

*Story of a Detective “Expert”*  
From the Knickerbocker for March

The reader of the “Lost Jewels of Achmet Bey,” in a late number of Knickerbocker, will need no added inducement to peruse the following, which proceeds from the same pen:

“The circumstances which occurred in Cairo to which I alluded in my account of the jewels of Achmet Bey, happened in this wise:

“I had been to Petra and Mount Sinai and had reached Cairo en route for Upper Egypt. Departing from my regular custom of sleeping at a Khan, I put up at Shephard’s Hotel, determined to atone for past fatigue by a fortnight’s rest. Our caravan arrived late in the evening, and when I sat down to tea I found but one companion. He was a large and rather handsome Englishman, whose gigantic frame and ruddy countenance evidently bespoke a traveler for pleasure and not for health. The usual courtesies of strangers passed between us on meeting, and it was not until we were nearly through our meal, that an active conversation commenced.

“Finding our taste somewhat similar, and being much predisposed in his favor, at my solicitation he accompanied me to my room, where there was a good fire, more for appearance than for necessity, and soon being involved in a dense cloud of Latakia (for which my heart now sighs) we unfolded our several histories. He had for some years been the chief “detective” in a large English city; having grown weary of his calling, and possessing some property, he had determined to travel. – “Not,” as he bluntly and honestly confessed, “Because he was a scholar, and wished to see that of which he had read, but because he simply wished to enlarge his views, and enjoy himself.” He entertained me until long after midnight, with detailed accounts of the adventures and difficulty he had experienced in ferreting out offenders, although he frankly confessed that it was an unpleasant thing to find that what at first the amusement was, and soon turned into an unpoetic, degraded feeling of spy-like drudgery. About one o’clock we separated, promising to devote the next day to sight-seeing: I offering, as an inducement, my knowledge of the language, which would preclude the necessity of other guides than our donkey boys.

“Two or three days of pleasant companionship had rapidly flown, during which much was accomplished, when the servant who brought fresh water to me in the morning, asked if I heard of the murder. In answer to my listless inquiries, he told me that Ibrahim, the cobbler, was missing, and that there had been enough blood found on the floor of his room to guarantee the belief that wherever he was, he was not alive. This was all he knew, and I thought little more on the subject until breakfast time.

Thompson – so I shall call my friend – was already seated when I reached the table, and after bidding me good morning, he asked me the English and American question: “What news.”

“It would appear,” I replied, “that they have had a murder or abduction case during the night, for our old friend of whom you bought your red slippers, has disappeared.”

“If, instead of murdering him, they had made him wear a pair of his own slippers for an hour or two, I think they would have punished him enough,” said Thompson, who the day before had been heroically enduring a pair of Turkish shoes.

“After we had finished our meal I proposed the pyramids, or the palace of Abbas Pasha (which latter was not then completed) Thompson said his feet were too much blistered to walk around “the curiosities,” and proposed we should visit the house where the murder was committed, and, said he, “Perhaps I can give you a hint or two on circumstantial evidence which will prove useful to you some day.” So saying, he limped out of the hotel, I following, and we were soon cantering gaily toward the bazaars.

“When we reached the house, which was in the thickest part of the Tahan Bazaar, a large crowd had already assembled, and the secretary of the Pasha was loudly vociferating and calling upon them to disperse.

“Thompson seemed to forget his lameness, for dismounting, he plowed a path to the house, I following in his furrow. Watching his chance when the secretary was engaged in laying down the law to the most persistent, he pushed open the door and walked in, as quietly closing it, leaving none within its walls but ourselves. The sight to me was almost sickening; and, to divert my thoughts, I was about peering into the closets, when my companion called me to stop.

“Do not touch anything,” he said; “here is a rare chance to show you that all my adventures were not idle talk. I will guarantee that if you will interpret for me, I can find out who did this deed.”

“I looked at him in astonishment. His keen eye was rapidly scanning the room, and indelibly transferring to his memory all it rested on.

“We shall not long remain undisturbed here, and therefore don’t say anything to me, but note everything, however minute, about the place, and we will talk it up afterward.”

