Bovril sets you up

THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN RAY

By William Le Queux

CHAPTER I.

Beside Still Waters.

The youth in the multi-colored blazer laughed.

"You'd have to come and be a nurse," he suggested.

"Oh, I'd go as a drummer-boy. I'd look fine in uniform, wouldn't I?" the waitress simpered in return.

Dennis Burnham swallowed his liqueur in one savage gulp, pushed back his chair, and rose from the table.

"Silly young ass," he said, in a voice loud enough for the object of his wrath to hear. "Let's get outside."

The four of us rose, paid our bill, and went out, leaving the youth and his flippant companions to themselves. For it was Bank Holiday, August the third, 1914, and I think, though it was the shortest and most uneventful of all our river "annuals," it is the one which we are least likely to forget. On the Saturday Dennis, Jack Curtis, Tommy Evans and myself had started from Richmond on our yearly trip up the river. Even as we sat in the two punts playing bridge, moored at our first camping-place below Kingston Weir, disquieting rumors reached us in the form of excited questions from the occupants of passing craft. And now, as we rose from the dinner-table at the Magpie, Sunbury, two days later, it seemed that war was inevitable.

"What I can't understand," growled Dennis, as we stepped into one of the punts and paddled idly across to the lock, "is how any young idiot can treat the whole thing as a terrible joke. If we go to war with Germany—and it seems we must—it's going to be——. Good Heavens! who knows what it's going to be!"

"Meaning," said Tom, who never allowed any thought to remain half-expressed, "meaning that we are not prepared, and they are. We have to step straight into the ring untrained to meet an opponent who has been getting ready night and day for the Lord knows how many years."

"Still, you know," said Jack, who invariably found the bright spot in everything, "we never did any good as a nation until we were pushed."

"We shall be pushed this time," I replied; "and if we do go to war, we shall all be wanted."

"And wanted at once," Tom added. "Which brings me to the point which most concerns us," said Dennis, with a serious face. "What are we going to do?"

"It seems to me," I replied, "that there is only one thing we can do. If the Government declares war, it is in your cause and mine; and who is to fight our battles but you and me?"

"That's it, old man, exactly," said Dennis. "We must appear in person, as you lawyers would say. I'm afraid there is not the slightest hope of peace being maintained now; and, indeed, in view of the circumstances, I should prefer to say there is not the slightest fear of it. We can't honorably keep out, so let us hope we shall step in at once."

Jack's muttered "hear, hear" spoke for us all, and there was silence for a minute or two. My thoughts were very far away from the peaceful valley of the Thames; they had flown, in fact, to a still more peaceful glen in the Western Highlands—but of that anon. I fancy the others, too, were thinking of something far removed from the ghastly horror of war. Jack was sitting with an open cigarette-case in his hand, gazing wistfully at the bank to which we had moored the boat. There was a "little girl" in the question. Poor chap; I knew exactly what he was thinking; he had my sympathy! The silence became uncomfortable, and it was Jack who broke it.

"Give me a match, Tommy," he exclaimed suddenly, "and don't talk so much." Tom, who had not spoken a word for several minutes, produced the matches from a capacious pocket, and we all laughed rather immoderately at the feeble pally.

"As to talking," said Tom, when our natural equanimity had been restored, "you all seem to be leaving me to say what we all know has to be said. And that is, what is the next item on the program?"

"I think we had certainly better decide—" Dennis began.

"You old humbug!" exclaimed Tom. "You know perfectly well that we've all decided what we are going to do. It is merely the question of putting it in words. In some way or other we intend to regard the case of Rex v. Wilhelm as one in which we personally are concerned. Am I right?"

"Scored a possible," said Jack, who had quite recovered his spirits.

"In which case," Tom continued, "we don't expect to be of much assistance to our King and country if we go gallivanting up to Wallingford, as originally intended. The question, therefore, remains, shall we go back by train—if we can find the station here—or shall we punt back to Richmond?"

"I don't think we need worry about that," said Dennis. "I vote we go back by river; it will be more convenient in every way, and we can leave the boats at Messums. If things are not so black as we think they are we can step on board again with a light heart, or four light hearts, if you prefer it, and start again. What do you say, Ron?"

"I should prefer to paddle back," I replied. "It would be a pity to break up our party immediately. I don't want to be sentimental, or anything of that sort, but you chaps will agree that we have had some very jolly times together in the past, and if we are all going to take out our naturalization papers in the Atkins family, it is just possible that we—well, we may not be all together again next year."

"And you, Jack?" asked Dennis.

"Oh, down stream for me," said young Curtis, with what was obviously an effort at his usual light-hearted manner. "Think of all the beer we've got left." But the laugh with which he accompanied his remark was not calculated to deceive any of us, and I am afraid my clumsy speech had set him thinking again. So we went "ashore," and had a nightcap at the Magpie, where the flippant youth was announcing to an admiring circle that if he had half a dozen pals to go with him he wouldn't mind joining the army himself! Having scoured the village in an unavailing attempt to round up half a pound of butter, we put off down stream, and spent the night in the beautiful backwater. No one suggested cards after supper, and we lay long into the night discussing, as thousands of other people all over the country were probably discussing, conscription, espionage, martial law, the possibilities of invasion, and the probable duration of the war. I doubt very much if we should have gone to sleep at all had we been able to foresee the events which the future, in its various ways, held in store for each of us. But as it was, we plunged wholeheartedly into what Tommy Evans described as "Life's new interest." We positively thrilled at the prospect of army life.

