



The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes

Adventure LVI – The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier

The Hounds have just concluded a week in which the question of Canonical authorship has been debated very earnestly, and it is certainly tempting to explain the varied quality of the Casebook tales by suggesting that some or all of them were written by persons unknown. “The Blanched Soldier” is a particularly easy target for suspicion because it is purportedly written by Holmes, which is unusual, and because it is not a very good story, which is regrettable. But if we completely dismiss this tale as non-Canonical, we risk making any discussion of its text a pointless exercise. Therefore I hope that all good Hounds will at least provisionally accept the premise that “The Blanched Soldier” was written by Sherlock Holmes, not only so that we have enough to talk about on the list this week, but also so that we don’t deprive the good Watson of his wife! Next up: a few comments and questions on the story of the week, plus a naughty theory of my own.



Try it yourself, Holmes: It’s odd that Holmes should have written “The Blanched Soldier” so badly, when his accounts of “The Musgrave Ritual” and “The Gloria Scott” are wonderfully readable and exciting. Are we to believe that in his “declining years” Holmes forgot how to tell a story, or can we deduce that Watson must have done some heavy editing of Holmes’s previous accounts?

Or is it possible that Holmes was simply a better storyteller when he was unselfconsciously telling the tale to Watson than he was when he took pen in hand to write the case down? Is “The Blanched Soldier” so badly done because Holmes was making a clumsy attempt to imitate Watson’s style?

Holmes has been criticized for choosing this story to write when there must have been many more interesting cases in his notes. What purpose might Holmes have had in bringing this particular tale to light? Was he simply trying to dispel the rumors of the strange goings-on at Tuxbury Old Park?

Fathers and sons: Why do you suppose that Godfrey Emsworth joined the army as an enlisted man instead of an officer? (I believe he would have been called a “gentleman ranker” in those days.) Wouldn’t the wealthy scion of a retired officer have been much more likely to be an officer? Is there something fishy here, or was Godfrey’s military career at least partly intended to defy and annoy his bullying father?

Ralph the butler intrigues me. He is so much more affectionate towards Godfrey than the young man’s own father. Is it possible that Godfrey’s mother found Ralph to be a sympathetic partner at some point when the Colonel was off with his regiment? Was Godfrey actually Ralph’s son? Is this the real reason for the antagonism between Colonel Emsworth and Godfrey?

Is it likely that any medical man would mistake a case of ichthyosis for leprosy? Did cranky old Colonel Emsworth encourage Mr. Kent to come up with a discouraging diagnosis as a way of controlling Godfrey? Was there a Copper Beeches type of dirty work afoot at Tuxbury Old Park?

What do you think of Holmes’s involvement in this case? If he suspected leprosy all along, do you agree with his methods of verifying his theories? What do you think would have happened if Godfrey truly had leprosy?

Rosemary Michaud