



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

1888 Sherlock Holmes was 34 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 36.

Main Characters:

Colonel Ross, owner of the champion racehorse Silver Blaze. John Straker, racehorse trainer and retired jockey. Fitzroy Simpson, a wealthy London bookmaker and profligate gambler. Inspector Gregory, member of the official police. Silas Brown, Mapleton stables trainer. Ned Hunter, stable boy at King's Pyland stables. Silver Blaze, the stolen racehorse. The dog in the night-time.

Notable Quotes:

"I made a blunder, my dear Watson—which is, I am afraid, a more common occurrence than anyone would think who only knew me through your memoirs."

"[N]othing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person."

"The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact—of absolute, undeniable fact—from the embellishments of theorists and reporters."

"I follow my own methods and tell as much or as little as I choose. That is the advantage of being unofficial."

"Is there any other point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

**An Inquiry into:
"Silver Blaze"**

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"Silver Blaze" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1892. It is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

As depicted by the table, our chronologists are not in full agreement in placing the case's time; however, a majority has decided on 1888 as the year in question.

If the majority of our chronologists are correct, then in

<i>Silver Blaze</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>A Thursday</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Thursday, September 25, 1890</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Early Autumn 1881</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>1881 to 1887</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>September 1887</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Thursday, September 3, 1891</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>October 1888</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Tuesday, September 18, 1888</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>End of September 1888</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Thursday, October 25, 1888</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1888</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Thursday, July 12, 1888</i>

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.

“The dog did nothing in the night-time.”

“That was the curious incident.”

The Great Detective Blunders

The case opens with a situation that appears very difficult to explain. We learn that Holmes has been



receiving telegrams from both Colonel Ross and Inspector Gregory, some two days before he finally decides to travel to King's Pyland. The reason for this is that he could not conceive of a champion such as Silver Blaze to remain concealed for so long. This seems atypical behavior on the Great Detective's part. Even if it had been true that the horse finally turned up, the supposed murder of John Straker, its trainer remained unsolved. At this point, it seemed fairly certain that this was not going to solve itself.

In the entire Canon, I believe this may be the only case in which Sherlock Holmes delayed taking a case in hand in

the astonishing belief that it was going to solve itself.

The Scene of the Crime

By any evaluation, it is clear that John Straker was a very poor criminal. His decision to take Silver Blaze away from the stables, to a lonely place where he can go ahead and cripple it, endangered his whole plan.

When one considers that Ned Turner was safely out of the way after having been heavily drugged in the stable, and that the two other men who slept in the loft were as good as, especially considering that they didn't react to the horse being stolen, Straker could have more easily (and safely) crippled Silver Blaze at the stable. He would have had better lighting and would not have risked having someone see him taking out the horse at a late hour and then return it, leading to all sorts of unwelcomed questions.



Although Holmes also made this point, he later thought that the horse's reaction would have awakened the soundest of sleepers. Even if that had been the case, if Silver Blaze had made much of a fuss in the stable, Straker could have easily explained it away.

The Foolish Criminal

It is almost possible to pity John Straker. The poor plonker emerges from all this as a foolish middle-aged man who, not unusually, meets his ruination at the demanding whims of a much younger woman who he deceives himself into believing loves him for his manly self and not what she can get out of him.

A small consideration of the economy of those days easily reveals the magnitude of the man's stupidity. Salaries in 1888, being what they were, It is not unlikely that after a dozen years of faithful work



for Colonel Ross, Straker's salary was comparable to that of top skilled workers such as cabinet makers, carpenters, or locomotive engineers: about £200 (≈\$75,000). Added to the fact that he and his wife lived in the premises of the training stables and probably did not have to pay for food, would have made his salary far more than merely adequate.

Adequate or not it would have been far from sufficient to fritter away for £37 15s (≈\$14,000) gowns designed by Madame Lesurier, of Bond Street! To put the thing into perspective, just one of these frocks alone was worth almost 80% the yearly average

salary of a governess like Violet Hunter. Straker's "Mrs. Derbyshire" had to have been a very high-maintenance creature!

One enters a field marked on the map with the warning, "Here Be Landmines" when speculating how Straker could possibly have kept up the double life that Holmes stated he had been involved in.

If we go by what Madame Lesurier told our sleuth, that had not been the first dress Straker had purchased for the lady in question. It is not unlikely that the poor sucker ensured that his *maitresse's* living arrangements reflected the quality of the *haute couture* to which the lady was accustomed. While it is true that with the other perks Straker's salary was above adequate, still it would have been insufficient to finance that sort of pastime. So how could have have managed?



