Duncan McNab, chief steward of the RAJAPUR, was a man who, as we have seen, never allowed to pass an opportunity of making or saving a penny, or even the half of that sum. The thrifty care which kept him at his post on the ship at Southampton when he might have obtained leave, because leave would have meant not only a railway fare out of his own pocket, but payment for his own board and lodging, while remaining on duty would save both—that same thrifty care caused him rather to welcome than otherwise the delay in the repair of the RAJAPUR. For it meant a few more days free board and a few more days’ pay to take—unless he were paid off summarily, which was not unlikely. But days went, no orders came, and he still remained, to his very great content.

It had been an uncommonly good voyage, on the whole, for McNab. Tips had been more plentiful and larger than usual, for it was not often that the RAJAPUR carried so many passengers of a well-to-do sort as she had carried on this last voyage, thanks to the Durbar and the over-filling of the mail ships. And now, after profiting from the ship’s good fortune in this respect, McNab was making a trifle more out of her misfortunes. Truly everything seemed going very well with McNab, and there was only one thing with which he was inclined to reproach himself—his lack of boldness in speculating in Tokay.

Plainly that had been a great chance lost. He had ventured so far as to speculate on a single magnum at the sale—and that with much mis-giving that he was wasting his money. But this bottle, although it had only cost him nine shillings, had sold readily for five pounds, and McNab was consumed with angry regrets on two accounts—first, because he had not bought more magnums when he might have had them; and second, that he had not made Mr. Merrick pay more than five pounds for the one he had sold him. What it could be that made these magnums of wine so valuable McNab could not imagine; indeed he did not try, for he was far from being a man of imagination—he would have repelled that imputation with scorn. Certainly he never dreamed of such a reason as the concealment of a priceless jewel in one of the bottles. It was sufficient for McNab that here was quite a little crowd of people inquiring for those particular bottles of wine, and ready to pay high prices for them, too.

In the first place, Mr. Merrick had given two hundred pounds for the dozen. That, figured the brooding McNab, was at the rate of £16 13s 4d a magnum. True, he had immediately afterwards sold off eleven of the dozen at about nine or ten shillings apiece; but there was no accounting for the eccentricities of American millionaires, who could afford that sort of thing. Indeed, had not that same millionaire been glad soon afterwards to pay five pounds to get back one of the bottles? He ought to have been made to pay more—certainly he should have paid more, reflected McNab. There had been all sorts of people after that bottle since then, and he might have made his own price. Mr. Crook had been one of them—the man who had originally sold the dozen for two hundred pounds; clearly he knew the value of the wine. Then there was a mysterious man—a foreigner, McNab supposed—the man whom Crook had afterwards described, and whom he had called Hahn. He had made higher offers than anybody—spoke casually of giving eight or nine pounds a magnum for any that he could get, and spoke in such a way that the shrewd McNab guessed very well that he would easily go higher. Lastly, the very auctioneer’s clerk himself, one Symons, had found him out, and had offered first a sovereign and then two for the magnum he supposed he still had, or any other. Of course this offer McNab laughed to scorn; but it served at any rate to prove that the great value of this wine had become known to the clerk, who was anxious to make a profit out of his knowledge. Duncan McNab grew gloomy and savage. Why hadn’t he had the enterprise of that fellow Smith, the man who had bought the next four lots after the first? He had paid ten
shillings for each, and it was only that extra shilling that had choked McNab off the lot following the one he had actually bought.

Now early on the morning of Merrick and Crook’s adventure at the late Pritchard’s lodgings in Redway Street, in London, McNab was taking an airing in Southampton, cogitating on these things, when he suddenly became aware of Hahn himself, standing on the steps of an hotel, smoking a cigar and smiling and nodding recognition.

