

JORKENS HAS  
A LARGE WHISKEY  
BY LORD DUNSANY

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# **Jorkens Has a Large Whiskey**

By  
Lord Dunsany

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## PREFACE

BY naming this book as I have I do not for a moment suggest that there was anything unduly large about the size of the whiskey that Mr. Jorkens drank: no such imputation is intended. It merely happens that at the outset of certain investigations of mine into questions of biology or geography, a large whiskey has held a prominent place; and I may say that there are only two sizes of whiskey to be had at the Billiards Club, a large and a small, and Jorkens has taken a dislike to the small size ever since one was brought to him by mistake. This whiskey, by stimulating the memory of Mr. Jorkens, has brought to light some unusual data that were not only forgotten otherwise by Mr. Jorkens himself, but were unknown in several instances to all the rest of the world. My own interest in these stories is purely scientific, as I have no doubt my reader's will be. But let not the ardour of scientists lead them to cast away the steps by which they have mounted, and let us all realize that without that humble glass of whiskey, there are things in biology that we might not quite have suspected; and let us give credit where it is due, as I do by this slight tribute of naming the book from the original starting point of a certain amount of research.

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JORKENS HAS  
A LARGE WHISKEY

# Chapter 1

## JORKENS' REVENGE

AGAIN winter had come to London, and the clock said a quarter past three and night lay over the Billiards Club. At any rate the sun had set behind houses, and a long arm of fog had come reaching down the street and lights were lit in windows; and our own large window was just being hid with its curtains, and cheery lights were shining. Jorkens was there, among nearly a dozen of us; and, lunch over and the fire burning well, it was pre-eminently the occasion for a story. In a hush that came drowsily down on our conversation some of us looked at Jorkens; more than a look seemed hardly needed by the occasion; then we sat quiet and waited for him to begin. Something more, however, seemed to have been needed to brighten his memory and start him: Jorkens never said what, and somehow or other none of us seemed to have thought of it, and we never got a story from him that day. I waited expecting one, for it was the very evening of all the evenings of that November to start Jorkens remembering sunshine and all of us listening eagerly. I did not give up hope of a tale from him, to pass a dark hour away, till he turned and talked to Terbut, and about London. Then I saw we should have no tale of the wilder parts of Africa. "Terbut," he said, "you know London better than I do . . ."

We all looked up, and so began the strangest experience of all the strange things I have been introduced to by Jorkens. And I am glad to relate it, for not only am I able to check its accuracy, but any reader who is able to visit London can check the veracity of it for himself, thus obtaining absolute proof to test one of Jorkens' exploits.

"You know London better than I do," said Jorkens. "I wonder which is the further, from Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster Bridge, or . . ."

"Yes?" said Terbut, leaning forward, eager to justify his knowledge of London.

"Or from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge," said Jorkens reflectively.

"What?" said Terbut.

And Jorkens repeated it.

“Don’t talk silly nonsense,” said Terbut rudely, as soon as he was sure of what Jorkens was saying.

“I only asked you a question,” said Jorkens.

“It’s a nonsensical one,” said Terbut.

We all saw that Jorkens was trying to catch Terbut somehow, although we didn’t see how. And it was unlike Jorkens to turn on Terbut like that. But I think he had never forgiven a certain remark that Terbut had made about a unicorn; a remark such as a man who has never travelled, and who is a little jealous of one who has, might be expected to make. It is easy to sneer at unicorns. But it is definitely on record that Pope Clement gave the horn of one of these interesting creatures to Francis I of France, and that he commissioned no less an artist than Benvenuto Cellini to have the horn properly mounted. It may perhaps be said that the Pope may have easily made a mistake. But that is mere bigotry.

Well then, Jorkens was asking Terbut which was the further, from Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster Bridge, or from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge; and Terbut was telling him that the question was nonsense.

“I was only wondering,” said Jorkens, gazing away to the last thin strip of the fog that the waiter was tidily hiding, as he brought the curtains together.

“Don’t be silly,” said Terbut.

“Don’t let’s argue,” said Jorkens.

“There’s nothing to argue about,” Terbut answered.

“Let’s try it,” said Jorkens.

“Try it?” gasped Terbut.

“Measure it,” Jorkens explained.

And Terbut remained silent, gaping.

“We could do it in a taxi,” said Jorkens. “Watch where his clock ticked, and measure anything that was left over with a tape. Try it each way, and see which was the longer.”

Of course that calm explanation infuriated Terbut, and I saw that it was meant to; I saw, as I think we all saw then, that Jorkens was heading Terbut into a bet. And I think Terbut deserved it, considering the number of times

that he has tried to catch Jorkens over things that could never be proved. Here was something that could definitely be proved. But how Jorkens was going to win his bet we could none of us see. And Terbut exploded with: “Waste my money on a taxi to test an absurdity?”

And Jorkens quietly said: “I should say that from Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge would be the longer.”

“Nonsense,” said Terbut again.

“Ah. You think Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster Bridge,” said Jorkens. “I daresay you may be right.”

“Nonsense” was now becoming a parrot cry with Terbut.

“Equal, you think,” said Jorkens.

“Of course,” spluttered Terbut.

“Well, I don’t know,” said Jorkens, “but let’s bet about it.”

“I shouldn’t bet about anything so absurd,” Terbut answered.

“Ah, I thought I was right,” said Jorkens.

“Thought you were right?” exclaimed Terbut.

“Yes, I thought that Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge was the further of the two; and when people won’t bet with you they’re generally wrong.”

“Wrong?” said Terbut like a single explosion.

“Well, have a bet then,” insisted Jorkens.

“How much?” asked Terbut.

“A fiver,” Jorkens suggested.

“Right,” said Terbut.

Terbut was angry and had decided to rob Jorkens; but Jorkens merely ordered a whiskey from the waiter, adding: “I’ll pay for it this evening, if you’ll just put it down.”

And so the two men set out into the fog to see which was the further, Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster Bridge, or Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge, and to measure it chiefly by taxi. They agreed on that method as they went, Jorkens suggesting a second journey in case either party should be dissatisfied, and Terbut refusing this, for fear Jorkens should somehow wriggle out; but Jorkens’ last words as he left were: “Then a

second journey over the two distances if you are dissatisfied, but not if I am.”

Terbut considered a moment over even that generous offer, then gruffly agreed, and the two went out of the club. Soppit, a member with a noisy little car that he thinks a great deal of, went too, with the idea of checking the bet by means of his own instrument. The rest of us sat silent. One was used to wonders with Jorkens; but, without for a moment saying that proofs have been needed, we had never sat before with the proof of one of his contentions within almost half an hour of us, and the proximity of it a little awed us all. Also, I, for one, scarcely liked to commit myself with any hasty comment. On the one hand the thing was absurd, on the other Jorkens had a certain air about him that I had come to know so well, and that air seemed almost to prophesy the defeat of Terbut. We were perhaps chary of identifying ourselves with the losing side, merely to champion sanity. And then that present of five pounds, as it appeared to be, to Terbut: that was hardly like Jorkens.

Then a few suggestions were uttered out of the silence. But there was no point in any of them.

Then silence again. And you know what it is after lunch, with fog outside and warmth within, and good comfortable chairs. Very little more was said.

And so time passed, and presently Jorkens and Terbut came back, with Soppit running behind. What had happened, if I can make head or tail of it, seems to have been this: they started at Blackfriars Bridge, which is the nearer one to the club: they stopped their taxi exactly at the edge of the bridge, and got out and paid him. Then they hired him again, as soon as his flag was up, and told him to drive to Westminster Bridge. This he did, and his clock ticked about 90 yards short of it, and they got out and measured that 90 yards with a tape; 91 yards, 2 feet, 2½ inches, to be exact; from the point where the taxi-clock ticked to the edge of Westminster Bridge. Then they paid off their taxi and hired him once again, and drove back to Blackfriars Bridge. And the second journey was unmistakably longer.

There had apparently been an exhibition of temper by Terbut, and of calmness by Jorkens, Jorkens merely saying suavely, “But let’s try again.” While Terbut had argued and blustered. An onlooker would not easily have seen on which side was reason and sanity. And in the end they did try again. And they got the same result.

And then Soppit did the distance with his little car, and corroborates the whole absurd story; and is ready to prove to anyone who doubts it, by a trip in his car, that Westminster Bridge to Blackfriars Bridge is further than from Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster Bridge. He says that the river flows almost in a semicircle there. I never said it didn't. He says that taxis always keep to their left. We all knew that. He was saying something about the arc of a larger circle. But I interrupted him there, to express what we all felt, that no arcs of circles in the world were going to make the distance from Blackfriars Bridge to Westminster Bridge any shorter than the distance between the same two points going the other way. And I could have proved it too. But just as I was going to speak, Jorkens came in on the side of craziness, of absurdity, the side that I shall always think to be wrong, if only one were able to prove it; and yet he came in with what I have to admit was irrefutable argument, as he wagged his head to where his old opponent was standing dejected and silent.

“Terbut,” he said, “has paid up.”

There was no more one could say.

## Chapter 2

# JORKENS RETIRES FROM BUSINESS

A MEMBER of our club had made a little coup on the Stock Exchange; nothing very much, but enough to bring the conversation round to investments, transactions and such. And so we got to talking of the whole art of making money; until one of us suddenly introduced the theme of leaving that game, of giving it up altogether, retiring and living far away from towns on such money as one had made. For those who care to know the general feeling of the Billiards Club upon such topics as this, I may say that the consensus of opinion was very soon evident, and it held that it cannot be done; that you cannot deliberately turn from acquiring gold, where it is at all plentiful and you have the power to acquire it. The issue was slightly confused at first by several members saying that they had retired from business themselves: the personal histories of the commercial careers of members of the Billiards Club will not interest the general public, so let it suffice to say that old age, bankruptcy, depreciation of stocks, or general commercial depression, are four factors that amongst them accounted for every case. It is the turning away from gold while it is still to be had in handfuls that in our opinion, as soon as it crystallized, cannot be done by any man.

“That is so,” said Jorkens suddenly.

We thought he was asleep in his chair.

He said it so finally, so judicially, that, even though he confirmed the opinion of all of us, Terbut felt that he must contradict.

“It is not so easy for anyone to find gold just now,” said Terbut.

“There’s no difficulty in that,” said Jorkens, away amongst shadows that bowed and trembled before the fire.

“Can you find it?” said Terbut, from the table where most of us still lingered late after lunch; and outside was the darkening sky of a forbidding December.

“Plenty of it,” said Jorkens.

“Where?” answered Terbut, rather naturally.

“If you’ve a good map,” began Jorkens.

And Terbut almost ran to an atlas that there was lying about, and had it in Jorkens' hand before there was time for the conversation to take any other turn. And Jorkens opened it with perfect composure, and turned the pages to India.

"It's on an island in a lake," said Jorkens. "The island's barely an acre, a quarter mile out from the shore. It's heaped with nuggets. Big ones; the lake's an old crater nearly a mile across; and I imagine that all that gold must have been thrown up by volcanoes. The nuggets are big as flints, the kind that you see in flint-heaps gathered up from a farm. There was probably a pool of it once, all molten, a mile or so down, a lake perhaps; and the volcano shot it up, a fountain of gold. I should have liked to have seen it going up. They say that granite has often been shot up like that."

"Did you mention the name of the lake?" said Terbut.

"Umboodwa," said Jorkens.

"Could you show it us on the map?" continued Terbut.

"Yes," replied Jorkens. "The actual name's not marked, but there, where there's no sign of water, it's just there, by my finger."

"No sign of water?" repeated Terbut.

"No," Jorkens continued, "the Government don't allow it to appear on any map."

"Is it there at all?" asked Terbut.

"Certainly," said Jorkens. "I've seen it."

"You've seen it?" said Terbut.

"Yes," said Jorkens.

"A bit difficult, wasn't it?" said Terbut. "If the Government wouldn't let it be marked on the map, they can hardly have been very keen on your going there."

"They weren't so particular in those days," said Jorkens.

"And what made them grow more so?" went on the tenacious Terbut.

"You see," said Jorkens reflectively, "I was the only one that ever came back from it."

"The only one?" Terbut muttered.

"I think so," said Jorkens.



And then we got the rather peculiar tale of how Jorkens went to Umboodwa.

“I first heard of it,” said he, “at a club they had in the hills. Some of them asked me to dine there once or twice.”

“What were you doing in India, Jorkens?” asked one of us.

“Just looking round,” said Jorkens; “taking a look at the lie of the land.”

“That all?” said Terbut.

“That and one thing and another,” said Jorkens. “And I happened to come to the Terai, and upon the hills above me was this club, among a few houses, white like patches of snow. I dined there once or twice. Well, they used to play pretty high in those days. I don’t give you the name of the club, because they asked me not to mention what happened that night. I’ll tell you, but I’ll suppress names. Well, one night when I was there a young fellow got up from one of those tables, having lost £250. Lost it in one sitting. He got up very white and said: ‘I must go to Umboodwa.’

“The men to whom he had lost the money shrugged their shoulders at that, and with no more said by anyone he went out of the room.

“I naturally began to ask about Umboodwa. ‘Oh, it’s a place,’ was the sort of answer I got. There seems to have been some kind of distrust of it even then. And with their effort to hush up the episode of losing £250 at a sitting I heard little more about Umboodwa then. But I persevered and was very soon on the track of it. After all, you can’t easily hide a lake nearly a mile across and something like three miles long. What I didn’t quite like about it was that, by the time I had found out all I wanted to know of how to get to the lake, I began to ask about that young fellow who had walked out, all white, from the club. The bare fact is, he was never heard of again. I didn’t like that, naturally. But I went to Umboodwa.

“I got there from the hills in a couple of days. I got to within fifteen miles of it by train; and then hired a bullock-tonga, and travelled in that as far as there was a road, and then walked over the circular line of low hills that hide the lake from the world. Below me from the top of the hills there lay a perfect circle, part land and part lake. In the lake was a little island, a quarter of a mile from the shore, with a tiny temple on it. There was another small temple on the mainland, at the nearest point to the island, and there seemed to be no paths anywhere. There was no particular scenery to tell you of, except for the perfection of that circle that was made by the low hills. By

the little temple opposite the island there were one or two men walking about. There were no boats whatever.

“I walked down to the two men, who seemed to take no notice of my coming until I was quite close, and one of them then came a little way forward to meet me. They both looked the kind of Indians that spend their time contemplating things, and I hardly expected either of them to be practical guides. But the one that was coming to meet me said at once: ‘You want gold?’ So that at any rate he knew what I had come about. It was curious being asked such a question by this Indian: over here we take it for granted.

“‘Yes, please,’ I said.

“‘Will you please to take a ticket? It is two rupees,’ he told me; which is about half a crown. And he motioned me to the other man.”

“Half a crown for a ticket to pick up gold nuggets?” exclaimed Terbut.

“No,” answered Jorkens, “for a bathing-suit.”

“A bathing-suit,” muttered Terbut.

“There are a lot of places like that,” Jorkens replied, “where they won’t let you enter the water without a bathing-suit. But here it was particularly necessary, because the suit was equipped with pockets in which to carry the gold. But in any case they wouldn’t let you go in without it. So I paid my half-crown for a little paper ticket, and went and got the kit. It was handed out to me by a man in a little shack by the temple, very much as you might get your bathing kit at a swimming bath in England. But everything else was different. The kit was different; and the attitude of the two men by the shore, though you couldn’t describe it, was different from anything else whatever. They both sat down and they watched me; they watched me alertly all the time I was there, and utterly without interest. That’s odd, you know; and it gave me an odd feeling; to be watched by eyes that noted your every movement, and yet without caring, as one could see by the look of them, whether one prospered or failed in anything that one wanted, or even whether one were alive or dead. That look on their faces as they watched me left me no illusions as to what they would do if I got into difficulties swimming back from the island; they would go on with their watching. I didn’t know, when I came to that conclusion, how long they both had been at that very thing. They must have been at it for years.”

“At what?” said Terbut.

“Watching men drowning,” said Jorkens.

“Murdering them, do you mean?” said Terbut, suddenly indignant.

“Not in the least,” said Jorkens. “Just watching the very thing we were speaking of a little while ago, the difficulty men find in stopping the acquisition of gold.

“Well, I stripped and the fellow in the shack by the temple strapped the bathing kit on to me: it fastened from behind. In front there were two large bags to carry the nuggets, with the opening below, so that you had to close them when filled, to prevent everything falling out. They closed with padlocks, and, as the man who took my ticket kept the key, there was no opening them till one brought them back to the temple. Well, he told me one or two things about the lake; told me the depth of it, though I don’t know how he knew that; said that it was five miles; and said that sometimes there were storms on it, local storms when no wind was blowing. And he told me about the nuggets on the island and said that I could take as many as I liked; any man might do that who bought the two-rupee ticket, but he could only go once. There is a rather similar arrangement in the Sudan, where you buy a licence to shoot (amongst other things) two Mrs. Gray’s Cob: you can never go back again for the rest of your life to shoot any more of that animal, when once you have got your two.”

“I wonder you didn’t go across in a boat,” said Terbut, “and get the whole lot, you could surely have got a boat there.”

“A boat,” said Jorkens. “That’s just what one couldn’t do. To begin with it would be stealing; for the gold on that island legally belongs to the idol they keep in that temple; not a very nice idol either; and the ownership is definitely respected by the Government of India. Your two-rupee ticket only entitles you to bring away what you can swim with. More than that the idol does not grant. As for boats, boats anywhere near that lake are contrary to the religion of the people whose little temple is there, and contrary to the edicts of the idol, drawn up for it by its priests. Bringing a boat there would be just like taking a bicycle into St. Paul’s cathedral: it isn’t done, and it can’t be.

“Well, I walked down to the shore and into the warm water, and found the queer kit they had fastened on me hampered me very little. A swim of four hundred yards or so didn’t tire me much in those days, and whenever I felt in the least need of a rest I turned over and floated. And so I came to the island in under ten minutes.

