

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers*, May 30, 1891 to February 6, 1892)

M.D.

I was a doctor without a hobby. When a patient presented an ugly bug, confidently expecting me to tell the germs and species. I could only look learnedly puzzled and murmur over such etcra as still lingered from my smattering of the sciences. At professional gatherings I was frequently asked what I was collecting. Until the joke grew stale I was accustomed to answer bad debts. Then with shame I perforce confessed to having no mania except for the sufferings of humanity. Every M.D. present was a third rate chemist, a half way Etymologist, a fourth rate geologist, a tenth rate something else. I steadily lost caste.

The partner of my woe and weal suggested going into hypnotism- I tried this, but could neither hypnotize nor be hypnotized. Moreover everyone who I desired to impress could, I found, match my hypnotic stories in the more wonderful personal experiences. After searching for, embellishing and manufacturing this stuff to no purpose. I joyfully abandoned hypnotism. A physician high up in the ranks about this time took to amateur photography – Here was my cue, I further then determined to get an outfit.

To the uninitiated photography would seem to be a difficult art. Professional photography, besides requiring the power to sooth ruffled vanity and [how too] successfully to howling infants, does undoubtedly afford opportunities for special skill. The amateur photographer buys his plates already made, points his machine, squeezes his bulb, presses his button until tired of the thing and then sends his plates to a professional. When the beautiful silver prints come back, he exhibits them to admiring friends as specimens of his skill.

Altogether this was not a very hard hobby to ride. But the useless Yankee blood that was mingled in my veins would not allow to walk content the well beaten track of amateur. I invented a slide that would not work and made a camera that was not as good as the one I had bought. I confiscated the bath room for a dark chamber, developed some indifferent plates and produced a few respectable bromide prints. Then a brilliant thought came to me. It came in the night and spoiled what might else have been one of my rare chances for an all night rest.

Light travels quickly. The electric light serves very well for sensitive plates. If I could have an arc light concealed in a corner of a room with an aperture in the covering I could turn the light upon the room at will. My idea was to have my camera also concealed use a very sensitive plate, flash the light and take the photograph by the same impulse. In this way I should get people with unstudied expressions and in unexpected attitudes. The victims would know neither whence the light came now what was its meaning. My wife dutifully sympathized with my enthusiasm but not the extent of willingness to yield a corner of our best drawing room. Determined to carry out the plan I begged for the head of the stairway, of this vantage ground I obtained a provisional grant.

A neat box containing an arc light and a camera appeared at the top of the stairs. It was evening and the joiner had departed after arranging everything to my satisfaction; and my wife had to stand in the hallway, while I focused her and blinded her with experimental flashes. I put in a fresh plate for a final experiment but my wife refused to endure another flash. My eagerness to test the results of the experiments may be imagined. Even a call from rich widow Darby proved hardly a counter excitement, although I promptly donned hat and gloves.

When I returned after a long consultation over the largely imagined ills of my new patient, it was ten o' clock. I did not feel sleepy and went upstairs to my dressing room to smoke

and think about my photographic experiment. Not long after twelve I heard a slight sound downstairs. Without waking my wife, lest she should lock me up in the dressing room I stole noiselessly to the head of the stair. Unmistakably there was someone moving in the hall below. I saw a man coolly removing my pet fur lined coat from the hat rack. Should I go down and grapple with him? Prudence answered; he will pistol you and escape. Should I make a move, and scare him away? Just then I bethought, one of my experiments in photography. Feeling for the large bulb that worked the contrivance I grasped it firmly with my left hand, with my right hand I turned the electric switch. The lamp hissed horribly but I squeezed the bulb convulsively and (must I confess) fled for wifely support.

We heard a hasty exit from some back window, then all was still. Having grown bold now that danger seemed over, I was anxious to go down and see what was missing but my wife would not hear of it. We spent the remainder of the night conversing an hourglass and burglary. When sufficient light came to dispel my wife's fears, I went down to find my overcoat gone. Nothing else was missing except the burglarproof catch from a basement window. My camera case was sadly warped from the heat of the electric lamp but everything else was in good order. I did not trust myself with the development of the plate nor did I explain to the photographer why I wished him to take special pains with it. The result anxiously awaited was all I could desire.

The man startled by the hissing of the lamp had looked up and was caught full face. Such a mild looking fellow. I wished that I had obliged my first impulse to go down and capture him. Armed with the proof I visited the inspector who listened rather incredulously to my tale but promised to look into the matter. A week later I was summoned to the police court to confirm my man. I had been warned not to say anything about the photograph and was getting uncomfortably eager to tell the story, especially to the renowned amateur whom (in these matters only) I

considered my mentor. The fellow barefacedly pleaded an ingenious alibi. Then came the coup. The detective who had “ nabbed ” him pulled out my photograph and shouted at the amazed thief, “ what d’ you say to that ? ” The man ’ s eyes fairly started from his head. Like one in a daze he muttered, “ It must a bin the lightnin as took me . ”

I never got my coat back but can think with some comfort of Charles Smith alias Slick Charley reposing behind prison bars. My camera chamber now occupies the coveted position in the drawing room but no one assumes unstudied expression while I am there about. With meekness not unmixed with pride I hear, the sobriquet of the Medical Detective.

J. Remsen Bishop  
August 7, 1890

Read at the Literary Club  
June 13, 1891