, many today believe that Sir Winston Churchill was a fictional character, while many more believe (as we all do!) that Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street was real. England's Royal Mint recently honored him by issuing a 50-pence piece with his likeness on the reverse, and that of Queen Elizabeth II on the obverse. Unsurprisingly, in 2002 Holmes was awarded an Honorary Fellowship from the Royal Society of Chemistry, for his pioneering use of forensic science.



Holmes was born during a time when it was rapidly becoming obvious to everyone that science was destined to play an increasingly important part in their lives—on the year that STUD took place, everyone 30 years old or older remembered the impact that Darwin's *Origin of the Species* exerted upon the Victorian *zeitgeist*. Early science-fiction writers like Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and Edgar Rice Burroughs all contributed to this by popularizing the bright promises and dystopian possibilities of the advancement of science and technology. Sir Arthur himself contributed to the genre with the adventures of Professor Challenger.

Sherlock Holmes made his appearance into this world, full-grown from ACD's mind, much like Athena out of Zeus' forehead. He was the first (and it may be genuinely argued the only) one of his kind. A consulting detective who applied logic, science, and observation to his professional activities and who, for the sake of his calling, chose to be as detached as possible from the mainstream of human society, a highly moral individual guided by an unerring sense of ethics.

We would not see anyone even comparable to him until the coming of Mister Spock who (with atypical Vulcan pride) once boasted from the very bridge of the starship USS *Enterprise* of being a direct descendant of the Great Detective.

Above everything else, Sherlock Holmes is a product of his era, which explains the difficulty—some would say the impossibility—to transplant him to another time. He forever lives in 1895; he is the archetypal Victorian gentleman a kind of paladin that no other culture or era has been able to match. He was the first to apply what would become known as forensic methods to the detection of crime—an able chemist who knew the use of a microscope and understood that crimes are solved by the observation of small detail such as the ash of a cigar or a faint footprint.

He also understood the fact that sometimes the slow turning wheels of justice grind far more exceedingly fine than necessary, preferring to rely upon his own conscience for a judgment.

Small wonder that until relatively recently, Scotland Yard presented its new recruits with a copy of Watson's complete works.

Part of the genius of ACD in creating Holmes was that he did not make him perfect. Like Superman and kryptonite, our sleuth has his weaknesses: his self-pride is somewhat oversized, his behavior sometimes tended to be self-destructive, he suffered with great difficulty the existence of those who

like so many of us were unable to follow the lightning conclusions of his agile mind, and as poor Watson well knew, he tended to indulge in acerbic comments.

It is not so much Holmes himself who calls to every generation, as the unattainable wish in all our hearts that we could be like him: wise, observant, and logical, while inhabiting an orderly world in which life flowed in three-quarters time, where everyone and everything had its place, and where, with our help, justice always prevailed. Of course, this is not possible, so we all content ourselves with emulating Watson.

Thank you very much, Sir Arthur.

And now once more, Hounds, the game is afoot!

The Doctor's Health

Watson laments that he returned from the battlefield in Afghanistan with his health "irretrievable ruined." Fortunately, this was not the case; otherwise, he would have been physically unable to be the stouthearted and often energetic (he jumped over a six-foot wall in CHAS) participant in so many of Holmes' adventures. Like many veterans, the war wounds reminded him of their existence on certain occasions, but this seems to have been more a function of weather than of mind.

This is not to belittle his war experiences. One should not understate the seriousness of his condition. In those pre-antibiotic days any wound could be serious. Watson was fortunate after all, considering that Jezail ordnance was composed of bits and piece of various metals—including old nails—which almost always resulted in infected wounds.

In Watson's case, things progressed from bad to worse. After being seriously wounded and when he was at his weakest during the beginning of his recovery, he contracts enteric (i.e., typhoid) fever. Finally, after everything that he had to endure, he was invalidated out of the Army, possibly destroying the possibility of a career he may have intended to follow.

The question then arises as to why he came out seemingly so weakened. Many Canon scholars have speculated that he suffered from what today we call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While this could be likely, I do not think it accurate.

I think that at worse, Watson was experiencing post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS). The main difference between PTSS and PTSD is intensity and duration. PTSS often resolves on its own within a few days or weeks, in which case it is not considered a diagnosable mental disorder. And the more severe post-traumatic symptoms—flashbacks, total loss of self-confidence, suicidal ideation—typically do not occur with PTSS, or are one-time and relatively minor.

