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The Hound of the Baskervilles

SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

With an Introduction by

DAVID STUART DAVIES

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藏书章



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INTRODUCTION

You hold in your hand the most exciting of all Sherlock Holmes's adventures. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* one is presented with all the tried and trusted elements that make the Holmes stories compelling reading – the cosy Baker Street opening, the pyrotechnical demonstrations of Holmes's brilliant deductions, bizarre elements connected with a baffling mystery and a cruel and subtle villain of great cunning – but added to these is an extra ingredient which strengthens the mixture, making it both unique and thrilling. This extra ingredient is the world of the supernatural. In this novel not only has Holmes to contend with a flesh-and-blood villain but also a spectral hound whose ghastly shape is 'outlined in flickering flame'. Arthur Conan Doyle's clever marriage between the rational and the irrational in this Sherlock Holmes adventure is the main reason that this novel has retained its grip on readers' imaginations ever since it was published. And that is why it is a masterpiece.

It is true to say that Arthur Conan Doyle could have had no conception of the power and everlasting appeal of his detective Sherlock Holmes when he first created the character. It was while Doyle was practising as a doctor in Southsea in 1886 and was occupying the long, dull periods in between infrequent patients by trying to write stories that he lit upon the idea of a detective who solved his cases by scientific deduction rather than by relying on chance or the carelessness of the criminal.

Sherlock Holmes first appeared in a novella, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887). Despite its originality, Doyle had great difficulty in persuading publishers to accept the story. In the end he sold it to *Beeton's Christmas Annual* for a mere twenty-five pounds. The story is narrated by Dr John H. Watson who shares rooms with Holmes at 221B Baker Street. The two men were to become inseparable companions and share over fifty adventures together.

Holmes's second published case was *The Sign of Four* (1890). In

this novel Conan Doyle introduced the idea of the detective's addiction to drugs – a seven-per-cent solution of cocaine. However, it was made clear that Holmes only indulged in this habit when he was bored and there was no baffling case on hand to occupy his fertile brain.

Neither book excited much interest amongst the reading public and the whole Holmes saga could have ended there if it had not been for the advent of the *Strand Magazine*, a monthly periodical which began publishing Sherlock Holmes short stories. Within less than six months, the main selling point of the *Strand* was the new adventure of Sherlock Holmes within its pages. By the end of the first series of twelve stories Conan Doyle's detective had become a national institution. Eager Holmes fans would form queues outside bookstalls on the day the *Strand* was due out in order to snatch up the latest adventure.

Ironically as Holmes's fame and appeal mushroomed, the author began to grow disenchanted with his Baker Street puppet. Conan Doyle had performed his Holmes trick successfully and he was not keen to keep on repeating it *ad nauseam*. He wanted to move on to pastures new – in particular to concentrate on his historical novels which he considered to be more important.

To Conan Doyle they were Literature with a capital L. However, the offer of more money persuaded him to create a further twelve Holmes mysteries (a set which are now known as *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*), but he saw this commission as a chore and gained little pleasure from it. One thing was certain, Conan Doyle was determined that these were to be the final stories featuring the nuisance Sherlock Holmes. To ensure this, he killed off his hero in the last story of *The Memoirs*, called, appropriately enough, *The Final Problem* (1893). He had Holmes tumble into the terrible Reichenbach Falls in Switzerland locked in combat with his archenemy the master criminal Professor Moriarty. So it was goodbye Sherlock Holmes. The reading public was shocked; some sensitive souls even went into mourning, wearing black armbands to denote their grief at the loss.

Doyle received abusive letters but was unabashed by it all. 'I'm glad I've killed him,' he announced. However, the method of Holmes's demise meant that there was no corpse and this fact kept alive a flicker of hope in his devoted readers that the author might one day relent and pen further Holmes mysteries.

We now move on in time. In March 1901 Conan Doyle was taking a golfing break with a friend, Fletcher Robinson, at Cromer in Norfolk. As the story goes, one night in the hotel the two men

fell to talking about ghosts and Fletcher Robinson told Conan Doyle about the legend of a spectral hound that supposedly haunted the moors of Dartmoor. The author was taken with the story and it sparked his imagination. He saw in this legend the basis for an exciting story. Indeed he began working out the plot with Robinson there and then. He later visited Dartmoor to research some locations and soak up its atmosphere. He was driven around by an old coachman called Baskerville and it is supposed that Conan Doyle decided to use this unusual and rather Gothic-sounding name in the title of his story.

