



An Inquiry into: "The Naval Treaty"

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"The Naval Treaty" first appeared in *The Strand Magazine* from October to November 1893. It is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

As their estimates on the table show, a majority of our chronologists agree that the case took place in 1889. As

the time Sherlock Holmes would have been 35 years old and Doctor John H. Watson 37.

Main Characters:

Percy Phelps, nephew of Lord Holdhurst and trusted clerk in the Foreign Office. Lord Holdhurst, Foreign Minister and presumptive Premier of England. Annie Harrison, Phelps' fiancée and devoted nurse. Joseph Harrison, Annie's brother. Mr. and Mrs. Tangey, Foreign Office commissioner and his wife. Charles Gorot, Phelps' colleague at the Foreign Office. Mr. Forbes, Scotland Yard detective.

Notable Quotes:

"You are the stormy petrel of crime, Watson."

"What a lovely thing a rose is! There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion. It can

be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers, our desires, our food, are all really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers."

(Holmes) "Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea."

(Watson) "The board-schools."

<i>The Naval Treaty</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Late July</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Tuesday, July 30, 1889</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Late July 1888</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>July 1889</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>July 1888</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Monday, July 29, 1889</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Monday, July 29, 1889</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Monday, July 29, 1889</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>July 1888</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Friday, July 29, 1887</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1889</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Monday, July 29, 1889</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.

(Holmes) “Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future.”

“[O]ut of my last fifty-three cases my name has only appeared in four, and the police have had all the credit in forty-nine. I don’t blame you for not knowing this, for you are young and inexperienced, but if you wish to get on in your new duties you will work with me and not against me.”

Percy Phelps, Trusted Wimp

My dictionary defines the word *Wimp* as “an offensive term that deliberately insults somebody regarded as weak, timid, unassertive, or ineffectual.” If ever such a description perfectly described somebody, it had to be Percy Phelps.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

It is unlikely that one can find anyone in the whole of the Canon who comes through as weak, whinny, and unlikeable as Phelps. To his credit, Watson did his best to elicit the reader’s sympathy towards his former schoolmate; however, he met with absolutely no success.

Although described “as a very brilliant boy, [who] carried away every prize which the school had to offer, finishing his exploits by winning a scholarship which sent him on to continue his triumphant career at Cambridge,” there is very little to personally recommend him.

Twice, once in writing and the other in person, he boasts that he obtained through the influence of Lord Holdhurst (his uncle) “a good appointment at the Foreign Office,” and that “he occupied a situation of trust and honor.” It appears quite obvious that these attainments would not have been possible had it not been for a very large dose of nepotism. He also does not make any bones of the fact that his uncle was also directly responsible for his rapid advancement in the Foreign Office. Such is Phelps’ character that instead of being embarrassed by this, he appears to be boasting about it.

This is doubly infuriating when one considers that by the time that this adventure took place, civil service entrance exams had been instituted in England; a reflection, interestingly enough, of British experiences in India and China, where such tests had been part of their civil service systems for a very long time.

What makes this career trajectory even more irritating is Phelps himself. Had he progressed out of guile and cleverness, one might have maybe been able to shrug shoulder and say, “Oh, well he’s a shrewd offspring of a female beagle.” As it is, the man is “high-



Courtesy of ITV Granada

strung” to the point of hysteria, has all the ruggedness of a solid piece of tinfoil, and bears the dubious distinction of being the only male in the entire Canon to have succumbed to the mysterious nerve malady known as brain fever.

One must also consider the ethos of the era. From the time they were boys, men were taught to deplore weakness in a male and the manly virtues and the virtues of a stiff upper lip were inculcated especially into public school youngsters. It is therefore an utter mystery what it was that Annie Harrison could have seen in such a sorry specimen to have been so faithfully attracted to him. This is especially puzzling, because she emerges as one of the Canon’s strongest women.

Phelps’ reaction when Holmes recovered the treaty says it all: *He caught it up, devoured it with his eyes, and then danced madly about the room, passing it to his bosom and shrieking out in his delight. Then he fell back into an arm-chair so limp and exhausted with his own emotions that we had to pour brandy down his throat to keep him from fainting.*

“Fainting”? Truly?

The Noble Lord Holdhurst

The eminent Lord Holdhurst does not come out looking much better than his nephew in this whole mess. Whether in reality, as Watson described him, he was “a nobleman who is in truth noble,” his favoritism towards his nephew—whose rapid advancement must have almost certainly taken place at the expense of another who was not as well-connected—puts in question the orientation of his ethical compass.



Courtesy of ITV Granada

There are some seemingly contradictory facts in this case. More than once we are reminded of the momentous importance of the Naval Treaty, which appears to have established a military union between nations to counteract the influence of the Triple Alliance, an agreement between Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Italy to come to the others’ defense should they be attacked by any other major power.

