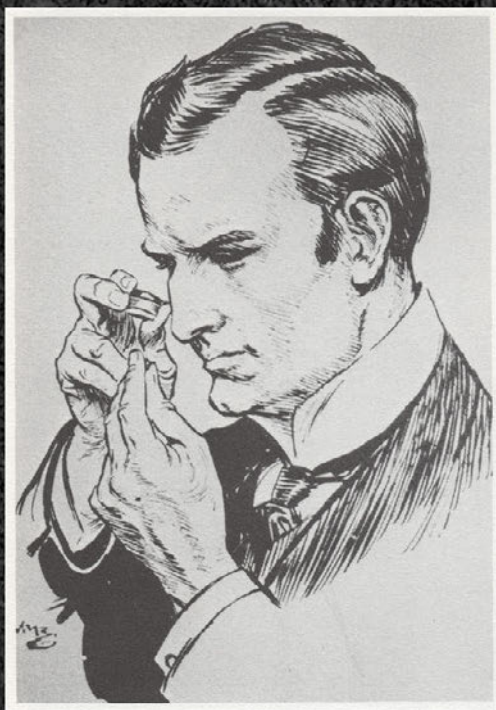


THE COMPLETE DR. THORNDYKE



BY R. AUSTIN FREEMAN
EDITED BY DAVID MARCUM

VOLUME I

THE RED THUMB MARK
THE EYE OF OSIRIS
THE MYSTERY OF 31 NEW INN

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DAVID MARCUM

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Meet Dr. Thorndyke

by R. Austin Freeman

My subject is Dr. John Thorndyke, the hero or central character of most of my detective stories. So I'll give you a short account of his real origin—of the way in which he did in fact come into existence.

To discover the origin of John Thorndyke I have to reach back into the past for at least fifty years, to the time when I was a medical student preparing for my final examination. For reasons which I need not go into I gave rather special attention to the legal aspects of medicine and the medical aspects of law. And as I read my text-books, and especially the illustrative cases, I was profoundly impressed by their dramatic quality. Medical jurisprudence deals with the human body in its relation to all kinds of legal problems. Thus its subject matter includes all sorts of crime against the person and all sorts of violent death and bodily injury: Hanging, drowning, poisons and their effects, problems of suicide and homicide, of personal identity and survivorship, and a host of other problems of the highest dramatic possibilities, though not always quite presentable for the purposes of fiction. And the reported cases which were given in illustration were often crime stories of the most thrilling interest. Cases of disputed identity such as the Tichbourne Case, famous poisoning cases such as the Rugeley Case and that of Madeline Smith, cases of mysterious disappearance or the detection of long-forgotten crimes such as that of Eugene Aram. All these, described and analysed with strict scientific accuracy, formed the matter of Medical Jurisprudence which thrilled me as I read and made an indelible impression.

But it produced no immediate results. I had to pass my examinations and get my diploma, and then look out for the means of earning my living. So all this curious lore was put away for the time

being in the pigeon-holes of my mind—which Dr. Freud would call the *Unconscious*—not forgotten, but ready to come to the surface when the need for it should arise. And there it reposed for some twenty years, until failing health compelled me to abandon medical practice and take to literature as a profession.

It was then that my old studies recurred to my mind. A fellow doctor, Conan Doyle, had made a brilliant and well-deserved success by the creation of the immortal Sherlock Holmes. Considering that achievement, I asked myself whether it might not be possible to devise a detective story of a slightly different kind—one based on the science of Medical Jurisprudence, in which, by the sacrifice of a certain amount of dramatic effect, one could keep entirely within the facts of real life, with nothing fictitious excepting the persons and the events. I came to the conclusion that it was, and began to turn the idea over in my mind.

But I think that the influence which finally determined the character of my detective stories, and incidentally the character of John Thorndyke, operated when I was working at the Westminster Ophthalmic Hospital. There I used to take the patients into the dark room, examine their eyes with the ophthalmoscope, estimate the errors of refraction, and construct an experimental pair of spectacles to correct those errors. When a perfect correction had been arrived at, the formula for it was embodied in a prescription which was sent to the optician who made the permanent spectacles.

Now when I was writing those prescriptions it was borne in on me that in many cases, especially the more complex, the formula for the spectacles, and consequently the spectacles themselves, furnished an infallible record of personal identity. If, for instance, such a pair of spectacles should have been found in a railway carriage, and the maker of those spectacles could be found, there would be practically conclusive evidence that a particular person had travelled by that train. About that time I drafted out a story based on a pair of spectacles, which was published some years later under the title of *The Mystery of 31 New Inn*, and the construction of that story determined, as I have said, not only the general character of my future work but of the hero around whom the plots were to be

woven. But that story remained for some years in cold storage. My first published detective novel was *The Red Thumb-mark*, and in that book we may consider that John Thorndyke was born. And in passing on to describe him I may as well explain how and why he came to be the kind of person that he is.

I may begin by saying that he was not modelled after any real person. He was deliberately created to play a certain part, and the idea that was in my mind was that he should be such a person as would be likely and suitable to occupy such a position in real life. As he was to be a medico-legal expert, he had to be a doctor and a fully trained lawyer. On the physical side I endowed him with every kind of natural advantage. He is exceptionally tall, strong, and athletic because those qualities are useful in his vocation. For the same reason he has acute eyesight and hearing and considerable general manual skill, as every doctor ought to have. In appearance he is handsome and of an imposing presence, with a symmetrical face of the classical type and a Grecian nose. And here I may remark that his distinguished appearance is not merely a concession to my personal taste but is also a protest against the monsters of ugliness whom some detective writers have evolved.

These are quite opposed to natural truth. In real life a first-class man of any kind usually tends to be a good-looking man.

Mentally, Thorndyke is quite normal. He has no gifts of intuition or other supernormal mental qualities. He is just a highly intellectual man of great and varied knowledge with exceptionally acute reasoning powers and endowed with that invaluable asset, a scientific imagination (by a scientific imagination I mean that special faculty which marks the born investigator, the capacity to perceive the essential nature of a problem before the detailed evidence comes into sight). But he arrives at his conclusions by ordinary reasoning, which the reader can follow when he has been supplied with the facts, though the intricacy of the train of reasoning may at times call for an exposition at the end of the investigation.

Thorndyke has no eccentricities or oddities which might detract from the dignity of an eminent professional man, unless one excepts an unnatural liking for *Trichinopoly* cheroots. In manner he

is quiet, reserved and self-contained, and rather markedly secretive, but of a kindly nature, though not sentimental, and addicted to occasional touches of dry humour. That is how Thorndyke appears to me.

As to his age. When he made his first bow to the reading public, he was between thirty-five and forty. As that was thirty years ago, he should now be over sixty-five. But he isn't. If I have to let him "*grow old along with me*" I need not saddle him with the infirmities of age, and I can (in his case) put the brake on the passing years. Probably he is not more than fifty after all!

Now a few words as to how Thorndyke goes to work. His methods are rather different from those of the detectives of the Sherlock Holmes school. They are more technical and more specialized. He is an investigator of crime but he is not a detective. The technique of Scotland Yard would be neither suitable nor possible to him. He is a medico-legal expert, and his methods are those of medico-legal science. In the investigation of a crime there are two entirely different methods of approach. One consists in the careful and laborious examination of a vast mass of small and commonplace detail: Inquiring into the movements of suspected and other persons, interrogating witnesses and checking their statements particularly as to times and places, tracing missing persons, and so forth—the aim being to accumulate a great body of circumstantial evidence which will ultimately disclose the solution of the problem. It is an admirable method, as the success of our police proves, and it is used with brilliant effect by at least one of our contemporary detective writers. But it is essentially a police method.

The other method consists in the search for some fact of high evidential value which can be demonstrated by physical methods and which constitutes conclusive proof of some important point. This method also is used by the police in suitable cases. Fingerprints are examples of this kind of evidence, and another instance is furnished by the Gutteridge murder. Here the microscopical examination of a cartridge-case proved conclusively that the murder had been committed with a particular revolver, a fact which incriminated the owner of that revolver and led to his conviction.

This is Thorndyke's procedure. It consists in the interrogation of things rather than persons, of the ascertainment of physical facts which can be made visible to eyes other than his own. And the facts which he seeks tend to be those which are apparent only to the trained eye of the medical practitioner.

I feel that I ought to say a few words about Thorndyke's two satellites, Jervis and Polton. As to the former, he is just the traditional narrator proper to this type of story. Some of my readers have complained that Dr. Jervis is rather slow in the uptake. But that is precisely his function. He is the expert misunderstander. His job is to observe and record all the facts, and to fail completely to perceive their significance. Thereby he gives the reader all the necessary information, and he affords Thorndyke the opportunity to expound its bearing on the case.

Polton is in a slightly different category. Although he is not drawn from any real person, he is associated in my mind with two actual individuals. One is a Mr. Pollard, who was the laboratory assistant in the hospital museum when I was a student, and who gave me many a valuable tip in matters of technique, and who, I hope, is still to the good. The other was a watch- and clock-maker of the name of Parsons—familiarily known as Uncle Parsons—who had premises in a basement near the Royal Exchange, and who was a man of boundless ingenuity and technical resource. Both of these I regard as collateral relatives, so to speak, of Nathaniel Polton. But his personality is not like either. His crinkly countenance is strictly his own copyright.

To return to Thorndyke, his rather technical methods have, for the purposes of fiction, advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is that his facts are demonstrably true, and often they are intrinsically interesting. The disadvantage is that they are frequently not matters of common knowledge, so that the reader may fail to recognize them or grasp their significance until they are explained. But this is the case with all classes of fiction. There is no type of character or story that can be made sympathetic and acceptable to every kind of reader. The personal equation affects the reading as well as the writing of a story.

Dr. Thorndyke: In the Footsteps of Sherlock Holmes

by David Marcum

When Sherlock Holmes began his practice as a “Consulting Detective”, his ideas of scientific criminal investigations caused the London police to look upon him as a mere “theorist”. He was perceived as an amateur to be tolerated, often with amusement—until, that is, his assistance was required. Then they were more than willing to come knocking upon his door, asking for whatever help that they could receive. And usually this help took the form of brilliant solutions to bizarre and otherwise insoluble problems.

Holmes espoused methods and ideas that were considered ludicrous in the late 1800’s. For instance, his frustration knew no bounds when a crime scene was disturbed. Holmes realized that so much could be determined from the physical evidence—footprints, fibres, and spatters. The police were happy to trod into and disturb the evidence as if they were herds of field beasts, with the equivalent level of intelligence.

However, Holmes’s methods, and the science behind catching criminals, eventually won out and became so important that it’s hard to now imagine the world without them. Many of the exact same techniques and methods that he advocated are now standard practice. From being an amateur with unusual ideas, Holmes is now recognized around the world as The Great Detective. In 2002, Holmes received a posthumous Honorary Fellowship from the British Royal Society of Chemistry, based on the fact that he was beyond his time in using chemistry and chemical sciences as a means of solving crimes.

And before that, in 1985, Scotland Yard introduced *HOLMES* (*Home Office Large Major Enquiry System*), an elaborate computer system designed to process the masses of information collected and evaluated during a criminal investigation, in order to ensure that no vital clues are overlooked. This system, providing total compatibility and consistency between all the police forces of England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as the Royal Military Police, has since been upgraded by the improved *HOLMES 2*—and like the first version, there is absolutely no doubt as to who is being honoured and memorialized for his work in dragging criminology out of the dark ages.

Many famous Great Detectives followed in Holmes's footsteps—Nero Wolfe and Ellery Queen, Hercule Poirot and Solar Pons—each with their own methods and techniques, but before they began their careers, and while Holmes was still in practice in Baker Street, another London consultant—Dr. John Thorndyke—opened his doors, using the scientific methods developed and perfected by Holmes and taking them to a whole new level of brilliance.

Meet Dr. Thorndyke

Dr. John Evelyn Thorndyke was born on July 4th, 1870. We don't know about where he was raised, or if he has any family. At no point will we be introduced to a more brilliant brother who sometimes *is* the British Government. He was educated at the medical school of St. Margaret's Hospital in London, and while there, he met fellow student Christopher Jervis. They became friends but, after completing school in 1895, they lost touch with one another. Over the next six years, Thorndyke remained at St. Margaret's, taking on various jobs, hanging "about the chemical and physical laboratories, the museum and *post mortem* room," and learning what he could. He obtained his M.D. and his Doctor of Sciences, and then was called to the bar in 1896.

He'd prepared himself with the hope of obtaining a position as a coroner, but he learned of the unexpected retirement of one of St. Margaret's lecturers in medical jurisprudence. He applied for the

position and, rather to his own surprise, it was awarded to him. (He would continue to maintain his association with the hospital, going on to become the Medical Registrar, Pathologist, Curator of the Museum, and then Professor of Medical Jurisprudence, all while maintaining his own private consulting practice.)

It was when Thorndyke was named lecturer that he obtained his chambers at 5A King's Bench Walk, in the Inner Temple, that amazing and historic area between Fleet Street and the River. Founded over eight-hundred years ago by the Knights Templar, it is one of the four Inns of Court, (along with the Middle Temple, Lincoln's Inn, and Gray's Inn.) The buildings along King's Bench Walk, and particularly No.'s 4, 5, and 6, have a great deal of historical significance—and not just because Dr. John Thorndyke practiced at 5A for a number of years.

Thorndyke was quite fortunate to obtain a suite of rooms on multiple floors at this location, which leads to speculation about his influence and resources—a question which has no answer. In any case, it was there that he opened his practice and began to wait for clients and cases. He also made the acquaintance of elderly Nathaniel Polton, that man-of-all-work with the crinkly smile who ran the household, as well as Thorndyke's upstairs laboratory.

