



*An Inquiry into:
"His Last Bow"*

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

There can be not the slightest doubt of when this story took place, and our chronologists reflect this.

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.”

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

THE WEATHER
Generally fair today and Monday;
gentle to moderate south wind.

VOL. LXIII...NO. 29,644.
NEW YORK, SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 1914--88 PAGES, In Seven Parts.
PRICE FIVE CENTS.

GERMANY DECLARES WAR ON RUSSIA, FIRST SHOTS ARE FIRED;
FRANCE IS MOBILIZING AND MAY BE DRAWN IN TOMORROW;
PLANS TO RESCUE THE 100,000 AMERICANS NOW IN EUROPE

Transports for Refugees Being Considered by State Department.

MAY CHARTER VESSELS

Appropriation Will Probably Be Asked from Congress to Rescue Stranded Americans.

MIGHT SEND OVER GOLD

To Relieve Those Unable to Get Cash on Paper or to Obtain Passage.

NEW WARNINGS NOW THERE

ENGLAND HESITATES WHAT COURSE TO TAKE

Grey Wants to Throw the Weight of Great Navy at Once in Favor of Russia and France.

Special Cable to The New York Times. LONDON, Sunday, Aug. 2.—Great Britain's role in the European war now hangs in now a great question. The Times correspondent learns on good authority that the Cabinet is practically divided into equal parts on the question whether to take immediate action or await developments in the hope of remaining outside of the struggle.

Mr. Edward Grey, according to this information, heads the party which believes that it is England's duty and interest to throw the weight of her navy at once into the scales on behalf of France and Russia.

France Orders Mobilization After Germany Asks Her Intentions.

DELGASSE WAR MINISTER

Germany's Old Enemy Heads Army Organization—Once Nearly Caused Conflict.

CLEMENCEAU IN CABINET

President and Cabinet Issue a Manifesto to French Nation.

Poincare Orders Mobilization, Telling France It Is Not War Yet

PARIS, Aug. 1.—President Poincaré and the members of the Cabinet today issued the following joint proclamation to the French nation:

For some days the States of Europe have been continuously aggravated, and, notwithstanding the efforts of diplomacy, the horizon has darkened. At the present hour a greater part of the nations have mobilized their forces. Even the countries protected by neutrality conventions have deemed it their duty to take this measure as a precaution.

The powers whose constitutional or military legislation differs from our preparations which, in reality, are equivalent to mobilization, and are but the anticipated execution of it.

France, who always has affirmed her desire for peace, who on many a tragic day has given to Europe examples of moderation and a living peace of the world, has now prepared herself for all eventualities, and has taken from henceforth her first irrevocable dispositions for the safeguarding of her territory.

But our legislation does not permit the completion of these preparations without a decree of mobilization. Conscious of its high responsibility, and feeling that it would fail in its sacred duty if it did not take this measure, the Government has signed the decree.

Mobilization is not war. Under the present circumstances it would appear, on the contrary, to be the best means of assuring peace with honor.

Strong in its ardent desire of arriving at a peaceful solution of this crisis, the Government under cover of these essential provisions will continue its diplomatic efforts, and still hopes to succeed. It commands the confidence of the people and to give itself up to unjustified emotion. It counts upon the patriotism of every Frenchman, and it knows that there is not a state on earth which is not in sympathy with France.

Germany's War Challenge Delivered to Russia at 7:30 Last Evening

EMBASSY THEN DEPARTS

Enrolment of Reservists Begun Throughout the Czar's Vast Empire.

STIRRING SCENES ATTEND IT

Hardly a Family but Loses a Protector, Yet They Take the Call Submissively.

Chronology of Yesterday's Fateful Events

12 Midnight—Germany demands that Russia cease mobilization and give a twenty-hour limit.

4 A. M.—King George of England, after an audience with Premier Asquith, telegraphs to the Czar, making a strong appeal for peace.

12 Noon—The time limit of Germany's ultimatum to Russia expires.

2:45 P. M.—Emperor William signs an order for the mobilization of the German Army.

7:30 P. M.—The German Ambassador at St. Petersburg delivers to the Russian Government a declaration of war in the name of Germany and leaves St. Petersburg.

First Shots Fired in the Russo-German War.

BERLIN, Aug. 1.—A German patrol near Protsken was fired on this afternoon by a Russian frontier patrol. The Germans returned the fire. There were no losses.

Protsken is a village of 2,500 inhabitants, in East Prussia. It is situated about two and one-half miles west of the international boundary line, on the Königsberg & Lyck Railroad. The nearest Russian village is Grajewo, about three miles across the international boundary.

