



"A singular set of people, Watson."

An Inquiry into:

The Hound of the Baskervilles

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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 seen on the table, more than is usual, our chronologists are far from being in accord with each other, as to when

this case took place. By a small majority, our experts place the year of the case as being 1889. Were that to be correct, 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.

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

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.

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.”

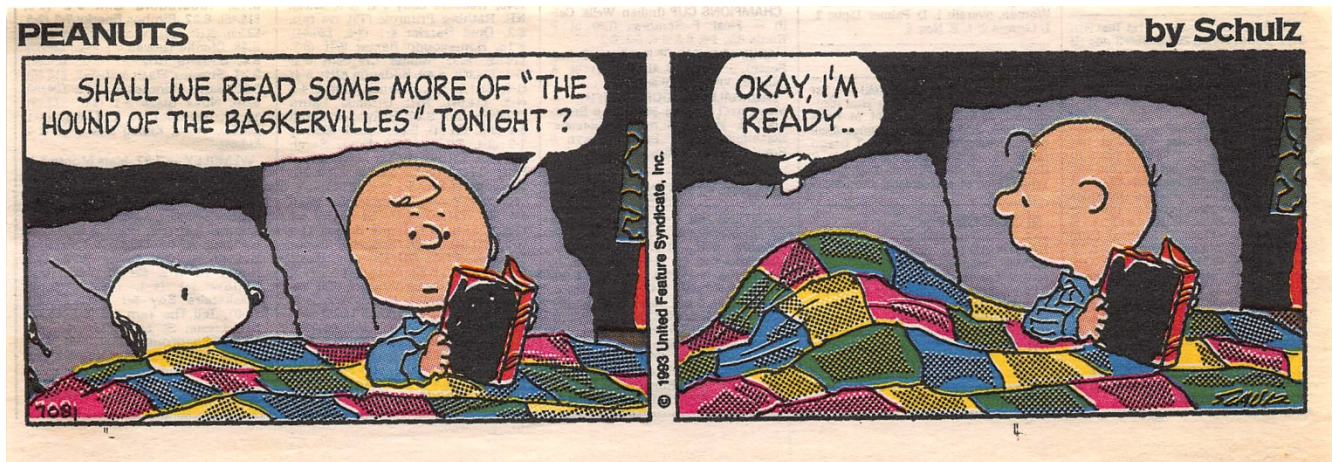
“A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing.”

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 Dim Conductor

There are some aspects of the relationship and rapport between Sherlock Holmes and Doctor John H. Watson that can be somewhat puzzling to the Canon student—which, of course is one the main reasons why the Great Game *is* the Great Game!

In this case, the Great Detective's statement to his Boswell 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," could, under most circumstances—and to most of us—be considered as offensive; at best, a very backhanded compliment. Consider that what Holmes is saying here essentially



is that his genius is stimulated by Watson's denseness. Even more puzzling is the Good Doctor's apparent pleasure at such remark.

Perhaps the key to all of this is to be found in Holmes' earlier 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." This may very well be an understatement because although Watson chronicled most of his famous friend's cases, he often—

shall we say?—bent the facts a trifle or left some out. Certainly, in most of the cases authored by Watson, Holmes emerges as being a most formidable individual; with our biographer (as *we* often do) seemingly always coming out as second-best in the reasoning department.

The fact remains, however, that Watson was light-years away from being the *Boobus britannicus* interpreted by the much-missed Nigel Bruce in the old Basil Rathbone Holmes movies. The Good Doctor was no fool.

I therefore insist that considering that this was Watson writing about Watson, as Holmes noted he purposely underrated his own abilities, to make his subject appear even more superior. As is the case today, back in our friends' time readers were as partial to superheroes (of which Holmes is an early version) as so many are today. Watson's genius was that by perpetually displaying astonishment at our sleuth's reasoning he led us to identify with him and not with super Holmes.

He was, indeed, a very good writer...

