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Recollections of a Police-Officer

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*Guilty or Not Guilty?*

A few months ago, I was engaged in the investigation of a remarkable burglary, accompanied by homicide, which had just occurred at the residence of Mr. Bagshawe, a gentleman of competent fortune, situated within a few miles of Kendal in Westmoreland. The particulars forwarded to the London Police authorities by the local magistracy were chiefly these:

Mr. Bagshawe, who had been some time absent at Leaminton, Warwickshire, with his entire establishment, wrote Sarah King—a young woman left in charge of the house and property—to announce his own speedy return, at the same time directing her to have a particular bed-room aired, and other household matters arranged for the reception of his nephew, Mr. Robert Bristowe, who, having just arrived from abroad, would, he expected, leave London immediately for Five Oaks House. The positive arrival of this nephew had been declared to several tradesmen of Kendal by Sarah King, early the day proceeding the night of the murder and robbery; and by her directions butcher's meat, poultry, fish, and so on, had been sent by them to Five Oaks for his table. The lad who carried the fish home stated that he had seen a strange young gentleman in one of the sitting rooms on the ground floor, through the half-opened door of the apartment. On the following morning it was discovered that Five Oaks House had been not indeed broken into, but broken out of—this was evident from the state of the door fastenings—and the servant woman barbarously murdered. The neighbors found her lying quite dead and cold at the foot of the principal staircase, clothed only in her nightgown and stockings, and with a flat chamber candlestick tightly grasped in her right hand. It was conjectured that she had been roused from sleep by some noise below, and having descended to ascertain the cause, had been mercilessly slain by the disturbed burglars. Mr. Bagshawe arrived on the following day, and it was then found that not only a large amount of plate, but between three and four thousand pounds in gold and notes—the produce of government stock sold out about two months previously, had been carried off. The only person, except his niece, who lived with him, that knew there was this sum in the house, was his nephew, Robert Bristowe, to whom he had written, directing his letter to the Hummums Hotel, London, stating that the sum for the long-contemplated purchase of Ryland's, had been some time lying idle at Five Oaks, as he had wished to consult him on his bargain before finally concluding it. This Mr. Robert Bristowe was now nowhere to be heard of; and what seemed to confirm without a doubt the—to Mr. Bagshawe and his niece—torturing, horrifying suspicion that his nephew was the burglar and assassin, a portion of the identical letter written to him by his uncle, was found in one of the offices. As he was nowhere to be met with or heard of in the neighborhood of Kendal, it was surmised that he must have returned to London with his booty, and a full description of his person, and the dress he wore, as given by the fishmonger's boy, was sent to London by the authorities. They also forwarded for our use and assistance one Josiah Barnes, a sly, sharp, vagabond sort of fellow, who had been apprehended on suspicion, chiefly, or

rather wholly, because of his former intimacy with Sarah King, who had discharged him, it seemed on account of his incorrigibly idle, and in other respects, disreputable habits. The *alibi* he set up was, however, so clear and decisive, that he was but a few hours in custody; and now he exhibited great zeal for the discovery of the murderer of the woman to whom he had, to the extent of his perverted instincts, been sincerely attached. He fiddled at the festivals of the humbler Kendalese; sang, tumbled, ventriloquized at their tavern orgies; and had he not been so highly gifted, might, there was little doubt, have earned a decent living as a carpenter, to which profession his father, by dint of much exertion, had about half bred him. His principal use to us was that he was acquainted with the features of Mr. Robert Bristowe; and accordingly, as soon as I received my commission and instructions, I started off with him to the Hummums Hotel, Covent Garden. In answer to my inquiries, it was stated that Mr. Robert Bristowe had left the hotel a week previously, without settling his bill—which was, however, of very small amount, as he usually paid every evening—and had not since been heard of; neither had he taken his luggage with him. This was odd, though the period stated would have given him ample time to reach Westmoreland on the day it was stated he *had* arrived there.

“What dress did he wear when he left?”

“That which he usually wore; a foraging cap with a gold band, a blue military surtout coat, light trousers, and Wellington boots.”

