

**Edgar Wallace** was born illegitimately in 1875 in Greenwich and adopted by George Freeman, a porter at Billingsgate fish market. At eleven, Wallace sold newspapers at Ludgate Circus and on leaving school took a job with a printer. He enlisted in the Royal West Kent Regiment, later transferring to the Medical Staff Corps, and was sent to South Africa. In 1898 he published a collection of poems called *The Mission that Failed*, left the army and became a correspondent for Reuters.

Wallace became the South African war correspondent for *The Daily Mail*. His articles were later published as *Unofficial Dispatches* and his outspokenness infuriated Kitchener, who banned him as a war correspondent until the First World War. He edited the *Rand Daily Mail*, but gambled disastrously on the South African Stock Market, returning to England to report on crimes and hanging trials. He became editor of *The Evening News*, then in 1905 founded the Tallis Press, publishing *Smithy*, a collection of soldier stories, and *Four Just Men*. At various times he worked on *The Standard*, *The Star*, *The Week-End Racing Supplement* and *The Story Journal*.

In 1917 he became a Special Constable at Lincoln's Inn and also a special interrogator for the War Office. His first marriage to Ivy Caldecott, daughter of a missionary, had ended in divorce and he married his much younger secretary, Violet King.

*The Daily Mail* sent Wallace to investigate atrocities in the Belgian Congo, a trip that provided material for his *Sanders of the River* books. In 1923 he became Chairman of the Press Club and in 1931 stood as a Liberal candidate at Blackpool. On being offered a scriptwriting contract at RKO, Wallace went to Hollywood. He died in 1932, on his way to work on the screenplay for *King Kong*.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR  
ALL PUBLISHED BY HOUSE OF STRATUS

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|---|--|
| THE ADMIRABLE CARFEW                                      | GOOD EVANS   |
| THE ANGEL OF TERROR                                       | THE HAND OF POWER  |
| THE AVENGER ( <i>USA: THE HAIRY ARM</i> )                 | THE IRON GRIP  |
| BARBARA ON HER OWN  | THE JOKER ( <i>USA: THE COLOSSUS</i> )   |
| THE BLACK ABBOT   | THE JUST MEN OF CORDOVA  |
| BONES   | THE KEEPERS OF THE KING'S PEACE  |
| BONES IN LONDON   | THE LAW OF THE FOUR JUST MEN   |
| BONES OF THE RIVER  | THE LONE HOUSE MYSTERY   |
| THE CLUE OF THE NEW PIN                                   | THE MAN WHO BOUGHT LONDON  |
| THE CLUE OF THE SILVER KEY                                | THE MAN WHO KNEW   |
| THE CLUE OF THE TWISTED CANDLE                            | THE MAN WHO WAS NOBODY   |
| THE COAT OF ARMS<br>( <i>USA: THE ARRANWAYS MYSTERY</i> ) | THE MIND OF MR J G REEDER<br>( <i>USA: THE MURDER BOOK<br/>OF J G REEDER</i> ) |
| THE COUNCIL OF JUSTICE                                    | MORE EDUCATED EVANS  |
| THE CRIMSON CIRCLE  | MR J G REEDER RETURNS<br>( <i>USA: MR REEDER RETURNS</i> )                     |
| THE DAFFODIL MYSTERY                                      | MR JUSTICE MAXELL  |
| THE DARK EYES OF LONDON<br>( <i>USA: THE CROAKERS</i> )   | RED ACES   |
| THE DAUGHTERS OF THE NIGHT                                | ROOM 13  |
| A DEBT DISCHARGED   | SANDERS  |
| THE DEVIL MAN   | SANDERS OF THE RIVER   |
| THE DOOR WITH SEVEN LOCKS                                 | THE SINISTER MAN   |
| THE DUKE IN THE SUBURBS                                   | THE SQUARE EMERALD ( <i>USA: THE<br/>GIRL FROM SCOTLAND YARD</i> )             |
| THE FACE IN THE NIGHT                                     | THE THREE JUST MEN   |
| THE FEATHERED SERPENT                                     | THE THREE OAK MYSTERY  |
| THE FLYING SQUAD  | THE TRAITOR'S GATE   |
| THE FORGER ( <i>USA: THE CLEVER ONE</i> )                 | WHEN THE GANGS CAME TO<br>LONDON   |
| THE FOUR JUST MEN   |  |
| FOUR SQUARE JANE  |  |
| THE FOURTH PLAGUE   |  |
| THE FRIGHTENED LADY                                       |  |

Edgar Wallace.

