



ANY break in the monotony of life in the little seaside village of Pygwyllion was rare, and when posters were put up stating that Professor Schlafmacher, of Berlin, the renowned hypnotist, would give a lecture in the schoolroom, and exemplify his powers on any who cared to go upon the stage, there was considerable excitement amongst all the population. All, that is to say, except Captain John Tompkins and myself, Robert Jones, both late of the merchant service. We had each, on our retirement, settled down in this remote little place, where I had purchased a small cottage, whilst Tompkins boarded in the schoolmaster's house. We had not previously known each other, but we naturally soon became acquainted, and our having been in the same profession, together with a community of taste in tobacco and other matters, had in the course of seven years ripened the acquaintance into a close friendship, and a day seldom passed in which

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we were not to be seen in one another's company. Tompkins and I had, of course, seen a good deal of the world in our way, and we rather prided ourselves on being hard-headed, practical men of experience, who could see as far as most people and were not to be imposed on. Therefore, when the rest of the village was anxiously looking forward to the approaching lecture we remained calm and unmoved, took our pipes, grog, and walks as usual, and betrayed no excitement.

We talked about it to one another, though. "Ever seen any of this hypnotism, Bob?" asked Tompkins. I said I had once been to a performance where a man had pretended to mesmerize a woman, and made her tell how many shillings someone in the audience—a confederate, no doubt—had in his pocket, and so on. "All arranged beforehand, of course," I concluded.

"Nothing genuine, eh?"

"Well, not quite that, perhaps. He got two girls up on the stage and gave them

some beans, which he said were chocolate creams, and just as they were going to eat them he told them they were black beetles, and, by Jove! you should have seen them drop those beans and jump on the chairs and shake themselves. I think that was genuine. They looked a mighty weak-minded lot."

"That sort of thing wouldn't do with you and me, would it, Bob?"

"Not much," said I. "I should like to come across the man who could hypnotize either of us, Jack!"

"It wouldn't be a bad joke to go and see the show, would it?" said he.

"All right," said I. "Let's go." And so, when the afternoon arrived, to the astonishment probably of many of the audience, Tompkins and myself put in an appearance.

Punctually to the moment the lecturer stepped on to the platform. He was a man of about forty-five, or perhaps fifty, and there was nothing remarkable about him except his eyes, which had a peculiar expression of depth which I cannot attempt to describe. I had never seen any eyes like them. He spoke in very good English with somewhat of a foreign accent, and his manner was perfectly quiet and free from affectation. In a few opening remarks he explained that he trusted we should not regard him as wishing to impose on us by any deception, but simply as the exponent of certain powers possessed, more or less, by all, but little known and less cultivated, which were capable of working the greatest benefits to the world when properly exercised. Any confederation was, as we could see for ourselves, impossible, since the whole audience were practically known to one another, and it was from them only that the subjects of his experiments would be taken. He begged us to judge what we might see with impartiality, and then to ask ourselves whether he was in any sense exaggerating the tremendous possibilities which might result from a more general and intelligent recognition of his science.

The lecturer then asked that some of the audience would come on to the stage. As there seemed to be some hesitation in complying with this, he said, "Perhaps there is some lady present who will play us a little tune upon the piano? Will anyone be so kind?"

Hereupon a little girl, the daughter of the schoolmaster, stepped forward, after some urging from her mother, and was helped on to the platform by the professor. He opened the piano and placed a seat for her. But

here a hitch occurred. It appeared that the intending performer could not recollect her piece, and her music was at home.

"Ach! that is very awkward," said the professor. "But, tell me, is your music in a book?"

She said it was, in a book "about so big" (holding out her hands), and with a green cover.

There were some books on a shelf near the piano, and the professor, taking down one of about the size described, with a brown cover, on which was inscribed in large letters, "Copy-Book," placed it before her, and, touching her head lightly with his hand, said, "Is this not the same book as yours? Yes? That is very fortunate. Will you please find the place, for you see I do not know which is your tune?" The little girl turned over six or seven pages rapidly, and then, keeping her eyes fixed on a statement, in large text hand, that "Honesty is the best policy," played her little tune through carefully and correctly. When she had finished the lecturer thanked her politely, and, taking her hand, led her to the steps.