“And there the nuggets were, in enormous numbers, lying like flints in the stoniest field that anyone ever set eyes on; and an old man sitting upon

the ground outside a little temple was watching, without raising his eyes at my arrival, as though he only cared to see which of the nuggets I'd take. They were lying all over the shore like big potatoes. I began to calculate how many I should be able to carry, after a good rest before swimming back; I picked up several and felt the weight of them; I found out how to get them into the sacks which had the openings below; I did it by lying down and tilting myself a little up from my heels. And then I looked at the old man again. And a look at his eyes made me think again about the whole business: he looked too much like Destiny watching a village that was going to get an avalanche or some other disaster; children and chickens running about, and men singing, and nobody guessing that all that wouldn't go on year after year for ages; and only Destiny knowing. He looked like that. And I began to think of the other two men, and the man who had sold me the ticket. I began to get the idea that whoever took one nugget would take one or two more, and that those men might not be so ready as they appeared to give all that gold away to any stranger at the price of half a crown. And gradually from that, looking every now and then at the eyes of the old man sitting there without speaking, I very luckily came upon the idea that the only way to get safe from that place at all was to acquire the idea about gold that they evidently held themselves in the two little temples; to ignore it, that is to say, altogether, and to leave it alone as one would leave alone cobras. You see, you wouldn't much think of swimming with leaden belts strapped on to you, belts that you couldn't get off; yet there's this advantage in lead, there's no temptation to take just a little bit more, and a little bit more again, beyond the amount you are sure you can safely carry. For a moment I thought of taking just one fair-sized nugget; but I see now that, if I had, I should never have stopped at one. And, just as I was making up my mind, I took one more look at the old man sitting there, who never had spoken yet. And somehow that look was enough. I ran down to the water, butting my toe on a horribly large nugget, and dived in and swam back for the shore; and a nasty storm was coming up from beneath, a very nasty storm, but I reached the shore before it got to its worst. There are thousands of men that have kept away from acquiring gold, and many no doubt have been as near as I, but any nearer is impossible; any nearer than that and it drags you down."

And Jorkens uttered a sigh. The sigh of a man who has barely escaped a great peril? The sigh of a man who has lost incomparable riches? I don't know which it was.

## Chapter 3

### JORKENS HANDLES A BIG PROPERTY

AT a corner of our window from which we can see the spring, Jorkens was standing. The seasons in London steal so veiled through the streets, so unnoticed and inconspicuous, like four royal ladies lost in a land that is strange to them, that one cannot claim to see spring from every window. From a corner of ours, however, in the dining-room of the Billiards Club, you can see, when you know where to look, the railings of a little enclosure; and there the leaves of the lilac, when the downs far off are rioting with the vernal festival, push out over the top rail, young and shining, to show that they too have heard the strange call and heeded it, and that London has her part in the magic of woods. Jorkens stood there alone, while the rest of us sat at our long table, smoking cigars or whatever else seemed appropriate to put the final touch to our luncheon; some, I regret to say, smoked pipes, which the smarter clubs seldom allow. There he stood, and looked away towards the lilac, with something of the wistful expression with which a man may sometimes watch the approaching footsteps of spring, but a man thirty or forty years younger. What mood or what memories influenced that silent figure I, for one, did not know; nor when he spoke did any of us at the time understand him. "It is something to have had one's share in all this," he said.

He said it more to himself than to any of us; and none of us made any comment, nor did one seem called for. We went on with the topic that some of us were discussing, the comparison of various deals in which we had been engaged, the size of properties that had passed through our hands: one had sold three large Rolls cars in a single day; another had been the secretary of some company that had sold a hundred acres of London, and had himself signed the transfer; and, carried away by our commercial emulation, we forgot the lonely figure at the window. Then he himself joined our discussion. "I once had a pretty big property through my own hands," said Jorkens.

"What was it?" asked one of us.

"Let me explain," he said, and came over and sat on the arm of a large chair from which he was able to look down the length of our table. "I was in New Orleans a long time ago, looking out for something to handle on a

commission basis, though I scarcely thought of anything of the size of the property that I actually did handle.”

“A big property, was it?” came from somewhere along the table, like the little flick of a whip that used to stimulate carriage-horses.

“Big enough,” replied Jorkens. “Well, I was taking a walk outside New Orleans one day, along a little canal that was just an unending flower-bed: large mauve-and-blue flowers lay along its water, and entirely filled it up: butterflies all the way floated upon the warm air, or darted with sudden speed from languorous attitudes. I had found no sort of business in the town; it had seemed too hot for it; and I was turning things over in my mind, when all of a sudden I met the Spaniard, or whatever he may have been: Mexican Jim was his name. He was coming past the solemn grey-bearded trees, for I had come by then to the edge of a forest growing in miles of swamp, and all the trees there are bearded with long growths of grey moss. On the lonely road he took off his great hat, and holding it still in his hand, first sought my pardon for addressing me; and, when I had assured him of that, he asked me if it would be presuming too far upon our momentary acquaintance, were he to ask me to be so generous to a stranger as to give him a match with which to light his cigarro. This I did, while the great trees looked down on us, as though gravely interested in our courtesies. He asked to be permitted to accompany me on my walk, and I said I should be delighted, as indeed I was, for the more people I got to know in New Orleans, the less hopeless should be my chance of getting the handling of some little property on a commission basis; not that I ever dreamed of the magnitude of the property that would actually come my way. I turned back for the city, taking the way that he was going; and as we talked on our walk, I began to see from a certain indirectness with which he answered questions, a certain parrying wherever information might be concerned, that he was interested in business himself. No further than that did I get before the wide avenues of New Orleans came in sight, with their large flowers flaming; and I went to my hotel, and he to wherever he lived. But not the wide sweep of his hat as he bowed before leaving, nor the really magnificent compliments that he paid me, nor his thanks that were like Southern flowers, had evidently repaid the debt that he felt he owed me on account of my match, for he arranged a meeting on the following evening. And when the next evening came, and we had sat on chairs on the verandah of my hotel for an hour, uttering preliminary compliments, while the frogs chirruped on and on in the cool air, he said that it would be a distinguished pleasure to him if he could obtain for me a remunerative avocation that would, if only partly, reward me for my kindness over the match.

“We talked awhile of the river, that river that from the mountains of the North comes down through a continent and whirls round the Gulf of Mexico, and then flows on, without its banks any longer, but still a mighty current, far out to sea. And then he spoke of currents, and of certain sand-banks over which they went, and of shafts of steel that could be driven down into the sand-banks in pairs, with slots that would hold a kind of steel shutter. Perhaps every detail of the technicalities might not have been instantly clear to me, had he not asked my permission to send for a large basin of water; and in this, by currents that he made with his hand, and by sheets of cardboard by which he deflected them, I learned more about the control of ocean-currents than I had thought possible.

“Well, Mexican Jim explained his invention to me, while the little frogs in the night chirruped and chirruped on. And there was business in it, good sound business, as it looked to me, as soon as we got my percentage right. He had suggested 5 per cent for me at first, and I had had to explain that that was only his joke, no such percentage being known in proper business such as we do over here; and in the end he understood, and we got it fixed at ten.”

“And what was the business?” said Terbut.

“I’ll tell you,” said Jorkens. “I’ll tell you as I told Sir Rindle Brindley. I rang him up at Whitehall as soon as I got to England, and I kept on at his secretary till I got him to see I was sane, and then I gradually worked up his curiosity, and in the end I got an interview with Sir Rindle. Of course that took some doing; it took a good *deal* of doing; but then everything does in business, if you’re going to do it properly. Well, I was shown in to Sir Rindle. I should have liked to have gone a bit slow at first, so that he wouldn’t get scared; but there wasn’t time to do that, so I had to go straight to the point. I told him that I had the selling of a property that was a necessity to the nation, and that I hoped England would get it, but that it did not belong to me, and that the principal for whom I acted might sell it to one of several other countries if I could not negotiate it here. And I told him I wanted a million.”

“A million?” gasped Terbut. “Did he listen to you any more?”

“Certainly,” said Jorkens. “He began to listen then. You see those people think in millions. And it’s not till you begin to talk their talk that they take the least interest in you. He asked what the property was, and then I had to explain to him the method of Mexican Jim for controlling ocean-currents, for diverting them, that is to say, by means of steel shutters that slanted them off from their course. And I had to explain without any basin of water, that

had made it so clear to me when Mexican Jim had shown me his method that night in New Orleans. But I got him to understand that a current could be diverted, many degrees from its course, by putting the shutters down in the right place. And, the moment he understood, he stopped me talking; and I saw that it would be easier to get money out of him than time; and he leaned forward and looked at me, and he struck me as being like a large meat-eating fish. And he said: 'What exactly is it you wish to sell?'

"And I said, 'The Gulf Stream.'

"Yes, you see, if a man can divert a current, especially near its source, he can send it within reason where he likes, and I wanted England to have it. He couldn't have sent it down the African coast, but he could have sent it to Greenland or Iceland; and probably could have slipped it through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean, if he made a good enough shot. It was to all our interests for England to buy it, and so I told Sir Rindle. If England bought it her climate was safe, while whatever Mexican Jim got for it would be sheer profit, as in that case he would not have to erect a single shutter, but would just leave the Gulf Stream alone."

"Blackmail," said Terbut.

"Not in the least," said Jorkens. "And that was not the view that Sir Rindle took. The Gulf Stream is a natural commodity that has been lying about the sea for years, like whales. Anybody who can has a right to take it; or to divert it, or to use it in any way that he may. A man can't divert a stream on land, because others are sure to have rights in it; but nobody has any rights in the Gulf Stream. Anyone can do what he likes with it. Sir Rindle never said a word to the contrary. Where he did disagree with me, unfortunately, was about the million. I said that it was a matter of national importance; and he agreed. But he said that the Treasury did not put up large sums merely on that account, and instanced the defences of Scapa Flow before the war, and the struggle that there was to get Dreadnoughts. I could see that he meant what he said and was not merely arguing, so I dropped the price to half, and still he would not look at it. 'Look here,' I said, 'we are practically living on America's bounty, and have never yet paid a penny for it. It's their Gulf and it's practically part of their river; and where should we be without it? No summer to speak of, no harbours open in winter; no better off than Greenland; and probably glad of a visit from a few whaling schooners.' That was Mexican Jim's argument, and he argued that an American, and especially anyone living around that Gulf, had a right to do what he liked with their own stream. I don't say I took that view entirely; it seemed to me a bit hard to freeze us out for the sake of a business deal; but I



took that line now to encourage Sir Rindle to do business, instead of looking at me like a large well-fed fish. And Mexican Jim could have done it too; there was no doubt of that; and I didn't want to see Iceland cutting us out and taking our rightful place, just because the Treasury wouldn't put up two hundred thousand pounds; for that is what I soon brought it down to: I wasn't grasping.

“‘Do you grudge two hundred thousand pounds,’ I said, ‘to save all our harbours from ice, and to hold back a winter that will last right into April?’

“‘Not at all,’ he said, ‘but I should have to explain to ten or a dozen men what you have explained to me, before I could get the Treasury to put up such a sum. And it isn't too easily explained. I understand it myself,’ he hastened to add, ‘but it's one thing to do that and quite another to convince several other people. All you've explained to me about the slant to be given to the current I should have to pass on second hand, and to people that may or may not be as quick of comprehension as myself.’

“‘Then Iceland's to have our climate?’ I said.

“‘I can't pledge the Treasury to £200,000,’ he answered.

“And I saw that he meant it, and dropped the price to a hundred thousand.

“Well, I'd got him more interested than I've told you. He quite saw what it would be to sit in that office with the Thames frozen solid, and I thought I was making some headway with him; but just then his secretary began waving his watch about a good deal, and snapping it open and shut, and I saw that my time was up. I dropped the price to fifty thousand as I got near the door, but he wouldn't rise to that either, and I went out to the office with the Gulf Stream still unsold.

“It wasn't only having the property still on my hands that worried me; but it was the fear that if I couldn't dispose of it here, the Mexican might sell it somewhere else, and we should never see spring come round to our shores again. That was what I was fighting for, as much as anything, the English spring. All very well for Browning, or whoever it was, to say ‘Oh, to be in England now that April's there,’ but it was my job to keep it there. There wouldn't have been much April left, but for me. So, you see, when I watch these lilac-leaves shoving out through the railings, they set me remembering the past, and what a weary struggle I had to save them. It was spring in London then, a little further on than it is now; and all St. James's Park, to which I turned from Whitehall, was flashing and dancing with it. I

remember wondering if we should ever get another there; knowing we never should, if Mexican Jim should get another customer and drive down his slanting steel shutters into the Gulf Stream. It made me pretty keen that England should get it, and I wasted no time in abusing them for not being able to see what the Gulf Stream meant to them; it was for me to make them see it, and I concentrated all my thought on that. But who should I try next? That was the immediate question.

“I passed a little man hurrying by with a bag, and knew him for a commercial traveller. I thought how easy it was for a man travelling with samples; nothing to do but open his bag and pull one of them out; but my samples, if only I could get people to see it, were the grass gleaming, the leaves flashing, the birds nesting, the crocuses with their radiant colours below and the pale-blue sky overhead, all given us by the gentle warmth that we borrow without a thought, as we have done year after year, from the Gulf of Mexico.

“Well, I sat down on a seat beside the lake, and considered hard what I should do for it.”

“Do for what?” blurted out Terbut with characteristic bluntness.

“The lake,” said Jorkens. “I wanted to prevent it freezing solid. I knew pretty well what Mexican Jim would be likely to do with the Gulf Stream if I couldn’t get an offer for it in England. And I saw pretty soon that the people to try next would be some big firm in the City. They wouldn’t want the kind of changes that the loss of the Gulf Stream would bring: business is too delicate for that. They didn’t want polar bears ambling down Fleet Street. And these firms would be run by men intelligent enough to understand Mexican Jim’s methods, and the awful effect of them upon London, if put into practice.

“When I had decided on that I didn’t even go home. I went straight to the nearest post office, and telephoned to a man I had once met who was the president of one of those firms that I had in mind, in the City. I got on to his secretary and asked for an interview as soon as possible; a matter of business, I told him, worth twenty-five thousand pounds: that was good enough for the secretary. I arrived at the £25,000 by deciding that whenever I failed to get any definite price for the Gulf Stream from any responsible person I should have to regretfully recognize that that sum couldn’t be got, and start next by asking half, wherever I asked it. Sir Rindle Brindley had refused me £50,000 as I went out through his door, so I started with Evvans at twenty-five thousand. It was no use touting the Gulf Stream round the

City at a price that I had found I could not get for it. There was not time for that. Mexican Jim might have got impatient and sold it to Iceland or Greenland, and you'd all be sitting huddled over the fire, and wearing furs even then. Well, I got my interview for the following morning, the only crab being that Evvans appeared to be even a busier man than I wanted, and I wanted a fairly busy one, or he wouldn't be likely to touch a new thing: the more interests he had, the more likely he'd be to take things up. But Evvans could only give me four minutes.

“So next morning at the appointed time I walked in and found him sitting at his desk, a thin face and intensely bright blue eyes. I walked up to him and shook hands as quick as I could, and sat down where he pointed. ‘It’s about ocean currents,’ I said, ‘and a method for controlling them. How long will it take you to understand my system?’ Rude, but there was no time for courtesies. Mexican Jim would spend an hour over them, before he came to business.

“ ‘A minute,’ said Evvans.

“So I raced through my explanations in a minute, and sure enough he did.

“ ‘Now,’ I said, ‘my senior partner in America can twist the Gulf Stream twenty or thirty degrees out of its course, and within those limitations can send it where he likes. Is it worth £25,000 to England, and will your firm put up that to keep it where it is?’

“His answer surprised me. ‘It is worth fully that to England,’ he said, ‘but there are other and cheaper ways of preventing your friend from tampering with the Gulf Stream.’

“I sat and looked at him, wondering what influence he wielded, whether it stretched as far as the Gulf of Mexico, how he meant to use it, and exactly who would approach my sharp friend in New Orleans and what they would say or do to him; and I often wonder still. And as I sat wondering and Evvans sat saying nothing further, and scarcely even smiling, unless very slightly, I saw that my time was very nearly up.

“ ‘Your firm, then . . .’ I began.

“ ‘No,’ answered Evvans. And that was all he said.

“I felt that it was no use trying to bargain with him; and, besides, there was no time. So I thanked him and walked out; and the Gulf Stream was now below £25,000.

“And the next man I tried was Lord Looborough, as he is now. He was chairman of a large concern in the City, and I got an introduction and fixed up a meeting, and went into his office and halved it: I offered him the Gulf Stream for £12,500.

“He was a pleasant, and even a hearty man, and I think that he would have readily put up the money, for he had spent far more than that, without a murmur, on fox-hunting; only I couldn’t get him to see it. I couldn’t get him to understand that, if you headed a current off in a certain direction, that was the direction it would take: he seemed to think that after a bit it would turn round and come home, like a carrier-pigeon or a cat. And I couldn’t get him to remember that he had understood how the current could be diverted by slanting screens: he understood it when I explained it, but kept on forgetting how the thing worked, and I had to explain it all again and again. I knocked off £2,500 to see if that would help him, but at £10,000 (which would have been nothing to his firm) he couldn’t understand it any better than when I was asking £12,500. I suppose I was beginning to be annoyed, but he asked me so pleasantly if I had ever been out with the North and West Middlesex, or one of those smart packs, that I somehow couldn’t be angry; but I was unable to get him to do business, and I left with the Gulf Stream unsold at £8,000.

“I began to wish I was dealing in some smaller commodity, something solid, or liquid for that matter, but more easily handled. It wasn’t its being liquid that I minded. Not at all. Let me see: what was I saying?”

“Waiter,” I said, and indicated what Jorkens wanted. Then Jorkens thanked me with compliments that I suppose I should not put down here. And when he had moistened his mouth he continued his story.