Big Foot



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## SOOPER

It was a coincidence that Sooper made a call at Barley Stack this bright spring morning, for at that moment he knew nothing of the attempt to burgle Mr Stephen Elson's house, was ignorant that such a person as Sullivan the tramp existed, or that his crazy companion in crime was wandering loose around the fair countryside, singing foolish little songs about love – and those in a foreign and unintelligible language.

But Barley Stack had for Sooper the fascination which the flame has for the moth, or, a better illustration, the battle for the veteran war-horse. Though he must have known that at this hour Mr Cardew had long since departed to the City, for Gordon Cardew, though retired from his profession, had the nine o'clock habit ineradicably implanted in his system.

Nevertheless Sooper called. Failing a more poignant thrill of crossing swords with this man Cardew, there was generally a certain amount of satisfaction to be had from an encounter with Hannah Shaw. Mr Cardew's attitude of mind towards him was one of resentment, for Sooper had hurt him. Hannah, on the other hand, was incapable of feeling or expressing the fine nuances of personal regard, and hated this ancient superintendent of police with a loathing which she never attempted to conceal.

Hannah stood squarely in the porch of Barley Stack, and the malignant light in her brown eyes might have spoken for her. She was a woman below middle height and rather plump, and her black alpaca dress did not enhance her comeliness. Comely she was, in a way. Her heavy face was unlined, the thick black fringe over her forehead

untinged with grey, though she was well past forty. If her features were big they were regular, and in spite of her proportions it would have been unfair to describe her as dumpy.

"Nice weather we're havin'," murmured Sooper. He leant languidly against his dilapidated motor-bicycle, his eyes half-closed as though, in the warmth of the morning and the beauty of the surroundings, he was predisposed to take his siesta. "And the garden's looking lovely too. Never seen so many daffydils as you've got in the park, and carnations too! Got a good gardener, I'll bet. Mr Cardew in?"

"No, he isn't!"

"Out followin' the trail of the Boscombe Bank hold-up, I'll bet!" said Sooper, shaking his head in simulated admiration. "Soon as I saw that hold-up in the papers, I said to my sergeant, 'It wants a man like Mister Cardew to trail that gang – ord'nary police couldn't do it. They'd never find a clue – they'd be baffled from the start.'"

"Mr Cardew has gone to his office, as you very well know, Minter," she snapped, her eyes blazing. "He has something better to do than waste his time on police work. We pay rates and taxes for the police, and a precious lot of use they are! An incompetent, ignorant lot of men who haven't even an education!"

"Can't have everything," said Sooper sadly. "Stands to reason, Mrs Shaw –"

"Miss Shaw!" Hannah almost shouted the correction.

"Always think of you that way," said Sooper apologetically. "I was only sayin' to my sergeant the other day, 'Why that young lady doesn't get married beats me: she's young –'"

"I've no time to waste on you, Minter –"

"Mister Minter," suggested Sooper gently.

"If you've any message for Mr Cardew I'll take it – otherwise, I've a lot of work to do and I can't waste my time with you."

"Any burglaries?" asked Sooper as she half-turned to go.

"No, there aren't any burglaries," she answered shortly. "And if there were, we shouldn't send for you."

"I'll bet you wouldn't," said Sooper fervently. "I'll bet Mr Cardew would just take the size of the burglar's footprint an' look him up in

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his book on anthro – whatever the word is, an' the poor nut would be pinched before night.”

Miss Hannah Shaw turned round on him in a fury.

“If you think you're being clever, let me tell you that there are people in London who can make you look small, Minter. If Mr Cardew went to the Secretary of State and told him half of the things you do and say, he'd have your coat off your back before the end of the week!”

Sooper examined his sleeve critically.

“What's the matter with it?” he asked, as she slammed the door viciously in his face.

Sooper did not smile, nor was he annoyed. Instead he filled his foul pipe with great deliberation, gazed admiringly at the glorious colouring of the spring flowers that filled every bed in sight, and, stopping only long enough to fix a stolen pimpernel in the lapel of his worn jacket, went noisily down the drive to the main road.

Half an hour later:

“When a man's got to my age 'n' exalted position,” said Sooper, blinking rapidly at the sober-faced young officer who sat on the other side of the table, “he's entitled to be temp'ramental. I'm temp'ramental today. There's a touch of spring in the air, an' I'll bet I didn't hear a cuckoo last Sunday? And when there's cuckoos around and the bluebells are growing in the woods, I'm temp'ramental. Besides, I've just had a talk with the Belle of Barley Stack, and my head's full of sentimental ideas. You ask me to give a good look at this here tramp an' I reply that I'd sooner go chasing primroses on the river's brink.”

