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Edgar Wallace

The Four Just Men

Read by **Bill Homewood**

**CLASSIC
CRIME**

THE FOUR JUST MEN • 1

1	The Four Just Men by Edgar Wallace – Prologue	5:30
2	Leon twisted his knuckles down and struck forward...	3:24
3	He mounted the horse I had brought...	4:00
4	Chapter 1: A Newspaper Story	4:40
5	'Here is one of the letters,' and Sir Philip produced a sheet...	3:41
6	The <i>Daily Megaphone</i> is able to publish a full list...	3:13
7	Seattle (Kentucky), October, 1900. – Judge Anderson.	3:08
8	Chapter 2: The Faithful Commons	5:03
9	There were cheers for the Secretary for Foreign Affairs...	5:35
10	'To the Members of the House of Commons,' he read...	3:08
11	The Premier, with a troubled face, paced the floor...	3:22
12	Chapter 3: One Thousand Pounds Reward	4:34
13	All day long little knots of people gathered...	4:15
14	'Is it the Mafia?' asked the Comet noisily...	4:45
15	Sir Philip was a constant source of interest...	4:48
16	Chapter 4: Preparations	3:44
17	It was a plain-fronted shop...	4:10
18	The physiognomist might have continued Seneca's picture...	3:11
19	After this the conversation became Greek to the Spaniard...	3:41
20	The object of their discussion finished his tenth cigarette...	3:15

21	A thin smoke was rising from the cup.	2:30
22	Chapter 5: The Outrage at the 'Megaphone'	4:51
23	Half an hour later the editor of the <i>Megaphone</i> sat discussing...	4:50
24	So Welby and the chief kept the matter a secret...	4:01
25	The cab speeding along Oxford Street turned into Edgware Road...	5:14
26	Manfred scanned the pages carefully, then threw them aside.	4:26
27	He spoke all the while in English...	4:10
28	Chapter 6: The Clues	3:02
29	From which may be gathered that, acting on the information...	4:20
30	His official residence he absolutely refused to occupy...	5:11
31	In the top room in the workshop at Carnaby Street...	4:02
32	'I am going to survey the land,' said Manfred suddenly...	3:31
33	He threw up his hands as if to ward them off.	4:22
34	Chapter 7: The Messenger of The Four	3:57
35	The Four Just Men were on the nerves of more people...	5:04
36	He placed the letter in a drawer of his desk...	5:09
37	The detective finished reading.	4:13
38	Ramon paced his room with quick, nervous steps.	3:46
39	He took a quick step to the door...	3:01
40	Chapter 8: The Pocket-Book	4:22

41	'It is a poetical idea,' said the phlegmatic Premier...	4:40
42	They resumed their walk.	4:55
43	So, the night being comparatively young...	4:28
44	The contents of this page was understandable...	3:28
45	'Now, Billy,' said the detective...	2:24
46	Chapter 9: The Cupidity of Marks	4:41
47	The detective rose with a sigh.	4:15
48	Then Poiccart spoke: 'The very stars in their courses are fighting...'	4:10
49	'"Can you oblige me with a match?" I asked.'	2:19
50	Poiccart paused for a moment...	4:31
51	'The explanation is simple,' said Gonzalez quietly...	4:45
52	He pushed open the swing doors...	3:37
53	He turned from the contemplation of the unpleasant possibilities...	3:40
54	Chapter 10: Three Who Died	5:06
55	And within an hour there was witnessed in London...	4:45
56	The Commissioner nodded.	4:50
57	'From my vantage place,' wrote Smith in the <i>Megaphone</i> ...	4:42
58	Seven o'clock boomed forth...	4:06
59	That forty minutes was the longest...	3:36
60	Chapter 11: A Newspaper Cutting	4:27

61	What steps did you take when you discovered this?	5:28
62	You speak of a blow leaving no contusion.	3:31
63	After the tragedy did you make a systematic search...	3:16
64	Chapter 12: Conclusion	4:56
65	He stood for a moment at the entrance...	5:13

Total time: 4:31:56

Edgar Wallace

(1875–1932)

The Four Just Men

Most thrillers offer the reader an escape into a world where the pursuer of justice, often a detective, is a good person; his quarry a bad one. The stories may be more or less complicated (e.g. John Grisham's novels), the subjects may be parochial (e.g. Agatha Christie's novels) or they may involve international intrigue (e.g. Andy McNab's novels) but on the whole the villain ultimately suffers the consequences of his actions, and justice triumphs.