This opens the door to a completely different set of speculations. It is not unlikely that Mrs. Straker, like any other good wife, would have had him save a sizable portion of his wages. Because the Strakers gave no indication of having been extravagant people living beyond their means, the pounds must have accumulated in the bank. This could explain how our clumsy would-be criminal could satisfy the costly whims of his young lady. At that level of expenditure, those saved pounds

must have soon run out and very likely her favors with it. Where to get quick cash? Enter Silver Blaze.



Straker's obsession with his mistress not only ruined him economically, but morally as well. He became insensible about the damage he was prepared to do to an innocent animal as well as to his wife and to his employer. This reached a particularly distasteful nadir, considering that Colonel Ross seems to have treated him well over the years.

Sadly, the person the most aggrieved by all the most innocent as well. Mrs. Straker was probably left penniless. Watson tells us that according to Holmes, the Strakers "lived in a small villa about two hundred yards from the stables." This house had to have been owned by Colonel Ross. After

everything that happened, it is unlikely that the poor woman would have been allowed to continue living there, and would have had to leave to find employment someplace else, with very dim prospects for a decent life.

Silas Brown—Dímwít

Unquestionably, Silas Brown was a mold on the shoe sole of life. This is abundantly proven by the way he was reduced to a shuddering mess of protoplasm when Holmes described how he had taken the horse from the moor. Certainly, his mindless adherence to Holmes' orders also point towards a lack of intelligence. Why did he believe he had to carry out the Great Detective's instructions to the letter? If when Holmes had left he had let Silver Blaze go, it would have been nearly impossible to track the horse back to him. The evidence of the hoof-marks would have been insufficient to charge with a crime. With the great race being so close, once the horse had been found the whole matter would have lost importance.

On the other side of the equation, why would Holmes have been so sure that Brown would carry out his instructions? Even if Brown believed that the Great



Detective had seen him take the horse from the moor, it still would have been our sleuth's word against his, and the (soon vanished) evidence of the tracks would have been insufficient to have him charged.

Not knowing what it was that Sherlock Holmes threatened Brown with, one must speculate that it had to have been something of great import and legally impossible to avoid. Other than for Holmes' word, nothing connected him to the horse's felonious disappearance. Everything else—the tracks, for instance—was purely circumstantial evidence which would have proven nothing in court. Had Holmes brought in Inspector Gregory and both retrieved the horse from Brown's possession, the matter would of course have taken a completely different turn.

Alas, we will never know why Brown was so meticulous in carrying out the Great Detective's unusual instructions, which makes one wonder why our sleuth decided to meet alone with Brown, choosing to leave Watson waiting for him outside.

The Peculiar Entry

Turf *habitués* perpetually wonder what could have possibly move the race authorities to allow a strange, nameless horse, run in place of the favorite as a last-minute entry. Because even Colonel



Ross was unable to recognize his disguised horse, it is unlikely that they identified the mystery contestant for what it really was.

The outraged reactions of those who had waged for or against the horse, when seeing an unknown animal running in its stead stagger the imagination.

A brief aside...

In his autobiography, *Memories and Adventures*, (1924) the Literary Agent confessed:

Sometimes I have got upon dangerous ground where I have taken risks through my

own want of knowledge of the correct atmosphere. I have, for example, never been a racing man, and yet I ventured to write "Silver Blaze," in which the mystery depends upon the laws of training and racing. The story is all right, and Holmes may have been at the top of his form, but my ignorance cries aloud to heaven. I read an excellent and very damaging criticism of the story in some sporting paper, written clearly by a man who did know, in which he explained the exact penalties which would have come upon every one concerned if they had acted as I described. Half would have been in jail and the other half warned off the turf for ever.

A Dazzling Case

Of all the adventures set down in the entire Canon, very few cases approximate the level of this one; it is truly a classic. We see Sherlock Holmes at the top of his game, weaving a tapestry of seemingly unconnected clues. His inspired observations cut through the tangled skein of mystery, and not only solve the disappearance of Silver Blaze, but the John Straker's apparent murder as well.

Straker's death wound showed no trace or the shape of a horseshoe; otherwise Inspector Gregory, who to the best of his ability had been quite thorough, would have noticed it. Holmes' deduction that the mortal blow was inflicted by the horse itself is another quantum leap of inspiration, especially

when one considers that the place and circumstances of Straker's death and the condition in which his body was found perfectly mimicked a murder scene.

His untangling of where Straker fit in this mystery, solely based upon a milliner's bill for £37 15s addressed to a William Derbyshire is nothing short of luminous. Furthermore, his suspicion that the sheep may have been used by Straker to hone his ability to cripple Silver Blaze enters the realm of legend.