Sooper was tall and angular and very untidy. His suit had been an old one in pre-war days, and now, cleaned and turned, was a mockery of clothes. His lank, brown face and awkward grey eyebrows gave him a distinction which his garb did much to dissipate. Hannah Shaw's contempt for his wardrobe was one of his dearest joys.

There were many superintendents of police, but when you spoke in Metropolitan Police circles of Sooper, you meant Superintendent Patrick J Minter and nobody else.

“Go you and interview the vagrant, my good sergeant.” He waved his big hand with a lordly gesture. “The serious business of criminal detection belongs to my past – it was too simple! Got me going senile – that’s why I took this job, where I can live in the country an’ keep chickens an’ rabbits an’ study nature in all its majesty an’ splendour.”

“I” division of the Metropolitan Police covers that part of rural London which comes up against the Sussex border. It is notoriously a sleepy division, a backwater into which men drift gratefully from the turbulent waters of Limehouse and Greenwich and Notting Dale. “I” division dealt mainly with such surprising crimes as vagrancy, poaching and rick-firing. The men of “I” division, to the envy of their city fellows, impound straying horses and cattle and take active steps to deal with foot-and-mouth disease. They are known as “the yokels”, “the hayseeders” and “the lost legion”. But the men cultivate gardens (many raising their own garden truck), and can afford to smile tolerantly when jealous comrades make sneering references to their bucolic pursuits.

Sooper was transferred from Scotland Yard to this pleasant haven, not as a mark of his superiors’ appreciation of his excellent services – he was one of the Big Five that smashed the Russian gang in Whitechapel – but (the truth had best be told) because he was a thorn in the side of certain police officials. Sooper was a source of constant irritation to headquarters. He respected nobody, from the Chief Commissioner downwards; he was polite to nobody; he agreed with nobody. He wrangled, he argued, and occasionally he defied. Most irritating of his qualities was the fact that he was generally right. And when he was proved right and his chiefs were wrong, he mentioned the fact some twenty or thirty times in the course of a working day.

“What’s more,” he went on, “talking to this low tramp’s goin’ to interrupt my studies. I’m takin’ an intensive course of criminology. Never heard of Lombroso, I’ll bet? Ah! Then you don’t know anything about criminals’ brains! Ord’nary brains weigh... I’ve forgotten what, but criminals’ brains are lighter. Go bring me this man’s brain and I’ll tell you whether he was trying to break into Barley Stack. And prehensile feet: d’ye know that five per cent of crim’nals can pick up

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things with their toes? An' d'you know that oxycyphalic heads are all the fashion in crim'nal circles? You've missed sump'n'. Go take a tape measure and get that hobo's statistics and watch out for his assymetrical face! It was always simple, catchin' 'em. It's childish easy now!"

Sergeant Lattimer was too wise a man to interrupt his superior until his garrulity showed signs of running dry. This seemed a favourite moment to interject a remark.

"But, Super, this isn't an ordinary burglary. According to Sullivan – that is the tramp's name –"

"Tramps haven't got any names," said Sooper wearily. "You started wrong. They're 'Mike' and 'Weary' and 'Box Car Billy', but they haven't any family names."

"According to Sullivan, the other tramp who was with him would not allow him to get into Mr Elson's house and take money. He wanted something else –"

"Deeds of the family estate, maybe," interrupted Sooper thoughtfully. "Or the birth certificat' of the rightful heir? Or maybe Mr Elson, bein' a low-down American, stole the sacred ruby from the right eye of the great god Hokum, an' s'nister Injuns have followed him waitin' their opportunity? This is a case for Cardew – maybe you can tackle it. Go to it, Sergeant. You'll get your pitcher in the papers: and you're a good-looker too. P'raps you'll marry the girl that's supposed to be a housemaid but turns out to be the daughter of the duke, having been pinched by gipsies in her youth. Go on!"

## THE UNEXPECTED HANNAH

The young officer listened with admirable patience.

“I took Sullivan because he was sleeping in the neighbourhood last night – and he has now practically admitted that he ‘felt’ the house for an entry.”

