



An Inquiry into: "The Stock-Broker's Clerk"

"The Stock-Broker's Clerk" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in March 1893. It is part of *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*.

As may be seen from the table, our chronologists are almost unanimous in their estimate that the case took place in 1889.

If the case did indeed take place in 1889, then at the time Sherlock Holmes was 35 years old and John H. Watson 37.

Main Characters:

Hall Pycroft, young stock-broker's clerk. "Arthur Pinner," financial agent based in London. "Harry Pinner," supposed owner of a newly established hardware distribution company based in Birmingham. The Beddingtons, criminal brothers recently released after serving a five-year prison sentence. Sergeant Tuson and Constable Pollock, officials who captured the Beddington brother posing as Pycroft.

Notable Quotes:

Like all Holmes's reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained.

"I am afraid that I rather give myself away when I explain. Results without causes are much more impressive."

Back in Practice

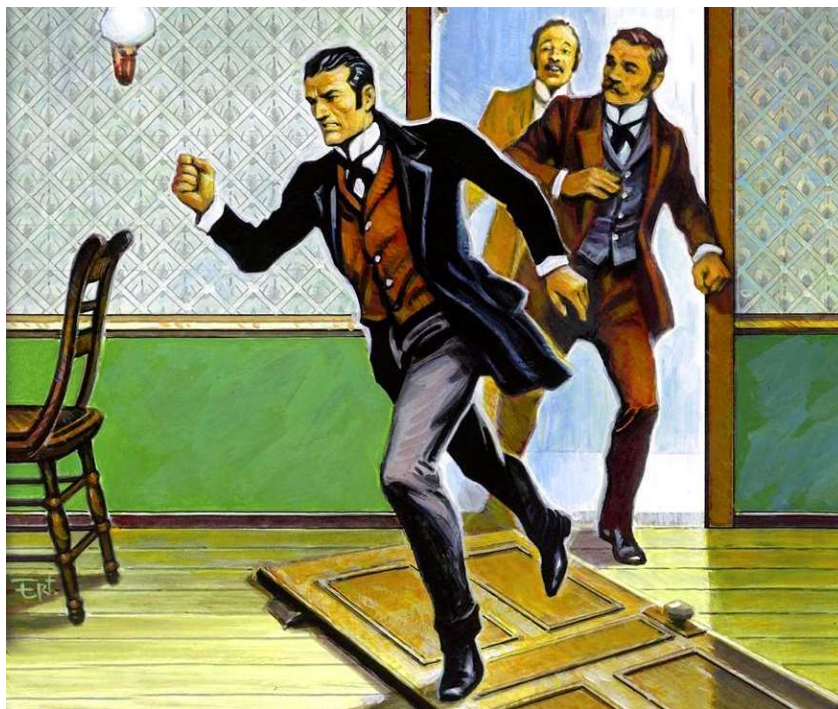
Our story begins with Watson enthusiastically informing us that he was back in harness. He had just bought another doctor's practice which, although declining as he puts it he "had confidence in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever."

<i>The Stock-Broker's Clerk</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>A Saturday in June</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Saturday, June 15, 1889</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Early June 1888</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>Saturday, June 1, 1889</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>June 1888</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Saturday, June 15, 1889</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Saturday, June 15, 1889</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Saturday, June 1, 1889</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>June 1888</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Saturday, June 1, 1889</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1889</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Saturday, June 15, 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.

Modestly enough, it never crossed Watson's mind that his literary output would eventually be the subject of profound scholarly research and discussion, so he self-effacingly left open a number of personal questions that we today would dearly have liked to have answered. As it is, we can only theorize and surmise.

For example, our biographer tells us that he had confidence that his own youth and energy would bring what had been a prosperous practice back to its original valuable level in "a very few years." Overwhelmingly, our learned chronologists conclude that the case took place in 1889. That being so, Watson would have been 37 years old; considering that the average middle-class Victorian had a



lifespan of 60 years (usually about 40 or less for the lower classes), it seems unusually optimistic that he would have considered himself that youthful. Due to diet and very basic medical care (primitive by our standards), as well as varied environmental problems, people aged very differently back then. This is something that becomes very apparent from even a cursory look at photographs of the time in which, for instance, a man in his forties by our standards looks as if he were in his sixties.

Holmes appears to have recognized this fact in BOSC, which is estimated to have taken place on the same year, 1889. As he and Watson are headed to the crime

scene, the Great Detective comments, "Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the case to me, and hence it is that two *middle-aged gentlemen* [italics mine] are flying westward at fifty miles an hour instead of quietly digesting their breakfasts at home."

But then, perhaps our medico felt energized as a result of his recent marriage.