The Unambitious Doctor

Although unquestionably Watson's deductions about Dr. Mortimer's walking stick were wide off the mark, I do not think that Holmes did that much better in that he crossed the field of deduction into the foggy land of guesswork. His reasoning that Mortimer lacked ambition because he abandoned his position in the hospital to move to the country lacked foundation; Mortimer's statement proved this:

“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 that this derailed his conclusion.

When Watson made a long arm to look him up in the Medical Directory, we discovered that our man had won a prestigious prize with a learned essay, which must have required some considerable amount of work and effort. We also find out that has contributed to the general medical literature of the time, is a corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society, and Medical Officer for three parishes. Holmes himself had to admit to the accuracy and clarity of his deductions regarding Sir Charles Baskerville’s final moments.



To paraphrase Shakespeare, “Was this not ambition?”

The Baskerville Fortune

According to the newspaper account of Sir Charles Baskerville’s death, he had made large sums of money in South African speculation.

Sir Arthur made mention on the levels of British investment and speculation in the profits of South African Natural resources. In his book, *The Great Boer War*, he referred to the region as one of the “great treasure chests in the world.”



Vast fortunes were created towards the end of the 19th century by investments in prominent enterprises such as Cecil Rhodes’ De Beers Mining Company (1880), the De Beers Consolidated Mines (1888), and the British South Africa Company, organized in 1889. One may posit, with little chance for error, that Sir Charles most likely had money in these or others like them.

As Mortimer put it, “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.” In this case, “rich” is a bottomless understatement.

By the terms of Sir Charles’ will, Mortimer received £1,000, (≈\$380,000), the Barrymores £500 (≈\$188,000) each, with a cash remainder of £740,000 (≈\$280,000,000) going to Sir Henry as part of an estate already worth about £1,000,000 (≈\$380,000,000). Sir Henry became £1,740,000 (≈\$653,000,000) richer practically overnight.

Holmes was correct in remarking, “Dear me! It is a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game.”