“Go get his ear marks,” murmured Sooper, taking up his pen. “Ever notice how crim’nals an’ paranoiaks have windscreen ears? It’s in the book. And the book can’t lie. Detectivizin’ is not what it was, Sergeant. We want more physiognomists an’ more chemists. My idea of a real detective is a feller who sits in a high-class fam’ly mansion with a microscope an’ a blood stain an’ a bit of London mud, an’ putting the three together can tell you that the jewels were pinched by a left-handed man who drove a Patchard coupé (’21 model) painted green. Ever meet a man called Ferraby?”

“Mr Ferraby from the Public Prosecutor’s office?” asked the sergeant, momentarily interested. “Yes, sir: I saw him the day he called here.”

Sooper nodded; his jaws closed like a rat-trap and he showed two rows of teeth. He was smiling.

“*He’s* not a detective,” he said emphatically; “he only understands fac’s. If that feller was called in to unravel the myst’ry of the Rajah of Bong’s lost wrist-watch an’ he found that the Grand Vizzer or Visher or whatever they call him, had pawned a wrist-watch at Veltheim’s Day an’ Night Loan Office, he’d go and pinch the Grand – whatever he is. A real detective wouldn’t be that foolish. He’d just deduce at once that the clock was torn off in a struggle with the young and beautiful st’nographer who’s hidden behind a secret panel gagged ’n’

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bound an' ready to be freighted to the loathsome Injun palace built of lapsus laz – whatever it is. Now, old man Cardew *is* a detective! There's a man you might model yourself on, Sergeant."

Soooper pointed the end of his pen impressively at his subordinate.

"That man's studied crime from all angles; he's got the psycho – whatever the word may be – psychology, is it? Well, he's got that. And he's strong for ears an' prognathic jaws and as-sym-metrical faces an' the weight of brains an' all that. Got a library up at Barley Stack full of stuff about crime."

When Soooper started on the subject of that excellent amateur, Mr Gordon Cardew, he was a difficult man to turn, and the sergeant sighed lightly and respectfully.

"The point is, sir, would you care to see this man Sullivan? He has practically confessed that he went to Hill Brow to commit a burglary."

Soooper stared menacingly, and then, to Lattimer's surprise, nodded.

"I'll see this Sullivan – shoot him in."

The sergeant rose with alacrity and disappeared into the small charge-room. He returned in a few minutes accompanied by a very big, a very unprepossessing, and an altogether embarrassed tramp.

"This is Sullivan, sir," reported the officer, and Soooper put down his pen, wrenched off his pince-nez and glared up at the prisoner.

"What's this stuff you've been giving us about the hobo who wouldn't let you go into Hill Brow?" he asked unexpectedly. "And if you're lyin', tramp, lie plausibly!"

"It's true, Soooper," said the tramp huskily. "If I die this minute, this crazy fellow nearly killed me when I tried to open the window. And we had it all fixed – he told me about the place an' where this American kept his 'stuff'. If I die this very second –"

"You won't: hobos never die," snapped Soooper. "Sullivan? Got you! You went down for three at the London Sessions for robbery – Luke Mark Sullivan, I remember your holy names!"

Mr Luke Mark Sullivan shuffled uneasily, but before he could protest himself an injured and innocent convict, Soooper went on:

“What do you know about this crazy tramp?”

Sullivan knew very little. He had met the man in Devonshire, and had heard something about him from other knights of the road.

“He’s plumb nutty, Sooper: all the fellers say so. Goes about the country singing to himself. Doesn’t run with any gang, and talks queer – swell stuff and foreign languages.”

Sooper leaned back in his chair.

“You *couldn’t* invent that. You haven’t the weight of brain. Where’s his pitch?”

“Everywhere, but I got an idea he’s got a real pitch near the sea. He used to ask me – I’ve been on the road with him for a week – if I liked ships. He said he looked at ’em for days passin’ on the sea, and got to wonderin’ what kind of ships couldn’t sink. He’s crazy! An’ after we’d fixed to go into this house, what do you think he said? He turned on me like a dog and said, ‘Away!’ – just like that, Sooper – ‘Away! Your hands are not clean enough to be the...’ well, sump’n about ‘Justice’...he’s mad!”

The superintendent stared at the uncomfortable man for a long time without speaking.

“You lie in your throat, Sullivan,” he said at last. “You couldn’t tell the truth: you’ve got odd eyes! Put him in the cooler, Sergeant – we’ll get him hung!”

