Baker Street *Elementary*

Presents

"The Life and Times in Victorian London"

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The Life and Times in Victorian London

 # 019 – Your Frontal Development is Showing – January, 2022

Welcome to topic number 19… today we will be looking at phrenology, the study of the shape and size of the cranium as a supposed indication of character and mental abilities.

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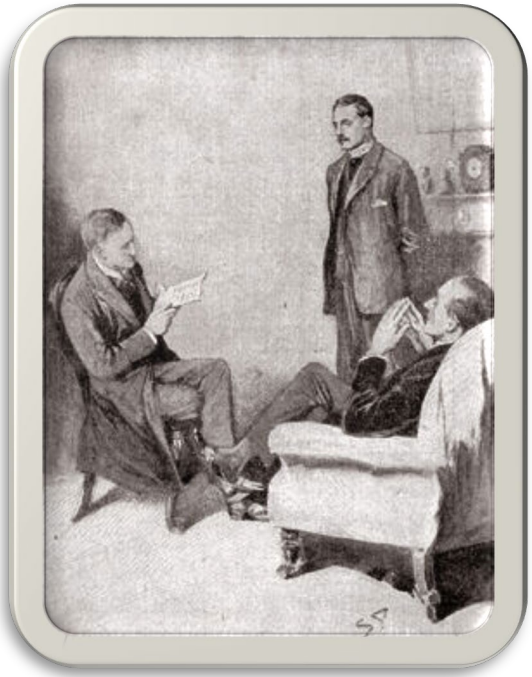
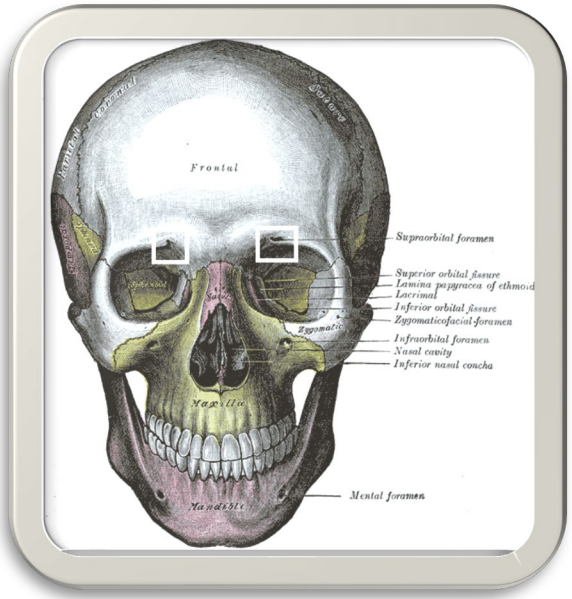


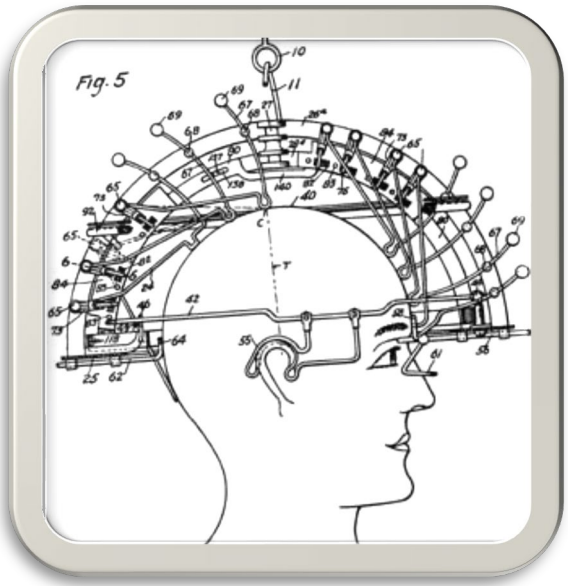
In the Canon, two very different characters will comment on your skull and provide quite diverse interpretations of its shape.

***In The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Dr. Mortimer will describe your skull as "dolichocephalic" with "well-marked supra-orbital development."**

On the other hand, Dr. Moriarty in "The Final Problem" will find your frontal development "lacking."

