Hornung Ernest William

The Camera Fiend

Ernest Hornung

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E.W. Hornung
The Camera Fiend

A CONSCIENTIOUS ASS

Pocket Upton had come down late and panting, in spite of his daily exemption from first school, and the postcard on his plate had taken away his remaining modicum of breath. He could have wept over it in open hall, and would probably have done so in the subsequent seclusion of his own study, had not an obvious way out of his difficulty been bothering him by that time almost as much as the difficulty itself. For it was not a very honest way, and the unfortunate Pocket had been called "a conscientious ass" by some of the nicest fellows in his house. Perhaps he deserved the epithet for going even as straight as he did to his house-master, who was discovered correcting proses with a blue pencil and a briar pipe.

"Please, sir, Mr. Coverley can't have me, sir. He's got a case of chicken-pox, sir."

The boy produced the actual intimation in a few strokes of an honoured but laconic pen. The man poised his pencil and puffed his pipe.

"Then you must come back to-night, and I'm just as glad. It's all nonsense your staying the night whenever you go up to see that doctor of yours."

"He makes a great point of it, sir. He likes to try some fresh stuff on me, and then see what sort of night I have."

"You could go up again to-morrow."

"Of course I could, sir," replied Pocket Upton, with a delicate emphasis on his penultimate. At the moment he was perhaps neither so acutely conscientious nor such an ass as his critics considered him.

"What else do you propose?" inquired Mr. Spearman.

"Well, sir, I have plenty of other friends in town, sir. Either the Knaggses or Miss Harbottle would put me up in a minute, sir."

"Who are the Knaggses?"

"The boys were with me at Mr. Coverley's, sir; they go to Westminster now. One of them stayed with us last holidays. They live in St. John's Wood Park."

"And the lady you mentioned?"

"Miss Harbottle, sir, an old friend of my mother's; it was through her I went to Mr. Coverley's, and I've often stayed there. She's in the Wellington Road, sir, quite close to Lord's."

Mr. Spearman smiled at the gratuitous explanation of an eagerness that other lads might have taken more trouble to conceal. But there was no guile in any Upton; in that one respect the third and last of them resembled the great twin brethren of whom he had been prematurely voted a "pocket edition" on his arrival in the school. He had few of their other merits, though he took a morbid interest in the games they played by light of nature, as well as in things both beyond and beneath his brothers and the average boy. You cannot sit up half your nights with asthma and be an average boy. This was obvious even to Mr. Spearman, who was an average man. He had never disguised his own disappointment in the youngest Upton, but had often made him the butt of outspoken and disastrous comparisons. Yet in his softer moments he had some sympathy with the failure of an otherwise worthy family; this fine June morning he seemed even to understand the joy of a jaunt to London for a boy who was getting very little out of his school life. He made a note of the two names and addresses.

"You're quite sure they'll put you up, are you?" "Absolutely certain, sir."

"But you'll come straight back if they can't?"

"Rather, sir!"

"Then run away, and don't miss your train."

Pocket interpreted the first part of the injunction so literally as to arrive very breathless in his study. That diminutive cell was garnished with more ambitious pictures than the generality of its order; but the best of them was framed in the ivy round the lattice window, and its foreground was the nasturtiums in the flower-box. Pocket glanced down into the quad, where the fellows were preparing construes for second school in sunlit groups on garden seats. At that moment the bell began. And by the time Pocket had changed his black tie for a green one with red spots, in which he had come back after the Easter holidays, the bell had stopped and the quad was empty; before it filled again he would be up in town and on his way to Welbeck Street in a hansom.

The very journey was a joy. It was such sport to be flying through a world of buttercups and daisies in a train again, so refreshing to feel as good as anybody else in the third smoker; for even the grown men in the corner seats did not dream of calling the youth an "old ass," much less a young one, to his face. His friends and contemporaries at school were in the habit of employing the ameliorating adjective, but there were still a few fellows in Pocket's house who made an insulting point of the other. All, however, seemed agreed as to the noun; and it was pleasant to cast off friend and foe for a change, to sit comfortably unknown and unsuspected of one's foibles in the train. It made Pocket feel a bit of a man; but then he really was almost seventeen, and in the Middle Fifth, and allowed to smoke asthma cigarettes in bed. He took one out of a cardboard box in his bag, and thought it might do him good to smoke it now. But an adult tobacco-smoker looked so curiously at the little thin cross between cigar and cigarette, that it was transferred to a pocket unlit, and the coward hid himself behind his paper, in which there were several items of immediate interest to him. Would the match hold out at Lord's? If not, which was the best of the Wednesday matinees? Pocket had received a pound from home for his expenses, so that these questions took an adventitious precedence over even such attractive topics as an execution and a murder that bade fair to lead to one. But the horrors had their turn, and having supped on the newspaper supply, he continued the feast in *Henry Dunbar,* the novel he had brought with him in his bag. There was something like a murder! It was so exciting as to detach Pocket Upton from the flying buttercups and daisies, from the reek of the smoking carriage, the real crimes in the paper, and all thoughts of London until he found himself there too soon.

The asthma specialist was one of those enterprising practitioners whose professional standing is never quite on a par with their material success. The injurious discrepancy may have spoilt his temper, or it may be that his temper was at the root of the prejudice against him. He was never very amiable with Pocket Upton, a casual patient in every sense; but this morning Dr. Bompas had some call to complain.

"You mean to tell me," he expostulated, "that you've gone back to the cigarettes in spite of what I said last time? If you weren't a stupid schoolboy I should throw up your case!"

Pocket did not wish to have his case thrown up; it would mean no more days and nights in town. So he accepted his rebuke without visible resentment.

"It's the only way I can stop an attack," he mumbled.

"Nonsense!" snapped the specialist. "You can make yourself coffee in the night, as you've done before."

"I can't at school. They draw the line at that."

"Then a public school is no place for you. I've said so from the first. Your people should have listened to me, and sent you on a long sea voyage under the man I recommended, in the ship I told them about. She sails the day after to-morrow, and you should have sailed in her."

The patient made no remark; but he felt as sore as his physician on the subject of that long sea voyage. It would have meant a premature end to his undistinguished schooldays, and goodbye to all thought of following in his brothers' steps on the field of schoolboy glory. But he might have had adventures beyond the pale of that circumscribed arena, he might have been shipwrecked on a desert island, and lived to tell a tale beyond the dreams of envious athletes, if his people had but taken kindly

to the scheme. But they had been so very far from taking to it at all, with the single exception of his only sister, that the boy had not the heart to discuss it now.

"If only there were some medicine one could take to stop an attack!" he sighed. "But there doesn't seem to be any."

"There are plenty of preventives," returned the doctor. "That's what we want. Smoking and inhaling all sorts of rubbish is merely a palliative that does more harm than good in the long run."

"But it does you good when the preventives fail. If I could get a good night without smoking I should be thankful."

"If I promise you a good night will you give me your cigarettes to keep until to-morrow?"

"If you like."

The doctor wrote a prescription while the boy produced the cardboard box from his bag.

"Thank you," said Bompas, as they made an exchange. "I don't want you even to be tempted to smoke to-night, because I know what the temptation must be when you can't get your breath. You will get this prescription made up in two bottles; take the first before you go to bed to-night, and the second if you wake with an attack before five in the morning. You say you are staying the night with friends; better give me the name and let me see if they're on the telephone before you go. I want you to go to bed early, tell them not to call you in the morning, and come back to me the moment you've had your breakfast."

They parted amicably after all, and Pocket went off only wondering whether he ought to have said positively that he was staying with friends when he might be going back to school. But Dr. Bompas had been so short with him at first as to discourage unnecessary explanations; besides, there could be no question of his going back that night. And the difficulty of the morning, which he had quite forgotten in the train, was not allowed to mar a moment of his day in town.

The time-table of that boy's day must speak for itself. It was already one o'clock, and he was naturally hungry, especially after the way his breakfast had been spoilt by Coverley's card. At 1.15 he was munching a sausage roll and sipping chocolate at a pastry-cook's in Oxford Street. The sausage roll, like the cup of chocolate, was soon followed by another; and a big Bath bun completed a debauch of which Dr. Bompas would undoubtedly have disapproved.

At 1.45, from the top of an Atlas omnibus in Baker Street, he espied a placard with "Collapse of Middlesex" in appalling capitals. And at the station he got down to learn the worst before going on to Lord's for nothing.

The worst was so hopelessly bad that Pocket wished himself nearer the theatres, and then it was that the terra-cotta pile of Madame Tussaud's thrust itself seductively upon his vision. He had not been there for years. He had often wanted to go again, and go alone. He remembered being taken by his sister when a little boy at Coverley's, but she had refused to go into the Chamber of Horrors, and he had been relieved at the time but sorry ever afterwards, because so many of the boys of those days had seen everything and seemed none the worse for the adventure. It was one of the things he had always wanted not so much to do as to have done. The very name of the Chamber of Horrors had frozen his infant blood when he first heard it on the lips of a criminological governess. On the brink of seventeen there was something of the budding criminologist about Pocket Upton himself; had not a real murder and *Henry Dunbar* formed his staple reading in the train? And yet the boy had other sensibilities which made him hesitate outside the building, and enter eventually with quite a nutter under the waistcoat.

A band in fantastic livery was playing away in the marble hall; but Pocket had no ear for their music, though he was fond enough of a band. And though history was one of his few strong points at school, the glittering galaxy of kings and queens appealed to him no more than the great writers at their little desks and the great cricketers in their unconvincing flannels. They were waxworks one and all. But when the extra sixpence had been paid at the inner turnstile, and he had passed down a

dungeon stair into the dim vaults below, his imagination was at work upon the dreadful faces in the docks before he had brought his catalogue to bear on one of them.