"I think," he then said, "that the piano will perhaps be in the way of the performances presently. Will anyone be so good as to help me to move it back a little?"

Two hulking youths at once started forward; but, to our great astonishment, no sooner had they mounted the platform than one immediately thrust his hand into his waistcoat after the manner of a sling, whilst the other limped to the nearest chair and, sitting down, put one foot on his knee and nursed it most tenderly; the faces of both wearing an expression of intense pain.

"Dear me," said the professor, "this is very sad, and so very sudden! Please let me look at your foot." He went to the youth on the chair, and after looking at him a moment said, "My young friend, you are either very foolish or you play a little joke on me. You have not hurt this foot at all. It is the other one that pains you." Instantly the young man dropped the foot to the ground with a crash of his heavy boot, and seizing the other he placed it most gingerly over the other knee, whilst he groaned heavily.

"That is better," said the professor; "and now, my friend, let me see your wrist. Ach! yes! I must make you a proper sling for it." He turned away for an instant, and then, facing them again, said, pointing to a corner of the stage, "Will you please move the piano over there? I think that will be the

best place." Both youths at once jumped up, and the instrument was placed in the desired position; after which they returned to their seats in the room, apparently wondering what on earth there could be to excite the roars of laughter in which the audience indulged.

I cannot give an account of all the experiments. Suffice it to say that people were made to shiver with cold, or wipe their foreheads from heat; that they shot imaginary bears with walking-sticks, and ran from visionary mad dogs. Those sang, or at least tried to, who never sang before; and the sexton, a preternaturally solemn person,

in reality. All the results which we had seen were caused merely by the imposition of his will for the time on the person operated on. The strength of the will-power, like the strength of the muscles, could be greatly developed by constant practice. At the same time, as a very strong man might at some period or other be confronted with one still stronger, so it might happen that the trained hypnotist might meet with a subject with will-power equal to or greater than his own, over whom he might fail to exercise any influence. Such an occurrence at a lecture like the present was, of course, inconvenient; but any

genuine professor of hypnotism who, as it were, challenged a whole audience must be, of course, prepared to face the possibility. Admitting the power of the operator to be sufficient, he desired to call our attention to the fact that as it was possible, as we had seen, to induce sensations of pain, it was also possible in many cases to remove it by the same agency, often permanently. Such cures were, however, not suitable for public exhibition, and he was happy to think, judging from their appearance, that his present audience were not in need of such treatment. This was, however, a most important part of his science, and one which ought to receive far more attention than had been at present accorded to it. Time was drawing on, and he must shortly leave; but he had still some minutes to spare, and would be pleased to see a few more of the audience on the stage, if any were disposed to come.

"Bob," whispered Tompkins, "I'm going up."

"Right, old man," said I. "I'm with you."

The professor bowed politely as we appeared on the platform, but looked at us, I thought, doubtfully, as at possibly difficult subjects.

"Kindly be seated, gentlemen," he said.

We took chairs on either side of the stage, and facing one another. The professor kept us waiting whilst he was apparently looking for something in his pockets. He



"THE SEXTON, A PRETERNATURALLY SOLEMN PERSON, DANCED A HORNPIPE ON THE TABLE."

danced a hornpipe on the table. Tompkins and I regarded it all with openly superior smiles. The professor had got a wonderfully soft lot!

After about an hour the lecturer again addressed us. Though such exhibitions might seem, he said, to some of us to have something of the marvellous about them, there was, he assured us, nothing of the sort

didn't seem to find it, and I got so tired of waiting to be operated on that I closed my eyes. I fancy that, strangely enough, I must have dozed off for a moment, for I woke up with a start just in time to see Tompkins open his eyes and stare at me. Just then the professor spoke.