“I saw it was time,” he said, “to go to somebody more definitely concerned than any I had tried yet. All of us in these islands are of course concerned with the Gulf Stream, greatly concerned with it; but I went now to people that actually saw it and sailed on it. I went to the Green-funnel Line. I went to their office in Swampgate and saw Sir Edward Bant and told him about the theory of the control of currents, and he understood at once. ‘Now,’ I said, ‘do you want your harbours frozen?’

“‘Well, no,’ he said, pretty thoughtfully.

“‘For £4,000,’ I said, ‘the Gulf Stream is yours.’

“‘The trouble is,’ he said, ‘and I don’t want you to pass this on to anybody’ (and I didn’t for twenty years, but they went broke years ago and

sail the Gulf Stream no longer). ‘The trouble is that we are not paying a dividend this year. That leaves us nothing at all to splash about.’

“‘Splash about!’ I said. ‘That four thousand will just save you. If the Gulf Stream goes astray you’ll be broke.’

“‘I know,’ he said, ‘but so will a lot of other people too. It’s one thing to be caught in a universal disaster, and quite another to have people pointing you out and saying “That’s the man who’s gone bankrupt.” If all the pipes in my club freeze I trust we shall bear it like men, but it’s quite another matter to be called before the Committee and asked to explain to them one’s financial affairs.’

“‘I’ll let you have it for £3,000,’ I said.

“And he refused that too. And I saw how broke he must be; for he clearly understood what the loss of the Gulf Stream meant.

“So away I went with the property still unsold. I was getting to the end of the people I knew in the City and was wondering whom to try next; when, oddly enough, Swinburne helped me. I was in my lodgings pondering what to do, when I idly pulled out of a shelf, low on the wall, a copy of *Atalanta in Caledon*, and I hadn’t read two pages when, as often happens when you are worrying over anything, a word caught my eye in the book, that was the very word I was thinking of. I read the word gulf-stream: ‘that the sea-waves might be as my raiment, the gulf-stream a garment for me.’ And that gave me the idea to sell the thing to a tailor.

“So I went straight off to the smartest tailor I knew of, and told him that I had a property to sell. ‘What kind of property?’ of course he asked.

“‘Wait a moment,’ I said. ‘Do you want to see people going about huddled in furs and all wrapped up in old coats; waists gone, spats gone, tail coats gone?’

“‘What’s it all about?’ he asked.

“And then I told him.

“‘And it would have that effect?’ he asked. ‘Freeze us all up?’

“‘Ask anyone,’ I said. ‘Ring up the Royal Geographical Society. Or merely look at a map and see what kind of countries are on our latitude when they haven’t got any Gulf Stream. There are polar bears in Siberia about the same latitude as Dublin.’

“‘What are you asking for it?’ he said.

“ ‘Fifteen hundred pounds,’ I told him. ‘And cheap for what it is.’

“ ‘You know,’ he said, ‘people think that tailors make big profits. And so we do from the best of our customers. But what about those that never pay? And where do our profits all go, those that we do make?’

“ ‘Ground rents,’ I said, for I knew the line of argument.

“ ‘Exactly,’ he said.

“ ‘I’ll let you have it for a thousand,’ I told him.

“And that was no good either.

“I began to see that it was time to leave London and to get to some place that was more in touch with the Gulf Stream, Devon or Cornwall where they could feel the warmth that was sent them across the Atlantic, and probably took some pride in it. One more shop I tried before I gave up London as hopeless, a large jewellers that I happened to come to. I went in and saw one of their principal men. He had to listen to me, because he didn’t know but that I might be wanting some jewellery; and before he found out that I wasn’t, I had explained to him the method of diverting ocean-currents in the shallows near to their sources. Of course he didn’t see what ocean-currents had to do with his business; and I told him that the Gulf Stream, which is not many yards across, could be diverted easier than most of them. It was then that he asked me politely, but rather firmly, what his shop had to do with the Gulf Stream; and I told him something of the climate that is brought north from New Orleans for us. Again the polite question: what had that to do with his firm? But with a little more insistence this time. ‘Well,’ I said, ‘I never heard that trade followed the polar bear.’ And he began to see.

“ ‘My partner is offering the Gulf Stream,’ I said, ‘for £500.’

“But he shook his head.

“ ‘Unfortunately,’ he said, ‘we have to show a profit on our transactions.’

“ ‘Oh,’ I mumbled.

“ ‘Yes, share-holders, you see,’ he told me.

“A profit! As though the plane-trees in the parks, the large beds of hyacinths, the neat swards, the azaleas, the unfrozen Serpentine, the myriads of birds, and the warm air loitering along our streets, were not a profit worth millions per cent on what I was asking. But I saw his point, and lowered my price to four hundred.

“But he was a man with no width of imagination, no length of vision; and I saw that he’d never see the larger issues beyond his immediate profits. So I left him, and left London altogether, and took a train for the West country, with the Gulf Stream priced for my next customer at no more than £200. And he was there in the railway carriage with me, the man that I hoped to be my customer for the Gulf Stream. We were alone in the carriage together, and I got into conversation. He seemed at first sight to be quite a pleasant fellow, though you cannot always tell from appearances. I drew from our conversation that he owned a small villa in Cornwall, a house he had recently bought, in sight of the sea. He seemed the ideal man for my class of business. I began to speak of the warm Cornish climate, of the rare flowers and ferns that grew there, and the sea glistening in April with a brightness little less than the smiles of the Mediterranean. I had never seen it then, but I had read the advertisements. He agreed with all I said, and indeed seemed so keen on Cornwall that I was a little doubtful if he would allow any credit to a Mexican stream like the one I was interested in. But he did, all right, when I mentioned it. He evidently looked on the Gulf Stream as a natural part of Cornwall; which of course it is in a way, it had been lulling that coast and nurturing all its flowers, since Cornwall was first inhabited. So I said, ‘What if icebergs should come that way, drifting by in sight of your villa?’ And he said they couldn’t. And I said, ‘What if the coast froze solid for half a mile out?’ And he said I didn’t know the Cornish coast.

“And then I explained to him the method for diverting the Gulf Stream, in the shallows near to its source, and told him the icebergs would come all right, and that he’d probably be able to feed polar bears from his window; but that for £200 I’d sell him the Gulf Stream and he could keep Cornwall just as it was.

“Do you know, there are all kinds of men in the world, though some of them you hardly expect to meet. Whether he had ever done business with anyone in his life I don’t know, or what he supposed was at the back of my perfectly straight offer, but he sat thinking a moment without speaking, and then stood up with his hand stretched upward and said: ‘Any more of it, and I’ll pull the communication cord.’

“Well, you can’t do business with a man who behaves like that, and I changed my carriage at the next station, and the Gulf Stream was still unsold.

“Somebody a bit more responsible for his actions was what I was looking for now.

“So I decided to get in touch with municipal authority; and this is what I did as soon as we got in, after taking a walk along the beach to pick up local colour, for if you know nothing of a man’s chief interests you usually can’t do business with him.

“Well, I went and saw the Town Clerk; I won’t say of what town, for I didn’t get on very well with him. He probably has his side of the case, but I don’t want to get into correspondence with him about that after all these years, if my words leak out.” And Jorkens looked sidelong at me.

“I said to him: ‘This is the English Riviera. You have a coast-line unrivalled by foreign watering-places, and matchless for beauty and perfection.’ Their kind of talk you know.

“He agreed that this was so. Then I explained to him the theory of ocean-currents, as told me by Mexican Jim. And I thought that I had got him to understand it.

“‘I am asking £100 for the Gulf Stream,’ I said.

“Well, either he hadn’t understood it at all, or he refused to believe from my merely verbal credentials that I was the appointed representative of Mexican Jim.

“Best be brief: he was rude; I lost my temper. I lost my temper and was I think more insulting than I have ever been before or since, and you know you can be damnably insulting with the politest words.

“‘You’ve got funny little holes in the cliff,’ I said, ‘just by Tregantle.’

“‘Rabbit-holes,’ he said hurriedly. As though rabbits would live in a sheer cliff, and square holes at that.

“I oughtn’t to have said it, and I have regretted it ever since; but I had utterly lost my temper. ‘Harbour lights,’ I answered.

“You know there is some story, and I’m afraid it’s true, of Cornish people luring ships to the rocks by putting harbour lights in a sheer cliff. And as a matter of fact that’s what those holes were for. Well, I need hardly say we did no business after that. I was shown out; that is the word for it; and the Gulf Stream was still unsold.

“With the Gulf Stream, as one may say, still in my pocket, I went next to a big hotel and asked to see the manager.

“‘Your coast-line,’ I said to him ‘is without rival for excellence; superbly placed as it is in a commanding position, it successfully challenges



all claims from continental resorts to provide those conveniences and refinements that the *recherchés* rightly demand.’

“‘Yes, that is so,’ he said thoughtfully.

“‘And where would you be without the Gulf Stream?’ I asked.

“And then I explained to him Mexican Jim’s theory and told him that I was his accredited representative, and it wasn’t long before he understood the whole business, and I offered him the Gulf Stream for £50.

“Yes, he understood all right, but he countered with a point that I hadn’t thought of.

“‘We’ve central heating in my hotel,’ he said. ‘As good a system as there is on the market. And if it comes to freezing, there’s no hotel in these parts that will be able to compete with us.’

“‘But they won’t come to these parts at all,’ I said, ‘except to catch walruses.’

“‘Don’t you think it,’ he answered. ‘It’s the fashion to come here in the winter, and if you think icebergs will stop that, you don’t know what fashion is.’

“I dropped it to forty then, but he wouldn’t take it; and lower than that I told him he could not have it, as I wouldn’t cheapen the Gulf Stream.

“But the thing was still on my hands, and as it didn’t seem to fetch £40, I had to cheapen it at the next place; another hotel. This was a much smaller affair, and when I said to the man who was running it that I had come in the interests of the hotels of the English Riviera he didn’t seem very keen, telling me that the hotel I had just left got all the business, and that anything done in support of the tourist trade ought to be done by them. Well, to put it briefly, I told him the whole story, and offered him the Gulf Stream at £20. It wasn’t that he didn’t understand, but he told me that the climate was not what they worked it on; they advertised, and when that was properly done it brought visitors just as well whether there was bright sunshine or whether they only had icebergs drifting through fog. Well, I had to admit that he was right about that, so it was no use bargaining, and without cheapening the Gulf Stream any further I set out once more on my long hunt for a customer. And as I went I saw a man with a large bag covered with labels, who hailed me as soon as he saw me, calling out across the street: ‘Say, can you tell me any little old place where I can get a lodging?’

“‘Stranger,’ I said, ‘I sure can.’

“He came across the street to me. ‘I’m sure grateful,’ he said. ‘What’s the name of it?’

“‘The name of it,’ I said. ‘Now that’s what I can’t remember, these lodging-houses have such odd names; but I’ll show you just where it is. It’s the best lodging-house on this coast.’

“Well, he thanked me and we went on, and I did what I could for him, which wasn’t too easy, as I’d never been near the place before. But I had a good enough instinct for the part of the town where the lodging-houses would be: it was just where I was going myself. And when I got there I chose, as far as one could choose by exteriors, the one that looked the nicest. ‘There it is,’ I said. ‘The Laburnums.’

“We went up the steps and I rang the bell, and a maid with large blue eyes that should have been looking after sheep appeared out of the dinginess as she opened the door.

“‘Is she in?’ I said.

“‘Who? Mrs. Smerkit?’ she asked.

“‘Yes,’ I said. ‘This gentleman would like to see her best rooms, if she’d kindly come.’

“Away ran the maid and called her; and out came Mrs. Smerkit in her sequins and black dress, the perfect seaside lodging-house-keeper, showing that one can judge a whole house by exteriors. Well, she showed us over the rooms, nice rooms looking out over that happy sea that was still being tended and protected from ice and fog by the Gulf Stream, and I took the first opportunity of drawing Mrs. Smerkit aside, while her prospective guest was gazing out at the view.

“‘And the price?’ I asked.

“‘£3 a week,’ she said hesitatingly.

“‘You don’t understand,’ I said, ‘and there’s not time to explain. But say £5.’

“A moment’s look of surprise, and then she said it; and we got it all fixed up. The stranger, quite grateful to me, for they really were nice rooms, went to get the rest of his luggage, and I was alone with Mrs. Smerkit. Briefly then I told her what the climate meant to that sunny English coast, instancing the arrival of this new guest from the other side of the Atlantic, and carefully explaining to her the theory of the control of ocean-currents, and told her all about my friend who was waiting for me in New Orleans.

“‘Now,’ I said, ‘I am this Mexican gentleman’s authorized agent, and we can let you have the Gulf Stream for £10.’”

“She had a real laburnum in her garden and I pointed to it as I spoke, and waved my hand along that sunny coast-line. The laburnum’s buds were just yellowing, and she seemed to see more clearly than any of the men I had spoken to what the Gulf Stream meant to that laburnum of hers, and to the whole of our coast. Though she saw it at once she did not answer at once, but stood there with her arms lightly folded, considering, as I have so often seen one of them considering some question of tariff that a lodger of theirs may have put to her. And in the end the good sensible woman took it. Yes, she saw what it meant to the whole of the tourist traffic, and backed her judgment with ten pounds of her money; and so I sold the Gulf Stream.

“Don’t look at the price of it: look at the size of the property that I handled: look at the value to England of having the Gulf Stream left where that staunch old landlady left it, when the Government of the country and some of the biggest financial houses would do nothing at all in the matter.

“And a few months later I was back again in New Orleans, in connection with another type of business. And I strolled out every morning to the edge of the forest that stood in the swamp, with its trees grey-bearded and brooding, as though they remembered Spain. And I hadn’t gone there more than two or three times when I saw the hidalgo-like figure of Mexican Jim coming along under his great hat. When his elaborate courtesies were over and we came down to mere business, I apologized for the short-sightedness of some of my countrymen, and told him that fifty dollars had been all I could get for his Gulf Stream. Mexican Jim was delighted. Possibly his busy mind had forgotten about it altogether; possibly he had not expected to find an English purchaser, who saved him the time and trouble of moving the Gulf Stream at all, so that that £10 was sheer profit, small though it was, with no expenses except my 10 per cent commission, which he paid me there and then. And many a larger sum I’ve had paid me with less grace, but the receipt of the trivial amount that I had from Mexican Jim is a mellow memory with me yet.

“And there on that road, under the bearded trees, with a sweep of his hat that seemed to carry his thanks beyond the point where words ended, we parted for the last time.”

“But,” began Terbut, and would have developed some theory of his, either about business or currents. But Jorkens had gone back to that window

again, and was watching the leaves of the lilac pushing out through those railings, with what almost looked to me like an air of paternal benevolence.

## Chapter 4

# THE INVENTION OF DR. CABER

A GOOD many of us at the Billiards Club are interested in gardening, but it gives a certain amount of zest to the atmosphere of the club to know that, when our tales of horticultural achievement are over, there is a good substratum of the various professions, represented by lawyers, doctors, retired soldiers, etc.; so that in the end our talk is sufficiently varied. I have heard stories of vegetables there that would be of world-wide interest; in particular one concerning the size of a single bloom of a cauliflower, which would probably surprise my readers; and had these stories been true, I should have given them to the world long ago. On the day of which I shall tell there had been a story of extraordinary interest about the size of a pumpkin, grown by a member named Meakers, but to give its dimensions might be to mislead my readers; so that, rather than risk such a thing, I suppress the tale altogether. From this story the topic had passed into legal hands, and the extraordinary triumph of a rising young lawyer named Foggett was being related by a member named Taravel, himself a lawyer. Foggett had been defending a man accused of being drunk while in charge of a motor-car; he had driven it about twenty-five yards from his own door, on the wrong side of the road, and then collapsed over the wheel, while the car had come to a standstill against some convenient railings; it was a difficult case to defend, and elder lawyers looked on to see what a young man would make of it. What seemed to increase the difficulty of the defence was that over the whole of the twenty-five yards there lay a trail of empty gin bottles, and the prosecution had brought a witness to show that the man's breath smelt of gin. This witness when asked about it in the box had been so emphatic that he had added to his statement about the breath, "The whole air smelt of gin." It was upon this statement that Foggett laid his groundwork.

"Were there any gin bottles in the car?" he asked.

"No."

"Was the gutter full of gin bottles?"

"Yes."

"Did gin smell?"

"Yes."

“Might not the smell of gin in the air, and in the breath that breathed it, be from the bottles that had been left in the gutter?”

The answer was mumbled, but had seemed to serve Foggett’s purpose. And then he had turned to a description of the atmosphere of London all through November and December, for it was in London in later December that the alleged offence had occurred, a description that was probably unequalled in those courts. He dwelt on the gloom that had come down late in October, the frequent fogs and the cold, the almost complete veiling of the sun for the short time that it should have been over the houses, and this going on and on with scarce any relief till Christmas. He quoted reports from the meteorologists’ office just where they suited his purpose, but never enough to check with tiresome detail the splendid flow of his oratory. The very gloom of the court, for it was only January, helped the less imaginative among the jury to see the picture that Foggett’s words were painting; and he welcomed this aid and put it to every use, though his brilliance might have dispensed with it. He took the gloom of those two months in London and seemed to condense it and hang it over the jury. Was he attempting to show a justification for drunkenness? the judge asked.

“No, my lord,” said Foggett, “but to show that it was not drunkenness from which my client was suffering.”

“What then?” said the judge.

“Sunstroke,” said Foggett.

And then the jury began to see light. It was not to drink that the gloom of the weather had been driving the accused, according to Foggett, but to artificial sun-bathing; and in despair at the long weeks of darkness the man had overdone it. He made them see that drink could not bring back the sun that London had lost; that the urgent need was for ultra-violet rays. The judge made a few ineffectual efforts, but the jury were away after Foggett, and the accused was triumphantly acquitted, and was given the ovation upon leaving the court, that properly belonged to his counsel.