In his *Four Just Men* series, Edgar Wallace comes up with something different: the 'villains' are not necessarily bad people, and the pursuers of justice – the Four Just Men, as they call themselves – are acting outside the law. They argue that their actions are for the public good, and dispassionately eke the ultimate revenge – death – on their victims. In their turn, the Four Just Men are pursued by the

police but somehow remain our heroes, even garnering the reluctant praise of politicians:

'It is a poetical idea,' said the phlegmatic Premier, 'and the standpoint of the Four is quite a logical one. Think of the enormous power for good or evil often vested in one man: a capitalist controlling the markets of the world, a speculator cornering cotton or wheat whilst mills stand idle and people starve, tyrants and despots with the destinies of nations between their thumb and finger – and then think of the four men, known to none; vague, shadowy figures stalking tragically through the world, condemning and executing the capitalist, the corner maker, the tyrant – evil forces all,

and all beyond reach of the law. We have said of these people, such of us as are touched with mysticism, that God would judge them. Here are men arrogating to themselves the divine right of superior judgment. If we catch them they will end their lives unpicturesquely, in a matter-of-fact, commonplace manner in a little shed in Pentonville Gaol, and the world will never realise how great are the artists who perish.'

One does not have to look far in adventure films and literature to find glamorous heroes with questionable methods (for example Barry Eisler's hit-man thrillers with titles like *Blood from Blood* and *One Last Kill*, Alexandre Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo*, Johnston McCulley's *Zorro*, innumerable war films of heroic and bloody retribution, and, of course, cowboy classics such as *The Magnificent Seven*). These appeal to the vigilante in all of us. Who has not dreamed of super revenge on a school bully, an unpleasant teacher, a traffic warden, a treacherous colleague? Perhaps, in twenty-first-

century literature, the equivalent of *The Four Just Men* might be the action stories of our Special Forces heroes on so-called 'deniable operations', where we are led to believe that governments prefer to wash their hands of the illegal action – an abduction, an assassination – rather than admit to having ordered it. In such books we love the cautious, wicked methodology of killing – the plotting and creeping, even the dreadful moment itself. What is extraordinary is that we are following these events from the point of view of the assassin, who is honourable only because he is on government duty. It is great fun, and possibly the best sort of holiday reading, to be vicariously criminal. We enjoy suspending the ordinary morality which we apply to our everyday lives in our schools, colleges and workplaces, and replacing it with this 'naughty' morality, where the end justifies the means.

George Manfred, Leon Gonzalez and Raymond Poiccart are wealthy Europeans who move easily in high society but, capable of convincing disguise and brilliant acting, are as likely to be found on the street corners of London as at the dinner

tables of Paris and Rome. Like Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, they recruit a fourth person, and, by means of ingenious plotting and perfect timing, always a step ahead of the police, they never fail in their task. They leave false trails and provocative notes, often teasingly pulling off extraordinarily complicated, even ritualistic, murders under the very noses of the police. It is probably the swagger and assurance with which the Four enact their crimes, rather than the justice of the punishment, which attracts our awe.



The Four Just Men, written in 1905, is often referred to as the first thriller, and has been made into several films. Wallace became a screenwriter, and his style is dramatic and stark. In warning notes to their victims, the Just Men's control and precision is chilling:

We allow you until tomorrow evening to reconsider your position... If by six o'clock no announcement is made in the afternoon newspapers of your withdrawing this measure we shall

have no other course but to fulfil our promise. You will die at eight in the evening.