Like Sherlock Holmes during those early years in the 1870's when he had rooms in Montague Street next to the British Museum and spent his vast amounts of free time learning his craft, Thorndyke also found a way to make the empty hours more useful. He had the unique idea of imagining increasingly complex crimes—often a murder or series of them, for instance—and then, when he had planned every single aspect of the crime, he would turn around and work out the solution from the other side. While doing this, he made extensive notes of each of these theoretical exercises, and retained them for their later usefulness when encountering real-life crimes.

His first legal case was *Regina v Gummer* in 1897. Sadly, no further information about this affair is ever revealed to us, but we may be certain that Thorndyke used his considerable skills to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion, adding to his reputation as he did so.

In the meantime, Jervis had a more unfortunate story. As his time at school ended, his funds ran out rather unexpectedly, and after paying his various fees, he was left with earning his living as a medical assistant, or sometimes serving as a *locum tenens*, moving from one low-paying and temporary job to another, with no prospects of improvement.

Jervis is unemployed on the morning of March 22nd, 1901 when he encounters Thorndyke a few doors up from 5A King's Bench Walk. The two friends are happy to see one another, and before long, Jervis is involved in an investigation that will change his life in several ways, as recounted in *The Red Thumb Mark*.

But it should not be assumed that every Thorndyke adventure is narrated by Jervis in a typical Watsonian manner. In fact, the very next book, *The Eye of Osiris*, is instead told from the perspective of one of Thorndyke's students, Dr. Paul Berkeley. It is one of several that provide a look at Thorndyke—and Jervis—from a different perspective. But Jervis returns as narrator in the third novel, *The Mystery of 31 New Inn*, and we see Thorndyke through his eyes for a good many of both the novels and short stories.

Here a word might be mentioned about the Chronology of the Thorndyke stories. For some this is an irrelevant factor, but for others—like me—understanding the correct chronological placement of the stories is very important. Like the volumes that make up the Sherlock Holmes Canon, the Thorndyke stories aren't published in chronological order—a case set in 1907 (such as “Percival Bland's Proxy”) might be collected before one that occurs in 1908, (“The Missing Mortgagee”), or it might not. For instance, *The Red Thumb Mark* (1907) is set in March and April 1901. (This chronological placement, by the way, is determined by noticing that a specific date is given three times in the book—in the British fashion of day before month—9.3.01—or *March 9th, 1901*. The dates for the events of the rest of the book can be carefully worked out from this fixed point.)

The next book, *The Eye of Osiris* (1911) is primarily set in the summer of 1904 (with Chapter 1, something of a prologue, taking

place in late 1902.) Then, the next book to follow, *The Mystery of 31 New Inn* (1912), jumps back to the spring of 1902, about a year after the events of *The Red Thumb Mark*, and before *The Eye of Osiris*. And one of the short stories, “The Man With the Nailed Shoes” occurs in September and October 1901, between the first two books. Clearly, there is a great deal of material for the chronologist in the Thorndyke Chronicles.

As Jervis becomes a part of Thorndyke’s world, following their reacquaintance in March 1901, he meets others in Thorndyke’s circle, including policemen such as Superintendent Miller and Inspector Badger, lawyers like Robert Anstey, Marchmont, and Brodrigg, and other physicians like Dr. Paul Berkeley and Dr. Humphrey Jardine. He also has more opportunity to learn from his friend as he begins his own studies in order to become a similar specialist in the medico-legal practice—although he’ll never be another Thorndyke.

Through Jervis’s eyes—as well as others along the way—we build up our knowledge of Dr. Thorndyke. In appearance, he is tall and athletic, just under six feet in height, slender, and weighing around one-hundred-and-eighty pounds. He is exceptionally handsome—and has been called the handsomest detective in literature. He has no vices, except—perhaps—that he enjoys a Trichinopoly cigar upon occasion when he is feeling especially triumphant—although there is one time when the criminal’s knowledge of this fact leads to a clever attempt at Thorndyke’s murder . . .

There are several instances where Thorndyke displays a marked resemblance to Sherlock Holmes—and not just in his scientific approach to crime. The two men sometimes say similar things—such as when Holmes says “*It is quite a pretty little problem,*” (in “A Scandal in Bohemia”) or “. . . *there are some pretty little problems among them*” (in “The Musgrave Ritual”). Thorndyke mimics this in *Felo de Se?* (“*There, Jervis,’ said he, ‘is quite a pretty little problem for you to excogitate*”) or “*Ah, there is a very pretty little problem for you to consider*” (in *The Eye of Osiris*).

And who can forget the many instances when Holmes refers to *data*:

- *“It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts.”—“A Scandal in Bohemia”*
- *“I had,” said he, “come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it always is to reason from insufficient data.”—“The Speckled Band”*
- *“No data yet,” he answered. “It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment.”—A Study in Scarlet*
- *“The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession.”—The Valley of Fear*
- *“Still, it is an error to argue in front of your data.”—“Wisteria Lodge”*

Thorndyke’s version? “. . . believe me, it is a capital error to decide beforehand what data are to be sought for.”—from *The Mystery of 31 New Inn*. There are others.

Then there is Holmes’s quote from “The Man With the Twisted Lip”:

“You have a grand gift of silence, Watson,” said he. “It makes you quite invaluable as a companion.”

Here’s the Thorndyke equivalent:

“It has just been borne in upon me, Jervis,” said he, “that you are the most companionable fellow in the world. You have the heaven-sent gift of silence.”

And then there is the time, in “The Anthropologist at Large”, that a client—expecting a Holmes-like performance as based on “The Blue Carbuncle”—presents Thorndyke with an object for examination:

“I understand,” said he, “that by examining a hat it is possible to deduce from it, not only the bodily characteristics of the wearer, but also his mental and moral qualities, his state of health, his pecuniary position, his past history, and even his domestic relations and the peculiarities of his place of abode. Am I right in this supposition?”

The ghost of a smile flitted across Thorndyke’s face as he laid the hat upon the remains of the newspaper. “We must not expect too much,” he observed. “Hats, as you know, have a way of changing owners . . .”

Another area of intersection between Holmes and Thorndyke is the assembly of information. Recall Holmes’s *“ponderous commonplace books in which he placed his cuttings”* as mentioned in “The Engineer’s Thumb”. We find, also in “The Anthropologist at Large”, that Thorndyke does the same thing:

[H]is method of dealing with [the morning newspaper] was characteristic. The paper was laid on the table after breakfast, together with a blue pencil and a pair of office shears. A preliminary glance through the sheets enabled him to mark with the pencil those paragraphs that were to be read, and these were presently cut out and looked through, after which they were either thrown away or set aside to be pasted in an indexed book.

No doubt and examination of Thorndyke’s lodgings at 5A King’s Bench Walk would reveal—in addition to a series of indexed commonplace books filled with clippings—a number of other items and aspects that would remind one of 221b Baker Street.

Like many locations where the detective’s residence is almost a character in and of itself—Sherlock Holmes’s London address at 221 Baker Street, and the New York homes of Ellery Queen on West 87th Street and Nero Wolfe’s Brownstone on West 35th Street—Thorndyke’s rooms at 5A King’s Bench Walk are a living and vibrant place—from the entry way, where a heavy door known

as “The Oak” leads visitors into a most comfortable wood-panelled sitting room, located on the (British) first floor, one flight up from the ground floor. On the next floor up, Polton has his laboratory and workshop, containing everything that is needed (or what might be manufactured) in order to solve the case.

On the next floor, underneath the attic, are bedrooms belonging to Thorndyke, Jervis, and Polton. Even after Jervis has married—and now you know that he does get married!—he continues to reside a good deal of the time in King’s Bench Walk. As he explains in *When Rogues Fall Out* (1932, with the U.S. title of *Dr. Thorndyke’s Discovery*):

Here, perhaps, since my records of Thorndyke’s practice have contained so little reference to my own personal affairs, I should say a few words concerning my domestic habits. As the circumstances of our practice often made it desirable for me to stay late at our chambers, I had retained there the bedroom that I had occupied before my marriage; and, as these circumstances could not always be foreseen, I had arranged with my wife the simple rule that the house closed at eleven o’clock. If I was unable to get home by that time, it was to be understood that I was staying at the Temple. It may sound like a rather undomestic arrangement, but it worked quite smoothly, and it was not without its advantages. For the brief absence gave to my homecomings a certain festive quality, and helped to keep alive the romantic element in my married life. It is possible for the most devoted husbands and wives to see too much of one another.

Thorndyke’s Other Appearances

Through the years, Thorndyke’s reputation continues to grow, as presented through a number of adventures. Surprisingly, in light of the tens of thousands of Post-Canonical Sherlock Holmes that have come to light over the years, as discovered by latter-day Literary Agents taking over Watson’s first Literary Agent, Sir Arthur Conan

Doyle, stopped literary-agenting, there have been almost no additional Thorndyke cases brought to the public's attention. The few exceptions to this statement are *Goodbye, Dr. Thorndyke* (1972) by Norman Donaldson, and *Dr. Thorndyke's Dilemma* (1974) by John H. Dirckx. Both narratives deal with Thorndyke and Jervis in their latter years, and each is written by an expert in the field of Thorndyke scholarship.

Donaldson also wrote what might be the final scholarly word on the subject, *In Search of Dr. Thorndyke* (1971). In fact, he had intended his pastiche, *Goodbye, Dr. Thorndyke*, to be published as the conclusion to this book, but it ended up appearing separately.

To my knowledge, "The Great Fathomer", as Thorndyke is sometimes known, has rarely appeared in other locations. He is mentioned in the Solar Pons tale "The Adventure of the Proper Comma" by August Derleth, which finds Dr. Parker returning "from Thorndyke & Polton with an analysis of the capsules Mrs. Buxton had carried with her . . ."

In my own book of authorized Solar Pons stories, *The Papers of Solar Pons* (2017), Thorndyke makes two appearances. "The Adventure of the Additional Heirs" has Pons and Parker visiting King's Bench Walk:

At 5A, we learned that our friend Thorndyke, the medical juris-practitioner, was out on some investigation or other, but Pons handed the papers, sans photograph, into the care of Polton, his crinkly-faced laboratory technician, with a detailed explanation of what he wished to learn. The man nodded and smiled, and without any extraneous chit-chat, shut the door, freeing us to return to Fleet Street. We paused at the edge of the walk to look at the photograph, still in Pons's hand.

Later Thorndyke sends Pons a detailed report that helps toward the solution of the problem. And in "The Affair of the Distasteful Society", set in July 1921, Pons and Parker attend the first meeting

of a group gathered to honour Sherlock Holmes, where the following conversation occurs:

“I see that you invited Thorndyke, and that little Belgian over on Farroway Street,” said Rath.

“And Sexton Blake as well,” replied Sir Amory.

“Sexton Blake is a fictional character, Sir Amory,” said Pons with a smile.

In my story, “The Adventure of the Two Sisters”, to be included in an upcoming Solar Pons anthology, Dr. Parker writes:

Pons was not the only detective who offered his services to the London populace, although he might have been the most well-known. We were friends with several others, including the former Belgian policeman who lived in Farroway Street, and another rather mysterious fellow in nearby Bottle Street. And of course, Pons went way back with Thorndyke, whose chambers were across town. It wasn't unusual for Pons and the others to regularly confer on investigations, or simply to sit down and share a few drinks and professional anecdotes.

Thorndyke doesn't just appear in some of my Solar Pons adventures. He's also been referenced off-stage in a couple of Sherlock Holmes adventures that I've pulled from Watson's Tin Dispatch Box—and it's more than likely that others will follow. In “The London Wheel”, contained in *The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part IV: 2016 Annual* (2016), Holmes, looking through some documents, states:

“I believe,” said Holmes, “that I have enough amateur legal training that I can get a sense of the implications of the clauses in question in both of these documents.” He pulled the folded pages from his pocket. “I thought about sending a message to my protégé Thorndyke in King's Bench Walk for his opinion, as he could have been here very quickly, should he

be at home at all and not out on his own business. However, I don't believe that will be necessary.

Perhaps it is a point of interest that Thorndyke is referred to Holmes's protégé. Possibly more information will be forthcoming, such as that which is hinted in my forthcoming story, "The Coombs Contrivance". Set in 1889, when Thorndyke was nineteen years old, Holmes and Watson are discussing a precocious Baker Street Irregular:

[Holmes] pinched the bridge of his nose. "Do you trust Levi's judgment, Watson?"

I considered. "For an eight-year-old, he's remarkable perceptive—as much as any of the other Irregulars who have assisted you. The Wiggins family, or the Peakes, or Thorndyke, before he went away to university."

So was Thorndyke, perhaps, a gifted Irregular who learned from The Master, and then went on to create his own successful practice, taking what he learned to a next very successful level? Possibly. As Robert Downey, Jr. succinctly stated when playing Holmes in 2009's *Sherlock Holmes*: "Food for thought!"

Thorndyke is also mentioned in Bob Byrne's Holmes story, "The Adventure of the Parson's Son" (*The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part III: 1896–1929*), wherein Holmes, examining a piece of evidence, cries:

"Ha! I believe we have discredited the coat entirely. Though I wish I could get Thorndyke to examine it. Would that we were back in London."

And it isn't just Thorndyke who has appeared elsewhere. His lawyer friend Marchmont has assisted Holmes and Watson in a small way a couple of my own forthcoming adventures, *Sherlock Holmes and The Eye of Heka* and "The Coombs Contrivance".