In my experience it is far from unusual to meet someone recovering from serious wounds or a life-threatening disease that is going through a period of depression. In short, it might not have been of PTSS either. The real reason is described by Watson himself, "Under such circumstances, I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortless, meaningless existence. . . ." Notice the word *lounger,* and "leading a comfortless, meaningless existence."

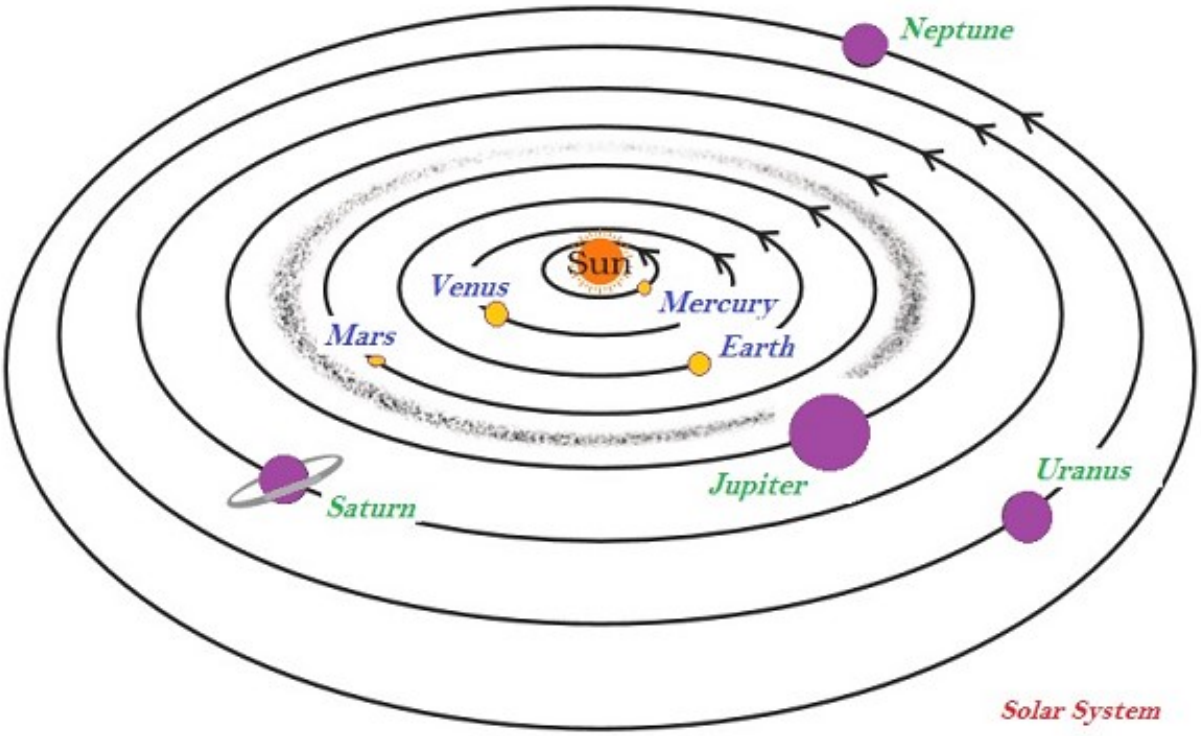
What Watson needed most at that point in his life was not so much rest, as a new purpose in life. It is revealing that although he claims that his nerves are shattered and wants to avoid noise or excitement, he is willing to share digs with someone described to him as a would-be poisoner who is following an eccentric course of studies (when he is at the university and not avoiding it for weeks), of whom nobody dares ask personal questions, and who beats up cadavers. Someone in Watson's supposed condition would have avoided placing himself in a situation in which he must share his daily life with someone with such as seemingly unbalanced personality!

Yet when he asks Stamford how it was that Holmes knew he came from Afghanistan and the other answers that many would like to know how he concludes these things, Watson's reaction is, "Oh! a mystery is it? This is very piquant. I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. 'The proper study of mankind is man,' you know."

His friendship with Holmes provided him when he needed it the most with a North for his life compass, which led to new interests, to resume his profession, and even embark upon marriage.