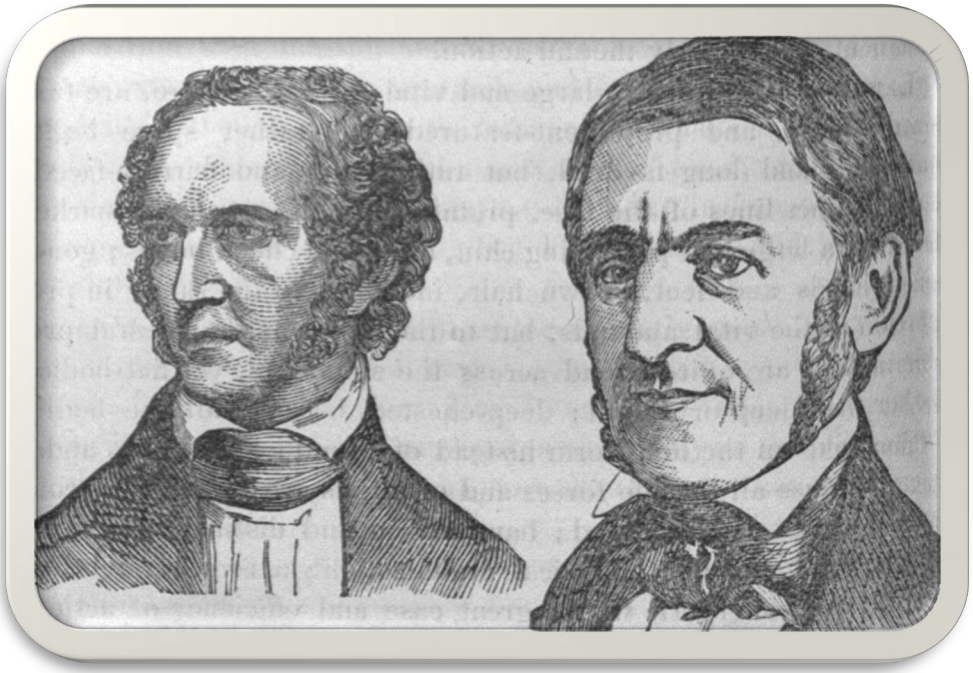


The Supra-orbital development is the region immediately above the eye sockets, where the eyebrows are located.



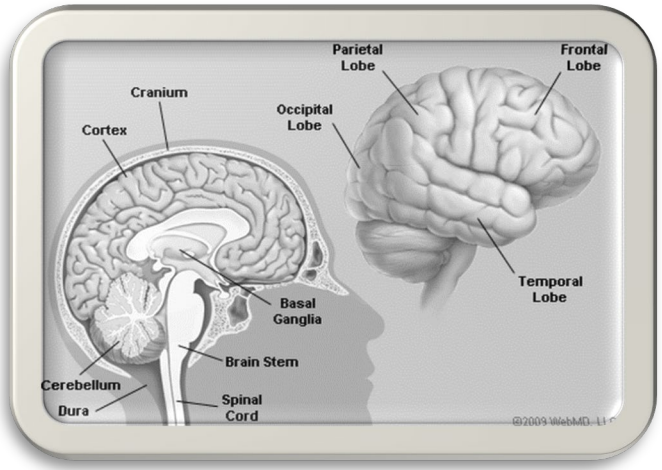
Both men will refer to the indication of intellectual capacity offered by the pseudo-science of phrenology.

While the variation in your aptitude might be explained by the person making the observation, the scientific tenets of phrenology suggest another possibility as well.

