

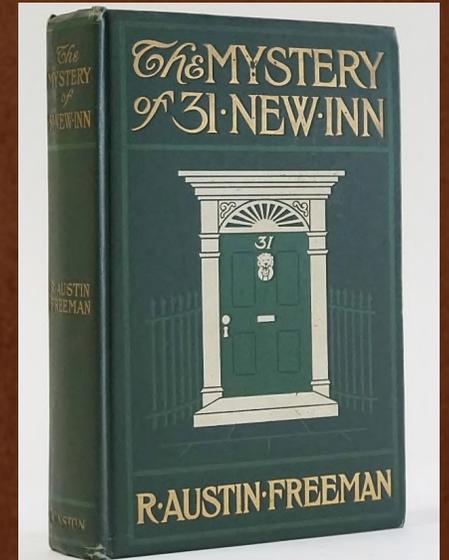


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# R. Austin Freeman [1862-1943]

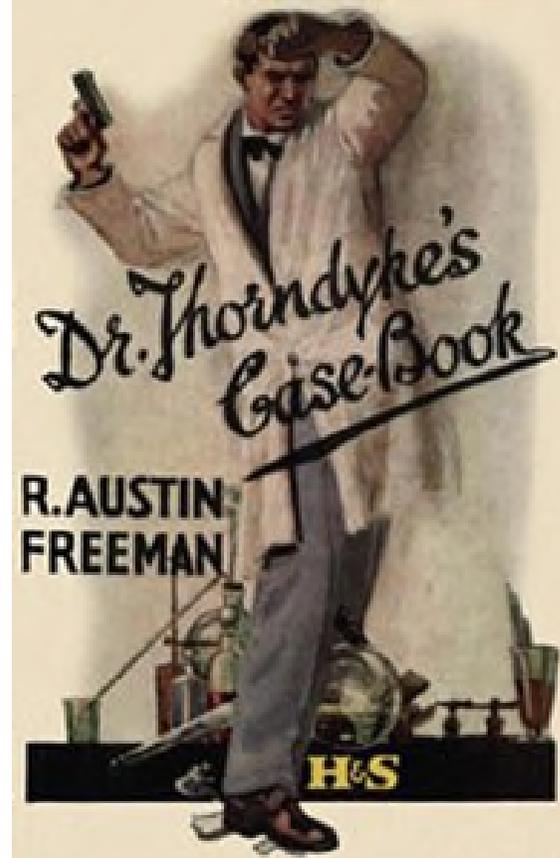
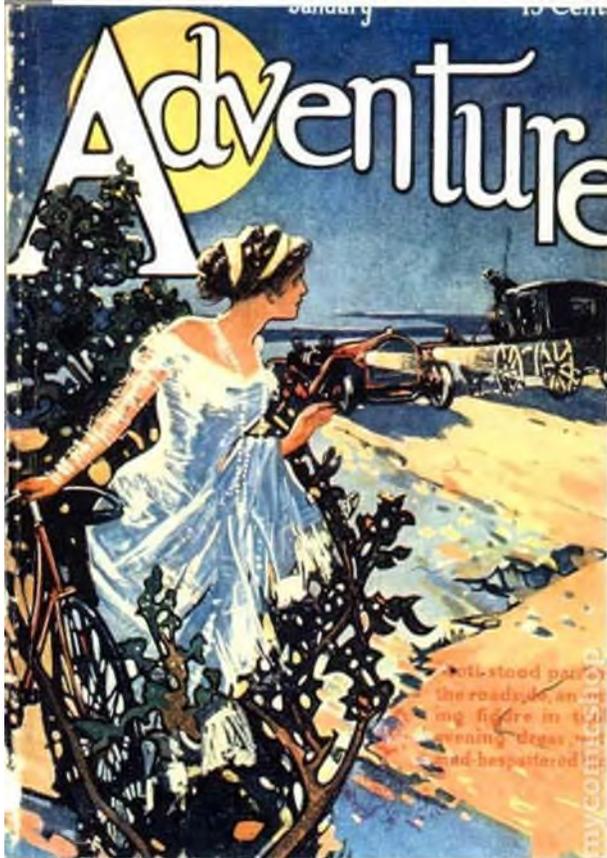
THE MYSTERY OF 31 NEW INN  
(1912)





The Ashante empire in west Africa was spread over 100,00 sq miles and included up to two million people.

