



An Inquiry into: “The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez”

Vol. XII No. 76 • February 17, 2022

“The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez” was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in July 1904. It is part of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.

As may be seen from the table, all our chronologists agree regarding the year in which this adventure took

place, with a few variants on the exact date. In 1894, Sherlock Holmes was 40 years old and Doctor James H. Watson was 42.

Main Characters:

Stanley Hopkins, a promising young detective in whose career Holmes has shown an interest; Professor Sergius Coram, elderly invalid academician; Willoughby Smith, young researcher working for Professor Coram; Anna, a former Russian Nihilist; Mrs. Marker, Professor Coram’s housekeeper; Susan Tarlton, Professor Coram’s maid; Mortimer, an Army pensioner and Professor Coram’s gardener.

Notable Quotes:

When I look at the three massive manuscript volumes which contain our work for the year 1894 I confess that it is very difficult for me, out of such a wealth of material, to select the cases which are most interesting in themselves and at the same time most conducive to a display of those peculiar powers for which my friend was famous. As I turn over the pages I see my notes upon the repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby the banker. Here also I find an account of the Addleton tragedy and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow. The famous Smith-Mortimer succession case comes also within this period, and so does the tracking and arrest of Huret, the Boulevard assassin—an exploit which won for Holmes an autograph letter of thanks from the French President and the Order of the Legion of Honour.

Outside the wind howled down Baker Street, while the rain beat fiercely against the windows. It was strange there in the very depths of the town, with ten miles of man’s handiwork on every side of us, to feel the iron grip of Nature, and to be conscious that to the huge elemental forces all London was no more than the molehills that dot the fields.

The Adventure of Golden Pince-Nez

Chronologist	Date of the Adventure
Canon	Late November 1894
Baring-Gould	Wednesday, November 14, 1894
Bell	Late November 1894
Blakeney	November 1894
Brend	November 1894
Christ	Wednesday, November 13, 1894
Dakin	November 1894
Folsom	Late November 1894
Hall	End of November 1894
Keefauver	Friday, November 23, 1894
Klinger	1894
Zeisler	Saturday, October 27, 1894

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.

“What did you do, Hopkins, after you had made certain that you had made certain of nothing?”

Absent-Mindedness or Wicked Sadism?

On more than one occasion, Doctor Watson has opened an account of a case by breezily enumerating a number of other, unpublished cases solved by Sherlock Holmes. This time, however, he seems to break the bank by mentioning very much in passing more of these unpublished cases than in any other place in the Canon:

“As I turn over the pages I see my notes upon the repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby the banker [also] an account of the Addleton tragedy and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow. The famous Smith-Mortimer succession case . . . [and] the tracking and arrest of Huret, the Boulevard assassin—an exploit which won for Holmes an autograph letter of thanks from the French President and the Order of the Legion of Honour.”

Seemingly unsatisfied by our level of grief, he tells us, “When I look at the three massive manuscript volumes which contain our work for the year 1894 I confess that it is very difficult for me, out of such



a wealth of material, to select the cases which are most interesting in themselves and at the same time most conducive to a display of those peculiar powers for which my friend was famous.”

It is enough to make one gnash his teeth!

By this time, the Great Detective was much of a household word, for not only had he become famous by solving seemingly unsolvable cases, but had a following of thousands in the readers of *The Strand Magazine* and others, who devoured anything that Watson had to write about our sleuth. Watson had to know that Holmes’ fans would have done just about anything to learn about those unpublished cases, yet—for whatever reason—he did not publish them, but seemingly taunted us by revealing their existence but not their content.

There may be a few of us who might not readily sign on the dotted line were a grinning Lucifer offer us a collection of these lost cases. And still Watson further tortures us by adding that “Each of these would furnish a narrative, but on the whole I am of opinion that none of them unite so many singular points of interest as the episode of Yoxley Old Place, which includes not only the lamentable death of young Willoughby Smith, but also those subsequent developments which threw so curious a light upon the causes of the crime.”

Incredibly, the Good Doctor then decides that the story of an abominable chain-smoker and his miserable past activities makes for far more compelling reading than “the repulsive story of the red leech” or “the singular contents of the ancient British barrow.”