Here were wretches whose vile deeds had long been familiar to the schoolboy through a work on his father's shelves called *Annals of Our Time.* He recalled bad nights when certain of those annals had kept him awake long after his attack; and here were the actual monsters, not scowling and ferocious as he had always pictured them, but far more horribly demure and plump. Here were immortal malefactors like the Mannings; here were Rush and Greenacre cheek by jowl, looking as though they had stepped out of Dickens in their obsolete raiment, looking anything but what they had been. Some wore the very clothes their quick bodies had filled; here and there were authentic tools of death, rusty pistols, phials of poison with the seals still bright, and a smug face smirking over all in self-conscious infamy. There was not enough of the waxwork about these creatures; in the poor light, and their own clothes, and the veritable dock in which many of them had heard their doom, they looked hideously human and alive. One, a little old man, sat not in the dock but on the drop itself, the noose dangling in front of him; and the schoolboy felt sorry for him, for his silver bristles, for the broad arrows on his poor legs, until he found out who it was. Then he shuddered. It was Charles Peace. He had first heard of Charles Peace from the nice governess aforesaid; and here under his nose were the old ruffian's revolver, and the strap that strapped it to his wrist, with the very spectacles he had wiped and worn. The hobbledehoy was almost as timorously entranced as he had been in infancy by untimely tale of crime. He stood gloating over the gruesome relics, over ropes which had hanged men whose trials he had read for himself in later days, and yet wondering with it all whether he would ever get these things out of his mind again. They filled it to overflowing. He might have had the horrid place to himself. Yet he had entered it with much amusement at the heels of a whole family in deep mourning, a bereaved family drowning their sorrow in a sea of gore, their pilot through the catalogue a conscientious orphan with a monotonous voice and a genius for mis-pronunciation. Pocket had soon ceased to see or hear him or any other being not made of wax. And it was only when he was trying to place a nice-looking murderer in a straw hat, who suddenly moved into a real sightseer like himself, that the unwholesome spell was broken.

Pocket was not sorry to be back in the adulterated sunshine and the comparatively fresh air of the Marylebone Road. He was ashamed to find that it was after four o'clock. Guy and Vivian Knaggs would be home from Westminster in another hour. Still it was no use getting there before them, and he might as well walk as not; it was pleasant to rub shoulders with flesh and blood once more, and to look in faces not made of wax in the devil's image. His way, which he knew of old, would naturally have led him past Miss Harbottle's door; but, as she was only to be his second string for the night, he preferred not to be seen by that old lady yet. Such was the tiny spring of an important action; it led the wanderer into Circus Road and a quite unforeseen temptation.

In the Circus Road there happens to be a highly respectable pawnbroker's shop; in the pawnbroker's window the chances are that you might still find a motley collection of umbrellas, mandolines, family Bibles, ornaments and clocks, strings of watches, trays of purses, opera-glasses, biscuit-boxes, photograph frames and cheap jewellery, all of which could not tempt you less than they did Pocket Upton the other June. There were only two things in the window that interested him at all, and they were not both temptations. One was an old rosewood camera, and Pocket was interested in cameras old and new; but the thing that tempted him was a little revolver at five-and-six, with what looked like a box of cartridges beside it, apparently thrown in for the price. A revolver to take back to school! A revolver to fire in picked places on the slow walks with a slow companion which were all the exercise this unfortunate fellow could take! A revolver and cartridges complete, so that one could try it now, in no time, with Guy and Vivian at the end of their garden in St. John's Wood Park! And all very likely for five bob if one bargained a bit!

Pocket took out his purse and saw what a hole the expenditure of any such sum would make. But what was that if it filled a gap in his life? Of coure it would have been breaking a school rule, but

he was prepared to take the consequences if found out; it need not involve his notion of dishonour. Still, it must be recorded that the young or old as was conscientious enough to hesitate before making his fatal plunge into the pawnbroker's shop.

A BOY ABOUT TOWN

The young Westminsters had not come in when Pocket finally cast up in St. John's Wood Park. But their mother was at home, and she gave the boy a cup of tepid tea out of a silver tea-pot in the drawing-room. Mrs. Knaggs was a large lady who spoke her mind with much freedom, at all events to the young. She remarked how much Upton (so she addressed him) had altered; but her tone left Pocket in doubt as to whether any improvement was implied. She for one did not approve of his luncheon in Oxford Street, much less of the way he had spent a summer's afternoon; indeed, she rather wondered at his being allowed alone in London at all. Pocket, who could sometimes shine in conversation with his elders, at once reminded Mrs. Knaggs that her own Westminster boys were allowed alone in London every day of their lives. But Mrs. Knaggs said that was a very different thing, and that she thought Pocket's public school must be very different from Westminster. Pocket bridled, but behaved himself; he knew where he wanted to stay the night, and got as far towards inviting himself as to enlarge upon Mr. Coverley's misfortune and his own disappointment. Mrs. Knaggs in her turn did ask him where he meant to and even the conscientious Pocket caught himself declaring he had no idea. Then the boys were heard returning, and Mrs. Knaggs said of course he would stop to schoolroom supper, and Pocket thanked her as properly as though it were the invitation he made sure must follow. After all, Vivian Knaggs had stayed at Pocket's three weeks one Christmas, and Guy a fortnight at Easter; the boys themselves would think of that; it was not a matter to broach to them, or one to worry about, prematurely.

Vivian and Guy were respectively rather older and rather younger than Pocket, and they came in looking very spruce, the one in his Eton jacket, the other in tails, but both in shiny toppers that excited an unworthy prejudice in the wearer of the green tie with red spots. They seemed very glad to see him, however, and the stiffness was wearing off even before Pocket produced his revolver in the basement room where the two Westminsters prepared their lessons and had their evening meal.

The revolver melted the last particle of ice, though Vivian Knaggs pronounced it an old pin-firer, and Guy said he would not fire it for a thousand pounds. This only made Pocket the more eager to show what he and his revolver were made of, then and there in the garden, and the more confident that it never would be heard in the house.

“It would,” answered Vivian, “and seen as well. No, if you want to have a shot let's stick up a target outside this window, and fire from just inside.”

The window was a French one leading into the back garden; but, unhappily, Mrs. Knaggs's bedroom was only two floors higher, and it also looked out on the back; and Mrs. Knaggs herself was in her room and near her window when the report startled her, and not less because she little dreamt what it was until she looked out in time to see a cloud of smoke escaping from the schoolroom window, and Pocket examining the target, weapon in hand.

There was a great scene about it. Mrs. Knaggs shrieked a prohibition from aloft, and having pacified an incoherent cook upon the stairs, descended to extract a solemn promise which might well have ended the matter. Pocket was very contrite, indeed, drew his weapon's teeth with a promptitude that might have been his death, and offered it and them to be placed under lock and key until he left. But Mrs. Knaggs contented herself with promoting a solemn promise into a Sacred Word of Honour – which rather hurt poor Pocket – and with sending him a very straight message by Vivian after supper.

“The mater's awfully sorry,” said Vivian, returning from a mission which Pocket had been obliged to instigate after all. “There's not a spare bed in the house.”

Guy incontinently declared there was. A fraternal frown alone prevented him from going into particulars.

“A sofa would do me all right,” suggested Pocket, who had long ago lost his last train, and would have preferred a bare plank where there were boys to fussy old Miss Harbottle's best bed. But Vivian Knaggs shook his head.

“The mater says she couldn't sleep with firearms in the house.”

“I'll bury them in the garden if she likes.”

“Then you smoke in the night, and at Coverley's you once walked in your sleep,” pursued Vivian, who certainly seemed to have been urging the interloper's cause. “And the mater's afraid you might walk out of a window or set the house on fire.”

“I shouldn't do either to-night,” protested Pocket, with a grin. “I've not got anything to smoke, and I have got something to keep me quiet.”

And with further information on both points the son of the house went upstairs again, only to return in quicker time with a more embarrassed gravity.

“She's awfully sorry,” he said unconvincingly, “but she can't undertake the responsibility of putting you up with your asthma.”

Oddly enough, for he was only too sensitive on some points, Pocket was not really hurt by his treatment at the hands of these people; he felt he had made rather a mistake, but not that he had been most inhumanly cast adrift at sixteen among the shoals and quicksands of London. Nor was this quite the case as yet; there was still old Miss Harbottle in Wellington Road. But to her he was not going until decency compelled him; he was going to have another game of bagatelle with Guy Knaggs first. It will be seen that with all his sensibilities the youngest Upton was a most casual and sanguine youth. He took a great deal for granted, prepared only for the best, and although inclined to worry over the irrevocable, took no thought for the morrow until he was obliged. He was sorry he had been so positive with Spearman on the subject of his friend's hospitality. He was sorry he had asked and been refused, rather sorry he had not caught that last train back from St. Pancras. Yet he left poor Miss Harbottle the best part of another hour to go to bed in; and that was neither the first nor the last of his erratic proceedings.

“What about your luggage?” asked the elder Knaggs, as he put on his hat to walk round with Pocket.

“Good Lord!” cried that worthy, standing still in the hall.

“Haven't you got any?”

“I left it at Madame Tussaud's!”

“Left your luggage there?”

“It was only a handbag. How long are they open?”

Young Knaggs looked in *Whitaker* and said they closed at ten. There was still time to recover the bag with a taxicab, but in that case it was not much use his going too. So they said goodbye at the Swiss Cottage, and the adventures of Pocket Upton began in earnest.