The Educated Ignoramus

There is a general consensus amongst Canon scholars and students, that Holmes was having fun at Watson's expense when it came to the extent of his education. We know that later, on more than one occasion, he was able to guess Watson's thoughts when the latter fell into a brown study. Surely he must have realized from the Good Doctor's sidelong glances and unexpressed curiosity over the clients who visited at 221B—forcing him to abandon the sitting room to Holmes—that he was consumed with curiosity to find out what it was he was involved in.



Realizing as he must have, with great amusement, that Watson was ineffectually attempting to gauge his abilities it is not too extreme a conclusion that he had fun at his expense regarding his supposed ignorance of common-knowledge things such as the Copernican Theory. The remarkable thing is that Watson did not realize that he was being had!

Regardless of how focused Holmes' adult studies were then, as a schoolboy he would have been force-fed the reality of the workings of the Solar System. How could the Good Doctor have thought

that Holmes was such an ignoramus, when he tells us that he, "Prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati." Not only that, but he quoted Darwin, and bought a book printed in Latin, *De Jure inter Gentes,* which, from the title, one may suppose dealt with the beginnings of international law. In this first adventure with Watson, Holmes gave him proof of having at least a working knowledge of German, French, and Latin.

It has been said that, "First impressions are always unreliable." In Watson's case, however, the lack of accuracy of his first (and later) impressions of Holmes was not improved by the Great Detective's pawky wit.

Holmes' invitation to Watson (whom he still hardly knew) to accompany him in what would become their first case together is also another indication his great perspicacity in giving his new companion something to distract him from his despondency and survivor's misery.

Sadly enough, Watson was also mistaken when he concluded that had not been for "the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life," he might have suspected Holmes of using narcotics. Here, his incipient admiration for the man clouded his medical judgment. We can, however, celebrate the fact that the Good Doctor eventually weaned him away from the use of drugs.

Destitution at 221B

We regularly rejoice over the fact that Holmes was unable to afford by himself the quarters at 221B and had to look for a roommate. Had it been otherwise, our friends would have never met and we would have been deprived of many wonderful times and comradeship.

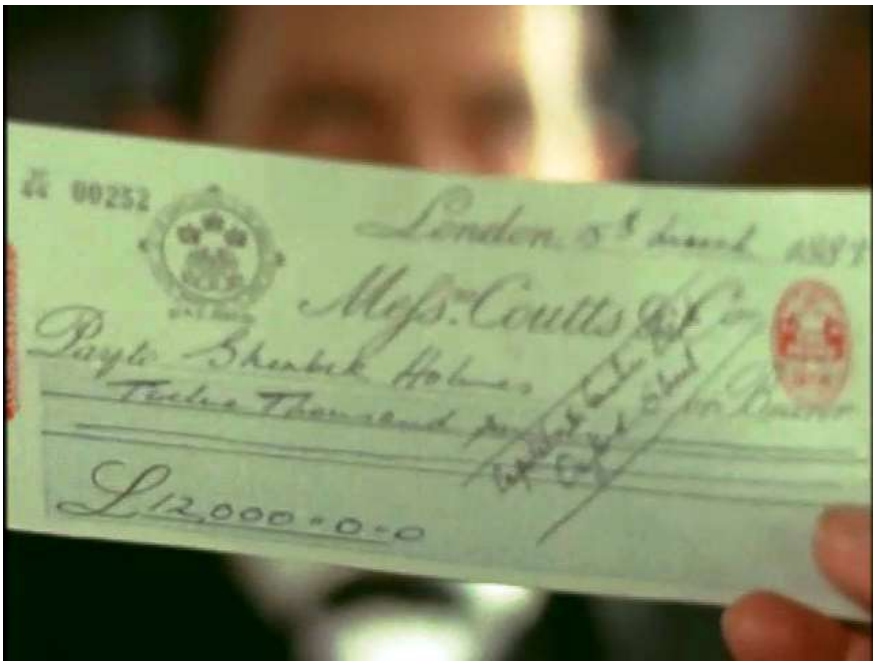
However, one must wonder why Holmes' economy was at that troubled low level. Watson tells us that from the moment they settled down in their new digs, Holmes had many "visitors" (a.k.a. "clients"). It is difficult to believe that if he were as strapped for cash as he supposedly was that he would say, "My professional charges are upon a fixed scale I do not vary them, save when I remit them altogether." Surely, this was still in the future.

