

# THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN RAY

By William Le Queux

## CHAPTER II.—(Cont'd.)

"I will indeed," I promised readily, "and I'll write you the train I'm coming back by. I should like you to meet it, and we can spend the remaining days I have together. If you don't get past the doctor I should like you to keep your eye on one or two things for me while I'm away."

"Of course, anything you like. The more the merrier," he answered readily; and the poor fellow brightened visibly at the thought of being able to do something for a pal.

We taxied round the corner with my kit and joined the others at the grill room. They were both in the highest of spirits. Jack, of course, in particular. He had been told that his intimate knowledge of motors and motorcycles would be of great advantage to him, and he had been advised on all hands to join as a dispatcher. In imagination he already saw himself up to the most weird pranks on his machine, many of which, much to the gratification of his friends, and just as much to his own astonishment, were proved later to have a solid foundation in fact. Over dinner we discussed the question of applying for commissions.

"Oh, dash it, no," said Jack; "I'm going to Berlin on the old snorter."

"Commissions are off—quite out of the question," Tommy agreed with emphasis. "To begin with, it means waiting, which is absurd; and in the second place I object to any attempt to travel first-class. It's silly and snobbish, to put the kindest construction on it. If I've got to go where they like to put me, and if necessary I'll hang on behind."

I record this remark because it was the best that I ever heard poor Tommy Evans make in this connection; and I think the reader will agree it was just what one would have expected of him.

We said good-bye after dinner. They all wanted to come to the station to see me off, but I was anxious to be alone with Dennis.

The others in any case had plenty to do, and I could scarcely let them sacrifice their "last few hours of liberty" to come and see me off. I rather expected that the excitement of the war would have prevented a lot of people travelling, but the reverse was the case. There seemed to be more people than ever on the platform, and I could not get a corner seat even in the Fort William coach. I bundled my things into a carriage, and took up as much room as I could, and then Dennis and I strolled about the platform until the train was due to start.

"Strange mixtures of humanity you see on a railway platform," Dennis remarked presently.

"Very," I agreed. "I daresay there are some very curious professions represented here."

"This chap for instance," said Dennis, indicating a youth in a tweed jacket and flannel trousers. "He might be anything from an M.P.'s private secretary to an artist's model, for all we know. I should say he's a journalist; he knows his way through a crowd as only journalists do."

"A typical Yorkshire cattle-dealer in his Sunday best," I suggested, as we passed another passenger. And so we went the length of the platform making rough guesses as to the professions of my fellow travellers. Suddenly I noticed a tall man wearing a tweed cap and a long overcoat, his hands in his pockets, a stumpy cigar stuck in the corner of his mouth. His hair was gray, and his face bore signs of a tough struggle in early youth. His complexion was of that curious gray-yellow one so frequently in America and occasionally in Denmark—something quite distinct from the bronze-gray of many colonialists. I nudged Dennis.

"What do you make of that?" I asked him after we had passed.

"I should be much more interested to know what that made of us," he replied.

"Not so, I should think," I answered carelessly. "Why, the man's eyes are nearly closed, he was half asleep. I bet he hasn't taken the slightest notice of anyone for the past ten minutes. You could commit a murder under his nose and he wouldn't see it."

"I think not," said Dennis quietly. "I fancy that if you took out a cigarette-case as you passed him he would be able to tell you afterwards how many cigarettes you had left in the case, what brand they were, and what the monogram on the front was. If you've any murders to commit, that our American friend is some thousands of miles away."

"Good heavens, you old sleuth!" I exclaimed in astonishment. "I never saw a more innocent-looking man in my life."

"I hate innocent people," said Dennis emphatically; "they are usually dangerous, and seldom half as innocent as they look."

"But what makes you think this man is only pretending to look like a dreaming, unobservant idiot, and why do you call him American so definitely?"

"He may or may not be American; but we have to give him a name for purposes of classification," Dennis explained. "In any case his overcoat was made in the States; the cut of the lapels is quite unmistakable. I knew an American who tried everywhere to get a coat cut like that, over here, and failed. As to his being observant, you seem to have overlooked one important fact. There the man stands, apparently half asleep. Occasionally he displays a certain amount of life—tucks his papers more tightly under his arms, and so on. Now, the man who has been dreaming on a station platform and is obviously going by the train would wake up to look at the clock, or glance round to see how many are travelling, and generally take an interest in the bustle of the station. But this man doesn't. Why? Because he sees all he wants to see for the moment. When we pass him the second time he will probably appear to be more awake, unless there is someone else passing him in the other direction, simply because he has seen us and sized us up and dismissed us as of no interest; or, more likely, stowed us away in his capacious memory, and having no further use for us, he forgets to appear disinterested."