"I am extremely sorry, gentlemen, but I find that I have mistaken the time. Allow me to ask your pardon, and to express my great regret for the trouble I have given you; I trust you will excuse me."

Of course, we returned to our seats, and the professor, after briefly thanking the audience for their attention, hurried out to his cab and drove off to the nearest station.

"Thought he wouldn't tackle us, Bob," said Tompkins, when we got outside. "Wouldn't have done to fail just at the end. All bunkum about the time, you know. Had a quarter of an hour more, easy." I agreed with him. Indeed, it was such a palpable case of running away that I felt quite sorry for the professor.

If I live to be a hundred I shall never forget the awakening the following morning: the first drowsy feeling that something had gone wrong, the clearer impression that the something was very serious, and then the full recollection of the whole horror. Could it be but a dream? Alas! no. Too well did I recall the dreadful details. I sat up in bed, and the whole ghastly sequence of events repeated itself.

I had gone to bed, and to sleep, but had woke again. I had looked at my watch. It was just after eleven. I felt wide awake, and after tossing about restlessly a short time I determined, finding sleep impossible, to go out for a stroll. I dressed, and let myself quietly out. I walked on slowly, without thinking where I was going, till I found myself on the small wooden pier that runs out into the bay—a favourite resort of Tompkins and myself. What was my

astonishment to see Tompkins standing there. He explained that he, like myself, could not sleep, and preferred strolling out to a wakeful night in bed. I was very glad to see him, and we walked up and down and smoked together. The night was fairly light, but somewhat cloudy. Our conversation turned presently on the lecture that afternoon.

"You did get just a little bit queer when you were on the stage, though, didn't you?" said Tompkins.

"What do you mean?" said I.

"Why, you shut your eyes," said he.

"I didn't," said I—but I knew this was not true.

"I saw you," said he.

"I saw you open yours," said I.

"You didn't," said he.



"WHY, YOU SHUT YOUR EYES," SAID HE.

"I did," said I.

"That's a lie," said he. And then some devil got hold of me, and—we were walking by the edge of the pier and Tompkins was on the outside—I gave him a push, and over he went into two fathoms of water.

He couldn't swim, and I can't either, and he fell too far out for me to reach him, even had I tried. But I didn't. I must have been mad, I suppose. I just stood there and saw him go under once, twice, and the third

time. The clock struck twelve as he sank finally. And then I had walked home and gone to bed.

This was the recollection the morning brought me—I had committed a foul and dastardly murder. I had slain one who was as a brother to me, and the brand of Cain was on me for ever.

How I got up and dressed I don't know. My brain was all in a whirl, the one clear idea being that I must try to conceal my crime. There were no witnesses. No one had seen me go out or come in, and if Tompkins's body were found there was no reason for supposing he had been thrown in by anybody at all. He might very easily have fallen in. No; I had only to keep cool and collected, and no suspicion could possibly attach to me. If anyone were suspected, it would certainly not be his best friend.

I nerved myself, therefore, to swallow some breakfast, after which I took my hat and coat and told my servant I was going over for the day to the neighbouring town, where I had a little business to attend to. I actually forced myself to turn back, as if by an afterthought, and say that if Captain Tompkins should call he was to be told that I might not be home till late, but would see him in the morning. Once clear of the village I walked as if my life depended on it. Where I went I hardly know. I believe I had some food somewhere, but it was mostly walk, walk all day. I knew I must return at night, and intuitively I made my way back in the evening.

And then, as I neared the village, came the awful feeling that I must go down to the pier and see if Tompkins's body were there. It was late for Pygwyllion—about ten—and there would be no one about. The more I resisted this gruesome impulse the stronger did it grow. The hideous attraction that the scene of his crime has for the murderer was upon me, and I was compelled to yield to it.