Although I have encouraged these Thorndyke cameos in my own stories or in Holmes and Pons books that I edit, his appearances elsewhere are much more fleeting. In the 2015 BBC radio series *The Rivals*, Inspector Lestrade, Holmes's most frequent associate at Scotland Yard, is placed into the events of the Thorndyke short story "The Moabite Cipher". And Thorndyke has only had a handful of other media appearances. In 1964, the BBC produced seven episodes (now mostly lost) of *Thorndyke*, starring Peter Copley. The episodes were:

- "The Case of Oscar Brodski"
- "The Old Lag"
- "A Case of Premeditation"
- "The Mysterious Visitor"
- "The Case of Phyllis Annesley"—Adapted from "Phyllis Annesley's Peril"
- "Percival Bland's Brother"—Adapted from "Percival Bland's Proxy"
- "The Puzzle Lock"

From 1971 to 1973, Thames TV aired *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes*, and two stories were adapted: "A Message from the Deep Sea" starring John Neville (who had also played Holmes in 1965's *A Study in Terror*), and "The Moabite Cipher" starring Barrie Ingram. Except for a 1963 BBC Radio adaption of *Mr. Pottermack's Oversight*, and a few on-air readings by a single performer, there have been no other Thorndyke adaptations—which is a terrible shame, as the stories certainly lend themselves to visual and audible interpretations. Perhaps a new generation will discover Thorndyke, Jervis, and the rest, and they will find popularity once again, as they did more than a century ago.

A Few (Hundred) Words About R. Austin Freeman, Thorndyke's Chronicler

Richard Austin Freeman was born on April 11, 1862 in the Soho district of London. He was the son of a skilled tailor and the youngest of five children. As he grew, it was expected that he would become a tailor as well, but instead he had an interest in natural history and medicine, and so he obtained employment in a pharmacist's shop. While there, he qualified as an apothecary and could have gone on to manage the shop, but instead he began to study medicine at Middlesex Hospital.

Austin Freeman qualified as a physician in 1887, and in that same year he married. Faced with the twin facts of his new marital responsibilities and his very limited resources as a young doctor, he made the unusual decision to join the Colonial Service, spending the next seven years in Africa as an Assistant Colonial Surgeon. This continued until the early 1890's, when he contracted Blackwater Fever, an illness that eventually forced him to leave the service and return permanently to England.

For several years, he served as a *locum tenens* for various physicians, a bleak time in his life as he moved from job to job, his income low, and his health never quite recovered. (These experiences were reflected in the narratives of Doctors Jervis and Berkeley.) However, he supplemented his meagre income and exercised his creativity during these years by beginning to write. His early publications included *Travels and Live in Ashanti and Jaman* (1898), recounting some of his African sojourns.

In 1900, Freeman obtained work as an assistant to Dr. John James Pitcairn (1860–1936) at Holloway Prison. Although he wasn't there for very long, the association between the two men was enough to turn Freeman's attention toward writing mysteries. Over the next few years, they co-wrote several under the pseudonym *Clifford Ashdown*, including *The Adventures of Romney Pringle* (1902), *The Further Adventures of Romney Pringle* (1903), *From a Surgeon's Diary* (1904–1905), and *The Queen's Treasure* (written around 1905–1906, and published posthumously in 1975.) The specifics

of the two men's writing arrangement are unknown to the present day, although much research was carried out by Freeman scholar Percival Mason ("P.M.") Stone, who was actually able to confirm Pitcairn's involvement and influence. Following this association, which apparently helped to train Freeman to be a better writer and to focus on a recurring character, his luck changed, and he was able, within just a few years, to abandon the practice of medicine, which had never been successful, and become a professional author.

In approximately 1904, Freeman began developing a mystery novella based on a short job that he had held at the Western Ophthalmic Hospital. This effort, "31 New Inn", was published in 1905, and it is the true first Dr. Thorndyke story. In it, we meet narrator Dr. Christopher Jervis, working as a *locum tenens*, moving from practice to practice in the same bleak existence that Freeman had experienced. Jervis becomes involved with a patient that may or may not be in danger. Unsure what to do, he recalls his former classmate, the brilliant Dr. John Thorndyke.

Curiously, this novella, (included in Volume II of this newly reissued collection *The Complete Dr. Thorndyke*), has numerous references to the events of the first Thorndyke novel, *The Red Thumb Mark*, which would not be published until 1907. Much of Freeman's life is obscure and unknown, including his writing processes and milestones, but clearly, with so much already clearly defined in this novella about Thorndyke and Jervis, he had firmly established not only fixed aspects of their histories, but the plot of *The Red Thumb Mark* as well, several years before the book's publication. One wonders why he chose to first publish "31 New Inn", since it occurs chronologically a whole year *after* the events of *The Red Thumb Mark*.

Interestingly—at least to a chronologist such as myself—the original novella of "31 New Inn" is specifically set in April 1900, as indicated internally. However, when it was later revised to become the third Thorndyke novel, *The Mystery of 31 New Inn*, (1912, and included in Volume I of *The Complete Dr. Thorndyke*), the narrative's date is changed to 1902—which fits, since the events

definitely occur after *The Red Thumb Mark*, which takes place in March and April 1901.

Like Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe, who seemed to have sprung fully formed from his creator's brow, Thorndyke and his world are well-defined and immediately real. Although certain characters are added to the circle through the years, the basic layout—with Thorndyke, Jervis, and Polton (the man-of-all-work crinkly-smiled assistant) are always at 5A, ready to spring into action when Jervis—or one of the other varied narrators who show up throughout the series—arrive with a curious problem.

Freeman had found his voice with the Thorndyke books and short stories, and he was able to make use of his lifelong interest in medicine and natural science—often conducting extensive experiments to work out exactly how the solutions in his stories could be discovered. And in Thorndyke's early days, Freeman was able to turn the literary form inside out with the creation of the "Inverted Mystery Story", wherein the criminal is known from the beginning—the motive is explained, the planning and execution of the crime are observed, and the miscreant is left to believe that all is well and that he'll never be caught. And then, in the second part of the story, Thorndyke enters to inexorably follow the trail that is completely invisible to everyone else, scraping away, layer by layer and point by point, until the truth is inevitably revealed.

As Freeman explained:

Some years ago I devised, as an experiment, an inverted detective story in two parts. The first part was a minute and detailed description of a crime, setting forth the antecedents, motives, and all attendant circumstances. The reader had seen the crime committed, knew all about the criminal, and was in possession of all the facts. It would have seemed that there was nothing left to tell. But I calculated that the reader would be so occupied with the crime that he would overlook the evidence. And so it turned out. The second part, which described the investigation of the crime, had to most readers the effect of new matter.

This format went on to be used by a great many authors through the years. For example several of the Lord Peter Wimsey narratives come close to being this type of story, and television's *Columbo* used this type of story-telling as its basis.

While these volumes are an attempt to reintroduce the modern reader to Thorndyke, and are a celebration of him and his world, it must be discussed at some point that Freeman held views that are unacceptable. Unlike Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who spent his last decades championing spiritualism but never allowed it to creep into the Sherlock Holmes stories, Freeman sometimes did let his own prejudices make their way into the Thorndyke tales. In his book *Social Decay and Regeneration* (1921), he expressed his rather nationalistic view that England had become an “homogenized, restless, unionized working class”. Worse, he inexcusably and detestably supported the eugenics movement, arguing that people with “undesirable” traits should not be allowed to reproduce by means such as “segregation, marriage restriction, and sterilization”. He referred to immigrants as “Sub-Man”, and argued that society needed to be protected from “degenerates of the destructive type.”

Some have attempted to excuse his beliefs as being a product of his times. For instance, it has been written that he had a distrust of Jews because of the competition that his father, a tailor, had faced when Freeman was a boy. Later, he served in the Colonial Service in Africa during some of the worst years in terms of treatment of natives by the British, and as an older man, he existed in the Great Britain between the two wars when great upheavals disrupted much of what he had known and expected.

Sadly, there are occasional racial stereotypes and references in the Thorndyke books. As I explain in the *Editor's Caveat*, some of these stereotypes had to be unfortunately maintained within the story in order to accurately reflect the plot and the characters of those times. However, there are some words or phrases that were used in the original stories—vile racial epithets that have no business being repeated or perpetuated anywhere—that I have

cheerfully and happily removed. (There weren't many of them, but any are too many.)

These books are intended to bring Dr. Thorndyke and his adventures to a new generation—and not to be an untouchable and sacred literary artefact, with every nasty stain preserved and archived for the historical record. As I warn in the *Caveat*, if readers find that they want to experience the original versions as they were first written, with those hateful words included, then they would be advised to go and seek out the original books, because you won't find that filth here. These versions celebrate Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Jervis—who do not use the awful stereotyped language, I'm glad to say!—and as such, I felt no need whatsoever to include and perpetuate the objectionable and offensive material

From Thorndyke's creation until 1914, Freeman wrote four novels and two volumes of short stories. Then, with the commencement of the First World War, he entered military service. In February 1915, at the age of fifty-two, he joined the Royal Army Medical Corps. Due to his health, which had never entirely recovered from his time in Africa, he spent the duration of the war involved with various aspects of the ambulance corps, having been promoted very early to the rank of Captain. He wrote nothing about Thorndyke during this period, but he did publish one book concerning the adventures of a scoundrel, *The Exploits of Danby Croker* (1916).

Following the war, he resumed his previous life, writing approximately one Thorndyke novel per year, as well as three more volumes of Thorndyke short stories and a number of other unrelated items, until his death on September 28th, 1943—likely related to Parkinson's Disease, which had plagued him in later years.

Upon learning the news, *Chicago Tribune* columnist Vincent Starrett wrote:

When all the bright young things have performed their appointed task of flating the complexes of neurotic semi-literates, and have gone their way to oblivion, the best of the

Thorndyke stories will live on—minor classics on the shelf that holds the good books the world.

Raymond Chandler wrote in his famous essay, which initially appeared in a couple of magazines and then was published in the book of the same name, *The Simple Art of Murder* (1950):

This man Austin Freeman is a wonderful performer. He has no equal in his genre, and he is also a much better writer than you might think, if you were superficially inclined, because in spite of the immense leisure of his writing, he accomplishes an even suspense which is quite unexpected . . . There is even a gaslight charm about his Victorian love affairs, and those wonderful walks across London.

In the introduction to *Great Stories of Detection, Mystery, and Horror* (1928), Dorothy L. Sayers, Chronicler of Lord Peter Wimsey, stated:

Thorndyke will cheerfully show you all the facts. You will be none the wiser . . .

Discovering Dr. Thorndyke

I first encountered Dr. Thorndyke in a rather backwards way—in passing only—and it took several decades to correct that mistake. In approximately 1980, my dad gave me Otto Penzler's *The Private Lives of Private Eyes, Spies, Crime Fighters, and Other Good Guys* (1977). This wonderful oversized book has biographies of twenty-five well-known heroes, along with lists of the original books featuring each one.

My dad bought it for me because it had a chapter about Sherlock Holmes. There were a few others in there that I recognized or had already read about—Ellery Queen and Perry Mason—and soon I would become fanatical about a few more—Nero Wolfe and Hercule Poirot. Over the next few years I would also find

the chapters on James Bond and Lew Archer indispensable, and later than that I would come to appreciate the entries about Philip Marlowe, Sam Spade, Miss Marple, Philo Vance, and Lord Peter Wimsey. But there were a few that, to this day, I've never bothered to read—such as Modesty Blaise or Mr. Moto—and a few others that I skimmed but otherwise ignored. And one of these was the biography of Dr. Thorndyke.

That fact was easily understandable, as throughout the entire time that I was growing up in eastern Tennessee—and in the years since as well—I've never come across a Thorndyke book for sale here in the wild, either in a new bookstore or in a used one. If I'd found one, I might have bought and read it, liked it, and then sought out others. Instead, I was bound to discover Thorndyke by way of Sherlock Holmes.

I've been collecting traditional Sherlock Holmes pastiches since the same time that I discovered the Sherlockian Canon, when I was ten years old in 1975. Since that time, I've collected, read, and chronologized literally thousands of them. It never gets old, and I'm constantly looking for more—and that means checking Amazon to see what new releases are on the horizon.

In 2012, someone—and I've never determined who—began releasing a variety of Holmes stories for Kindle under the author name *Dr. John H. Watson*. This wasn't too unusual—there have been a number of pastiches that officially list Watson as the author, rather than putting the editor of Watson's papers first. Of course, after determining that these latest entries weren't going to be available as real books, I bought the e-versions, and then printed them on real paper. (I cannot stand e-books—ephemeral electronic blips that you lease instead of buy. I'll only buy those titles if they aren't going to be released as legitimate books—and in this case, it's a good thing that I did, as each of these Kindle stories that I found and paid for were soon withdrawn.)

As I read these latest “Holmes” stories, I noticed that each had a definite style that captured the writing from the late 1800's or early 1900's. (No matter how modern pasticheurs try to achieve that, they never quite pull it off.) But in one of the first two or three titles

that I read, I caught a couple of mistakes. In one story, Holmes and Watson leave 221 Baker Street and are immediately in the area around The Temple and Fleet Street, rather than in Marylebone, where Baker Street is properly located. On another occasion, the story's policeman—who had been identified up to that point as Inspector Lestrade—was inexplicably named *Superintendent Miller*—but only in one instance. And in another place in one of the stories, Holmes's address was stated to be *5A King's Bench Walk*.

