THE MYSTERY OF THE GREEN RAY

By William Le Queux

CHAPTER XIV.—(Cont'd.)

After the meal we adjourned to the hut above the falls. Hilderman certainly had some right to be proud of his view. It was magnificent. We stood outside the door and gazed out to sea, north, south and west, for some minutes.

"You have the same uninterrupted view from inside," said Hilderman, as we mounted the three steps to the door. He held the door open, and I stepped in first, followed by Dennis and Fuller. The window extended the whole length of the room, and folded inwards and upwards, in the same way as some greenhouse windows do. Suddenly I laughed aloud.

"What's the joke?" asked Hilderman.

"This," I said, pointing to a large carbon transparency of a mountain under snow, which hung in the window on the north side. "You've no idea how this has been annoying us over at Invermalluch."

"How?" asked Dennis.

"It swings about in the breeze," I replied, "and it reflects the light and catches everybody's eye. It's a very beautiful photograph, Mr. Hilderman, but, like many human beings, it's exceedingly unpopular owing to the position it holds."

"A thousand apologies, Mr. Ewart," said the American. "It shall be removed at once."

"Oh, not at all!" I protested. "Surely you are entitled to hang a positive of a photograph in your window without receiving a protest from neighbors who live nearly three miles away."

"That's Invermalluch Lodge, then, across the water," Dennis asked.

"Yes," I replied, and we forgot about the transparency, which remained in undisputed possession of a pitch to which it was certainly entitled. We sat and smoked, and looked out at the mountains of Skye and the wonderful panorama of sea and loch, with an occasional glance at the gurgling waterfall at our feet, and presently I picked up a copy of an illustrated paper which was lying at my hand. I turned the pages idly, and threw a cursory glance at the photographs of the week's brides, and the latest efforts of the theatrical press agents, and I noticed without thinking anything of the fact, that one page had been roughly torn out. I was about to remark that probably the most interesting or amusing picture in the whole paper had been accidentally destroyed, when Fuller leaned across Dennis, and took the paper out of my hands.

"Don't insult Mr. Hilderman's precious view by reading the paper in his smoking-room, Mr. Ewart," he said, with a loud laugh. "As a Highlander you should have more tact than that."

Hilderman turned round, and looked from one to other of us.

"What paper is he reading? I didn't know there was one here."

I explained what paper it was, adding, "I quite admit that it was a waste of time when I ought to be admiring your unrivalled view, Mr. Hilderman. I offer you my sincere apologies."

Hilderman threw a quick glance at Mr. Fuller.

"Better give it him back, Fuller," he said. "There is nothing more annoying than to have a paper snatched away from you when you're half-way through it."

Shortly after that Fuller declared that he must be leaving, and asked Hilderman rather pointedly whether he felt like a trip to Loch Duich. I determined to step in with an idea of my own.

"I was going to make a suggestion myself, Mr. Hilderman," I began, "but it doesn't matter if you are engaged."

"Well, I don't know that I'm particularly keen to come with you this afternoon, Fuller," he remarked. "What was your suggestion, Mr. Ewart?"

"I was wondering whether you would come over to Invermalluch with Burnham and me and—er—have a look round with us?"

"Well, if Fuller doesn't think it exceedingly rude of me, I should like to," the American replied, "especially as Mr. Burnham will be leaving you to-morrow, or the day after at latest."

"Incidentally, I don't know how we shall get back without you," I pointed out. "You see, we sent the motor-boat on."

"By Jove, so you did!" Hilderman exclaimed. "Well, that settles it, Fuller."

"I could take them on the Fiona and put them ashore," his companion persisted. Hilderman gave Fuller a look which seemed to clinch the matter, however, for the little man beamed at me through his spectacles, and explained that if he took us in his yacht it would be killing two birds with one stone.

"Still, of course, my dear fellow," he concluded, "you must please yourselves entirely."

So we saw him safely on board the Fiona, and then started for Invermalluch in Hilderman's magnificent Wolseley launch.

"Fuller knows me," he explained, by way of apology. "I go up with him sometimes as often as three times a week, but I gathered that you asked me with a view to discussing the mystery of the green flash, or whatever you call it."

"You're quite right; I did," I replied. "I simply want you to come and have a look at the river, and see what you can make of it."

"Anything I can do, you know, Mr. Ewart," he assured me, "I shall be delighted to do. If you think it will be of any assistance to you if I explore the river with you—well, I'm ready now."

From that we proceeded to give him, at his request, minute details of Garnesk's conclusions on the matter, and I am afraid I departed from the truth with a ready abandon and a certain relish of which I ought to have been most heartily ashamed.

When we stepped ashore at Invermalluch Hilderman looked back across the water.

"If I'd waited for Fuller," he laughed, "I should have been stuck there yet. He's let the water go off the boil or something."

We went up to the house and had tea on the verandah, for the General had taken Myra up Loch Hourn in the motor-boat. After tea we got to business.

"Now that I've had a very refreshing cup of tea," the American remarked, "I feel rather like the mouse who said 'Now bring out your cat' when he had consumed half a teaspoonful of beer! Now show me the river."

