



## The Wrong Passage

A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of  
"The Golden Pince-Nez" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle  
with Annotations and Commentary on the Story

Edited and Introduced by  
Andrew Solberg, BSI and Robert Katz, MD, BSI

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## From Russia with Love: Siberia to Yoxley Old Place

by John Baesch

The "Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez" takes place in 1894, shortly after "The Adventure of the Empty House," which heralded Sherlock Holmes's return to London from the Reichenbach Falls via Florence, Tibet, Persia, Mecca, Khartoum, Montpellier, and all points Sigerson. The year 1894 is half-way between the birth of Winston Churchill and the beginning of World War I. This was the high summer of the Victorian age and was marked by continuous technological advancement, particularly in transportation – especially railways – and in communications.

### Background

The basic political and economic function of the railways was to bind nations together in commerce. The Transcontinental Railroad linked the American Midwest with California in 1869. In 1885, the Canadian Pacific became Canada's first transcontinental railway. Construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway began in 1891. Russian railway history more or less developed along the same lines as North American railways. Both countries faced the same challenges: vast territories, steep mountains, rivers that ran north-south where the predominant flow of commerce was east-west – only Russia was taking on this challenge about thirty years after North America. Once the Russians began to build railways, they built them as quickly as they could as a matter of national security and national pride.

German involvement with Turkish railways in the 1890s gave vision to a Berlin to Baghdad railway. In Africa, Cecil Rhodes dreamed of a Cape to Cairo railway to unite British possessions in Africa.

In 1894, Queen Victoria sat upon the throne and reigned over the Empire at its zenith. She was in the fifty-seventh year of her reign. Her grandson ruled the German Reich as Wilhelm II. Grover Cleveland of New York was in his second term as President of the United States. Pope Leo XIII

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reigned as the 256<sup>th</sup> successor to St. Peter. In France, the Opportunist-Republican Marie Francois Sadi Carnot was President. Carnot favored an alliance with Russia and had a friendly relationship with Tsar Alexander III. This was an alliance that would have fatal consequences for both nations twenty years later in 1914. Both Carnot and Tsar Alexander would die in 1894: Carnot from the thrust of an assassin's blade, the Tsar from a kidney infection. Nicholas II succeeded his father as Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias.

In general, the world was at peace. The Japanese went to war with China over control of Korea; the Belgians fought the Arab traders over trading rights in the Congo. For most of the world, however, the fact that Britain ruled the waves fostered a climate where trade prospered and people could travel without encountering civil unrest or piracy.

The world was shrinking fast in terms of travel time and effective communications. The telegraph, railways, and steam navigation all developed together from the 1830s to 1900. These inventions and their development became giant conquerors of distance and time, and, in some cases, provided comfort on a scale hitherto unknown. (Even if the journey was uncomfortable, it *still* did not take as long as it used to.) In the field of communications, the telegraph and transoceanic cables took the delivery of messages as if from the speed of a horse to the speed of light.

The beginning of Queen Victoria's reign was marked by railway mania throughout the British Isles: a mania to build railways whether it made any sense or not, irrespective of the railway gauge, the line's destination, or the type of equipment. In comfort, the early Victorian railway journeys differed little from the stagecoaches they replaced. Like the stagecoaches, the trains were heated by customer-supplied foot warmers and customer-furnished brandy. In speed, they differed considerably. Before the railways, the only human beings who had traveled 40 mph were in a cavalry charge like the Scots Greys at Waterloo or were the great racing jockeys at Newmarket Race Course or Ascot. With the coming of the railways, 40 mph speeds were commonplace, and sustained 60 mph speeds were regularly achieved on the main line. By 1894, the fastest recorded train speeds were creeping up to 100 mph point on both sides of the Atlantic. By 1904, trains had travelled in excess of 100 mph in both the United States and Great Britain.

The Railways acquired a certain popular appeal that went beyond the people who needed to travel. On June 13, 1842 Queen Victoria herself, accompanied by her husband, Prince Albert, took a train on the Great Western Railway from Slough near Windsor to London Paddington. This journey gave the railway a good deal of positive publicity and attracted people of all classes to ride the trains.

The whole concept of a railroad was that people and goods could be moved very efficiently. Under ideal conditions, the capacity and efficiency of a railroad was enormous as compared to highways. One cause of those ideal conditions was effective, instantaneous communication such as the telegraph. Messages governing the movement of trains could be telegraphed up and down the line so that train movements could be properly and safely spaced. The first commercial electric telegraph was put into service on the Great Western Railway in 1839 from Paddington to West Drayton. This is the same line on which Queen Victoria made her first trip.

Railways have a fixed plant that requires basic maintenance regardless of tonnage or use. Railways make money by fares and tariffs based on use: the more users (passengers, goods, etc.), the more money. The great marketing insight that drove the railway's service plans came to the fore in the years following the royal trip of 1842. That insight was that more people would pay premium fares to ride the train if it was comfortable. Travel for its own sake was starting to take hold. Sleeping

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cars and dining cars began to operate on the railways in the 1860s and 1870s on both sides of the Atlantic.

A year before the royal journey, Thomas Cook, a Baptist minister and an organizer of anti-liquor meetings and Temperance rallies, arranged with the Midland Counties Railway for a special train to transport over 500 Temperance adherents 11 miles from Leicester to Southborough, with lunch included at one shilling per person. This was the world's first excursion train advertised to members of the public. Eventually, arranging trips turned out to be more popular than temperance, and Cook turned to it full time.

By the time of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, Cook arranged for more than 150,000 people to attend it over the six-and-a-half-month period it was open. By the 1860s, Cook sponsored tours to Switzerland, Italy, Egypt, and to the United States once the Civil War ended. By this time, Thomas Cook had entered a partnership with his son and the firm was known as Thomas Cook and Son.

Cook's genius was coming up with the concept of "inclusive independent travel." That is to say, Cook made the travel arrangements, booked lodgings, meals and excursions with hotels, restaurants, and tour operators, but the customer travelled unescorted by guides or tour leaders. Making these arrangements work involved the invention of things we take for granted today, such as coupons for hotels and meals, tour vouchers, and that most useful piece of legal tender before there was plastic, the circular note (or, as American Express called them, the Traveler's Cheque).

By 1890, the company had established offices throughout the world and was heavily involved in transportation support and postal operations for the British forces. During the great hiatus, Mycroft could have very easily supplied Holmes with the money he needed through the worldwide connections of Thomas Cook and Son. However, dinner for one in a restaurant in Mecca or a five-star hotel in Lhasa might have proved a challenge even for Thomas Cook and Son....

(Continued)

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