It was then that some vague memory triggered in my head, and I realized why these stories had captured the style of the late Victorian and early Edwardian eras: *It was because they had actually been written then*. I recalled—from reading Otto Penzler's book of biographies so long ago—that 5A King's Bench Walk belonged to Dr. Thorndyke, and not Sherlock Holmes. Someone was taking the original Thorndyke stories, which I had never before read, and simply changing names: Dr. Thorndyke, Dr. Jervis, and Superintendent Miller became Sherlock Holmes, Dr. Watson, and Inspector Lestrade, respectively.

Between 2012 and 2014, the anonymous author continued to load new Kindle editions on Amazon of Thorndyke-converted-to-Holmes stories, and I continued to buy them. As soon as I had one, I would read it, and then try to figure out the original Thorndyke story from which it was taken. When I'd done so, I'd post a review, identifying what this editor was doing, from where he or she was taking the story, and urging that person, whoever it was, give credit to R. Austin Freeman instead of listing the author as Dr. John H. Watson.

Soon after each of my reviews would appear, the story would be withdrawn. I don't know if it was because the editor had made enough money from the initial sales, or if my reviews alerted him or her that they're game had been uncovered. In any case, I still have the printed copies of each of these converted stories—possibly the only copies that are still in existence.

For the record, over that two year period, this editor produced sixteen converted tales—four of the original Thorndyke novels, and twelve short stories. One of the original short stories, “The

Mandarin's Pearl", was converted twice, with slight variations—initially published as "The Dragon Pearl", withdrawn, and later revised and reloaded as "The Oriental Pearl":

- "The Bloodied Thumbprint"—Originally the first Thorndyke novel, *The Red Thumb Mark*;
- "The Eye of Ra"—Originally the second Thorndyke novel, *The Eye of Osiris*;
- "The Cat's Eye Mystery"—Originally the sixth Thorndyke novel, *The Cat's Eye*;
- "The Julius Dalton Mystery"—Originally the ninth Thorndyke novel, *The D'Arblay Mystery*;
- "The Green Jacket Mystery"—Originally "The Green Check Jacket";
- "Mr. Crofton's Disappearance"—Originally "The Mysterious Visitor";
- "The Coded Lock"—Originally "The Puzzle Lock";
- "The Duplicated Letter"—Originally "The Stalking Horse";
- "The Bullion Robbery"—Originally "The Stolen Ingots";
- "The Talking Corpse"—Originally "The Contents of a Mare's Nest";
- "The Blue Diamond Mystery"—Originally "The Fisher of Men";
- "The Dragon Pearl"—Originally "The Mandarin's Pearl". (This story was also reworked and published again as a Holmes story under the title "The Oriental Pearl");
- "The Ingenious Murder"—Originally "The Aluminium Dagger";
- "The Bloodhound Superstition"—Originally "The Singing Bone"; *and*
- "The Magic Box"—Originally "The Magic Casket".

For quite a while, I was happy to have these as Holmes stories, and I even considered converting the rest of the Thorndyke adventures into additions to the extended Holmes Canon as well. (For at that time I cared nothing for Dr. Thorndyke.) It was partly with these converted stories in mind that I was motivated to go ahead and publish *Sherlock Holmes in Montague Street* (2014, 2016),

which did the same thing to the Martin Hewitt stories, making them early adventures of Holmes before he met Watson and moved to Baker Street. I had long before decided to my own satisfaction that Martin Hewitt *was* a young Sherlock Holmes, with his identity changed through the preparations of a different literary agent than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The taking of old public-domain stories featuring other detectives as the main protagonists and switching them so that Holmes is the main character has also been done by Alan Lance Andersen for his collection *The Affairs of Sherlock Holmes* (2015, 2016), wherein various non-series Sax Rohmer stories from nearly a hundred years ago were reworked as Holmes tales. Other non-Holmes authors have sometimes done the same thing. Raymond Chandler revised some of his early short stories so that the original characters' names were changed to Philip Marlowe. Ross MacDonald—(Kenneth Millar) also rewrote his old stories as well, making them into Lew Archer cases instead. More recently, the British ITV series *Marple* has taken non-Miss Marple Agatha Christie stories and converted them into episodes featuring that character.

So I had no problems with this type of change—and still don't. In fact, in my foreword to *Sherlock Holmes of Montague Street*, I wrote that I would rather have these converted Thorndyke stories as Holmes adventures, because I would rather read about Holmes than Thorndyke. But gradually my mind began to change, and I became more curious about Thorndyke, as presented in the proper fashion.

In 2013, I was able to go to London, as well as other places in England and Scotland, on the first (of three so far) Holmes Pilgrimages. For the most part, if a location wasn't related to Holmes, I didn't visit it. There were a few exceptions—I did intentionally visit Solar Pons's house at 7B Praed Street, Hercule Poirot's two residences, James Bond's flat in Chelsea—but everything else was pretty much pure Holmes.

One day, during my Holmesian rambles, I was making my way east down Fleet Street, and I visited both of the possible locations of "Pope's Court" (as featured in "The Red-Headed League"),

Poppin's Court and Mitre Court. (The latter is also one of the locations where Denis Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie had quarters in some of the Fu Manchu books.) I decided that Mitre Court was certainly the original of "Pope's Court", and I passed through it to find myself unexpectedly in The Temple.

That's the amazing thing about a Holmes Pilgrimage to London—one travels to a site and finds two more very close by. I had planned to visit The Temple, but hadn't realized that I was so close. And now here I was—and more interesting was the fact that I was walking along King's Bench Walk, which runs downhill from the Miter Court passage. I recalled that Thorndyke had lived at 5A, so I made my way there—but without too much awe on that day, because I hadn't actually read any Thorndyke adventures yet—just some converted Holmes stories.

After I returned home, the thought of that side-trip to Thorndyke's front door stuck in my mind, and I sought out and read the first novel in the series, *The Red Thumb Mark*. I was so impressed that I kept going, and discovered a wonderful series of books and stories—fascinating characters and mysteries, and very evocative descriptions of both the London and the countryside of those times.

When I returned on my second Holmes Pilgrimage in 2015, I took the second Thorndyke book with me, reading it while there—while also reading Holmes stories too, of course! This one, *The Eye of Osiris*, has a great deal of London atmosphere, and I spent part of one late afternoon tracking down locations in this book—or what's now left of them—in the area around Fetter Lane to the north of Thorndyke's home in The Temple. It was truly unforgettable.

And of course I made an intentional stop at King's Bench Walk on that 2015 trip, and again on Holmes Pilgrimage No. 3 in 2016. By that point I was a Thorndyke fan, and I took the trouble to write to the current occupiers of 5A before I travelled to see if I could step inside and perhaps spend a moment in Thorndyke's old quarters. Sadly, they did not respond—either because it was simply beneath them to do so, or possibly because they get too many

people like me who want to make a literary pilgrimage to what is a functioning and thriving business location.

While making photographs at Thorndyke's old doorway, I had several chances to go inside when someone else would enter or leave—My ever-present deerstalker and I could have simply been bold enough to slip in and then talk my way onward. It worked at other places on my Holmes Pilgrimages—the laboratory at Barts where Holmes and Watson met, for instance, and the site of the (former?) Diogenes Club at No. 78 Pall Mall, where they acted just oddly enough to make me think that the club is still there. But for some reason, barging into Thorndyke's old chambers without proper permission didn't feel quite right. But if or when I make Holmes Pilgrimage No. 4, I'll definitely make an even greater effort to see the doctor's former rooms.

With many thanks . . .

These last few years have been an amazing ride, and I've been able to play in the Sherlockian sandbox more than I'd ever imagined. (And subsequently, the Solar Pons sandbox, and now Thorndyke, too! Along the way, I've been able to meet some incredible people, both in person and in the modern electronic way, and also I've been able to read several hundred new Holmes adventures, as well as to be able to share them with others.

Still, what is most important is my amazingly wonderful wife (of over thirty years!) Rebecca, and our truly awesome son and my friend, Dan. I love you both, and you are everything to me! I am the luckiest guy in the world.

I have all the gratitude in the world for everyone that I've encountered along the way—It's an undeniable fact that Sherlock Holmes authors are the *best* people! I'd like to thank those who offer support, encouragement, and friendship, sometimes patiently waiting on me to reply as my time is directed in many other directions. Many many thanks to (in alphabetical order): Brian Belanger, Derrick Belanger, Bob Byrne, Roger Johnson, Mark Mower, Denis Smith, Tom Turley, Dan Victor, and Marcia Wilson.

In particular, I'd also like to especially thank Steve Emecz, who is always supportive of every idea that I pitch. It's been my particular good fortune that he crossed my path—it changed my life in a way that would have never happened otherwise, and I'm grateful for every opportunity!

I hope that these books will provide pleasure to those discovering Dr. Thorndyke for the first time, and to others who have known him for a long time. As always, I approach these matters from a Sherlockian perspective, so of course these stories, to me, are a peripheral extension of Holmes's world, and as such they are just more tiny threads woven into the ongoing Great Holmes Tapestry. However, they are wonderful on their own, and however one reads them, I wish great joy upon the journey.

David Marcum
October 2018

*Questions, comments, and story submissions
may be addressed to David Marcum at
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Editor's *Caveat*

These stories have been prepared using modern text-converting software, and as such, occasional deviations in punctuation have occurred. Those who absolutely must have the original version, down to each jot and dash, should understand that this version was created in order to present Dr. Thorndyke's adventures to a modern audience, and not to preserve an absolute pristine model for the historical archives.

Similarly, these stories were written in a time when racial prejudice and stereotypes were much more common than today. While some of these stereotypes must be unfortunately maintained within the story in order to accurately reflect the plot and the characters of those times, there are some words that were used in the original stories—vile racial epithets that have no business being repeated or perpetuated anywhere—that I have cheerfully removed. (There weren't many of them, but *any* are *too many*.)

If readers find that they want to experience the original versions as they were first written, with those hateful and ignorant words included, then they would be advised to seek out the original books. These versions celebrate Dr. Thorndyke and Dr. Jervis—who do *not* use the awful stereotyped language, I'm glad to say!—and as such, I felt no need whatsoever to include objectionable and offensive material simply for the sake of honouring or archiving the historical record.

David Marcum
Editor

The Red Thumb Mark

Preface

In writing the following story, the author has had in view no purpose other than that of affording entertainment to such readers as are interested in problems of crime and their solutions, and the story itself differs in no respect from others of its class, excepting in that an effort has been made to keep within the probabilities of ordinary life, both in the characters and in the incidents.

Nevertheless it may happen that the book may serve a useful purpose in drawing attention to certain popular misapprehensions on the subject of finger-prints and their evidential value, misapprehensions the extent of which may be judged when we learn from the newspapers that several Continental commercial houses have actually substituted finger-prints for signed initials.

The facts and figures contained in Mr. Singleton's evidence, including the very liberal estimate of the population of the globe, are, of course, taken from Mr. Galton's great and important work on finger-prints, to which the reader who is interested in the subject is referred for much curious and valuable information.

In conclusion, the author desires to express his thanks to his friend Mr. Bernard E. Bishop for the assistance rendered to him in certain photographic experiments, and to those officers of the Central Criminal Court who very kindly furnished him with details of the procedure in criminal trials.

R.A.F.

Chapter I: My Learned Brother

“Conflagratam An° 1677. Fabricatam An° 1698. Richardo Powell Armiger Thesaurar.” The words, set in four panels, which formed a frieze beneath the pediment of a fine brick portico, summarised the history of one of the tall houses at the upper end of King’s Bench Walk and as I, somewhat absently, read over the inscription, my attention was divided between admiration of the exquisitely finished carved brickwork and the quiet dignity of the building, and an effort to reconstitute the dead and gone Richard Powell, and the stirring times in which he played his part.

I was about to turn away when the empty frame of the portico became occupied by a figure, and one so appropriate, in its wig and obsolete habiliments, to the old-world surroundings that it seemed to complete the picture, and I lingered idly to look at it. The barrister had halted in the doorway to turn over a sheaf of papers that he held in his hand, and, as he replaced the red tape which bound them together, he looked up and our eyes met. For a moment we regarded one another with the incurious gaze that casual strangers bestow on one another. Then there was a flash of mutual recognition. The impassive and rather severe face of the lawyer softened into a genial smile, and the figure, detaching itself from its frame, came down the steps with a hand extended in cordial greeting.

“My dear Jervis,” he exclaimed, as we clasped hands warmly, “this is a great and delightful surprise. How often have I thought of my old comrade and wondered if I should ever see him again, and lo! Here he is, thrown up on the sounding beach of the Inner Temple, like the proverbial bread cast upon the waters.”

“Your surprise, Thorndyke, is nothing to mine,” I replied, “for your bread has at least returned as bread, whereas I am in the position of a man who, having cast his bread upon the waters, sees it return in the form of a buttered muffin or a Bath bun. I left a

respectable medical practitioner and I find him transformed into a bewigged and begowned limb of the law.”

Thorndyke laughed at the comparison.

“Likened not your old friend unto a Bath bun,” said he. “Say, rather, that you left him a chrysalis and come back to find him a butterfly. But the change is not so great as you think. Hippocrates is only hiding under the gown of Solon, as you will understand when I explain my metamorphosis, and that I will do this very evening, if you have no engagement.”

“I am one of the unemployed at present,” I said, “and quite at your service.”

“Then come round to my chambers at seven,” said Thorndyke, “and we will have a chop and a pint of claret together and exchange autobiographies. I am due in court in a few minutes.”

“Do you reside within that noble old portico?” I asked.