Watson could have given lessons to the expert questioners of the Spanish Inquisition.

A Choice of Honors

From what Watson has told us, one possibly more than one occasion Sherlock Holmes declined the offer of a knighthood. Although we have been led to believe that this may have been the Great Detective’s aversion to finding himself in the limelight that moved him to make such a decision, the fact remains that he did accept the Order of the Legion of Honor from the French government for the capture of Huret, the Boulevard assassin.



Why the Legion and not knighthood? There can be no question that Holmes was an Englishman to his very marrows. It has been speculated that the reason for the declining the honor (or honors) that his country wished to bestow upon him possibly arose from a personal disagreement on his part with some of the policies of the British government.

The term “deep waters” most certainly applies to Sherlock Holmes’ personality. I have always had the suspicion that there had to have been more to this than an aversion to publicity; after all, he *did* accept the French symbol of merit. I think that Holmes was an honest soul; his abilities surely must have allowed him to always follow Polonius’ advice, “This above all: to thine own self be true and it must follow, as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man.” I therefore tend to think that he accepted one and declined the other based on a personal assessment of his record of triumph and failure.

He did capture Huret, who today we would probably call a serial killer. Did a past failure haunt him to the extent that he was unable to accept his grateful nation’s attempts to honor him?

Let us not forget that Jack the Ripper was never caught.

Doctor John H. Watson, Ret.?

At the opening of the case Watson mentions the “three massive volumes which contain *our* [italics mine] work for the year 1894.”

Of course, by then, Watson had already sold his Kensington medical practice to a colleague, Dr. Verne, who according to our biographer paid him what was by his own description “the highest price that I ventured to ask.” It was not until much later that he discovered that Verner was a distant relation of Holmes’ and that it had been his friend who provided the funds for the sale.



Whatever events Sherlock Holmes lived through during the time of the incident at Reichenbach Falls and his return three years later, these experiences appear to have determined him to ensure he would not have to reenter the fray without his friend and colleague at his side. This is confirmed by the fact that this seems to have been one of the first things that he did upon his return.

Even though Watson was obviously still interested in medicine—we find him reading about surgical developments at the beginning of this case—his reference to “our work for the year 1894” makes it clear that he was no longer active in his profession, but instead was focused on assisting Holmes in his investigations.

Much speculation has gone into theorizing whether there existed some arrangement regarding the fees received. Did Watson share in the sometimes outrageous fees received by Holmes? While it is true that by this time our biographer had to have been deriving a very good income from *The Strand* and other publications for his chronicles of Holmes’ investigations, there could have been some arrangement between the two; after all, Holmes often forbade Watson from publishing some of his cases, thereby depriving him of that potential income.

The Indestructible Professor

Coram said that every fortnight he ordered one thousand cigarettes from Ionides of Alexandria. If



one were to suppose that his guilty conscience allowed him to sleep the standard eight hours, he would have had 16 daily hours in which he was awake and smoking. A simple calculation indicates that he then must have smoked four-and-a-half cigarettes per hour, or slightly over 71 cigarettes per day. A pack of cigarettes in the United States contains 20 coffin nails.

Going by that calculus, Professor Coram would have been an almost four-packs-a-day man.

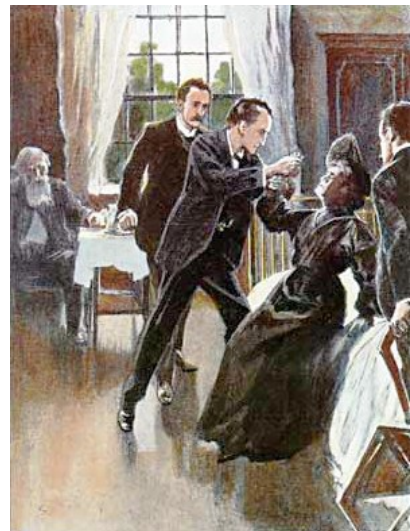
Incredible as it may sound, I have known smokers who easily exceeded this level. The human body is an incredibly tough mechanism!

A Futile Hope

One need not be an historian to know that the tender mercies of Soviet justice closely resembled those of Tsarist times—the guilt, especially of someone who plotted against the government was easily assigned but not that easily reconsidered.