“Ah, Mr. McNab, how do you do?” cried Hahn with a very elaborate cordiality. “You don’t remember me, do you? I called on you on your ship to inquire about some wine—you remember now, don’t you? You had sold it, you know. My name is Hahn, and I came back to my hotel—this is my hotel—yesterday morning. Will you have a drink, Mr. McNab?”

This was an invitation to which McNab never failed to respond. Indeed, if it were not for such invitations it would have been cheaper to be a tee-totaller. So Hahn and McNab went into the bar, and McNab drank whisky.

“Yes,” pursued Hahn, who seemed uncommonly—even feverishly—communicative. “Yes, I came here early yesterday morning, and registered in the office just before twelve. I—I took a sitting-room, as well as a bedroom, and told them to book it from that time; and I had lunch here. I’ve been in the place, in fact, ever since. By the way, what’s the day of the month?”

“Nineteenth,” replied McNab.

“Yes, of course—Thursday the nineteenth. I might have known. I shouldn’t have expected to find you in Southampton so long, Mr. McNab!”

McNab explained the reason of the delay.

“Ah—yes, most unfortunate,” Hahn commented. “Most unfortunate. And yet if it had not been for that little accident, I should not have have had the pleasure of meeting you here, Mr. McNab, on the nineteenth—Tuesday the nineteenth—afer being at this hotel since mid-day yesterday, which was the eighteenth. So if you’ll finish your glass, Mr. McNab, we will have it re-filled! It all goes down in my bill, you see; I’m staying here, since yesterday morning—the eighteenth.”

McNab did not wholly understand Hahn’s frequent references to the date and time of his arrival at the hotel, but he quite appreciated the whisky, not to mention the comforting reflection that he was a shilling ahead as a consequence of the encounter.

“I think you remember me now, Mr. McNab,” Hahn resumed. “I offered you a good price for that bottle of wine, you know, didn’t I? Eight or nine pounds I’d have given, or even a bit more, for that magnum of wine, or any others like it. You’ve never seen any since, have you?”

McNab shook his head gloomily. “I have not, Mr. Hahn,” he said. “Not a bottle whatever. You’ll be very fond of that Tokay wine, I’m thinkin’?”

“Oh yes, of course,” Hahn replied. “As a collector, of course. I’d give high prices for that particular case of Tokay as a collector. I’m sorry you haven’t been able to get any for me, Mr. McNab. I don’t think I should have refused ten pounds a magnum, Mr. McNab. As it is, I’m sorry, both for your sake and mine. You might have made a good profit, and I should have been very glad to get the wine.”

This roused all the bitter regrets that the whisky had tended to mollify; and presently, after listening to a few more reminders that Hahn had been at the hotel since yesterday morning, and was very sorry to have missed the Tokay, McNab took his departure.

He walked through the town toward the dock, and scarcely two streets from Hahn’s hotel he found himself in luck again. For, emerging from the private bar of a public-house, he saw another person whom he recognised.
was a little man, round, oiled and brushed, with a red polished face and large triangular checks all over his
clothes. His body seemed positively globular on his neat little legs, his face was round, his cheeks were round,
his low-crowned hat, perched aside, was all brimmy curves and curls and high polish, and his general fullness
and roundness suggested that a very slight accident would cause him to burst like an over-ripe gooseberry. And
in this nobby little man, McNab, with a shock of astonishment, recognized—Smith, the wine-merchant’s
traveller who had bought four magnums of Tokay at the sale!

The nobby little man went strutting along the street, and McNab went after him—not strutting, but galloping.
Three seconds was time enough for McNab to recover from his surprise, three more to realise that here, within
half-a-mile of each other, were the two men between whom a large profit was to be made, and—to catch
Smith.

“Eh? Hullo!” ejaculated the little man, seized by the shoulder. “What’s up?”

“Morn’, Mr. Smith! Maybe ye’ll no remember me; but I saw ye at the sale here at Lawson’s a whiles ago, when
ye bought four magnums of Tokay. I’m thinkin’ maybe you’re looking for a customer for they four magnums.”