“No,” replied Thorndyke. “I often wish I did. It would add several inches to one’s stature to feel that the mouth of one’s burrow was graced with a Latin inscription for admiring strangers to ponder over. No, my chambers are some doors further down—number 5A,” and he turned to point out the house as we crossed towards Crown Office Row.

At the top of Middle Temple Lane we parted, Thorndyke taking his way with fluttering gown towards the Law Courts, while I directed my steps westward towards Adam Street, the chosen haunt of the medical agent.

The soft-voiced bell of the Temple clock was telling out the hour of seven in muffled accents (as though it apologised for breaking the studious silence) as I emerged from the archway of Mitre Court and turned into King’s Bench Walk.

The paved footway was empty save for a single figure, pacing slowly before the doorway of number 5A¹, in which, though the

[1] EDITOR’S NOTE: In the original text, Thorndyke’s residence is identified here—and in no other location throughout the entire Thorndyke Canon—as 6A *King’s Bench Walk*. This has long been considered to be a mistake by Freeman, and is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter X of Norman Donaldson’s *In Search of Dr. Thorndyke* (Bowling Green

wig had now given place to a felt hat and the gown to a jacket, I had no difficulty in recognising my friend.

“Punctual to the moment, as of old,” said he, meeting me half-way. “What a blessed virtue is punctuality, even in small things. I have just been taking the air in Fountain Court, and will now introduce you to my chambers. Here is my humble retreat.”

We passed in through the common entrance and ascended the stone stairs to the first floor, where we were confronted by a massive door, above which my friend’s name was written in white letters.

“Rather a forbidding exterior,” remarked Thorndyke, as he inserted the latchkey, “but it is homely enough inside.”

The heavy door swung outwards and disclosed a baize-covered inner door, which Thorndyke pushed open and held for me to pass in.

“You will find my chambers an odd mixture,” said Thorndyke, “for they combine the attractions of an office, a museum, a laboratory and a workshop.”

“And a restaurant,” added a small, elderly man, who was decanting a bottle of claret by means of a glass syphon, “you forgot that, sir.”

“Yes, I forgot that, Polton,” said Thorndyke, “but I see you have not.” He glanced towards a small table that had been placed near the fire and set out with the requisites for our meal.

“Tell me,” said Thorndyke, as we made the initial onslaught on the products of Polton’s culinary experiments, “what has been happening to you since you left the hospital six years ago?”

“My story is soon told,” I answered, somewhat bitterly. “It is not an uncommon one. My funds ran out, as you know, rather unexpectedly. When I had paid my examination and registration fees the coffer was absolutely empty, and though, no doubt, a medical diploma contains—to use Johnson’s phrase—the potentiality of wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, there is a vast difference in

University Popular Press, 1971). For consistency and correctness, the true address is used here.

practice between the potential and the actual. I have, in fact, been earning a subsistence, sometimes as an assistant, sometimes as a *locum tenens*. Just now I've got no work to do, and so have entered my name on Turcival's list of eligibles."

Thorndyke pursed up his lips and frowned.

"It's a wicked shame, Jervis," said he presently, "that a man of your abilities and scientific acquirements should be frittering away his time on odd jobs like some half-qualified wastrel."

"It is," I agreed. "My merits are grossly undervalued by a stiff-necked and obtuse generation. But what would you have, my learned brother? If poverty steps behind you and claps the occulting bushel over your thirty thousand candle-power luminary, your brilliancy is apt to be obscured."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," grunted Thorndyke, and he remained for a time in deep thought.

"And now," said I, "let us have your promised explanation. I am positively frizzling with curiosity to know what chain of circumstances has converted John Evelyn Thorndyke from a medical practitioner into a luminary of the law."

Thorndyke smiled indulgently.

"The fact is," said he, "that no such transformation has occurred. John Evelyn Thorndyke is still a medical practitioner."

"What, in a wig and gown!" I exclaimed.

"Yes, a mere sheep in wolf's clothing," he replied. "I will tell you how it has come about. After you left the hospital, six years ago, I stayed on, taking up any small appointments that were going—assistant demonstrator, or curatorships and such like—hung about the chemical and physical laboratories, the museum and post mortem room, and meanwhile took my M.D. and D.Sc. Then I got called to the bar in the hope of getting a coronership, but soon after this, old Stedman retired unexpectedly—you remember Stedman, the lecturer on medical jurisprudence—and I put in for the vacant post. Rather to my surprise, I was appointed lecturer, whereupon I dismissed the coronership from my mind, took my present chambers and sat down to wait for anything that might come."

“And what has come?” I asked.

“Why, a very curious assortment of miscellaneous practice,” he replied. “At first I only got an occasional analysis in a doubtful poisoning case, but, by degrees, my sphere of influence has extended until it now includes all cases in which a special knowledge of medicine or physical science can be brought to bear upon law.”

“But you plead in court, I observe,” said I.

“Very seldom,” he replied. “More usually I appear in the character of that *bête noir* of judges and counsel—the scientific witness. But in most instances I do not appear at all—I merely direct investigations, arrange and analyse the results, and prime the counsel with facts and suggestions for cross-examination.”

“A good deal more interesting than acting as understudy for an absent g.p.,” said I, a little enviously. “But you deserve to succeed, for you were always a deuce of a worker, to say nothing of your capabilities.”

“Yes, I worked hard,” replied Thorndyke, “and I work hard still, but I have my hours of labour and my hours of leisure, unlike you poor devils of general practitioners, who are liable to be dragged away from the dinner table or roused out of your first sleep by—confound it all! Who can that be?”

For at this moment, as a sort of commentary on his self-congratulation, there came a smart rapping at the outer door.

“Must see who it is, I suppose,” he continued, “though one expects people to accept the hint of a closed oak.”

He strode across the room and flung open the door with an air of by no means gracious inquiry.

“It’s rather late for a business call,” said an apologetic voice outside, “but my client was anxious to see you without delay.”

“Come in, Mr. Lawley,” said Thorndyke, rather stiffly, and, as he held the door open, the two visitors entered. They were both men—one middle-aged, rather foxy in appearance and of a typically legal aspect, and the other a fine, handsome young fellow of very prepossessing exterior, though at present rather pale and wild-looking, and evidently in a state of profound agitation.

“I am afraid,” said the latter, with a glance at me and the dinner table, “that our visit—for which I am alone responsible—is a most unseasonable one. If we are really inconveniencing you, Dr. Thorndyke, pray tell us, and my business must wait.”

Thorndyke had cast a keen and curious glance at the young man, and he now replied in a much more genial tone, “I take it that your business is of a kind that will not wait, and as to inconveniencing us, why, my friend and I are both doctors, and, as you are aware, no doctor expects to call any part of the twenty-four hours his own unreservedly.”

I had risen on the entrance of the two strangers, and now proposed to take a walk on the Embankment and return later, but the young man interrupted me.

“Pray don’t go away on my account,” he said. “The facts that I am about to lay before Dr. Thorndyke will be known to all the world by this time to-morrow, so there is no occasion for any show of secrecy.”

“In that case,” said Thorndyke, “let us draw our chairs up to the fire and fall to business forthwith. We had just finished our dinner and were waiting for the coffee, which I hear my man bringing down at this moment.”

We accordingly drew up our chairs, and when Polton had set the coffee on the table and retired, the lawyer plunged into the matter without preamble.

Chapter II: The Suspect

“I had better,” said he, “give you a general outline of the case as it presents itself to the legal mind, and then my client, Mr. Reuben Hornby, can fill in the details if necessary, and answer any questions that you may wish to put to him.

“Mr. Reuben occupies a position of trust in the business of his uncle, John Hornby, who is a gold and silver refiner and dealer in precious metals generally. There is a certain amount of outside assay work carried on in the establishment, but the main business consists in the testing and refining of samples of gold sent from certain mines in South Africa.

“About five years ago Mr. Reuben and his cousin Walter—another nephew of John Hornby—left school, and both were articled to their uncle, with the view to their ultimately becoming partners in the house, and they have remained with him ever since, occupying, as I have said, positions of considerable responsibility.

“And now for a few words as to how business is conducted in Mr. Hornby’s establishment. The samples of gold are handed over at the docks to some accredited representative of the firm—generally either Mr. Reuben or Mr. Walter—who has been despatched to meet the ship, and conveyed either to the bank or to the works according to circumstances. Of course every effort is made to have as little gold as possible on the premises, and the bars are always removed to the bank at the earliest opportunity, but it happens unavoidably that samples of considerable value have often to remain on the premises all night, and so the works are furnished with a large and powerful safe or strong room for their reception. This safe is situated in the private office under the eye of the principal, and, as an additional precaution, the caretaker, who acts as night-watchman, occupies a room directly over the office, and patrols the building periodically through the night.

“Now a very strange thing has occurred with regard to this safe. It happens that one of Mr. Hornby’s customers in South Africa is interested in a diamond mine, and, although transactions in precious stones form no part of the business of the house, he has, from time to time, sent parcels of rough diamonds addressed to Mr. Hornby, to be either deposited in the bank or handed on to the diamond brokers.

“A fortnight ago Mr. Hornby was advised that a parcel of stones had been despatched by the *Elmina Castle*, and it appeared that the parcel was an unusually large one and contained stones of exceptional size and value. Under these circumstances Mr. Reuben was sent down to the docks at an early hour in the hope the ship might arrive in time for the stones to be lodged in the bank at once. Unfortunately, however, this was not the case, and the diamonds had to be taken to the works and locked up in the safe.”

“Who placed them in the safe?” asked Thorndyke.

“Mr. Hornby himself, to whom Mr. Reuben delivered up the package on his return from the docks.”

“Yes,” said Thorndyke, “and what happened next?”

“Well, on the following morning, when the safe was opened, the diamonds had disappeared.”

“Had the place been broken into?” asked Thorndyke.

“No. The place was all locked up as usual, and the caretaker, who had made his accustomed rounds, had heard nothing, and the safe was, outwardly, quite undisturbed. It had evidently been opened with keys and locked again after the stones were removed.”

“And in whose custody were the keys of the safe?” inquired Thorndyke.

“Mr. Hornby usually kept the keys himself, but, on occasions, when he was absent from the office, he handed them over to one of his nephews—whichever happened to be in charge at the time. But on this occasion the keys did not go out of his custody from the time when he locked up the safe, after depositing the diamonds in it, to the time when it was opened by him on the following morning.”

“And was there anything that tended to throw suspicion upon anyone?” asked Thorndyke.

“Why, yes,” said Mr. Lawley, with an uncomfortable glance at his client, “unfortunately there was. It seemed that the person who abstracted the diamonds must have cut or scratched his thumb or finger in some way, for there were two drops of blood on the bottom of the safe and one or two bloody smears on a piece of paper, and, in addition, a remarkably clear imprint of a thumb.”

“Also in blood?” asked Thorndyke.

“Yes. The thumb had apparently been put down on one of the drops and then, while still wet with blood, had been pressed on the paper in taking hold of it or otherwise.”

“Well, and what next?”

“Well,” said the lawyer, fidgeting in his chair, “to make a long story short, the thumb-print has been identified as that of Mr. Reuben Hornby.”

“Ha!” exclaimed Thorndyke. “The plot thickens with a vengeance. I had better jot down a few notes before you proceed any further.”

He took from a drawer a small paper-covered notebook, on the cover of which he wrote “Reuben Hornby,” and then, laying the book open on a blotting-pad, which he rested on his knee, he made a few brief notes.

“Now,” he said, when he had finished, “with reference to this thumb-print. There is no doubt, I suppose, as to the identification?”

“None whatever,” replied Mr. Lawley. “The Scotland Yard people, of course, took possession of the paper, which was handed to the director of the finger-print department for examination and comparison with those in their collection. The report of the experts is that the thumb-print does not agree with any of the thumb-prints of criminals in their possession—that it is a very peculiar one, inasmuch as the ridge-pattern on the bulb of the thumb—which is a remarkably distinct and characteristic one—is crossed by the scar of a deep cut, rendering identification easy and infallible. That it agrees in every respect with the thumb-print of

Mr. Reuben Hornby, and is, in fact, his thumb-print beyond any possible doubt.”

“Is there any possibility,” asked Thorndyke, “that the paper bearing the thumb-print could have been introduced by any person?”

“No,” answered the lawyer. “It is quite impossible. The paper on which the mark was found was a leaf from Mr. Hornby’s memorandum book. He had pencilled on it some particulars relating to the diamonds, and laid it on the parcel before he closed up the safe.”

“Was anyone present when Mr. Hornby opened the safe in the morning?” asked Thorndyke.

“No, he was alone,” answered the lawyer. “He saw at a glance that the diamonds were missing, and then he observed the paper with the thumb-mark on it, on which he closed and locked the safe and sent for the police.”

“Is it not rather odd that the thief did not notice the thumb-mark, since it was so distinct and conspicuous?”

“No, I think not,” answered Mr. Lawley. “The paper was lying face downwards on the bottom of the safe, and it was only when he picked it up and turned it over that Mr. Hornby discovered the thumb-print. Apparently the thief had taken hold of the parcel, with the paper on it, and the paper had afterwards dropped off and fallen with the marked surface downwards—probably when the parcel was transferred to the other hand.”

“You mentioned,” said Thorndyke, “that the experts at Scotland Yard have identified this thumb-mark as that of Mr. Reuben Hornby. May I ask how they came to have the opportunity of making the comparison?”

“Ah!” said Mr. Lawley. “Thereby hangs a very curious tale of coincidences. The police, of course, when they found that there was so simple a means of identification as a thumb-mark, wished to take thumb-prints of all the employees in the works, but this Mr. Hornby refused to sanction—rather quixotically, as it seems to me—saying that he would not allow his nephews to be subjected to such an indignity. Now it was, naturally, these nephews in whom the police were chiefly interested, seeing that they alone had had

the handling of the keys, and considerable pressure was brought to bear upon Mr. Hornby to have the thumb-prints taken.