For a while the lawyers that were in the club talked over Taravel’s story, till the followers of other avocations were stung into emulation and began to tell tales to show what their callings could do; even a chess-player tried to join in. Old tales of many professions were brought to light, showing heights to which their most gifted followers came, and as every tale was ended, another member would hastily draw his cigar, to get it well alight before he partially neglected it to talk, and would usually begin with, “That reminds

me of a case. . . .” And so we would get another story. So they went on. And then Jorkens spoke.

“It’s not always the regular professions,” he said, “that achieve the greatest things.”

“Not?” said somebody.

“No,” said Jorkens.

A silence fell on the club; perhaps they’d had tales enough; but I for one have a certain liking for Jorkens, or it may be that a slight curiosity was aroused in me by the prospect of some touch of novelty that there might be in work outside the well-known professions. So I said to Jorkens: “I don’t suppose you could give us an actual example.”

“A very remarkable achievement in medicine,” said Jorkens, “one of the most remarkable in our time, was the discovery of a man I knew slightly. He wasn’t a doctor.”

“Why not?” asked Terbut.

“He did want to be,” said Jorkens. “Studied for medicine, and all that; in fact knew a great deal of it; but the authorities took some dislike to his private life, so that he was never a qualified doctor.”

“What was the matter with his private life?” asked Terbut.

“I never quite knew,” said Jorkens. “Just bad all round, I fancy. I rather think; mind you, I don’t know; but I rather think that Scotland Yard have his finger prints. I was at school with him, and he left that rather suddenly. Then I heard of him studying medicine. And after that he seemed to drift a bit, and one heard snatches of rumours about him; until finally I heard someone openly say of him what I told you about Scotland Yard, which I think rather stamps a man. But his intellect was amazing, and he made this remarkable discovery.”

“What was it?” asked Terbut.

Which was exactly what I was hoping that Terbut would ask.

“By a short treatment; two or three weeks;” said Jorkens, “he could make a man twenty years older.”

“But, but,” began Terbut.

“Twenty years older in every single respect,” said Jorkens; “teeth, wrinkles, colour of hair, figure, baldness, shortness of breath; actually older

in every particular.”

“But, but,” said Terbut again.

But Jorkens went on ahead of him: “And it answered to every test; blood-pressure, stethoscope, or any other test you please.”

Again Terbut butted in, and still Jorkens ran on.

“And what is more, after a month’s convalescence, the man could go to him again, and he could make him twenty years older still; white hairs this time instead of grey, and everything to match.”

“But, but, but,” said Terbut, “who would want to be twenty years older? Can you answer me that?”

“I’ll tell you a story,” said Jorkens.

We all leaned forward to listen, or sat back in our chairs, according to our different ways of settling ourselves to pass a quarter of an hour away; for each of the professions had had its tale, and we somehow felt it the due of that great body of men on whom none leaves cards that they also should have their little meed of praise for whatever they might have done.

“A man stood in the sun,” said Jorkens, “at the door of a lodging-house, and rang the bell, while the sea pounded gravel behind him. He was perhaps forty. Presently the landlady came to the door, which she opened herself, and standing there on the threshold she summed him up thus, before either of them spoke: ‘Thirty-eight or thirty-nine, been ill, well-enough off for the front room, worried about something, quiet young man except when he drinks cocktails, hasty then.’ ”

“How did she know all that?” asked Terbut.

“Know all that?” said Jorkens. “Why! Doesn’t every trade know something of its own raw materials? I don’t know how they do it. But they know at a glance. They have to. Take jewellers, or bootmakers, or . . .”

“Yes, I know,” I said. “They all find it quite simple.”

“Oh, well,” said Terbut.

“Very well,” said Jorkens. “So, when she’d done that, she said, ‘It’s a nice morning.’ And he said ‘Very nice.’ And then they got to talking about that front room. And he said he wanted to live quietly for a few weeks, as he had not been very well; nothing infectious. And all that was settled; and he lived in the front bedroom in a way that Mrs. Hemens, his landlady, described afterwards as ‘nice and quiet,’ and had his meals there by himself.



And yet, for all Mrs. Hemens' professional summing up of her lodger, there was one thing about him that she couldn't make out; and she didn't know what it was.

"Mrs. Hemens used to go up to her lodger's room once a day and have a few minutes' talk with him. He was pleasant-spoken enough.

"Gradually the thing that Mrs. Hemens could not understand crystallized itself into this, that he looked one thing and talked another. It was not that he was trying to deceive her about anything; he didn't seem, she thought, to be doing that; it was merely that he talked about football, while he looked more likely to care for golf, and asked of all manner of things that looked out of his line altogether; and so it went on and she seemed to get no nearer; to get no nearer, I mean, to what was part of her life's work, to learn the history, status and income of all her lodgers. Naturally she used suspicion, as well as other kinds of research, to further her quest for information: she even discussed crime with him as the newspapers provided the cases, but there did not seem any case to which she could fit him. There were plenty of crimes recorded, but the perpetrators of them were soon laid by the heels; until there only remained one mystery, the murder of a woman in London; and the alleged murderer was known, but had escaped, and was still at large. But his age was given by Scotland Yard as twenty. They discussed that murder one day: 'It's young men that do that sort of murder before they settle down and get sense,' said the lodger.

" 'It's bad men that do it,' Mrs. Hemens had said.

" 'Yes, but young ones,' the lodger insisted.

"He had a little stubbly beard, and was growing it longer. When he had been there ten days without receiving a letter from anyone, Mrs. Hemens went down to the police station and carefully described her lodger, but no one answering to her description was wanted by the police.

"One day, as though drawn irresistibly to speak of a topic that he had long avoided, he blurted out to Mrs. Hemens, 'How old do you think I am?'

"And she had answered 'Thirty-five,' only meaning to please him.

"The shadow of some horror had seemed to touch him at that. 'Thirty-five!' he exclaimed. 'I am nearer forty-five.'

" 'Put you at thirty-five or thirty-six,' she repeated. And his uneasiness seemed to increase.

“From then on he never went out, even at night, but haunted his room like a ghost, the front bedroom that looked over the sea; till one day he blurted out furtively, ‘I must leave at once. I have an important appointment in London.’

“To London he went, and to the house of Caber, which he knew well enough where to find: he had been there before: it was Caber who had made him forty: he was a young man of twenty, wanted for murder.”

“You haven’t told us his name,” said Terbut.

“Boran,” said Jorkens.

“Why! I remember that case,” said Terbut.

And I said so too, and several of the rest of us. He had murdered a woman, cutting her throat in a flat, and locking it up, by which he gained twenty-four hours, and twelve hours more while the police found out who did it; then he had disappeared. As a matter of fact he had gone to Caber’s house, and Caber had hidden him while he did the course; and he had slipped out one night, a man of forty, and gone down to the seaside.

“Let me see. Didn’t something go wrong with him under an anaesthetic?” said someone.

“Not a bit of it,” said Jorkens. “I’ll tell you what happened. He slipped back to Caber’s house, the night that he left the lodgings, and when there was no one about in the street he gave the knock on the little door, that Caber’s patients knew, and Caber heard it and came down and let him in. I fancy he had to ring the bell before knocking, so as to wake Caber, then wait half a minute and knock; but I don’t know exactly what Caber’s arrangements were; they didn’t quite know that even at Scotland Yard. It was he that told me what became of Boran. Nothing to do with an anaesthetic.”

“You seem to have known Caber fairly well,” said Terbut.

“No,” said Jorkens. “I had happened to find out about his practice, that is to say treating people in the way I have told you. Of course it was all pretty secret, but somebody had to know or he would never have had any patients; and amongst the right people, as he called them (the wrong people, as we should say), it was pretty widely known. His clientele, as he called it, was limited, not only by there being rather few cases in which men needed to be twenty years older, but also by his fee, which was a thousand pounds.”

“A thousand pounds!” exclaimed Terbut.

“Yes,” replied Jorkens. “More murderers can scrape that together than you would suppose, when it comes to that or the rope. Look at the expensive defences they often put up. Well, a man committed his murder, then he would often wait a few days till he found that Scotland Yard had got on his tracks, and then, if he knew about Caber, and it is wonderful how the news of him percolated (it was like underground water) he would slip down to the Caledonian Market, where more than one could tell him of Caber’s address and how to knock on his door. If you went down there with a fiver in your hand, it mightn’t be long before you came on one of the right men yourself.”

“Thank you,” muttered Terbut.

“No, no, no. I am not suggesting anything,” said Jorkens. “Well then, his fee was a thousand; and Boran came running in panting for fright, and his extra twenty years, all because his landlady had said he looked thirty-five. It seemed too close to twenty, and Boran didn’t seem to himself to have altered much, not knowing that there were all kinds of scientific tests that would have proved he was long past twenty. He panicked and asked for another twenty years.”

“Sixty,” said Terbut.

“Yes,” said Jorkens, “but with ten more years to live at least, as Boran had figured it out; and then dying in bed. He thought it well worth it. And you must remember, for you say you do remember the case, that the police had photographs of him in every paper that ever published photographs, even *The Times*; who said they didn’t usually do that sort of work; but Scotland Yard were so keen, that they had to. Well, naturally Caber didn’t try to dissuade him, if he wasn’t satisfied with the twenty years that he had got already, forty in all; he merely pocketed his second thousand and started off on the course. I think a fortnight was all it took. Of course he never told me how he did it; you’d hardly get a qualified doctor to do that. I fancy he used cocktails a good deal; distilled essences of them, you know; and of course a great many other things. He never told me that. But he told me much more than what came out later. The course was going perfectly satisfactorily, he told me; following the lines of the first; in fact Boran took to it very well. He was ageing all over; every evening when Caber made his observations at the same hour, in the room in which he hid Boran, he could see definite progress; and at the end of ten days the white hairs were coming on nicely. Everything else of course was keeping pace, and Boran was fattening rapidly and developing a beautiful stoop. When I call it beautiful you know what I mean; I mean beautiful from Caber’s point of view; you know what collectors are, and how much a beetle or a postage stamp may

mean to them; well, stoops and wrinkles and shortness of breath, and even a touch of sciatica, were all that to Caber. And they were coming on nicely. At the end of the fortnight Boran might have gone to any police station in London and said 'I am Boran, the man that did that murder,' and conviction would have been impossible, so he should have had another ten years to live if his make-up was timed to run down at seventy; but there was no end to that fortnight for Boran. It wasn't any anaesthetic: he didn't have any. In fact it was nothing that came out at the inquest. Not a word of that was true. It was merely that Boran's constitution, or whatever you call it, was timed to run to about fifty-eight. Call it Fate, if you like. The way I look at it is that men die at various ages, according to their make-up, and fifty-eight was Boran's time."

"But Boran was only twenty," blurted out Terbut.

"I told you," said Jorkens patiently, "that Caber was making him older. He was ageing him in every respect. After twelve days Boran began to show symptoms that a proper doctor would have recognized. Heart trouble, I fancy. By dawn on the thirteenth day Caber was getting alarmed. He tried every remedy then of which he knew anything, against the most deadly disease that is known to man."

"Dear me," said Terbut. "What is that?"

"Old age," said Jorkens; "and you want to be careful. Well, he didn't make any headway, and by the time that people were about, Boran was dead. It was a nasty position for Caber. Boran looked younger when he was dead, and Caber pulled out his white hairs and smartened him up a bit, and managed to get him identified. He was naturally keen that, if he had to have a corpse in his house, he could say it was the body of someone that Scotland Yard wanted to hang; but, even then, he felt himself in the position of a poacher who has shot a fox that the foxhounds are hunting. And that's very much the position that he was in too. But in the end Scotland Yard were very sporting about it. They wanted to see Boran dead, and they took the sensible view that, provided Caber hadn't actually murdered him, they could afford to do without the trial and the hanging of Boran. And of course Caber hadn't murdered him; so there was that inquest and the evidence that you read; not a word of it true of course, but interesting as showing the point of view that the police very reasonably took. And that is really about all that Caber told me."

"He seems to have told you a good deal," said Terbut.

"A certain amount," said Jorkens.

“I wonder,” said Terbut, “how one manages to get a man like that to tell one so much.”

“Personally,” said Jorkens, “I got him to tell it me for an old tie.”

“An old tie?” said Terbut.

“Yes,” said Jorkens, “our old school-tie. It can only be got by those that have been at the school and that are properly qualified to wear it. The few shops that supply it have all our names in a book. Caber wasn’t qualified.”

## Chapter 5

# THE GRECIAN SINGER

IT may seem to some of my readers that the principal occupation of the Billiards Club is to listen to tales by Jorkens. This is by no means the view taken by the club. In fact the other day we were all discussing singing, for no other reason than that we knew Jorkens to be uninterested in it and therefore unlikely to join in with a tale; for, much as we sometimes appreciate Jorkens' contrast of Africa to our somewhat dark street, we each of us have an occasional liking for the sound of our own voice, which we share with the whole human race and the vast majority of animals. I trust it is unnecessary for me to defend it.

We were talking, then, about singing; when Jorkens broke in with the words: "I never cared about singing; it never meant anything to me."

"You speak," said Terbut, "as though your lamentable deficiency were something to be proud of."

"It's meant a good deal to me," said Jorkens.

"Meant a good deal?" said Terbut. "What has?"

"The lamentable deficiency, as you call it," Jorkens replied. "In fact it once saved my life."

"Saved your life?" muttered Terbut.

"I'll tell you," said Jorkens. "And, mind you, I never disliked singing, but it never had power to draw me, as I've known it draw other men. I'll tell you what happened. Well, there was a young fellow I knew called Bob Hosden, who had never travelled and was rather liable to get in love, which of course leads to trouble in the long run; and into his life came a woman who had travelled a long way, all the way from Greece, and was really beautiful. That is to say, he met her in London and was introduced, and nobody seemed to know anything about her; and, instead of that warning him, it attracted him all the more. If he had ever travelled, he might have wanted to know what part of the country she came from; but, as it was, I suppose he pictured her home as a little island in a caerulean sea, with small ships sailing by, and somewhere Homer singing. Which made it all worse, though she was romantic enough with her dark hair and her fine features, clear as lines cut in marble, to have caught a young fellow like him without

any other accessories. She was a widow and nobody knew how many husbands she had had: once she mentioned two. Nobody knew her age, or indeed anything of her whatever. She took a nice flat in Knightsbridge, overlooking Hyde Park. Even her finances were queer, like everything else about her: she had them in small bags of sailcloth; unstrung, unpierced pearls and a few nuggets of gold. Somebody took the nuggets to a bank, and sold a few of the pearls for her; otherwise she would have paid her bills with the nuggets and pearls direct. Bob Hosden introduced me to her at a sherry-party, and asked me what I thought of her. Of course I said she was very nice: it wasn't my job to advise him not to amuse himself; one has to be more sure of exactly what life is for before one starts doing that. She spoke English after a fashion, and her talk was fairly full of nautical phrases, as though she'd learnt it from sailors. And then one day I heard she'd a fine voice, but would not sing at concerts, because she only sang when she felt like it. Temperamental I supposed, and thought no more about it. I thought no more about it till one evening when I was walking along the road that bounds the south side of the park, the far side from the houses, and heard a woman singing softly. It was she, and a crowd was beginning to gather. She was up in her flat, out of sight of me. She was singing as though in idleness and only to please herself, or at the bidding of a mood that arose in her, singing as birds sing. And, as with the songs of birds, there seemed little tune in it, as human beings judge tunes; it set me thinking more of valleys than concert halls, valleys on the far side of hills, that you could not see. The crowd increased and she seemed to be calling, like some shepherd with an incredibly beautiful voice calling a message from hill-tops. I went across the road to hear the message, but it was not in English. Some of the crowd went down what passage there is, and I think they rang the bell of the door in Knightsbridge; but no one seems to have opened it, and the singing went softly on. There was a window of the ground floor open, and they might have climbed in through that, but an English crowd doesn't do that sort of thing. I stood there perfectly motionless, and the evening went glimmering away; and all the time I knew I should have gone at once and found Bob Hosden and warned him, but I could not leave that song."

"I thought you said you cared nothing for singing," said Terbut.

"That's the whole point," said Jorkens. "I like an orchestra, and I like those little tunes that Arabs play upon reeds all through North Africa, and I thrill to the sound of pipes that one hears in India, suddenly blowing a bar when the sky is blazing with sunset; but nothing that the human voice can do seems to me worth stopping to hear. And here was a song that had drawn me

over the road, and had gripped me so that I could not let it alone; and I knew that something was wrong, and that I must warn Bob Hosden.”

“What did you think was wrong?” one of us asked.

“I didn’t know,” said Jorkens. “But it was as though I had seen a magnet picking up pieces of wood. It wouldn’t be right; it would be upsetting a natural law: a thing like that would frighten me. I knew that singing that could draw me like that must have something terrible in it, and the woman must have some power that wasn’t right. Anyway there would be no chance for Bob Hosden, if he had anything more to do with her. But how was I to warn him?”

“Well, Bob saved me the trouble by coming that way himself. He heard her a long way off, though she was singing softly, and there came a look in his eyes of a man seeing other worlds. He never saw me at all; he walked past me brushing against me, for I never moved out of his way; and he turned out of the park down the passage, I after him. He came to the street-door of the flats in which she lived and found it shut: the hall porter had shut it because of the crowd that had been trying to get in. He began ringing then, and nobody answered. Then he began beating on the door, and the singing went on softly; you hardly heard it in Knightsbridge. After a while he was making such a noise that I saw something would happen. I mean someone was bound to come, and in the end he would have got in; and the song that I only heard faintly was increasing its strange power. I don’t know what I was afraid of; I only know I was certain that if a song could draw me like that, who cared nothing for any singer I’d ever heard till then, there was some awful power let loose and not a chance for Bob Hosden.

“‘Bob,’ I said, ‘chuck it. That’s not your house.’”

“A silly remark perhaps, but it didn’t matter; Bob never heard me speak.

