The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXIX – The Adventure of the Norwood Builder

A mysterious bequest. A secret room. A creepy housekeeper. NORW is very nearly gothic, isn't it? Or is it? As we enter Oldacre's grudge-y world this weekend, here are my questions and comments to get the discussion going:

The correct title of this week's story is *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*, which would seem to suggest that Oldacre, not McFarlane, was the one around whom the action swirls. What exactly was the builder's adventure? Was it more of an adventure than the unhappy McFarlane experienced?

Lestrade asks Holmes for alternate theories to fit the facts of the case. Holmes obliges with one, though he says he can think of five more. What might some of these other theories be?

I admit to enjoying Holmes' little dig at Lestrade, calling him "Mr." rather than "Inspector." He did the same thing to "Mr." Moriarty in FINA. The slights surely were noticed, but neither of the men rose to the bait. Why does Holmes do this to people? Why didn't these men rise to the bait?

Lestrade congratulates Holmes with the following words: "This is the brightest thing that you have done yet." In Lestrade's experience of Holmes, is that really true?

One of the things I like best about NORW is the colorful names and place names. From Old English: Norwood ("northern woods"), Deep Dene ("deep narrow valley"), Blackheath ("dark heathland') and Torrington ("turbulent river"); while Mrs. Lexington's name translates as "town where the leeches are." "Cornelius," is Latin, but the root "corn" happens to be found in Old English as well, where it means "crane" or "heron" — those stealthy, wading birds with beady eyes. From the Greek, "Hector" was the son of Priam; he was the bravest of Trojans in the Iliad. "Hector" means "holding fast," but in English to "hector" someone means to bully them. In dramatizations, McFarlane is sometimes portrayed with a Scottish accent. The real "MacFarlanes" have an interesting history, mostly in the military arena. Back in the 1400s, they had a strong, valid claim to the earldom of Lennox, but it was whisked away from them and given instead to John Stewart,

Lord Darnley. ("Lennox" comes from the Celtic "levanach," which means a smooth-flowing stream. Contrast that with Torrington!) Thereafter, Clan MacFarlane began a slow decline, and the direct line of male chiefs finally died out in 1886. Perhaps he was a distant clansman of the unhappy John Hector whom we meet in this weekend's reading?

Sonia Fetherston, BSI

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