"I don't want to sound at all panicky," I said, "but I think I ought to warn you that our experiences at the particular spot we are going to have—well, shall we say they have provided a striking contrast from the routine of our daily life?"

"I'm not at all afraid of the river, Mr. Ewart," he replied lightly. "I should be the last person to doubt the statements of yourself and Miss McLeod and the General, but I am inclined to think the river has no active part in the proceedings."

"You hold the view that it was the merest coincidence that Miss McLeod and the General both had terrible and strange experiences at the same spot?" asked Dennis.

"It seems to be the only sensible view to hold," Hilderman declared emphatically. "I must say I think Miss McLeod's blindness might have happened in her own room or anywhere else, and the General's strange experience seems to me to be the delusion of overwrought nerves. I confess there is only one thing I don't understand, and that is the disappearance of the dog. That's got me beaten, unless it was that crofter."

"We intended to go to the Saddle to-morrow and make a few investigations. I was going by myself," I added cautiously, "but I think I can persuade Burnham to stay and go with me."

"I certainly should stay for that, Mr. Burnham," Hilderman advised. "One more day can't make much difference."

"I'll think it over," said Dennis, careful not to commit himself rashly.

We came to the Dead Man's Pool, and crossed over the river, and began to walk up the other side.

"This is about the right time for a manifestation of the mystery," I remarked lightly, though I was far from laughing about the whole thing.

"Well," said Hilderman, "if we are to see the green flash in operation I hope it will be in a gentle mood, and not pull our teeth out one by one or anything of that sort." Evidently he had little sympathy with our fear of the green ray and the awe with which we approached the neighborhood of the river.

"Are we going to the right place?" Dennis asked. "I mean the identical spot?"

"That lozenge-shaped thing up there is the Chemist's Rock," I replied, "and the other important place is Dead Man's Pool, which we have just left."

"Miss McLeod went blind on the Chemist's Rock, didn't she?" Dennis inquired.

"Yes," I replied, with a shudder. "She was fishing from it."

"Then suppose we go back to the pool," he suggested. We agreed readily enough, for I had no desire to hang about the fateful rock, and Hilderman for his part seemed to have no faith in the idea at all. I fancy he thought it would make no difference to us in what part of the river we might be, only provided we didn't fall in. So Dennis led the way back, and he was the first to pick his way to the middle of the stream. Hilderman and I were some distance behind. Suddenly we stopped stock-still, and looked at him. He had begun to cough and splutter, and he seemed rooted to the small stone he was standing on in the middle of the stream. In a flash I understood, and with a cry I bounded after him, Hilderman following at my heels.

"It's all right, Ewart," cried Hilderman behind me. "He's only choked, or something of that sort. He'll be all right in a minute."

Dennis had crossed to the centre of the stream by a way of his own, and we ran down to the stepping-stones by which we had come, in order to save the time which we should have been compelled to waste in feeling for a foothold as we went. Every second was of importance, and I fully expected to see Dennis topple unconscious into the pool below before I should be able to save him. I knew what it was exactly; he was going through my own horrible experience of "drowning on dry land," to quote Garnesk's vigorous phrase. Imagine my astonishment, therefore, when I reached Dennis's side with only a slight difficulty in breathing. There was no sign, or at least very little, of the air which was "heavier than water." Hilderman plunged along behind me, and we reached the stone on which my friend was standing almost simultaneously. Dennis held an arm pointing up the river, his face transfixed with an expression of horrified amazement. Suddenly Hilderman gave a hoarse, shrill shout, breaking almost into a scream.

"Shut your eyes!" he yelled. "Shut your eyes! Oh, for heaven's sake, shut your eyes!"

But I never thought of following his advice. Dennis's immovable arm, pointing like an inanimate signpost up the river, fascinated me. Slowly I raised my eyes in that direction. Then I stepped back with a startled cry, lost my footing, slipped, and fell on my face among the rocks.

The river had disappeared!

CHAPTER XV.

Concerns An Illustrated Paper.

The river had disappeared!

In front of us was a great green wall of solid rock, which seemed to tower into the sky above us, and to stretch away for miles to right and left. The curious part about it was that the rock was undoubtedly solid. The shrubs that grew upon it, the great crevices and clefts, were all real. I knew—though I had a hard struggle to make myself believe—that it was all a marvellous and indescribable delusion, for there could be no cliff where only a few seconds before there had been a mighty, rushing torrent.

And yet I could have planted finger and foot on the ledges of that solid precipice and climbed to the invisible summit. Hilderman was muttering to himself beneath his breath, but I was too dazed, my brain was too numbed to make any sense out of the confused mumble of words which came from him. Dennis held my arm in a vice-like grip that stopped the circulation, and almost made me cry out with the pain.

Hilderman staggered, his arm over his eyes, across the stepping-stones to the side of the stream. I found my voice at last.

"Dennis!" I shouted at the top of my voice, though why I should have shouted I can never explain, for my friend was standing just beside me. "Dennis, come away, man. Get out of this!"

