



The Hounds of the Internet

"A singular set of people, Watson."

*An Inquiry into:
"His Final Bow"*

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"His Last Bow" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 1917.

There is no doubt of when this story took place, and this is reflected by the table.

At the time Holmes was 60 years old and Watson 62.

Main Characters:

Von Bork, German master spy posing as an avid sportsman in England. Martha, von Bork's servant. Baron von Herling, chief secretary of the German Legation to London. "Altamont," an anti-British Irish-American informant.

Notable Quotes:

The friends of Mr. Sherlock Holmes will be glad to learn that he is still alive and well, though somewhat crippled by occasional attacks of rheumatism. He has, for many years, lived in a small farm upon the downs five miles from Eastbourne, where his time is divided between philosophy and agriculture. During this period of rest he has refused the most princely offers to take up various cases, having determined that his retirement was a permanent one. The approach of the German war caused him, however, to lay his remarkable combination of intellectual and practical activity at the disposal of the government, with historical results which are recounted in *His Last Bow*. Several previous experiences which have lain long in my portfolio have been added to *His Last Bow* so as to complete the volume.

The Irish-American had entered the study and stretched his long limbs from the armchair. He was a tall, gaunt man of sixty, with clear-cut features and a small goatee beard which gave him a general resemblance to the caricatures of Uncle Sam.

"I chose August for the word and 1914 for the figures."

<i>His Last Bow</i>	
<i>Chronologist</i>	<i>Date of the Adventure</i>
<i>Canon</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Baring-Gould</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Bell</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Blakeney</i>	<i>1914</i>
<i>Brend</i>	<i>August 1914</i>
<i>Christ</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Dakin</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Folsom</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Hall</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Keefauver</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</i>
<i>Klinger</i>	<i>1914</i>
<i>Zeisler</i>	<i>Sunday, August 2, 1914</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.

“The old sweet song. How often have I heard it in days gone by. It was a favorite ditty of the late lamented Professor Moriarty. Colonel Sebastian Moran has also been known to warble it. And yet I live and keep bees upon the Sussex Downs.”

“But how did you get to work again?”

“Ah, I have often marvelled at it myself. The Foreign Minister alone I could have withstood, but when the Premier also deigned to visit my humble roof—!”

“Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There is an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it’s God’s own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared.”



A Different Quote

In June 1916, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle visited the French front where he was fêted by General Georges-Louis Humbert. Over cognac the general leaned closer and earnestly asked Conan Doyle: “*Sherlock Holmes, est ce qu’il est un soldat dans l’armée anglaise?*”

A startled (and very likely amused) Sir Arthur replied, “*Mais, mon général, il est trop vieux pour service.*”

Obviously, as LAST shows, this was not quite true.

An Important Revelation

LAST is one of two of the adventures written in the third person, the other being MAZA. Its tone and style point to it as not having been written by Dr. Watson; however, it rings genuine pointing, perhaps, to it having been authored by Sherlock Holmes himself.

That being said, let us not forget what the Good Doctor said in THOR regarding some of his friend’s other cases: “In some I was myself concerned and can speak as an eye-witness, while in others I was either not present or played so small a part that they could only be told as by a third person.”

Very importantly, it also clarifies the matter of the Great Detective’s year of birth.

The Complicated Relationship



Until 1914, the English and the Germans had had a peculiar, complicated relationship. Like all other members of the large dysfunctional European family, neither one was very fond of the other. However, unlike with, for example, the French whom they positively detested, the English gritted their teeth and attempted to be at least polite to the Imperial prig now ruling from Berlin—this was mostly due to the British Royal Family’s Germanic roots. This relationship deepened when Queen Victoria married Prince Albert, which made the British Royals

part of the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha.

Back then, the King was closely related to the Kaiser; in fact, Queen Victoria—Wilhelm and George V's grandmother—died in the very arms of her German grandson. Both Edward VII and his son and successor George V were honorary officers in German regiments as had the Kaiser in British regiments, as may be seen from the photo, in which the King of England (right) appears in full German military regalia with his cousin Wilhelm.



By July 1917, the ongoing bloodshed in the trenches had stimulated English anti-German sentiment to a record level which slowly and dangerously began to be directed at Buckingham Palace, accusing the King in particular of not being sufficiently English. George V put an end to this when he officially changed the family name to the completely British surname of Windsor.

Simply Not Done!

Von Bork made ample use of his social position to further his ends. The fact that his English was so good makes it very likely that as a boy or young man he might have attended one of top English schools and made many friends there. This, added to his sporting attitude, would have made him acceptable to British society as a “gentleman” during the years before the War. At that time, being German did not carry too much negative weight. After all Queen Victoria and her successor Edward VII both spoke English with a trace of German accent.



