

THE SEMI-WEEKLY TELEGRAPH, ST. JOHN, N. B., SATURDAY, JUNE 17, 1905.

RAFFLES, the AMATEUR CRACKSMAN.

WILFUL MURDER

Fourth Story in the Absorbing Raffles Series
BY E. W. HORNING

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Of the various robberies in which we were both concerned, it is but the for, I feel that will bear telling at any length. Not that the others contained details which even I would hesitate to recount; it is, rather, the very absence of outward incident which renders them useless for my present purpose. In point of fact our plans were so carefully laid (by Raffles) that the chances of a hitch were invariably reduced to a minimum before we went to work. We might be disappointed in the market value of our haul; but it was quite the exception for us to find ourselves confronted by unforeseen impediments, or involved in a really dramatic dilemma. There was a sameness even in

"Oh dear, no; only old Baird."
"Baird? But wasn't it Baird who took the emeralds?"
"It was."
"Then how came he to chase you?"
"My dear fellow, I'll tell you if you give me a chance; it's really nothing to get in the least excited about. Old Baird has at last spotted that I'm not quite the common cracksmen he has taken me for. He's been doing his best to run me to my burrow."
"And you call that nothing?"
"It would be something if he had succeeded; but he has still to do that. I admit, however, that he made me sit up for the time being. It all comes of going on

skinned him. By God, but I'd like to skin old Baird!"
"And his tone took a sudden low fury, made the more noticeable by another long silence which lasted, indeed, throughout an admirable dinner at the club and for some time after we had settled down in a quiet corner of the smoking-room with our coffee and cigars. Then at last I saw Raffles looking at me with his lazy smile and I knew that the morose fit was at an end."
"I dare say you wonder what I've been thinking about all this time," said he. "I've been thinking what rot it is to go doing things by halves!"
"Well," said I, returning his smile,



Posed by Kylie Bellaw, Management Lieber Co.

THE COVERING FIGURE ROSE GRADUALLY ERECT

our spoil; for, of course, only the most precious stones were worth the trouble we took and the risks we ran. In short, the most successful escapades would prove the greatest weariness of all narrative forms; and none more so than the dull affair of the Arabian emeralds, some eight or nine weeks after the Manchester cricket week. The former, however, had a sequel that I would rather forget than all our burglarious put together.

It was the evening after our return from Ireland, and I was waiting at my rooms for Raffles, who had gone off as usual to dispose of the plunder. Raffles had his own method of conducting this very vital branch of our business, which I was well content to leave entirely in his hands. He drove the bargains, I believe, in a thin but subtle disguise of the flashy, ready order, and always in the Cockney dialect of which he had made himself a master. Moreover, he invariably employed the same "fence," who was ostensibly a money-lender in a small (but yet notorious) way, and in reality a rascal as respectable as Raffles himself. Only lately I also had been to the man, but in my proper person. We had needed capital for the raising of these very emeralds, and I had raised a hundred pounds, on the terms you would expect, from a self-spoken greybeard with an ingratiating smile, an incessant bow, and the slightest odor of that ever-fresh from rim to rim of a pair of spectacles. So the original sinews and the final spools of war came in this case from the self-same source—a circumstance which appealed to us both.

But these same final spools I was still to see, and I waited and waited with an impatience that grew upon me with the growing dusk. At my open window I had played Sister Ann until the faces in the street below were no longer distinguishable. And now I was tearing to and fro in the grip of horrible hypotheses—a grip that was tightened when at last the light-gate opened with a clatter outside—that held me breathless until a well-known sattoo followed on my door.

"In the dark!" said Raffles as I dragged him in. "Why, Bunny, what's wrong?"
"Nothing—now you've come," said I, shutting the door behind him in a fever of relief and anxiety. "Well? Well? What did they fetch?"
"Five hundred."