The precise dress described by the fishmonger’s errand boy! We next proceeded to the Bank of England, to ascertain if any of the stolen notes had been presented for payment. I handed in a list of the numbers furnished by Mr. Bagshawe, and was politely informed that they had all been cashed early the day before, by a gentleman in a sort of undress uniform, and wearing a foraging cap. Lieutenant James was the name endorsed upon them; and the address, Harley Street, Cavendish Square, was of course a fictitious one. The cashier doubted if he should be able to swear to the person of the gentleman who changed the notes, but he had particularly noticed his dress. I returned to Scotland Yard to report no progress; and it was then determined to issue bills descriptive of Bristowe’s person, and offering a considerable reward for his apprehension, or such information as might lead to it; but the order had scarcely been issued, when who should we see walking deliberately down the yard towards the police office, but Mr. Robert Bristowe himself, dressed precisely as before described! I had just time to caution the inspector not to betray any suspicion, but to hear his story, and let him quietly depart, and to slip with Joseph Barnes out of sight, when he entered, and made a formal but most confused complaint of having been robbed something more than a week previously—where or by whom he knew not—and afterwards deceived, bamboozled and led astray in his pursuit of the robbers, by a person whom he now suspected to be a confederate with them. Even of this latter personage he could afford no tangible information; and the inspector having quietly listened to his statement—intended, doubtless, as a mystification—told him the police should make inquiries, and wished him good morning.

As soon as he had turned out of Scotland Yard by the street leading to the Strand, I was upon his track. He walked but without pausing until he reached the Saracen’s Head,

Snow-Hill, where to my great astonishment, he booked himself for Westmoreland by the night coach. He then walked into the inn, and seated himself in the coffee room, called for a pint of sherry wine and some biscuits. He was now safe for a short period at any rate; and I was about to take a turn in the street, just to meditate upon the most advisable course of action, when I espied three buckishly attired, bold-faced looking fellows—one of whom I thought I recognized, spite of his fine dress—enter the booking office. Naturally anxious in my vocation, I approached as closely to the door as I could without being observed, and heard one of them—my acquaintance sure enough, I could not be deceived in that voice—ask the clerk if there were any places in the night coach to Westmoreland! Why, what in the name of Mercury could a detachment of the Swell-mob be wanting in that country of furze and frieze coats? The next sentence uttered by my friend, as he place the money for booking three insiders to Kendal on the counter was equally or perhaps more puzzling: “Is the gentleman who entered the office just now—him with a foraging cap I mean—to be our fellow passenger?”

“Yes, he has booked himself; and has, I think, since gone into the house.”

“Thank you; good morning.”

I had barely time to slip into one of the passages, when the three gentlemen came out of the office, passed me, and swaggered out of the yard. Vague, undefined suspicions at once beset me relative to the connection of these worthies with the “foraging cap” and the doings at Kendal. There was evidently something in all this more than natural, if police philosophy could but find it out. I resolved at all events to try; and in order to have a chance of doing so, I determined to be of the party, nothing doubting that I should be able, in some way or other, to make one in whatever game they intended playing. I in my turn entered the booking office, and finding that there were still two places vacant, secured them both for James Jenkins and Josiah Barnes, countrymen and friends of mine returning to the “north countrie.”

I returned to the coffee room, where Mr. Bristowe was still seated, apparently in deep and anxious meditation and wrote a note, with which I dispatched the inn porter. I had now ample leisure for observing the suspected burglar and assassin. He was a pale intellectual-looking, and withal handsome young man, of about twenty-six years of age, of slight but well-knit frame and with the decided air—travel stained and jaded as he appeared—of a gentleman. His look was troubled and careworn, but I sought in vain for any indication of the starting, nervous tremor always in my experience exhibited by even old practitioners in crime when suddenly accosted. Several persons had entered the room hastily, without causing him even to look up. I determined to try an experiment on his nerves, which I was quite satisfied no man who had recently committed a murder, and but the day before had changed part of the produce of that crime into gold at the Bank of England, could endure without wincing. My object was, not to procure evidence producible in a court of law by such means, but to satisfy my own mind. I felt a growing conviction that, spite of appearances, the young man was guiltless of the deed imputed to him, and might be the victim, I could not help thinking, either of some strange combination of circumstances, or, more likely, of a diabolical plot for his destruction, essential, possibly, to the safety of

the real perpetrators of the crime; very probably—so ran my suspicions—friends and acquaintances of the three gentlemen who were to be our fellow travelers.