“I obeyed his instructions. In about half an hour the crowd had been dispersed, and the latch was drawn. At the noise we both looked up. It was the secretary who entered, with a broom in his hand; I paid little attention to his looks, however; my friend paid more. The secretary was a little startled at finding two Franks in the dwelling, and he seemed heated and fatigued with his contest with the people outside; he, however, asked us to be seated, and apologized for having no refreshments to offer us. He did not ask us our business, as is the custom among Orientals, although they always couch the inquiry in such terms as to make it appear an act of friendly interest rather than curiosity. Although he did not ask me, it seemed so natural to make some remark about our affairs, that I asked Thompson what excuse we should offer for our intrusion.”

“Tell him,” replied he, “that we are going to discover the murderer, after the English plan; that we would like him to recommend us to the Pasha, as being excellent detectives.”

“Although I was somewhat troubled to find the requisite words in which to frame this eloquent address, I managed in some manner to convey the idea to him, and with abundant assurances that he would exert his influence with the Pasha on our behalf, we left him.”

“After taking a ride for an hour or two longer, we returned and enjoyed a *siesta* before dinner. I took a little walk around the square, which is in front of the hotel, and then went to my friend’s room. I found him drawing, at the table, and without looking up, he pushed a piece of paper before me and asked me to draw a plan of the room in which the tragedy took place.”

“On comparing them, they were found to agree in general; but in detail his was much more exact than mine.”

“He then drew two chairs before the fire, and after clapping his hands in the hall to summon a servant, he ordered some of “Alsop’s East India,” which, though less poetical than sherbet, is far more satisfactory. We lighted our cherry-handled chibouks and drew comfort from their amber mouth-pieces.”

“And now,” said Thompson, after we had smoked a while in silence, “what do you remember about the room, and what things attracted your special attention.”

“I gave him all the observations I had made, without skipping, as I thought, the most trivial thing. When I had ended, he praised my powers of noticing, and said he thought a few lessons would make me an adept. Then, refilling his pipe, he told me this views, as follows, I only omit such things as we talked up and discarded as irrelevant.”

“I noticed that the house was at one end of a small street, although it fronted on the bazaar; there was no occupied house in front of it, and the shops on either side, I remember, are closed at night. In the rear there are no houses whose windows command Ibrahim’s dwelling. I noticed that the house was composed of the room in which we were and the loft above. Now, that loft has never been opened, within a week at least, as the cobwebs were as thick round it as they are round the mouth of a parish poor box. Now, as the man must have slept somewhere, he slept in that room, and perhaps was sleeping when his assassin entered. I observed in the corner of the room a mat and some pillows, which had not been disturbed, and the only evidence I have that he was sleeping was the evident adjustment of those three ottomans. Now a man is never murdered – at least very seldom – except for covetousness, jealousy, or hatred for an injury done, insanity I look upon as a mere make-shift used by clever counselors to divert the law from its true course; although so popular had the doctrine become that the word murder seems to be defined unpunishable insanity. But that is getting off our subject. In this enlightened country, where it is no object for a man to be insane, we may reduce our inquiries to the

three causes of murder before mentioned. And first, let us take up jealousy. Was the man handsome? Was he passably good looking? Was he young? Was he attractive? What do you think?"

"To me," I replied, "he appeared to be none of these."

"Very well," continued Thompson, "at best these are but suppositions; we will find out to-morrow, in a quiet way, a great deal more about him. You think, then, we might dismiss jealousy?"

"I do."

