



Arthur Conan Doyle Encyclopedia

His Last Bow Adventure XLVII – His Last Bow

SUMMARY (Diogenes Club)

It is the eve of World War One. Von Bork is the head of a German spy ring operating in England. Altamont, his chief operative is really Holmes in disguise. Holmes spent two years preparing for the job, starting by joining an Irish secret society in Chicago.

Holmes captures Von Bork and he and Watson carry him off to jail after removing all the papers and correspondence from his safe.

SUMMARY (Wikipedia)

On the eve of the First World War, the German agent Von Bork is getting ready to leave England with his vast collection of intelligence, gathered over a four-year period. His wife and household have already left Harwich for Flushing in the Netherlands, leaving only him and his elderly English housekeeper.[1] Von Bork's associate, Baron von Herling, a German diplomat from the Embassy of Germany, is impressed by his acquisition of vital British military secrets, and tells Von Bork that he will be received in Berlin as a hero. Von Bork says that he is waiting for one last transaction with his Irish-American informant, Altamont, who will arrive shortly with a rich treasure: naval signals.

Von Herling leaves just before Altamont arrives. Von Bork's housekeeper has turned her light off and retired. Altamont shows Von Bork a package. Altamont disparages Von Bork's safe, but Von Bork proudly says



that its construction and the double combination lock make it impenetrable. He tells Altamont that the combination is "August 1914". Altamont, mentioning cases in which several German informants have ended up in prison, is distrustful of Von Bork and refuses to deliver the naval codes until he receives payment. Von Bork refuses to pay until he has examined Altamont's intelligence data.

Altamont hands him the package. Von Bork finds that it is a book titled Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, hardly what he expected. Even less expected is the chloroform-soaked rag that is held in his face by Altamont a moment later. Altamont is actually Sherlock Holmes in disguise, and the chauffeur who brought him is Dr. Watson. Now past their heyday, they have nonetheless caught several spies (Holmes is actually responsible for the imprisoned agents of whom "Altamont" spoke), and fed the Germans some thoroughly untrustworthy intelligence. Holmes had retired from detective work, spending his days beekeeping in the countryside, but returned after the Foreign Minister and the Premier came to him. Holmes has been on this case for two years, and it has taken him to Chicago, Buffalo, and Ireland, where he learnt to play the part of a bitter Irish-American, even gaining the credentials of a member of a secret society. He identified the security leak through which British secrets were reaching the Germans, and then set out to apprehend the receiving agents themselves. The housekeeper was one of Holmes' agents: the light that she switched off was the signal to Holmes and Watson that the coast was clear.

Holmes and Watson take Von Bork and the evidence to Scotland Yard. In reference to the impending War, Holmes says, "There's an east wind coming, Watson." Watson misinterprets the meaning of the words and says, "I think not, Holmes. It is very warm", to which Holmes replies:

"Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's 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."