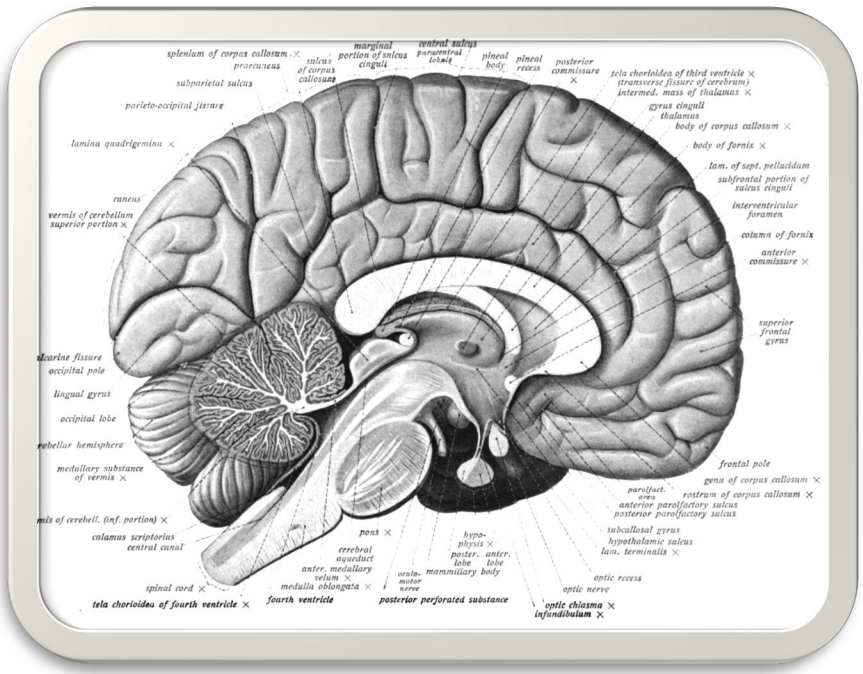


Franz Joseph Gall, the founder of phrenology, described six basic principles of his work:

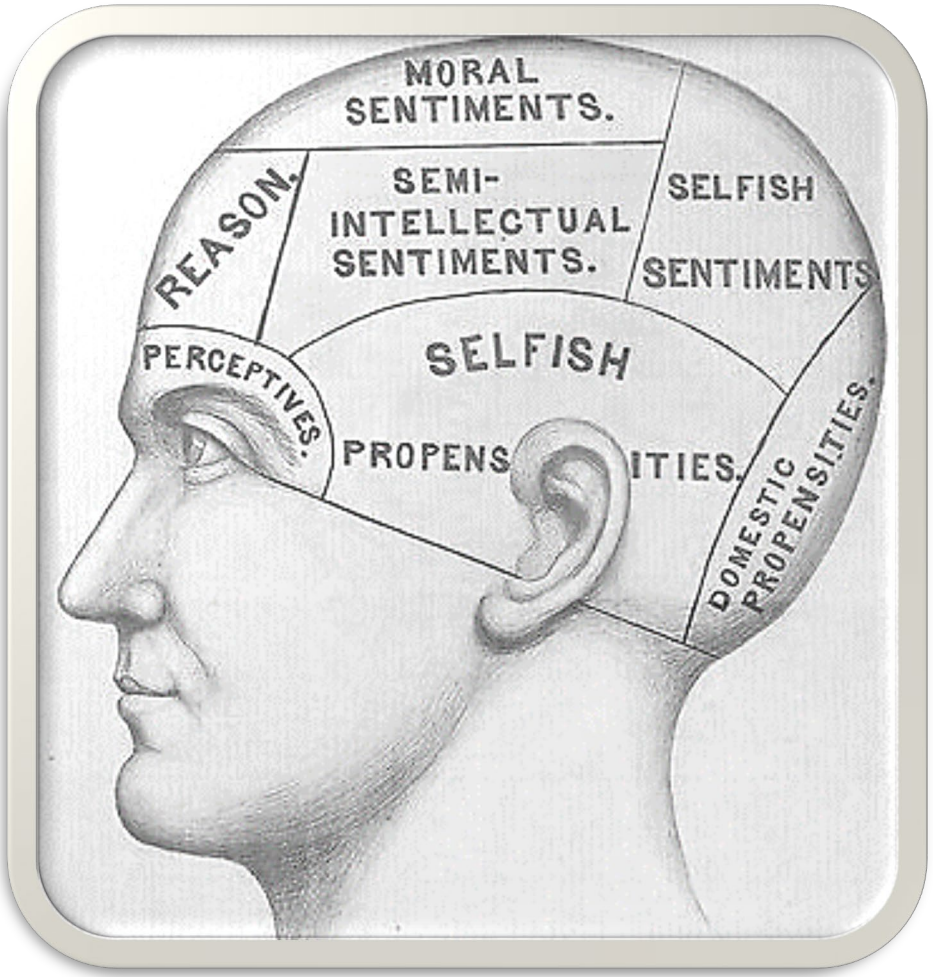
First, the brain is the organ of the mind;
Second, the mind is composed of multiple, distinct, innate faculties…