It would amaze us today how remarkably ignorant Europeans were about their neighbor nations. Von Bork is an excellent example of this. Considering how closed German society was at the time, one should not wonder that von Bork found the conversation at a gathering at the home of a Cabinet Minister over a weekend to have been “amazingly indiscreet.”

Although the English were extremely adept at playing the “Great Game,” until that time espionage had been much of an opportunistic endeavor, more often than not practiced by free agents ready to sell their illicit wares to the highest bidder. Oberstein, La Rothiere, and the unfortunate Eduardo Lucas—all mentioned in SECO—immediately come to mind.

If you belonged to the same club, you were considered a trustworthy fellow, and once one was accepted to that level of society, it would not have been unusual to be present when some of these “indiscreet” comments were made. Things were different in Germany, France, Austria, Italy, and the rest; this is probably an advantage (as well as disadvantage) of living on an island.

Von Bork's contempt for British honor was extremely misplaced. Obviously, his dismissive belief that England might not honor her treaty with Belgium was grossly mistaken. Unfortunately, however, he was right about British unpreparedness. When the war started, the British army numbered 225,000, arranged in 140 battalions, 55% of which were stationed overseas. There were 17,000 cavalymen in

twenty-eight cavalry regiments, six to nine of which were in India at a given time. With Waterloo and the Zulu War in the history pages, Britain knew only how to keep the peace within its empire—as Kipling put it, “the savage wars of peace.” There had been no war with a European power since the 1850s.

It is said that although history does not repeat itself, it rhymes. This unpreparedness was a hard lesson that was not learned. England was also unprepared for the Second World War.

In spite of all this, by any extent of the term von Bork was no genius. Although he must have been passing Holmes’ misinformation to the German authorities, he kept the product of four years of espionage in his safe until the night before the war began. Knowing what was coming, why did he not pack the lot of it and sent it to Berlin via diplomatic pouch? Surely by then much of that four-year-old information (ostensibly genuine) would have been outdated. Why wait? Surely he had to know that diplomatic immunity did not apply to espionage, particularly during what he knew would be a major war. In any case, it is doubtful that he was accumulating all that information to give it to his masters in one giant lot. He had to have been sending it via diplomatic pouch or some other secure means.

The Call to King and Country

To me Holmes has always personified the quintessential, dyed-in-the-wool Victorian gentleman. While it might not have occurred to him that at his age he could have taken part in the coming conflict, there is no doubt in my mind that he would have answered the first call to serve the Realm.

And it came from no less than Lord Asquith himself!

Our sleuth’s self-esteem had to have been flattered by the appearance at his cottage’s doorstep of Herbert Henry Asquith, 1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith, KG, PC, KC, FRS, Prime Minister of Britain, there to ask (beg?) him to please embark in this final mission for the Realm. Although it cost him two years of his life, his satisfaction over a job well done clearly comes through in his final remarks to von Bork.

When war broke out, the English meticulously fulfilled every requirement of diplomatic immunity. A special train—under heavy guard—was chartered to safely take all German diplomatic personnel to a neutral ship which returned them to their country.

This is lightly touched upon by the two Germans as they discuss leaving the country with all the material gathered by Altamont. As von Herling put it, “So far as I can judge the trend of events, you will probably be back in Berlin within the week. When you get there, my dear von Bork, I think you will be surprised at the welcome you will receive. I happen to know what is thought in the highest quarters of your work in this country.”

Poor von Bork! After years of having been led down the primrose path by Holmes his reception in Berlin must indeed have been a warm one. It is surprising he did not consider asking for asylum!



The Perennial “Irish Problem”

Holmes’ cover as an embittered Irish-American who deeply hates England showed real genius. He couldn’t have chosen a better *persona* to dispel any doubts von Herling might have had.



Aside from being a nation of poets, the Irish proved that they could also be a perennial thorn in the British lion’s paw. They plotted against England during Elizabeth I’s time by passing information to Spain. After the sinking of the Armada, many of the sailors who survived found a haven in the old sod. As anyone who has gone adventuring with Horatio Hornblower knows, during the Napoleonic Wars one of England’s biggest concerns lay in the fact that a considerable percentage of the Royal Navy’s sailors—and many officers as well—were Irish. The Irish also proved troublesome to England during the First and Second World Wars providing a very porous point of entry for German spies and saboteurs.

Certainly, Holmes could not have chosen any better disguise to string von Bork along. Small wonder the Great Detective could not resist telling the German that he was responsible for revealing his own agents!

Watson’s description of him as a caricature of Uncle Sam was sheer genius!