My duty, I knew, was quite as much the vindication of innocence as the detection of guilt and if I could satisfy myself that he was not the guilty party, no effort of mine should be wanting, I determined, to extricate him from the perilous position in which he stood. I went out of the room, and remained absent for some time; then suddenly entered with a sort of a bounce, walked swiftly, and with a determined air, straight up to the box where he was seated, grasped him tightly by the arm, and exclaimed roughly, “So I have found you at last!” —There was no start, no indication of fear whatever—not the slightest, the expression of his countenance, as he peevishly replied, “What the devil do you mean?” was simply of surprise and annoyance.

“I beg your pardon,” I replied: “the waiter told me, a friend of mine, one *Bagshawe*, who has given me the slip was here, and I mistook you for him.”

He courteously accepted my apology, quietly remarking at the same time that though his own name was Bristowe, he had, oddly enough, an uncle in the country of the same name as the person I had mistaken him for. Surely, thought I, this man is guiltless of the crime imputed to him; and yet— At this moment the porter entered to announce the arrival of the gentlemen I had sent for. I went out; and giving the newcomer instructions not to lose sight of Mr. Bristowe, hastened home to make arrangements for the journey.

Transformed, by the aid of a flaxen wig, broad-brimmed hat, green spectacles, and a multiplicity of waistcoats and shawls, into a heavy and elderly, well-to-do personage, I took my way with Josiah Barnes—whom I had previously thoroughly drilled as to speech and behavior towards our companions—to the Saracen’s Head a few minutes previous to the time for starting. We found Mr. Bristowe already seated; but the “three friends,” I observed, were curiously looking on, desirous, no doubt, of ascertaining who were to be their fellow travelers before venturing to coop themselves up in space so narrow, and under circumstances, so difficult of egress. My appearance and that of Barnes—who, sooth to say, looked much more of a simpleton than he really was—quite assured them and in the jumped with confident alacrity. A few minutes afterwards the “all right,” of the attending ostlers gave the signal for departure, and away we started.

A more silent, less social party I never assisted at. Whatever amount of “feast of reason” each of us might have silently enjoyed, not a drop of “flow of soul” welled up from one of the six insides. Every passenger seemed to have his own particular reason for declining to display himself in either mental or physical prominence. Only one or two incidents—apparently unimportant, but which I carefully noted down on the table of my memory—occurred during the long, wearisome journey, till we stopped to dine about thirty miles from Kendal; where I ascertained from an overheard conversation of one of the three with the coachman, that they intended to get down at the roadside tavern more than six miles on this side of that place.

“Do you know this house they intend to stop at?” I inquired of my assistant as soon as I got him out of sight and hearing at the back of the premises.

“Quite well: it is within about two miles of Five Oakes House.”

“Indeed! Then you must stop there too. It is necessary that I should go on to Kendal with Mr. Bristowe; but you can remain and watch their proceedings.”

“With all my heart.”

“But what excuse can you make for remaining there, when they know you booked for Kendal? Fellows of that stamp are keenly suspicious; and in order to be useful, you must be entirely unsuspected.”

“Oh, leave that to me. I’ll throw dust enough in their eyes to blind a hundred such as they, I’ll warrant you.”

“Well, we shall see. And now to dinner.”

Soon after the coach had once more started, Mr. Josiah Barnes began drinking from a stone bottle which he drew from his pocket; and so potent was the spirit it contained, that he became rapidly intoxicated. Not only speech, but eyes, body, arms, legs, the entire animal, by the time we reached the inn where we had agreed he should stop, was thoroughly, hopelessly drunk; and so savagely quarrelsome, too, did he become, that I expected every instant to hear my avocation pointed out for the edification of the company. Strange to say, utterly stupid and savage as he seemed, all dangerous topics were carefully avoided. When the coach stopped, he got out—how I know not—and reeled and tumbled into the taproom, from which he declared he would not budge an inch till the next day. Vainly did the coachman remonstrate with him upon his foolish obstinacy; he might as well have argued with a bear; and he at length determined to leave him to his drunken humor. I was out of patience with the fellow; and snatching an opportunity when the room was clear, began to upbraid him for his vexatious folly. He looked sharply round and then, his body as evenly balanced, his eyes as clear, his speech as free as my own, crowed out in a low, exulting voice, “Didn’t I tell you I’d manage it nicely?”