“No,” answered Smith, “I ain’t.”

McNab’s face fell. “Maybe they’re sold? ” he queried.

“No,” Smith replied; “barrin’ one. I did sell one. But I’ve got the others—an’ got ’em ’ere in Southampton, too.
As I said, I ain’t lookin’ for a customer. But I’m open to an offer. What’ll ye give?”

“Fifteen shillun’ a magnum,” said McNab, with a wrench at his heart-strings. For indeed this man had bought
them at ten shillings, and it was positively agonising to have to offer him more. “Fifteen shillun’ a magnum; and
that’s a clear profit o’ feefty percent for you,” the steward added with something like a groan.

“That’s no go,” said Smith decisively, with a cock of the hat and a turn in the direction of his journey. “I can do
a lump better than that with ’em.”

“Weel—don’t go—ah’m no sayin’ but what I might revise the offer a trifle,” urged McNab. “Say twa pun’ ten for
the three, then.”

“That’s a five-bob advance on the lot,” replied Smith, whose arithmetic was as ready as McNab’s. “Not a bit o’
good—it’s wastin’ time. Ten pound for the three.”

“Impawsible, Mr. Smith, quite impawsible!” gasped McNab in agony. “Sic an’ awfu’ sum is unreasonable!”

“All right—don’t pay it,” answered the implacable Smith. “You needn’t, you know. I didn’t ask you. But if you
want them three magnums that’s the price, without a penny of discount. Barring enough to pay for a drink,” he
added liberally. “I’m willing enough to stand that.”

Poor McNab was shocked and amazed. That anybody but himsely should contemplate making a large profit out
of those magnums of Tokay seemed a wicked and deplorable thing. The notion of paying ten pounds for those
three bottles racked him to the soul. And yet—he could make thirty pounds of them at the least, merely by
carrying them down the street to Hahn’s hotel. He made one last desperate attempt to secure an abatement, and
then, finding that nothing would shake the adamantine Smith, he agreed.

“Very well,” said the nobby little man calmly.

“They’re not far off. Got the money with you?”

Yes, McNab had the money. It was not McNab’s habit to leave money or other valuables about in his cabin
while the ship lay in dock. He was ready to complete the bargain.
“All right, we’ll go straight along,” Smith said. “I’m stopping at Nottidge’s—always do. I left the magnums there
when I bought ’em, knowing I’d be back in a little while before I went to London. It ain’t far.”

They walked together to Nottidge’s Hotel, Mr. Smith humming gaily as he went. The little man was on Bob and
Sarah terms with the entire household of Nottidge’s, and the transaction was completed with very little
ceremony. McNab had his three big bottles, and Smith had his ten pounds.

“That’s settled, signed, and sealed,” said Smith as he dropped the sovereigns into his pocket. “Now we’ll go to
the bar and get that drink I promised you. I’ll get Bob to do those bottles up in straw and brown paper, if you
like, so that you can carry them. What’ll you have?”

McNab glanced round the bar, and saw a list of American drinks, the topmost of which was priced at eighteen
pence. So he had that. Whisky would have pleased him a great deal better, but would not have torn away half
as much of Smith’s ten pounds.

But Smith was quite cheerful. He paid for the drinks gaily, and sent the pot-boy to pack the magnums.

“That’s no bad deal for me,” Smith said. “Those four bottles cost me two pound, and I got the money back
before I left the auction-rooms. Remember that murder the other day over there behind the town? Old
gentleman named Clifton? Well, he bought one magnum of me. He bought one himself in the sale, and
and, as I was going out, he said he wished he’d bought another, and asked if I could spare one o’ mine.
‘Yes,’ says I, ‘at a price, o’ course.’ ‘How much?’ says he. ‘Two pound,’ says I, and he paid it without another
word, though I fancy he looked a bit sour at being rooked. So I stood on velvet, you see. Them three o’ yours
cost me nothing.”