The Interrupted Friendship

Every time that we study this case, I am always struck by the fact that apparently Holmes and Watson had not seen each other in years (“How have the years used you? You look the same blithe boy as ever.”) It is difficult to believe for me that they would not have gotten together, if not regularly, at least once in a while perhaps for birthdays, Christmas or New Year’s. How can it be that the Great Relationship was so completely interrupted? Certainly, while there was breath in Watson, Holmes knew he could count on him for anything, regardless of the passage of years. But I find it very curious that two such great friends, living in the same country, would not have seen one another for so many years. This might be understandable, especially back then, if they had been in different countries, but by the late Victorian period there was hardly a place in England that could not have been reached at most in a couple of days



Perhaps the fault lay more on Holmes’ side than on Watson’s. He might have gotten into the habit of living as a recluse, surrounded by his books and working on his researches. There is a slight hint of this having been the case when one considers that it took someone like Lord Asquith to convince him to abandon his retirement and assist his realm against its enemies.

Holmes the Warmonger

Some Canon scholars have busily worked at transmuting molehills regarding Holmes’ musings about the imminent war, that it was “God’s own wind” and that a “cleaner, better stronger land will lie in



Young Winston Churchill

beginning there still were a few—the very last—cavalry charges foolishly led against machine gun emplacements. The attrition of trench warfare lay in the future, and schoolchildren still excitedly recited “Half a league, half a league, half a league onward, all in the valley of Death rode the six hundred.”

As the war dragged on—progressively deadlier and increasingly destructive—it is not difficult to imagine the horror and disgust that must have burdened Holmes who, for all his apparent coldness, was a sensitive man.

Watson’s participation must have been nothing short of nightmarish, directly dealing with the results of the insanity as he tended to the wounded and the dying. In his case, however, after having experienced Afghanistan, it is very unlikely that he would have held any illusions of glory when he re-entered the Army Medical Service.

Undoubtedly, both men would have been utterly appalled by the post-war world that resulted.

There may have been a prophetic glimpse of what was to come. I base this upon part of Holmes said to Watson, “It may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have.” Perhaps this was also reflected by his reference to “God’s own wind” and his consideration that “A good many of us may wither before its blast.”

By the time this woeful episode of human history finally staggered to its end, it had obliterated three ancient and honored dynasties, resulted in indescribable destruction and loss, and drove a stake through the heart of the society Holmes had been born into and lived in.

the sunshine when the storm has cleared.” The main argument is that the Sleuth Master held the deluded belief that a destructive war would lead to a better world.

I tend to think that those who believe so are merely raising the tattered flag of presentism, thus committing the mortal sin of judging by the standards of one’s time the motives and actions of people who lived in a completely different era and society.

One cannot forget that Holmes was a Victorian, born and raised during a time of Empire (much like Ancient Rome) when war was deemed a glorious, manly enterprise. Abominations such as the Battle of the Somme with its one million casualties, and the Battle of Verdun with its more than 700,000 casualties still lurked within history’s dark womb. Even Winston Churchill recognized this change: “War, which used to be cruel and magnificent has now become cruel and squalid.”

Few expected that this “war to end all wars” would last more than a year or so. It would be splendid! At its



All this, added to the increasing weight of his years, must have provided the final push that led Holmes to his ultimate and permanent retirement. I picture him thinking something along the lines of what Rhett Butler said to Scarlett when he finally left her: “I want the outer semblance of the things I used to know, the utter boredom of respectability . . . the calm dignity life can have when it’s lived by gentle folks, the genial grace of days that are gone. When I lived those days I didn’t realize the slow charm of them.”

What Happened on August 1914

On August 1, Germany pushed the first domino of the line by declaring war on Russia. On August 2, Germany sent an ultimatum to Belgium demanding free passage for its troops, alleging that France



World War I Military Cemetery, Verdun, France.

was about to invade Germany by going through Belgium. The Belgian king refused the ultimatum and mobilized the army. Then on August 3, Germany declared war on France; meanwhile, London sent Berlin an ultimatum to respect Belgian neutrality. On August 4 Germany invaded Belgium. By the evening of August 4, no satisfactory response having been received from Germany to its ultimatum, England declared war on

Germany. On August 6, Hungary declared war on Russia, and Serbia declared

war on Germany. On August 7, the British Expeditionary Force arrived in France, and France invaded Alsace-Lorraine. On August 13, France declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

By the time the insanity ended, on November 11, 1918, the butcher’s bill was staggering: some 40 million casualties. There was an estimated 15 to 19 million deaths and about 23 million wounded military personnel. The total number of estimated military fatalities on all sides ranges from nine to 11 million.



Next week’s case: MAZA.

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 photos 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.

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