The door opened, and, in a twinkling, extremity of drunkenness of both brain and limb, was again assumed with a perfection of acting I have never seen equaled. He had studied from nature, that was perfectly clear. I was quite satisfied, and with renewed confidence obeyed the coachman’s call to take my seat. Mr. Bristowe and I were now the only inside passengers; and as further disguise was useless, I began stripping myself of my superabundant clothing, wig, spectacles, &c., and in a few minutes, with the help of a bundle I had with me, presented to the astonished gaze of my fellow traveler the identical person that had so rudely accosted him in the coffee room at the Saracen’s Head inn.

“Why, what in the name of all that’s comical, is the meaning of this?” demanded Mr. Bristowe, laughing immoderately at my changing appearance.

I briefly and coolly informed him; and he was for some minutes overwhelmed with consternation and astonishment. He had not, he said, even heard of the catastrophe at his uncle's. Still, amazed and bewildered as he was, no sign which I could interpret into an indication of guilt escaped him.

"I do not wish to obtrude upon your confidence, Mr. Bristowe," I remarked, after a long pause; "but you must perceive that unless the circumstances I have related to you are in some way explained, you stand in a perilous predicament."

"You are right," he replied, after some hesitation. "It is a tangled web; still, I doubt not that some mode of vindicating my perfect innocence will present itself."

He then relapsed into silence; and neither of us spoke again till the coach stopped, in accordance with a previous intimation I had given the coachman, opposite the gate of the Kendal prison. Mr. Bristowe started and changed color, but, instantly mastering his emotions he calmly said,

"You of course but perform your duty; mine is not to distrust a just and all-seeing Providence."

We entered the jail, and the necessary search of his clothes and luggage was effected as forbearingly as possible. To my great dismay we found among the money in his purse a Spanish gold piece of a peculiar coinage, and in the lining of portmanteau, very dexterously hidden, a cross set with brilliants, both of which I knew, by the list forwarded to the London police, formed part of the plunder carried off from Five Oakes House. The prisoner's vehement protestations that he could not conceive how such articles came into his possession excited a deserved smile on the face of the veteran turnkey; while I was thoroughly dumbfounded by the seemingly complete demolition of the theory of innocence I had woven out of his candid open manner and unshakable hardihood of nerve.

"I dare say the articles came to you in your sleep!" sneered the turnkey as we turned to leave the cell.

"Oh," I mechanically exclaimed, "in his sleep! I had not thought of that!" The man started; but I had passed out of the prison before he could express his surprise or contempt in words.

The next morning the justice room was densely crowded to, hear the examination of the prisoner. There was also a very numerous attendance of magistrates; the case, from the position in life of the prisoner, and the strange and mysterious circumstances of the affair altogether, having excited an extraordinary and extremely painful interest among all classes in the town and neighborhood. The demeanor of the accused gentleman was anxious certainly, but withal calm and collected; and there was, I thought, a light of fortitude and conscious probity in his clear bold eyes, which guilt never yet successfully simulated.

After hearing of some minor evidence, the fishmonger's boy was called, and asked if he could point out the person he had seen at Five Oaks on the day preceding the burglary? The lad looked fixedly at the prisoner for something more than a minute without speaking, and then said:

"The gentleman was standing before the fire when I saw him, with his cap on; I should like to see this person with his cap on before I say anything." Mr. Bristowe dashed on his foraging cap, and the boy immediately exclaimed "That is the man!" Mr. Cowan, a solicitor, retained by Mr. Bagshawe for his nephew, objected that this was, after all, only swearing to a cap, or at best to an *ensemble* of a dress, and ought not to be received. The chairman, however, decided that it must be taken quantum valeat, and in corroboration of other evidence. It was next deposed by several persons that the deceased, Sarah King, had told them that her master's nephew had positively arrived at Five Oaks. An objection to the reception of this evidence, as partaking of the nature of "hearsay," was also made, and similarly overruled. Mr. Bristowe begged to observe "that Sarah King was not one of his uncle's old servants, and was entirely unknown to him; it was quite possible, therefore, that he was personally unknown to her." The bench observed that all these observations might be fully urged before a jury, but in the present stage of the proceedings were uselessly addressed to them, whose sole duty was to ascertain if a sufficiently strong case of suspicion had been made out against the prisoner to justify his committal for trial. A constable next proved finding a portion of a letter which he produced, in one of the offices of Five Oaks; and then Mr. Bagshawe was directed to be called in. The prisoner, upon this order given, exhibited great emotion, and earnestly entreated that his uncle and himself might be spared the necessity of meeting each other for the first time, after a separation of several years, under such circumstances.