Old Miss Harbottle, his mother's great friend, would have none of him either! He stopped on the way to Baker Street to make sure. The garden gate was one that only opened by a catch and a cable manipulated indoors. The downstairs lights were out. The gate opened at last, a light shone through the front door, and the door opened a few inches on the chain. Pocket confronted a crevice of quilted dressing-gown and grey curls; but his mother's friend's mastiff was making night so hideous within, and trying so hard to get at his mother's son, that it was some time before he could exchange an intelligible word with the brute's mistress. It was not a satisfactory interchange then, for Miss Harbottle at first flatly refused to believe that this was Tony Upton, whom she had not seen since his preparatory schooldays, and she seemed inclined to doubt it to the end. Upton or no Upton, she could not take him in. She had no sheets aired, no fire to air them at, and the cook had just left. Miss Harbottle's cook had always just left, except when she was just leaving. The rejected visitor got an instant's fun out of the reflection as he returned to his palpitating taxicab.

His position was now quite serious. He had not many shillings in his purse. The only thing to do was to put up at Shaw's Hotel, Trafalgar Square; that was where his people always stayed, where every servant was supposed to know them all. He pushed on at once through the cool June night, and paid away three of his last shillings for the drive. Alas! not a bed to be had at Shaw's; it was the worst time of the year, they told him, and he supposed they meant the best. He also supposed there had been changes in the staff, for nobody seemed to know his name as well as he had been led to expect at home.

They were quite nice about it. They pointed out the big hotels opposite, and recommended more than one of the little ones in Craven Street. But the big hotels were all full to overflowing; and at the only little one he tried the boy lost his temper like a man on being requested to deposit six shillings before proceeding to his room. Pocket had not got it to deposit, and the galling reflection caused him to construe the demand as a deliberate reflection upon his outward respectability – as if he could not have borrowed the money from Dr. Bompas in the morning!

"I'll see you blowed," was his muttered reply, and he caught up his bag in a passion.

"All right, little man! I shouldn't be rude about it," said the dapper cashier. "If I couldn't pay my shot I should sleep in the Park, on a nice fine night like this."

"I shall!" shouted Pocket through his teeth, as though that would prevent the brute of a cashier from sleeping soundly in his bed. And it was his own idle and childish threat that set him presently wondering what else he was to do. He had the spirit of adventure, as we have seen.

He had the timorous, or let us say, the imaginative temperament, which lends to adventure its very salt. He wished to have done dangerous or heroic things, if not to have to do them. He had so little to boast about; his brothers, and so many other fellows of his own age, had so much. It would make a great yarn some day, how he had come up from school to see a doctor – and slept in the Park!

Meanwhile he had only a vague idea of his way there; he knew hardly anything of London except St. John's Wood and his present landmark of the Nelson column and the Landseer lions. He knew them from having stayed some time (under another doctor) as a child at Shaw's Hotel. But, I say! What would Bompas say to his sleeping out, and what sort of night could he expect in the open air?

He had an overcoat. It had been in his way all day; it would come in more than handy for the night. And it suddenly struck Pocket, with all the force of a forgotten novelty, that he had a revolver and cartridges as well.

That decided him. Not that he seriously thought himself the kind of person to use a revolver with resolution or effect; but it made him feel doughty and even truculent to find the means of heroic defence all ready to his hand. He began to plume himself on his providential purchase. He would sell his young life dearly if he fell among London thieves; in his death he would not be unhonoured at school or at home. Obituary phrases of a laudatory type sprang like tears to a mind still healthy enough to dash them away again, as though they had been real tears; but it was with all the nervous exaltation of the unsuspected desperado that he inquired his way of a colossal constable at the corner of Pall Mall and the Haymarket.

The man wanted to know if he meant Hyde Park Corner. "Yes," said Pocket, hastily, because his heart was in his mouth and the policeman looked as though he had seen it there. And he overshot the mark in the motor omnibus through being ashamed to ask again, only alighting at Albert Gate; but here there was quite a little stream of decent people to follow without further tremors into the indubitable Park.

He followed them across the drive and across Rotten Row, gaining confidence as he went. In a minute it was all delightful; his eyes were turned outward by all there was to see; and now his chief fear was lest some one or other of the several passers should stand in his path and ask what he was doing there. He was still afraid of speaking or being spoken to, but no longer unreasonably so. Detection as an escaped schoolboy was his one great dread; he felt he was doing something for which he might be expelled.

But nobody took any notice of him; this gradually encouraged him to take more notice of other people, when he found, not altogether to his surprise, that the majority of those passing through the Park at that late hour were hardly of his own class. So much the more infinitesimal were the chances of his being recognised or even suspected for what he was. There were young men in straw hats, there were red-coated soldiers, and there were girls. They all filled the schoolboy with their fascinating possibilities. They were Life. The boy's heart beat at what he heard and saw. The couples were hilarious and unrefined. One wench, almost under his nose, gave her soldier a slap with such a remark as Pocket had never heard from a woman's lips before. He turned away, tingling, and leant upon the parapet of a bridge he had been in the act of crossing, and thought of school and home and Mr. Coverley.

It was not really a bridge at all. It was only the eastern extremity of the Serpentine; but as the boy leant over the stone balustrade, and gazed upon the artificial flood, broadening out indefinitely in the darkness, it might have been the noblest river in the world. Its banks were muffled in a feather boa of trees, bedizened by a chain of many lights; the lights of a real bridge made a diadem in the distance; and between these sped the lamps of invisible vehicles, like fretful fireflies. And the still water gave back every glimmer with its own brilliance, unchallenged and undimmed by moon or star, for not a trace of either was in the sky; and yet it was the most wonderful sky the boy had ever seen – a black sky tinged with sullen rose, or a red sky seen through smoked glasses, he hardly knew which he would have called it. But he did know that warm and angry glow for the reflection of London's light and life; he could not forget he was in London for a moment. Her mighty machinery with its million wheels throbbed perpetually in his ears; and yet between the beats would come the quack of a wild duck near at hand, the splash of a leaping fish, the plaintive whistle of water-fowl: altogether such a chorus of incongruities as was not lost upon our very impressionable young vagabond. The booming strokes of eleven recalled him to a sense of time and his immediate needs. His great adventure was still before him; he pushed on, bag in hand, to select its scene. Another road he crossed, alive with the lamps of cyclists, and came presently upon a wide space intersected with broad footpaths from which he shrank; it was altogether too public here; he was approaching an exposed corner in an angle of lighted streets, with the Marble Arch at its apex, as a signboard made quite clear. He had come right across the Park; back over the grass, keeping rather more to the right, in the direction of those trees, was the best thing now.

It was here that he found the grass distinctly damp; this really was enough to deter an asthmatic, already beginning to feel asthmatical. Pocket Upton, however, belonged to the large class of people, weak and strong alike, who are more than loth to abandon a course of action once taken. It would have required a very severe attack to baulk him of his night out and its subsequent description to electrified ears. But when bad steering had brought him up at the bandstand, the deserted chairs seemed an ordained compromise between prudence and audacity, and he had climbed into the fenced enclosure when another enormous policeman rose up horribly in its midst.

"What are you doing here?" inquired this policeman, striding upon Pocket with inexorable tread.

"No harm, I hope," replied our hero humbly, but with unusual readiness.

"Nor no good either, I'll be bound!" said the policeman, standing over him.

"I was only going to sit down," protested Pocket, having satisfied his conscience that in the first place that was all he really had been going to do.

"There are plenty of places to sit down," rejoined the policeman. "You're not allowed in here. And unless you look sharp about it you won't have time to sit down at all."

"Why not?"

"The Park closes at twelve."

"Closes?"

“At twelve o'clock, and it's half-past eleven now.” The boy's heart sank into his wet boots. Here was an end of all his dashing plans. He was certain he had heard or read of people sleeping in the Park; he had looked upon it as a vast dormitory of the houseless; that was the only reason he was there. The offensive clerk in the hotel had evidently entertained the same belief. This idiot of a policeman must be wrong. But he seemed quite clear about it.

“Did you think we were open all night?” he inquired with a grin.

“I did,” said Pocket; and he was inspired to add, “I even thought a lot of loafers used to sleep here all night!”

The policeman chuckled aloud.

“They may if they get up the trees; that's about their only chance,” said he.

“You search the whole place so thoroughly?”

“We keeps our eyes open,” said the policeman significantly, and Pocket asked no more questions; he scaled the forbidden fence and made off with the alacrity of one who meant to go out before he was put out. Such was his then sincere and sound intention. But where next to turn, to what seat on the Embankment, or what arch in the slums, in his ignorance of London he had no idea.

Meanwhile, to increase the irony of his dilemma, now that he was bent on quitting the Park he found himself striking deeper and deeper into its heart. He skirted a building, left it behind and out of sight, and drifted before the wind of destiny between an upright iron fence on one hand and a restricted open space upon the other. He could no longer see a single light; but the ground rose abruptly across the fence, and was thick with shrubs. Men might have been lying behind those shrubs, and Pocket could not possibly have seen them from the path. Did the policeman mean to tell him that he or his comrades were going to climb every fence and look behind every bush in Hyde Park?

Pocket came to anchor with a new flutter at his heart. This upright fence was not meant for scaling; it was like a lot of area palings, as obvious and intentional an obstacle. And the whole place closed at twelve, did it? The flutter became a serious agitation as Pocket saw himself breaking the laws of the land as well as those of school, saw himself not only expelled but put in prison! Well, so much the better for his story so long as those penalties were not incurred; even if they were, so much the greater hero he!

No wonder his best friends called him disparaging names; he was living up to the hardest of them now, and he with asthma on him as it was! But the will was on him too, the obstinate and reckless will, and the way lay handy in the shape of a row of Park chairs which Pocket had just passed against the iron palings. He went back to them, mounted on the first chair, wedged his bag between two of the spikes, set foot on the back of the chair, and somehow found himself on the other side without rent or scratch. Then he listened; but not a step could he hear. So then the cunning dog put his handkerchief through the palings and wiped the grit from the chair on which he had stood. And they called him a conscientious ass at school!