The Breaking of the Cracks



Queen Victoria with her brood. From right to left, Edward, Prince of Wales, George his son, and Kaiser Wilhelm, Queen Victoria's grandson.

For many years, affairs between the various European countries (read, “royal houses”) could charitably be described as “dysfunctional”; none had any great love for the others. One might compare the whole unwieldy structure to a large, fine porcelain plate crisscrossed by cracks. Through a spider’s web of marital alliances, Queen Victoria managed to keep the whole structure from falling to pieces. As per the late Prince Albert’s plan, the peace of

Europe would be maintained in the marriage bed, by familial ties, the idea being that no member of a family would be willing to fight his or her relatives.

When Queen Victoria, who was often referred to as “the grandmother of Europe” died in 1901, these endemic cracks began worsening finally leading to a shattering of the European plate in 1914. Until her death, Victoria had managed to keep her crippled, arrogant grandson, Kaiser Wilhelm in check. It is a testimony to her success that she actually died in the arms of a disconsolate Wilhelm.

Until 1914, England and Germany had maintained a somewhat peculiar relationship. Neither one liked the other very much; but unlike with, say, the French, everyone gritted their teeth and tried to be courteous to the Imperial prig who now ruled from Berlin, son of the Queen’s eldest daughter. Additionally, when Victoria married Albert, the Royal House changed from Hanover to the even more Germanic patronymic of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha. Germanic roots ran deep within the Royal Family. As a young girl, Queen Victoria’s first language was German, not English and she spoke English with a German accent until it was eliminated by experts that today we might call “speech therapists.”



Kaiser Wilhelm with his cousin, King George V. Each is wearing the uniform of the other’s regiment.

Wilhelm disliked his uncle, Edward VII, who was popular and respected as a European peacemaker who ruled comfortably within parliamentary limitations. Like his father Edward, George V shared various honors with the Kaiser; for example, they were honorary officers in each others’ regiments.

When war broke out in 1914, dislike and hatred for anything German grew exponentially, to the point at which the British Royal Family was being referred to by an alarming portion of its subjects, as “alien” and “German.” By 1917, rising English anti-German sentiment began to dangerously focus on Buckingham Palace, accusing the King specifically of not being sufficiently English. In July of that year, George V officially changed the family name to the more English-sounding “Windsor.”

The Master Spy

In the context of the times, it is not to be wondered how von Bork was so easily able to infiltrate the highest levels of society and gather sensitive information that was carelessly bandied about. From our vantage it seems almost incredible that at a gathering at the home of a Cabinet Minister over a weekend, the conversation could have been so “amazingly indiscreet,” as the master spy put it.

How is it possible that the nation that baptized the very art of espionage as the “Great Game,” and were so adept at playing it could have been so careless? One could refer to this as “the old school tie syndrome.”

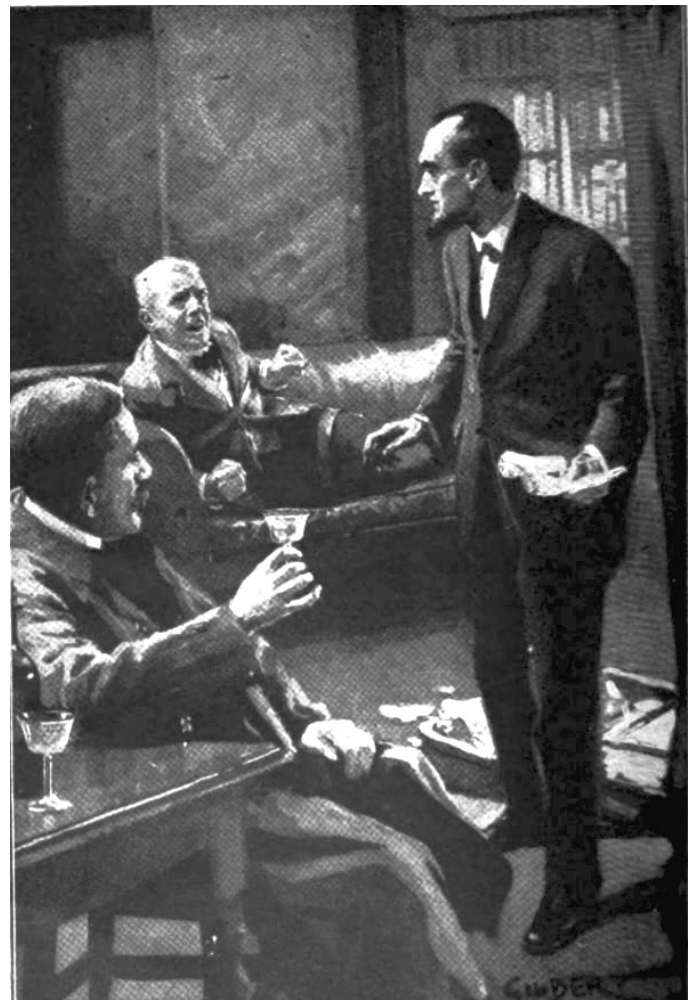
We are told that von Bork's English was excellent. It is therefore not too farfetched to speculate that as a boy and later as a young man, this nobleman might have attended some of the top English schools. He would have made many aristocratic friends there who would remember him as a pleasant schoolmate. When one adds to this his sporting attitude, we end up with an individual who would have been easily accepted into British society as a "gentleman" during the years before the War. His nationality would not have been much of a crucial factor in those levels of society, considering the Germanic roots of the Royal House itself. Unforgivable as all of this may have been, there is nothing to wonder if the conversation at a gathering in the home of a Cabinet Minister over a weekend turns out to be "amazingly indiscreet" amongst people who accept each others as equals.