"We can receive no evidence against you, in your absence," replied the chairman, in a compassionate tone of voice; "but your uncle's deposition will occupy but a few minutes. It is, however, indispensable."

"At least, then, Mr. Cowan," said the agitated young man, "prevent my sister from accompanying her uncle; I could not bear that."

He was assured that she would not be present; in fact, she was seriously ill through anxiety and terror; and the crowded assemblage awaited in painful silence the approach of the reluctant prosecutor. He presently appeared—a venerable white-haired man, seventy years old at least he seemed, his form bowed down by age and grief, his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his whole manner indicative of sorrow and dejection. "Uncle!" cried the prisoner, springing towards him. The aged man looked up, and seemed to read in the clear countenance of his nephew a full refutation of the suspicions entertained against him, tottered forward with outspread arms, and in the words of the Sacred text, "fell upon his neck, and wept," exclaiming in choking accents, "Forgive me—forgive me, Robert, that I ever for a moment doubted you, Mary never did—never, Robert; not for an instant."

A profound silence prevailed during this outburst of feeling, and a considerable pause ensued before the usher of the court, at a gesture from the chairman, touched Mr. Bagshawe's arm, and begged his attention to the bench— "Certainly, certainly," said he, hastily wiping his eyes and turning toward the court. "My sister's child, gentlemen," he added appealingly, "who has lived with me from childhood; you will excuse me, I am sure."

"There needs no excuse, Mr. Bagshawe," said the chairman kindly; "but it is necessary this unhappy business should be proceeded with. Hand the witness the portion of the letter found at Five Oaks. Now, is that your handwriting; and is it a portion of the letter you sent to your nephew, informing him of the large sum of money kept for a particular purpose at Five Oaks?"

"It is."

"Now," said the clerk of the magistrate, addressing me, "please to produce the articles in your possession."

I laid the Spanish coin and the cross upon the table.

"Please to look at these two articles, Mr. Bagshawe," said the chairman. "Now, sir, on your oath, are they a portion of the property of which you have been robbed?"

The aged gentleman stooped forward and examined them earnestly; then turned and looked with quivering eyes, if I may be allowed the expression, in his nephew's face; but returned no answer to the question.

"It is necessary you should reply, Yes or No, Mr. Bagshawe," said the clerk.

"Answer, uncle," said the prisoner soothingly; "fear not for me. God and innocence to aid, I shall yet break through the web of villainy in which I at present seem so helplessly involved."

"Bless you, Robert—bless you! I am sure you will. Yes, gentlemen, the cross and the coin on the table are part of the property carried off."

A smothered groan, indicative of the sorrowful sympathy felt for the venerable gentleman, arose from the crowded court on hearing this declaration. I then deposed to finding them as previously stated. As soon as I concluded, the magistrates consulted together for a few minutes; and then the chairman, addressing the prisoner, said, "I have to inform you that the bench are agreed that sufficient evidence has been adduced against you to warrant them in fully committing you for trial. We are of course bound to hear anything you have to say; but such being our intention, your professional adviser will perhaps recommend you to reserve whatever defense you have to make for another tribunal; here it could not avail you."



Mr. Cowan expressed his concurrence in the intimation of the magistrate; but the prisoner vehemently protested against sanctioning by his silence the accusation preferred against him.

“I have nothing to reserve,” he exclaimed with passionate energy; “nothing to conceal. I will not owe my acquittal of this foul charge to any trick of lawyer-craft. If I may not come from this investigation with an unstained name, I desire not to escape at all. The defense, or rather the suggestive facts I have to offer for the consideration of the bench are these: On the evening of the day I received my uncle’s letter I went to Drury Lane theatre, remaining out very late. On my return to the hotel, I found that I had been robbed of my pocketbook, which contained not only that letter, and a considerable sum in banknotes, but papers of great professional importance to me. It was too late to adopt any measures for its recovery that night; and the next morning as I was dressing myself to go out, in order to apprise the police authorities of my loss, I was informed that a gentleman desired to see me instantly on important business. He was shown up, and announced himself to be a detective police officer; the robbery I had sustained had been revealed by an accomplice, and it was necessary I should immediately accompany him.