“Well, I thought for a moment, and then I darted off. I couldn’t have done it from the other side of the house, where the song was in full blast, a song low and soft but coming straight at you out of the back windows. I couldn’t have got away. But in Knightsbridge I turned and darted off and got a policeman. I hadn’t far to go. ‘There’s a man giving trouble at *13a*,’ I said. ‘Annoying people in the flats. He wants to get in.’”

“The policeman came at once.

“‘I’ve come chiefly on behalf of Madame Anthropofalos,’ I said. ‘It’s her he’s annoying mostly.’”

“‘I’ll deal with him,’ said the constable.



“Well, the first question the constable asked of Bob, who was making a lot of noise on the door by now, was: ‘What do you want in there?’ And Bob replied: ‘I want to see Madame Anthropofalos.’ So his case was pretty well prejudiced from the start. The constable took him away, and the singing soon stopped; and then I felt at once that the power relaxed, whatever it may have been, and I had no idea then what it was.

“Bob was bound over to keep the peace for six weeks, and I felt I had saved him that time. I could never make out why magistrates don’t pass a sentence of eighty years when they are binding a man over; it is no hardship to keep the peace. Why only six weeks?”

It is a curious thing but, though there was a distinct clique in the club that had tried to prevent Jorkens from starting his story, impatience was exhibited now to get him back to the thread of it.

“What happened to Bob?” asked Terbut.

“The moth and the candle,” said Jorkens. “She didn’t sing again for some days. But, as soon as she did, back he came again.”

“Did he live in the same street?” asked Terbut.

“No; the other side of the park,” said Jorkens.

“Then how could he hear her?” asked Terbut.

“That’s what we shall never know,” said Jorkens. “Well, back he came again one evening, just at the time when I usually take a walk in the park; and I had heard her singing and I was there too. I spotted him at once and tried to dissuade him from going round to the door; but, whether or not he heard me, he went straight on down the passage, with me beside him, and came to the door of the flats and found it open; and she was singing all the time, and the air seemed filled with her singing, as the April woods are filled with the blackbirds’ chorus at dawn. He went straight to the door of the lift-shaft and rang the bell that brings the lift down from the upper floors, and above the sound of the lift I heard her wild song flooding the well of the stairs. I had hold of his arm, but nothing would stop him, and as soon as the lift arrived he went in and shut the door, and pressed a button and was off to the third floor. I looked up the stairs, down which that song was rippling, and then for the first time in my life I wished that singing had the power to draw me as it seemed to draw other men. I began to suspect a great deal about her just then, and yet there I was in the basement wishing that that song could have drawn me up those stairs, to throw myself at her feet and to hear her singing for ever. Almost it did; almost I ran up those stairs; had I

ever felt the least interest in the singer's art, I should have done so; but in the end I only sat down on one of the steps and wept.

"The singing soon stopped; I found by comparison afterwards that it never rose to its full beauty in London, and the intensity of the mood in her which accompanied it seems also to have been cramped by the great mass of the houses. Then Bob Hosden came down the stairs looking rather scared, and we walked away, and when we got outside he told me that they were engaged to be married. So I said, 'For the last time, Bob Hosden, can I persuade you to leave her alone?' And he said 'No.' So I said, 'Oh, well then, I congratulate you'; but very sadly, for I was fond of Bob Hosden. We parted then, Bob still looking rather white and scared; and soon after that they were married. I didn't attend the wedding, but I went down two days after to see them on their honeymoon."

"Wonder you didn't go next day," said Terbut.

"Lord knows why I didn't," exclaimed Jorkens. "I knew I ought to. Follow your intuitions: they're righter than reasoning. I knew I ought to have gone. What I could have done is another matter, but I knew I ought to have gone. And the strength of that feeling grew and grew all day, and in the end I went, but I should have gone sooner. It was a lovely little cottage down in Sussex, and I arrived in the morning. I had been awake all night, and had gone by the first train. I had a mile or two to walk, and I walked as fast as I could, till I saw the roof of the cottage show over a fold of the downs, and a little column of smoke was loitering up, pale-grey from a red chimney; it was as peaceful a scene as any I ever saw. And then I heard a song that the woman was singing, coming towards me in snatches, as the gusts of the wind, or her voice, rose and fell. It was a croon more than a song, a lullaby full of contentment, made, you might say, of ease in quiet valleys, of sheep-bells and sound of streams and blackbirds calling, and winds going over the downs, bringing swallows home. If singing had ever meant more to me I could have told you more, but then I should have not been here to tell."

"How's that?" said Terbut.

But Jorkens went straight on.

"I went up to the cottage, all covered with leaves; honeysuckle, I suppose, but honeysuckle was over. She was upstairs, singing beside an open window. You hardly liked to interrupt the calm of her lullaby, by speaking or even breathing; it was like the calm there might be at the end of the world, if you came to the very edge, with Venus glowing in twilight. But I called up to her from below the window. 'Where's Bob?' I shouted. An

unusual question to ask on a honeymoon; unusual to call at all; but there it was, I hadn't slept a wink since they had been married, and a strange uneasiness about Bob Hosden was driving me.

“‘He's inside,’ she said.

“So I went in through the door that was open to bees and butterflies, and called for Bob and searched for him all through the cottage. I did not find him. She stopped that gentle song, but all my questions she answered only with her blue eyes, the strangest look I ever saw.”

“Ugly?” asked one of us.

“No more ugly,” said Jorkens, “than the sea far south of here, warm and placid and lapping, lit by a gloaming lovelier than anything we shall see. No, no, not ugly; only strange. And after a bit I looked away from her eyes, and said to her, looking away from her all the while, ‘You know I shall have to tell the police.’”

“At that, she sang to me, sang suddenly like someone pulling out the stops of an organ and blasting the hush with music; but not any organ here; like an angel sitting down after a journey, before a precipice of gold that was all hollowed to organ-pipes, and playing from his heart a dirge for the story of man. Some men never know the misery of missing the things they miss. I knew it then. By a fraction it failed to hold me. And I left. The song missed me by no more than the distance by which a bird will sometimes miss butterflies. But I went back to London, and so I'm sitting here without a drink, and without any money, and with the whole of Somerset House waiting for me at quarter day.”

“Oh, well,” said Terbut, “have a drink. But get on with your story.”

And he grudgingly signed to the waiter.

“Thanks,” said Jorkens. “Well, I got back to London, and I went straight to a man I knew at Scotland Yard, and he showed me in to another man, and we had a long talk. And they searched that house for a week, and then I saw them again.

“‘How have you got on?’ I asked.

“‘So-so,’ they said.

“And then I turned to the man my friend had taken me to at first, Inspector Grives. ‘This murder,’ I began.

“‘Look here,’ said the inspector; ‘you use language like that to me inside here, but you know it’s slander outside.’

“Then I knew they’d failed.

“‘But can you do nothing?’ I asked; for I had been very fond of Bob Hosden.

“‘We’ve got to prove everything, you see,’ said my friend.

“‘It’s hard on Bob,’ I answered.

“‘We might get her out of the country,’ he said.

“‘Deport her?’ I asked.

“‘We might,’ he said.

“‘On what charge?’ I asked him. For I didn’t see how they could do that if it was slander for me to mention what she had done.

“‘We could do it,’ said the inspector, ‘if we could get her driving her car without a licence.’

“‘Wait till I’m out with her one day,’ I said.

“And with that I left.

“She came to London again, for which I had bided my time; and one day I went round to see her when she was not singing; and she talked to me in her flat with her sailor’s talk and her queer Greek accent.

“‘You’re fond of sailors,’ I said to her.

“And she answered, ‘Very.’

“I never got any nearer than that to saying to her what was on my mind, and it was perhaps rash to have got even that far. But I asked her if she could give me a lift to the City, as I had overstayed my time and had things to attend to there, and yet would like to talk with her a bit longer. She didn’t wish to let me go too easily, so she said she would drive me there, and we started at once for her garage. I said: ‘The English police are very particular. You must have a driving-licence.’

“‘I have it,’ she said.

“‘But you must have it on you,’ I told her.

“‘It is in the left-hand pocket of the car,’ she said.

“She climbed in and sat at the wheel and I on her left; and away we went, she speaking very little.

“I will say that Scotland Yard know their job. The very first policeman we came to stopped her for driving too fast. ‘I’ll swear you were only doing twenty,’ I said. Which was perfectly true.

“ ‘I must look at your driving-licence,’ he said.

“ ‘It’s in that pocket,’ she told him.

“The policeman looked and I looked and she looked, and it wasn’t there. She showed her beautiful teeth, but said nothing. And on that they were able to get her out of the country.”

“And what do you think she did to your friend?” we asked.

Now Jorkens’ whiskey had come, and he drank it off, and then sat silent awhile.

“I think,” said Jorkens, “that her name was a clue. Oddly enough in this old bundle of papers,” and he pulled some out of his pocket, “I have her driving-licence to this day. There you see, Anthropofalos, no meaning at all. But one day I copied it out in Greek letters and looked at it; and then I noticed a very curious thing. Suppose she’d turned one of the letters upside-down; you have sense then.”

“Which letter?” said Terbut.

“Write it in Greek,” said Jorkens, “and turn the lamda upside down, and you get gamma.”

“And then?” said Terbut.

“Why then, you get Anthropofagos.”

Those that did not know Greek of course said nothing, and those that did began groping among our memories trying to sort out words we partly remembered from ones that we never knew, until one of us said: “You don’t mean Man-eater!”

“Well,” said Jorkens, “of course that’s what the word means. We should remember they had different standards in classical times. It’s very clearly stated in Homer. I don’t defend it of course.”

But we felt we had heard enough, and all of us left without anyone offering Jorkens the usual little gift that, as far as liquid can go, is our recognition that we have been instructed by one of his tales.

## Chapter 6

# THE JORKENS FAMILY EMERALDS

ONE day at the Billiards Club we were discussing the prices of precious stones. I think one of our members had done a deal in the City over a nice assortment of emeralds, for it is a mistake to suppose that there are not some at our club who work as hard as any. And then Terbut remarked to Jorkens, who was resting after his lunch, "You've had a good many sorts of stones through your hands?"

"A fair number," said Jorkens.

"You've told us of pearls and sapphires," Terbut went on; "not to mention nuggets; and a diamond, if I recollect rightly. Have you ever had any others?"

"No," said Jorkens.

"No emeralds or anything?" Terbut asked.

"No," said Jorkens, "no emeralds. But wait a minute. Yes, I had. I certainly had once. Some very fine emeralds."

"I thought so," said Terbut.

A captious kind of remark. But all Jorkens said was: "Yes, I had five or six very fine emeralds once."

"And lost them," suggested Terbut.

"No," said Jorkens, with a look full of surprise at the suggestion. "I sold them."

"Left to you, I suppose," said Terbut. "Family stones." Deliberately, as it seemed to me, attributing the unlikeliest origin that he could think of to the emeralds.

"Yes," said Jorkens, "they were left me by my father."

"Left you by your father!" said Terbut, and contributed no more to the discussion that evening. Others asked Jorkens to tell us more of the emeralds, and so we heard not only one more of Jorkens' exploits, but had a glimpse of his parentage, which so often helps to explain a man.

“Yes, my father practically left them to me,” said Jorkens. “He might have got them himself, which he was well able to do, but then there would have been death duties, and he said I had better get them instead. Not that he had fully worked out how they were to be got, so far as he actually told me; but he knew just where they were, and seemed to know what had happened to everyone that had ever tried to get them, and it wouldn’t have taken him long to work out the right way. To a man like him it would have been child’s play. Selling them would have been another matter: he’d never have sold them well. And as for keeping any money he got from them, well, he wasn’t that kind of man. Money went through his fingers like fine sand. He had had handfuls of it, gathering it up in every part of the world; he had owned fifty acres of diamond-bearing clay, and a whole rubber forest once, and enough ivory to have built a good-sized ship with it; he had had heaps of money, but it never stuck. He roamed the world till very near his end, much more than I’ve ever done; and when his beard was growing scraggly, and looked small against his great chest and so far up from the ground, for he was far over six foot, he would still dart off to a far end of the earth to look for a fortune, and very likely find it, and lose it on the way back. How did he lose it? Oh, anyhow. Travelling was one way.”

“Yes, travelling’s expensive,” said one of us, who had gone as far as Venice.

“Travelling his way was expensive,” said Jorkens. “Once he set out with a caravan on a long voyage, from some African city at dawn, with a hundred slaves he had bought the day before, and forgot to tie them up for the night. Of course they were all gone next morning, to say nothing of the camels.”

“Pretty forgetful,” someone muttered because Jorkens chanced to be looking at him, and he felt he must say something.

“And the odd thing,” said Jorkens, “was that he wasn’t forgetful by nature. It was just deliberate forgetfulness, brought on by a generous whim for those poor devils’ benefit. And another time he gave all he had to an exiled Indian princess, who turned out to be really an Afghan as much as anything, born I think at Brighton. You know, you can’t keep money that way.”

“You were saying . . .” I suggested to Jorkens.

“Yes, the emeralds,” he said. “He was very old, and he was dying, and he sent for me, and he said: ‘For one reason and another I can’t leave you any money, and if I got what I’ve long had my eye on and left you that, there’d be death duties enough to cripple any business. Best get it yourself.’”

“He had a tiny room in a lodging-house in London. He sent for me there.

“ ‘It’s emeralds,’ he said.

“The door was partly open, to give him air; and I noticed his landlady hanging about outside.

“ ‘Tell me another time,’ I said, with a glance at the door.

“He understood but went on.

“ ‘That’s all right,’ he said. ‘It takes a man who has seen a little bit of the world, and may have seen one or two of its wonders, and knows there are a few more, to believe what I’m going to tell you. Five years of London makes it difficult, and ten years of this street at a stretch makes it quite impossible. Well, take a look at this map and see the mark on those mountains:’ and he pulled out a map from the bed in which he was lying. ‘That mark I made is just on top of the ridge; the river running beside it is not so near as it looks; it’s seventy yards away by the map; but on the ground there’s two hundred yards of slope, and then two thousand feet; which, being sheer, doesn’t show. It’s a mountain running just up to the snow-line: it’s really only on the last thousand feet that there’s any snow at all. If you follow that track that I’ve marked, it’s perfectly easy climbing: you never need to use your hands at all. Those are villages dotted about on the slope.’ And he showed me several quite near the top of the ridge. ‘You go up there,’ he went on, ‘the last bit through the snow, and you come to the top of the mountain, which is in the form of a ridge, with snow of course on the other side the same as it is on the near, and a slightly steeper slope; but at the very top, where I’ve made that mark, is a little cliff of from ten to twenty feet, facing bare the other way with the snow at its feet, and looking out over land of which no one seems to know anything. It only runs for two or three hundred yards; the rest is snow on both sides; so you have no difficulty in going over the ridge. The cliff begins there where I’ve marked it, and it’s all full of emeralds.’

“ ‘Emeralds?’ I said.

“And I thought I heard a titter outside the door, and I think the old man heard it too. For he said: ‘Yes, and the funny part of the joke I’m making is what happened to all the people that ever went after those emeralds. Fetch me that box.’ And I went where he pointed and brought him a box that had once held note paper. And when he reached out his arm from under the blankets I found it was all shaky, a thing I could hardly believe, as he’d always seemed such a giant. ‘I’ve been collecting the stories,’ he said, ‘of all



that tried it on, and have studied all their plans. I think there are twenty-seven of them in that box. Read all those plans very carefully. Read every one of them. There may be one or two that I haven't got, but read all that I have.'

"As a general rule I daren't interrupt him; and I think he saw that I wanted to then, and he was silent, glaring at me, with his mouth open, breathing. But I didn't ask him anything. And then he spoke very deliberately, tapping the papers with a finger as he spoke each word. 'Every one of these plans was wrong,' he said. 'Get that into your head.' I thought for a while. And then I asked the old man: 'Had they any one thing in common?' And at that he all lighted up. 'Aye,' he said. 'They had. That's the way to think, boy. You'll get those emeralds yet. I wasn't sure. But that's how to set about it. They had one thing in common, all twenty-seven. They all tried to come back down the near side of the mountain.'

"'And the far side?' I asked.

"'I told you,' he said. 'Two hundred yards of good smooth snow, a steepish slope. Then two thousand feet drop. And then the river.'

"'It's a nasty drop,' I said; for he had stopped speaking.

"'They're a nastier people,' said he. 'Very polite, polite as be-damned; but nasty ways. They come out of their villages as soon as their watcher sees anyone on the snow. They're behind you then, and they come up the slope after you. They spread out, though that's not necessary when all the villages join in, but anyhow there's no getting away to left or right; they see to that by keeping their flanks well wide of you. Then they come up smiling and bowing, and invite you down to their village. And that's the end of you.'

"'The end of you?' I said.

"'Yes, and a sticky end,' said the old man. 'They've a round house built of brass, in one of their villages, it's a single room, and they take a man in there and torture him ceremonially.'

"'To death?' I asked.

"'Yes, if he's lucky,' he said.

"'And what for?' I asked him.

"And he told me of a sort of holy man who had lived in one of these villages, and who was by no means the poor ignorant heathen one might have supposed, but had a very accurate insight into the exploitation of natives where wealth of this kind was discovered. And he taught his people

to stick to their pastoral ways, and not let their mountain be turned into any kind of Johannesburg. ‘So they seem to have the idea,’ he said, ‘that the whole mountain is holy, though from the kind of things that some of them do on it you’d hardly think that, so perhaps it’s only the little cliff at the top that’s holy; but, whatever it is, a white man there is a pretty big desecration to them, and they come up to him very politely and ask him down to their village.’

“‘What about the river?’ I asked him.