It seems more likely that at the beginning of the Great Friendship Holmes, like Watson, had to carefully use every available pence. Although he did not yet command the munificent fees that he was to receive years afterwards, the volume of a large clientele would have supplied a decent amount of shillings. Although it is not mentioned, his reputation must have already been respectable by this time; otherwise, why would members of the official police regularly consult him?

Watson revealed to us what his economic resources were—£17 5s per month, or roughly $7,000; however, we are uncertain about Holmes' resources.

We are told that the Great Detective was unable to swing the rent for 221B by himself, which is why he was looking for someone with whom to share expenses. The question arises, then how great were those expenses?

In 1881 (as today with Washington DC), Imperial London was not an inexpensive place to live in, particularly for someone who wanted to keep his surroundings above the level of the working class. Although it was possible to live very economically, it would have been impossible to sustain the social standing both Holmes and Watson were accustomed to. Thus, the Baker Street solution was ideal. It was situated at the center of the great city and in view of what prices were then, it is not unlikely that our friends shared a yearly rent of £200 (≈$75,000), which probably included laundry and food. It simplified their desire to decently get along.



And, lest we forget, not too much later afterwards, by 1890, Holmes could afford paying "princely" sums for his digs all by himself, to the point at which, according to Watson, "the rooms might have been purchased at the price."

It has often been speculated that much of Holmes' financial success at his invented profession partly resulted from the publicity that Watson's telling of his adventures gave him. There are good grounds for this; even he conceded the point in FOUR, "[A] good many of the criminal classes begin to know me—especially since our friend here took to publishing some of my cases. . . ."

When he and Watson first met, our sleuth was already well known (and sought after) by leading Scotland Yarders. This had to mean that in certain circles beyond those of just the official police he already had a good reputation. As he himself remarked, some of his clients were recommended to him by the police. Watson tells us that by the time they first met, he already had a wide and varied clientele who obligingly climbed up those seventeen steps to consult him. If fact, as Holmes examined the rooms at Lauriston Gardens, Watson's observation that Gregson and Lestrade "watched the maneuvers of their amateur companion with considerable curiosity and some contempt," seems off the mark—after all Holmes was there at their request. Had they deemed Holmes so contemptible it is unlikely that they would have called upon him so regularly.

The question of course arises whether Holmes do this *pro bono?* It would seem so because he was unofficially called to help by the detectives on the field, not by Scotland Yard authorities. Considering that a police inspector's yearly earning back then was ≈£80 (≈$$30,000 today) our official detectives would have been unable to afford outside experts on their own shilling!

Of course, his unofficial assistance did nothing to burnish his reputation because even back then the papers would credit the Yard, not Holmes for the results.

Had it not been for Watson singing his praises, Holmes might not have experienced the resounding successes that he obtained.

Then, years later, came what Sherlock Holmes must have considered the highest praise he ever received when, in SIXN, Lestrade says, "I've seen you handle a good many cases, Mr. Holmes, but I don't know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. We're not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. No, sir, we are very proud of you, and if you come down to-morrow there's not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn't be glad to shake you by the hand."

The Baker Street Irregulars

Often our Canonical studies give us an insight into another era. I have been told by some that Holmes' apparent unfeeling acceptance of the state of Wiggins and the other Barker Street Irregulars showed a lack of feeling and humanity. Of course, that is pure presentism.

The Great Detective displayed a modicum of admiration for the boys' pluck in earning a living, oblivious of their miserable situation. Like in every other country of the time, poverty existed with very little notice of the rest of the population, Mark's admonition (Mar 14:7), "For ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good" was staunchly believed.

"Street Arab," generally meant "orphan" and at that time, in Victoria's Imperial England (and the rest of the world, West and East, for that matter), children were very much disposable items. While some attempts were made by some charitable organizations to care for them, for the most part nobody cared much about their fate. Dickens certainly knew what he was writing about.

What else happened in 1881:

Empire

Sudanese Revolt under Mahdi, war in the Sudan (1881-1898).

India reaches 253 million.

Stanley founds Leopoldville in the Congo.

Britain defeated by the Boers at Laing's Neck and Majuba Hill. Prime Minister Gladstone grants Transvaal self-government. Britain reserves right to veto all foreign treaties that might be entered into by the South African Republic.

British North Borneo Company chartered.

Parliament passes Second Irish Land and Coercion Acts, Land Courts to fix fair rents.

Britain

Bradlaugh reelected; ejected from Commons by ten policemen.