Dr John Thorndyke – appears  
in 21 novels, 40 short stories



John Thorndyke as drawn by H. M. Brock in 1908

ayou



“Thorndyke delicately swept the little fragments on to it”



“But as I rose she snatched up her change and left the shop”

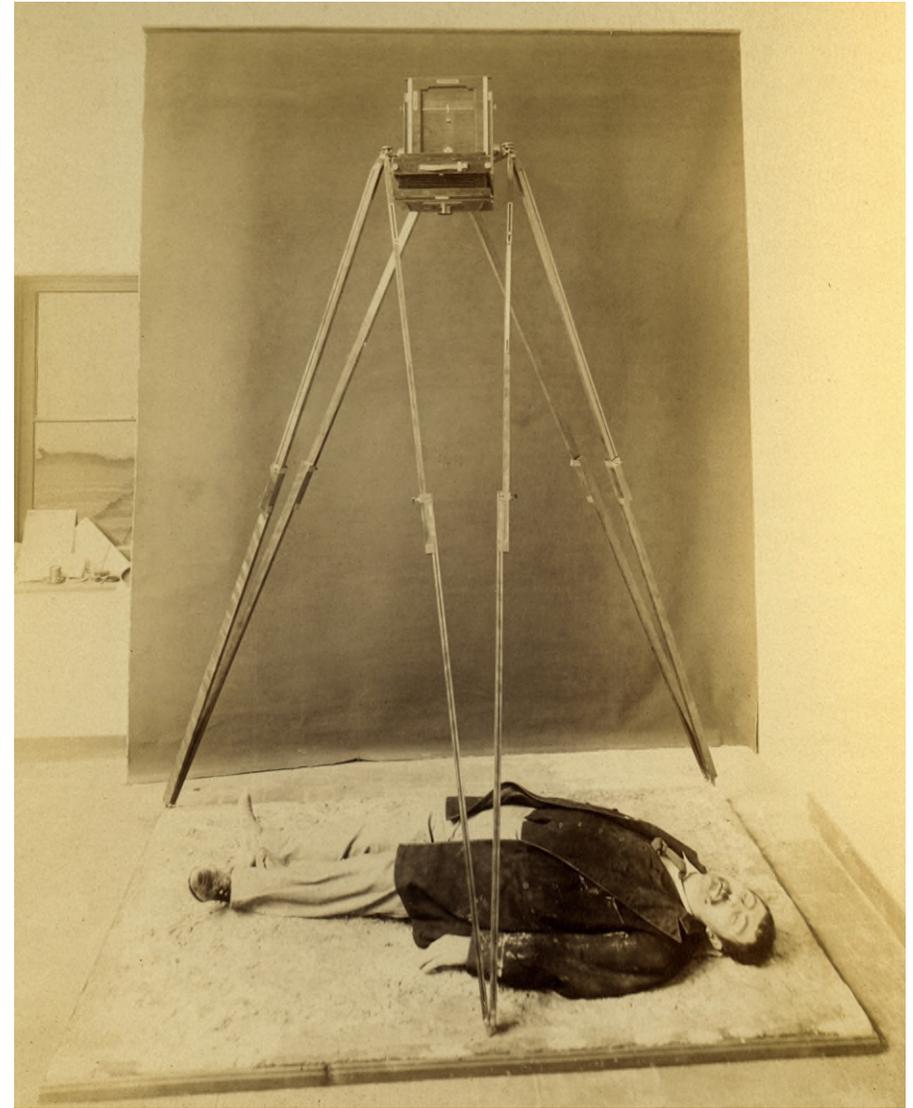


“The Woman Resting Against Him with Her Head on His Shoulder”