This was a cruel rubbing of it into McNab. Mr. Clifton had looked sour at paying two pounds for a magnum—
and now he, McNab the frugal, had paid ten pounds for three!

“So that between the two of you,” Smith pursued, “I did very well. Very well indeed. All your ten quid’s found
money, you see, old chap! Not that I’d ha’ let ’em go for much less; not very much less, anyhow. I might ha’
knocked off a quid or two if you’d stood out, but as you didn’t, that’s neither here nor there.”

McNab’s inward writhings began to show in his face. Hahn should be made to pay for all this. No ten pounds a
magnum to Hahn now! The expensive American drink being finished and the bottles tied up in a straw-packed
parcel, McNab went off for Hahn’s hotel with no delay. Smith strolled as far as the corner of the street with
him, and there stood, watching his progress. As the little man stood there, Symons, the auctioneer’s clerk,
entered the hotel he had just left.

Now Symons had for some days been in pursuit of Smith by systematic means. A wine-merchant’s traveller, he
argued, visiting Southampton probably had customers there. Therefore steady inquiry at Southampton public-
houses would probably yield information. Steady inquiry he began, therefore, and this morning he had learned
that Mr. Smith, when in Southampton, usually stayed at Nottidge’s. Smith had had four bottles of that Tokay,
and since Symons could count on a profit of five pounds a bottle from Crook, even if he paid five pounds a
bottle for the wine, the business-like Symons hoped to make twenty pounds at least by an interview with
Smith.

So that presently, as the triumphant Smith saw McNab disappear in the entrance of another hotel, he was
touched on the shoulder, and turned to confront Symons.

“Good morning, Mr. Smith,” said Symons. “My name’s Symons. You don’t know me, but I think we can do a
stroke of business together. Shall we go back to Nottidge’s?” So the nobby little traveller and the auctioneer’s
clerk went back to Nottidge’s.
McNab, with the parcel of precious magnums hugged under his arm, found Hahn, with a fluttering telegram in his hand, busy at the hotel office. Turning away hastily therefrom, he almost knocked McNab and his weighty burden over.

“Aye, Mr. Hahn,” said McNab, “ye see I’m no’ so long awa’. Ye hae luck, Mr. Hahn—I’ve three magnums o’ the Tokay here!”

Hahn was curiously preoccupied and excited, but he controlled himself by an effort.

“No!” he cried. “You don’t say so, Mr. McNab! Three magnums?”

“Oh aye, sir, three hail magnums o’ the lot that was roupit at Lawson’s. Ye shall hae ’em as reasonable as pawsible, Mr. Hahn—though I paid cruel dear for ’em mysel’!”

Hahn looked at his watch. “And how much shall we say then, Mr. McNab,” he said, “for the three magnums?”

“I’ll juist tak’ aff the wrappin’s,” said McNab, fencing the question for the moment. “I’ll juist tak’ aff, and ye shall see the bottles yersel’—fine an’ great bottles as they are; fine great bottles.”

“Never mind that,” Hahn answered impatiently. “Don’t bother about unpacking them. How much for the lot?”

McNab drew a long breath and looked hard in his customer’s eye. “Feefty pun’,” he said.

“Right!” Hahn answered hurriedly. “That’ll do. I must run out to the bank and get the money. Sit down here in the hall, Mr. McNab, and wait. I may be gone a quarter-of-an-hour or twenty minutes—perhaps a little more. But you’ll be sure to wait, Mr. McNab, won’t you?”

“Oh aye, I’ll wait,” answered McNab readily enough; and he found a seat while Hahn hurried out at the door.

It was a noble profit, but he was angry with himself nevertheless. He never expected Hahn to jump so willingly at such a demand, and now he was consumed with vexation not to have asked more. He might as well have said a hundred—at worst Hahn could only have offered less. But how could anyone have guessed that Hahn would pay such a sum? And at any rate, fifty pounds for the three was the equivalent of the rate Merrick had paid for the whole case on the ship. But the consolation to be drawn from this fact was marred by the reflection that he, McNab, had sold this same Merrick a bottle for five pounds. It was a wicked thing, thought McNab, for a rich man to take advantage of him like that.