“‘It’s a good river,’ he said. ‘A current of I should say five knots; between precipices for hundreds of miles; they only discovered that it was the same river lower down, as the one that entered those nullahs, by pouring in half a ton of permanganate of potash and finding the water pinkish a hundred miles further on; so they won’t get round to you if you reach the river, however much they may want you down in their house of brass. There are deodars growing in all the cracks along the foot of the precipice. Enough to make a raft. You’d want an axe.’ He began talking in short sentences then, mixing the things that I should have to take, like a hammer and chisel and food, with a message he wanted sent to a priest of a temple in Egypt. ‘You’ll not see a village,’ he said, ‘for four hundred and fifty miles, so you’ll want plenty of food. And I met a priest of the temple of Kom Ombos. He blew through the temple while I was there. Tell him he’s dust, and tell him I go to him. Take a Canadian toboggan. Very light. The emeralds are in the rock: the cliff is mottled with them. Chisel out what you can and slip away. We’ll go all through Egypt again, that priest and I.’ Then he tapped on the papers once more and said, ‘Every one of them wrong.’ And then he died.

“Well, it was his last message, and I determined to remember it, and to do just as he said. I took occasion to mention to his old landlady that he was light-headed before he died: but I needn’t have done it; the old man was right; she hadn’t the sense to believe a single word of his story; it was as good as locked in a safe, so far as she was concerned. But I hadn’t the emeralds yet.”

And Jorkens was silent, remembering; till I began to fear that if he remembered too much he would drift away from his tale, and Terbut would probably say that he never had had any emeralds. So I said: “And how did you get the emeralds, Jorkens?”

And he said: “After the funeral, and when I’d paid all expenses, and come into a sum of thirty-three pounds eight shillings, which turned out very handy, I did a good deal of thinking. And yet thinking wasn’t really needed:

the old man had done it all. There was only one thing more to tell when he'd told me about the toboggan. He might have told me if he'd had the time; or he might have left me to work it out, provided I had the brains, and then to do it, provided I had the guts. But with a toboggan on a snow slope of two hundred yards, and then a precipice of two thousand feet, it stood to reason that I should require a parachute."

"A parachute," muttered one of us.

"Yes," said Jorkens. "You see, what would be the use of a toboggan, when you only had two hundred yards to go, and then the precipice sheer for two thousand feet? It would be no good without the parachute. I had the bundle in front of me where I could hold it, so that it wouldn't flap out as I slipped down the slope, and of course it was strapped to my shoulders: the toboggan I carried on my back and it weighed almost nothing; they make them of birch-bark you know. And then I had about fifteen pounds of food, for I calculated that it might take me three days to make the raft, and five more to do the four hundred and fifty miles on the five-knot current through the ravines, till I came to the village he spoke of. And of course I took some money. And I had an axe slung over my shoulder clear of the straps of the parachute, and a hammer and a chisel for the emeralds. I had about enough weight with all that: I didn't take a revolver for the people on the mountain; I fancied there'd be too many of them, and it was one of those things that was certain to have been tried before, and not to have worked; but I took a good wad of opium that would be enough for myself, in case the blighters should catch me.

"It was right in the middle of Asia, that mountain; North of India, East of Persia, and South-West of China. That's where it was. And when I got to it, it was just as the old man said; a mountain with little villages thousands of feet up, and a skull-cap of snow. I started climbing very leisurely, so as to have plenty of pace left when the little men came after me; the more time I had to myself at the top, the more emeralds I'd get. I took three days over the climb, sleeping in a good cloak that they make in those parts out of sheepskins; the skins on the outside, embroidered and patched with bright silks, and on the inside the long brown hair of the sheep. It was warmer than I wanted, the first night; on the second night I was glad of it; but on the third night nothing could keep me warm. On the morning of the fourth day I came to the villages, little houses with big thatches, a lot of them at the same level just under the snow-line. They looked the kind of houses where you'd go up and talk to the owners, and hear their talk of the crops, and feel sorry if they did badly. And then I saw the round one-storied house of brass shining right

in the middle of the nearest village with plenty of space all round it, and I remembered my father's words. And at that point I began to hurry my pace. But very soon a horn blew, and out they came from their huts and began to come after me from the village I had just passed, and two more villages were doing the same. Little men in warm coats, carrying bows and arrows, as far as I could see. The line came quite slowly, as though any need for hurrying had never occurred to any of them. Rather unnerving that steady slow pace must have been, to the men whose plans were all wrong. I had come to the snow before they left their villages, and even there I gained on them, though it was harder going on the snow, and I did those last few hundred feet in such good time, that I must have had nearly a quarter of an hour to myself at the top. And there was the little cliff all right, facing away towards the unknown country, and mottled with emeralds just as my father had said. Below me stretched perfect snow, an ideal spot for tobogganing, but only for two hundred yards. A few things that I had carried up the mountain to make myself comfortable at nights, I threw away then, not wanting to be too heavy, and only kept bare necessities. The little cliff struck me as not having been there very long, as precipices count time: I thought from the look of the rock that very likely there'd been a bit of a landslide within the last hundred years, and that the light that was now glittering on those emeralds had been there no longer than that. I got to work with my hammer and chisel at once, choosing the largest emerald within reach, and chiselling all round it, flaking the grey rock away, till I was able to give a tap that loosened the emerald itself. And there the snow helped me; as, with one hand holding the hammer and the other the chisel it would have been hard to look after the stone; but all I had to do was to watch it plop into the snow, where the grey flakes of the rock I had chiselled lay on the surface and spread out fan-wise where some had slithered away. Small stones would have come out much quicker, but the market price for emeralds the size of the thick ends of hens' eggs made it worth the three or four minutes I spent on each. Two or three men appeared on the ridge within ten yards of me, but I still worked on: I only had to throw my toboggan down and jump on it; I'd everything ready. I was working at my fifth emerald. I just got it out and then six of them came up and all bowed together. It was time to be off. So I bowed too, and lifted my toboggan over my head as I bowed and laid it down on the snow, watching them all the time, and they looked at the toboggan. They all had knives, and some had bows and arrows, but I fancied that, if they started shooting in time, the pace of my toboggan would beat them. And one of them, only two yards from me, said something about honouring his village, and I said: 'No, I'm going this way,' and threw the chisel down and kept the hammer, and clutched my parachute against my

ribs and was off. It was a perfect surface for a toboggan, just that touch of ice that makes it slip along almost without leaving a track; the radiant mountain air rushed into my lungs and sang screeching past me; there was one shout from the little men, and then I came to the edge, and I saw my toboggan floating with the air of a tired butterfly, while I dropped like a stone. I let the bundle go, and then I felt the parachute tug at my shoulders, and soon after that I saw my toboggan swoop past me. I realized on the way down how wise my father had been in recommending me to take a toboggan, and the parachute which necessarily went with it, and which his advice therefore implied. The two things worked in admirably together: the toboggan gave me speed to get away from those men at any moment I liked, and a second or so later it gave me just that clearance from the precipice without which one could never have worked a parachute. And here I was with five emeralds in my pocket, the smallest of which would scarcely have been hidden by a florin. Did I say six? Well, I didn't count the sixth: it was scarcely larger than a pea. I had other things in my pockets too, and began to regret that I had brought so much; the hammer, for instance, to drive in nails in my raft; the axe might have done for that, or a bit of a stone; and I was feeling much too heavy, in spite of which the winds that roamed the ravine were flapping me about like a feather. But one does not think of everything, particularly for journeys one has not made before. Well, to make a long story short, I just missed the river and landed among the rocks; and I got to work at once on the deodars and made a very light raft that night, so as to be able to slip away if those villagers should find a path down the precipice or work their way round; but when I found that they did not come for me I made the raft stronger and more comfortable, using the parachute for a sort of cabin, while its cords came in very handy to bind the logs. I spent four days at that, and kept nice and warm at night, burning the branches that weren't big enough for my raft. Then I drifted down that unexplored river for a week, and came to the villages of a different people, and bought good food from them, and drifted on; and one foggy night I heard the sound of ships and the river got hugely wide, and with dawn I came to the coast. And three weeks later I reached London, travelling steerage, with thirty thousand pounds worth of emeralds in my pocket."

"And you got all that for them?" asked Terbut.

"I did," said Jorkens.

"You should be pretty well off, if you invested it well," said Terbut.

"Well," said Jorkens, "I invested it in a way. You know the way one does. And a lot of things happened. I'll tell you about them some day."

“I wouldn’t say too much about having got the thing from your father,” said one of the others, probably pulling his leg. “If Somerset House gets to hear of it they’ll put in a claim against you for death duties yet.”

“No,” said Jorkens. “No they won’t. They know it would be no good: in strictly legal language, *nullum bonum*.”

## Chapter 7

# A FISHING STORY

THERE is a certain attitude taken by some at the Billiards Club towards my friend Jorkens, which I hope has not spread beyond its walls. If I were to express that attitude in a single word, the word would be Doubt. Whether any who have read some of the tales that I have recorded from time to time as I heard them from Jorkens may have felt any doubts of them I do not know, but I set down this tale not entirely for any slight interest it may possess for those interested in wells and the various objects their waters may be sometimes found to contain; but I more particularly record it because I know the tale to be true, being acquainted with one of the men to whom it occurred, and able thereby to check Jorkens' veracity, who was there as a chance onlooker, but a perfectly accurate one.

"I was taking a walk in India," Jorkens began.

"What for?" asked Terbut.

"To get away from the flies," said Jorkens.

"How far did you have to go to do that?" asked Terbut.

"Three thousand miles," said Jorkens. "But why not start? In fact I felt I couldn't delay any longer. Perhaps you don't know those flies?"

Terbut shook his head rather impatiently; for we all knew, and Jorkens better than most of us, that Terbut had never travelled.

"Well," Jorkens continued, "I was walking over a plain with a good deal of grass on it, and it was hot enough to kill more than grass, and there was nothing to see on it except a horse grazing, if nibbling that withered stuff can be so described; and he was grazing with a bit in his mouth and a saddle on his back. And then I came suddenly on a well. A rather thick patch of grass hid it entirely, until I was right on top of it. And when I did get there I saw a little flight of steps, cut out of the dry mud of which all that part of the world seems to be made, going down to the well. And on one of the lower steps a man was seated, holding a rod. I never saw him till I stood at the top step, and he didn't see me even then, being so intent on the water.

"'Fishing?'" I said.

“‘It’s a spear,’” he answered, and sat there patiently for a few more seconds, leaning over the water not looking at me, then made a jab. There was some commotion in the well, in fact more noise than I ever heard in any well before, and then he made another jab; and this time, above the noise of the threshing of water, I clearly heard a pig squeal.

“‘Have you got a pig in the well?’” I asked.

“‘Sounds like it,’” he said.

When the pig stopped squealing he leaned forward and began to pull; and very soon he hauled up a man out of the well, but the noise of some big thing swimming did not stop. It turned out from their conversation to each other, though they said little enough to me, that the second man had been hanging by one arm from the lower step of the well, the other arm being broken. The noise in the well continued, and rather puzzled me.

“‘Have you got anything more down there?’” I asked them.

“‘Only a horse,’” said the one that I had mistaken for a fisherman. And he went on with his angling, until he got a pair of reins on the end of his spear. And sure enough there was a horse at the end of the reins, just as the man had said. I admit I hadn’t believed him all at once, and perhaps it is rather a lesson to us not to disbelieve a thing merely because it’s unlikely; and a horse in a well seemed so very unlikely, especially a well that already had so much else in it. But I was wrong, for very soon I saw a horse’s head appearing; and more than that the two men could not manage to bring to sight for a long time.”

“‘But what was it all about?’” asked Terbut. “‘What were they doing?’”

“‘They told me that,’” said Jorkens. “‘They were a long while getting the horse out, and every now and then one of them would call out to me a few words of explanation: you couldn’t call it a story, just explanation. And what I gathered from it all was that they had been out pig-sticking and they had come on a lot of pigs, a sounder they call them, rustling in the long grass where they could not see them. And they had ridden up to a little village and got some men to go into the grass making noises, and some of the natives had brought their dogs with them; and all the pigs had come out and they had ridden after the biggest. They got right away from the long grass at once and saw no more of it, except little patches that they scarcely noticed; in fact the one beside which we all met they never noticed at all, nor did the pig; or, if he did, he went straight for it because it reminded him of home; nor did the first horse, nor his rider. And they all went into the well.



“The pig climbed on to the horse’s back, to keep himself out of the water; and the horse kept on rolling sideways as he swam, so as to put the pig back in the well. And that is another unusual thing to see, I mean a pig riding a horse; but, again, one should not disbelieve it merely on that account. I don’t claim to have seen it myself, but the man who killed the pig saw it; in fact he killed it actually in the saddle. He killed the pig first because it seemed to make more room in the well, especially considering how near his tusks kept coming to the shoulder-blades of the man who was hanging by one arm from the bottom step. And then he pulled the man out. Getting the horse out was the hardest job of the lot.”

“Did you lend them a hand with the horse?” asked Terbut, rather unnecessarily.

“Well, no,” said Jorkens, “I was perfectly ready to, but the fellow took offence at a quite natural remark that I made in all innocence. It was a simple and harmless remark, and very much to the point. But he took offence at it.”

“What did you say to him?” I asked.

“I merely said,” replied Jorkens, “ ‘Nice for their drinking water.’ ”

## Chapter 8

# JORKENS IN HIGH FINANCE

“DAMN it. I will,” said Jorkens one day at the Billiards Club from his chair in front of the fire. It was a dark afternoon of October, and a few of us lingering at the long table at which we had lunched were discussing the probability of one of Jorkens’ tales; the one, if I remember right, that I have called The Jorkens Family Emeralds.

“You will what?” asked Terbut.

“I will tell you a tale that is strictly confidential,” said Jorkens.

“Well, I think you can trust all of us,” said one of the others, with only a shade of doubt in his voice.

“Not one of you,” replied Jorkens. “At any rate not with a tale that I’m strictly bound not to divulge. It isn’t that, but you’re all so damned incredulous that I know no harm will be done if I do tell you.”

“Oh, we’re not as bad as that,” said another.

But Jorkens could not be so easily soothed.

“You’re as unbelieving a lot as I ever met,” replied Jorkens. “And when I think of the tales I’ve seen believed! I’ve heard tales in ships’ smoking-rooms in the Indian Ocean, that . . . But never mind *them*. The point is that the high interests that bound me to secrecy will come to no harm through any of you, and the personages concerned would be the first to recognize that your unbelieving wits are as good a hiding-place for the tale as anywhere. Then, if it ever leaks out from other sources, people will say ‘That is one of the yarns of the Billiards Club.’”

“Well, go on,” said Terbut.

“I will,” said Jorkens. And even had I realized how important a secret he was going to give away I could not have stopped him: he was in a temper, stung by these doubts of his tales, and he was flinging us the truth as he might have thrown gold, if he had any, full in the face of a too importunate creditor. “I will. It was in the autumn of 1931. I was hanging about with nothing to do, in fact I was in a chair in front of my fire in my lodgings, not even reading, just lonely and bored; when there was a knock, and in came my landlady, and said there was somebody from the Government who

wanted to see me. Well, of course I supposed he was a tax-gatherer, so I said ‘Show him up at once.’ I hadn’t a bean just then, nothing whatever, and I knew he could do me no harm. And she showed him in. Who or what he was exactly I don’t know; he merely gave the name of Smith; but he came on business of far vaster importance than taxing a poor devil like me. I don’t know if you want me to describe him to you: he was tallish, wore a moustache, was in the thirties, and had that indefinable suggestion of watching what is going on that you sometimes see on the racecourse. The kind of man that knows what is going to happen next. I had that feeling about him at once. And then I thought, ‘Oh, well, he can’t do me any harm, as I haven’t got a penny for him.’ And yet I wasn’t quite easy.

“What he wanted was a ship. Someone had told him of me, that I was a man that had knocked about the world and been to queer places, and I suppose he thought I was the kind of man that might be good for a queer job, for it was a queer job that he wanted the ship for. He came from the Treasury, and he wanted a ship that could be conveniently sunk in a deep part of the sea, and a captain and crew that would be rescued and would never say a word. I did not waste any time saying I had no ships; we understood each other better than that at once. What I did say was, ‘Not a word ever?’ and he said, ‘Yes.’ And I said, ‘That will be the trouble.’ And he said, ‘That is why I’ve come to you.’

“So I asked then, ‘What has it to be sunk for?’ And he just gave that wag of the head that means ‘Can’t tell you.’

“‘It can’t be done,’ I said. ‘They’ll talk.’

“‘It must be done,’ he said.

“‘Safety of the country?’ I asked, for he was looking grave enough.

“‘Safety of the whole world,’ he answered.

“And then I thought for a bit. ‘Is it animal, vegetable or mineral?’ I asked him after a while, quite thinking that he’d say Animal, and that I should be mixed up with some pretty high politics; but he said ‘Mineral,’ yet it was high politics all right.

“‘Couldn’t you put it on a raft and tow it,’ I said, ‘and then cut the tow-rope and arrange for the raft to blow up in some way?’

“‘Too heavy,’ he said.

“And I fell back on my verdict, ‘Can’t be done.’ And he thought a long while in silence, pulling an end of his moustache and glancing at me quickly

now and then. And after a while he said, 'I'd better tell you.'

"So he swore me to conceal the tale by every means in my power, not merely by being silent, but by hushing it up if others let it out, by denying it, by concealing it in every possible way, and that is what I am doing by telling it to people like you whose incredulity is a byword, who won't believe others and can't expect to be believed in return. Yes, damn it, a byword. So, if you do repeat this story, you'll meet just that disbelief that you well deserve. It will do you good."

"I think it will, Jorkens," I said. "What did the man want the ship for?"

"I'll tell you," said Jorkens. "I said he was from the Treasury. Well, he told me briefly, what one knew already, that there was a tremendous financial crisis in the world: he didn't like telling me much that one didn't know; but he had to tell me what they were going to do about it. It was, according to them, the only cure for a desperate situation. Then he explained to me that the wealth of the world was labour and raw material, those two things, and a third thing that was only the first multiplied by the second, that is to say the finished product. Well, gold he said commanded the lot, and there was too much of it; prices and wages had been all upset and there was only one thing to do. He said so finally, 'There is only one thing to do,' that he seemed to think I should understand from that without his troubling to divulge anything further. He stood there waiting for me to solve the financial crisis of the whole world in a single breath; but he might as well have shown me all the grain in the world, and then asked me to eat it. 'And what are you going to do?' I asked.