Regarding "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time" comment—reminiscent of Odysseus' return to Ithaca—no one can calculate how often it has been quoted in varied writings ranging from science to philosophy, history, cartoons, and the daily news.



What else happened in 1888:

Empire

Mashonaland and Matabeleland declared British sphere of influence.



Sarawak and Brunei placed under British protection.

A 7.0-7.3-magnitude earthquake strikes North Canterbury, New Zealand.

◀ Suez Canal Convention signed: Suez Canal declared open to ships of all nations and free from blockade.

Great Britain annexes Christmas Island.

Queen Victoria grants a charter to the Imperial British East Africa Company, and it is incorporated in London, England.

Canadian Pacific Railway opens Hotel Vancouver, Vancouver, British Columbia.

Hailstones kill about 250 in Moradabad district of Delhi, India.

Britain

County Councils' Act establishes representative county-based authorities.

Jack the Ripper has murder spree in Whitechapel, kills his last victim.

Annie Besant leads the London match factory girls on strike.

Commission to examine charges against Parnell.

General Buller founds RASC (Royal Army Service Corps).

County Councils Act: elects councils to take over administrative duties of JPs.

Foundation of London General Omnibus Company.

Miners Federation of Great Britain formed; demands minimum wage.

Foundation of Scottish Labour Party.

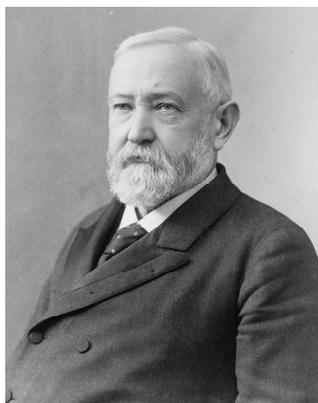
Final report on Commission on Elementary Education Acts in England.

English Priory of Knights Hospitalers authorized by Royal Charter.

World

French Indochina formed.

Princess Isabel of Brazil signs *Lei Auréa* abolishing slavery.



Emperor Wilhelm I of Germany dies; Frederick III becomes Emperor from March to June, dies, and is succeeded by Wilhelm II.

◀ Benjamin Harrison elected President of United States. Even though Cleveland received more popular votes, the Electoral College gives Harrison the election.

Unemployment demonstration in Rome suppressed by the military.

Louisville, Kentucky, becomes first government in U.S. to adopt Australian ballot.

Marshal Bazaine, officer in charge of the French Foreign Legion in Mexico during Emperor Maximilian's rule, dies.

Agricultural depression causes Sweden to abandon free trade.

British Honduras adopts decimal currency.

Great Blizzard of 1888 strikes northeast U.S., 400 die.

Phil Sheridan, who fought as a Union General against the South during the American Civil War dies.

Clashes in Paris between Radicals and Monarchists. Anarchists riot in favor of weavers of Lille and glass blowers of Lion. Paris stone masons and waiters strike for higher wages and shorter work schedules.

More liberal constitution granted to Serbia by Milan.

Pennsylvania's Monongehela River rises 32 feet after 24-hour rainfall.

Bandai volcano in Japan erupts for first time in 1,000 years.

Use of Danish language forbidden in schools in German N. Schleswig.

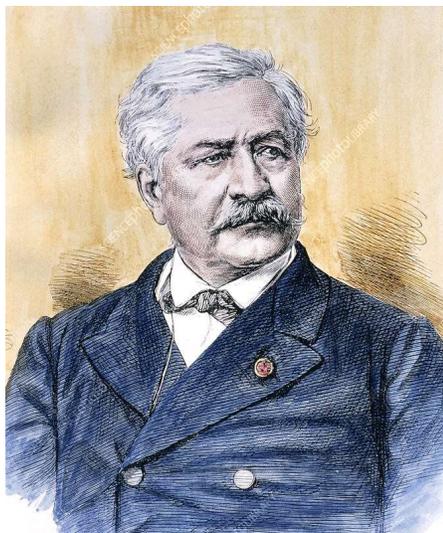
Founding of the Dutch shipping line Koninklijke Paketvaart-Maatschappij (KPM). It supports the unification and development of the colonial economy.

Reconstructed free port of Hamburg opens.

The Washington Monument officially opens to the general public.

Italy and Spain sign military treaty.

King Leopold II of Belgium introduces the Order of the African Star.



Revolution in Haiti culminates in the destruction of public buildings and the flight of President Salomon.