“We left the hotel together; and after consuming the entire day in perambulating all sorts of bystreets, and calling at several suspicious looking places, my officious friend all at once discovered that the thieves had left town for the west of England, hoping, doubtless, to reach a large town, and get gold for the notes before the news of their having been stopped should have reached it. He insisted upon immediate pursuit, I wished to return to the hotel for a change of clothes, as I was lightly clad, and night traveling required warmer apparel. This he would not hear of, as the night coach was on the point of starting. He, however, contrived to supply me from his own resources with a great coat—a sort of policeman’s cape—and a rough traveling cap, which tied under the chin. In due time we arrived at Bristol, where I was kept loitering about, till, finally, my guide decamped, and I returned to London. An hour after returning there I gave information at Scotland Yard of what had happened, and afterwards booked myself by the night coach for Kendal. This is all I have to say.”

This strange story did not produce the slightest effect upon the bench, and very little upon the auditory, and yet I felt satisfied it was strictly true. It was not half ingenious enough for a made-up story. Mr. Bagshawe, I should have stated, had been led out of the justice hall immediately after he had finished his deposition.

“Then Mr. Bristowe,” said the magistrate’s clerk, “assuming this curious narrative to be correct, you will be easily able to prove an *alibi*?”

“I have thought over that, Mr. Clerk,” returned the prisoner mildly, “and must confess that remembering how I was dressed and wrapped up—that I saw but few persons and those casually and briefly, I have strong misgivings of my power to do so.”

“That is perhaps the less to be lamented,” replied the county clerk in a sneering tone, “inasmuch as the possession of these articles,” pointing to the cross and coin on the table, “would necessitate another equally probable though quite different story.”

“That is a circumstance,” replied the prisoner in the same calm tone as before, “which I cannot in the slightest manner account for.”

No more was said, and the order for his committal to the county jail at Appleby on the charge of ‘willful murder,’ was given to the clerk. At this moment a hastily scrawled note from Barnes was placed in my hands. I had no sooner glanced over it than I applied to the magistrate for an adjournment till the morrow, on the ground that I could then produce an important witness, whose evidence at the trial it was necessary to assure. The application was as a matter of course, complied with; the prisoner was remanded till the next day, and the court adjourned.

As I accompanied Mr. Bristowe to the vehicle in waiting to convey him to jail, I could not forbear whispering, “Be of good heart, sir, we shall unravel this mystery yet, depend upon it.” He looked keenly at me, and then, without other reply than a warm pressure of the hand, jumped into the carriage.

“Well, Barnes,” I exclaimed as soon as we were in a room by ourselves, and the door closed, “what is it you have you discovered?”

“That the murderers of Sarah King are yonder at the Talbot where you left me.”

“Yes; so I gathered from your note. But what evidence have you to support your assertion?”

“This! Trusting my apparent drunken imbecility, they occasionally dropped words in my presence which convinced me not only that they were the guilty parties, but that they had come down here to carry off the plate, somewhere concealed in the neighborhood. This they mean to do tonight.”

“Anything more?”

“Yes. You know I am a ventriloquist in a small way, as well as a bit of a mimic: well, I took occasion when that youngest of the rascals—the one that sat beside Mr. Bristowe, and got out on the top of the coach the second evening, because, freezing cold as it was, he said the inside was too hot and close” —

“Oh, I remember. Dolt that I was, not to recall it before. But go on.”

“Well he and I were alone together in the parlor about three hours ago—I dead tipsy as ever—when he suddenly heard the voice of Sarah King at his elbow exclaiming, “Who is that in the plate closet?” If you had seen the start of horror which he gave, the terror

which shook his falling limbs as he glanced round the apartment, you would no longer have entertained a doubt of the murderer.”

“This is scarcely judicial proof, Barnes; but I daresay we shall be able to make something of it. You return immediately; about nightfall I will rejoin you in my former disguise.”

It was early in the evening when I entered the Talbot, and seated myself in the parlor. Our three friends were present, and so was Barnes.

“Is not that fellow sober yet?” I demanded of one of them.

“No, he has been lying about drinking and snoring ever since. He went to bed, I hear, this afternoon; but he appears little the better for it.”

