

THE SCHWOTTEM RAY!

An Episode in the Amazing Career of Herlock Sholmes the World's Worst Detective!

Chronicles by His Friend, DR. JOTSON.



A minute later our old friend, Inspector Pinkeye, entered the room, tearing nervously at his hair.

GREAT pip!" It was seldom indeed that I allowed myself the luxury of any such juvenile expression. Nevertheless, that exclamation escaped my lips as I reached across the breakfast-table and drew the "Daily Buzz" towards me.

Herlock Sholmes, his slim fingers delicately dissecting a kipper, smiled patiently.

"You are surprised, my dear Jotson? And yet what more natural than that Mynheer Schwottem's great discovery should be stolen?"

"You have seen the newspapers, Sholmes?"

"No, I have seen nothing—except a couple of dozen bills from butchers, bakers, and rate-collectors. But it was perfectly obvious to the meanest intelligence that the notorious Ray apparatus would be stolen. Are not ninety per cent. of modern inventions stolen by someone or another? Go down to the Thames Embankment any fine night, my dear Jotson, and inquire of the poor, homeless wanderers you will find there. Most of them were inventors, the remainder devotees of that obnoxious game known as auction bridge—gentlemen who failed to lead trumps and suffered the inevitable penalty."

With a dainty gesture he flicked a kipper-bone from the lapel of his becoming mauve dressing-gown.

Heaving a sigh, I turned to the front page of the "Buzz" and perused the print beneath the bold headlines which first had attracted my eye.

"THE SCHWOTTEM RAY STOLEN!"

That was what the newspaper shrieked across its front page. And below there followed an account of how Mynheer Schwottem, the discoverer of the patent ray, of which all England had been talking for the past week, had had the ray apparatus filched from him.

In the midst of my perusal of the meagre newspaper account of the affair, Mrs. Spudson, our landlady, appeared.

"Inspector Pinkeye to see you, sir!"

"Hah! Let him enter!" said Sholmes. He rose gracefully from the breakfast-table, rolled the cocaine cask within easy reach of his armchair, and reseated himself near the empty fire-grate.

A minute later our old friend, Inspector Pinkeye, entered the room. The nervous way in which he tore tufts of hair from his bushy moustache did not escape the eagle eye of the famous sleuth.

"You are upset, my dear Pinkeye," drawled Sholmes, taking a liberal pinch of cocaine. "The Schwottem Ray case, I suppose?"

"You're right, Mr. Sholmes," said the inspector, "though how you guessed I cannot make out. At one-thirty this morning I received a telephone message from Mynheer Schwottem informing us that his secret ray apparatus had been stolen. It was in my office at the Yard at the time, and I

told him he could rest assured that heaven and earth would be moved to recover the invention. When I woke up seven hours later I discovered that Mynheer Schwottem himself was also missing."

"Missing!" I gasped. "Vanished! Vamooshed! Skiddooed! Anything you like!" Inspector Pinkeye tore another tuft from his ample moustache and savagely scattered it upon the carpet.

"I called at the Hotel Rookham, Pimlico, where he has been staying. He had left there the previous evening."

"No mystery in that," murmured Sholmes, placing the tips of his elongated fingers together. "I know the Rookham."

"The worst of it is, I've never seen Mynheer Schwottem," groaned Pinkeye. "He's a bit of a mystery man, as you know. Beyond the fact that he was fat, wore a heavy flaxen moustache and beard and blue spectacles. I can get no good description of him. Help me to find him and his ray apparatus, Mr. Sholmes, and if ever you are arrested for not paying your income tax, I'll visit you in prison."

"You may rely upon me, Pinkeye," said Sholmes quietly. He reached into the coat-scuffle for his valuable Vhadistrubius violin. "Don't hurry away, Pinkeye. But it is ten o'clock, and I must run through Yugelstein's thumb-and-finger exercise in B sharp."

"Er—er—I have an appointment at the dentist's," muttered Pinkeye, rising hurriedly. "My corns have troubled me fearfully lately. Au revoir—and if you have news for me I shall be in the Yard."

"Back or Scotland?" drawled Sholmes, with that humorous twinkle that always accompanied a display of his scintillating wit.

After the burly inspector had fallen down the flight of stairs leading from our apartments, and had been shown out by Mrs. Spudson, Sholmes began to play his violin. Sitting opposite him, I employed myself sharpening a few handsaws and chisels, for I had an appointment to remove a brace of inflated tonsils from one of my patients that afternoon.