Report of Royal Commission on agricultural depression.

Flogging is banned by the British Army and Navy .

London's population reaches 3.3 million.

The Savoy Theatre is built in London.

Queen's College, Dundee, Founded; becomes part of St. Andrews University in 1953.

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli (Lord of Beaconsfield) dies.

National History Museum at Kensington in London opens.

Thomas Carlyle, British historian, dies.

Leadenhall Market opens.

First electrical power plant and grid in Godalming, Britain.

Leyton Orient football team formed.

World

Jewish pogroms in East Europe, particularly Russia.

Tsar Alexander II of Russia accepts Melikov's proposal for a Consultative Committee for reform, is assassinated on that same day. Alexander III decides to dismiss the draft for a liberal constitution found in his father's desk after the assassination.

◄ James A. Garfield, 20th U.S. President, shot and wounded after four months' administration; dies two months later.

Japanese promised a constitution and national parliament to meet in 1890. Rights of sovereignty and executive power, are vested in the person of the Mikado, with ministers were accountable to him alone.

Dr. Ogden of Aberdeen publishes account of experiments to ascertain the causes of inflammation and suppuration. He concludes that suppuration is caused by certain bacteria. Results achieved afterward verify this.

Maximilien Littré, French philologist and philosopher, author of the *Dictionnaire de la Langue Française* dies.

French Ministry of Agriculture established.

The Barnum and Bailey Greatest Show on Earth Circus is created.

National Society of the Red Cross is established.

Gunfight at the O.K. Corral.

De Lesseps and Gustave Eiffel, French engineers, begin construction of the Panama Canal.

U.S. Supreme Court establishes income tax is constitutional.

France invades Tunis; occupies Bizerta; Treaty of Bardo establishes protectorate over Tunis--Arabs revolt and are put down; Italians hostile.

Franco-British intervention secures most of Thessaly and part of Epirus for Greece.

Serbia and Austria sign secret treaty.

Liberty of public meeting and press granted in France.

Tidal wave in China kills 300,000 people.

Completion of St. Gotthard Tunnel linking Göschenen and Airolo, Switzerland.

Prince Alexander of Bulgaria Suspends Organic Laws; takes absolute power for seven years.

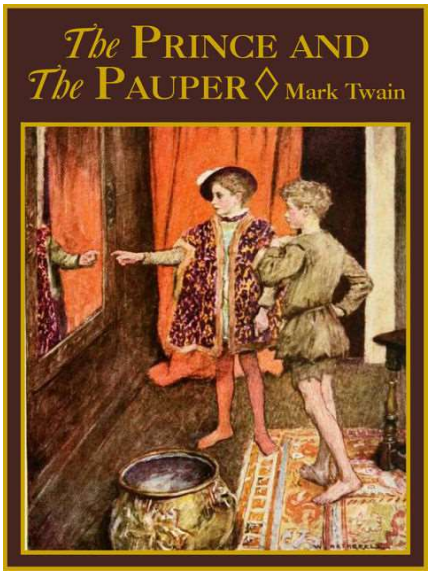
Jules Ferry laws passed in France, establish free, secular education.

Sitting Bull surrenders.

Russian General Skobelev takes Geok Tepe, defeats Turkomans, brings territory under Russian influence.

Nitrate war between Chile and Peru continues after fall of Lima.

Art



Nietzche's *Aurora*.

Monet's painting, *Sunshine and Snow* exhibited.

Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience* debuts.

◄ Mark Twain publishes *The Prince and the Pauper*.

Tales of Hoffmann completed after Offenbach's death.

Feodor Mikhailovitch Dostoevsky dies.

Revised Version of the New Testament.

Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet,* published posthumously.

Anatole France's *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard* published.

Ibsen's *Ghosts,* a drama dealing with venereal disease debuts.

Science and Technology

Electricity exhibition in Paris.

Hiram Maxim invents a self-regulating electrical generator.

Michelson invents an instrument to measure distance with light waves.

Carlos Finlay of Cuba develops theory that mosquitoes carry yellow fever.

Koch works on the destruction effect of certain chemicals (disinfectants) on microbes.

Louis Pasteur develops anthrax vaccine.

Billroth successfully operates on the abdomen.

First electrical power plant and grid in Godalming, Britain.

Next week's case: SIGN.

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..."

All Sherlock Holmes illustrations have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

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

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