



His Last Bow

Adventure XLVII – His Last Bow

First published in:

The Strand Magazine, September 1917, and *Collier's Weekly*, September 22, 1917

Time frame of story (known/surmised):

August 2, 1914, at the beginning of WWI. (Note: Britain declared war on Germany on August 4, 1914, in response to a German ultimatum regarding passage through Belgium on August 2nd.)

Holmes & Watson living arrangements:

Not stated. Holmes is 60 years old, and came out of retirement to become a double agent for Britain. He had been keeping bees, presumably upon the Sussex Downs which was a plan he stated earlier.

Opening scene:

(This story is not told by Watson or Holmes, but by the author, in the third person.) Baron Von Herling, the chief secretary of the German legation, and Von Bork — a remarkable man who could hardly be matched among all the devoted agents of the Kaiser, were standing outside Von Bork's quiet country house gloating about their success spying upon the English in preparation for the war.



They are waiting for the arrival of their last contact, an Irish-American spy named Altamont, who is to bring

important new information about the latest naval signals, code-named sparking plugs. (Altamont is actually Holmes, who had been portraying a motor-expert.) The Baron left in his car just before Holmes arrived.

Client:

Holmes had come out of retirement and became a double agent, feeding false information to the German spymasters. Holmes was working for the British government, and known to the Germans as Altamont. (Altamont was Arthur Conan Doyle's father's middle name.)

Crime or concern:

Enemy espionage in Britain.

Villain:

"The Hun", the Kaiser, the German government. Particularly their spy network in Britain.

Holmes Method:

Holmes was recruited by the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister to break up the spy network. It had cost him 2 years, which were not devoid of excitement. Holmes started his pilgrimage at Chicago, graduated in an Irish secret society at Buffalo, gave serious trouble to the constabulary at Skibbareen, and eventually caught the eye of a subordinate agent of Von Bork, who then recommended him as a likely man. The matter was complex. Since then Holmes was honoured by Von Bork's confidence, which did not prevent most of the German plans going subtly wrong and five of their best agents going to prison. Holmes watched them and picked them as they ripened. Von Bork was fooled. His assessment of Altamont: "Our most pan-Germanic Junker is a sucking dove in his feelings towards England as compared with a real bitter Irish-American."

Policemen:

The Skibbareen constabulary, in West Cork. Finally, Scotland Yard where the spies were deposited.

Holmes' fees:

Not mentioned. Surely the British government paid Holmes. Holmes as Altamont also got a final payment of £500 from Von Bork for the "sparking-plugs".

Transport:

Modern. The Baron had a 100 PS Benz car. Holmes and Watson, as Holmes' chauffeur, drove a little Ford of

unspecified power rating.

Food:

No mention.

Drink:

After capturing Von Bork, Holmes & Watson celebrate by drinking some of Von Bork's excellent dessert wine, Imperial Tokay from Franz Josef's special cellar at the Schoenbrunn Palace, which Holmes proclaimed to be "a remarkable wine, Watson."

Vices:

After capturing Von Bork, Holmes offered to light a cigar and place it between his lips, but all amenities were wasted upon the angry German.

Other cases mentioned:

SCAN. Also that it was Holmes who saved from murder, by the Nihilist Klopman, Count Von und Zu Grafenstein, Von Bork's mother's elder brother.

Notable Quotables:

Holmes to Von Bork, the captured spy – "You are a sportsman and you will bear me no ill-will when you realize that you, who have outwitted so many other people, have at last been outwitted yourself. After all, you have done your best for your country, and I have done my best for mine, and what could be more natural?"

Other interestings:

Mrs. Hudson (Martha) worked as a servant in the Von Bork house. She was working with Holmes as a covert agent, and was invited to meet him at Claridge's Hotel the following day. The relationship between Mrs. Hudson and Holmes had changed to that of co-workers.

When all was said and done:

Holmes remarks to his old friend after wrapping up their last case: "Watson, you are joining us with your old service, as I understand, so London won't be out of your way. Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may

be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have.”

“Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There’s an east wind coming, 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. Start her up, Watson, for it’s time that we were on our way. I have a check for five hundred pounds which should be cashed early, for the drawer is quite capable of stopping it if he can.”

McMurdo’s Camp