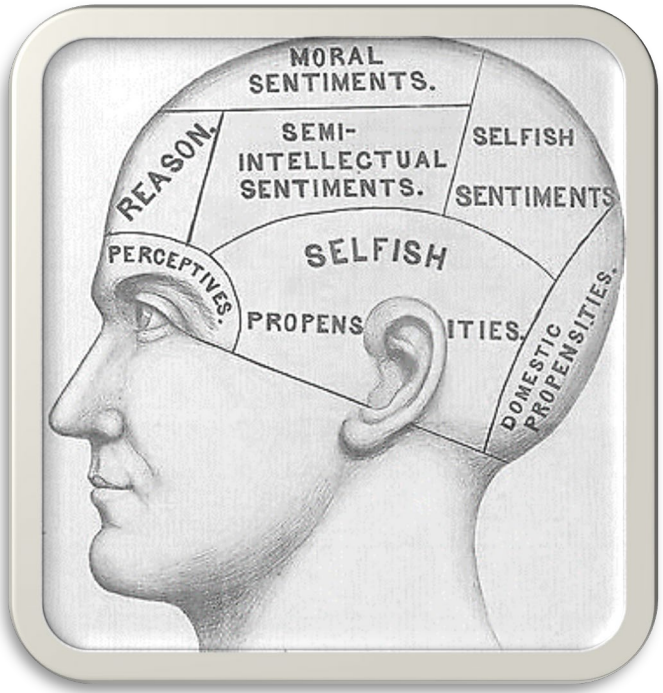
… Third, because they are distinct, each faculty must have a separate seat or "organ" in the brain; Fourth, the size of an organ, other things being equal, is a measure of its power…

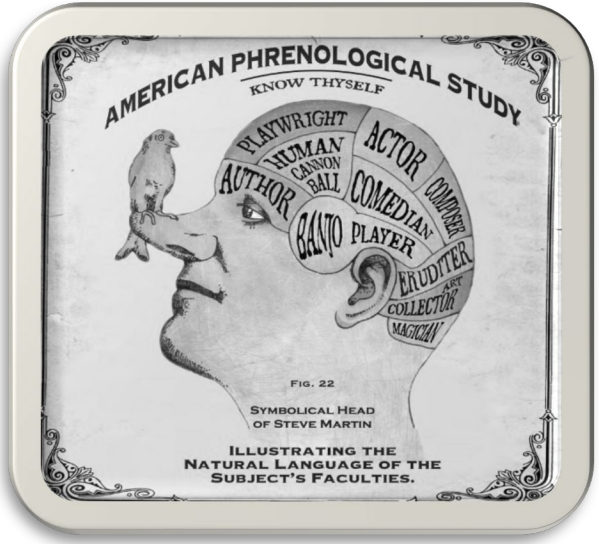


… Fifth, the shape of the brain is determined by the development of the various organs; and…



…Sixth, as the skull takes its shape from the brain, the surface of the skull can be read as an accurate index of psychological aptitudes and tendencies.





In other words, various areas in the brain govern different intellectual and personality characteristics and by mapping these areas on the skull…

…certain tendencies — from aggression to perception to intelligence — can be identified.

Johann Kaspar Spruzheim, a disciple of Gall, introduced these concepts into Britain…

…and by the 1840s, August Comte had incorporated them into his positive psychology, greatly influencing educational and penal reform in the US and Britain.

Comte's approach involved the use of phrenology and craniology (the study of skull shapes) in order to identify and adjust deviant behaviors.

Detecting certain physical characteristics associated with different behaviors, either appropriate or inappropriate…

Auguste Comte

Father of

Positive

Philosophy

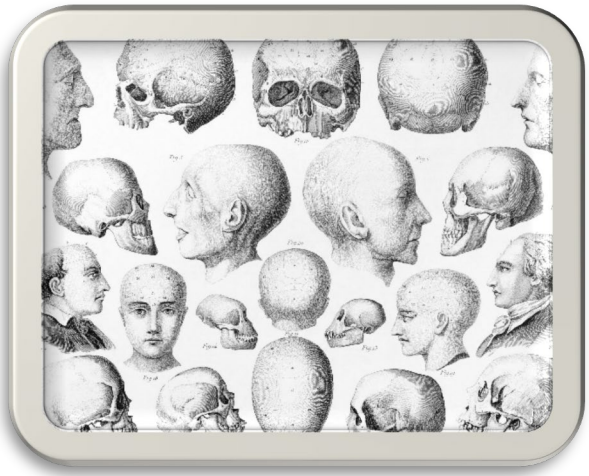
…provides a means to select out specific individuals in need of specialized instruction.