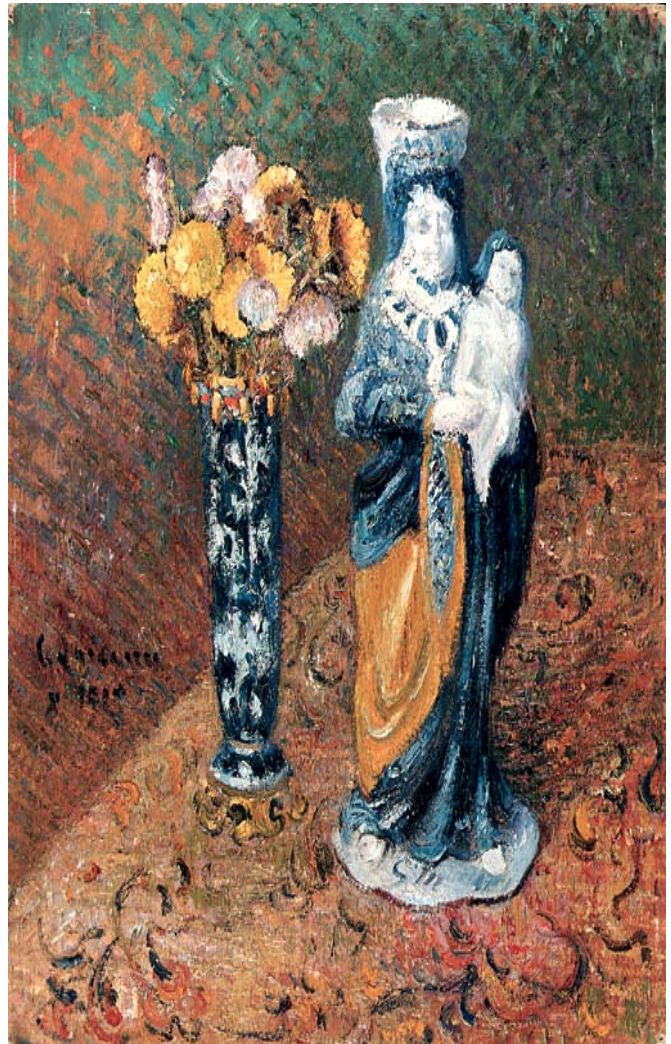
The Crude Sleuth

Watson tells us that Holmes and he 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.” Considering that we have been repeatedly told that it seems unlikely that there was even one subject that the Great Detective could not speak about learnedly. It makes me wonder whether Watson was ever truly capable of fully gauging Holmes’ abilities and education. Consider that later, at Baskerville Hall, Holmes expertly identified paintings by Sir Godfrey Kneller and Sir Joshua Reynolds with but a mere glance: “I know what is good when I see it,” he commented, “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 he lectures Inspector MacDonald about the painting hanging in Professor Moriarty’s study, that was done by Jean Baptiste Greuze, adding that, “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.” Then later we learn from our sleuth himself that he and Watson had quite different tastes in art, and frequently disagreed on the subject.

This leads me to think that, unlike Watson, Holmes with his penchant for precision may not have had a high tolerance for impressionism, which at the time was the rage, and probably had a preference for the Renaissance masters, such as da Vinci and Rafael.

The (Mal)Practice



Emile Claus (Belgian, 1849-1924) , *La lecture*.

Although a very competent physician, one must conclude that Watson had to have had a substantial source of income other than that derived from his medical practice. Even though we know that he was a successful writer it seems unlikely that he was able to make a living solely out of writing about his adventures with Sherlock Holmes. The only logical thing to assume is that he must also have written other material, perhaps under a pseudonym for periodicals other than *The Strand*. It was, after all, a more literate age and there was an abundance of magazines and publications needing good writers. There also must have been a return in the reprints all

around the world, although I confess to being ignorant about how the matter of residual functioned in those years.

In the present case, Holmes thinks it is not safe for Sir Henry to be alone at Baskerville Hall. He also realizes that Dr. Mortimer not only lives miles away, but also has “his practice to attend to.” Unhesitatingly then, he volunteers Watson, who immediately agrees saying, “I do not know how I could employ my time better,” and proceeds to stay at Baskerville Hall for weeks! Those poor patients...

It is easy to see why Holmes bought up Watson’s practice through *interpósita persona*—the thing was a nothing but an inconvenience and an obstacle to finer things like the investigation of crime!

The Greatest Case

Personally, I consider *The Hound of the Baskervilles* as the premier Canonical case. Whenever Canon aficionados are questioned regarding which of the 60 adventures is the best, it invariably comes up first. 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!”

Interestingly enough, although it is Holmes who solves this Gordian knot of a mystery, it is the one



case in which he is marginally involved. It is Watson who carries on for most of the story.

In HOUN we find everything and more than what the fiercest Canon student might wish in the way of brilliant deductions, such as Holmes’ conclusion that the warning letter sent to Sir Henry urging him to keep away had to have been written in a hotel, because of the condition of the pen and the inkwell. Every character in the story, from the leading ones to the lesser is fully fleshed and developed. One would expect 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 dreary life of genteel poverty. Then there is Mortimer who although capable is hampered by many interests that lead him to pretty much live in a world of his own.

Even though none of the Canonical novels can be described as being disappointing, HOUN shines in being the only one of the four that is unburdened by a sizeable portion dealing with events that take place well before the case itself.

Towards the end of the 19th century, there was a revival of Gothic literature. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *Dracula*, and *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, are three of the more outstanding and best known examples of the genre's rebirth.

Perhaps not coincidentally, this was also a time when the placid Victorian expectation of continued unlimited progress began experiencing a few cracks in its foundation. Although society widely accepted, Darwin's theory of evolution, the concept nevertheless exerted an unsettling effect that led many to consider the possibilities of devolution—the dread that mankind might be cursed by unholy genetic demons able to leap from one generation to the next, making us all physically weaker and morally decadent. Shakespeare's expostulation in *Measure for Measure*, "O, what may man within him hide, though angel on the outward side!" seemed increasingly appropriate.

We view a very strong hint of this when Holmes discovers the connection between Stapleton and Sir Henry through the painting of Hugo Baskerville. It is reminiscent of *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, when Dorian, the main character, wanders through his house's picture gallery as he contemplates engaging in an increasingly debauched life studies as he views "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.