Based on this Anna had to have been acting not on the certainty, but the slim hope that the diary and the other papers would be sufficient to clear Alexis and have him released. While there is no reason to believe that she was lying when she described Alexis’ aversion to violence, the one solid fact is that he had been a member of Anna and Coram’s Nihilist organization. That alone would have been more than enough to keep him in the salt mines for the rest of his days.

The Nihilist movement was started in Russia in the 1860s by people who hated the established social order, supposedly because (genuinely) Russia was backwards compared to life in Western countries. Like most extremists,



they did not accept step by step reforms insisting instead in total and radical change. When Tsar Alexander II freed the serfs, the nihilist insisted that they were not truly free, but had merely transitioned from land to factory slavery. Although the tsar sincerely attempted to meet their demands by calling an assembly to consider new reforms, they later assassinated him with a bomb in 1881. This action did little to help their cause.

In not a too long time, Nihilism became notorious across the world. The movement's tendency to use indiscriminate violence in their attempts to bring about political change by trying to assassinate authority figures whom they blamed for—real or imagined—social wrongs they perceived, their efforts



frequently ended hurting and killing innocent bystanders. In Russia, the movement attained its zenith in the 1870s and by 1905 was practically finished.

In view of all this, Anna's decision to suicide is puzzling. She did not do it because she had mistakenly killed Smith—Holmes clearly stated that the killing had been unintended; it is therefore very unlikely that she would have been charged with murder. Had it come to the worse, however, Victorian justice rarely executed women.

She should have realized that Alexis' best chance would have been a high-profile murder trial in which all the facts that she wanted the Russian Government to acknowledge would have been brought out in a very public way by the sensational press of the time. It is very likely that public opinion would have favored her, and that even the Tsar would take notice about the matter and possibly deliver the desired mercy, leading to Alexis' release.

Because this was not the case, it is unlikely that our two friends would have met with much success in their visit to the Russian ambassador. One can only hope that it was possible to exert some pressure

on the Russian government, using Mycroft's good offices, or perhaps even appeal to the Royal Family itself to whom, after all, Tsar Nicholas II was closely related.

What else happened in 1894:

Empire



Jameson occupies Matabeleland.

British troops occupy Ilorin, Gold Coast.

◀ Premier Rosebery declares Uganda a British protectorate

British and Belgian secret accord on dividing Central Africa.

Britain

Gladstone retires; Rosebery becomes prime minister with its minority Liberal government.

London taxi driver George Smith becomes first person to be fined for drunk driving.

Tower Bridge opens.

First Lyon's tea shop.

Big wheel erected at Earl's Court.



St. Bride's Institute opens.

◀ Harcourt's Budget raises death duties.

Parish Councils Act: Parish, Rural, and Urban Districts established.

Thirlmere Dam completed; for Manchester water supply, aqueduct 96 miles long.

Water tube boilers fitted in HMS *Hornet* and HMS *Sharpshooter*.

Turbinia, first steam-turbine ship launched.

Merchant Shipping Act: Masters, mates, and engineers to hold Board of Trade certificates.

Railway and Canal Traffic Act; fixes existing rates as maxima.

Official opening of the Manchester Ship Canal (begun 1887).

Blackpool Tower opens, 518 ft. high.

Death duties first introduced in Britain.

World

War breaks out between Japan and China. Japanese naval victory at Yalu River; Japanese capture of Port Arthur. After the First Sino-Japanese War, China cedes Formosa (Taiwan now) to Japan and grants Japan a free hand in Korea (1894-1895).

French take Madagascar.

French officer Alfred Dreyfus court-martialed for treason, triggers worldwide charges of anti-Semitism (Dreyfus is later vindicated).

President Carnot of France assassinated by Italian anarchist.

French Captain Henri Decoeurs' troops reach Nikki West Africa. Frederick Lugard's expedition reaches Nikki, Nigeria, signs accord with King Lafia Absalamu of Nikki

Great fire in Shanghai; over 1,000 buildings destroyed.

French under Joffre capture Timbuktu.

First newspaper Sunday color comic section published (*New York World*).

Sicilian bread riots lead to martial law and suppression of Italian socialist societies.