If the treaty was of such vital importance, and at least one copy of it was necessary, how is it that it could have remained undisturbed (and seemingly unmissed)

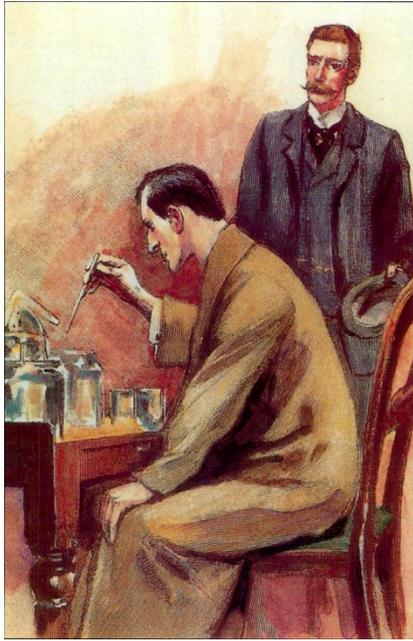
under the floorboards of Phelps’ country place for nine weeks without anyone in the government needing to consult it? We were told that this was, after all, a state secret that were it to be made public, would cause very grave results. However, if it were to be returned over two months after its disappearance, Phelps would be able to continue with an undisturbed career. And why, according to Lord Holdhurst, would it not matter in a few months if the contents were made public?

Treaties of that kind have usually been made public early on, principally as a warning to the countries that they are aimed against. A good example in modern times would be the Tripartite Pact signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan in Berlin in 1940, with the signatories surrounded by a gaggle of newsreel cameras.

Perhaps the treaty itself was not as important as we have been given to understand. The casual way in which it was handled would seem to indicate this: Holdhurst turns the document over to his nephew, instructing him to lock it overnight in his office desk if he is unable to finish copying it. *His desk?* Did the Foreign Office lack a safe in which to keep documents of such Imperial import? Could the copying of a relatively unimportant treaty have been just make-work for Phelps? Perhaps Holdhurst might not have been too upset over the prospect of his high-strung nephew having to leave the Foreign Office.

Deep waters indeed!

The Premier Detective of All Time



Regardless of what one may think of the participants, this is a case in which Holmes shines like a supernova! His deductions are brilliant and through brainwork he untangles a very complicated Gordian knot, while taking a few moments off to ponder on the Deity's beneficence and metaphorical lighthouses marking a brighter future for England through better education.

We see Holmes the scientist and forensic expert at the beginning of the adventure, applying chemistry to the resolution of a crime. In this story, he immediately focuses on the case's important details; for example, who was it that rang the bell in Phelps' office. And his deduction regarding the lack of wet footprints, which indicated the use of a cab by someone who was not only expected, but also knew the layout of the Foreign Office.

Finally, his discretion in essentially letting Joseph Harrison go, to avoid the scandal that undoubtedly would have resulted had this whole affair been dragged through the courts.

(And, of course, we all enjoyed his put-down of the arrogant Inspector Forbes!)

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.

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.

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

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 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 use 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.

◀ 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.)

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.

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.

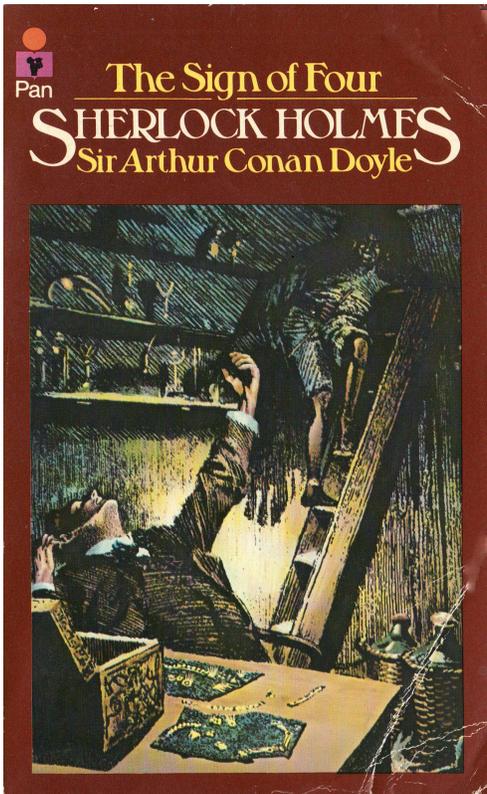
Erection of Tacoma Building in Chicago. First skyscraper, 13 storeys high.

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*.

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

William Butler Yeats publishes *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

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

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.

The brassiere is invented.

◀ First dishwashing machine marketed in Chicago.

Mering and Minkowski show that the pancreas prevents diabetes.

William Gray patents coin-operated telephone.

First linotype machine in use.

Thomas Edison shows his first motion picture.

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

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: FINA

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.

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