"Then to my mind, he either had something worth coveting, or else he had done someone a real or supposed injury, and this was their revenge. From my experience, I am much inclined to favor this idea, and here are my reasons: he seemed to be a poor man: had he been a Jew, we might have found him working hard, notwithstanding immense, so to speak, latent wealth. Then again the Turks are an extremely jealous people, and from the crafty way this murder was conducted, I am disposed to think the culprit one of that nation. Here again, however, in my mind two ideas clash; I have some reason to think the offender a Bedowee; and if I am correct, I would be willing to bet, from your description of their character, that rapacity was the object; had it been revenge, a less open place would have been selected. To further this opinion, that it was covetousness of treasure, to which we are to ascribe the deed, I would call your attention to the room once more. Do you remember that there was a pile of bed clothing in one corner untouched, although the three ottomans bore marks of a person having reclined on them? Now why were these clothes not used? You know that an inhabitant of these climes, even in the hottest weather, covers himself completely when he sleeps. May we not argue from this circumstance, however slight, that he did not intend to compose himself to sound sleep – what was the motive? We must look for a strong one for this people are not easily caused to forgo rest. What motive stronger than on account of treasure? The blood dashed all around the apartment shows a struggle; the man was not sound asleep; he hears the assassin enter, he mingles the noise first with half-waking dreams the thought of treasure arouses him, and he copes with his adversary. He is at disadvantage, however, and is at length overcome."

Thompson stopped; and after sitting, each absorbed in his own thoughts, we separated for the night.

Early the next morning we went into the bazaar, and found the Pasha's secretary holding forth to the multitude on the probable and improbable manners by which the deceased came to his death. We pushed into the room, not heeding this gestures or vociferations to the contrary. He was too busy to hinder us, for he had his hands full outside. On looking again at the room, we found a mark under one of the head ottoman, as of a sack or bag drawn across the floor; the mark was almost obliterated but it was there nonetheless. The track was a narrow one. Now as the object had been dragged, it must have been heavy, and as it was a narrow track, the mind caught the idea of a money-bag at once. So far, so

good. I was looking under the ottoman to see if there was any more treasure of the same sort, when my eye caught a sparkling object. I drew it out and found it a seal, with a piece of guard attached. I showed it to Thompson.

“Read the name,” he said.

I did so: “Ali Ebu Daoud.”

“Do you know any such person?”

“Yes, that’s our friend the Secretary; I will return it to him now.”

“Are you a fool!” said Thompson, stopping me.

“I beg your pardon for my haste, but I was so excited at seeing that, that I did not know what I said.”

“Tell me this, was that guard on it when you found it?”

“It was.”

“Where do these folks wear their signets?”

“Round their necks by a guard.”

“Did you break this guard, or is it as you found it?”

“Did you get that blood on it, or was it on it?”

“I had not noticed any, but if there is any, it was on before.”

“Let us now go.”

We pushed out, and now the secretary was as anxious to stop our retreat, as before to stop our entrance. With a humble salaam, and pretending not to understand, we rode away. Thompson told me to direct the boys to guide us to the gate that leads to the tomb of the Mamelukes. I did so; and we soon were standing by the weasel-faced porter. Thompson stopped, and turning to me said:

“Give the man a piaster, and tell him I lost an ass night before last, pretty late, with a sack on his back.”

I did so. The porter, whose wit was sharpened by the bribe, asked what color the ass was.

I interpreted for Thompson.

“Tell him all beasts are the same color at night, and then ask him over again.”

I did so. The porter was a little ruffled by the species of answer I gave, and said pettishly:  
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“But one beast passed here after night, and that was a horse with two sacks, so I don’t know anything about your ass.”

“Ask if he did not go through without an order?”

The porter was turning his heel; but the sight of another piaster brought him back, although it did not quite soothe his ruffled dignity; so he only answered: “By the secretary’s own order. Why?”

Thompson now took his turn at not answering, and rode toward the bazaars. I now began to see what he was driving at.

When we came to a cobbler’s stall, just round the corner from Ibrahim’s, Thompson dismounted, and with the blandest manner possible, invited me to come up with him and sit by the cobbler, and traffic for a pair of slippers. After taking popes, (the cost of which you have included in your pair of shoes) and making his purchase, Thompson proceeded to a systematic but unnoticed pumping. We gleaned from it that the departed Ibrahim was not a man to cause jealousy, and had never for thirty years hurt any man by word or deed; and that on the day of his murder, he had sold the secretary some lands and had been paid for them; and that in the evening, when the secretary had gone to take a receipt, he had found the poor man dead, which fact he did not give out until the next morning, for fear of creating a disturbance. I asked the man why he had not borne witness to these facts. He said his opinion was, that a Bedowee had murdered the man for the money he was known to possess at that time, and “perhaps the same Bedowee might murder me, who knows?” and with a pious shake of the head he began a new topic.