"Think of it," said Jack enthusiastically, "open air all the time. Nothing to worry about, no work to do, only manual labor. Why, it's going to be one long holiday. Hang it! I've laid drain-pipes on a farm—for fun!"

It was past one o'clock when we got out supper. And our appetites lost nothing by the prospect of hardships which we treated rather lightly, since we entirely failed to appreciate their seriousness. Jack's visions of storming ramparts at the point of the bayonet merely added flavor to his amazing collation of cold beef, ham, brawn, cold fowl, and peaches and cream, which he insisted on winding-up at nearly two in the morning. He would have shouted with laughter had you told him that in less than three weeks he would be dashing through the enemy's lines with despatches on a red-hot motorcycle. And Tommy—poor old Tommy—well, I fancy he would have been just as cheerful, dear old chap, had he known the fate that was in store. For to him was to fall the lot which, of all others, everyone—rich and poor alike—understands. There is no need for me to repeat the story. Even in the rush of a war which has already brought forward some thousands of heroes, the reader will remember the glorious exploit of Corporal Thomas Evans, in which he won the D.C.M., and also, unfortunately, gave his life for his country. It is sufficient to say that those men in particular will ever cherish his memory as that of a loyal friend, a cheery comrade, a clean, honest, straightforward Englishman through and through.

As for Dennis and myself—but I am coming to that.

Having finished our early morning supper, we turned in for a few hours' sleep, Jack and Tommy in one boat, Dennis and I in the other. But before we did so we stood up, as well as we could under our canvas roofs, and drank "The King"; and I fancy that in the mind of each of us there was more than one other name silently coupled with that toast. Then, for the first time in my memory of our intimacy together, we solemnly shook hands before turning in. But, try as I would, I couldn't sleep. For a long time I lay there, in the beautiful silence of the night, my thoughts far away, sleep farther away still. Presently I groveled for my tobacco-pouch.

"Restless, Don?" Dennis asked, himself evidently quite wide awake.

"Can't sleep at all," I answered. "But don't let me disturb you."

"You're not disturbing me, old man. I can't sleep either. Let's light the lamp and smoke."

Accordingly we fished out our pipes and relighted the acetylene lamp, which hung from the middle hoop. Jack turned over in his sleep.

"Put out the light, old fellow. Not a cab'net meeting, y'know," he murmured drowsily. And by way of compromise I pulled the primitive draught curtain between the two boats, and as I sat up to do so I noticed with a start that Dennis wore a worried look I had never seen before. I lay back, got my pipe going, and waited for him to speak.

"I wonder," he said presently, through the clouds of smoke that hung imprisoned beneath our shallow roof—"I wonder if there would have been any war if the Germans smoked Jamavana?"

"What's worrying you, Den?" I asked, ignoring his question.

"Worrying me? Why, nothing. I've got nothing to worry about. What about you, though? I don't want to butt in on your private affairs, but you've a lot more to be worried about than I have."

"I? Oh, nonsense, Dennis," I protested.

"None of that with me, Ron. You know what I mean. There's no point in either of us concealing things. This war is going to make a big difference to you and Myra McLeod. Now, tell me all about it. What do you mean to do, and everything?"

"There isn't much to tell you. You know all about it. We're not engaged. Old General McLeod objects to our engagement on account of my position. Of course, he's quite right. He's very nice about it, and he's always kindness itself to me. You know, of course, that he and my father were brother officers? Myra and I have been chums since she was four. We love each other, and she would be content to wait, but, in the meantime—well, you know my position. I can only describe it in the well-worn phrases, 'briefless barrister' and 'impecunious junior.' There's a great deal of truth in the weak old joke, Dennis, about the many that are called and the few that are briefed. Of course the General is right. He says that I ought to leave Myra absolutely alone, and neither write to her nor see her, and give her a chance to meet someone else, and all that—someone who could keep her among her own set. But I tried that once for three months; I didn't answer her letters or write to her, and I worried myself to death very nearly about it. But at the end of the three months she came up to town to see what it was all about. Gad, how glad I was to see her!"

"I bet you were," said Dennis, sympathetically. "But what d'you mean by telling me you'd got nothing to worry about? Now that you're just getting things going nicely, and look like doing really well, along comes this wretched war, and you join the army, and such practice as you have goes to the devil. It's rotten luck, Ronnie, rotten luck."

"It is a bit," I admitted with a sigh. My little bit of hard-earned success had meant a lot to me.

(To be continued.)

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Woman's Interests

Remember the Absent Student.

Trooping to school and college have just gone many young men and women to spend a season away from home for the first time in their lives. Fathers and mothers are more or less anxious to know how their boys and girls will face the new responsibilities, and whether they will stand the physical strain; but if they are wise, they will not show too much anxiety on that point. Youth has the happy faculty of seeing so much of the good and so little of the bad that a well-brought-up young person can be trusted to a great extent.