But we were not to be left in peace. Mrs. Spudson put her head into the room and shrieked that there was a "furrin gent" on the premises.

"A foreigner!" exclaimed Sholmes, desisting from his musical efforts. "Did he give his name?"

"Mynheer Schwottem he called himself, sir," replied our landlady. "He repeated it ten times."

Both Sholmes and I were on our feet. "Mynheer Schwottem!" cried Sholmes. "Show him up."

Hardly had Sholmes replaced his violin in the scuttle and I had put my surgical instruments in my little black bag, than Mrs. Spudson appeared again. With characteristic politeness she ushered our visitor into the room.

"The furrin gent!" she announced.

Stepping outside, she closed the door as Sholmes greeted the guest. The latter was a man of distinguished appearance. He was about five feet four in height, ninety inches in circumference, splay-footed, wore blue glasses, and had the most amazing jungle of face-fungus that I had ever set eyes upon. So luxurious was this yellow beard, that it was impossible for me to see whether he wore a collar or not. Under his arm he carried a large brown-paper parcel. When he spoke his voice sounded as though it were coming from his fashionable, elastic-sided boots.

"Mynheer Herlock Sholmes, and't it? Vos dot not so? Yes? No?"

"Exactly," replied my famous friend. "Pray be seated, Mynheer Schwottem, Jotson, produce the pickled gherkins."

As I took the bottle from the sideboard and placed it hospitably within reach of our visitor, I noticed that Sholmes was regarding him intently.

"Ach!" exclaimed our client, helping himself from the jar. "I vos in sad troubles, Mynheer Sholmes."

"Trouble?" drawled Sholmes. "You're found, and't it—er—I mean, aren't you?"

"Found! I haf never been lost—nein! It vos der ray!"

"But you have it in that parcel," said Sholmes.

Plainly our client was perturbed at Sholmes' perspicacity. Personally, I had imagined that the brown paper contained a new wireless set or a dozen haddock. But the look on the face of Mynheer Schwottem—or, rather, on that part not concealed by his massive whiskers—showed that Sholmes was nearer the mark.

With fat hands that trembled, he unwrapped the parcel, to reveal a metal cylinder, a couple of electric batteries, and a Dutch cheese.

"Look vot I vill do," grunted our client. He rose and held the cylinder near the window. Sholmes and I gazed down upon the traffic of Shaker Street. Schwottem pressed a button. A taxicab that had been rattling along at three miles per hour came to a dead stop, and three wheels fell off.

"Plaster pills!" gasped I. "Amazing!"

A boy with a pea-shooter was standing on the kerb. Evidently the flabbergasted taxi-driver imagined he had something to do with his misfortunes. The driver stumbled off his vehicle, collared the lad, and cuffed him soundly. Policemen arrived on the scene. There was a whirling of arms and legs; a free-for-all fight developed on the spot.

"Der ray vos der greatest invention for der cause of peace in der world," remarked Mynheer Schwottem, blowing a Tube train near Shaker Street Station off the rails. "I vill now blow der head off der captain of one of der British battleships in Blackpool Harbour."

"One moment!" said Sholmes. "You'll be hurting someone in a minute. Have another gherkin, and—"

At that moment I saw a man coming down Shaker Street in a Ford car. He was a most detestable person, and I owed him one-and-sixpence.

"Quick, mynheer!" I cried. "Turn the ray on that Tin Lizzie!"

With a smile, Mynheer Schwottem pressed the button. There was a clatter of tin. The Ford had disappeared, and the street was scattered with what looked like fragments of old tomato-cans. I gave a grim chuckle as I saw my enemy seated in the middle of the road, gazing round in blank bewilderment and rubbing his coat-tails.

"Magnificent!" I cried. "The ray is the

ray on that Tin Lizzie!"

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invention of the century. When it is on sale at the shops I'll buy a couple."

"Ach, you do not understand!" roared Mynheer Schwottem. He pressed the button and blew a bus over. "It is no goot. Dat bus, for instance, it should have been nodings but matchwood."

For a moment I thought our client was suffering from batusimus belfritis—in other words, bats in the belfry. Overwork and worry in connection with his great discovery may have affected his bokoranium.

"No good!" I echoed. "The Schwottem Ray no good?"

"Dis ray was no goot," said the visitor gloomily. "It is not der Schwottem Ray at all! Nein!"