Their deeds are roundly reported, and the Four Just Men become at once folk heroes and demons:

The first intimation of their intentions had excited widespread interest... But here was the hidden terror in the metropolis itself. Why, argued London, with suspicious sidelong glances, every man we rub elbows with may be one of the Four, and we none the wiser.

Wallace is skilled at evoking an atmosphere of fear. In the wake of terrorist attacks on major cities in more recent times, his prescient 'hidden terror in the metropolis' has resonances for today.



Edgar Wallace was born on 1 April 1875. His parents were unmarried actors. Nine days later he was adopted by a fish porter. At 11 years old he started his career

selling newspapers on Ludgate Circus, London. After military service he became a journalist, working in South Africa and then London. He was a prolific and popular writer (despite Leon Trotsky's assessment of his work: 'It is hard to imagine anything more mediocre, contemptible and crude'). At one time Wallace's publisher claimed that a quarter of all books read in England were written by Wallace. He lost a fortune on gambling and lavish entertainment. One particular decision was his ruin: a competition in the *Daily Mail*, which serialised *The Four Just Men*, in which readers had to solve the mystery. Too many were successful, and Wallace had to underwrite the prize money. He died penniless in 1931, while working on the screenplay of the Hollywood film *King Kong*. Today a memorial plaque in Ludgate Circus reads: 'He knew wealth and poverty, yet had walked with kings and kept his bearings. Of his talents he gave lavishly to authorship – but to Fleet Street he gave his heart.'

Notes by Bill Homewood



Bill Homewood's West End credits include leads in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Grand Hotel*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Boys From Syracuse*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Hollow Crown* (Royal Shakespeare Company). His innumerable television series include *The Professionals*, *Berkeley Square*, *A Wing and a Prayer*, *The Renford Rejects*, *London's Burning*, *Casualty*, *Coronation Street*, *Crocodile Shoes*, *The Bill* and *Spy Trap*. Bill also directs theatre in the USA, the UK, and France, where he runs a ranch with his wife Estelle Kohler. His recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Les Misérables*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *She*.

Credits

Edited by Malcolm Blackmoor

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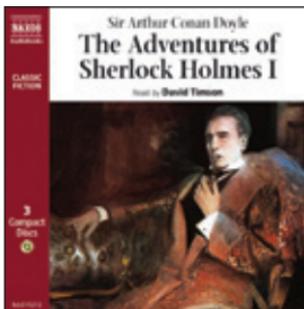
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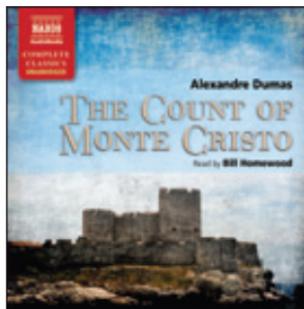
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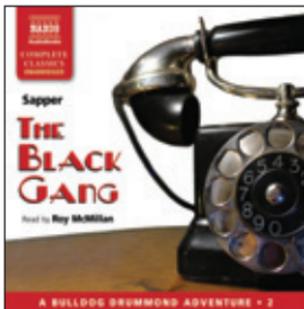
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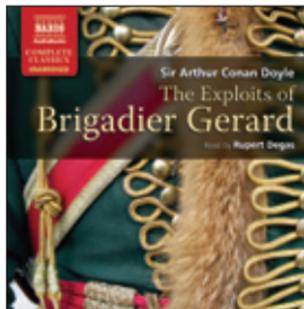
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Edgar Wallace

The Four Just Men

Read by **Bill Homewood**

The mysterious Four Just Men are wealthy Europeans who move easily in high society but, capable of convincing disguise and brilliant acting, are as likely to be found on the street corners of London as at the dinner tables of Paris and Rome. They are the ultimate vigilantes. Their job is to exact justice where governments and police are hamstrung. They work outside the law – and set about their business with grim precision.

Bill Homewood is well known for his appearances in numerous television shows and leading roles in the West End and for the Royal Shakespeare Company. His other recordings for Naxos AudioBooks include *Les Misérables*, *King Solomon's Mines*, *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *She*.



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