## Men of Science

Sherlock Holmes's transformation of the world and body into text that can be read is undoubtedly a mechanism of social control, a means of mastering the other. It is, however, important to note that, at the *fin de siècle*, he works independently of the law. **The stories chart the emergence of new forensic technologies and their “intensifying incursion” into “traditional English law enforcement”.**

(Dauncey, 2010, 170)



In contrast, in the narratives of R. Austin Freeman, published at the beginning of the twentieth century, the law and science are yoked in the figure of Dr Thorndyke, a lawyer-pathologist. Freeman grants more space to detailing forensic techniques and the judicial process in comparison with Doyle. Notably, where the words “trace” and “clue” prevail in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Thorndyke speaks more frequently of “evidential value” (170)

According to Thorndyke, fingerprints are a fact “which, like any other fact, requires to be weighed and measured with reference to its evidential value”. He therefore challenges the police and fingerprint experts and questions their view that a thumbprint is “tantamount to the evidence of an eyewitness”. (171)

(Dauncey, 2010)



The first board was clamped to the easel, the latter was slid along its guides until the pointer stood at  $\div 2$  on the long-focus scale and Thorndyke proceeded to focus the camera with the aid of a little microscope that Polton had made for the purpose. When Mr. Britton and I had inspected the exquisitely sharp image on the focusing-screen through the microscope, Polton introduced the plate and made the first exposure, carrying the dark-slide off to develop the plate while the next batch of cheques was being fixed in position.

**In his photographic technique**, as in everything else, Polton followed as closely as he could the **methods of his principal and instructor**; methods characterized by that unhurried precision that leads to perfect accomplishment. When the first negative was brought forth, dripping, from the dark-room, it was without spot or stain, scratch or pin-hole; uniform in colour and of exactly the required density. The six cheques shown on it—ridiculously small in appearance, though only reduced to half-length—looked as clear and sharp as fine etchings; though, to be sure, my opportunity for examining them was rather limited, for Polton was uncommonly careful to keep the wet plate out of reach and so safe from injury.

"Well," said Mr. Britton, when, at **the end of the séance**, he returned his treasures to the bag

# Graphology

“Herbert Greenhough Smith, the longtime editor of the Strand Magazine, recalled in the 1920s how ‘one of Doyle’s own pet theories’ was ‘that character [could] be read from handwriting’”

(Vranken, 2017, 172).

“Have you ever had occasion to study character in handwriting? “What do you make of this fellow’s scribble?”

“It is legible and regular,” I answered. “A man of business habits and some force of character.”

Holmes shook his head. “Look at his long letters,” he said. “They hardly rise above the common herd. That *d* might be an *a*, and that *l* an *e*. **Men of character always differentiate their long letters, however illegibly they may write.** There is vacillation in his k’s and self-esteem in his capitals.”

*(The Sign of the Four)*

[Mr Britton] “let me tell you, these signatures that you have got wouldn't help you [...] There is an appreciable amount of variation; a very appreciable amount. *But* under the variation one can trace the personal character (which is what matters); the subtle, indescribable quality that makes it **recognizable to the expert eye** as Jeffrey Blackmore's writing. You understand me. There is such a quality, which remains when the coarser characteristics vary; just as a man may grow old, or fat, or bald, or may take to drink, and become quite changed; and yet, through it all, **he preserves a certain something which makes him recognizable as a member of a particular family**. Well, I find that quality in all those signatures, and so will you, if you have had enough experience of handwriting.”

“...very interesting general truth that is contained in Britton's statement; **that physiognomy is not a mere matter of facial character**. A man carries his personal trademark, not in his face only, **but in his nervous system and muscles—giving rise to characteristic movements and gait**; in his larynx—producing an individual voice; and even in his mouth, as shown by individual peculiarities of speech and accent. And the individual nervous system, by means of these characteristic movements, transfers its peculiarities to inanimate objects that are the products of such movements [...] And so with handwriting. A particular specimen is the product of a particular set of motor centres in an individual brain.”