“However, he was obdurate, scouting the idea of any suspicion attaching to either of the gentlemen in whom he had reposed such complete confidence and whom he had known all their lives, and so the matter would probably have remained a mystery but for a very odd circumstance.

“You may have seen on the bookstalls and in shop windows an appliance called a ‘Thumbograph,’ or some such name, consisting of a small book of blank paper for collecting the thumb-prints of one’s friends, together with an inking pad.”

“I have seen those devices of the Evil One,” said Thorndyke, “in fact, I have one, which I bought at Charing Cross Station.”

“Well, it seems that some months ago Mrs. Hornby, the wife of John Hornby, purchased one of these toys—”

“As a matter of fact,” interrupted Reuben, “it was my cousin Walter who bought the thing and gave it to her.”

“Well, that is not material,” said Mr. Lawley (though I observed that Thorndyke made a note of the fact in his book), “at any rate, Mrs. Hornby became possessed of one of these appliances and proceeded to fill it with the thumb-prints of her friends, including her two nephews. Now it happened that the detective in charge of this case called yesterday at Mr. Hornby’s house when the latter was absent from home, and took the opportunity of urging her to induce her husband to consent to have the thumb-prints of her nephews taken for the inspection of the experts at Scotland Yard. He pointed out that the procedure was really necessary, not only in the interests of justice but in the interests of the young men themselves, who were regarded with considerable suspicion by the police, which suspicion would be completely removed if it could be shown by actual comparison that the thumb-print could not have been made by either of them. Moreover, it seemed that both the young men had expressed their willingness to have the test applied, but had been forbidden by their uncle. Then Mrs. Hornby had a brilliant idea. She suddenly remembered the ‘Thumbograph,’ and thinking to set the question at rest once for all, fetched the little

book and showed it to the detective. It contained the prints of both thumbs of Mr. Reuben (among others), and, as the detective had with him a photograph of the incriminating mark, the comparison was made then and there, and you may imagine Mrs. Hornby's horror and amazement when it was made clear that the print of her nephew Reuben's left thumb corresponded in every particular with the thumb-print that was found in the safe.

"At this juncture Mr. Hornby arrived on the scene and was, of course, overwhelmed with consternation at the turn events had taken. He would have liked to let the matter drop and make good the loss of the diamonds out of his own funds, but, as that would have amounted practically to compounding a felony, he had no choice but to prosecute. As a result, a warrant was issued for the arrest of Mr. Reuben, and was executed this morning, and my client was taken forthwith to Bow Street and charged with the robbery."

"Was any evidence taken?" asked Thorndyke.

"No. Only evidence of arrest. The prisoner is remanded for a week, bail having been accepted in two sureties of five hundred pounds each."

Thorndyke was silent for a space after the conclusion of the narrative. Like me, he was evidently not agreeably impressed by the lawyer's manner, which seemed to take his client's guilt for granted, a position indeed not entirely without excuse having regard to the circumstances of the case.

"What have you advised your client to do?" Thorndyke asked presently.

"I have recommended him to plead guilty and throw himself on the clemency of the court as a first offender. You must see for yourself that there is no defence possible."

The young man flushed crimson, but made no remark.

"But let us be clear how we stand," said Thorndyke. "Are we defending an innocent man or are we endeavouring to obtain a light sentence for a man who admits that he is guilty?"

Mr. Lawley shrugged his shoulders.

"That question can be best answered by our client himself," said he.

Thorndyke directed an inquiring glance at Reuben Hornby, remarking, "You are not called upon to incriminate yourself in any way, Mr. Hornby, but I must know what position you intend to adopt."

Here I again proposed to withdraw, but Reuben interrupted me.

"There is no need for you to go away, Dr. Jervis," he said. "My position is that I did not commit this robbery and that I know nothing whatever about it or about the thumb-print that was found in the safe. I do not, of course, expect you to believe me in the face of the overwhelming evidence against me, but I do, nevertheless, declare in the most solemn manner before God, that I am absolutely innocent of this crime and have no knowledge of it whatever."

"Then I take it that you did not plead 'guilty'?" said Thorndyke.

"Certainly not, and I never will," replied Reuben hotly.

"You would not be the first innocent man, by very many, who has entered that plea," remarked Mr. Lawley. "It is often the best policy, when the defence is hopelessly weak."

"It is a policy that will not be adopted by me," rejoined Reuben. "I may be, and probably shall be, convicted and sentenced, but I shall continue to maintain my innocence, whatever happens. Do you think," he added, turning to Thorndyke, "that you can undertake my defence on that assumption?"

"It is the only assumption on which I should agree to undertake the case," replied Thorndyke.

"And—if I may ask the question—" pursued Reuben anxiously, "do you find it possible to conceive that I may really be innocent?"

"Certainly I do," Thorndyke replied, on which I observed Mr. Lawley's eyebrows rise perceptibly. "I am a man of facts, not an advocate, and if I found it impossible to entertain the hypothesis of your innocence, I should not be willing to expend time and energy in searching for evidence to prove it. Nevertheless," he continued, seeing the light of hope break out on the face of the unfortunate young man, "I must impress upon you that the case presents enormous difficulties and that we must be prepared to find them insuperable in spite of all our efforts."

“I expect nothing but a conviction,” replied Reuben in a calm and resolute voice, “and can face it like a man if only you do not take my guilt for granted, but give me a chance, no matter how small, of making a defence.”

“Everything shall be done that I am capable of doing,” said Thorndyke, “that I can promise you. The long odds against us are themselves a spur to endeavour, as far as I am concerned. And now, let me ask you, have you any cuts or scratches on your fingers?”

Reuben Hornby held out both his hands for my colleague’s inspection, and I noticed that they were powerful and shapely, like the hands of a skilled craftsman, though faultlessly kept. Thorndyke set on the table a large condenser such as is used for microscopic work, and taking his client’s hand, brought the bright spot of light to bear on each finger in succession, examining their tips and the parts around the nails with the aid of a pocket lens.

“A fine, capable hand, this,” said he, regarding the member approvingly, as he finished his examination, “but I don’t perceive any trace of a scar on either the right or left. Will you go over them, Jervis? The robbery took place a fortnight ago, so there has been time for a small cut or scratch to heal and disappear entirely. Still, the matter is worth noting.”

He handed me the lens and I scrutinised every part of each hand without being able to detect the faintest trace of any recent wound.

“There is one other matter that must be attended to before you go,” said Thorndyke, pressing the electric bell-push by his chair. “I will take one or two prints of the left thumb for my own information.”

In response to the summons, Polton made his appearance from some lair unknown to me, but presumably the laboratory, and, having received his instructions, retired, and presently returned carrying a box, which he laid on the table. From this receptacle Thorndyke drew forth a bright copper plate mounted on a slab of hard wood, a small printer’s roller, a tube of finger-print ink, and a number of cards with very white and rather glazed surfaces.

“Now, Mr. Hornby,” said he, “your hands, I see, are beyond criticism as to cleanliness, but we will, nevertheless, give the thumb a final polish.”

Accordingly he proceeded to brush the bulb of the thumb with a well-soaked badger-hair nail-brush, and, having rinsed it in water, dried it with a silk handkerchief, and gave it a final rub on a piece of chamois leather. The thumb having been thus prepared, he squeezed out a drop of the thick ink on to the copper plate and spread it out with the roller, testing the condition of the film from time to time by touching the plate with the tip of his finger and taking an impression on one of the cards.

When the ink had been rolled out to the requisite thinness, he took Reuben’s hand and pressed the thumb lightly but firmly on to the inked plate, then, transferring the thumb to one of the cards, which he directed me to hold steady on the table, he repeated the pressure, when there was left on the card a beautifully sharp and clear impression of the bulb of the thumb, the tiny papillary ridges being shown with microscopic distinctness, and even the mouths of the sweat glands, which appeared as rows of little white dots on the black lines of the ridges. This manoeuvre was repeated a dozen times on two of the cards, each of which thus received six impressions. Thorndyke then took one or two rolled prints, *i.e.* prints produced by rolling the thumb first on the inked slab and then on the card, by which means a much larger portion of the surface of the thumb was displayed in a single print.

“And now,” said Thorndyke, “that we may be furnished with all the necessary means of comparison, we will take an impression in blood.”

The thumb was accordingly cleansed and dried afresh, when Thorndyke, having pricked his own thumb with a needle, squeezed out a good-sized drop of blood on to a card.

“There,” said he, with a smile, as he spread the drop out with the needle into a little shallow pool, “it is not every lawyer who is willing to shed his blood in the interests of his client.”

He proceeded to make a dozen prints as before on two cards, writing a number with his pencil opposite each print as he made it.

“We are now,” said he, as he finally cleansed his client’s thumb, “furnished with the material for a preliminary investigation, and if you will now give me your address, Mr. Hornby, we may consider our business concluded for the present. I must apologise to you, Mr. Lawley, for having detained you so long with these experiments.”

The lawyer had, in fact, been viewing the proceedings with hardly concealed impatience, and he now rose with evident relief that they were at an end.

“I have been highly interested,” he said mendaciously, “though I confess I do not quite fathom your intentions. And, by the way, I should like to have a few words with you on another matter, if Mr. Reuben would not mind waiting for me in the square just a few minutes.”

“Not at all,” said Reuben, who was, I perceived, in no way deceived by the lawyer’s pretence. “Don’t hurry on my account. My time is my own—at present.” He held out his hand to Thorndyke, who grasped it cordially.

“Good-bye, Mr. Hornby,” said the latter. “Do not be unreasonably sanguine, but at the same time, do not lose heart. Keep your wits about you and let me know at once if anything occurs to you that may have a bearing on the case.”

The young man then took his leave, and, as the door closed after him, Mr. Lawley turned towards Thorndyke.

“I thought I had better have a word with you alone,” he said, “just to hear what line you propose to take up, for I confess that your attitude has puzzled me completely.”

“What line would you propose?” asked Thorndyke.

“Well,” said the lawyer, with a shrug of his shoulders, “the position seems to be this: Our young friend has stolen a parcel of diamonds and has been found out—at least, that is how the matter presents itself to me.”

“That is not how it presents itself to me,” said Thorndyke drily. “He may have taken the diamonds or he may not. I have no means of judging until I have sifted the evidence and acquired a few more facts. This I hope to do in the course of the next day or two, and

I suggest that we postpone the consideration of our plan of campaign until I have seen what line of defence it is possible to adopt.”

“As you will,” replied the lawyer, taking up his hat, “but I am afraid you are encouraging the young rogue to entertain hopes that will only make his fall the harder—to say nothing of our own position. We don’t want to make ourselves ridiculous in court, you know.”

“I don’t, certainly,” agreed Thorndyke. “However, I will look into the matter and communicate with you in the course of a day or two.”

He stood holding the door open as the lawyer descended the stairs, and when the footsteps at length died away, he closed it sharply and turned to me with an air of annoyance.

“The ‘young rogue,’” he remarked, “does not appear to me to have been very happy in his choice of a solicitor. By the way, Jervis, I understand you are out of employment just now?”

“That is so,” I answered.

“Would you care to help me—as a matter of business, of course—to work up this case? I have a lot of other work on hand and your assistance would be of great value to me.”

I said, with great truth, that I should be delighted.

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “come round to breakfast to-morrow and we will settle the terms, and you can commence your duties at once. And now let us light our pipes and finish our yarns as though agitated clients and thick-headed solicitors had no existence.”

Chapter III: A Lady in the Case

When I arrived at Thorndyke's chambers on the following morning, I found my friend already hard at work. Breakfast was laid at one end of the table, while at the other stood a microscope of the pattern used for examining plate-cultures of micro-organisms, on the wide stage of which was one of the cards bearing six thumb-prints in blood. A condenser threw a bright spot of light on the card, which Thorndyke had been examining when I knocked, as I gathered from the position of the chair, which he now pushed back against the wall.

"I see you have commenced work on our problem," I remarked as, in response to a double ring of the electric bell, Polton entered with the materials for our repast.

"Yes," answered Thorndyke. "I have opened the campaign, supported, as usual, by my trusty chief-of-staff, eh! Polton?"

The little man, whose intellectual, refined countenance and dignified bearing seemed oddly out of character with the tea-tray that he carried, smiled proudly, and, with a glance of affectionate admiration at my friend, replied, "Yes, sir. We haven't been letting the grass grow under our feet. There's a beautiful negative washing upstairs and a bromide enlargement too, which will be mounted and dried by the time you have finished your breakfast."

"A wonderful man that, Jervis," my friend observed as his assistant retired. "Looks like a rural dean or a chancery judge, and was obviously intended by Nature to be a professor of physics. As an actual fact he was first a watchmaker, then a maker of optical instruments, and now he is mechanical factotum to a medical jurist. He is my right-hand, is Polton. Takes an idea before you have time to utter it—but you will make his more intimate acquaintance by-and-by."

"Where did you pick him up?" I asked.

“He was an in-patient at the hospital when I first met him, miserably ill and broken, a victim of poverty and undeserved misfortune. I gave him one or two little jobs, and when I found what class of man he was I took him permanently into my service. He is perfectly devoted to me, and his gratitude is as boundless as it is uncalled for.”

“What are the photographs he was referring to?” I asked.

“He is making an enlarged *facsimile* of one of the thumb-prints on bromide paper and a negative of the same size in case we want the print repeated.”