As he progressed in writing *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Conan Doyle realised that he needed a central character to unravel the mystery he was constructing, a catalyst figure who would bring together the various elements of the plot – in other words a brilliant detective. However much he tried to avoid the obvious conclusion, he failed. He accepted, no doubt with some reluctance, that this was quite simply a case for Sherlock Holmes. When the publishers heard this, they danced for joy. They knew that the name of the Baker Street sleuth would guarantee vast sales. They also believed that now the author had weakened in bringing Holmes back once, he would do it again in further stories. But Conan Doyle was adamant: Sherlock Holmes had not returned from the dead. He stated quite clearly that the case featured in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* took place before the detective's watery demise and did not signal a whole new series of stories.

The Hound of the Baskervilles was serialised in the *Strand Magazine* first. It ran for nine instalments from August 1901 to April 1902. One can only begin to imagine the fiery enthusiasm and inspiration with which Doyle wrote the novel – a novel that was but a mere idea in March and a completed entity by August. The first instalment concluded with perhaps the most chilling interchange in all detective fiction:

‘Footprints?’

‘Footprints.’

‘A man’s or a woman’s?’

Dr Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered: ‘Mr Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!’

Readers were agog with excitement but had to wait a whole month before they got their hands on the next fragment of this thrilling tale.

In 1902 *The Hound of the Baskervilles* came out in book form and was a tremendous success. It has never been out of print since. It is the most famous of all Sherlock Holmes adventures and has been filmed and staged numerous times; but no dramatisation can equal the power of the novel in its creation of atmosphere and the description of the bleak Dartmoor location with its strange granite tors and its treacherous mire that can swallow up man and beast and carry them down into its slimy depths. Watson's first view of the moor sets the tone for the dark mood that suffuses the story once the action moves to Devonshire:

Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there rose in the distance a grey, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream.

And then there is the hound itself. When it does make its appearance, Conan Doyle does not disappoint. His depiction of the creature leaping out of the fog on its frightened prey is a masterpiece of descriptive writing, that can never be equalled by any film or stage representation.

Unlike the other Sherlock Holmes novels, which have large flashback sequences where Holmes is not involved, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* has a continuous narrative. Although Holmes is absent from the action for a section of the story, quite legitimately, we are linked to the character by Watson's narration and letters. Indeed it is as much Watson's case as Holmes's. Watson acts as our eyes and ears and it is through his observations that we learn all about the various characters – suspects, if you like – who people the area. Watson allows the reader to form his own theory as to who is behind the devilry on the moor before Sherlock Holmes arrives to bring the case to its very dramatic and chilling conclusion.

Published on the brink of a new century, the novel cleverly combined the myths and superstitions of the past with the rationality and scientific boldness of the future, implying that while we embrace the latter, we still cannot necessarily eliminate the former. While we are sure that Sir Henry can banish the shadows around Baskerville Hall with 'a thousand-candlepower Swan & Edison', we are not so sure that he can banish the darkness beyond the shadows. Equally we know that if Sherlock Holmes, the supreme logical thinker, dismisses the existence of a phantom hound, we can share his certainty – until we are taken on to the mist-enshrouded moors at night and hear the spine-tingling baying of a hound. Then we are not so sure.

It is these elements which question our certainties, along with the rattling, page-turning pace and the magnetic central character that have ensured and will continue to ensure the appeal of this great book. Wait no longer. Sherlock Holmes is about to examine a walking stick that a visitor has left behind in his sitting room. It is an examination which will lead to mystery, danger, excitement and, finally, to the terrifying hound of the Baskervilles. You should be there to witness it all.

DAVID STUART DAVIES

David Stuart Davis is editor of *Sherlock Holmes – The Detective Magazine* and author of several books concerning Sherlock Holmes.

