



# The Narrative of John Smith

*Arthur Conan Doyle*

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## The Narrative of John Smith Arthur Conan Doyle

Before there was the astute detective Sherlock Holmes and his capable compatriot Watson, there was the opinionated Everyman John Smith. In 1883, when he was just twenty-three, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote *The Narrative of John Smith* while he was living in Portsmouth and struggling to establish himself as both a doctor and a writer. He had already succeeded in having a number of short stories published in leading magazines of the day, such as *Blackwood's*, *All the Year Round*, *London Society*, and the *Boy's Own Paper*—but as was the accepted practice of literary journals of the time, his stories had been published anonymously. Thus, Conan Doyle knew that in order to truly establish his name as a writer, he would have to write a novel. That novel—the first he ever wrote and only now published for the first time—is *The Narrative of John Smith*.

Many of the themes and stylistic tropes of his later writing, including his first Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*—published in 1887—can be clearly seen. More a series of ruminations than a traditional novel, *The Narrative of John Smith* is of considerable biographical importance and provides an exceptional window into the mind of the creator of Sherlock Holmes. Through John Smith, a fifty-year-old man confined to his room by an attack of gout, Conan Doyle sets down his thoughts and opinions on a range of subjects—including literature, science, religion, war, and education—with no detectable insecurity or diffidence. His writing is full of bravado.

Though unfinished, *The Narrative of John Smith* stands as a fascinating record of the early work of a man on his way to being one of the best-known authors in the world. This book will be welcomed with enthusiasm by the numerous Conan Doyle devotees.

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