Then there is the matter of the purchase of his practice. According to what Watson tells us, the practice originally brought in £1,200 (≈\$450,000 today) annually; however, it was now reduced to a paltry £300 (≈\$113,000). Paltry or not, however, in Victorian times the price of a practice usually ran to one-and-a-half times the yearly earnings that it brought its owner. That would have meant Watson had to pay some £450 (≈\$170,000). The question naturally arises: Where did the funds come from? Up to now, we had been given to understand that he was not exactly in the chips, and at this point his writings could not have brought him much money.

The most likely source would seem to have been Mary Morstan's pearls, which she herself described as being "of a rare variety and of considerable value." Although Watson would certainly not have even suggested that she sell her pearls, it seems very likely that Mary would have thought nothing of it, eager to see her new husband succeed in his profession.

If that had been the case, then Watson's readiness to abandon his patients to a next-door colleague to go with Holmes in pursuit of a case seems to put his expressed medical commitment on thin ice.

Fortunately for us.

Mr. Hall Pycroft

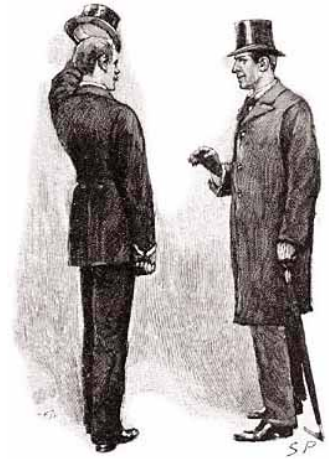


Pycroft is one of my favorite characters principally because, although he is bamboozled by Pinner, he is no fool like so many others of the Great Detective's clients—he is merely inexperienced. One would like to know what became of him afterwards. The poor man was left without a job thanks to the machinations of Pinner and, while it is true that he got £100 (≈\$100,000), it could not have lasted him long in London. How much could one do today, considering living expenses and such, with that amount in today's Washington DC or New York City? In Silicon Valley the price of a miniscule apartment runs to \$4,500 and more per month. Perhaps Holmes kindly used his influence to get him a new crib.

Arthur/Harry Pinner, a.k.a. the Beddingtons

Unsurprisingly so, the police during Queen Victoria's time half-heartedly pursued what we would today refer to as "white collar crime." They were mainly focused on crimes of violence—which, as *The Illustrated Police News* garishly depicted—were very common. Those caught and arrested received a fast trial and maximum punishment. What went on back then in the financial world and in companies such as Mawson & Williams, investors' manipulations and employee theft has merited a number of volumes that have attempted to gauge the criminality rampant in these sectors. However, so long as these crimes were non-violent, they were usually at the bottom of the authorities' "To Catch List."

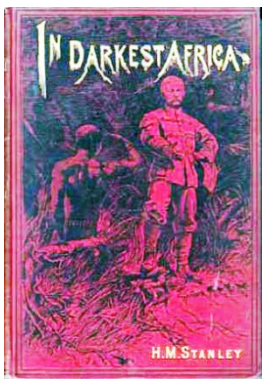
By killing the watchman, Pycroft's brother crossed the line. Murder was a crime which usually led the murderer directly to the gallows. Because the Beddingtons were habitual criminals, it is almost a certainty that they shared the same rope.



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.

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

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.

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.

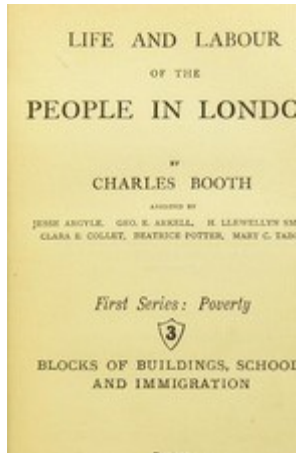
Parnell vindicated as all charges are revealed as false. *The London Times* apologizes.

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.

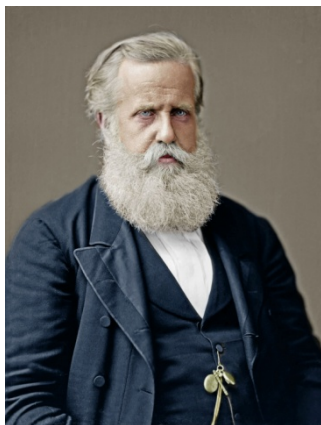
Moulin Rouge opens in Paris.

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.



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.)

◀ End of Portuguese Empire in Brazil; republic proclaimed and Dom Pedro, the emperor, exiled.

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.

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.

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*.

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: GLOR

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.

© 2019 Alexander E. Braun