"Down?"
"Got it in my pocket."
"Good man," I cried. "You don't know what a stew I've been in. I'll switch on the light. I've been thinking of you and nothing else for the last hour—I was as good as dead!"
"Five hundred," said Raffles, leaning back in my chair as he lit a cigarette, and looking somewhat amused. "What should you say if something had? Sit right, my dear chap. It was nothing of the slightest consequence, and it's all over now. A stern chase and a long one, Bunny, but I think I'm well to windward this time."

And suddenly I saw that his collar was damp, his hair matted, his boots thick with dust.

"The police?" I whispered sghastically.

"That's not a charge that you can bring against yourself, is it?"

"I'm not sure," said Raffles, blowing a meditative puff; "as a matter of fact, I was thinking less of myself than of you. I was thinking of the man who does things by halves; he's a half gone to the bad, and look at the difference between him and us! He's under the thumb of a villainous money-lender; we are solvent citizens. He's taken to drink; we are sober as we are solvent. His pals are beginning to cut him; our difficulty is to keep the pal from the door. Enfin, he begs or borrows, which is stealing by halves, and we steal outright and are done with it. Obviously ours is the more honest course. Yet I'm not sure, Bunny, but we're doing the thing by halves ourselves!"

"Why? What more could we do?" I asked, leaning in soft suspicion looking round, however, to make sure that we were not overheard.

"Then stay where you are, my good fellow. I told you I didn't want you; and this was the house. So, good night. I could see no house at all, only the angle of a high wall rising solitary in the night, with the starlight glittering on battlements of broken glass, and in the wall a tall green gate, bristling with spikes, and showing a front for battering rams; the feeble rays of an outlying lamp-post cast across the road, and I seemed to see a road of building sites, with but this one house built, all by itself, at one end; but the night was too dark for more than a faint impression."

Raffles, however, had seen the place by daylight, and had come prepared for the special obstacles; already he was reaching up and down the wire, and the spikes, and in another moment he had his folded covert coat across the corks. I stepped back as he raised himself, and saw the pyramid of spikes slip the sky above the gate; as he squirmed over I ran forward, and had my own weight on the spikes and corks and covert coat when he gave the latter a tug.

"Coming, after a tug."

"Take care, then; the place is all bell-wire and springs. It's no soft thing, this. There—stand still while I take off the corks."

"I know very well I'm going to commit one tonight!"

He had been leaning back in the saddle-chair, watching me with keen eyes sheathed by languid lids; now he started forward, and his eyes leapt to mine like cold steel from the scabbard. They struck home to my slow wits; their meaning was no longer in doubt. I, who knew the man, read murder in his cleared hands, and murder in his locked lips, but a hundred murders in those hard blue eyes.

"Baird?" I faltered, moistening my lips with my tongue.

"Of course."

"But you said it didn't matter about the room in Chelsea?"

"Anyway, you gave him the slip afterward."

"That was another. I didn't. I thought I had when I came up to this evening; but when I looked out of your window—your window? To make assurance doubly sure—there he was on the opposite pavement down below."

"And you never said a word about it?"

"I wasn't going to spoil your dinner, Bunny, and I wasn't going to let you spoil mine. But there he was as large as life, and, of course, he followed us to Albany. A fine game for him to play,

a game after his mean old heart; black-mail from me, bribes from the police, the one bidding against the other; but he shouldn't play it very me, he shouldn't live to, and the world will have an extortioner the less. Waiter! Two Scotch whiskies and sodas. I'm off at 11, Bunny; it's the only thing to be done."

"You know where he lives, then?"

"Yes, out Willesden way, and alone; the fellow's a miser among other things. I long ago found out all about him."

Again I looked round the room; it was a young man's club, and young men were laughing, chatting, smoking, drinking, on every hand. One nodded to me through the smoke like a machine I nodded to him, and turned back to Raffles with a groan.

"Surely you will give him a chance," I urged. "The very sight of your pistol should bring him to terms."

"It wouldn't make him keep them."

"But you might try the effect?"

"I probably shall. Here's a drink for you, Bunny. Wish me luck."

"I'm coming, too."

"I don't want you."

"An ugly gleam shot from the steel-blue eyes."