Italians defeat the Dervishes at Kassala.



Kurds massacre Armenians at Sassoun.

National Society founded in Greece to extend Greek authority in the Balkans.

◀ Alexander III of Russia dies; Nicholas II (last Romanov tsar) accedes to the Throne.

Sergius Witte becomes minister of finance in Russia.

Alexander Obrenovitch annuls liberal constitution of 1889.

Sale of spirits resumed in Russia as state monopoly.

Formation of French Agricultural Mutual Loan Society.

Baron Pierre de Coubertin initiates congress reviving the Olympic Games.

Beginning of car racing Paris to Rouen.

France and the Russian Empire form a military alliance.

Belgium Princess Josephine marries Prince Karl von Hohenzollern.

Lombok War. The Dutch loot and destroy the Cakranegara palace of Mataram. J. L. A. Brandes, a Dutch philologist discovers and secures the Nagarakretagama manuscript in Lombok royal library. ►

Denmark adopts Mid-European time.

U.S. flag fired on in Rio; prompt satisfaction exacted by Admiral Benham.

First U.S. poliomyelitis epidemic breaks out, Rutland, Vermont.



German emperor Wilhelm II fires Chancellor Leo von Caprivi and premier Botho zu Eulenburg.

Nicaragua captures Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

U.S. Congress passes Wilson-Gorman Tariff Act, which includes a graduated income tax. It was later struck down by the Supreme Court.

Columbus World's Fair in Chicago destroyed by fire.

Balinese troops assault Dutch army, 97 killed.

Republic of Hawaii proclaimed, with Sanford B. Dole as president.

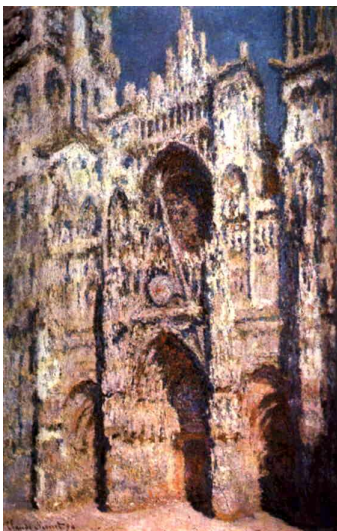
New York passes first state dog license law.

Korea declares independence from China, asks for Japanese aid.

Six thousand Armenians massacred by Turks in Kurdistan.

Roman Catholics win Parliamentary election in Belgium.

Art



Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*.

Debussy, *L'Après Midi d'un Faun*.

Toulouse-Lautrec, *Les Deux Amis*.

Degas, *Femme à sa Toilette*.

Strauss' first opera, *Guntram*, produced at Weimer.

◀ Monet, *Rouen Cathedral*.

George Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*, premieres in London.

George du Maurier, *Trilby*.

Anthony Hope, *The Prisoner of Zenda*.

Science and Technology

Escalators introduced (U.S.).

Halstead (U.S.) details his operation for breast cancer (mastectomy).

Sir William Ramsey and Lord Rayleigh discover existence of zero valences.

Flagstaff (Lowell) Observatory erected.

Oliver and Schäfer discover the nature of insulin.

J.H. Northrop (U.S.A.) invents automatic loom.

Louis Lumière invents the cinematograph.

Pneumatic hammer patented by Charles King of Detroit.

J.L. Johnstone of England invents horse racing starting gate.

Edison Kinetoscopic *Record of a Sneeze* released in movie theaters.

Elwood Haynes successfully tests one of the first American automobiles at 6 mph.

Daniel Cooper patents time clock.

Vaccine for diphtheria announced by Dr Roux of Paris.

First commercial film release by Jean Aimé Le Roy.

Berliner modifies earlier work on the gramophone by using a horizontal disk instead of a cylinder, leads to the first gramophone record. Not fully satisfactory until 1897.

Guaranty Building, Buffalo erected. Metal-framed building.

Karl Elsener invents the Swiss Army knife.

Next week's case: MISS.

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..."

All Sherlock Holmes illustrations have been published by courtesy of ITV Granada.

If you would like to join the Hounds of the Internet, email us at CourageousMurray@aol.com.

Copyright © 2022 Alexander E. Braun