But then none of these desperate deeds were against his conscience, and they had all been thrust on Pocket Upton by circumstances over which he had lost control when the last train went without him from St. Pancras. They did not prevent him from kneeling down behind the biggest bush that I he could find, before curling up underneath it; neither did his prayers prevent him from thinking – even on his knees – of his revolver, nor yet – by the force of untimely association – of the other revolvers in the Chamber of Horrors. He saw those waxen wretches huddled together in ghastly groups, but the thought of them haunted him less than it might have done in a feather bed; he had his own perils and adventures to consider now. One thing, however, did come of the remembrance; he detached the leather strap he wore as a watch-guard. And used it to strap a pin-fire revolver, loaded in every chamber, to his wrist instead.

That was the last but one of the silly boy's proceedings under the bush; the last of all was to drain the number-one draught prescribed by Bompas in the morning, and to fling away the phial. The stuff was sweet and sticky in the mouth, and Pocket felt a singular and most grateful warmth at

his extremities as he curled up in his overcoat. It was precisely then that he heard a measured tread approaching, and held his breath until it had passed without a pause. Yet the danger was still audible when the boy dropped off, thinking no more about it, but of Mr. Coverley and Charles Peace and his own people down in Leicestershire.

HIS PEOPLE

It so happened that his people in Leicestershire were thinking of him. They had been talking about him at the very time of the boy's inconceivable meanderings in Hyde Park. And two of them were at it still.

On a terrace outside lighted windows a powerful young fellow, in a butterfly collar and a corded smoking jacket, was walking up and down with a tall girl not unlike him in the face; but their faces were only to be seen in glimpses as they passed the drawing-room windows, and at not less regular intervals when a red light in the sky, the source of which was concealed by the garden foliage, became positively brilliant. The air was sweet with the scent of honeysuckle and musk-roses and mown grass; midges fretted in and out of the open windows. But for the lurid lighting of the sky, with its Cyclopean suggestion of some mammoth forge, you were in the heart of England undefiled.

"It's no use our talking about Tony," the tall girl said. "I think you're frightfully down on him; we shall never agree."

"Not as long as you make a fool of the fellow," said the blunt young man.

"Tony's no fool," remarked Lettice Upton, irrelevantly enough.

"You know what I mean," snapped her brother Horace. "He's being absolutely spoilt, and you're at the bottom of it."

"I didn't give him asthma!"

"Don't be childish, Letty."

"But that's what's spoiling his life."

"I wasn't talking about his life. I don't believe it, either."

"You think he enjoys his bad nights?"

"I think he scores by them. He'd tell you himself that he never even thinks of getting up to first school now."

"Would you if you'd been sitting up half the night with asthma?"

"Perhaps not; but I don't believe that happens so often as you think."

"It happens often enough to justify him in making one good night pay for two or three bad ones."

"I don't call that playing the game. I call it shamming."

"Well, if it is, he makes up for it. They were doing Ancient Greek Geography in his form at early school last term. Tony tackled it in his spare time, and got most marks in the exam."

"Beastly young swot!" quoth his elder brother. "I'm glad he didn't buck to me about that."

"I don't think there's much danger of his bucking to you," said Lettice, smiling in the red light. She did not add as her obvious reason that Horace, like many another athletic young man, was quite incapable of sympathising with the non-athletic type. But he guessed that she meant something of the sort, and having sensibilities of his own, and a good heart somewhere in his mesh of muscles, he felt hurt. "I looked after him all right," said Horace, "the one term we were there together. So did Fred for the next year. But it's rather rough on Fred and myself, who were both something in the school at his age, to hear and see for ourselves that Tony's nobody even in the house!"

Lettice slipped a sly hand under the great biceps of her eldest brother.

"But don't you see, old boy, that it makes it the worse for Tony that you and Fred were what you were at school? They measure him by the standard you two set up; it's natural enough, but it isn't fair."

"He needn't be a flyer at games," said Horace, duly softened by a little flattery. "But he might be a tryer!"

"Wait till we get a little more breath into his body."

"A bag of oxygen wouldn't make him a cricketer."

"Yet he's so keen on cricket!"

"I wish he wasn't so keen; he thinks and talks more about it than Fred or I did when we were in the eleven, yet he never looked like making a player."

"I should say he thinks and talks more about most things; it's his nature, just as it's Fred's and yours to be men of action."

"Well, I'm glad he's not allowed to cumber the crease this season," said Horace, bowling his cigarette-end into the darkness with a distinct swerve in the air. "To have him called our 'pocket edition,' on the cricket-field of all places, is a bit too thick."

Lettice withdrew her sympathetic hand.

"He's as good a sportsman as either of you, at heart," she said warmly. "And I hope he may make you see it before this doctor's done with him!"

"This doctor!" jeered Horace, quick to echo her change of tone as well. "You mean the fool who wanted to send that kid round the world on his own?"

"He's no fool, Horace, and you know nothing whatever about him."

"No; but I know something about our Tony! If he took the least care of himself at home, there might be something to be said for letting him go; but he's the most casual young hound I ever struck."

"I know he's casual."

Lettice made the admission with reluctance; next moment she was sorry her sense of fairness had so misled her.

"Besides," said Horace, "he wouldn't be cured if he could. Think what he'd miss!"

"Oh, if you're coming back to that, there's no more to be said."

And the girl halted at the lighted windows.

"But I do come back to it. Isn't he up in town at this moment under this very doctor of yours?"

"He's not my doctor."

"But you first heard about him; you're the innovator of the family, Letty, so it's no use trying to score off me. Isn't Tony up in London to-night?"

"I believe he is."

"Then I'll tell you what he's doing at this moment," cried Horace, with egregious confidence, as he held his watch to the windows. "It's after eleven; he's in the act of struggling out of some theatre, where the atmosphere's so good for asthma!" Lettice left the gibe unanswered. It was founded on recent fact which she had been the first to deplore when Tony made no secret of it in the holidays; indeed, she was by no means blind to his many and obvious failings; but they interested her more than the equally obvious virtues of her other brothers, whose unmeasured objurgations drove her to the opposite extreme in special pleading. She tried to believe that there was more in her younger brother than in any of them, and would often speak up for him as though she had succeeded. It may have been merely a woman's weakness for the weak, but Lettice had taught herself to believe in Tony. And perhaps of all his people she was the only one who could have followed his vagaries of that night without thinking the worse of him.

But she had no more to say to Horace about the matter, and would have gone indoors without another word if Mr. Upton had not come out hastily at that moment. He had been looking for her everywhere, he declared with some asperity. Her mother could not sleep, and wished to see her; otherwise it was time they were all in bed, and what there was to talk about till all hours was more than he could fathom. So he saw the pair before him through the lighted rooms, a heavy man with a flaming neck and a smouldering eye. Horace would be heavy, too, when his bowling days were over. The girl was on finer lines; but she looked like a woman at her worst; tired, exasperated, and clearly older than her brother, but of other clay.

That young man smoked a last cigarette in his father's library, and unhesitatingly admitted the subject of dissension and dissent upon the terrace.

"I said he wasn't doing much good there," he added, "and I don't think he is. Letty stood up for him, as she always does."

"Do you mean that he's doing any harm?" asked Mr. Upton plainly.

"Not for a moment. I never said there was any harm in Tony. I – I sometimes wish there was more!"

"More manhood, I suppose you'd call it?"

Mr. Upton spoke with a disconcerting grimness.

"More go about him," said Horace. He could not say as much to his father as he had to Letty. That was evident. But he was not the boy to bolt from his guns.

"Yet you know how much he has to take all that out of him?" continued Mr. Upton, with severity.

"I know," said Horace hastily, "and of course that's really why he's doing no good; but I must say that doctor of his doesn't seem to be doing him any either."

Mr. Upton got excitedly to his feet, and Horace made up his mind to the downright snub that he deserved. But by a lucky accident Horace had turned the wrath that had been gathering against himself into quite another quarter.

"I agree with you there!" cried his father vehemently. "I don't believe in the man myself; but he was recommended by the surgeon who has done so much for your poor mother, so what could one do but give him a trial? The lad wasn't having a fair chance at school. This looked like one. But I dislike his going up to town so often, and I dislike the letters the man writes me about him. He'd have me take him away from school altogether, and pack him off to Australia in a sailing ship. But what's to be done with a boy like that when we get him back again? He'd be too old to go to another school, and too young for the University: no use at the works, and only another worry to us all."

Mr. Upton spoke from the full heart of an already worried man, not with intentional unkindness, but yet with that unimaginative want of sympathy which is often the instinctive attitude of the sound towards the unsound. He hated sickness, and seemed at present surrounded by it. His wife had taken ill the year before, had undergone a grave operation in the winter, and was still a great anxiety to him. But that was another and a far more serious matter; he had patience and sympathy enough with his wife. The case of the boy was very different. Himself a man of much bodily and mental vigour, Mr. Upton expected his own qualities of his own children; he had always resented their apparent absence in his youngest born. The others were good specimens; why should Tony be a weakling? Was he such a weakling as was made out? Mr. Upton was often sceptical on the point; but then he had always heard more about the asthma than he had seen for himself. If the boy was not down to breakfast in the holidays, he was supposed to have had a bad night; yet later in the day he would be as bright as anybody, at times indeed the brightest of the party. That, however, was usually when Lettice drew him out in the absence of the two athletes; he was another creature then, excitable, hilarious, and more capable of taking the busy man out of himself than any of his other children. But Lettice overdid matters; she made far too much of the boy and his complaint, and was inclined to encourage him in random remedies. Cigarettes at his age, even if said to be cigarettes for asthma, suggested a juvenile pose to the man who had never studied that disorder. The specialist in London seemed another mistake on the part of that managing Lettice, who had quite assumed the family lead of late. And altogether Mr. Upton, though he saw the matter from a different point of view, was not far from agreeing with his eldest son about his youngest.