Auguste Comte

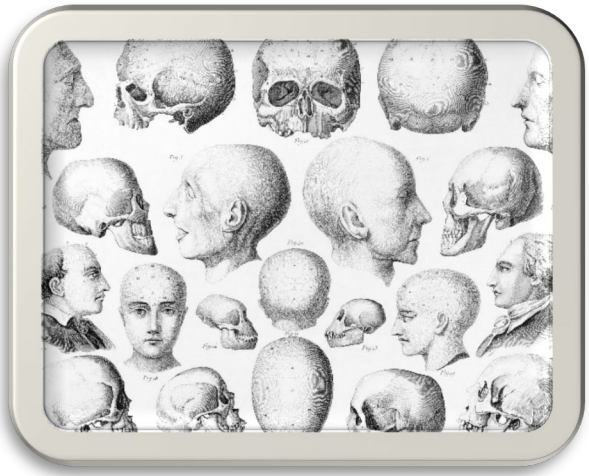
Father of

Positive

Philosophy

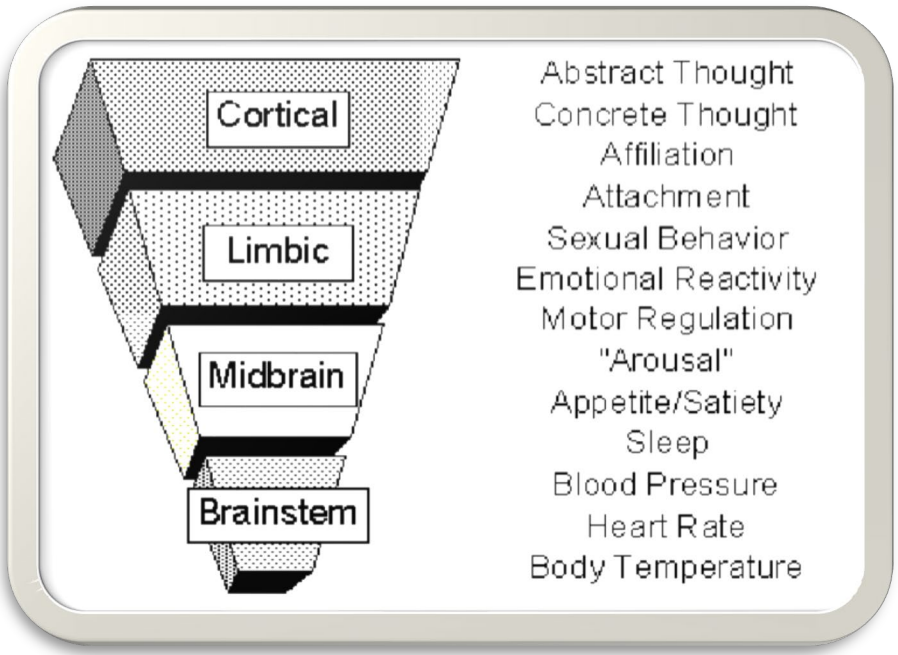


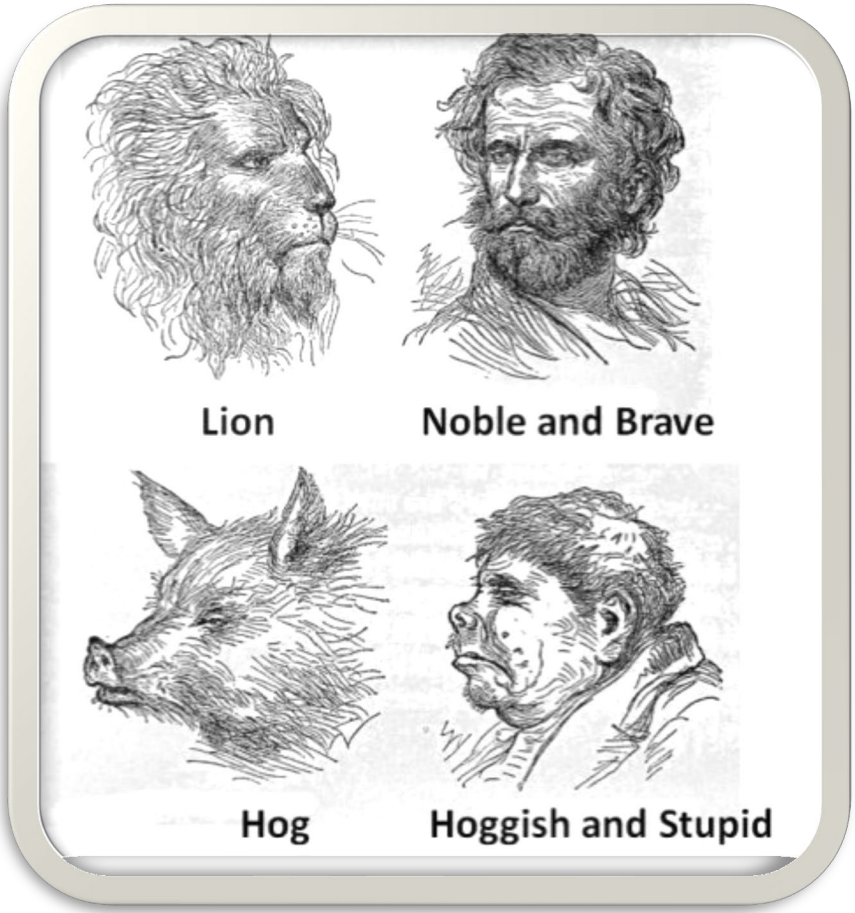
By the late 1800s, most scientists will reject the concept of the shape of the skull…