Cutting the interview short, we rode to our rooms to consult, and heard on our way thither at one of the Khans, that the Pasha’s secretary had offered a reward for the murderer.

On our arrival at Sheppard’s, we retired to my room and discussed the case at large. – Thompson said he would like to bring matters to a better close, but had determined to go with a party of his friends on to Suez that night. On deliberation, we determined to send the secretary a “notice to call.” I summoned the waiter, and quickly wrote the note.

To our minds the evidence was complete; it showed that the secretary had bought the lands of Ibrahim, paid for them, and then had gone at night and murdered the victim to get the money back. All we wanted was his own confession. We then arranged that Thompson was to pronounce the sentence. He told me that the facts must be made public, and that as he was to leave Egypt that night, I might take all the honor in the morning. “For,” said he, “by that time my sentence will be executed.”

He refused to enlighten me further.

In about an hour the secretary walked in, rubbing his hands and looking flushed (perhaps from rapid riding). Everything I said to him was at Thompson's dictation. Requesting him, therefore, to dismiss his attendants, with which wish he immediately complied, we bid him to be seated. Through me Thompson said: "You have offered a reward for the discovery of Ibrahim's murderer; am I right?"

"You are."

"If I know who he is, and draw up a contract, will you sign and seal it?"

"I will sign it."

"And seal it, too?"

"Impossible!"

"Why so?"

The man's tact did not fail him; he replied: "that his seal was worn out, and was not being recut."

"Very well; I know who the murderer was and if you will sign the contract, I will seal it with this." Here Thompson produced the seal.

The secretary, wretched man, paled and blushed alternately; he was speechless. I interpreted for Thompson here as quickly as I could (for I dreaded to hear the guilty man speak) as follows:

"You were paying him his just due; you went to his house; you robbed and murdered him; you placed his body in sacks, and drove them by night into the desert; you thought you were not discovered; you offered a reward; do you see the blood on that signet; blood will not be silent; that betrayed you."

I ceased. He was dumb; he did not raise his eyes, nor did he endeavor to recover his ring. We sat in silence some time. At last he raised his head, and said, "I did not wish to kill him."

"I believe you," responded Thompson, "and now listen to your sentence. As yet, we three are all who know of the deed." Here the poor fellow's eye brightened, quickly to be dimmed. "Send for the money you took, and have it here, in this room, in one short half-hour; if you are here one instant later, all Cairo shall know of the deed."

He gazed vacantly at us for an instant, and then ran down stairs. We heard his horse's hoofs dash rapidly across the road. I asked not any further explanation from Thompson;

he sat in silence; and I knew that a few minutes more would bring the last act of the tragedy on the stage.

Punctually and panting, Ali Ebu Daoud was back with the blood stained treasure. But instead of half an hour, an age seemed to have left its withering blight upon his features, as he stood to hear the rest.

“You have killed a man; one of Allah’s beings,” said the judge, “you have restored the treasure; instead of death, this is your sentence: Before the sun this day sets, you must leave Cairo, never again to return. As the morning gun is fired in the citadel, all Cairo must know the author of this horrid deed. – Go!”

He gave us one look, a look that will haunt me forever, and then left us, with the mark of Cain upon his forehead; a ruined man. What became of him I know not? Thompson and I parted, perhaps forever, that night; he to go to India by way of Suez; I to go up the Nile in a few days.

The next day, by Thompson’s instructions, I ferreted out the next of kin, and restored to him that to which he was heir, and gave him all the particulars of the sentence of the culprit. Great was the excitement when the secretary was found missing the next day, and great was the feeling manifested when the author of the dark deed was discovered?

My fame was uncomfortably great, when it was known that I had been in some degree the means of discovering and banishing the offender. So greatly was I inconvenienced, that I hastened my upward Nile voyage. Gardet was not at all pleased at my not having said anything to him till it was all over; but good-natured soul that he was, it did not disturb his equanimity long.

And thus ends the mystery of Ibrahim the cobbler.

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