

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
The Hound of the Baskervilles

Dr Mortimer:

“.....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”

“... The moon was shining bright upon the clearing, and there in the centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen, dead of fear and of fatigue. But it was not the sight of the body, nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo Baskervilles lying near her, which raised the hair upon the heads of these three dare-devil roisterers, but it was that, standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat, there stood a foul thing, a great, black beast, shaped like a hound yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon. And even as they looked the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskervilles, on which, as it turned its blazing eyes and dripping jaws upon them, the three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still screaming, across the moor. One, it is said, died that very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were but broken men for the rest of their days”

When Dr Mortimer had finished reading this singular narrative he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and stared across at Mr Sherlock Holmes. The latter yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire.

“Well?” said he

“Do you find it interesting?”

“To a collector of fairy-tales”

But one false statement was made by Barrymore at the inquest. He said that there were no traces upon the ground round the body. He did not observe any. But I did – some little distance off, but fresh and clear”

“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”

“If I had only been there!” Holmes cried. “It is evidently a case of extraordinary interest, and one which presented immense opportunities to the scientific expert. [.....]

Dr Mortimer: “There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless”

Holmes: “You mean that the thing is supernatural?”

Mortimer: “I did not positively say so”

Holmes: “No, but you evidently think it”

Holmes: “And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?”

“I do not know what to believe”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world” said he. “In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task. Yet You must admit that the footmark is material.

Dr Watson: [.....] *Twice I have with my own ears heard the sound which resembled the distant baying of a hound. It is incredible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of Nature. A spectral hound which leaves material footmarks and fills the air with its howling is surely not to be thought of. Stapleton may fall in with such a superstition, and Mortimer also; but if I have one quality upon earth it is common sense, and nothing will persuade me to believe in such a thing. To do so would be to descend to the level of these poor peasants who are not content with a mere fiend-dog, but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes.*

With feverish haste we had turned the body over, and that dripping beard was pointing up to the cold, clear moon. There could be no doubt about the beetling forehead, the sunken animal eyes. It was indeed the same face which had glared upon me in the light of the candle from over the rock – the face of Selden, the criminal

*An investigator needs
facts, and not legends
or rumours*