"'We want to get back,' he said, 'to much simpler methods of exchange. It is the only chance. I told you there was too much gold in the world.'

"'Well?' I said.

"'We want to sink it,' he answered.

Then I understood.

"'But the other countries?' I asked. 'Are they all in this?'

"'Oh, yes,' he said, 'they're all in. We're doing it through the League of Nations.'

"'And the gold?' I said.

"'And he looked at the door, and then he whispered, 'Here.'

"'In London?' I asked.

“And he nodded his head.

“ ‘The whole lot?’ I asked.

“And he nodded again. ‘It’s the only chance,’ he said.

“So then I started thinking pretty hard. If so drastic a remedy were needed to set prices and wages right, and if they relied on me to help with the job, it seemed that the fate of Europe might depend on my thinking it out right. If they couldn’t apply the remedy that they had decided was necessary, what would happen next? Starvation perhaps. Perhaps a breakdown of everything. So I thought pretty hard.

“Secrecy was obviously needed. But you couldn’t sink a ship and rescue the crew and expect none of them ever to say a word. And you couldn’t throw all the gold in the world overboard and expect them never to speak of it: they’d be working at it for hours.

“ ‘Hundreds of tons it would be, or thousands,’ I said.

“ ‘The hell of a lot,’ he answered.

“And I started thinking again. Of course England was the country to originate such a scheme, as it is practically the banking centre of the world; and it was the obvious country to handle the job, having so much shipping and knowing the ways of the sea. But how was she going to do it? That was my problem. Knocking about the world, as I’ve done, I’ve often had problems to solve on the spur of the moment; that’s probably why they came to me. Anyhow they were relying on me, and I felt that I must not fail them. I’m afraid you’ll think me an unromantic devil when I have told you my story. But I’m not really. The romance of gold in the long story of man appealed to me then as it never appealed before, now that we were just going to lose it. It had always seemed romantic to me, and ten times more so now. But it was not the moment for romance: I was being consulted by a government office about a matter of vital importance; it was some practical plan that they wanted, not romance. I might have said, ‘You can’t think of a plan for yourselves. Why should I be able to?’ But that was the very last thought that came into my head. Smith was standing there too silent for that, too obviously relying on me. And I got the plan; and, as I told you, it wasn’t the time for romance. ‘You can’t sink ships on the quiet,’ I said to him. ‘But if you can get it loaded quietly, I have thought of just the ship for you.’

“ ‘The loading will be all right,’ he said.

“ ‘Very well,’ I said. ‘You know Barking. Well, there are ships off Barking that nobody knows much about, but the lives of a few millions

depend on them, and they are just the ships for your purpose. They're accustomed to letting things down into deep waters, and their crew never talk of it. They're made for you.'

"'You don't mean . . .' he began.

"And I knew from the way he wrinkled up his nose that he knew what I was talking about.

"'After all it's been a curse to the world,' I said.

"'Oh, yes,' he answered.

"'Then let it go the way of the other stuff,' I told him.

"And that was all about it. They took my scheme because it worked, and because it was the only one they had, and all the gold in the world was put in the hold of a ship; or it may have been two ships; I don't know, for I couldn't bear to go and see so sorry an end to the splendidest lure that has ever shone before man. It was loaded into the hold and the ship steamed out of Barking in I think October 1931 and came as it came every day (year in year out) to a buoy in a part of the sea called The Black Deep; and beyond that buoy they did what they did every day, they opened the hold below and the whole contents dropped out."

"Opened it below?" said someone.

"Yes, they are built that way," said Jorkens. "It goes down every day in the Black Deep, and all London would be poisoned if it didn't. Few ships do more useful work. But on that one day it wasn't only for London that they were tidying up; they were cleansing the whole world; and not a soul on board knew. Very few people in the world can have known: things connected with high finance are always so secret. I waited all the next day and the day after, to see what would happen and how people would take it; I watched and waited a week, and then one day England quietly went off the gold standard."

"We don't think your story unromantic," said Terbut. "We think it's merely untrue."

"Didn't I tell you?" said Jorkens triumphantly. "I knew you wouldn't believe it."

"We can't believe all the gold is sunk," said Terbut. "The world's full of gold."

“That is the really curious part of it all,” said Jorkens. “The stupendous scheme made no difference. Gold coins disappeared for a while, and so you may say did the gold standard, and no one but private hoarders had any gold at all. But they dug up plenty more in Australia and Africa, and private firms got in gold ornaments everywhere by offering fancy prices. No one could help seeing these things; but that was all they noticed. It was pretty clear that all the gold had gone, yet nobody noticed it, if you follow my meaning; and now they won’t believe you if you tell them anything happened to it. I fear we overrated the value of gold.”

“Well,” said Terbut.

And that was all anyone said. You see we’d all been caught out disbelieving Jorkens.

## Chapter 9

### THE SIGN

ONE day as I entered the Billiards Club about lunch-time, I noticed at once that the conversation was a good bit deeper than usual. In fact they were all discussing transmigration. They were men of many topics, varying from the price of more than one commodity on the Stock Exchange to the best place to buy oysters, yet the intricacies of the afterlife of a Brahmin were a little outside their range. A glance at Jorkens showed me what it was all about; if they had gone out of their own depth, it was as much as anything to get out of Jorkens', just as anyone taking the air on an esplanade might walk out to sea to avoid an acquaintance with too long a story to tell. The reason for wishing to get out of Jorkens' depth was naturally that one or two of the others had tales of their own to tell.

"Transmigration," said Jorkens. "It's a thing one hears lots of talk of and seldom sees."

Terbut opened his mouth and said nothing.

"It happened to come my way once," went on Jorkens.

"To come your way?" said Terbut.

"I'll tell you," said Jorkens. "When I was quite young I knew a man called Horcher, who impressed me a great deal. One of the things for instance that used to impress me about him was the way in which, if one were talking of politics and wondering what was going to happen, he would quietly say what the Government were going to do, when there hadn't been a word about it in any paper: that was always impressive; and still more so if one was guessing what was going to happen in Europe; he would come in then with his information in just the same quiet way."

"And was he right?" asked Terbut.

"Well," replied Jorkens, "I won't say that. But it isn't everyone who would venture to prophesy at all. And any way he impressed me a great deal by it at the time, and older men than me. And another thing he was very good at; he would give me advice on any conceivable subject. I'm not saying the advice was good, but it showed the vast range of his interests and his gladness to share them with others, that to hear of anything that you wished to do was enough to call forth his immediate advice about it. I lost a



good deal of money, one way and another, on bits of advice of his; and yet there was a spontaneity about it, and a certain apparent depth, that could not fail to impress you. Well, one of those days, being very young and all the world equally new to me, and the faith of the Brahmins no stranger to me than the theory of man's descent, I started talking to Horcher on the subject of transmigration. He smiled at my ignorance, as he always did, in a friendly sort of way, and then told me all about it. The Brahmins, he said were wrong in a great many particulars, not having studied the question scientifically or being intellectually qualified to understand its more difficult aspects. I will not tell you the theory of transmigration as he explained it to me, because you can read it yourselves in textbooks; it's not what he told me that was new, so much as the quiet certainty with which he told it, and the rather exciting impression he left on my mind that he had discovered it all for himself. But two things I will tell you about it; and one was that, on account of the interest he had always taken in conditions that affected the welfare of the lower classes he would, 'if (as he put it) there was any justice hereafter,' be rewarded by a considerable promotion in his next existence. 'For if,' he said, 'there were to be no reward in a subsequent state for an interest in such things during this one, there would be no sense in it.' I remember we walked in a garden as he told me all this, and the path was full of snails, which were probably all moving towards some poplars a little way off, for every tree had several of them climbing up the trunks, as though they all made this journey at that time of the year, which was early October. I remember him stepping on the snails as he walked, not from any cruelty, for he was not cruel, but because it could not matter to forms of life that were so absurdly low. And the other thing that he told me was that he had invented a signal, or rather that he had invented a way of branding it into his memory. The signal was no more than the Greek letter  $\Phi$ , but he was a man of enormous industry and he had trained or hypnotized himself into remembering this one sign with such vehemence that he was convinced he would make it automatically, even in another existence. In this life he frequently made it quite unconsciously, tracing it on a wall with his finger, or even in the air: he had trained himself to do that. And he told me that if ever he saw me in his next life, and remembered me (and he smiled pleasantly as though he thought that such a remembrance was possible) he would make that sign to me, whatever our respective stations might be."

"And what did he think he was going to be?" I asked Jorkens.

"He never would tell me that," Jorkens replied. "But I knew he was sure that it was to be something of the most tremendous importance, I knew that from the condescension that showed through the kindness of his manner

when he said he would make the sign to me; and then there was a certain slow grace with which he lifted his hand, when he made the sign in the air, which more than suggested someone seated upon a throne. I don't think he would have wanted to be bothered with me at all in that triumphant second life of his, but for his pride in having stamped that sign by sheer industry into his very soul, so that he could not help making it now, and felt confident that habit would endure wherever his soul went, and he naturally wanted posterity to know what he had achieved. Every half hour or so he would, quite unconsciously, make the sign as we walked; he had certainly trained himself to do that."

"And had he any justification for thinking he would sit on a throne," I asked, "if he had a second life?"

"Well," said Jorkens, "he was a very busy man, and it isn't for me to say to what extent his interest in other men's lives was philanthropy or interference: I took him at his own valuation then, so I don't like to value him otherwise now he's dead. His own view was that pretty well all men were fools, so that somebody must look after them, and that at much personal inconvenience he was prepared to do so himself, and that any system that did not reward a man who was so philanthropic as that must be a silly system. Mind you I don't think he did think that Creation was silly, because he believed that he *was* going to be rewarded: the most I've heard him say against it was that he could have arranged many things much better than they are arranged if he had had the ordering of the world, and he gave me a few instances.

"Well, he impressed on me this sign, which he said would prove transmigration to be of the utmost value to science; though I think that what may have interested him more was that I should see to what heights he had deservedly risen. And, mind you, he had got me to believe him. I thought over it a lot, and often I pictured myself in my later years attending a levée or other great function at the Court of some foreign country, and suddenly receiving from the sovereign, I alone of all that assembly, that signal of recognition that would mean nothing to all the rest.

"He died at a good age, and I was still under thirty; and I decided to do what he had advised me, and to watch in my own old age the careers of men holding high places in Europe (for he didn't think much of Asia), born after his death and showing certain abilities which might be expected from himself in another life, with all the advantages of his experience in this one. For I said to myself 'if he's right about transmigration, he'll be right about what it can do for him.' And, do you know, he *was* right about

transmigration. I was walking in that very garden the year after he died, thinking of the Greek letter  $\Phi$ ; as he had told me always to think of it, the distinct circle and the upright bar through the midst of it. Often I would make the sign with my fingers, as he used to do, to keep it in my mind; I made it that day on the old red garden-wall. I watched a snail on the wall making its slow journey, and remembered his contempt for them, and was somehow glad to think that he had not despised the poor things more than he seemed to despise men. The glittering track it was making up the wall, and which gathered the sunlight to it, was to him not worth noticing, but then much of the work of men was to him equally foolish. I looked still at the bright track of the snail's progress, until I realized that he would have said that only a fool or a poet would waste his time with such trifles, and then I turned away. As I turned away I saw by one of those glances that stray from the corners of our eyes that the snail was making a very distinct curve. I looked again, and set little store by what I had seen, for chance could have done that much, but the snail had made a very distinct quarter of a circle on his way up the wall. It was so neat a bit of a circle that I went on watching, till it was as good a semicircle as it had been a quarter of a circle. It was not till it began to turn downwards that I grew excited. And then I did grow very excited indeed; for the snail had been obviously climbing the wall. What did it want to turn downwards for? The diameter of the circle was about four inches. On and on went the snail. With my mind so full of the sign I could not possibly ignore that, if the snail went on and completed the circle, it would be half the sign. And it was just the size, too, of the sign that Horcher used to make in that regal way with his forefinger. And the snail went on. When only half an inch remained to complete the circle, it may sound silly, but I made the sign myself, in the air with my finger. I knew the snail couldn't see it: if it really was Horcher, I knew it could only be the habit, self-hypnotized into the very ego, that was making that sign, and nothing to do with any intellect. Then I put the absurd idea clean out of my mind. Yet the snail went on. And then it completed the circle. 'Well,' I said, 'the snail has moved in a circle: lots of animals do: dogs do often: I expect birds do too: why shouldn't they? And I must keep steady.'

"Do you know that snail, as soon as it finished its round, went straight on up the wall, dividing that circle into two halves as neatly as you ever saw anything divided. I stood and stared with my mouth and my eyes wide open. Below ran the perfectly vertical track by which the snail climbed the wall, then the circle, and now the continuation of the vertical line dividing the circle in two. It came to the top of the circle. What now? The snail went straight on upwards. It came to a point a couple of inches above the top of

the circle and there it stopped, having made a perfect  $\Phi$ , having proved the dream of the Brahmin to be a reality. 'Poor old Horcher,' I said."

"Did you do anything for the snail?" asked Terbut.

"I thought for a moment of killing it," said Jorkens, "to give Horcher a better chance with his third life. And then I realized that there was something about his outlook that it might take hundreds of lives to purify. You can't go on and on killing snails, you know."

## Chapter 10

# THE ANGELIC SHEPHERD

I DON'T wish to say anything in public which might appear to be a criticism of the committee of the Billiards Club. There was a space on the wall of the staircase that no doubt needed filling, and the committee bought a print. It is framed and hung up now. I am not writing this with the intention of making any comment upon the print. It was a print of one of Woodler's pictures, which beyond any doubt are of high educational value; the only question that may arise is as to whether they are quite suited to our club.

Well, I chanced to be coming up the stairs with Jorkens one day, when he stopped in front of this print; at first, I think, in order to get breath, and it was while he was doing this that he made to me his comment upon the print, as I stood waiting behind him. It was, like all Woodler's pictures, a biblical scene; there were ninety-nine sheep in the foreground, carefully counted, while a little further off on the rocky sky-line, with the hundredth coming towards him, a shepherd was seated; the suggestion that the shepherd was an angel was expressed by an upward sweep of fleecy clouds that slanted away in the sky behind each of his shoulders and tapered to delicate points like enormous wings.

"An interesting picture," said Jorkens.

"Oh, ah, yes," I said; as one often does at the club, before conversation gets going.

"It's a spiritual face," said Jorkens.

"Well, yes," I said, "it's spiritual but . . ." You see I found it a trifle didactic for my taste.

"I knew the man," said Jorkens.

"The shepherd?" I exclaimed.

"Yes," he said. "I knew him. They have very spiritual faces, a great many of those tribesmen. It was Woodler's last picture, you know."

I knew that: it was widely advertised.

"Woodler knew where to go for spiritual types," Jorkens continued. "It wasn't Palestine that time, but the North-West frontier of India, in fact the Khyber; and quite the sort of country for Woodler's pictures."

“But you say you knew the man in the picture?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Jorkens, “I saw him once quite close, and I know his story.”

“Story? Story?” said Terbut, coming up the staircase behind us. “What? Another of them?”

We had had a good many stories from Jorkens during the last week; stories that I have not given to the public, on account of certain technicalities, trivial and unimportant in themselves, and yet requiring certain investigations before I am actually able to vouch for them.

“Yes, if you like,” said Jorkens. “I just happened to have met the shepherd in that picture.”

“You aren’t going to try to convert me or anything?” said Terbut.

“No, no,” said Jorkens, “too late for that. But I’ll tell you about the shepherd.”

“What about him?” said Terbut.

And then Jorkens started. “There was a time,” he said, “when I used to be rather keen on handling a business deal. There are a good many deals that are all put down in black and white upon paper, and are duly signed and witnessed, and done through the post. That was not so much the kind of deal I was interested in. All the more interesting deals, as it seemed to me, are the deals that more depend on a hint that one man lets drop, and that ultimately develop according to the way that the hint is taken up by some other man. That gives one a good large scope for employment of one’s initiative, and it was consequently the kind of deal that attracted me. It was a deal of that nature, between an Afghan gentleman, and a man in the City of London, whom I will not call exactly a gentleman, but who was none the worse for that, that took me once to the far end of the Khyber. As a matter of fact the deal never went through, as the London man got frightened at the way in which his clerk had been keeping his books; mere untidiness, I think; but it frightened him. Well, I was going along the Khyber in a car, with a man who knew the country, a man called Pieters, when we happened to see this man walk out of his house, the man in the picture, I mean. I was struck even then, at first sight, by his spiritual look, as he slipped out of his house with his rifle, and started up the pass with that quick glance in his face that told you he had a perfect eye for cover. And then Pieters told me his story. The house we had seen him come from was his home, and he lived there with two wives. I should perhaps describe the house to you: it was unmistakably two things; first of all it was a cottage, a cottage with a little yard at the back; its

size, its poverty, the chickens running about all over the yard, stamped it as obviously that: equally it was a castle; the wall of the yard was battlemented, the cottage ran to a little tower which had battlements too, and all the windows were loopholes. It was white-washed and stood by the road, an island of habitation in a desert savage with rock and heat and, but for the road, loneliness.

“Well, I said to Pieters, ‘That’s a fine-looking man.’

“And he said, ‘Yes. And it’s a fine coat he’s wearing.’

“And I looked and saw it was fur.

“‘A fur coat!’ I exclaimed. ‘And in this weather.’

“‘Yes,’ he said. ‘They call it a poshteen. They make them out of sheepskins. Their sheep aren’t woolly, they have brown hair like that. They sew them together with the bare skin on the outside, and ornament it with gay silk. That of course is a particularly fine one.’

“‘But why’s he wearing it in this weather?’ I asked.

“‘Well, that’s because he’s just got it,’ said Pieters. ‘He’s proud of it, you see. And proud of the way he got it.’

“‘How did he get it?’ I asked.