And what chance was there for a boy whose own father thought he posed, whose brothers considered him a bit of a malingerer, and his schoolfellows "a conscientious ass," while his sister spoilt him for un enfant incompris? You may say it would have taken a miracle to make an ordinary decent fellow of him. Well, it was a night of strange happenings to the boy and his people; perhaps it was the one authentic type of miracle that capped all in the morning.

The father had gone to bed at midnight, after an extra allowance of whisky-and-water to take the extra worry off his mind; it did so for a few hours only to stretch him tragically awake in the early morning. The birds were singing down in Leicestershire as in Hyde Park. The morning sun

was slanting over town and country, and the father's thoughts were with his tiresome son in town. Suddenly a shrill cry came from the adjoining room.

In a trice the wakeful man was at his sick wife's side, supporting her in bed as she sat up wildly staring, trembling in his arms.

“Tony!” she gasped. “My Tony!”

“I was just thinking of him!” he cried. “What about him, dear?”

“I saw him,” she quavered. “I saw him plainer than I see you now. And I'm almost positive I heard – a shot!”

A GRIM SAMARITAN

Though he afterwards remembered a shout as well, it actually was the sound of a shot that brought the boy to his senses in Hyde Park. He opened his eyes on a dazzle of broad daylight and sparkling grass. The air was strangely keen for the amount of sunshine, the sunshine curiously rarefied, and the grass swept grey where it did not sparkle.

Pocket's first sensation was an empty stomach, and his next a heavy head into which the puzzle of his position entered by laborious steps. He was not in bed. He was not at school. He was not even under the shrub he now remembered in a mental flash which lit up all his adventures overnight. He was wandering ankle deep in the dew, towards a belt of poplars like birch-rods on the skyline, and a row of spiked palings right in front of his nose. He had walked in his sleep for the first time for years, and some one had fired a shot to wake him.

Slow as these automatic discoveries had seemed, they had been in reality so swift that the report was still ringing in his ears when he who must have made it sprang hideously into being across the palings. A hand darted through them and caught Pocket's wrist as in a vice. And he looked up over the spikes into a gnarled face tinged with fear and fury, and working spasmodically at the suppression of some incomprehensible emotion.

“Do you know what you did?” the man demanded in the end. The question seemed an odd one, but a very slight foreign accent, not to be reproduced phonetically, corresponded with the peculiarity of tense, reminding Pocket of the music-masters at his school. It was less easy to account for the tone employed, which was low in pitch and tremulous with passion. And the man stood tall and dominant, with a silver stubble on an iron jaw, and a weird cloak and hat that helped to invest him with the goblin dignity of a Spanish inquisitor; no wonder his eyes were like cold steel in quivering flesh.

“I must have been walking in my sleep,” began Pocket, shakily; further explanations were cut very short.

“Sleep!” echoed the other, in bitter unbelief.

Pocket felt his prime quality impugned.

“Well? I can't help it! I've done it before to-day; you needn't believe me if you don't like! Do you mind letting go of my hand?”

“With that in it!”

The scornful tone made the boy look down, and there was the pistol he had strapped to his wrist, not only firm in his unconscious clasp, but his finger actually on the trigger.

“You don't mean to say I let it off?” cried Pocket, horrified.

“Feel the barrel.”

The tall man had done so first. Pocket touched it with his left hand. The barrel was still warm.

“It was in my sleep,” protested Pocket, in a wheezy murmur.

“I'm glad to hear it.”

“I tell you it was!”

The tall man opened his lips impulsively, but shut them on a second impulse. The daggers in his eyes probed deeper into those of the boy, picking his brains, transfixing the secrets of his soul. No master's eye had ever delved so deep into his life; he felt as though the very worst of him at school was known in an instant to this dreadful stranger in the wilds of London. He writhed under the ordeal of that protracted scrutiny. He tugged to free his imprisoned wrist. His captor was meanwhile fumbling with a penknife in his unoccupied hand. A blade was slowly opened; the leather watch-guard was sliced through in a second; the revolver dropped harmlessly into the dew. The man swooped down and whipped it through the railings with a snarl of satisfaction.

“And now,” said he, releasing Pocket, but standing by with his weapon, “I suppose you know that, apart from everything else, you had no right to spend the night in here at all?”

The boy, already suffering from his humiliating exertions, gasped out, “I'm not the only one!” He had just espied a recumbent figure through the palings; it was that of a dilapidated creature lying prone, a battered hat beside him, on the open grass beyond the path. The tall man merely redoubled his scrutiny of the face in front of, him, without so much as a glance behind.

“That,” said he, “is the sort that staggers in as soon as the gates are open, and spends the day sleeping itself sober. But you are not that sort at all, and you have spent the night here contrary to the rules. Who are you, and what's the matter with you?”

“Asthma,” wheezed Pocket, clinging to the palings in dire distress.

“So I thought. Yet you spend your night on the wet grass!”

“I had nowhere else to go.”

“Have you come up from the country?”

“To see a doctor about it!” cried Pocket bitterly, and told the whole truth about himself in a series of stertorous exclamations. It scarcely lessened the austerity of the eyes that still ran him through and through; but the hard mouth did relax a little; the lined face looked less deeply slashed and furrowed, and it was a less inhuman voice that uttered the next words.

“Well, we must get you out of this, my young fellow! Come to these chairs.”

Pocket crept along the palings towards the chairs by which he had climbed them. His breathing was pitiful now. The stranger accompanied him on the other side.

“If I lift one over, and lend you a hand, do you think you can manage it?”

“I did last night.”

“Here, then. Wait a bit! Can you tell me where you slept?”

Pocket looked round and pointed.

“Behind that bush.”

“Have you left nothing there?”

“Yes; my bag and hat!”

In his state it took him some time to go and fetch them; he was nearly suffocating when he came creeping back, his shoulders up to his ears.

“Stop! I see something else. Is that medicine-bottle yours? There – catching the sun.”

“It was.”

“Bring it.”

“It's empty.”

“Bring it!”

Pocket obeyed. The strange man was standing on a chair behind the palings, waiting to help him over, with a wary eye upon the path. But no third creature was in sight except the insensate sprawler in the dew. Pocket surmounted the obstacle, he knew not how; he was almost beside himself in the throes of his attack. Later, he feared he must have been lifted down like a child; but this was when he was getting his breath upon a seat. They had come some little distance very slowly, and Pocket had received such support from so muscular an arm as to lend colour to his humiliating suspicion.

His grim companion spoke first.

“Well, I'm sorry for you. But I feel for your doctor too. I am one myself.”

Pocket ignored the somewhat pointed statement.

“I'll never forgive the brute!” he panted.

“Come, come! He didn't send you to sleep in the Park.”

“But he took away the only thing that does me any good.”

“What's that?”

“Cigarettes d'Auvergne.”

“I never heard of them.”

“They're the only thing to stop it, and he took away every one I had.”

But even as he spoke Pocket remembered the cigarette he had produced from his bag, but lacked the moral courage to light, in the train. He had slipped it into one of his pockets, not back into the box. He felt for it feverishly. He gave a husky cheer as his fingers closed upon the palpable thing, and he drew forth a flattened cylinder the size of a cigarette and the colour of a cigar. The boy had to bite off both ends; the man was ready with the match. Pocket drank the crude smoke down like water, coughed horribly, drank deeper, coughed the tears into his eyes, and was comparatively cured.

"And your doctor forbids a sovereign remedy!" said his companion. "I cannot understand him, and I'm a doctor myself." His voice and look were deliberate even for him. "My name is Baumgartner," he added, and made a pause. "I don't suppose you know it?"

"I'm not sure I don't," replied Pocket, swelling with breath and gratitude; but in truth the name seemed vaguely familiar to him.

"A schoolboy in the country," observed Dr. Baumgartner, "is scarcely likely to have heard of me; but if you inquire here in London you will find that I am not unknown. I propose to carry you off to my house for breakfast, and a little rest. That is," added the doctor, with his first smile, "if you will trust yourself to me first and make your inquiries later."

Pocket scouted the notion of inquiries in an impulsive outburst; but even as he proceeded to mumble out his thanks he could not help feeling it would have been less embarrassing to know more exactly whom he was thanking and must needs accompany now. Dr. Baumgartner? Where was it he had come across that name? And when and where had anybody ever seen such a doctor as this unshaven old fellow in the cloak and hat of a conspirator by limelight?

But the schoolboy had still to learn the lesson of naked personality as the one human force; and he learnt it now unknown to himself. The gaunt grey man stood up in his absurd and rusty raiment, and Pocket thought, "How the chaps would rag him at school!" because the dreadful old hat and cloak suggested a caricature of a master's cap and gown. But there was no master at Pocket's school whom he would not sooner have disobeyed than this shabby stranger with the iron-bound jaw and the wintry smile; there was no eye on the staff that had ever made him quail as he had quailed that morning before these penetrating eyes of steel. Baumgartner said they must hurry, and Pocket had his asthma back in the first few yards. Baumgartner said they could buy more cigarettes on the way, and Pocket kept up, panting, at his side.

