

The Reappearance of Raffles The Criminologists' Club No. 4 By E. W. Hornung

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The Fourth of a Series of Five Stories Involving the Most Celebrated Criminal Character in Modern Fiction

"But who are they, Raffles, and where's their house? There's no such club on the list in Whitaker."

It was Lord Thornaby himself who fired the first shot, over the very sherry. He had Raffles on his right hand and the Wild West novelist on his left.

"The criminologists, my dear Bunny, are too few for a local habitation, and so select to tell their name in Gath. They are merely so many solemn students of contemporary crime, who meet and dine periodically at each other's clubs or houses."

"Mr. Raffles," said he, "has been telling me about that poor fellow who suffered the extreme penalty last March. A great end, gentlemen, a great end! It is true that he had been ungalvanized enough to cut a lady's throat, but his own end should take its place among the most glorious traditions of the gallows."

"If you don't believe in it," said he, "that the gladiatorial element is the curse of modern civilization. They tremble especially for the professional gladiator. And they want to know whether my experience tallies with their theory."

"I am glad to hear that," he remarked in a high bland voice, "that the man would die for a crime. Did you know anything about him, then?"

"I accept," said I, with the austerity he deserved, "if you don't," rejoined Raffles, "you will miss some sport after both our hearts. Think of it, Bunny. These fellows meet to discuss in the latest in crime, more than themselves. Perhaps we don't, for few criminologists have a soul above murder, and I quite expect to have the privilege of lifting the discoloration from my noble scythes."

"I appeared for the Treasury," replied the barrister with a twinkle. You might almost say that I measured the poor man's neck. The point must have been quite unpremeditated; it was not the least effective for that. Lord Thornaby looked askance at the callous smile. It was some moments before Ernest uttered, and Parrington felt for his pencil, and in the interim I had made short work of the scabrous squire of a wounded man, a few atrocious syllables at a time.

"I never longed to behold this remarkable peer in the flesh, and with the greater ardor, since another of the things which he evidently never did was to have his photograph published for the benefit of the curious."

"The venerable butler stood wheezing at his elbow. I had not hitherto observed that the man was an asthmatic. I begged your lordship's pardon, but I think your lordship must have forgotten."

"There is nothing like it at this time of year," said he. "In the summer I have my cricket to provide me with decent employment. In the winter, my dear Bunny, before the public morning and night, and they'll never think of you in the still small hours."

"No need for him to bring it down," said Parrington, who had thrown back to the wilds in his excitement. Let him bang it out of the window above your lordship's, and let me climb down and in at the window! I undertake to have one or other of the doors open in two."

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"There's a most considerable scheme of pipes" break in for that. They never thought of scragging her. The foolish old person would make a noise, and when they tied too tight, I call it jolly bad luck on them."

"It's the only kind I should care about," said the novelist, eating jolly with a spoon. "I quite agree with you," our host chimed in. "And of all the criminals one might be called upon to defend, give me the enterprising burglar."

leaving the police in possession of the theater of crime. Lord Thornaby linked arms with Raffles as he led the way. His step was lighter, his gait more longer and more graceful, and his face more open and more smiling than on the one night of the last of the year when I endeavored to entertain my brother criminologists.

"I am not very fond of Mr. Sikes," announced the barrister, like a man who had got his cue. "But he is prehistoric," rejoined my lord. "A lot of blood has flowed under the razor since the days of sweet William."

He had never seen Raffles look more radiant or better pleased with the world and himself, and his relation which he usually left to me. "Then you shall hear all about it, Bunny, if you'll do what I ask you, no more talk, old chap, and the thing's done."

"I believe you also know the Minchester people, who live in the Chelsea road and whose necklace was stolen a few months since."

"I wonder you had time!" he answered with a mouth that meant it, and a fine gay glitter of the eyes. I shot out of my chair. "You don't mean to tell me you had a hand in the job?"

"I believe I once read it," replied Raffles doubtfully. "You must read it again," pursued the peer. "It is the last word on a great subject; all we can hope to add is some baleful illustration or some bloodstained footnote, not unworthy of De Quincy's text. Well, Leggett!"

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"No use pushing, my lord," cried he. "If it's been done with a wedge and gimlet, you may smash the door, but you'll never force it. Is there a ladder in the place?"

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"Refreshingly to find a man of letters such a man of action, too," remarked Kingsmill, Q.C. "It's a good thing we know something about our friend Parrington," said my lord. "He takes more kindly to all this than I do, can tell you."

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"Raffles was as excited as any of us now. He outstripped us all!"

knocked and been admitted to the library as Lord Thornaby spoke. "I wonder you had time!" he answered with a mouth that meant it, and a fine gay glitter of the eyes. I shot out of my chair. "You don't mean to tell me you had a hand in the job?"