I went down to the pier, and stood there with my eyes wide open for any observer, and my ears alert for any sound. There was neither one nor the other. Except for the soft splash of the water all was silent as the grave. I hesitated for an instant, and then stole softly on to the pier. The structure, as explained, was of wood and built on piles, and near its outer end there were steps at either side leading down to a sort of lower platform, used for a landing from boats. It was my idea to go down to this platform, where I might see the body if, as was very possible,

it had been washed in amongst the piles. I climbed carefully and quietly down the slippery steps—and there, standing against the railing and looking down into the water, was a dark form.

The figure turned its head at the sound of my footsteps. Its face was of a ghostly pallor, and its features were the features of Tompkins. The eyes appeared to me to gleam with concentrated hate as it gazed at me, and I felt each individual hair of my head assume an erect position as I stared in turn at the awful apparition.

"Why are you here?" whispered the spectre, in scarcely audible tones, which seemed to tremble with rage. "Why are you here?"

I hardly know how I forced myself to reply, but I managed to stammer out, "I c—c—came to look for you."

"To look for me!" echoed the apparition. "Yes! I have always heard so. There is no peace for the murderer. None! Haunted! Always haunted! Haunted till he dies from the terror. Yes! day and night I shall see you. No darkness can shut from the eye of the murderer the presence, the constant presence, of his victim's spirit. Oh! the horror of it!"

I gave a dismal groan. It was awful.

"I'll go to the police," I began; but the spectre interrupted me.

"I shall do that," it said. "You forget that they wouldn't see you; no one sees you but me. You're dead, you know: since last night, when I threw you over the pier. I saw you go down three times; and I never even tried to save you, when perhaps I might have done so. But I'll give myself up in the morning. I'd rather be hanged than haunted. And when I am perhaps you'll be at rest."

The sudden relief I felt was almost too much for me. It was evident that it was not Tompkins's spirit, but Tompkins in the flesh that I had found, and I was therefore not a murderer in fact, although I certainly had been one in intention. On the other hand, it was clear that Tompkins, having in some way got out of the water (although I could have sworn I saw him drown), had lost his wits from the shock and become insane. This, however, was my salvation, for so long as he imagined himself to be the murderer and not the intended victim, as he really was, he certainly would not bring any charge against me. It was evidently my cue to avoid in any way disturbing this illusion, and, indeed, to foster it carefully. I should have to explain to him that I was not dead,

but had escaped in some extraordinary way. Thereupon Tompkins would fall on my neck and shed tears of joy, whilst I should magnanimously forgive him and he would remain indebted to me for life. It seemed perfectly simple. I began at once, in a solemn voice.

"Why did you throw me off the pier last night?"

"Torture me not," cried Tompkins, in a tone of agony. "I know you will haunt me till I'm hanged, but don't keep on like this.

I—er—that I learnt to swim—er—last week, and that I—er—dived, just to frighten you—and climbed out when you went away?"

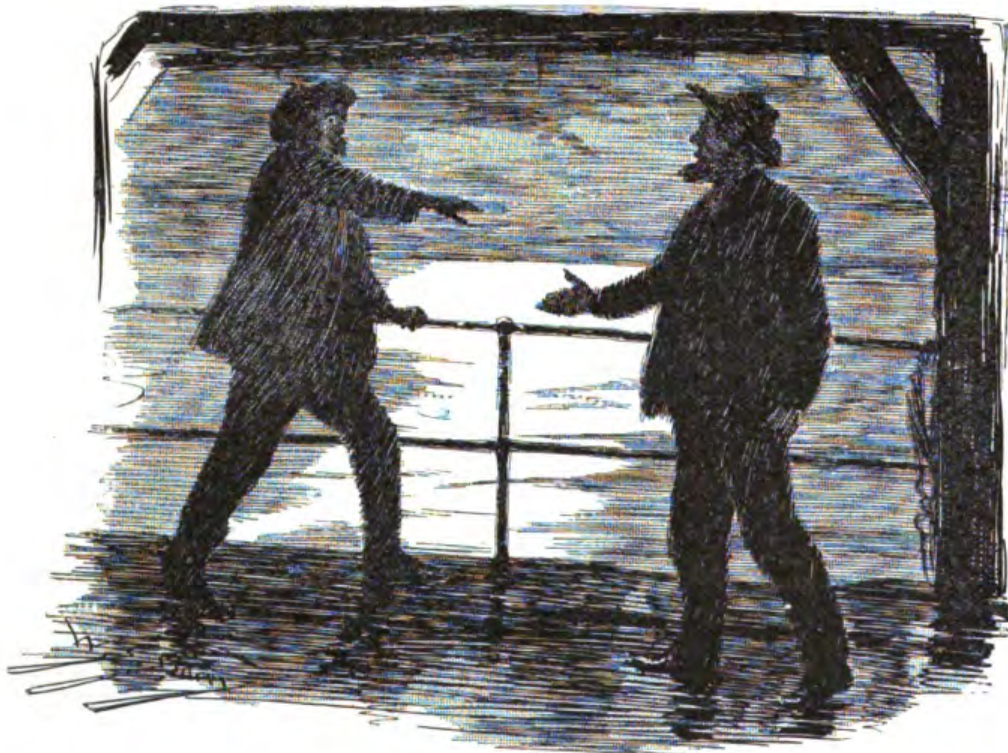
"Don't mock me," cried Tompkins, reproachfully. "I murdered you. You're dead; and I'm going to give myself up."