Mr Sullivan was back in his cell, and the sergeant was halfway through his lunch, before Sooper moved from his chair. He sat glowering at the office inkpot, motionless, his dry pen still in his hand. At last he moved with a grimace, as though the effort pained him, kicked off the slippers he invariably wore in office hours and pulled on his worn boots with a grunt.

Lattimer had reached the apple pie stage of his feast when the old man shuffled into the officers’ mess-room.

“Know anything about this American feller Elson?” asked Sooper. “Don’t stand up, man – eat your pie.”

“No, sir – except that he’s a bit of a rough diamond. They say he’s very rich.”

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“That’s my deduction too,” said Sooper. “When a man lives in a big house an’ has three cars an’ twenty servants I put two an’ two together and deduce that he’s well off. I’m goin’ up to see him.”

Sooper had a motor-cycle that was frankly disreputable. It bore the same relationship to an ordinary motor-cycle that a slum bears to Buckingham Palace. Every spring, Sooper took his machine to pieces, and, under the dazed eye of Sergeant Lattimer, put it together again in such a manner as to give it an entirely different appearance. This illusion may have had its cause in his passion for changing the colour of the weird contrivance. One year it was a vivid green, another year it was a flaming scarlet. Once he painted it white and picked out the spokes in sky-blue. Sooper was so constituted that he could not pass a hardware shop that displayed bicycle enamel without falling. In the little hut behind his cottage were shelves covered with tiny paint pots, and the year when, yielding to the influence of the war, he employed a dozen sample cans in camouflaging his machine, is one remembered by the whole of the Metropolitan Police force.

Yet it was a good motor-bicycle. By some miracle its two cylinders were capable of developing tremendous energies. Its once silvery handlebar had long since been painted over; its saddle seat was held in position by string, and its tyres were so patched that even the least observant village child could tell, from an examination of the dustprints, not only that Sooper had passed, but in what direction he was moving; but it “went”.

He chug-chugged his way up Dewlap Hill, skirted the high red wall of Hill Brow, and, dismounting, pushed open the gate and passed between the elms that bordered Mr Elson’s drive. Leaning his bicycle against a tree, he walked slowly towards the big house, up the broad steps, and halted in the open doorway.

The hall was empty, but he heard voices, a woman’s and a man’s. The sound came from a room that opened from the hall. The door was ajar, he saw four plump fingers at the edge as though somebody had paused in the act of pulling it open. Sooper looked round for a bell-push and then saw that it was in the centre of the front door. He was stepping into the hall to reach the push when...

“Marriage or nothing, Steve! I’ve been kept fooling around too long. Promises, promises, promises!... I’m sick of ’em!... Money? What’s the use of money to me?... I’m as rich as you...”

At that moment the door opened and the speaker came into view, and though her back was towards him, Sooper recognized her. It was Hannah Shaw, the ungenial housekeeper of Barley Stack.

For a second he stood looking at the figure, and then noiselessly stepped back to the angle of the wall, dropped lightly over the balustrade of the steps and melted out of sight. Hannah did not even see the shadow of him as he passed. To make doubly sure that his presence should escape notice, Sooper wheeled his bicycle a mile before he mounted.

## A LAWYER LOSES A CASE

The Temple, on a day in early summer, with a blue sky overhead, is a very pleasant and drowsily restful place. For there are rooks in Temple Gardens, and the green leaves of the trees that wave their branches over the worn flagstones are translucent in the sunlight, and the fountain splashes musically. The grim fronts of ancient buildings, so menacing in the thin fogs of February, take on a bland beauty of their own, so that hurrying lawyers in their grey wigs and long black gowns hesitate on the threshold of their own offices in momentary doubt as to whether or not they have, in a moment of aberration, wandered into some strange and more charming locality than that to which use has accustomed them.

Jim Ferraby, strolling at leisure from Fleet Street to his rooms in King's Bench Walk, paused by the fountain to rescue a small girl's hat from destruction, and passed on, whistling softly, his hands deep in his pockets, his brow unruffled, a good-looking and contented young man on the indiscreet side of thirty.

He reached the walk, paused again on the stone steps of his chambers, and surveyed, with evidence of approval, the silvery stretch of river visible from this point. Then he slowly mounted the gloomy stairs, and, stopping before a heavy black door, pulled a massive key from his pocket and inserted it in the huge lock.

He was twisting the key when he heard the door open on the opposite side of the landing, and, looking round, flashed a smile at the girl who stood in the open doorway.

"'Morning, Miss Leigh," he said cheerfully. The girl nodded.

"Good morning, Mr Ferraby."