“You evidently have some expectation of being able to help poor Hornby,” said I, “though I cannot imagine how you propose to go to work. To me his case seems as hopeless a one as it is possible to conceive. One doesn’t like to condemn him, but yet his innocence seems almost unthinkable.”

“It does certainly look like a hopeless case,” Thorndyke agreed, “and I see no way out of it at present. But I make it a rule, in all cases, to proceed on the strictly classical lines of inductive inquiry—collect facts, make hypotheses, test them and seek for verification. And I always endeavour to keep a perfectly open mind.

“Now, in the present case, assuming, as we must, that the robbery has actually taken place, there are four conceivable hypotheses: (1) that the robbery was committed by Reuben Hornby; (2) that it was committed by Walter Hornby; (3) that it was committed by John Hornby, or (4) that it was committed by some other person or persons.

“The last hypothesis I propose to disregard for the present and confine myself to the examination of the other three.”

“You don’t think it possible that Mr. Hornby could have stolen the diamonds out of his own safe?” I exclaimed.

“I incline at present to no one theory of the matter,” replied Thorndyke. “I merely state the hypotheses. John Hornby had access to the diamonds, therefore it is possible that he stole them.”

“But surely he was responsible to the owners.”

“Not in the absence of gross negligence, which the owners would have difficulty in proving. You see, he was what is called a

gratuitous bailee, and in such a case no responsibility for loss lies with the bailee unless there has been gross negligence.”

“But the thumb-mark, my dear fellow!” I exclaimed. “How can you possibly get over that?”

“I don’t know that I can,” answered Thorndyke calmly, “but I see you are taking the same view as the police, who persist in regarding a finger-print as a kind of magical touchstone, a final proof, beyond which inquiry need not go. Now, this is an entire mistake. A finger-print is merely a fact—a very important and significant one, I admit—but still a fact, which, like any other fact, requires to be weighed and measured with reference to its evidential value.”

“And what do you propose to do first?”

“I shall first satisfy myself that the suspected thumb-print is identical in character with that of Reuben Hornby—of which, however, I have very little doubt, for the finger-print experts may fairly be trusted in their own speciality.”

“And then?”

“I shall collect fresh facts, in which I look to you for assistance, and, if we have finished breakfast, I may as well induct you into your new duties.”

He rose and rang the bell, and then, fetching from the office four small, paper-covered notebooks, laid them before me on the table.

“One of these books,” said he, “we will devote to data concerning Reuben Hornby. You will find out anything you can—anything, mind, no matter how trivial or apparently irrelevant—in any way connected with him and enter it in this book.” He wrote on the cover “Reuben Hornby” and passed the book to me. “In this second book you will, in like manner, enter anything that you can learn about Walter Hornby, and, in the third book, data concerning John Hornby. As to the fourth book, you will keep that for stray facts connected with the case but not coming under either of the other headings. And now let us look at the product of Polton’s industry.”

He took from his assistant’s hand a photograph ten inches long by eight broad, done on glazed bromide paper and mounted flatly on stiff card. It showed a greatly magnified *facsimile* of one of the thumb-prints, in which all the minute details, such as the orifices of

the sweat glands and trifling irregularities in the ridges, which, in the original, could be seen only with the aid of a lens, were plainly visible to the naked eye. Moreover, the entire print was covered by a network of fine black lines, by which it was divided into a multitude of small squares, each square being distinguished by a number.

“Excellent, Polton,” said Thorndyke approvingly, “a most admirable enlargement. You see, Jervis, we have photographed the thumb-print in contact with a numbered micrometer divided into square twelfths-of-an-inch. The magnification is eight diameters, so that the squares are here each two-thirds-of-an-inch in diameter. I have a number of these micrometers of different scales, and I find them invaluable in examining cheques, doubtful signatures and such like. I see you have packed up the camera and the microscope, Polton. Have you put in the micrometer?”

“Yes, sir,” replied Polton, “and the six-inch objective and the low-power eye-piece. Everything is in the case, and I have put ‘special rapid’ plates into the dark-slides in case the light should be bad.”

“Then we will go forth and beard the Scotland Yard lions in their den,” said Thorndyke, putting on his hat and gloves.

“But surely,” said I, “you are not going to drag that great microscope to Scotland Yard, when you only want eight diameters. Haven’t you a dissecting microscope or some other portable instrument?”

“We have a most delightful instrument of the dissecting type, of Polton’s own make—he shall show it to you. But I may have need of a more powerful instrument—and here let me give you a word of warning: Whatever you may see me do, make no comments before the officials. We are seeking information, not giving it, you understand.”

At this moment the little brass knocker on the inner door—the outer oak being open—uttered a timid and apologetic rat-tat.

“Who the deuce can that be?” muttered Thorndyke, replacing the microscope on the table. He strode across to the door and opened it somewhat brusquely, but immediately whisked his hat off, and I then perceived a lady standing on the threshold.

“Dr. Thorndyke?” she inquired, and as my colleague bowed, she continued, “I ought to have written to ask for an appointment but the matter is rather urgent—it concerns Mr. Reuben Hornby and I only learned from him this morning that he had consulted you.”

“Pray come in,” said Thorndyke. “Dr. Jervis and I were just setting out for Scotland Yard on this very business. Let me present you to my colleague, who is working up the case with me.”

Our visitor, a tall handsome girl of twenty or thereabouts, returned my bow and remarked with perfect self-possession, “My name is Gibson—Miss Juliet Gibson. My business is of a very simple character and need not detain you many minutes.”

She seated herself in the chair that Thorndyke placed for her, and continued in a brisk and business-like manner, “I must tell you who I am in order to explain my visit to you. For the last six years I have lived with Mr. and Mrs. Hornby, although I am no relation to them. I first came to the house as a sort of companion to Mrs. Hornby, though, as I was only fifteen at the time, I need hardly say that my duties were not very onerous—in fact, I think Mrs. Hornby took me because I was an orphan without the proper means of getting a livelihood, and she had no children of her own.

“Three years ago I came into a little fortune which rendered me independent, but I had been so happy with my kind friends that I asked to be allowed to remain with them, and there I have been ever since in the position of an adopted daughter. Naturally, I have seen a great deal of their nephews, who spend a good part of their time at the house, and I need not tell you that the horrible charge against Reuben has fallen upon us like a thunderbolt. Now, what I have come to say to you is this: I do not believe that Reuben stole those diamonds. It is entirely out of character with all my previous experience of him. I am convinced that he is innocent, and I am prepared to back my opinion.”

“In what way?” asked Thorndyke.

“By supplying the sinews of war,” replied Miss Gibson. “I understand that legal advice and assistance involves considerable expense.”

“I am afraid you are quite correctly informed,” said Thorndyke.

“Well, Reuben’s pecuniary resources are, I am sure, quite small, so it is necessary for his friends to support him, and I want you to promise me that nothing shall be left undone that might help to prove his innocence if I make myself responsible for any costs that he is unable to meet. I should prefer, of course, not to appear in the matter, if it could be avoided.”

“Your friendship is of an eminently practical kind, Miss Gibson,” said my colleague, with a smile. “As a matter of fact, the costs are no affair of mine. If the occasion arose for the exercise of your generosity you would have to approach Mr. Reuben’s solicitor through the medium of your guardian, Mr. Hornby, and with the consent of the accused. But I do not suppose the occasion will arise, although I am very glad you called, as you may be able to give us valuable assistance in other ways. For example, you might answer one or two apparently impertinent questions.”

“I should not consider any question impertinent that you considered necessary to ask,” our visitor replied.

“Then,” said Thorndyke, “I will venture to inquire if any special relations exist between you and Mr. Reuben.”

“You look for the inevitable motive in a woman,” said Miss Gibson, laughing and flushing a little. “No, there have been no tender passages between Reuben and me. We are merely old and intimate friends. In fact, there is what I may call a tendency in another direction—Walter Hornby.”

“Do you mean that you are engaged to Mr. Walter?”

“Oh, no,” she replied, “but he has asked me to marry him—he has asked me, in fact, more than once, and I really believe that he has a sincere attachment to me.”

She made this latter statement with an odd air, as though the thing asserted were curious and rather incredible, and the tone was evidently noticed by Thorndyke as well as me for he rejoined, “Of course he has. Why not?”

“Well, you see,” replied Miss Gibson, “I have some six hundred a year of my own and should not be considered a bad match for a young man like Walter, who has neither property nor expectations, and one naturally takes that into account. But still, as I have said,

I believe he is quite sincere in his professions and not merely attracted by my money.”

“I do not find your opinion at all incredible,” said Thorndyke, with a smile, “even if Mr. Walter were quite a mercenary young man—which, I take it, he is not.”

Miss Gibson flushed very prettily as she replied, “Oh, pray do not trouble to pay me compliments. I assure you I am by no means insensible of my merits. But with regard to Walter Hornby, I should be sorry to apply the term ‘mercenary’ to him, and yet—well, I have never met a young man who showed a stronger appreciation of the value of money. He means to succeed in life and I have no doubt he will.”

“And do I understand that you refused him?”

“Yes. My feelings towards him are quite friendly, but not of such a nature as to allow me to contemplate marrying him.”

“And now, to return for a moment to Mr. Reuben. You have known him for some years?”

“I have known him intimately for six years,” replied Miss Gibson.

“And what sort of character do you give him?”

“Speaking from my own observation of him,” she replied, “I can say that I have never known him to tell an untruth or do a dishonourable deed. As to theft, it is merely ridiculous. His habits have always been inexpensive and frugal, he is unambitious to a fault, and in respect to the ‘main chance’ his indifference is as conspicuous as Walter’s keenness. He is a generous man, too, although careful and industrious.”

“Thank you, Miss Gibson,” said Thorndyke. “We shall apply to you for further information as the case progresses. I am sure that you will help us if you can, and that you can help us if you will, with your clear head and your admirable frankness. If you will leave us your card, Dr. Jervis and I will keep you informed of our prospects and ask for your assistance whenever we need it.”

After our fair visitor had departed, Thorndyke stood for a minute or more gazing dreamily into the fire. Then, with a quick glance at his watch, he resumed his hat and, catching up the microscope, handed the camera case to me and made for the door.

“How the time goes!” he exclaimed, as we descended the stairs, “but it hasn’t been wasted, Jervis, hey?”

“No, I suppose not,” I answered tentatively.

“You suppose not!” he replied. “Why here is as pretty a little problem as you could desire—what would be called in the jargon of the novels, a psychological problem—and it is your business to work it out, too.”

“You mean as to Miss Gibson’s relations with these two young men?”

Thorndyke nodded.

“Is it any concern of ours?” I asked.

“Certainly it is,” he replied. “Everything is a concern of ours at this preliminary stage. We are groping about for a clue and must let nothing pass unscrutinised.”

“Well, then, to begin with, she is not wildly infatuated with Walter Hornby, I should say.”

“No,” agreed Thorndyke, laughing softly, “we may take it that the canny Walter has not inspired a grand passion.”

“Then,” I resumed, “if I were a suitor for Miss Gibson’s hand, I think I would sooner stand in Reuben’s shoes than in Walter’s.”

“There again I am with you,” said Thorndyke. “Go on.”

“Well,” I continued, “our fair visitor conveyed to me the impression that her evident admiration of Reuben’s character was tempered by something that she had heard from a third party. That expression of hers, ‘speaking from my own observation,’ seemed to imply that her observations of him were not in entire agreement with somebody else’s.”

“Good man!” exclaimed Thorndyke, slapping me on the back, to the undissembled surprise of a policeman whom we were passing, “that is what I had hoped for in you—the capacity to perceive the essential underneath the obvious. Yes, somebody has been saying something about our client, and the thing that we have to find out is, what is it that has been said and who has been saying it. We shall have to make a pretext for another interview with Miss Gibson.”

“By the way, why didn’t you ask her what she meant?” I asked foolishly.

Thorndyke grinned in my face. "Why didn't you?" he retorted.

"No," I rejoined, "I suppose it is not politic to appear too discerning. Let me carry the microscope for a time. It is making your arm ache, I see."

"Thanks," said he, handing the case to me and rubbing his fingers, "it is rather ponderous."

"I can't make out what you want with this great instrument," I said. "A common pocket lens would do all that you require. Besides, a six-inch objective will not magnify more than two or three diameters."

"Two, with the draw-tube closed," replied Thorndyke, "and the low-power eye-piece brings it up to four. Polton made them both for me for examining cheques, bank-notes and other large objects. But you will understand when you see me use the instrument, and remember, you are to make no comments."

We had by this time arrived at the entrance to Scotland Yard, and were passing up the narrow thoroughfare, when we encountered a uniformed official who halted and saluted my colleague.

"Ah, I thought we should see you here before long, Doctor," said he genially. "I heard this morning that you have this thumb-print case in hand."

"Yes," replied Thorndyke, "I am going to see what can be done for the defence."

"Well," said the officer as he ushered us into the building, "you've given us a good many surprises, but you'll give us a bigger one if you can make anything of this. It's a foregone conclusion, I should say."

"My dear fellow," said Thorndyke, "there is no such thing. You mean that there is a *prima facie* case against the accused."

"Put it that way if you like," replied the officer, with a sly smile, "but I think you will find this about the hardest nut you ever tried your teeth on—and they're pretty strong teeth too, I'll say that. You had better come into Mr. Singleton's office," and he conducted us along a corridor and into a large, barely-furnished room, where we found a sedate-looking gentleman seated at a large writing table.

“How-d’ye-do, Doctor?” said the latter, rising and holding out his hand. “I can guess what you’ve come for. Want to see that thumb-print, eh?”