◀ Ferdinand de Lesseps attempts to issue a fresh series of 1,000,000 bonds “to finish the Panama Canal.” Proposal is withdrawn, de Lesseps resigns his directorship, and the project collapses.

Italians near Alite relieved by the withdrawal of the Abyssinians.

The first beauty contest is held, the Concours de Beauté, at Spa in Belgium. Winner is 18-year-old Bertha Soucaret of Guadeloupe.

First organized rodeo competition held, Prescott, Arizona.

New York State establishes electric chair for method of death penalty.

Boulanger supported by Monarchists in France; his popularity

threatens Third Republic.

Main portion of Bremen incorporated into German Customs Union; parts of Wesser estuary remain free port.

Art

Van Gogh in Arles, Holland, paints *Sunflowers*, *Portrait of Armand Roulin*, *La Mousme*, and *Drawbridge at Arles*. Cuts off his left earlobe and gives it to a prostitute in Arles.

Oscar Wilde publishes *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

Casey at the Bat is published in *The San Francisco Examiner*, and recited publicly for the first time.

John Phillip Sousa composes the military march *Semper Fidelis* for the U.S. Marine Corp.

Tchaikovsky performs *Symphony No. 5 in E Minor* at St. Petersburg.

George Moore publishes *Confessions of a Young Man*.

Cézanne paints *Peasant in a Blue Smock*.

Gilbert and Sullivan debut *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

◀ Iannis Psichari, one of the creators of modern Greek literary language, publishes *My Journey* in demotic Greek.

Morris publishes *Dream of John Bull*, on a socialist commonwealth.

Matthew Arnold, critic, essayist, and poet dies.

Fontane publishes *Irrungen, Wirungen*.

Monet paints *Cap d'Antibes*.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch publishes *Troy Town*, a novel about Cornwall.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec paints *Trace Horse of the Bus Line, Place Clichy*.

Stevenson publishes *The Black Arrow*, a novel about the War of the Roses.

Rimsky-Korsakov composes *Scheherazade*.

Charles Doughty publishes *Travels in Arabia Deserta*.



Seurat paints *Fishing Fleet at Port-en-Bessin*.

Thomas Hardy publishes *Wessex Tales*.

Kipling publishes *Soldiers Three*, and *Plain Tales from the Hills*; short stories of India.

Science and Technology

Dunlop's pneumatic tire developed, principle still unproven.

First wax drinking straw patented, by Marvin C Stone in Washington DC.

George Eastman registers the trademark "Kodak" and receives a patent for his box camera, which uses photographic paper roll-film.

Emile Berliner improves the gramophone.

Dr. Fitz, Boston surgeon, advocates the removal of the vermiform appendix in certain intestinal disorders, after several post-mortem operations. His advice is followed.

William Bundy patents the timecard clock.



First ballpoint pen patented.

The first known recording of classical music, Handel's *Israel in Egypt*, is made on wax cylinder.

Fridtjof Nansen, Norwegian explorer, crosses the Greenland icefield.

◀ Clinton Merriam founds the National Geographical Society in Washington, D.C., for "the increase and diffusion of geographical knowledge," and the first issue of its magazine is published.

Thomas Edison files a patent for the Optical Phonograph (the first movie).

Bertha Benz, wife of inventor Karl Benz, drives from Mannheim to Pforzheim, Germany in the first long distance automobile trip.

Lick Observatory, Mount Hamilton, California, formally inaugurates the Ewing duplex-pendulum seismometer, Ewing horizontal-pendulum seismometers, and Gray-Ewing vertical seismometers.

Hudson and Sclater publish *Argentine Ornithology*.

Mercerizing process introduced into cotton manufacture; facilitates later development of the artificial silk industry.

Spanish navy launches first submarine, designed by Isaac Peral. It features accumulator batteries, three dynamos, two 30-hp engines, electric propulsion, a torpedo tube, and periscope. Displacement is 80 tonnes, length 48 feet, and 6 feet beam.

Nikola Tesla makes first AC motor.

In the U.S., Leroy Buffington patents a system to build skyscrapers.

Incubators are first used for premature infants.

Pasteur Institute for the treatment of hydrophobia founded.

Theophilus Van Kannel of Philadelphia patents revolving door.

Sir J. Dewar and Sir F. Abel invent cordite.

William Seward Burroughs patents the first successful adding machine.

Louis Le Prince films the Roundhay Garden Scene, the earliest surviving film.

Heinrich Hertz produces electromagnetic waves, proves light and heat are both forms of electromagnetic radiation. Sir Oliver Lodge makes same discovery independently. Hertz used an induction coil; Lodge Leyden jars.

Next week's case: CARD.

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 photos 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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