CONTENTS

1	<i>Mr Sherlock Holmes</i>	3
2	<i>The Curse of the Baskervilles</i>	9
3	<i>The Problem</i>	18
4	<i>Sir Henry Baskerville</i>	26
5	<i>Three Broken Threads</i>	36
6	<i>Baskerville Hall</i>	45
7	<i>The Stapletons of Merripit House</i>	53
8	<i>First Report of Dr Watson</i>	65
9	<i>The Light upon the Moor</i>	71
10	<i>Extract from the Diary of Dr Watson</i>	86
11	<i>The Man on the Tor</i>	95
12	<i>Death on the Moor</i>	106
13	<i>Fixing the Nets</i>	118
14	<i>The Hound of the Baskervilles</i>	127
15	<i>A Retrospection</i>	137

THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

CHAPTER I

Mr Sherlock Holmes

MR SHERLOCK HOLMES, who was usually very late in the mornings, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated at the breakfast table. I stood upon the hearth-rug and picked up the stick which our visitor had left behind him the night before. It was a fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as a 'Penang lawyer'. Just under the head was a broad silver band nearly an inch across. 'To James Mortimer, MRCS, from his friends of the CCH', was engraved upon it, with the date '1884'. It was just such a stick as the old-fashioned family practitioner used to carry – dignified, solid and reassuring.

'Well, Watson, what do you make of it?'

Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of my occupation.

'How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head.'

'I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated coffee-pot in front of me,' said he. 'But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor's stick? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance. Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it.'

'I think,' said I, following as far as I could the methods of my companion, 'that Mr Mortimer is a successful, elderly medical man, well esteemed since those who know him give him this mark of their appreciation.'

'Good!' said Holmes. 'Excellent!'

'I think also that the probability is in favour of his being a country practitioner who does a great deal of his visiting on foot.'

'Why so?'

'Because this stick, though originally a very handsome one has been so knocked about that I can hardly imagine a town practitioner carrying it. The thick iron ferrule is worn down, so it is evident that he has done a great amount of walking with it.'

‘Perfectly sound!’ said Holmes.

‘And then again, there is the “friends of the CCH”. I should guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has possibly given some surgical assistance, and which has made him a small presentation in return.’

‘Really, Watson, you excel yourself,’ said Holmes, pushing back his chair and lighting a cigarette. ‘I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt.’

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took the stick from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked eyes. Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette, and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a convex lens.

‘Interesting, though elementary,’ said he as he returned to his favourite corner of the settee. ‘There are certainly one or two indications upon the stick. It gives us the basis for several deductions.’

‘Has anything escaped me?’ I asked with some self-importance. ‘I trust that there is nothing of consequence which I have overlooked?’

‘I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country practitioner. And he walks a good deal.’

‘Then I was right.’

‘To that extent.’

‘But that was all.’

‘No, no, my dear Watson, not all – by no means all. I would suggest, for example, that a presentation to a doctor is more likely to come from a hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials CC are placed before that hospital the words Charing Cross very naturally suggest themselves.’

'You may be right.'

'The probability lies in that direction. And if we take this as a working hypothesis we have a fresh basis from which to start our construction of this unknown visitor.'

'Well, then, supposing that CCH does stand for Charing Cross Hospital, what further inferences may we draw?'

'Do none suggest themselves? You know my methods. Apply them!'

'I can only think of the obvious conclusion that the man has practised in town before going to the country.'

'I think that we might venture a little farther than this. Look at it in this light. On what occasion would it be most probable that such a presentation would be made? When would his friends unite to give him a pledge of their goodwill? Obviously at the moment when Dr Mortimer withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start in practice for himself. We know there has been a presentation. We believe there has been a change from a town hospital to a country practice. Is it, then, stretching our inference too far to say that the presentation was on the occasion of the change?'

'It certainly seems probable.'

'Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the *staff* of the hospital, since only a man well established in a London practice could hold such a position, and such a one would not drift into the country. What was he, then? If he was in the hospital and yet not on the staff he could only have been a house-surgeon or a house-physician – little more than a senior student. And he left five years ago – the date is on the stick. So your grave, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff.'

I laughed incredulously as Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his settee and blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

'As to the latter part, I have no means of checking you,' said I, 'but at least it is not difficult to find out a few particulars about the man's age and professional career.' From my small medical shelf I took down the *Medical Directory* and turned up the name. There were several Mortimers, but only one who could be our visitor. I read his record aloud.