“Quite right,” answered Thorndyke, and then, having introduced me, he continued: “We were partners in the last game, but we are on opposite sides of the board this time.”

“Yes,” agreed Mr. Singleton, “and we are going to give you check-mate.”

He unlocked a drawer and drew forth a small portfolio, from which he extracted a piece of paper which he laid on the table. It appeared to be a sheet torn from a perforated memorandum block, and bore the pencilled inscription: “*Handed in by Reuben at 7.3 p.m., 9.3.01. J. H.*” At one end was a dark, glossy blood-stain, made by the falling of a good-sized drop, and this was smeared slightly, apparently by a finger or thumb having been pressed on it. Near to it were two or three smaller smears and a remarkably distinct and clean print of a thumb.

Thorndyke gazed intently at the paper for a minute or two, scrutinising the thumb-print and the smears in turn, but making no remark, while Mr. Singleton watched his impassive face with expectant curiosity.

“Not much difficulty in identifying that mark,” the official at length observed.

“No,” agreed Thorndyke, “it is an excellent impression and a very distinctive pattern, even without the scar.”

“Yes,” rejoined Mr. Singleton, “the scar makes it absolutely conclusive. You have a print with you, I suppose?”

“Yes,” replied Thorndyke, and he drew from a wide flap-pocket the enlarged photograph, at the sight of which Mr. Singleton’s face broadened into a smile.

“You don’t want to put on spectacles to look at that,” he remarked, “not that you gain anything by so much enlargement, three diameters is ample for studying the ridge-patterns. I see you have divided it up into numbered squares—not a bad plan, but ours, or rather Galton’s, for we borrowed the method from him—is better for this purpose.”

He drew from the portfolio a half-plate photograph of the thumb-print which appeared magnified to about four inches in length. The print was marked by a number of figures written minutely with a fine-pointed pen, each figure being placed on an "island," a loop, a bifurcation or some other striking and characteristic portion of the ridge-pattern.

"This system of marking with reference numbers," said Mr. Singleton, "is better than your method of squares, because the numbers are only placed at points which are important for comparison, whereas your squares or the intersections of the lines fall arbitrarily on important or unimportant points according to chance. Besides, we can't let you mark our original, you know, though, of course, we can give you a photograph, which will do as well."

"I was going to ask you to let me take a photograph presently," said Thorndyke.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Singleton, "if you would rather have one of your own taking. I know you don't care to take anything on trust. And now I must get on with my work, if you will excuse me. Inspector Johnson will give you any assistance you may require."

"And see that I don't pocket the original," added Thorndyke, with a smile at the inspector who had shown us in.

"Oh, I'll see to that," said the latter, grinning, and, as Mr. Singleton returned to his table, Thorndyke unlocked the microscope case and drew forth the instrument.

"What, are you going to put it under the microscope?" exclaimed Mr. Singleton, looking round with a broad smile.

"Must do something for my fee, you know," replied Thorndyke, as he set up the microscope and screwed on two extra objectives to the triple nose-piece.

"You observe that there is no deception," he added to the inspector, as he took the paper from Mr. Singleton's table and placed it between two slips of glass.

"I'm watching you, sir," replied the officer, with a chuckle, and he did watch, with close attention and great interest, while Thorndyke laid the glass slips on the microscope stage and proceeded to focus.

I also watched, and was a good deal exercised in my mind by my colleague's proceedings. After a preliminary glance with the six-inch glass, he swung round the nose-piece to the half-inch objective and slipped in a more powerful eye-piece, and with this power he examined the blood-stains carefully, and then moved the thumb-print into the field of vision. After looking at this for some time with deep attention, he drew from the case a tiny spirit lamp which was evidently filled with an alcoholic solution of some sodium salt, for when he lit it I recognised the characteristic yellow sodium flame. Then he replaced one of the objectives by a spectroscopic attachment, and having placed the little lamp close to the microscope mirror, adjusted the spectroscope. Evidently my friend was fixing the position of the "D" line (or sodium line) in the spectrum.

Having completed the adjustments, he now examined afresh the blood-smears and the thumb-print, both by transmitted and reflected light, and I observed him hurriedly draw one or two diagrams in his notebook. Then he replaced the spectroscope and lamp in the case and brought forth the micrometer—a slip of rather thin glass about three inches by one-and-a-half—which he laid over the thumb-print in the place of the upper plate of glass.

Having secured it in position by the clips, he moved it about, comparing its appearance with that of the lines on the large photograph, which he held in his hand. After a considerable amount of adjustment and readjustment, he appeared to be satisfied, for he remarked to me, "I think I have got the lines in the same position as they are on our print, so, with Inspector Johnson's assistance, we will take a photograph which we can examine at our leisure."

He extracted the camera—a quarter-plate instrument—from its case and opened it. Then, having swung the microscope on its stand into a horizontal position, he produced from the camera case a slab of mahogany with three brass feet, on which he placed the camera, and which brought the latter to a level with the eye-piece of the microscope.

The front of the camera was fitted with a short sleeve of thin black leather, and into this the eye-piece end of the microscope

was now passed, the sleeve being secured round the barrel of the microscope by a stout india rubber band, thus producing a completely light-tight connection.

Everything was now ready for taking the photograph. The light from the window having been concentrated on the thumb-print by means of a condenser, Thorndyke proceeded to focus the image on the ground-glass screen with extreme care and then, slipping a small leather cap over the objective, introduced the dark slide and drew out the shutter.

“I will ask you to sit down and remain quite still while I make the exposure,” he said to me and the inspector. “A very little vibration is enough to destroy the sharpness of the image.”

We seated ourselves accordingly, and Thorndyke then removed the cap, standing motionless, watch in hand, while he exposed the first plate.

“We may as well take a second, in case this should not turn out quite perfect,” he said, as he replaced the cap and closed the shutter.

He reversed the dark slide and made another exposure in the same way, and then, having removed the micrometer and replaced it by a slip of plain glass, he made two more exposures.

“There are two plates left,” he remarked, as he drew out the second dark slide. “I think I will take a record of the blood-stain on them.”

He accordingly made two more exposures—one of the larger blood-stain and one of the smaller smears.

“There,” said he, with an air of satisfaction, as he proceeded to pack up what the inspector described as his “box of tricks.” “I think we have all the data that we can squeeze out of Scotland Yard, and I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Singleton, for giving so many facilities to your natural enemy, the counsel for the defence.”

“Not our natural enemies, Doctor,” protested Mr. Singleton. “We work for a conviction, of course, but we don’t throw obstacles in the way of the defence. You know that perfectly well.”

“Of course I do, my dear sir,” replied Thorndyke, shaking the official by the hand. “Haven’t I benefited by your help a score of times? But I am greatly obliged all the same. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Doctor. I wish you luck, though I fear you will find it ‘no go’ this time.”

“We shall see,” replied Thorndyke, and with a friendly wave of the hand to the inspector he caught up the two cases and led the way out of the building.

Chapter IV: Confidences

During our walk home my friend was unusually thoughtful and silent, and his face bore a look of concentration under which I thought I could detect, in spite of his habitually impassive expression, a certain suppressed excitement of a not entirely unpleasurable kind. I forbore, however, from making any remarks or asking questions, not only because I saw that he was preoccupied, but also because, from my knowledge of the man, I judged that he would consider it his duty to keep his own counsel and to make no unnecessary confidences even to me.

On our arrival at his chambers he immediately handed over the camera to Polton with a few curt directions as to the development of the plates, and, lunch being already prepared, we sat down at the table without delay.

We had proceeded with our meal in silence for some time when Thorndyke suddenly laid down his knife and fork and looked into my face with a smile of quiet amusement.

"It has just been borne in upon me, Jervis," said he, "that you are the most companionable fellow in the world. You have the heaven-sent gift of silence."

"If silence is the test of companionability," I answered, with a grin, "I think I can pay you a similar compliment in even more emphatic terms."

He laughed cheerfully and rejoined, "You are pleased to be sarcastic, I observe, but I maintain my position. The capacity to preserve an opportune silence is the rarest and most precious of social accomplishments. Now, most men would have plied me with questions and babbled comments on my proceedings at Scotland Yard, whereas you have allowed me to sort out, without interruption, a mass of evidence while it is still fresh and impressive, to

docket each item and stow it away in the pigeonholes of my brain. By the way, I have made a ridiculous oversight.”

“What is that?” I asked.

“The ‘Thumbograph.’ I never ascertained whether the police have it or whether it is still in the possession of Mrs. Hornby.”

“Does it matter?” I inquired.

“Not much. Only I must see it. And perhaps it will furnish an excellent pretext for you to call on Miss Gibson. As I am busy at the hospital this afternoon and Polton has his hands full, it would be a good plan for you to drop in at Endsley Gardens—that is the address, I think—and if you can see Miss Gibson, try to get a confidential chat with her, and extend your knowledge of the manners and customs of the three Messieurs Hornby. Put on your best bedside manner and keep your weather eye lifting. Find out everything you can as to the characters and habits of those three gentlemen, regardless of all scruples of delicacy. Everything is of importance to us, even to the names of their tailors.”

“And with regard to the ‘Thumbograph?’”

“Find out who has it, and, if it is still in Mrs. Hornby’s possession, get her to lend it to us or—what might, perhaps, be better—get her permission to take a photograph of it.”

“It shall be done according to your word,” said I. “I will furbish up my exterior, and this very afternoon make my first appearance in the character of Paul Pry.”

About an hour later I found myself upon the doorstep of Mr. Hornby’s house in Endsley Gardens listening to the jangling of the bell that I had just set in motion.

“Miss Gibson, sir?” repeated the parlourmaid in response to my question. “She *was* going out, but I am not sure whether she has gone yet. If you will step in, I will go and see.”

I followed her into the drawing-room, and, threading my way amongst the litter of small tables and miscellaneous furniture by which ladies nowadays convert their special domain into the semblance of a broker’s shop, let go my anchor in the vicinity of the fireplace to await the parlourmaid’s report.

I had not long to wait, for in less than a minute Miss Gibson herself entered the room. She wore her hat and gloves, and I congratulated myself on my timely arrival.

"I didn't expect to see you again so soon, Dr. Jervis," she said, holding out her hand with a frank and friendly manner, "but you are very welcome all the same. You have come to tell me something?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "I have come to ask you something."

"Well, that is better than nothing," she said, with a shade of disappointment. "Won't you sit down?"

I seated myself with caution on a dwarf chair of scrofulous aspect, and opened my business without preamble.

"Do you remember a thing called a 'Thumbograph'?"

"Indeed I do," she replied with energy. "It was the cause of all this trouble."

"Do you know if the police took possession of it?"

"The detective took it to Scotland Yard that the finger-print experts might examine it and compare the two thumb-prints, and they wanted to keep it, but Mrs. Hornby was so distressed at the idea of its being used in evidence that they let her have it back. You see, they really had no further need of it, as they could take a print for themselves when they had Reuben in custody. In fact, he volunteered to have a print taken at once, as soon as he was arrested, and that was done."

"So the 'Thumbograph' is now in Mrs. Hornby's possession?"

"Yes, unless she has destroyed it. She spoke of doing so."

"I hope she has not," said I, in some alarm, "for Dr. Thorndyke is extremely anxious, for some reason, to examine it."

"Well, she will be down in a few minutes, and then we shall know. I told her you were here. Have you any idea what Dr. Thorndyke's reason is for wanting to see it?"

"None whatever," I replied. "Dr. Thorndyke is as close as an oyster. He treats me as he treats everyone else—he listens attentively, observes closely, and says nothing."

"It doesn't sound very agreeable," mused Miss Gibson, "and yet he seemed very nice and sympathetic."

“He is very nice and sympathetic,” I retorted with some emphasis, “but he doesn’t make himself agreeable by divulging his clients’ secrets.”

“I suppose not, and I regard myself as very effectively snubbed,” said she, smiling, but evidently somewhat piqued by my not very tactful observation.

I was hastening to repair my error with apologies and self-accusations, when the door opened and an elderly lady entered the room. She was somewhat stout, amiable and placid of mien, and impressed me (to be entirely truthful) as looking rather foolish.

“Here is Mrs. Hornby,” said Miss Gibson, presenting me to her hostess, and she continued, “Dr. Jervis has come to ask about the ‘Thumbograph.’ You haven’t destroyed it, I hope?”

“No, my dear,” replied Mrs. Hornby. “I have it in my little bureau. What did Dr. Jervis wish to know about it?”

Seeing that she was terrified lest some new and dreadful surprise should be sprung upon her, I hastened to reassure her.

“My colleague, Dr. Thorndyke, is anxious to examine it. He is directing your nephew’s defence, you know.”

“Yes, yes,” said Mrs. Hornby. “Juliet told me about him. She says he is a dear. Do you agree with her?”

Here I caught Miss Gibson’s eye, in which was a mischievous twinkle, and noted a little deeper pink in her cheeks.

“Well,” I answered dubiously, “I have never considered my colleague in the capacity of a dear, but I have a very high opinion of him in every respect.”

“That, no doubt, is the masculine equivalent,” said Miss Gibson, recovering from the momentary embarrassment that Mrs. Hornby’s artless repetition of her phrase had produced. “I think the feminine expression is more epigrammatic and comprehensive. But to return to the object of Dr. Jervis’s visit. Would you let him have the ‘Thumbograph,’ aunt, to show to Dr. Thorndyke?”

“Oh, my dear Juliet,” replied Mrs. Hornby, “I would do anything—anything—to help our poor boy. I will never believe that he could be guilty of theft—common, vulgar theft. There has been some dreadful mistake—I am convinced there has—I told the