Even my illustrious friend, Herlock Sholmes, evinced a modicum of surprise. I distinctly saw his ears give a slight flap as he paused in the act of conveying a pinch of the best cocaine to his aquiline proboscis.

"This is interesting," he said. "Pray explain yourself, mynheer."

"I will explain meinself mit der exceeding clearness. I vas a Dutchman dot vos come to dis countries for to try and sell der ray I haf invented. Last nights somebodies come to mein hotel and vot you call snaffle him, and't it? Dot's clear. Yes? No?"

"As clear as pea-soup," I remarked jocularly.

Sholmes frowned.

"Proceed, Mynheer."

Schwottem proceeded.

"Ven der thief snaffle mein lofely invention I vas snoring asleep. Ven I vake up der ray vas gone and dis vun left in der place of it."

"Ah, I see," drawled Sholmes. "A thief stole the ray apparatus from the room in your hotel, and left another invention in its place. The apparatus in your hand is not so powerful as your own invention."

"Nein! Dot is so. Dis vas a fraud—vat you call 'all fiddlesticks,' and't it?"

"Extraordinary!" muttered Sholmes. "On the evening prior to returning you had also had a shock. You had seen the hotel bill."

Mynheer Schwottem gasped.

"Vot makes you tink so, hein?"

"You yourself left the hotel, quietly during the night," said my brilliant friend. "Now, whom do you suspect of having robbed you?"

"Vun rascally German named Von Schneider," replied our client. "And I haf reasons to believe der fellow haf gone to Scotland. Follow him there, Mynheer Sholmes, and find mein lofely ray, and I will pay you a hundred marks. Pusenese calls me back to der Hook of Holland, but you can write to me at de Post Office, Ammercheeseron. Goot-mornings!"

"One moment!" said Sholmes. "Dr. Jotson and I are taking a taxi. We will drop you on your way."

A gale of wind was blowing in the street. The three of us waited outside the house until Sholmes summoned a taxi. He ushered our client and myself into the vehicle, and whispered to the driver.

Rapidly the taxi bowled through the London traffic. Suddenly it came to an abrupt halt.

"Vere we vas?" demanded our client, startled.

"Scotland Yard!" replied Sholmes.

The fat foreigner leaped to his feet with a snarl like an enraged bull-frog. There was a click like a penny dropping in the gas-meter; then, to my utter amazement, I saw that our caller was wearing a pair of dabs on his wrists.

Calmly filling his pipe with a couple of ounces of black shag, Sholmes ordered me to open the door of the cab. On the pavement was Inspector Pinkeye.

"A prisoner for you, Pinkeye," said Sholmes, picking a card from the foreigner's waistcoat-pocket. "Let me introduce you to Herr Schneider, who stole the famous Schwottem Ray last night. This apparatus is the true Schwottem Ray. Knowing that I am the only man in England likely to get on his track, he tried to send me on a false scent to Scotland. Then he intended catching the boat to Harwich to sell his booty to a foreign Government. I will now trace the real Mynheer Schwottem for you. By the way, you might look under the dyed beard of your prisoner. He has a bomb concealed there."

When the fuming Schneider had been



I OFTEN wonder why it is that people always worry an editor with their vizzits. Is there something fascinating about an editor, that they should always be calling to see him? I suppose that is the explanation, in my case. Now, if I were an old jossler of seventy summers, with a few winters thrown in, nobody would think of calling on me. They would leave me in piece. But bekwase I happen to be young and hansom, and a very fascinating fellow into the bargain, I have people dropping in all day long.

All sorts and konditions of people flock to my sanktum. I even had an income tacks collector calling on me the other day! He marched into my study as bold as brass, and without removing his gloves from his head, or his hat from his hands, he barked at me: "You are William George Bunter?"

"That is my name," I replied, with dignity.

"You are the editor of the jernal which bears your name?"

"I am."

"It is a very flurrishing paper, is it not?"

"As flurrishing as the flowers in May."

"Indeed! Then I must inform you that you must pay tacks on your income."

I larked hartly at this.

"Pay tacks!" I eggscloimed. "Rubbish! I am a miner!"

The tacks-collector frowned.

"You are not a miner," he said; "you are an editor. You do not go down into a pit to dig for cole, so how can you be a miner?"

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taken to the cooler by Pinkeye, Sholmes leaped back into the taxi. He gave the driver the address written on the card he had extracted from Schneider's pocket.