…reflecting psychological characteristics, but Gall's precepts did have two lasting legacies…

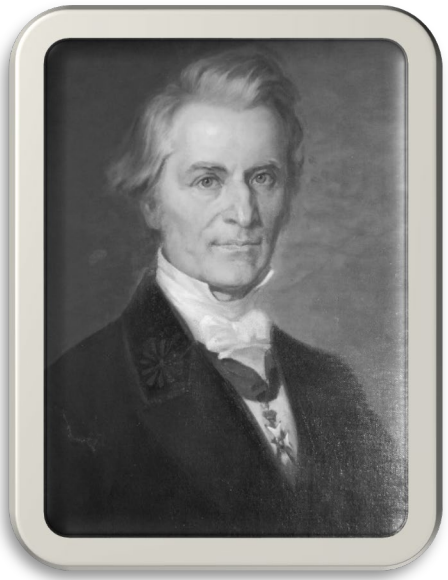
…the idea of a hierarchy of brain development (the most simple organisms having the most basic nervous systems and humans having the most complex)…





…and the relationship between the shape of the skull and intellectual ability.

Anders Retzius, a Swedish anatomist, used these concepts, and his own archeological and linguistic research, to develop a European racial hierarchy…



…from the short-skulled brachycephalics, primarily Mediterraneans, to the long-skulled dolichocephalics, primarily Germans.

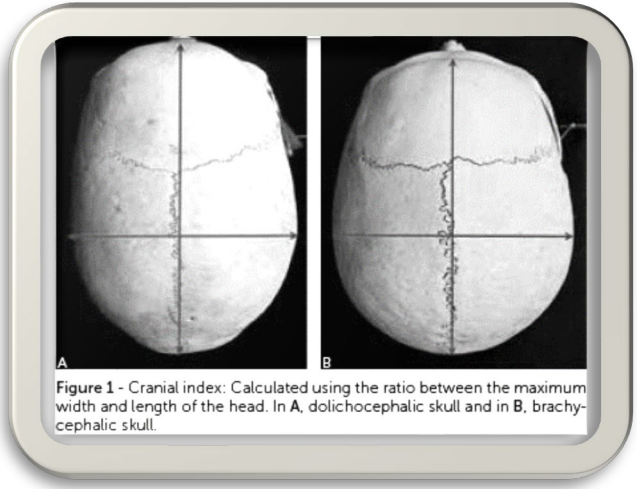
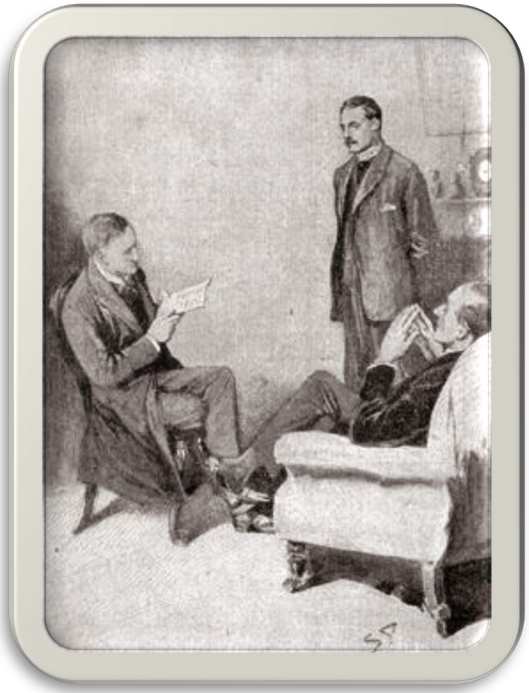
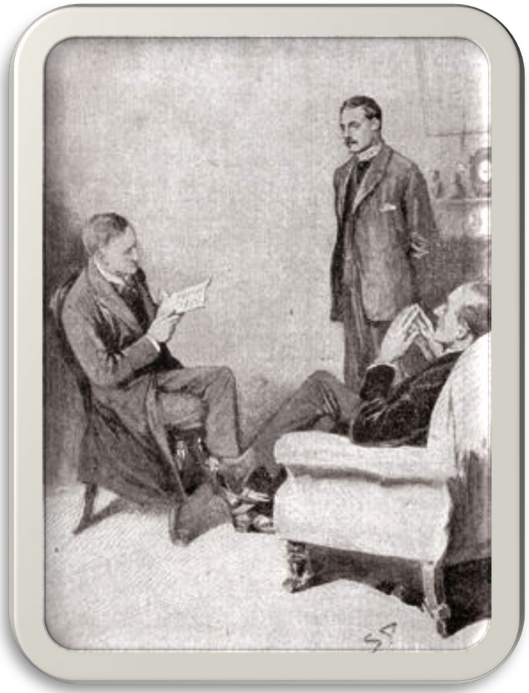


