

The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle - Norc
The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes, 1944
Regarding Sherlock Holmes: The Adventures of Solar Pons

Date

Copper/Mid April, 1928

Patrick/March, 1928

The Case

Benjamin Harrison Manton of Norcross Towers is married to the formerly widowed Lady McFallon, whose husband disappeared in the fens at Norcross. Manton's wife begins acting strangely at the same time that she tells him that she has rented out a ruined abbey on the property to a psychiatrist with a lunatic and his assistant. Manton approaches Pons after she asks him for one thousand pounds and then makes another request for five thousand pound, refusing to explain. Pons believes that someone may be blackmailing her and travels with Parker to Norcross Towers to uncover the truth.

Quotes

- Pons: *The science of deduction rests primarily on the faculty of observation.*
- Parker: *What do you make of it? I replied, somewhat nettled.*
Pons: *Oh little more...except that the gentleman is an American by birth, but has resided in England for some length of time; he is a man of independent means, and is between thirty-five and thirty-nine years of age. Furthermore, his ancestry is very probably Southern United States, but his parents were undoubtedly members of the American Republican political party*

Comments

- *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle* holds an important place in the Pontine Canon. *The Adventure of the Black Cardinal* had appeared in *Gangster Stories* in December of 1930. *The Norcross Riddle*, likely written in 1930, had sat on the shelf along with several other Pons stories written but never published.

In 1944, Ellery Queen was putting together the wonderfully conceived but ill-fated collection, *The Misadventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Derleth touched up Norcross and submitted it: Holmes enthusiasts applauded. Vincent Starrett and Fred Dannay (with Manfred B. Lee, half of Ellery Queen) learned that Derleth had several more tales and urged him to put out a collection of the Pons adventures in book form.

One year later, on Derleth's own Mycroft & Moran imprint, *In Re: Sherlock Holmes* was published. Pons had been absent for fourteen years, but new adventures and jottings from Dr. Parker's pen would be published right up until August Derleth's death in 1971. *The Adventure of the Norcross Riddle* brought Pons back from the dustbin and needs be accorded the greatest respect.

- Readers of Sherlock Holmes certainly found this case to be reminiscent of *The Adventure of the Yellow Face*, with the abandoned structure on the property mysteriously leased out by the wife. The wife's asking for large sums of money without giving any explanation also calls to mind *The Adventure of the Dancing Men*.
- The above-quoted exchange between Parker and Pons takes place as this case opens. Parker has made a few minor observations regarding Benjamin Harrison Manton's business card and Pons responds with his impressive list of deductions. He then explains the chain of inferences that led to his observations, an exasperated Parker finally conceding defeat at the end. It is a classic scene from the stories and is often listed as a favorite passage featuring Pons showcasing his talents.
- Luther Norris, founder of the Praed Street Irregulars, ranked *The Norcross Riddle* as his favorite Pons tale.
- Parker has a shining moment at the end of the story when he is re-examining Pons' explanation of the affair and makes an astute deduction.
- Pons has arranged for the villains to be arrested by Jamison at Dover. It is unclear how Blanton could be kept ignorant of the true state of affairs once they are put to trial. Of course, one has to assume that Blanton would eventually read Parker's chronicle of the affair since his is Pons' client and the name of his home is included in the title.