"I'm not dead," I said.

"You are," he persisted.

"Feel my hand," said I, and I made a step towards him.

He recoiled in horror. "Keep off!" he almost screamed. "I won't! I can't!



"KEEP OFF!" HE ALMOST SCREAMED.

It's not regular. You oughtn't to speak. Dead people don't talk, you know."

"Answer me," I replied. "I command you."

"You know very well," said he. "We quarrelled about that show yesterday, and you told me I'd been to sleep on the stage, and I told you it was a lie; and then you said—but what is the use of going over it again? I threw you in, and you're dead."

"What would you give to know I was alive?" said I.

"Give? Why, anything. But you're as dead as Moses, you know. You can't swim—I mean, you couldn't when you were alive."

"Tompkins," I said, "would you be surprised to hear that I'm not dead? That

You're only an appearance. You ought to vanish now and let me go home, and then come in the night again and stand over me. You shouldn't go on this way."

"Look here," I said, rather loudly, for I was getting irritated—a man who insists on calling himself a murderer when the body is alive and wanting to shake hands with him is an annoying person—"don't call me an appearance. I'm as solid as you are. What's this?" and I sprang on him suddenly and gave him a couple of smart blows on the chest.

Now this kind of thing is not usually soothing in effect, but the look of intense relief that came over Tompkins's face as he received the thumps I have never seen equalled. The deadly pallor fled; and, if

he did not literally fall on my neck, he wrung my hands till they ached, and the moonlight showed something very like tears in his eyes.

Soon, however, his face fell. "Bob, old man," he said, sadly, "I *meant* to drown you. It's no credit to me that you're alive. I shall go and give myself up for attempted murder."

"Don't be an idiot," I returned. "You haven't any proof. You don't suppose I'm going to charge you, do you?"

"You must," he said.

"Must, be blowed," said I. "There is no harm done. That sort of thing is quite common—amongst friends. A little temper, that's all. Why, I might have done it to you, instead."

"Aren't you going to do anything, then?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Yes," I said, "I am. I'm going home to have a drink, and you're coming with me."

And so it happened that, ten minutes later, two retired merchant skippers, each of whom regarded himself as the would-be murderer of the other, might have been seen marching amicably up the little street of Pygwyllion, arm in arm, to the residence of one of them, on liquid refreshment bent.