Is precisely this concept of hereditary traits—curses—being passed from generation to generation that that we see in HOUN, which play a crucial role in solving the mystery, as evidenced by the strong resemblance between depraved Sir Hugo and Stapleton, his evil descendant.



Baskerville Hall and its surroundings, as Watson describes them, present 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."

It is in this milieu that Holmes shines like a nova—after all who better to combat and defeat all this dark uncertainty than Sherlock Holmes, the very personification of reason and the scientific method.

Most of the others have their moment of doubt, like Sir Henry 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.”

Thus we observe how, over the development of the case Holmes’ mind and methods disperse the thick miasma of the curse of the Baskervilles; his rationality exorcises the region’s supernaturalism. Finally, he personally deals with the Representative of Evil itself when he slays the dreaded hell-hound. Of everyone else, 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 doubt as to whether there might not be something unnatural about this seeming hellish scourge.

Admirably well put together, 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.

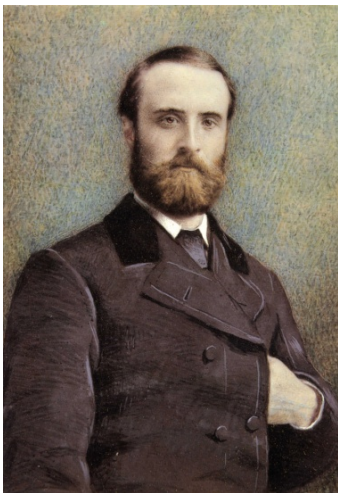
Transvaal claimed to be encircled by Rhodes’ concessions in East Africa. Rhodesia established.

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.

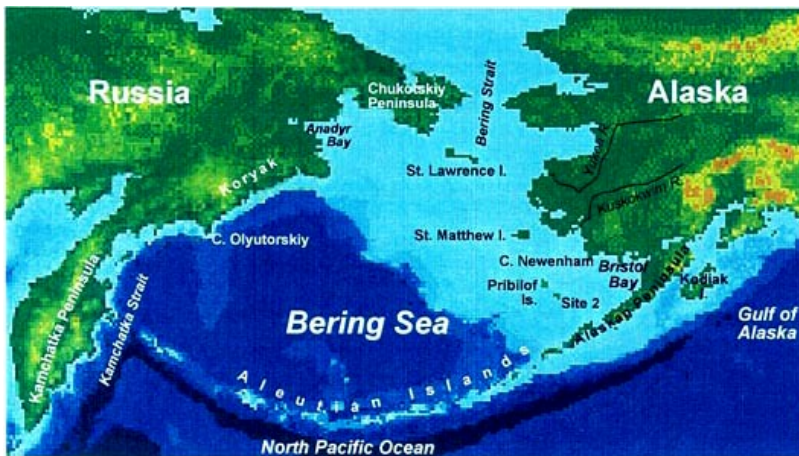
Wall Street Journal begins publishing.

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.

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.

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.

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.



◀ 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.