'Mortimer, James, MRCS, 1882, Grimpen, Dartmoor, Devon. House-surgeon, from 1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital.'

Winner of the Jackson Prize for Comparative Pathology, with essay entitled "Is Disease a Reversion?" Corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society. Author of "Some Freaks of Atavism" (*Lancet*, 1882) and "Do We Progress?" (*Journal of Psychology*, March 1883). Medical officer for the parishes of Grimpen, Thorsley and High Barrow.'

'No mention of that local hunt, Watson,' said Holmes with a mischievous smile, 'but a country doctor, as you very astutely observed. I think that I am fairly justified in my inferences. As to the adjectives, I said, if I remember right, amiable, unambitious and absent-minded. It is my experience that it is only an amiable man in this world who receives testimonials, only an unambitious one who abandons a London career for the country and only an absent-minded one who leaves his stick and not his visiting-card after waiting an hour in your room.'

'And the dog?'

'Has been in the habit of carrying this stick behind his master. Being a heavy stick the dog has held it tightly by the middle, and the marks of his teeth are very plainly visible. The dog's jaw, as shown in the space between these marks, is too broad in my opinion for a terrier and not broad enough for a mastiff. It may have been – yes, by Jove, it *is* a curly-haired spaniel.'

He had risen and paced the room as he spoke. Now he halted in the recess of the window. There was such a ring of conviction in his voice that I glanced up in surprise.

'My dear fellow, how can you possibly be so sure of that?'

'For the very simple reason that I see the dog himself on our very doorstep, and there is the ring of its owner. Don't move, I beg you, Watson. He is a professional brother of yours, and your presence may be of assistance to me. 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 ill. What does Dr James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime? Come in!'

The appearance of our visitor was a surprise to me, since I had expected a typical country practitioner. He was a very tall, thin man, with a long nose like a beak, which juttied out between two keen, grey eyes, set closely together and sparkling brightly from behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. He was clad in a professional but rather slovenly fashion, for his frock-coat was dingy and his trousers frayed. Though young, his long back was already bowed, and he

walked with a forward thrust of his head and a general air of peering benevolence. As he entered his eyes fell upon the stick in Holmes's hand, and he ran towards it with an exclamation of joy. 'I am so very glad,' said he. 'I was not sure whether I had left it here or in the Shipping Office. I would not lose that stick for the world.'

'A presentation, I see,' said Holmes.

'Yes, sir.'

'From Charing Cross Hospital?'

'From one or two friends there on the occasion of my marriage.'

'Dear, dear, that's bad!' said Holmes, shaking his head.

Dr Mortimer blinked through his glasses in mild astonishment.

'Why was it bad?'

'Only that you have disarranged our little deductions. Your marriage, you say?'

'Yes, sir. 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.'

'Come, come, we are not so far wrong, after all,' said Holmes.

'And now, Dr James Mortimer -'

'Mr, sir, Mr - a humble MRCS.'

'And a man of precise mind, evidently.'

'A dabbler in science, Mr Holmes, a picker up of shells on the shores of the great unknown ocean. I presume that it is Mr Sherlock Holmes whom I am addressing and not -'

'No, this is my friend Dr Watson.'

'Glad to meet you, sir. I have heard your name mentioned in connection with that of your friend. 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.'

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. 'You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in mine,' said he. 'I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. Have no hesitation in lighting one.'

The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity. He had long, quivering fingers as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in our curious companion.

‘I presume, sir,’ said he at last, ‘that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that you have done me the honour to call here last night and again today?’

‘No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing that as well. I came to you, Mr Holmes, because I recognised that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem. Recognising, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe – ’

‘Indeed, sir! May I enquire who has the honour to be the first?’ asked Holmes with some asperity.

‘To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly.’

‘Then had you not better consult him?’

‘I said, sir, to the precisely scientific mind. But as a practical man of affairs it is acknowledged that you stand alone. I trust, sir, that I have not inadvertently – ’

‘Just a little,’ said Holmes. ‘I think, Dr Mortimer, you would do wisely if without more ado you would kindly tell me plainly what the exact nature of the problem is in which you demand my assistance.’