



An Inquiry into: "His Last Bow"

"His Last Bow" was first published in *The Strand Magazine* in September 1917. It is part of *His Last Bow*.

As can be seen from the table below, our group of Sherlockian/Holmesian scholars all agree upon the chronology of this story: Sunday, August 2, 1914. At the

time Holmes was 60 years old and Watson 62.

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."

"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."

"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

<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-Gold</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>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>

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."

The Third Person

LAST is one of two of the adventures, which is related in the third person. While, because of its tone and style it may seem that it was not written by Dr. Watson, it rings genuine. Also, it definitely clarifies the matter of the Great Detective's year of birth.

Simply Not Done!

Von Bork recalls how at a gathering at the home of a Cabinet Minister over a weekend, he found the conversation to be "amazingly indiscreet." It may seem strange that this would be the case for a people so adept at playing the "Great Game," but the fact is that "the old school tie" exerted great influence upon the society of the time.



Because his English was so good, it seems very likely that as a boy or young man von Bork might have attended one of top English schools and made many friends there. This, and his sporting attitude, would have made him very acceptable to British society as a "gentleman" during the years before the War. Back then, the fact that he was a German would not have carried too much negative weight; lest we forget, at that time the Royal Family still belonged to the House of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha—they didn't become "Windsor" until 1917.

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Criticism?

Watson (assuming that he is, indeed, the story's author) makes very clear the contempt that the two Germans had for British unpreparedness. They even doubt whether England will honor her treaty with Belgium. Not too far from the truth: Britain was almost as unprepared to de-

clare war on Germany, as she was in 1939. I wonder whether Watson did not use this story as a forum to criticize the government for its nearsightedness.

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.

Historically, the Irish had always been a source of concern (and danger) for England's safety. In the 1600s they plotted with Spain, during the Napoleonic wars one of the Royal Navy's biggest headaches was the fact that an overwhelmingly large percentage of its sailors—as well as many officers—were Irish. During the First World War, the Irish would have done anything to get the Germans in and, in fact, received weapon from Berlin to use in revolt against England. During the Second World War, Ireland was a very porous point of entry for German spies and saboteurs.

Twisting the German's Nose

I think that Holmes was having fun at the expense of von Bork when he recriminated him about the sad fate of the men that Holmes himself had turned over to the authorities! You can almost see the Great Detective smile as he accuses the German spy of turning on his own agents!

The Interrupted Relationship

Whenever we consider this case, I am always struck by the fact 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.") One would think they would have gotten together, if not regularly, once in a while perhaps for birthdays, Christmas or New Year's. Why would the Great Relationship have been 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. 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.



Lord Herbert Henry Asquith

Wrenched Out of Retirement

I've always thought of Holmes as the quintessential, dyed-in-the-wool Victorian gentleman. While it might not have occurred to him that at his age he would have been able to be of any assistance in the coming conflict, I think that he would have answered the first call to serve the Realm. As it is, it took no one less than Lord Asquith himself to convince him to help his country!

What else happened in 1914

My chronology ends with the death of Queen Victoria's son; however, it is well to note that on the day in which LAST takes place, Germany declared war on Russia, France began mobilizing, and the U.S. expressed concern for the estimated 100,000 American nationals who found themselves in Europe at the start of the hostilities.

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..."

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