Hahn was a long time gone to the bank, but a prospective profit of four hundred percent made McNab patient. And he had the satisfaction of scoring over Smith too. For the steward had not long occupied his seat when Smith came puffing and hurrying in.

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“Ah, here you are!” cried the nob by little man. “I thought this was where you came. I’ve come to do a deal. I’ll give you a profit on your bargain over them magnums.”

“Verra kind of ye, Mr. Smith,” replied McNab sweetly. “What amount of profit would ye be disposed to offer?”

“I’ll give,” said Smith, “four quid a bottle.”

McNab shook his head with quiet enjoyment. “Na, na, Mr. Smith,” he answered. “It’s no go, in your ain words. Twenty pun’ a bottle might do it, now.”

“Twenty? Pooh—nonsense. Look here—here you are; twelve sovereigns—no, I’ll make it thirteen. Here you are, thirteen quid for the three!” And he rattled the money in his hand.

But McNab only shook his head again, and enjoyed the action. Clearly Smith had come to some sort of knowledge of the real value of this wonderful, this marvellous wine, in the last half-hour. Perhaps—who could tell?—he had met Hahn outside, and Hahn had sent him to try to get the bottles cheaper. But that game wouldn’t do with McNab. Hahn would have to come himself and pay the full fifty. No, no!
“Won’t take it?” queried Smith shortly. “I shan’t offer a cent more—I can’t; wouldn’t get anything out of it for myself if I did. You’ll make more out of it than I shall, at that price. For the last time, then, will you take the thirteen? “

“For the last time, Mr. Smith,” answered McNab, with a smile of amused superiority, “for the last time, I will not! “

“All right—keep ’em. No harm done!” And Smith slapped the money back into his pocket and strutted out.

Really Hahn was a long time at the bank—a very long time. McNab waited and waited. He had been there more than an hour now, and the hotel servants were beginning to take an inquisitive interest in him. Presently one of the porters, after taking instructions at the office, came across and said respectfully, “Was you a-waiting for anybody, sir?”

“Aye,” answered McNab. “For Mr. Hahn.”

“But Mr. Hahn’s been gone an hour and more.”

“Oh aye, I ken that verra wee! I’m just waitin’ till he comes back.”

The man looked surprised. “But he’s gone away, sir,” he said. “Gone by train. He sent his luggage before you came.”

“Eh? What? Gone by train? No—he’s no gone by train. He tell’t me he’d be back.”

The man looked a little doubtful at this. “I’ll send and ask the boots, sir,” he said. “He took the luggage to the station.”

The boots came, and testified not only that he had carried Hahn’s bag to the station, but that he had waited there and seen him go off by the twelve-ten train for London. There was no doubt whatever about that, the man said, with decision.

“He got a telegram,” explained the porter, “and ordered his bag down at once, sir. The boots went off with the bag just afore you came in, and left Mr. Hahn payin’ his bill. I see him a-talkin’ to you and a-lookin’ at his watch, and then he ran out an’ caught the train. Leastways boots ’ere says he caught it.”

“Yes,” corroborated boots, with all the affirmation he could muster; “he caught the train—I see him catch it. I see him catch it, certain, I did, with my own eyes; myself!”

There was no getting beyond this, and the speculative McNab began to experience an awful sinking in the stomach. The telegram—he remembered seeing the telegram in Hahn’s hand. And now he remembered that Hahn had been rather oddly pre-occupied, and certainly he had been in a great hurry to get away—to the bank, as McNab had fondly supposed.

The two hotel servants stood stolidly looking into the steward’s pallid face, till presently McNab gasped, “The Bank—which is Mr. Hahn’s bank in the town?”

