



The Return of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure XXXIV -- The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

Well, I suppose this story is where my personal literary adventure really began, writes Charlotte Anne Walters.

When I was sixteen, I wrote a full-length Sherlock Holmes screenplay which was a sequel to the Granada dramatization of this story. It was quite an achievement for my age and I worked on it for many a long hour, even using a home-writing course to learn all about how to correctly write scripts for TV with the technical stage directions and other requirements. It was very simplistic and involved Milverton coming back from the dead to seek revenge on Holmes in ghostly form. I do cringe now at the naivety of it, but the process did spark up an enjoyment of writing about Sherlock Holmes which ultimately led to the creation of my first published novel, Barefoot on Baker Street.

So I owe a lot to this story really and it was a pleasure to re-read it now. I suppose the key points of interest are that Holmes actually breaks the law by breaking in to Milverton's house and accessing the safe so that he can burn all the incriminating letters, and then he stands back and watches as one of Milverton's victims murders him in cold blood. Holmes keeps this truth from the police to protect the young lady.

This does sound rather extraordinary but we have seen before how Holmes uses his own judgement in exercising justice and takes full advantage of being an unofficial person. We have also seen how he can feel strong, emotional, revulsion against certain villains and great sympathy for the victims. It also demonstrates Watson's devotion to Holmes as he too colludes in this law-breaking without question.



This is also the story in which Holmes becomes engaged to Milverton's maid in order to gain information about the house in the disguise of a plumber. He walks out with her each evening and they talk – 'Those talks! However, I have got all I wanted'. Clearly such a romantic action was not to his taste, but then perhaps he just made this remark for affect to Watson. What if Holmes did actually quite enjoy those intimate walks with a devoted young girl upon his arm? I would more readily see him fall in love with a savvy maid than a lady that's for sure. Did he kiss her I wonder? Surely you wouldn't have become engaged to a man, even back then, without even a brief kiss?

Watson is rightly shocked by Holmes deception of the young lady but Holmes does ensure him that there is another more worthy suitor waiting in the wings to take over when he disappears. I still do think his actions are unfair but I suppose justified in light of the villain he faces and the high stakes if he fails.

In the opening part of the story Holmes refers to CAM as 'The worst man in London', and this hatred only deepens as the story continues. Even Watson is shocked as Holmes goes on to describe the cruel and villainous business in which CAM distinguished himself – 'I had seldom heard my friend speak with such intensity of feeling'.

Milverton made his living from acquiring sensitive letters from crooked maids, footmen, valets, anyone with something incriminating to sell. He would then, when the moment was right, blackmail his helpless victims mercilessly and the law could do nothing to stop him.

Milverton is a brilliantly devised baddie, I would even argue that he is more convincing and better described than Moriarty. And the Granada episode was one of my favourites with CAM played to perfection by Robert Hardy.

Brilliant, love it, even though a conclusion isn't brought about by any particularly brilliant deduction by Holmes but sometimes it's good to see him get his hands dirty in this way. And what a great villain we have in Milverton, definitely my favourite baddie of all the stories.

10 out of 10.

Charlotte Anne Walters

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