In the cab Baumgartner said, "Try sitting with your head between your knees." Pocket tried it like a lamb. They had encountered a young man or so hurrying into the Park with towels round the neck but no collar, an early cavalcade who never looked at them, and that was about all until the hansom had been hailed outside. During the drive, which seemed to Pocket interminable, his extraordinary attitude prevented him from seeing anything but his own boots, and those only dimly owing to the apron being shut and indeed pressing uncomfortably against his head. Yet when Dr. Baumgartner inquired whether that did not make him easier, he said it did. It was not all imagination either; the posture did relieve him; but it was none the less disagreeable to be driven through London by an utter stranger, and not to see the names of the streets or a single landmark. Pocket had not even heard the cabman's instructions where to drive; they had been given after he got in. His ear was more alert now. He noted the change from wood-paving to rough metal. Then more wood, and an indubitable omnibus blundering by; then more metal, in better repair; quieter streets, the tinkle of cans, the milkman's queer cry; and finally, "Next to the right and the fifth house on your left," in the voice with the almost imperceptibly foreign accent.

The fifth house on the left was exactly like the fourth and the sixth from the little Pocket saw of any of them. He was hurried up a tiled path, none too clean between swarthy and lack-lustre laurels; the steps had not been "done"; the door wore the nondescript complexion of prehistoric paint debased by the caprices of the London climate. One touch of colour the lad saw before this unpromising portal opened and shut upon him: he had already passed through a rank of pollard trees, sprouting emeralds in the morning sun, that seemed common to this side of the road, and effectually hid the other.

Within the doctor held up a finger and they both trod gently. The passage was dark and short. The stairs began abruptly on the right. Baumgartner led the way past a closed door on the left, into an unexpectedly bright and large room beyond it. “Sit down,” said he, and shut the door softly behind him.

Pocket took observations from the edge of his chair. The room was full of walnut trivialities that looked aggressively obsolete in the sunshine that filled it and flooded a green little garden at the back of the house. Dr. Baumgartner had pulled up a blind and opened a window, and he stood looking out in thought while Pocket hurriedly completed his optical round. A set of walnut chairs were dreadfully upholstered in faded tapestry; but a deep, worn one looked comfortable enough, and a still more redeeming feature was the semi-grand piano. There were books, too, and in the far corner by the bow-window a glass door leading into a conservatory as minute as Pocket's study at school, and filled with geraniums. On the walls hung a series of battle engravings, one representing a bloody advance over ridged fields in murderously close formation, others the storming of heights and villages.

Baumgartner met his visitor's eyes with the faint cold smile that scarcely softened the hoary harshness of his visage.

“I was present at some of those engagements,” said he. “They were not worse than disarming a man who has just fired a revolver in his sleep!”

He flung his cloak upon one of the walnut chairs, and Pocket heard the pistol inside it rattle against the back; but his attention was distracted before he had time to resent the forgotten fact of its forcible confiscation. Under his cloak the doctor had been carrying all this time, slung by a strap which the boy had noticed across his chest, a stereoscopic camera without a case. Pocket exclaimed upon it with the instructed interest of a keen photographer.

“Do you take photographs?” asked Baumgartner, a reciprocal note in his unemotional voice.

“Rather!” cried the schoolboy, with considerable enthusiasm. “It's the only thing I have to do instead of playing games. But I haven't got an instantaneous camera like that. I only wish I had!”

And he looked with longing eyes at the substantial oblong of wood and black morocco, and duplicate lenses like a pair of spectacles, which the doctor had set between them on one of the fussy little walnut tables.

THE GLASS EYE

Dr. Baumgartner produced a seasoned meerschaum, carved in the likeness of a most ferocious face, and put a pinch of dark tobacco through the turban into the bowl. “You see,” said he, “I must have my smoke like you! I can't do without it either, though what is your misfortune is my own fault. So you are also a photographer!” he added, as the fumes of a mixture containing latakia spiced the morning air.

“I am only a beginner,” responded Pocket, “but a very keen one.”

“You don't merely press the button and let them do the rest?” suggested the doctor, smiling less coldly under the influence of his pipe.

“Rather not! I develop, print, tone, and all the rest of it; that's half the fun.”

“Plates or films?” inquired Baumgartner, with an approving nod.

“Only plates, I'm afraid; you see, the apparatus is an old one of my father's.”

And honest Pocket was beginning to blush for it, when the other made a gesture more eloquent and far more foreign than his speech.

“It's none the worse for that,” said he. “So far we have much in common, for I always use plates myself. But what we put upon our plates, there's the difference, eh?”

“I should imagine so,” said Pocket, smiling.

Dr. Baumgartner was smiling too, and still less coldly than before, but yet darkly to himself, and at the boy rather than with him.

“You take portraits of your friends, perhaps?”

“Yes; often.”

“In the body, I presume?”

Pocket looked nonplussed.

“You only take them in the flesh?”

“Of course.”

“Exactly! I take the spirit,” said the doctor; “that's the difference.”

Pocket watched the now wonderfully genial countenance of Baumgartner follow the brutal features of the meerschaum Turk through a melting cloud of smoke. The boy had been taken aback. But his bewilderment was of briefer duration than might have been the case with a less ardent photographer; for he took a technical interest in his hobby, and read the photographic year-books, nearly as ravenously as *Wisden's Almanacke*.

“I see,” he said, lukewarmly. “You go in for psychic photography.”

“Psychic,” said Baumgartner; for the public schoolboy, one regrets to report, had pronounced the word to rhyme with sly-chick. The doctor added, with more disdain: “And you don't believe in it?”

“I didn't say so.”

“But you looked and sounded it!”

“I don't set myself up as a believer or unbeliever,” said the boy, always at his ease on a subject that attracted him. “But I do say I don't believe in the sort of thing I read somewhere last holidays. It was in a review of a book on that sort of photography. The chap seemed to have said you could get a negative of a spirit without exposing the plate at all; hide away your plate, never mind your lens, only conjure up your spirit and see what happens. I'll swear nothing ever happened like that! There may be ghosts, you may see them, and so may the camera, but not without focusing and exposing like you've got to do with ordinary flesh and blood!”

The youth had gone further and flown higher than he meant, under the stimulus of an encouragement impossible to have foreseen. And the doctor had come to his feet, waving eloquently with his pipe; his grey face beamed warmly; his eyes were lances tipped with fire.

“Well said, my young fellow!” cried he. “I agree with every syllable you have spoken.”

“It's a question of photography, not of spiritualism,” concluded Pocket, rounding off his argument in high excitement.

“I agree, I agree! All that is rubbish, pure moonshine; and you see it even at your age! But there's much more in it than that; you must see the rest as well, since you see so far so clearly.” The boy blushed with pleasure, determined to see as far as anybody. “You admit there may be such things as ghosts, as you call them?” he was asked as by an equal.

“Certainly, sir.”

“Visible shapes, in the likeness of man? As visible and yet as tangible as that sunbeam?”

“Rather!”

“You allow that the camera can see them if we can?”

Pocket allowed it like the man he was being made to feel; the concession gave him a generous glow. Promotion had come to him by giant leaps. He felt five years older in fewer minutes.

“Then,” cried the doctor, with further flattery in his air of triumph, “then you admit everything! You may not see these images, but I may. I may not see them, but my lens may! Think how much that glass eye throws already upon the retina of a sensitised film that our living lenses fail to throw upon ours; think of all that escapes the eye but the camera catches. Take two crystal vases, fill one with one acid and the other with another; one comes out like water as we see it; the other, though not less limpid in our sight, like ink. The eye sees through it, but not the lens. The eye sees emptiness as though the acid itself were pure crystal; the lens flings an inky image on the plate. The trouble is that, while you can procure that acid at the nearest chemist's, no money and no power on earth can summon or procure at will the spirit which once was man.”

His voice was vibrant and earnest as it had been when Pocket heard it first an hour earlier in the Park. It was even as passionate, but this was the passion of enthusiastic endeavour. If the man had a heart at all, it was in this wild question without a doubt. Even the schoolboy perceived this dimly. There was something else which had become clearer to him with each of these later remarks. Striking as they seemed to him, they were not wholly unfamiliar. The ring of novelty was wanting to his ear.

Suddenly he exclaimed, “I knew I knew your name!”

“You do know it, do you?”

Baumgartner spoke ungraciously, as though the announcement was discounted by the interruption it entailed.

“It was in connection with the very book I mentioned. I knew I had come across it somewhere.”

“You read the correspondence that followed the review?”

“Some of it.”

“My letter among others?”

“Yes! I remember every word of it now.”

“Then you recall my view as to the alleged necessity of a medium's co-operation in these spirit-photographs?”

“You said it wasn't necessary, if I remember,” replied Pocket somewhat tentatively, despite his boast.

“It was the pith and point of my contention! I mentioned the two moments at which I hold that a man's soul may be caught apart, may be cut off from his body by no other medium than a good sound lens in a light-tight camera. You cannot have forgotten them if you read my letter.”

“One,” said the boy, “was the moment of death.”

“The moment of dissolution,” the doctor corrected him. “But there is a far commoner moment than that, one that occurs constantly to us all, whereas dissolution comes but once.”

Pocket believed he remembered the other instance too, but was not sure about it, the fact being that the whole momentous letter had struck him as too fantastic for serious consideration. That, however, he could not and dared not say; and he was not the less frightened of making a mistake with those inspired eyes burning fanatically into his.

"The other moment," the doctor said at last, with a pitying smile, "is when the soul returns to its prison after one of those flights which men call dreams. You know that theory of the dream?" Baumgartner asked abruptly. The answer was a nod as hasty, but the doctor seemed unconvinced, for he went on didactically: "You visit far countries in your dreams; your soul is the traveller. You speak to the absent or the dead; it is your soul again; and we dismiss the miracle as a dream! I fix the moment as that of the soul's return because its departure on these errands is imperceptible, but with its return we awake. The theory is that in the moment of waking the whole experience happens like the flash of an electric spark."