But it is well to remember that young people get desperately homesick, and frequent letters from home help wonderfully. Then, too, every young person likes to get "lots of mail," and if the home folk rise to the occasion, much of the loneliness will vanish.

Presents of various sorts should follow the student, and take off the keen edge of hunger that a healthy, hearty boy or girl feels in a college boarding house. The box of apples, the loaf of homemade bread, the roasted chicken, the jelly, the big fruit cake, the mince pie, the nuts and pop corn, the cookies fat with fruit, the homemade taffy, the cheese, pickles, the gingerbread and all the other homely good things cost very little, yet are so welcome to the young students! Even if the young folks have a little spending money for luxuries, the home things taste better than anything else.

It is also well not to weigh down the absent ones with cautions and reminders that "your father and I have to sacrifice to get you through school, and we expect you to make the most of your opportunities." If the young people are in earnest, their standing will show their attitude toward their opportunities; if they are not in earnest, they might as well go home.

Let the youngsters work out their college life unhampered by constant admonitions. Make them feel that you have confidence in them and their determination to succeed.

And then remember that a little money gift now and then helps out wonderfully. At school, as at home, unexpected expenses come up, and the student who has his allowance figured so close as to preclude anything for emergencies will have a hard time of it unless he can get work. Little social occasions spring up as if by magic, and students who have no money for them are soon left out. Not that excessive spending should be encouraged, but rather that the country boy or girl should not be compelled to play the wallflower merely for the lack of a dollar or two.

Have the young people home as often as you can and make the occasion one of rejoicing and encouragement. Praise them all you honestly can, and be hopeful for the future.

Care of Furnaces.

Keep all heaters clean. Soot and ashes reduce effective heating.

Leaks cause drafts and consequent loss of heat. Mend them with cement.

To build a fire: Close all dampers, shake grate and remove ashes.

Put in crumpled papers, cover with kindlings laid criss-cross to admit air, then a thin layer of coal, or hard wood, if wood is used. Open ash pit and smokepipe dampers and light paper. When fuel is burning freely adjust the dampers.

Attend to fire regularly. If low, put on only a little coal. If a large amount of coal is used leave a part of glowing fire exposed.

In severe weather fill last thing at night. The first thing in the morning open dampers and add a little coal. When fire is burning well, shake it and add more coal.

Clean ash-pit daily. A short, swift stroke of shaker sifts ashes through grate. In mild weather have a bed of ashes on top of the grate. In severe weather, shake till a glow appears. Always leave grate set level.

Keep firepot full. You get better heat if coal is even with door in front and a little high in the back. Never poke fire bed.

Sunny Monday.

"Away with blue Monday
Let's make the day sunny,
With the aid of our wits,
We surely can do it."

When one's washing machine is run by a gasolene engine or some other machinery run motive power, one is not so concerned about the size of her weekly washing. But when one is dependent upon elbow grease as a motive power and there is a good-sized family to wash for, then it behooves the housewife to study up ways and means of making the weekly washing smaller.

I find that by using oilcloth for various purposes the weekly washing may be lessened to quite an extent. An oilcloth apron for kitchen use minimizes the number of dish aprons. A good-sized bib apron made of oilcloth, hung in a convenient place at the barn or in the dairy will be handy for the man of the house when he is milking and caring for the milk. Oilcloth apron bibs for the children to wear at the table help wonderfully in keeping their clothing clean.

The use of paper towels, napkins, etc., will be found a labor-saver. While these articles are comparatively cheap it might not be wise from an economical standpoint to use them every day, but it is a good plan to keep a supply on hand to be used when there is sickness or extra work to be done and one has little time to spend in washing clothes.

I find that the general washing is also greatly diminished when, through the week I gather up and wash the small pieces, such as hosiery, handkerchiefs, doilies, dishtowels, small pieces of children's wearing apparel, etc. It takes but a little time to wash a number of these, yet the general weekly washing will be noticeably smaller if this is done. A small wash tub, a stout toy washboard, the kind that usually sells for half a dollar, and a large pan with a cover to be used as a boiler, are the utensils I find handy when washing these small things.

When doing general washing I find a scrub brush valuable in removing dirt and grease from heavy overalls, men's shirts underclothing, etc. Many times a machine will not remove these entirely and it is necessary to rub them on a washboard. By placing the soiled part on a board and rubbing with a stiff scrub brush the work can be done better and easier than by rubbing with the hand.

It is the fellow that has to be told again and again to do the right thing that needs to worry about his job. The man that has to be told only once is safe and the man that can do it without being told at all will be the head of his department.

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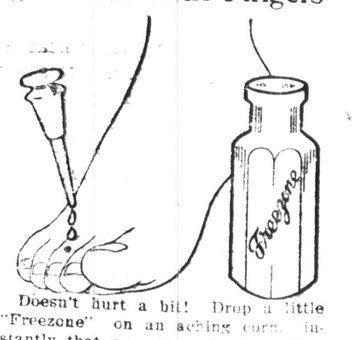

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