"It is likely that we shall find Schwottem there," said Sholmes, as we bowled along. "I deduce that he suspected Schneider of being on his track, and went to his address to accuse him of the theft."

Sholmes' theory was proved to the hilt. In a cellar, gagged and bound, we found the missing Dutch inventor. He had gone to Schneider's address, and had been captured and gagged by the scoundrel who was making preparations for his getaway.

The gratitude of Mynheer Schwottem knew no bounds. He presented Sholmes with a fiver, three Dutch cigars, and a couple of hyacinth bulbs, and invited both of us to call and see his uncle, the Burgomaster of Schwenkschiffen, next time we were in Holland.

Leaving us, Schwottem proceeded to Scotland Yard to identify his ray and Schneider.

As Sholmes and I drove back to Shaker Street, my curiosity could be restrained no longer.

"My dear Sholmes!" I cried. "How did you know? I never dreamt our client was other than an honest man."

Sholmes smiled patiently.

"From the first I suspected he was not all he professed to be. When waiting in Shaker Street for the taxi, a gale of wind was blowing. Yet his beard never swayed to the icy summer blast. Therefore I deduced he had a bomb or some other heavy missile attached to it out of sight. In the taxi I distinctly caught a glimpse of the infernal machine, with 'Made in Germany' stamped on the percussion-cap. The case was ridiculously simple. But let us stop at the corner and regale ourselves with a couple of fried dabs and parsley."

THE END.

"I'm not talking about cole-mining!" I replied, with some asperity. "My meaning is this. I am under twenty-one years of age; therefore, I am a miner. And miners don't have to pay income tacks. Even if my income was ten thousand a year, I shouldn't have to pay tacks, and you know it. Run away and pick flowers!"

The tacks-collector gave me a savidge look and departed. "He hadn't been able to get any change out of this child!"

Another Stormy Interview.

Before I had time to recover from this man, another vizziter was ushered into my sanktum. This was a big, berly fellow named Harry Higgs. He interjuiced himself as follows:

"I'm 'Arry 'Iggs, of Courtfield."

I waved him to the cole-skuttle.

"Sit down, Mr. Higgs," I said. "To what do I owe the onner of this vizzit?"

Mr. Higgs didn't sit down. He stood glaring at me.

"I don't like this 'ere paper of yours," he said bluntly. "It's full of Greyfriars matters, an' there 'ardly a word about Courtfield in it. I want you to chuck out all the Greyfriars stuff, an' fill your 'Weekly' with reports of what goes on in Courtfield. You'll ave plenty to write about. Things 'appen every day in Courtfield. There was a pig run over by a steam-roller this mornin'." This afternoon a man was arrested for shopliftin' at Chunkley's Stores."

"My hat!" I eggscloimed. "He must have been a pretty strong fellow to lift a shop of that size! But tell me, Mr. Higgs, why are you so keen on my paper being filled with Courtfield news?"

"Bekawse I want to write all the reports myself, of course!" said Mr. Higgs. I promptly told Mr. Higgs that there was nothing doing.

"I refuse to change the pollisy and stile of my paper, simply to suit your konvenience!" I said. "In fact, I've never heard of such cheek in my life!"

This seemed to annoy Mr. Higgs. As I have said, he was a big, berly fellow, and before I realised what was happening, he took a quick stride towards me. Seizing me by the scruff of the neck, he lifted me boddily out of my chair. Then he turned me upside-down, and put my head in the waist-paper basket. I hollered and screamed, but nobody came to the reskew.

Mr. Higgs held me upside down until I felt that my eyes were dropping out. Then he heaved me back into my seat, and picked up a coil of rope lying in the corner, and proseded to bind me to my chair. In vain I struggled and protested.

As soon as I had been made a helpless prizzoner, my assailant overturned the red-ink bottle over my napper, and the beastly stuff ran down my cheeks. Then he gave me a second baptism—of black ink this time—and he finished up by emptying the contents of the gum-bottle and the paste-pot over my head. I've never had such a horrible eggspereience in all my natcher! Then he left me.

An hour later Peter Todd came in and found me, and released me from my unhappy plight. I haven't seen Mr. Harry Higgs since, and I don't jolly well want to! In future, to prevent unwelcome vizziters, I shall work with my door locked and barricaded, and with a couple of fighting editors stationed outside, armed to the teeth with cricket-stumps! My readers will agree with me that such precautions are necessary.