For many years I wrote articles covering various aspects of the semiconductor industry, electronic warfare and high-frequency communications. I was well-known and had many friends in that milieu. On more than one occasion as I interviewed an engineer about a development in these fields he would suddenly pause and say to me, "Oops, you better not use that, Alex—it's classified." Von Bork's ease in obtaining indiscreet information is not surprising. This was not quite the same in Germany, France, Austria, Italy, and the rest. This probably was one of the advantages (as well as disadvantages) of living on an island.

It is surprising that, knowing the English as well as he must have, von Bork would have had such a disdain for British honor. It seems difficult to believe that he was truly convinced that England might not honor her treaty with Belgium. There is no question, however, that he was quite right about British unpreparedness. When the war broke out, the British army numbered 225,000, spread out in 140 battalions, 55% of which were stationed overseas. There were 17,000 cavalymen in 28 cavalry regiments, six to nine of which were in India at any given time. With Waterloo and the Zulu War history, Britain was ill-equipped to fight anything more extensive than the "little wars of peace" which sometimes broke out in the Empire's more restless regions. There had been no war with a European power since the 1850s.

It is unfortunate that the lesson was not learnt, and that England was just as unprepared for the Second World War.



All of this does not exactly give von Bork genius ranking. His handling of the supposedly invaluable military and technical information provided him by Holmes is peculiar—it almost seems as if he did not pass it on to the German authorities, but accumulated it instead. From what we are told, he kept the product of four years of espionage in his safe until the night before the war's beginning. Obviously, he seemed to know what was coming; after all, he had been working towards it for four years. Why, then, did he not send the material as he obtained it? He could have used the diplomatic pouch to speed it to Berlin. Why wait? Universally, espionage has never been protected by diplomatic immunity; surely he had to realize that this would be even more risky once war broke out.

Holmes' remark that, "These papers are not of very great importance, for, of course, the information which they represent, has been sent off long ago to the German government. These are the originals which could not safely be got out of the country," does not explain why the papers were kept; especially those that had held content already sent to Germany.

Perhaps some of the more revealing facts of the complete story fell behind the impassable wall of the Official Secrets Act, and remain locked up in some Whitehall safe.

A Job Well Done

There can be little doubt that Holmes' self-esteem must have been flattered by the appearance of Herbert Henry Asquith, 1st Earl of Oxford and Asquith, KG, PC, KC, FRS, Prime Minister of Britain at his cottage's doorstep, there to ask—or perhaps even beg—him to embark in this final mission for the Realm. The two years the Great Detective spent in this endeavor must have been more than rewarded by the satisfaction over a job well and important to the Realm. This clearly comes through in his final remarks to von Bork.

England meticulously fulfilled every requirement of diplomatic immunity. When the war started, a special train—under considerable protection—was chartered to safely take all German diplomatic personnel to a neutral ship that returned them to their country. Therefore, von Bork had every expectation of being able to leave England with his ersatz treasure. This was reflected by von Herling when he told his colleague, "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."



One cannot but feel (very slightly) sorry for poor von Bork. After having enthusiastically followed Holmes down the primrose path, his eventual reception in Berlin must indeed have been an exceedingly warm one. It is surprising he did not consider asking for asylum!