"To interfere?" said Raffles.

"No, I'm coming with you."

"I do."

"Bunny, if you break it!"

"You may shoot me, too!"

"I most certainly should," said Raffles, solemnly. "So you come at your own peril, my dear man; but if you are coming—well, the sooner the better, for I must stop at my rooms on the way."

Five minutes later I was on the bridge and at the Piccadilly entrance to the Albany. I had a reason for remaining outside. I was the feeling—half hope, half fear—that Angus Baird might still be on our trail; that some more immediate and less cold-blooded way of dealing with him might result from a sudden encounter between the money-lender and myself. I would not warn him of his danger, but I would avert tragedy at all costs. And when no such encounter had taken place, and Angus and I went fairly on our way to Willesden, that, I think, was still my honest resolve. I would not break my word if I could help it, but it was a comfort to feel that I could break it if I liked, on an understood penalty. Alas! I felt my good intentions were tainted with a devouring curiosity and overlaid by the imagination which goes hand in hand with horror.

I have a poignant recollection of the hour it took us to reach the house. We walked across St. James's Park (I can see the lights now, bright on the bridge and blurred in the water), and we had some minutes to wait for the last train to Willesden. It left at 11.21, I remember, and Raffles was not to find it did not go on to Kensal Rise. We had to get out at Willesden Junction and walk on through the streets into fairly open country that made it to be quite new to me. I could never find the house again. I remember, however, that we were on a dark footpath between woods and fields when the clocks began to chime.

"Surely," said I, "we shall find him in bed and asleep?"

"I hope we do," said Raffles, grimly.

"I don't think so," said I, looking at the ultimate crime had monopolized my mind. Baird is a burglar, was a burglar, but one to deprive none the less. I saw obvious objections; the man was an aut with cracksmen and their ways; he would certainly have firearms, and might be the first to use them.

"I could wish nothing better," said Raffles. "Then it would be man to man, and the devil take the worse about. You don't suppose I prefer foul play to fair, do you? But he must, by one or the other, or it's a long stretch for you and me."

"Better than this?"

"Then stay where you are, my good fellow. I told you I didn't want you; and this was the house. So, good night. I could see no house at all, only the angle of a high wall rising solitary in the night, with the starlight glittering on battlements of broken glass, and in the wall a tall green gate, bristling with spikes, and showing a front for battering rams; the feeble rays of an outlying lamp-post cast across the road, and I seemed to see a road of building sites, with but this one house built, all by itself, at one end; but the night was too dark for more than a faint impression."

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"I wasn't going to spoil your dinner, Bunny, and I wasn't going to let you spoil mine. But there he was as large as life, and, of course, he followed us to Albany. A fine game for him to play,

this glass that Raffles had first seen the light; and he now proceeded to take out a pane, with the diamond, the top of the tree and the sheet of brown paper which were seldom omitted from his impedimenta. Nor did he dispense with his own assistance, though he may have accepted it as instinctively as I was proffered. In any case, it was these fingers that helped to spread the treasure on the brown paper and pressed the latter to the glass until the diamond had completed its circuit and the pane fell gently back into its hands.

Raffles now inserted his hand, turned the key in the lock, and by making a long arm succeeded in drawing the bolt at the bottom of the door. It proved to be the only one and the door opened, though not very wide.

"What's that?" said Raffles, as something crunched beneath his feet on the very threshold.

A pair of spectacles. I whispered, picking them up. I was still fingering the broken lenses and the bent rims when Raffles tripped and almost fell, with a gasping cry that he made no effort to restrain.

"Hush, man!—hush!" I entreated under my breath. "He'll hear you!"

For answer his teeth chattered—even his hand I heard him fumbling with his matches. "No, Bunny; he won't hear us," the whispered Raffles, presently, and he rose from his knees and lit a gas as the match burned down.

Angus Baird was lying on his own floor, dead, with his gray hairs glued together by his blood; near him a poker with the black end glowing in a corner his desk, ransacked, littered. A clock ticked noisily on the chimney piece; for perhaps a hundred seconds there was no sound.