The porter looked at the boots and the boots looked at the porter. Then they shook their heads together. “No bank, sir, not ’ere I should say. You see he don’t live ’ere. He’s only been ’ere once before—a little while back. But I’ll ask at the office, if you like.”

The man went over to the office and left McNab a few quiet moments wherein to absorb the appalling conviction that in some mysterious, wholly unaccountable fashion he had been done—done. Then the porter came back, shaking his head once more.

“He always pays his bills in cash, sir,” he said, “and did today, with a note from a roll of ’em. They don’t think, in the office, as he has any bank ’ere.”
“Notes?” gasped poor McNab. “A roll of notes? Was’t a big roll of notes?”

“Can’t say that, sir,” the man answered. “They might know over at the office.”

Over to the office McNab went, with the porter close by his elbow, and asked his question about the roll of notes, explaining that Hahn owed him money. The young lady in the office said that the roll of notes seemed a pretty large one—a hundred pounds or more, she felt certain. And at that information—that proof that Hahn could have paid on the nail if he had wished to do so—the heart of McNab sank into his very boots. He suffered himself, unresisting, to be gently shepherded into the street, and there he walked up and down hugging his hateful parcel in a daze of anger and despair.

No wonder Hahn had been so ready to agree to a price he never meant to pay. But then—why come after the wine in the first place? What did it all mean? And surely the whole thing could not be delusion? It was not only Hahn who wanted the wine—there was quite a crowd after it, all willing to pay well. And at that thought McNab’s wits came back. There was Smith—he had offered thirteen pounds to buy the bottles back. Come, there would be some profit in this thing, anyhow.

That morning, in London, after the return from the scene of the tragedy in Redway Street, Harvey Crook found this telegram awaiting him:

*Three magnums Tokay here, but may have to pay long price. How high may I go? Hahn here. Symons.*

The Tokay interested Harvey Crook no more. The great green diamond had left its lurking place in the bottle bought by poor old Mr. Clifton, and was now in the hands of Mehta Singh, leaving a track of murder behind it. Of that Crook was certain enough; the tale he had heard of Pritchard’s behaviour upon his receipt of the mysterious object-letter, of his shutting himself up in his room, obviously frightened, but clinging to the stolen jewel still, his previous visits to Isaac’s office, and the rest of the whole matter—these things left no doubt in Crook’s mind. So that he resolved to instruct Symons to trouble no more about the wine. But the tail of the message was significant. Hahn was in Southampton—apparently, since Symons mentioned the fact, still trying to buy the wine. Indeed there seemed no reason why Symons should mention his name in connection with the possibility that a high price might have to be paid for the Tokay except to suggest that Hahn’s competition might raise the price. This would seem to indicate that Hahn was not in league with Mehta Singh, knew nothing of the actual situation of the Green Eye, nothing of the murder in Redway Street. The reflection gave Crook an odd sense of relief for which he would have found it difficult to give a reason. The man was a scoundrel, and Crook had no reason to love him; yet it was in some way a comfort to believe that he was not an accomplice in murder.

So Crook replied to Symons thus:

*Buy no more Tokay of that lot. I will come down and explain. Crook.*

Crook felt that some compensation was due to Symons for this sudden rescission of his orders, and for the trouble to which he had been put. So he decided to run down to Southampton and settle, while he had a few unoccupied hours.

It was because of Symons’s receipt of this telegram from Crook that further tribulation fell on the head of McNab. When that Napoleon of commerce at last abandoned his forlorn perambulations before the door of the hotel which Hahn had abandoned, he made his best pace for Nottidge’s. Smith was there, smoking a cigar half-a-foot too long for a man of his size, and writing a letter, in the commercial room.

“Mr. Smith,” cried McNab, “I’ve changed my mind. I’ll tak’ your thirteen pun’.”