Holmes' almost comical hurry to cash the German spymaster's £500 (≈\$190,000) check before he could cancel it smacks more of German nose-tweaking than cupidity. Although some might consider

it somewhat sad, that Sherlock Holmes' last canonically recorded words dealt with filthy lucre, he was, after all, a very practical, rational man.

The Interrupted Relationship

It is difficult to understand how it that, apparently, Holmes and Watson hadn't seen each other in years ("How have the years used you? You look the same blithe boy as ever.") Not a single Christmas, New Year's, or birthday? What could have so completely interrupted the Great Friendship? Nobody can doubt that while Watson breathed, Holmes knew he could count on him for anything, regardless of the passing of the years, but this does not explain this strange interval.

This hiatus could be better understood if they had been in different countries—but England? By the late Victorian period there was hardly a place in the British Isles that could not have been reached in a couple of days.

Although upon Holmes' return after an absence of three years they picked up on their relationship as if there had been no gap, there still appears to have been an unexplained, much longer, interruption.

The Persistent "Irish Problem."



Holmes once again put his genius in display when he went undercover as an embittered Irish-American with a deep hatred of England. Small wonder that this dispelled any doubts von Herling might have harbored.

Historically, the Irish had always played the part of the thorn on one's side in the safety of England. In the 1500s they plotted with Spain, adding to Elizabeth's headaches. After the sinking of the Armada, many of the sailors who survived found a haven in the old sod. During the Napoleonic wars one of the Royal Navy's greatest concerns lay in the fact that an overwhelmingly large percentage of its sailors—as well as many important officers—were Irish. During the First World War, the Irish would have gladly done anything to get the Germans in and cheerfully, received weapons from Berlin for use in a revolt against England that never took place. During the Second World War, Ireland turned a very blind eye to the entry of

German spies and saboteurs.

When the Great Game Became Real

A favorite anecdote of mine, dealing with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, dates from June 1916, when he visited the French front where he was fêted by General Georges-Louis Humbert. Over cognac the general leaned over 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 showed, this was not quite true.

What Happened on August 1914

On August 1, Germany declared war on Russia. On August 2, Germany sent an ultimatum to Belgium demanding free passage for her troops, alleging that France was about to invade Germany by going through Belgium. The Belgian king rejected the ultimatum and mobilized the army. 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 re-

sponse having been received from Berlin 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.

This was to have been the “war to end all wars,” and there was a thin, short-lived patina of glory associated with it—after all, it was not going to last much more than a year. There would be much glory to gather. This was before the Battle of the Somme with its one million casualties, and the Battle of Verdun with its more than 700,000 casualties. In the beginning, Polish and French lancers engaged in the last cavalry charges against pitiless machine-gun emplacements. The attrition of trench warfare still 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!”

By the time the war ended, on November 11, 1918, the butcher’s bill was 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.



What else happened in 1914:

Empire

Irish Home Rule Act restores Irish Parliament.

Northern and Southern Nigeria united as one colony.

Egypt and Cyprus declared British protectorates.

Britain conditionally agrees to extension of Baghdad railway to Basra.

Great Britain declares war on Germany.

Britain

Bank of England authorized to issue paper money in excess of statutory limit.

World

Confucianism declared State religion of Republican China.

The War: Archduke Franz-Ferdinand assassinated at Sarajevo. Austria attacks Serbia. Austria and Germany at war with Russia. Germany declares war on France, invades Belgium, British declare war on Germany and Austria. Japan declares war on Germany. Battle of Mons begins. Russians defeated at Tannenberg. Battle of Marne begins. Craddock defeated by Graf Spee. HMAS *Sydney* sinks German raider *Emden*. Graf Spee’s squadron destroyed at Falklands. British capture German Togoland. ANZAC troops occupy Samoa and German New Guinea. Japanese capture Kiaochow and German North Pacific islands. First zeppelin raid.

The United States expresses official concern for the estimated 100,000 American nationals who found themselves in Europe at the start of the hostilities.

Grand Trunk Pacific Railway completed in the United States.

Art

Edgar Rice Burroughs publishes *Tarzan of the Apes*, first of the Tarzan novels.

Chagall paints *The Rabbi of Vitebsk*.

Picasso paints *The Small Table*.

Science and Technology

Robert H. Goddard, American, carries out practical experiments with rockets.

E.C Kendall, American, prepares pure thyroxin for treatment of endocrine deficiencies, particularly thyroid.

H. Shapely, American astronomer, studies period luminosity of certain stars (Cepheid pulsation).

Panama Canal completed by the United States.

First single-seater fighter planes made in England.

Marconi transmits wireless telephone messages between Italian ships 50 miles apart.

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..."

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

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