The boy murmured very earnestly that he saw; but he was more troubled than enlightened, and what he did see was that he had picked up a very eccentric acquaintance indeed. He was not a little scared by the man's hard face and molten eyes; but there was a fascination also that could not be lost upon an impressionable temperament, besides that force of will or character which had dominated the young mind from the first. He began to wish the interview at an end – to be able to talk about it as the extraordinary sequel of an extraordinary adventure – yet he would not have cut it short at this point if he could.

"I grant you," continued the doctor, "that the final flight of soul from body is infinitely the more precious from my point of view. But how is one to be in a position to intercept that? When beloved spirits pass it would be cold-blooded desecration; and public opinion has still to be educated up to psychical vivisection! I have myself tried in vain to initiate such education. I have applied for perfectly private admission to hospital deathbeds, even to the execution-shed in prisons. My applications have been peremptorily refused."

Pocket's thoughts went off at a gruesome tangent.

"You could see a man hanged!" he shuddered, and himself saw the little old effigy on the model drop in Marylebone Road.

"Why not?" asked the other in wide wonder. "But as I am not allowed," he continued in lighter key, "I have to do the best I can. If I cannot be in at the death, I may still by luck be in at a dream or two! And now you may guess why I wander with my camera where men come in to sleep in broad daylight. I prowl among them; a word awakens them; and then I take my chance."

"They're not all like that man this morning, then," remarked Pocket, looking back on the inanimate clod reclining in the dew.

The doctor deliberated with half-shut eyes that seemed to burn the brighter for their partial eclipse.

"This morning," he rejoined, "was like no other. I owe you some confidence in the matter. I had the chance of a lifetime this morning – thanks to you!"

"Thanks to me?" repeated Pocket. A flash enlightened him. "Do you mean to say I – you took me – walking – ?"

"You shall see my meaning," replied Baumgartner, rising. "Wait one minute."

He was not gone longer. Pocket heard him on the other side of double doors in an alcove; but he had gone out into the passage to get there. Running water and the chink of porcelain were specially audible in his absence, but the boy was thinking of another sound. The doctor before leaving had discarded a black alpaca jacket, light as a pocket handkerchief, which had fallen so softly as to recall by contrast the noise made by the revolver in the pocket of the cloak. The lad was promptly seized with a strong desire to recover his property; he was within an ace of doing so, the cloak containing it being actually in his hands and only dropped as Baumgartner returned to announce that all was ready.

Sharp to the left, at the end of the passage, was a door which would simply have been a second way into the drawing-room had the double doors within been is use; these being shut, the space behind made a separate chamber which again reminded the schoolboy of his study, that smallest of small rooms. This one was as narrow, only twice the length. One end was monopolised by the door that admitted them, the other by a window from floor to ceiling. And this window was in two great sheets

of ruby glass, so that Pocket looked down red-hot iron steps into a crimson garden, and therefrom to his companion dyed from head to foot like Mephistopheles.

“This is something like a dark-room!” exclaimed the lad as the door was shut and locked behind him. The folding doors were permanently barred by shelves and lockers; opposite was a long porcelain trough, pink as the doctor's shirt-sleeves in the strong red light; racks of negatives and stoppered bottles glimmered over brass taps stained to an angry copper.

Everything was perfection from a photographer's standpoint; the boy felt instantaneously spoilt for his darkened study and his jugs of water. All he had ever sighed for in the prosecution of his hobby was here in this little paradise of order and equipment. The actual work, he felt, would be a secondary consideration in such a workshop; the mere manipulation of such stoppered bottles as his host was handling now, the choice of graduated phials, the wealth of trays and dishes, would have been joy enough for him. He watched the favoured operator with a watering mouth. A crimson blind had been lowered to reduce the light; the doctor had turned up his shirt-cuffs; his wrists were muscular and furry, as it now seemed with a fiery fur, yet they trembled with excitement as he produced his plate. And Pocket remembered how extravagant an image was expected on that plain pink surface.

He did not know whether to expect it or not himself. It was difficult to believe in that sort of thing, difficult to disbelieve in this sort of man, who entertained no shadow of doubt himself, whose excitement and suspense were as infectious as everything else about him. Pocket had come into the dark-room wheezing almost as much as ever; he was not to be heard breathing as the plate was rocked to and fro as in raspberry-juice, and gradually the sky showed sharp and black. But the sky it was that puzzled Pocket first. It was broken by perpendicular objects like white torpedoes. He was photographer enough to know what these were almost at once; they were those poplars in the park. But how could Baumgartner have photographed Pocket with those poplars behind him when they had been behind Baumgartner all the time?

Pocket said to himself, “Where am I, by the way?” and bent lower to see. His ear touched the doctor's; it heard the doctor breathing as though he were the asthmatic; and now a human shape was visible, but not walking in its sleep, lying in it like the man in the wet grass. “When did you get me?” asked Pocket aloud. But the tense crimson face paid no attention; in the ruby light it was glistening as though with beads of blood.

“There! there! there!” croaked a voice, husky and yet staccato. Pocket could scarcely believe it was the voice of his host – the one gentle thing about him. “You saw the figure? Surely you saw something else, hovering over it? I did, I swear I did! But now we shall have to wait.”

The plate had blackened all over, as though the uncanny thing had choked out its life. It was meticulously held under a tap, between fingers that most distinctly trembled now. Then he plunged it in the hyposulphite, and pulled up the blind. The sun shone again through the tall window, blood-red as before; grass and sky were as richly incarnadined. Baumgartner babbled while he waited for the fixing-bath to clear the plate. The chance of his life, he still pronounced it. “And I owe it to you, my young fellow!” This he said again and again, aloud but chiefly to himself. He picked up the plate at last and held it to the flaming window. He cried out in German to himself, a cry the schoolboy never forgot.

“Open the window!” he ordered. “It opens like a door.”

Pocket did as he was told. The pure white sunlight struck him momentarily blind. Baumgartner had the plate under the tap again. Pocket thought him careless with it, thought the tap on too full; it was held up an instant to the naked sun, and then dashed to a hundred fragments in the porcelain trough.

Pocket knew better than to ask a question. He followed his leader back into the drawing-room, and watched him pick up his coat. It might have been a minute before their eyes met again; the doctor's were calm and cold and critical as in the earlier morning. It was another failure, he said, and nothing more. Breakfast would be ready soon; they would go upstairs; and if his young fellow felt equal to a warm bath, he thought as a physician it might do him good.

AN AWAKENING

It was a normal elderly gentleman, with certain simple habits, but no little distinction of address, who welcomed the schoolboy at his breakfast-table. The goblin inquisitor of Hyde Park had vanished with his hat and cloak. The excited empiric of the dark-room was a creature of that ruby light alone. Dr. Baumgartner was shaved and clad like other men, the iron-grey hair carefully brushed back from a lofty forehead, all traces of strong acids removed from his well-kept hands. There was a third person, and only a third, at table in the immature shape of a young lady whom the doctor introduced as his niece Miss Platts, and addressed as Phillida.

Pocket thought he had never heard of nobler atonement for unmitigable surname. He could not help thinking that this Phillida did not look the one to flout a fellow, after the fashion of the only other Phillida he had ever heard of, and then that it was beastly cheek to start thinking of her like that and by her Christian name. But he was of the age and temperament when thoughts will come of contact with young animals of the opposite sex. He looked at her sidelong from time to time, but all four eyes dropped directly they met; she seemed as shy and uninteresting as himself; her conversation was confined to table attentions to her uncle and his guest.

Pocket made more valiant attempts. A parlour billiard-table, standing against the wall, supplied an irresistible topic. “We have a full-size table at home,” he said, and could have mutilated his tongue that instant. “I like a small one best,” he assured the doctor, who shook his head and smiled.

“Honestly, sir, and snob-cricket better than the real thing! I'm no good at real games.”

The statement was too true, but not the preference.

“That must be awkward for you, at an English public school,” was the doctor's comment.

Pocket heaved an ingenuous sigh. It was hateful. He blamed the asthma as far as modesty would permit. He was modest enough in his breakfast-table talk, yet nervously egotistical, and apt to involve himself in lengthy explanations. He had two types of listener – the dry and the demure – to all he said.

“And they let you come up to London alone!” remarked Dr. Baumgartner when he got a chance.

“But it wasn't their fault that I – ”

Pocket stopped at a glance from his host, and plunged into profuse particulars exonerating his house-master, but was cut short again. Evidently the niece was not to know where he had spent the night.

“I suppose there are a number of young men at your – establishment?” said the doctor, exchanging a glance with Miss Platts.

“There are over four hundred boys,” replied Pocket, a little puzzled.

“And how many keepers do they require?”

A grin apologised for the word.

“There must be over thirty masters,” returned Pocket more pointedly than before. He was not going to stand chaff about his public school from a mad German doctor.

“And they arm you for the battle of life with Latin and Greek, eh?”

“Not necessarily; there's a Modern Side. You can learn German if you like!” said Pocket, not without contempt.

“Do you?”

“I don't like,” said the boy gratuitously.

“Then we must stick to your excellent King's English.”

Pocket turned a trifle sulky. He felt he had not scored in this little passage. Then he reflected upon the essential and extraordinary kindness which had brought him to a decent breakfast-table that morning. That made him ashamed; nor could he have afforded to be too independent just yet, even had he been so disposed in his heart. His asthma was a beast that always growled in the background; he never knew when it would spring upon him with a roar. Breakfast pacified the brute; hot coffee

always did; but the effects soon wore off, and the boy was oppressed again, yet deadly weary, long before it was time for him to go to Welbeck Street.