(Chapter XI)

"A more important inference is to be drawn from the collected signatures. I have remarked that the change in the signature occurred abruptly, with one or two alterations of manner, last September, and that there are two distinct forms with no intermediate varieties. This is, in itself, remarkable and suspicious. But a remark made by Mr. Britton furnishes a really valuable piece of evidence on the point we are now considering. **He admitted that the character of the signature had undergone a change, but observed that the change did not affect the individual or personal character of the writing. This is very important; for handwriting is, as it were, an extension of the personality of the writer.** And just as a man to some extent snares his personality with his near blood-relations in the form of family resemblances, so his handwriting often shows a **subtle likeness** to that of his near relatives. You must have noticed, as I have, how commonly the handwriting of one brother resembles that of another, and in just this peculiar and subtle way. The inference, then, from Mr. Britton's statement is, **that if the signature of the will was forged, it was probably forged by a relative of the deceased.** But the only relative in question is his brother John."

(Chapter XVI, Mystery 31 New Inn)

COMMENTING upon one of my earlier novels, in respect of which I had claimed to have been careful to adhere to common probabilities and to have made use only of really practicable methods of investigation, a critic remarked that this was of no consequence whatever, so long as the story was amusing.

Few people, I imagine, will agree with him. To most readers, and certainly to the kind of reader for whom an author is willing to take trouble, complete realism in respect of incidents and methods is an essential factor in maintaining the interest of a detective story. Hence it may be worth while to mention that Thorndyke's method of producing the track chart, described in Chapters II and III, has been actually used in practice. It is a modification of one devised by me many years ago when I was crossing Ashanti to the city of Bontuku, the whereabouts of which in the far interior was then only vaguely known. My instructions were to fix the positions of all towns, villages, rivers and mountains as accurately as possible; but finding ordinary methods of surveying impracticable in the dense forest which covers the whole region, I adopted

this simple and apparently rude method, checking the distances whenever possible by astronomical observation.

The resulting route-map was surprisingly accurate, as shown by the agreement of the outward and homeward tracks. It was published by the Royal Geographical Society, and incorporated in the map of this region compiled by the Intelligence Branch of the War Office, and it formed the basis of the map which accompanied my volume of *Travels in Ashanti and Jaman*. So that Thorndyke's plan must be taken as quite a practicable one.

New Inn, the background of this story, and one of the last surviving inns of Chancery, has recently passed away after upwards of four centuries of newness. Even now, however, a few of the old, dismantled houses (including perhaps, the mysterious 31) may be seen from the Strand peeping over the iron roof of the skating rink which has displaced the picturesque hall, the pension-room and the garden. The postern gate, too, in Houghton Street still remains, though the arch is bricked up inside. Passing it lately, I made the rough sketch which appears on next page, and which shows all that is left of this pleasant old London backwater.

R. A. F.





Reflections of this kind occupied me pretty actively if not very agreeably during this strange journey. [...] I was, for example, greatly interested to notice how, when one sense is in abeyance, **the other senses rouse into a compensating intensity of perception.** I sat smoking my pipe in darkness which was absolute save for the dim glow from the smouldering tobacco in the bowl, and seemed to be cut off from all knowledge of the world without. But yet I was not. **The vibrations of the carriage,** with its hard springs and iron-tired wheels, registered accurately and plainly the character of the roadway. The harsh rattle of granite setts, the soft bumpiness of macadam, the smooth rumble of wood-pavement, the jarring and swerving of crossed tram-lines; **all were easily recognizable and together sketched the general features of the neighbourhood through which I was passing.**

And the **sense of hearing filled in the details.** Now the hoot of a tug's whistle told of proximity to the river. A sudden and brief hollow reverberation announced the passage under a railway arch (which, by the way, happened several times during the journey); and, when I heard the familiar whistle of a railway-guard followed by the quick snorts of a skidding locomotive, I had as clear a picture of a heavy passenger-train moving out of a station as if I had seen it in broad daylight.

(Chapter I, The Mystery of 31 New Inn)

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