"Good Lord, Dennis!" I exclaimed. "It's no idea you ever noticed things so keenly. What do you think he is—a detective?"

"Either that or a criminal. They are the same type of mind. One is positive and the other negative, that's all. We'll turn back and test him as we pass him. Talk golf, or fishing, or something."

So we commenced a half-hearted conversation on trout flies, and as we approached "the American" I was repaying the deadly nature of the Red Palmer after a spate and the advisability of including Greenwell's Glory on the same cast. Unfortunately, as we passed over the three other people coming towards us, and he was gazing over the top of the carriage with the same dreaming look that had, according to Dennis, deceived me before. But we were hardly abreast of him when his stick shot up in front of us. His arm never moved at all; it was done with a quick jerk of the wrist.

"You've dropped a paper, sir," he said to Dennis, with my utter astonishment, for I had seen no paper dropped. Dennis turned quickly, and picked up a letter which was lying on the platform behind him.

"I'm very much obliged, sir; thank you," said Dennis, as he put the letter in his pocket.

"I never saw you drop that," I exclaimed when we were safely out of earshot. "Did you?"

"There you are," my friend cried triumphantly. "You were walking beside me and you didn't spot it, and he did, and you say he was half asleep."

"I say, Dennis," I exclaimed, laughing, "do you think it's going to be safe to travel on this train? I wonder where he's going?"

Then we dismissed the man from our minds. The train was going in six minutes, and I joined the crowd round the rug and pillow barrow, and prepared to make myself comfortable. Leaving everything to the last minute, as most travellers do, we had a hurried stirrup-cup in view of the fact that I was about to "gang away," and as the train glided out of the station Dennis turned to wire for my breakfast-basket at Crianlarich. The one thing that it is important to do when travelling on the West Highland Railway I had forgotten! We had not passed Potter's Bar before I decided that it would be impossible to sleep, so I ferreted out the attendant and bribed him to put me into a first-class carriage. Better still, he showed me into a sleeper. I was dog-tired, and in ten minutes fell fast asleep. I awoke for a moment or two as the train started into a station and drew up. I dozed again for some time, and then the door of my sleeper opened and who should look in but "the American."

"Say, I beg your pardon," he exclaimed apologetically. "My mistake."

"Not at all," I replied. "Where are we now?" for the train was still standing.

"Edinburgh," he answered. "Just leaving. Sorry to disturb you."

I again assured him that there was no harm done, and he turned and left me, the tassels of his Jaeger dressing-gown trailing after him. The I fell asleep again, and woke up as we left Whistledale. I had finished my wretched ablutions—for an early morning wash on a train is always a wretched business—as we reached Crianlarich. I was put long in claiming my breakfast; and when the passengers in the refreshment-room had finished their coffee—which seems to be the time when the train is due to leave, and I not vice-versa, as might be expected—the guard was standing on the platform, flag in hand, on the point of blowing his whistle. Suddenly the heat of the American shot

out of the window of his carriage, and the quality of coal employed in it is always a dangerous adventure on the West Highland Railway, and presently I found myself with a big cinder in my eye. I was trying to remove the cause of my discomfort, and at the same time swearing softly, I am afraid, when Hilderman came ordered by telegraph.

"Hilderman—J. G. Hilderman, up."

"I'm here, sir," said the guard, dashing into the refreshment-room. I did not seem to wonder when the train started, but after a further heated argument in which the official refused to wait while a couple of eggs were being fried, Mr. Hilderman was supplied with a pot of coffee, some cold ham, and dried toast, and we recommenced our belated journey. I reached Fort William and changed on to the Malhag train, as did Mr. Hilderman, on whom, after the breakfast episode, I had begun to look with an affectionate and admiring regard. The man who can keep a train waiting in Great Britain while the guard gets his breakfast must be very human after all. Most of the way on the beautiful journey through Lochaber I leaned with my head out of the window, drinking in the gorgeous air and admiring the luxurious scenery of the mountain side. But, in view of the hilly nature of the track

# Bovril prevents that sinking feeling

Our trouble is this: "We want the pretense of a thing rather than the thing itself; we want a show of petty luxury if we are rich and a show of insulting stupidity if we are poor; we want to get something that looks as if it cost twice as much as it really did."—William Morris.