Figure 1 - Cranial index: Calculated using the ratio between the maximum width and length of the head. In **A**, dolichocephalic skull and in **B**, brachycephalic skull.

Sadly, this classification became the basis for the concept of the Aryan race and was not completely rejected by the scientific community until a hundred years later.

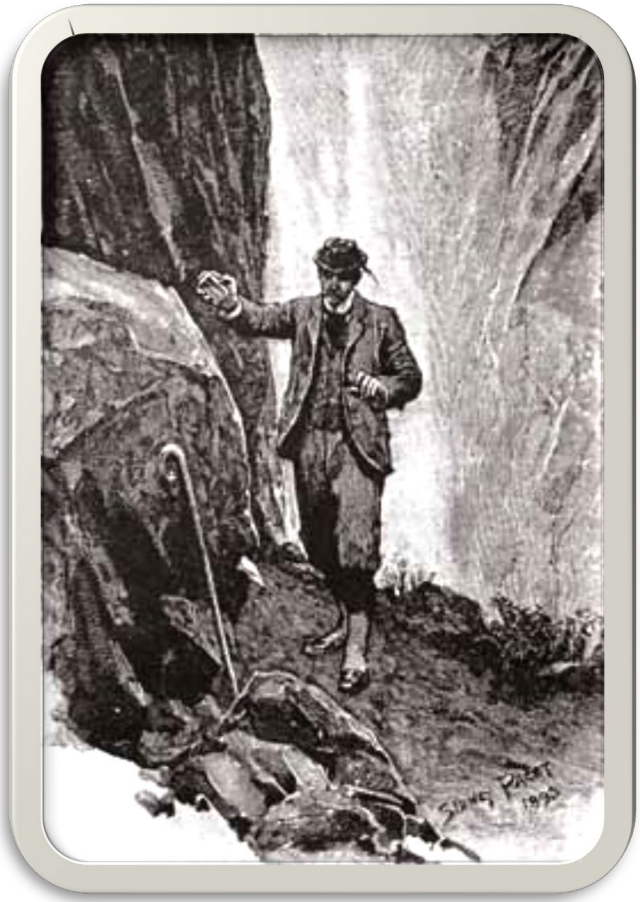


For the knowledgeable Victorian, Dr. Mortimer's observation of my dolichocephaly and the supra-orbital development…