“Is there really nothing you can take?” asked Dr. Baumgartner, standing over him in the drawing-room, where Pocket sat hunched up in the big easy-chair.

“Nothing now, I'm afraid, unless I could get some of those cigarettes. And Dr. Bompas would kick up an awful row!”

“But it's inhuman. I'll go and get them myself. He should prescribe for such an emergency.”

“He has,” said Pocket. “I've got some stuff in my bag; but it's no use taking it now. It's meant to take in bed when you can have your sleep out.”

And he was going into more elaborate details than Dr. Bompas had done, when the other doctor cut him short once more.

“But why not now? You can sleep to your heart's content in that chair; nobody will come in.”

Pocket shook his head.

“I'm due in Welbeck Street at twelve.”

“Well, I'll wake you at quarter to, and have a taxi ready at the door. That will give you a good two hours.”

Pocket hesitated, remembering the blessed instantaneous effect of the first bottle under the bush.

“Would you promise to wake me, sir? You're not going out?”

“I shall be in again.”

“Then it is a promise?”

Pocket would have liked it in black and white.

“Certainly, my young fellow! Is the stuff in your bag?”

It was, and the boy took it with much the same results as overnight. It tasted sweeter and acted quicker; that was the only difference. The skin seemed to tighten on his face. His fingers tingled at the ends It was not at all an unpleasant sensation, especially as the labour in his breast came to an end as if by magic. The faintly foreign accents of Dr. Baumgartner sounded unduly distant in his last words from the open door. It was scarcely shut before the morning's troubles ceased deliciously in the cosy chair.

Yet they seemed to begin again directly, and this was a horrid crop! Of course he was back in Hyde Park; but the sky must have rained red paint in his absence, or else the earth was red-hot and the sky reflected it. No! the grass was too wet for that. It might have been wet with blood. Everything was as red as beet-root, as wet and red and one's body weltering in it like the slain! Reddest of all was the old photographer, who turned into Mr. Spearman in cap and gown, who turned into various members of the Upton family, one making more inconsequent remarks than the other, touching wildly on photography and the flitting soul, and between them working the mad race up to such a pace and pitch that Pocket woke with a dreadful start to find Dr. Baumgartner standing over him once more in the perfectly pallid flesh.

“I've had a beast of a dream!” said Pocket, waking thoroughly. “I'm in a cold perspiration, and I thought it was cold blood! What time is it?”

“A quarter to six,” said the doctor, who had invited the question by taking out his watch.

“A quarter to twelve, you mean!”

“No – six.”

And the boy was shown the dial, but would not believe it until he had gaped at his own watch, which had stopped at half-past three. Then he bounded to his feet in a puerile passion, and there lay the little garden, a lake of sunlight as he remembered it, swallowed up entirely in the shadow of the house.

“You promised to wake me!” gasped Pocket, almost speechless. “You've broken your word, sir!”

"Only in your own interest," replied the other calmly.

"I believe you were waiting for me to wake – to catch my soul, or some rot!" cried the boy, with bitter rudeness; but he looked in vain for the stereoscopic or any other sort of camera, and Dr. Baumgartner only shrugged his shoulders as he opened an evening paper.

"I apologise for saying that," the boy resumed, with a dignity that sounded near to tears. "I know you meant it for the best – to make up for my bad night – you've been very kind to me, I know! But I was due in Welbeck Street at twelve o'clock, and now I shall have to bolt to catch the six-thirty from St. Pancras."

"You won't catch the six-thirty from St. Pancras," replied Baumgartner, scarcely looking up from his paper.

"I will unless I'm in some outlandish part of London!" cried Pocket, reflecting for the first time that he had no idea in what part of London he was. "I must catch it. It's the last train back to school. I'll get into an awful row if I don't!"

"You'll get into a worse one if you do," rejoined the doctor, looking over his paper, and not unfeelingly, at the boy.

"What about?"

Pocket held his breath instinctively as their eyes met. Baumgartner answered with increased compassion and restraint, a grey look on his grey face:

"Something that happened this morning. I fear you will be wanted here in town about it."

"Do tell me what, sir!"

"Can you face things, my young fellow?"

"Is it about my people – my mother?" the boy cried wildly, at her funeral in a flash.

"No – yourself."

"Then I can!"

The doctor overcame his final hesitation.

"Do you remember a man we left behind us on the grass?"

"Perfectly; the grass looked as wet as it felt just now in my dream."

"Exactly. Didn't it strike you as strange that he should be lying there in the wet grass?"

"I thought he was drunk."

"He was dead!"

Pocket was shocked; he was more than shocked, for he had never witnessed death before; but next moment the shock was uncontrollably mitigated by a sudden view of the tragic incident as yet another adventure of that adventurous night. No doubt one to retail in reverential tones, but a most thrilling adventure none the less. He only failed to see why it should affect him as much as the doctor suggested. True, he might be called as witness at the inquest; his very natural density was pierced with the awkward possibility of that. But then he had not even known the man was dead.

Had the doctor?

Yes.

Pocket wondered why he had not been told at the time, but asked another question first.

"What did he die of?"

"A bullet!"

"Suicide?"

"No."

"Not murder?"

"This paper says so."

"Does it say who did it?"

"It cannot."

"Can you?"

"Yes!"

“Tell me.”

The doctor threw out both hands in a despairing gesture.

“Have I to tell you outright, my young fellow, that you did it yourself?”

BLOOD-GUILTY

His overwhelming horror was not alleviated by a moment's doubt. He marvelled rather that he had never guessed what he had done. The walking in his sleep, the shot that woke him, the first words of Dr. Baumgartner, his first swift action, and the warm pistol in his own unconscious hand: these burning memories spoke more eloquently than any words. They would have told their own tale at once, if only he had known the man was dead. Why had he been deceived? It was cruel, it was infamous, to have kept the truth from him for a single instant. Thus wildly did the stricken youth turn and rend his benefactor for the very benefaction of a day's rest in ignorance of his deed. The doctor defended himself firmly, frankly, with much patience and some cynicism. Pocket was reminded of the state he himself had been in at the time. He also might have been a dying man, he was assured, and could well believe on looking back. Baumgartner had actually opened his lips to tell him the truth, but had checked himself in sheer humanity. Again the boy could confirm the outward detail out of his own recollection. To have told him later in the morning, the doctor went on to say, with an emphasis not immediately understood, could have undone nothing. He acknowledged a grave responsibility, but rightly or wrongly he had put the living before the dead.

How had he known the man was dead? Baumgartner smiled at the question. He was not only a doctor, but an old soldier who had fought in one at least of the bloodiest battles in European history. He had seen too many men fall shot through the heart to be mistaken for a moment; but in point of fact he had confirmed his conviction by brief examination while Pocket was fetching his things from behind the bush. Pocket pressed for earlier details with a morbid appetite which was not gratified without reluctance, and out of a laconic interchange the deed was gradually reconstructed with appealing verisimilitude. It was Baumgartner who had first caught sight of the somnambulist, treading warily like the blind, yet waving the revolver as he went, as though any moment he might let it off. The moment came with a wretched reeling man who joined Baumgartner on the path, and would not be warned. The poor man had raised a drunken shout and been shot pointblank through the heart. The doctor described him as leaping backward from the levelled barrel, then into the air and down in the dew upon his face.

The boy buried his face and wept; but even in his anguish he now recalled the shout before the shot. The enforced description had been so vivid in the end that he beheld the scene as plainly as though he had been wide awake. Then he dwelt upon the dead man, looking nothing else as he now remembered him, and that sent him off at a final tangent.

He cried, looking up with a shudder for all his tears, “What about that negative you smashed? It was the poor dead man all the time!”

“It was,” replied Baumgartner; “but it was never meant to be. I had you in focus when you fired. What I did was done instinctively, but with time to think I should have done just the same. You had given me the chance of a lifetime, though nothing has come of it so far. And that was another reason for saving you, ill as you were, from the immediate consequences of an innocent act.”

Pocket was passionately honest, as his worst friends knew; he had an instinctive admiration for downright honesty in another. His young soul was torn with grief and pity for the dead; he was already haunted by the inevitable and complex consequences of his fatal misadventure, and yet he could dimly appreciate the candid declaration of one who had attempted to turn that tragedy to instantaneous and inconceivable account. It was the mistaken kindness to himself that he still found most difficult to forgive.

“It's got to come out,” he groaned; “this will make it all the worse.”

“You mean the delay?”

“Yes! Who's to tell them I didn't do it on purpose, and run away, and then think better of it?”

Baumgartner smiled.

“Surely I am,” said he; but his smile went out with the words. “If only they believe me!” he added as though it was a new idea to him.

It was a terrifying one to Pocket.

“Why shouldn't they?” was his broken exclamation.

“I don't know. I never thought of it before. But what can I swear to, after all? I can swear you shot a man, but I can't swear you shot him in your sleep!”

“You said you saw I did!”

“So I did, my young fellow,” replied the doctor, with a kinder smile; “at least I can swear that you were walking with your eyes shut, and I thought you were walking in your sleep. It's not quite the same thing. It is near it. But we are talking about my evidence on oath in a court of justice.”

“Shall I be tried?” asked the schoolboy in a hoarse whisper.

“Perhaps only by the magistrate,” replied the other, soothingly; “let us hope it will stop at that.”

“But it must, it must!” cried Pocket wildly. “I'm absolutely innocent! You said so yourself a minute ago; you've only to swear it as a doctor? They can't do anything to me – they can't possibly!”

The doctor stood looking into the sunless garden with a troubled face.

“Dr. Baumgartner!”

“Yes, my young fellow?”

“They can't do anything to me, can they?”

Baumgartner returned to the fireside with his foreign shrug.

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