I had an opportunity soon afterwards of speaking to Barnes privately, and found that one of the fellows had brought a chaise cart and horse from Kendal, and that all three were to depart in about an hour, under pretense of reaching a town about fourteen miles distant, where they intended to sleep. My plan was immediately taken, I returned to the parlor, and watching my opportunity, whispered into the ear of the young gentleman whose nerves had been so shaken by Barnes’ ventriloquism, and who, by the way, was my old acquaintance—“Dick Staples, I want a word with you in the next room.” I spoke in my natural voice, and lifted for his especial study and edification, the wig from my forehead. He was thunderstruck; and his teeth chattered with terror. His two companions were absorbed over a low game at cards, and did not observe. “Come,” I continued in the same low whisper, “there is not a moment to lose; *if you would save yourself*, follow me!” And he did so, and I led him into an adjoining apartment, closed the door, and drawing a pistol from my coat pocket, said— “You perceive, Staples, that the game is up; you personated Mr. Bristowe at his uncle’s house at Five Oaks, dressed in a precisely similar suit of clothes to that which he wears. You murdered his servant”—

“No—no—no, not I,” gasped the wretch, “not I—I did not strike her.”

“At all events you were present, and that, as far as the gallows is concerned, is the same thing. You also picked the gentleman’s pocket during our journey from London, and placed one of the stolen Spanish pieces in his purse; you then went on the roof of the coach, and by some ingenious means or other contrived to secrete a cross set with brilliants into his portmanteau.”

“What shall I do—what shall I do?” screamed the young fellow half dead with fear, and slipping down on a chair; “What shall I do to save my life—my life!”

“First get up and listen. If you are not the actual murderer”— —

“I am not—upon my soul I am not!”

“If you are not you will probably be admitted to King’s evidence; though, mind, I make no promise. Now, what is the plan of operations for carrying off the booty?”

“They are going in the chaise cart almost immediately to take it up; it is hidden in the copse yonder. I am to remain here, in order to give the alarm should any suspicion be excited, by showing two candles at our bedroom window; and if all keeps right, I am to join them at the crossroads, about a quarter of a mile from hence.”

“All right. Now return to the parlor; I will follow you; and remember that on the slightest hint of treachery I will shoot you as I would a dog.”

About a quarter of an hour afterwards his two confederates set off in a chaise cart; I, Barnes, and Staples followed, the latter handcuffed, and superintended by an ostler whom I for the nonce pressed into the King’s service. The night was pitch dark fortunately, and the noise of the cart wheels effectually drowned the sound of our footsteps. At length the cart stopped; the men got out, and were soon busily engaged in transferring the buried plate to the cart. We cautiously approached and were soon within a yard or two of them, still unperceived.

“Get into the cart,” said one of them to the other, “and I will hand the things up to you.” His companion obeyed.

“Hollow!” cried the fellow, “I thought I told you” —

“That you are nabbed at last!” I exclaimed, tripping him suddenly up. “Barnes, hold the horse’s head. Now, sir, attempt to budge an inch out of that cart, and I’ll send a bullet through your brains.” The surprise was complete, and so terror stricken were they that neither resistance nor escape was attempted. They were soon handcuffed and secured; the remainder of the plate was placed in the cart; and we made the best of our way to the Kendal jail, where I had the honor of lodging them at about 9 o’clock in evening.

The news, as late as it was, spread like wildfire, and innumerable were the congratulations which awaited me when I reached the inn where I lodged. But that which recompensed me a thousandfold for what I had done, was the fervent embrace in which the white-haired uncle, risen from his bed to assure himself of the truth of the news, locked me, as he called down blessings from Heaven upon my head. There are blessed moments, even in the life of a police officer.

Mr. Bristowe was of course liberated on the following morning; Staples admitted King’s evidence; and one of his accomplices—the actual murderer—was hanged, the other transported. A considerable portion of the property was also recovered. A gentleman—who, to give time and opportunity for the perpetration of the burglary suggested by the perusal of Mr. Bagshawe’s letter—induced Mr. Bristowe to accompany him to Bristol, was soon afterward transported for another.

*Hartford Daily Courant*, October 8 & 9, 1849  
*Milwaukee Sentinel and Gazette*, November 1 & 2, 1849

*The Daily Sanduskian*, November 7, 8, 9, 1849

*The Sheboygan Mercury*, November 10, 1849

*The Oskosh True Democrat*, November 23, 1849

*The Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, December 1849

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Prior to the British publication of this volume, a pirated collection of the stories—titled *Recollections of a Policeman by Thomas Waters, An Inspector in the London Detective Corps*—was published in America (New York: Cornish and Lamport, 1852).