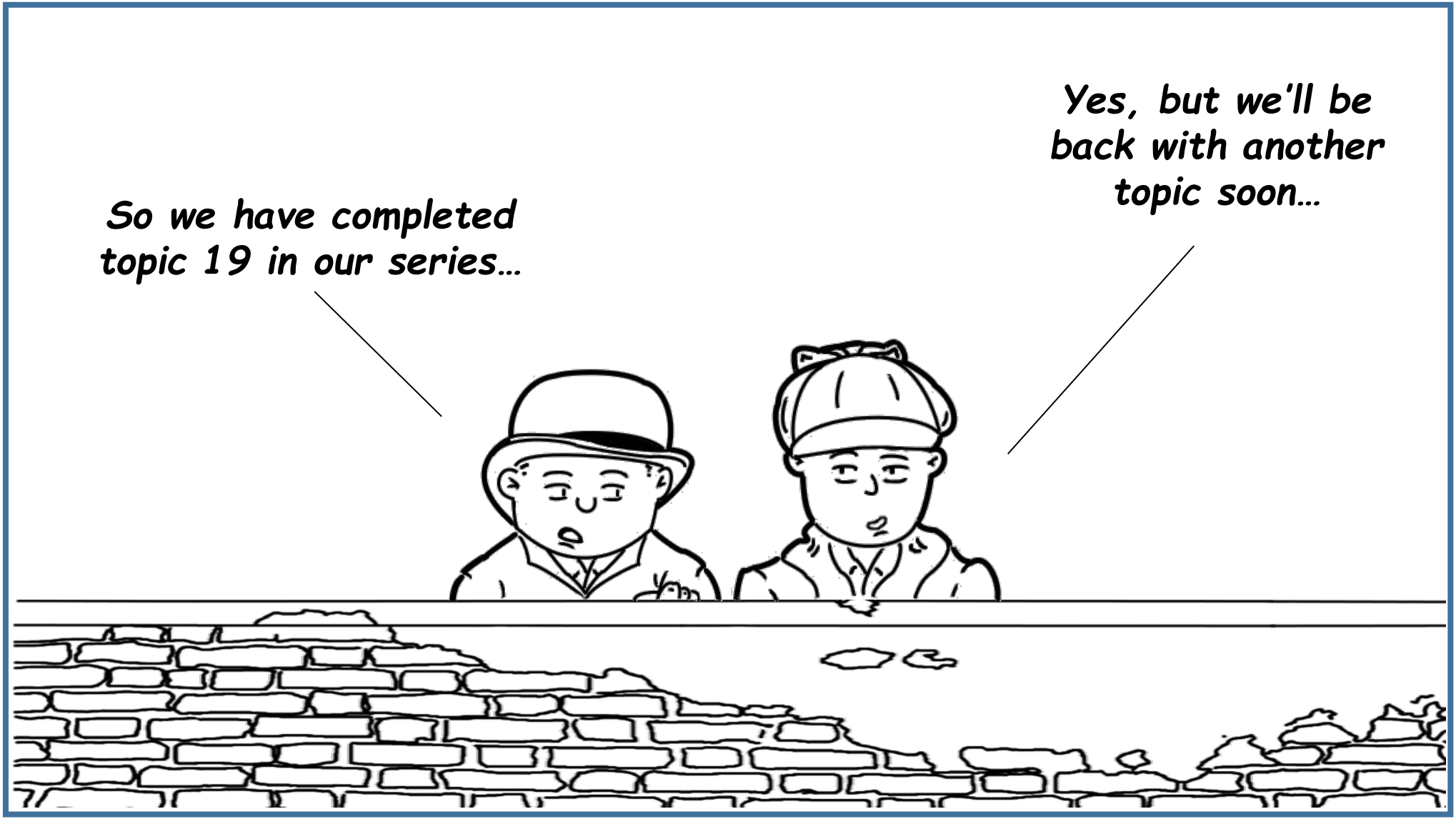


…would have been recognized as representing both superior intellectual development, as well as advanced perceptive skills…

…certainly well-known attributes of myself — and calls into question Dr. Moriarty's assessment which occurs prior to my self-imposed disappearance.



For the phrenologist, it will suggest an increase in my already-advanced mental powers, and points to the result of at least some of my activities following my "death."


So we have completed topic 19 in our series…
Yes, but we'll be back with another topic soon…

References for this topic:

1) http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/phrenology.aspx
2) Sally Mitchell, Victorian Britain: an Encyclopedia (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988)
3) Clarence Ray Jeffery, The Historical Development of Criminology, 50 J. Crim. L. & Criminology 3 (1959-1960)
4) Kyllingstad, Jon Røyne. Measuring the Master Race: Physical Anthropology in Norway, 1890-1945. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2014, http://dx.doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0051

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