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

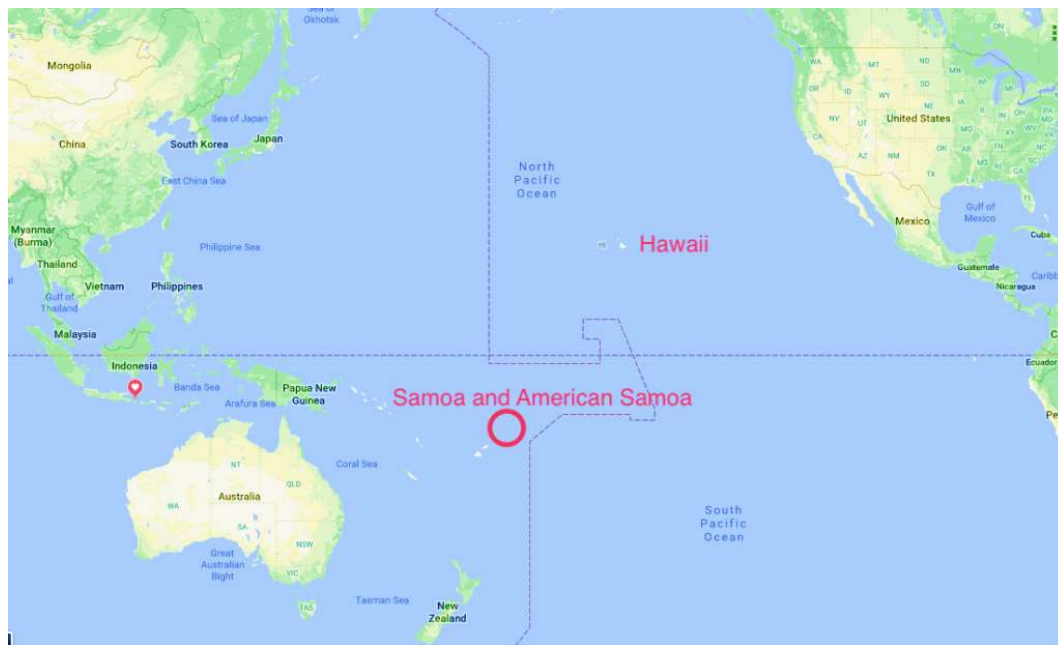
Brunner-Mond Salt Union formed; combine of 64 firms.

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.

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

Civil war in Haiti ends. General

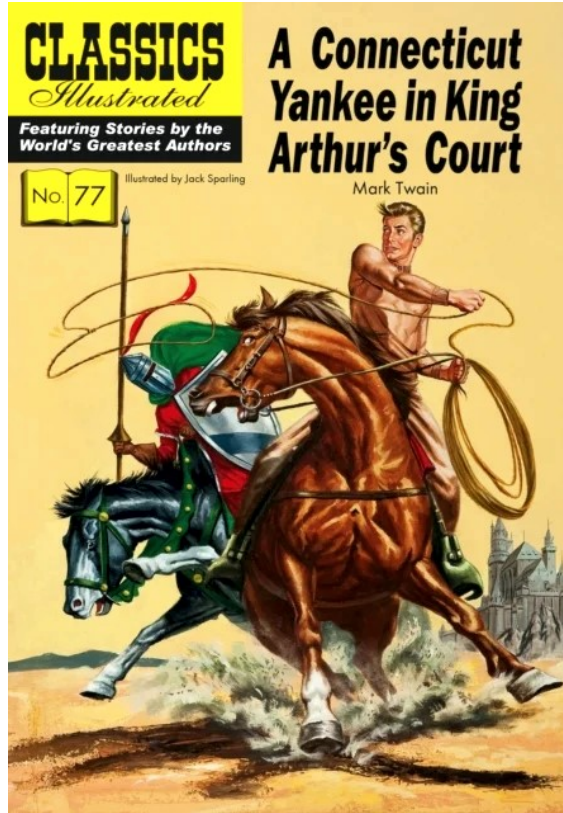
Légitime defeated by General Hippolyte, who becomes president.

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.

Art



German realistic play.



Sudermann publishes *Die Ehre*, a German play.

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

◀ Gilbert and Sullivan present *The Gondoliers*.

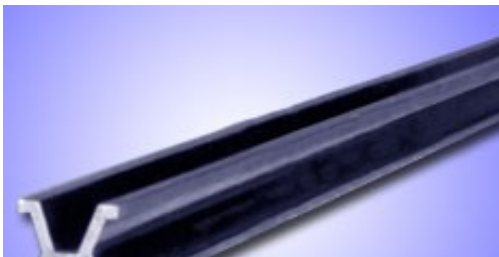
Renoir paints *Girls Picking Flowers*.

Seurat paints *The Side Show*.

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

Science and Technology

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



photographic film.

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

Ferdinand von Zeppelin patents his "Navigable Balloon."

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

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

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle publishes *A Sign of Four*.

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*.

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

Cézanne paints *Harlequin*.

Tchaikovsky introduces *The Sleeping Princess* ballet.

William Butler Yeats publishes *The Wanderings of Oisín*.

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

Gerhart J. Hauptmann publishes *Vor Sonnenaufgang*,

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: 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..."

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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