## Waving Your Hair.

You can have a pretty wave in your hair if you will follow these directions carefully. It is called a water wave and if your hair is inclined to be a bit curly, it will stay in quite a while. Anyway it is better than curling on hot irons. Brush your hair back naturally from your forehead or arrange it on top in the usual fashion in which you wear it. Sit down in a good light in front of your mirror. Dip your comb in hot water and run through your hair to moisten it slightly. Then push to the front with a comb. Stick a comb (you will need several small side combs) in your hair where you want the first wave and follow a line around your head with combs. Have the first row pointing to the right, the second to the left, the third to the right, and the fourth to the left, and have enough combs so they can be close together both in line and space. In the front "wave" the combs must be very close together. Pin up the long black hair and tie a veil or net over the combs quite tightly and let dry in the sunlight or with a fan. When you remove the combs, do not comb out at once, but let the wave "set" for a while.

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## Woman's Interests

### Christmas Gifts at Minimum Cost.

How can we prepare for Christmas when we have no money to spare for gifts? asks a perplexed correspondent.

Write Christmas letters to your distant friends. Letters are always welcome and, if made interesting and newsworthy, will prove almost equal to a visit. Into each letter you can tuck something which you know will please or be of use. The new apron pattern which you like so much, some recipes which you have found worth while, crocheted or knitting patterns, a poem, or some flower seeds—any of these can be added to a letter and will show that you have that particular friend's tastes in mind. Fasten the envelope flaps with Christmas seals, a packet of which can be bought for a few pennies.

When money can be spared for parcel post, a bag of pretty pebbles for an aquarium or a bulb bowl, a box of evergreens, holly or moss, a tiny tree for the Christmas dinner-table or a box of bittersweet or bayberry branches (which look so pretty in vases) might be sent. Get out your piece bags and see what possibilities they present. If you are not expert at planning pretty things, you could make up a package of pretty scraps which would fill the heart of a little girl with joy, or which would be welcome by some one who is interested in rag rugs or patchwork quilts. Tin containers, such as baking-powder or coffee cans make attractive boxes for holding the staple dry groceries. Paint the cans any soft color desired, preferably to match walls or woodwork in kitchen. The labels may be stenciled in white or in a contrasting color.

Little children enjoy picture books and get endless pleasure out of the home-made kind. The leaves of these books are made of colored cambric on which are pasted pictures cut from magazines and advertisements.

A window garden which would delight a shut-in friend is made by arranging wintergreen, mosses, etc., in a small glass aquarium. The piece of glass placed over the top of the bowl is lifted off for a few moments daily; the bowl and its contents need no other care. Or you could start some seeds of the grapefruit in a shallow pot. The seeds germinate slowly but develop into little plants which have an attractive dark green foliage. Your girl friends would appreciate hat-boxes covered with left-over pieces of wall paper.

### Getting Acquainted at the Party.

Guests usually arrive within a period of twenty minutes. As the people come in, have them take their places in a circle where they will play "Who's Your Neighbor?" in the centre of the circle stands a leader who is "it." The first half-dozen or dozen players will have had a chance to learn each other's names. Have the leader point to some one and shout: "One, two, three, who's your neighbor?" If the person indicated by the index finger fails to call aloud the name of the person at his right, that player must take the place in the centre. If the player answers immediately, telling the right name, the leader must point to another, and continue to be "it" until some one fails to respond correctly. As guests arrive, the game can be interrupted only long enough for each guest to take a place in the circle; at the same time the leader should announce "This is Miss So and So," or "Mr. So and So." After fifteen or twenty minutes of play the leader should announce that each player will be expected thereafter to tell the name of his neighbor at a moment's notice.

After the guests have gotten their neighbors' names straightened out, have them play the Sentence Game. Have the leader in the centre of the circle call out: "Mr. Smith, make a sentence of six words, each word beginning with the first letter of your name." One minute should be allowed for this, and if Mr. Smith is successful, he may respond with: "Sam Smith stole seven sleek sheep," or something else to that effect. If not



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