I exerted my strength to the uttermost, but Dennis was immovable, rooted to the spot by the strange, snake-like fascination of the nightmare. Then, as suddenly as it had arisen, the rock disappeared again, and there before our startled gaze was a peacefully flowing river. Dennis turned to me with a face as white as a sheet.

"The place is haunted," he said, with a somewhat hysterical laugh.

(To be continued.)

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Provision for others is a fundamental responsibility of human life.—Woodrow Wilson.

Woman's Interests

Bathing the Baby.

Baby should be bathed at least once a day. During hot weather one or two extra sponge baths may be given; but as a rule the daily bath should be a tub bath. It can be done more quickly and thoroughly, and the baby is not so liable to take cold.

The room should be warm; an open fire is desirable in cool weather. The water should be comfortably warm but not hot, about 90 to 95 leg. F. It may be tested with the bare elbow, never the hand. However, a bath thermometer is best.

Everything needed should be in readiness before baby is undressed. In a small wicker basket, painted white, should be kept a cake of pure white castile soap, a small bottle of olive oil, pure talcum powder, boric acid, four dozen safety pins of assorted sizes, and a roll of absorbent cotton. A clean wash cloth, clean towels, and a full set of clean clothing should also be in readiness.

To undress the baby, take the clothes off over his feet. If held on the lap, a large bath towel should be used to prevent his tender skin from coming in contact with the rough or worsted dress and to receive him when lifted out of the tub. More conveniently he may be undressed on a table.

Before putting the baby into the tub, wrap him in a small blanket or large towel, and wash his face, head, and ears, being careful not to get soap into his eyes and mouth. Very little soap is needed. It is most important that the skin should be rinsed thoroughly. Pat the skin dry with a soft towel, taking care to dry well back of the ears and in the soft folds of his neck. The eyes should be cleansed with absorbent cotton dipped in boracic acid solution. Squeeze a drop into each eye, being careful to use a fresh piece of cotton for each eye. The mouth and nose then should be cleaned with an applicator dipped in boracic acid solution. An applicator is made by twisting a small tuft of absorbent cotton upon the end of a wooden tooth pick in such a way as to make a rounded pad. If made correctly, the cotton will not slip off readily. Be careful not to injure the ears. It is better to ask your physician or the nurse to show just how to cleanse them correctly.

It is well to lay a bath towel in the bottom of the tub and put in only a small amount of water at first. If baby is plunged immediately into a tub of water, he will be startled and may never enjoy a tub bath; but if the water is added gradually, while baby's attention is diverted to something else, he soon learns to enjoy the morning dip.

First soap the baby's entire body thoroughly; then place him in the bath, holding him with the left forearm under the neck and shoulders, the left hand under his arm, and lifting his feet and legs with the right hand. Support him while in the tub with the left hand and arm. Sponge the entire body with the right hand; then lift him out and wrap him in a bath towel. Dry carefully with the soft towel, patting the skin gently. Never rub the baby's tender skin with anything less smooth than the palm of the hand. A little pure talcum may be used in the creases and folds of the skin, under the arms, and around the buttocks; but it should not be used so freely as to clog the pores of the skin, and never should be used until the skin has been dried as thoroughly as possible with the towel. A highly perfumed powder should not be used.

The bath should be given as nearly as possible at the same hour each day, at least an hour after feeding, and at first should last only about three minutes; later it may last five minutes. As the baby grows older and stronger he may be allowed to play in the water for about 15 minutes, for the skin absorbs some water, which is beneficial to the system, relaxes the muscles and aids in overcoming many wrong conditions.

Salads Furnish Variety and Vitamines.

Here are a few suggestions for simple salads that the family will greatly enjoy:

Sliced oranges and sliced Spanish onions served with French dressing.

Cauliflower cut up in small pieces and served with peanuts or any other kind of nuts and thousand island dressing.

Cabbage chopped fine and served with nuts and mayonnaise dressing makes an inexpensive and tasty salad.

Raw carrots ground through a meat grinder and served with either nuts, peas, or tuna fish, and mayonnaise dressing make a delicious and a pretty salad.

Spinach cooked and served with cheese and French dressing is another possible combination.

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CORNS

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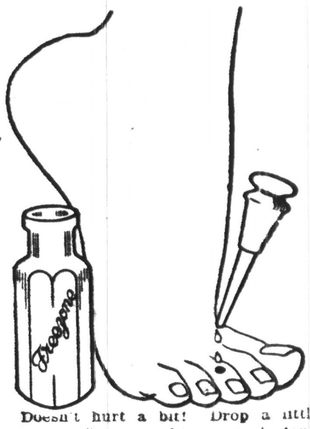

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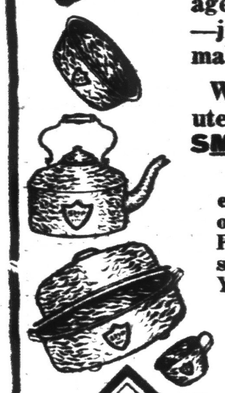

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