On arriving at my cottage I called to my old servant, Mary, to bring whisky and glasses. Now, Mary had lived with us during my wife's lifetime, and remained with me ever since, and on the strength of long service claimed privileges, one of which was to find fault with me whenever she pleased—which, to tell the truth, was pretty frequently. She always insisted on remaining up till I was at home and, as she considered, safe for the night, and held ideas about late hours which she made no scruple of expressing. Possibly my tone of voice was lacking in that humility suitable to a return home somewhat later than usual, and exhibited inappropriate cheerfulness. When a man suddenly finds that he has not committed a murder of which he believed himself guilty, and that, moreover, he is not to be called to account even for the attempt, there is undoubtedly something inspiriting in the situation, and it is possible that my voice may have been unduly jubilant. At any rate, old Mary appeared to think so. She set the bottle and glasses on the table with as much banging as was consistent with their safety, and delivered herself of the following:—

"A nice hour for a respectable gentleman to come home, Captain Jones, certainly! And I suppose you'll be sitting up the best

of the night now. You'd better make the most of the whisky; there's no more. And for goodness' sake don't forget to bolt the door after you've let Captain Tompkins out. Perhaps he'll sleep on the sofa, though. And when you do go to bed I hope you'll make less noise than you did last night, keeping me awake with your snoring and grunting and talking in your sleep till the clock struck twelve. And now I'll wish you good-night."

"Did you hear that, Bob?" said Tompkins, when she had gone. "Old lady had the nightmare badly. Why, at twelve o'clock last night you were just drow—I mean diving—down by the jetty."

"Never mind that, old man," said I. "It's all over. Take some grog."

Now, what glorious luck! I thought to myself. If my dear friend here should ever, which Heaven forbid, find out the rights of the matter, what a witness for an alibi! Unsolicited testimony to my being at home. And the old girl would swear to it with the best conscience.

"Bob, old chap, here's your health, and Heaven bless you for a kind-hearted fellow!"

Just then old Mary put her head in at the door and snapped out, as she threw a letter on the table, "This came for you this evening; I forgot it."

When the door was closed I took the letter up and examined it. It was addressed in a strange hand, and bore the postmark of a town some miles distant. On opening the envelope an inner cover appeared, on which was the following inscription:—

"To Captains Jones and Tompkins,
Pygwyllion.

"The writer begs that the enclosed may be read by the above-named gentlemen in the presence of each other."

The letter itself I here give in full:—

"Gentlemen,—In adopting the profession of a hypnotist, I did so not so much as a means of making money as from a desire to benefit my fellow-creatures, and to bring about a more extended belief in the marvellous powers of an art in relation to which such general ignorance prevails. With this end in view it has been my custom often to visit small towns and villages where the very existence of the science was perhaps unknown. It has been my good fortune to open the eyes of many to the enormous benefits offered to the human race by the legitimate practice of my profession, and I am thankful to say that I have in many cases effected radical cures

when the patient had been given up by the faculty. Towards honest, if sceptical, inquiry I have always been patient; but to the pig-headed, obstinate self-sufficiency of half-educated people—like yourselves, gentlemen—I have sometimes, as in your case, administered a sharp lesson. I will explain myself. When you came on the stage last night you did so in obedience to the exercise of my will, although you did not think so; and I may here inform you that you proved yourselves two of the easiest subjects to influence that I have met with. The smallest exertion only on my part was necessary. I must call to your recollection that you both felt a momentary sensation of sleepiness, after which I apologized for dismissing you. That instant, gentlemen, allowed me to impress on your minds (which in such matters are abnormally weak) the idea that each of you had murdered his friend by throwing him off the jetty. But this is not all. I willed that this impression should not come into force until

you were asleep last night. Whether this has happened as I intended I leave it to yourselves to say. I fear you may, perhaps, have been inconvenienced, but I can assure you that after the receipt of this letter you need fear no further interference in your affairs from me.

"I will merely add that I should strongly advise you not again to oppose your puny and untrained wills to a power the extent of which your very narrow intellects are quite incapable of realizing. In the hands of an unscrupulous operator the results to you might be much more serious than those caused by

"Yours faithfully,

"KARL SCHLAFMACHER,

"Professor of Hypnotism."

We looked at one another, but for some time nothing was said. When at length Tompkins broke the silence his remark seemed to be somewhat wanting in relevancy.

He said, "Bob, my boy, pass the grog."

