



Wisdom and Rubies: A tale of crime and misadventure in nineteenth century London

J F Slattery

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Wisdom is better than rubies", the dry and repressive Reverend Septimus Wood tells his students in the wet and foggy London of 1829. But who at the age of nineteen will believe him? Certainly not Lord Horatio Carlton and his friend Arthur Marshall, two boys full of jokes and fun. But things take a more serious turn when they find themselves in prison on a charge of burglary. How on earth did they get there? Yet their brief stay in Clerkenwell Gaol is only the first in a series of strangely interlinked events which will change their lives. Did Arthur ever think he would meet Frank Hoskins, "fence", police agent and charmer, and that they would become friends? Did Horatio ever dream he would one day have a man's life in his hands, a man to be charged with murder? Can Arthur ever tell what he knows about a sensational burglary and – worst of all – can he save a friend from the gallows? As they venture through the world of nineteenth-century London, seven years before the Victorian Age is to begin – a world of journalists and politicians, scholars and artists, prize-fighters and gamblers, burglars and confidence tricksters and pickpockets – the pressures increase, and they begin to wonder: can it be, after all, that wisdom is better than rubies? Their earlier laughter has vanished as they see themselves confronted with a devastating tragedy. Can they avert it? The story is told many years later by eminent criminal barrister Adolphus Winterbourne, who is writing his memoirs....

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