Mr. Smith turned round in his chair and looked up at McNab with the cigar cocked up as though it were a peashooter directed at the steward’s head. So he surveyed McNab for a moment, and then shook his head solemnly.

“It’s no go—in my own words, as you said. No go, my cute friend!”
“No go! But surely ye stand by your offer, man?”

“I made my offer once, and you wouldn’t have it. ‘He that will not when he may’—you know that pretty little verse, don’t you?”

“The twal’ pun’ then—surely ye’ll gie twal’ pun’?”

Smith’s round, sleek head began shaking steadily again. “I’m quite sure I won’t give you twelve pennies,” he answered deliberately. “When I made you that offer, it wasn’t for the sake of the wine, you may be sure, else I shouldn’t ha’ sold it you for what I did. I made that offer because I had a better one, and I could ha’ made a quid or two out of it—and so could you. But that better offer’s withdrawn now—it’s off. Consequence, I don’t want the wine, and I’m perfectly satisfied with the transaction as it stands. I’ve done all right out of it!”

McNab was plumbing the very deeps of despair. “But ye’ll no leave ‘em on my hands like this, Mr. Smith?” he pleaded. “Ye’ll relieve me of some pairt of the loss, conseederin’ the circumstances?”

“Considerin’ the circumstances, I’ll see you blowed first. Why should I take any of your loss? You’d ha’ made a gain if you’d taken my offer—and you grinned in my face when I made it! No, my boy. I’ll tell you who it was made me the higher offer, if you like—the offer that’s withdrawn. You can try him; go and give him a turn before I begin to get tired of you!”

“What’s his address, Mr. Smith?”

“Symons, the clerk at Lawson’s, auctioneers—up by the Memorial Hall. Where the stuff came from first.”

McNab waited no more, but tore away to Symons with the fateful parcel in his arms. Symons was as tough as Smith. He had had an order for the wine, and now the order was counter-manded; that was all. He wouldn’t buy the three magnums, nor two, nor even one, at any price whatever. And he was most exasperatingly cheerful over the whole transaction; so that now at last, driven to utter madness, the unhappy McNab ranted and swore and danced on the office doorstep and proclaimed his wrongs aloud to all the world.

“It’s a conspeeracy!” he cried. “A rank creeminal conspeeracy amang the hail gang o’ ye, sendin’ me frae ane to t’ither! A wicked conspeeracy to rob me o’ my money! I’m robbit—robbit o’ ten pun’ by a haill gang o’ thieving conspeerators!”

So that in the end, for the credit of the office, it grew necessary to call a policeman to propel the vociferous victim on his way. And so at last he went, and Symons saw him no more.

But McNab’s talk of conspirators sending him from one to another, and the other glimpses of the day’s doings which had been vouchsafed Symons, sufficiently aroused his curiosity to induce him to spend an hour in tracing the steward’s adventures from Nottidge’s to the other hotel and back again. So that when Crook arrived in Southampton that evening, Symons was able not only to explain how Mr. Clifton came by his second magnum, but also to give him a pretty clear idea of the course of events during the day.

“Hahn came into the office twice—I don’t know why,” said Symons. “Once yesterday and once early this morning. He made casual inquiries about that Tokay each time, but didn’t seem to care what I told him, or whether I told him or not. Not a bit so keen on it as he was before. But he seemed very anxious to bring himself to my recollection, and asked me each time if I remembered him. And he was particular, also, to tell me each time where he was staying, and that he’d been there since yesterday morning, the eighteenth, as he was careful to say. I don’t know why he thought I wanted to know about his movements.”

Crook also could not account for it till an idea struck him. And then the idea was that perhaps Hahn was not innocent of complicity in the murder of Pritchard after all. For what could it mean, this anxiety to impress on a stranger his identity, the date, and the time of his stay in Southampton? What but a careful preparation for a later proof, if it were necessary, of his absence from London on the night of the eighteenth? In short, an alibi?