"Raffles stood very still, staring down at the dead, as a man might stare into an abyss after striding blindly to its brink. His breath came audibly, his nostrils quivered; he made no other sign, and his lips seemed sealed.

"That light!" said I, hoarsely; "the light we saw under the door!"

With a start he turned to me.

"It's true! I had forgotten it. It was in here I saw it first!"

"He must be upstairs still!"

"If he is we'll soon rout him out. Come on!"

Instead I laid a hand upon his arm, imploring him to reflect—that his enemy was dead now—that we should certainly be involved—that now or never was our own time to escape. He shook me off in a sudden fury of impatience, a reckless contempt in his eyes, and, bidding me save my own skin if I liked, he once more turned his back upon me, and this time left me half reeling to take him at his word. Had he forgotten on what errand he himself was here? Was he determined that this night should end in black disaster? As I asked myself these questions his match flared in the hall; in another moment the stairs were creaking under his feet, even as they had creaked under those of the murderer; and the humane instinct that inspired him in refuge of his risk was borne in also upon my slower sensibilities. Could we let the murderer go? My answer was to bound up the creaking stairs and to overhaul Raffles on the landing.

But three doors presented themselves; the first opened into a bedroom where Baird had turned down but undisturbed; the second room was empty in every sense; the third door was locked.

"There's your man!" I cried, and I was about to knock when I saw the door was ajar.

"He's in there," said he, cocking his revolver. "Do you remember how we used to break into the studies at school? Here goes!"

His flat foot crashed over the keyhole, the lock gave, the door flew open, and in the sudden draught the landing gas heeled over like a cobbler in a squall; as the flame righted itself I saw a fixed bath, two bath towels knotted together—an open window—a covering figure—and Raffles struck against the threshold.

"Jack—Rutter!"

The words came thick and slow with horror, and in horror I heard myself repeating them, while the covering figure by the bathroom window rose gradually erect.

"It's you! he whispered, in amazement no less than our own. "It's you two! What's it all mean, Raffles? I saw you get over the gate; a bell rang the place is full of them. Then you broke in. What's it all mean?"

"We may tell you that when you tell us what in God's name you've done, Rutter!"

"Done? What have I done? The unhappy wretch came into the light with bloodshot, blinking eyes, and a bloody shirt front. You know—your seat—but I'll tell you if you like. I've killed a robber; that's all. I've killed a robber, a usurer, a jackal, a blackmailer, the cleverest and the bravest villain unbuggled. I'm ready to hang for him. I'll kill him again!"

And he looked us fiercely in the face, a defiance in his desperate eyes; his breast heaving, his jaw like a rock.

"Shall I tell you how it happened? I went passionately on. 'He's made my life hell these weeks and months past. You may know that. A perfect hell! Well, to-night I met him in Bond street. Do you remember when I met you fellows? He wasn't twenty yards behind you; he was on your tracks. Raffles, he saw me nod to you, and stopped me and asked me who you were. He seemed as keen as knives to know. I couldn't think why, and didn't care either, for I saw my chance. I said I'd tell him all about you if he'd give me a private interview. He said he wouldn't. I said he should, and held him by the coat by the time I let him go you were out of sight, and I waited where I was till he came back in despair. I had the whip hand of him then. I could dictate where the interview should be, and I made him take me home with him, still swearing to tell me something about you when we'd our talk. Well, when we got here I made him give me about to eat, putting him off and off; and about 10 o'clock I heard the gate shut. I waited a bit, and then asked him if he had found them."

"Not at all," says he; "did you not see the servant?"

"I said I'd seen her, but I thought I'd heard her go; if I was mistaken I don't know. Again and again we threatened to leave him to his fate, to wash our hands of him. But incredible and unmerciful luck was the force of us. Not a word we met between that and Willesden; and of those who saw us later, did one think of the two young men with crooked white ties, supporting a third in a seemingly unassailable condition, when the evening papers apprised the town of a terrible tragedy at Kensal Rise?"

We walked to Munda Vale, and thence drove openly to my rooms. But I alone went upstairs; the other two proceeded to the Albany, and I saw no more of

ment of all his iniquitous claims against me, or have his brains beaten out over his own carpet. He thought a minute, and then went to his desk for pen and paper. In two seconds he was round like lightning with a revolver and I went for him half-headed. He fired two or three times and missed; you can find the holes if you like; but I hit him every time—my God! I was like a savage till the thing was done. And then I didn't care. I went through his desk looking for my own bills, and was coming away when you turned up. I said I didn't care, nor do I; but was going to give myself up to-night, and shall still; so you see I shan't give you fellows much trouble!"

He was done; and there we stood on the landing of the lonely house, the low, thick, eager voice still racing and ringing through our ears; the dead man below, and in front of it his impatient slayer, I knew to whom the impetuous appeal when he had heard the story, and I was not mistaken.

"That's all right," said Raffles, speaking after a pause; "we shan't let you give yourself up."

"You shan't stop me! What would be the good? The woman saw me; it would only be a question of time; and I can't face waiting to be taken. Think of it; waiting for them to touch you on the shoulder! No, no, no. I'll give myself up, and get it over."

His speech was changed; he faltered, floundered. It was as though a clearer perception of his position had come with the bare idea of escape from it.

"But listen to me," urged Raffles. "We're here at our peril ourselves. We broke in like thieves to enforce redress for a grievance very like your own. But don't you see? We took out a pane—the thing like regular burglars. Regular burglars will get the credit of all the rest!"

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Raffles for forty-eight hours. He was not at his rooms when I called in the morning; he had left no word. When he reappeared the papers were full of the murder; and the man who had committed it was on the wide Atlantic, a stowaway passenger from Liverpool to New York.

"There was no arguing with him," so Raffles told me; "either he must make a clean breast of it or flee the country. So I rigged him up at the studio, and we took the first train to Liverpool. Nothing would induce him to sit tight and enjoy the situation as I should have endeavored to do in his place; and it's just as well I went to his diggings to destroy some papers, and what do you think I found?"

The police in possession; there's a warrant out against him already! The idiots think that window wasn't genuine, and the warrant's out. It won't be my fault if it's ever served!"

Nor, after all these years, can I think it will be mine.

DRAWING THE MORAL.

(Collier's Weekly.)

The triumph of Japan is taken in various ways by a complicated universe. We prefer to observe it in the first place for what it teaches of value to ourselves. The American bill for alcoholic drinks during a single year is estimated in dollars alone at a billion and a quarter. What it is in consequences who shall estimate? Japan drinks with the moderation which she exhibits in every phase of life. Her people so far care less for show, for personal conspicuousness, than they do for ends of general weight. Mr. Roosevelt, it seems to us, makes too much noise about the fighting-ship aspect of the war. The Japanese were worried for months by the fowness of their battleships, but in the end they won, not by numbers but by



Posed by Kylie Bellaw, Management Lieber Co.

RAFFLES . . . SUCCEEDED IN DRAWING THE BOLT

"You mean that I shan't be suspected?"

"I do."

"But I don't want to get off scot free," cried Rutter hysterically. "I've killed him. I know that. But it was in self-defense; it wasn't murder. I must own up and take the consequences. I shall go mad if I don't."

His hands twitched; his lips quivered; the tears were in his eyes. Ruffles took him roughly by the shoulder.

"Look here, you fool. If the three of us were caught here now, do you know what these consequences would be? We should swing in a row at Newgate in six weeks' time! You talk as though we were in a club; don't you know it's 11 o'clock in the morning, and the lights on, and a dead man down below? For God's sake pull yourself together, and do what I tell you, or you're a dead man yourself."

"I wish I was one," Rutter sobbed. "I wish I had his revolver to blow my own brains out. It's lying under him. O my God, my God!"

His knees knocked together; the frenzy of reaction was at its height. We had to take