“‘Well, that’s quite a story,’ said Pieters. ‘You see, this isn’t England.’

“‘Well, I knew that. I shouldn’t have been engaged on that particular deal if it had been.’

“‘What was the deal?’” asked Terbut.

“‘Private business,’” said Jorkens.

“‘I see,’” said Terbut.

“‘So I said to Pieters, ‘Tell me the story.’

“And he told it me just as we passed Shargai on our left, a little fort that gave me the impression of an oven let into the side of the hill, or a lime-kiln, or something hot like that. After Shargai tiny huts of stone on the tops of the hills watch the road, one every two miles or so. Men in favour of civilization live in them, and enforce that curious creed as far as their rifles can carry, among the rocks of the Khyber, where it somehow seems as out-of-place as a daisy.

“‘You see he had two wives,’ Pieters said, ‘and they all lived in that white-washed hovel in squalor and poverty. They didn’t mind the squalor, but the wives got tired of the poverty. So they both began to goad him to go out with his rifle and get some sheep. One of them goaded him straight out to go and raid a flock from a neighbour, and the other indirectly, but with equal effect, told him that his wishes were her code of laws, even though he wished to live in unnecessary and undignified poverty.’ ”

“How did Pieters know what this man’s wives said to him?” asked Terbut.

“He wouldn’t tell me that,” replied Jorkens.

“No,” said Terbut thoughtfully.

“Well,” said Jorkens, “after a few weeks of this sort of thing, Abdullah; that was his name, it means the slave of God; got together two or three friends and went out and raided a flock of sheep, just as his wives had said. A short stalk, a little shooting, and the flock of sheep was his. Of course he divided them honourably with his friends. Now, it was just at this time, coming back with his flock of sheep, that Woodler, the artist, met him. Pieters actually saw the incident. Abdullah was striding by with the look of deep satisfaction on his face that came not only from the success of his raid, but from the knowledge that he would have peace in his cottage or castle at last, and Woodler was rushing towards him waving his arms and compelling him to see, by a superabundance of signs, that he must stop and be painted. At this time Woodler was not wearing his poshteen, but it was late in the evening by the time the painting was finished, as you can see from the picture; and Woodler must have unpacked his poshteen and put it on to keep warm, because the cold comes down very quickly, at sunset, up in the Khyber.

“Abdullah had sat, with his sheep all about him, just as you see in the picture, and with that look of serene satisfaction, bland on his face. That hundredth sheep, Pieters thinks, must have been the leader of another lot that one of Abdullah’s friends was bringing in. And everything would have been all right for Woodler, Pieters said, if it had not been for that poshteen. But Woodler was making a good deal of money in those days, and he had bought one of the best poshteens that they had in Peshawar, a marvel of work in pale-orange silk all over the sheepskins, and the long brown hair inside. It was very likely the labour of months. Whatever it was, Abdullah would have known the value of it better than poor Woodler, and was quite unable to resist the temptation to be clothed, himself, in its splendours. So he must



have shot Woodler, about the time that the picture was finished. At any rate Woodler was found without his coat, and with a bullet through his heart, and the famous picture there on its easel, all alone in the Khyber. As far as Woodler's reputation goes, the bullet came just at the right time, for he could never have improved that look on the face of the angel, or shepherd, or whatever you like to call him, and with any more work he would only have spoiled it, as artists often do."

"But what did they do to Abdullah?" Terbut asked.

"Well, you see," said Jorkens, "the unfortunate thing about that, was that it didn't happen on the road. The really unfortunate thing was that Woodler didn't know anything about the customs of the Khyber. Nobody shoots anybody on the road, whereas off the road it's quite different. He might as well have set up his easel on a main road in England, as off the road in the Khyber. If he sat on the tarmac in England he would of course be killed at once. But it's the other way round in the Khyber."

## Chapter 11

# THE NEAPOLITAN ICE

I HAVE had on other occasions to mention topics carefully chosen by members of the Billiards Club with the sole intent of steering conversation where Jorkens might be unable to follow. I do not refer again to this unsporting device with any intention of deprecating it, but only because it was the beginning of a story by Jorkens of an experience that may be of interest to such as care to study his somewhat unusual character. The topic at lunch-time on the day in question was Polar exploration. I will not record the conversation in any detail, because it was scarcely original; after all, there is no need to be original when you are discussing something at a club; for instance one of our members said: "It must be pretty hard to keep warm."

"Yes, it's damned hard," said Jorkens.

It was clearly on the tip of Terbut's tongue to say, "How do you know?" One could see that. But rather than risk letting Jorkens in with a story, he closed his lips again with the remark unsaid.

"You'd keep warm with whiskey, wouldn't you?" said one of us.

"Oh, I don't know," said Jorkens. "Whiskey's a rather overrated drink."

One of the things I like about Jorkens is the immensely surprising remarks that he sometimes makes.

"Whiskey overrated!" we said.

"Well, yes, compared to some drinks," said Jorkens.

"What, for instance?" said Terbut, who really wanted to know.

"For keeping you warm in ice and snow," said Jorkens, "and probably keeping off frostbite, I know nothing like a liqueur a man gave me once at a dinner in a little restaurant that there used to be in Punt Street: it's closed down long ago: there's a hair-cutter's shop there now. It was a wonderful drink, a drink like honey and roses and a very gentle fire, a cosy, quiet fire mildly flickering. I never knew anything like it. Unfortunately I don't know its name. He was a bit of a traveller, this man. I don't know where the bottle came from; the waiter brought it in, but I was never able to get another like it in that restaurant, or elsewhere; my host was very secretive about it. He

did not have it brought in till the end of dinner. It came in with the Neapolitan ice. I should like to have had a glass of it beside me all through dinner; so would any of you if once you had tasted it, as none of you have; but it only came in with the ices.” And Jorkens uttered a small sigh.

“Did you never find out the name of it?” asked Terbut a little greedily.

“Well, no,” said Jorkens. “It was all a matter of business. There was a business deal that this man was rather keen on; and he wanted to get my attitude just right, so he brought out this liqueur. There are a good many secrets in business, and this liqueur was one of them. As a matter of fact the fellow overdid it, and the deal never came off, but I had one wonderful drink. I should have liked a lot more of it; but they only brought it with the ices. It was a good dinner he gave me. Well, naturally; because he was pretty keen on this deal. We had turtle soup; fresh turtle, you know; red mullet; good enough in its way, only too many bones; and then we had hare; just the common hare, but they could cook it at that restaurant that there used to be in Punt Street. And really I think that was about all; and then the Neapolitan ice. Quite a small dinner; but good, you know.” And he saw Terbut about to interrupt, and turned to him and forstalled him with the remark: “Perhaps you don’t know a Neapolitan ice, Terbut.”

And Terbut took this to be an aspersion on his ignorance of the world that Jorkens had travelled so much, and blurted out, “Of course I do. It’s green and white and pink. The white is supposed to be vanilla, and of course the pink is strawberry; as for the green, I don’t quite know what that is, but . . .”

“We are not meant to,” said Jorkens.

“We are a long way from the Arctic,” Terbut retorted.

“I was about to tell you,” said Jorkens. “The liqueur came in with the ices. And the moment I put it down, it woke the imagination as I’ve known nothing else able to. It liberated the very spirit. I may have had two glasses; that I don’t remember. But that restaurant, Punt Street, all London, fell behind me almost immediately, and my imagination or spirit or whatever carries one’s ego, swept northward through England.”

“How did you know you were going northward?” asked Terbut.

“How did I know?” said Jorkens. “I could see. I was liberated; my spirit was free. I was far far up above England. I could see the shape of it, a long green belt going northwards, and Scotland too; green all the way until we came to the snow. I must have passed over that strip of six hundred miles of

green in a few seconds: that is how spirits travel. Of course the fellow had let me have too much: there was no more business in me now, I was above all that sort of thing, and far above earth. And I was sweeping northwards. The seas froze almost at once; and instead of white foam there was ice, and snow on the ice for miles, and hundreds of miles; and still I went northwards. And there was the Arctic with the sun on the snow, a beautiful thing to see, the most wonderful journey that I have ever made. But liberations like this are never for long. Scarcely had I seen the beauty of that enormous vista of Arctic, when I felt that my spirit was falling. And fall it did, rapidly. And soon I was lying in the snow. I had not been conscious of my body when I was up at that glorious height travelling faster than birds migrating; but I was conscious of it now in the snow. The glittering whiteness of it began to weary my eyes; and my lips were freezing, for I was lying face downwards. I, who some seconds before had been superior to gravity, was now unable even to lift my face, and I knew that my lips were freezing. After the pain came numbness, the first symptom of frostbite.”

“How could your lips be frostbitten,” said Terbut, “if they were still indoors in London?”

“Well, they may not have been quite,” said Jorkens; “but I went to a doctor next day, and he said that another three minutes would have been sure to have done it.”

“I can’t see how,” said Terbut.

“I’m only telling you what happened,” said Jorkens quite calmly. “The ice was shining on the surface of the snow, and that beautiful scene, as it had been a while before, was now an intense weariness. The glare of the ice in my eyes was wearying my brain, and I could not lift up my face from it. That’s the trouble with any drink; the more it lifts you up, the more it lets you down. But I had never been let down quite like that before: I could barely lift my eyes. But I lifted them, and I saw the Abendgluth, quite close and the snow all flushed with it. The white snow ended just by a ridge where my weary face was lying, and I saw the tremendous sight that they call the Abendgluth, on miles and miles of snow. It was worth while lying there with frozen lips only to see that everlasting wonder; miles and miles of rose-pink snow shining like dawn on earth; cold snow like a world-wide jewel, and a scent of strawberries.”

“Strawberries!” said Terbut. “You must have a powerful imagination if you can imagine strawberries in the Arctic.”

“Not at all,” said Jorkens. “It was just sheer fact. It wasn’t imagination at all. I was lying over the table with my face in the Neapolitan ice; I had slid over the green part, and my lips were on the vanilla, and just in front of my eyes was the strawberry end of it. The amount of strawberry of course in a strawberry ice varies according to the conscience of the man who makes it, and there was a distinct trace of strawberry in this one; but no vanilla.”

## Chapter 12

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RILLSWOOD ESTATE

A FEW of us at the Billiards Club one day were sitting in the bay window: no one that day had any particular idea as to what the Government ought to do, or what things were coming to, or indeed about any topic whatever; so we were looking out at the street. Not only had conversation drooped and then died away; but, as often happens when things are dull in the club, they seemed dull in the street too. I for one would not have watched the street at all if I had had anything else to do; and that, I think, was the feeling of all of us. It was dull, and dull people passed through it. And then came an open motor, and in it reclined a man with sun-tanned skin, sharp aquiline features, small grey beard and rather foreign expression, in a coat of luxurious fur; with a cigar in the fingers of his right hand and one large diamond shining on one of them. His passage through the street seemed to change its whole aspect: it was dull no longer. I turned to my next neighbour, who chanced to be Jorkens, to make some comment on this rare personality; and I saw as I turned that everyone else seemed a little stirred by him too.

“He’s gone up a lot in the world,” said Jorkens.

Was it envy that made him say this?

“Who?” I said in order to draw Jorkens.

“That fellow,” said Jorkens pointing to the man in the new car. “Satyrides, the Greek financier.”

I had heard the name. “Is that who he is?” I said.

“Yes,” said Jorkens. “He is not Greek really.”

“What is he?” two or three of us asked.

“I’ll tell you his story,” said Jorkens.

And there and then he did; and it only shows us that one can wander the countryside for years, and at the end of all that time find something one knew nothing about; or, as is very often the case, never find it at all.

“There was a painter called Meddin,” said Jorkens, “who lived in a very large cottage, or perhaps one should call it a farmhouse, a really delightful building covered with honeysuckle and built in the way they used to build in Kent, with large flints and mortar. It had a garden behind it, and beyond that a small orchard, and beyond the orchard a wood. Meddin’s property ended at the further edge of the orchard: the wood belonged to the Rillswood estate. Meddin lived there with his sister. All through the warm weather he used to sit and paint in the garden, until there was no light left. I think he preferred the dim gloaming to good light, as he did imaginative pictures and could fancy classical figures between the wood and his orchard more easily when the glare of day was gone. It is not easy to describe in words a picture painted with oils, but an evident love of trees and an interest in old mythology, that was showed by his dim figures, often haunting a wood, rather suggested Corot. He was not imitative; but, if he had a master during the last hundred years, Corot would have been the man. Even in actual fact there can have been few places pleasanter than that garden of Meddin’s, and in his pictures it was doubly delightful. And then they developed, as they call it, the Rillswood estate; and one day they began to cut the wood down. In a month it was all gone, and in two months bungalows were going up.

“At this time Meddin and his sister Lucy both began to notice scratchings in their lawn: buttercups were being scratched up and larger plants, and sometimes they saw a bulb, all white in the earth, that had been exposed by these scratchings and then left where it grew, as though whatever had laid it bare had been scared away before eating it. They put it down to a badger. And then the tulips, that they had in the orchard, began to be scratched up. Meddin and his sister went all round the garden and could find nothing. Sometimes they listened from their windows at night, and both distinctly heard noises. Then they talked it all over, and they decided that the best thing to do would be for Meddin to sit up later than usual in the garden, with a gun. They had a shotgun with which Meddin used to shoot pigeons, until the houses of the Rillswood estate began to grow round them, and the pigeons came no longer.

“‘But you mustn’t shoot it if it’s a fox,’ said Lucy.

“‘No, no, that would never do,’ said Meddin.

“All this, I may say, was more than thirty years ago, and the shooting of a fox would have meant the placing of the Meddins for the rest of their lives in a class or caste to which the nearest approach would perhaps be the Indian Untouchables.

“Whatever it was seemed to avoid the house, and the scratchings in the lawn were all on the far side, and there were more of them in the orchard, deep scratchings to uncover small roots, which had apparently been eaten. Meddin had never had any more exciting sport than shooting an occasional pigeon, and when he left the house with his loaded shotgun and crossed the lawn, all hushed except for the birds’ last songs coming from shrubs and hedge, I gather that some of those thrills that come to men who sit up at nightfall for tigers came as near to Meddin as they were ever to come. The mystery with which evening always leaves us, and the uncertainty of sport, helped to bring such feelings to Meddin in his villa-surrounded garden. He crossed the lawn to the orchard in the direction in which the scratchings were thickest, and a new look came to the apple-trees; for hitherto he had looked at them as an artist, and beyond them to catch fancies stealing out from the wood, but now he approached them as a hunter. The difference was immense, for the fancies that lurked on the orchard’s edge for the artist were all friendly, while he carried a gun for them now; and whatever haunted the evening seemed hostile to Meddin, as he was hostile to it. As an artist he would almost have wept at that hour to see all the solemnity and mystery that had haunted the wood gone, and all its beauty, and the very earth that the wood had enchanted lying bare and untidy; but as a man with a gun, looking for something that lurked, he felt glad that it had less hiding-place than it had a month ago, if only the whole evening, stealing swiftly towards night, were not hiding-place enough for anything that might lurk. He went cautiously to a rhododendron just at the edge of the orchard, and got into it and sat down on a small camp-stool he carried, and was pretty well hidden, but could see the orchard. Darkness came to the desolate land where the wood had been, and Meddin had not hidden in his rhododendron long, when he heard the sound of steps that seemed soft and heavy stealing amongst his apple-trees. He shoved forward the safety-catch of his gun, which his sister had told him, quite rightly, not to do until the very last moment, and peered through his leafy screen. Whatever was coming came from where the wood had been, but it kept so persistently behind apple-trees that, though Meddin could hear where it was, he could not catch a glimpse of it. It stopped to scratch up some roots from the earth, still hidden from view: Meddin knew which apple-tree was giving it covert, but could not move to see round it without disturbing the whole rhododendron, which must have scared whatever it was away. Then, when the thing had eaten whatever it had scratched up, it came forward again, slipping slowly round the apple-tree. Meddin says that he knew what it was the moment he saw it, though I don’t set much store by what men tell you afterwards about such moments as that. Anyway it was a satyr.”



“A satyr!” exclaimed Terbut, who was on the window-seat with us.

“Yes,” said Jorkens, “and a full-grown one. A young satyr, Meddin thought, but quite full-grown; and it was looking straight at Meddin from round the trunk of the apple-tree, as he hadn’t hidden himself very well.”

“Do you usually get satyrs in suburban gardens?” said Terbut.

“No,” said Jorkens, “that’s just the point of it. They live in woods. But this wood had been cut down; and the satyr had nowhere to go. When it first put its head round the apple-tree, Meddin says, its lips were twitching as though it were hungry. Then it saw him, and surprise spread over its face, and it gave a low whistle. Meddin’s first thought, as he put his gun down on the ground, was that he had got a model, such a model as even Corot had probably never had. But there were many more thoughts to come, thoughts that worried Meddin and his sister for weeks, until Lady Rillswood called.”

“How did she come into it?” asked Terbut.

“I’m getting ahead of my story,” said Jorkens. “The first thing was what on earth Meddin was to do with the satyr. It was cold and had no wood to go to; and he couldn’t leave it there in his garden, hiding behind apple-trees for one of the neighbours to find it, quite naked.

“The first to speak was Meddin. ‘Come here,’ he said. And the satyr whistled again. ‘Come here,’ repeated Meddin, ‘and don’t make that noise. Where do you come from?’

“‘The wood,’ said the satyr.

“‘What’s your name?’ asked Meddin.

“And the satyr laughed.

“‘Are you hungry?’ said Meddin.

“The satyr nodded quickly.

“‘What do you get to eat?’ asked Meddin.

“‘Roots,’ said the satyr.

“‘Out of my garden, I suppose,’ said Meddin.

“‘Yes,’ said the satyr. ‘They’re good.’

“It was many years before the B.B.C. spoke to everyone every evening, and the satyr’s accent was wild and beastly. But Meddin understood him.

“‘Where do you sleep?’ he asked.

“‘I hide,’ said the satyr.

“‘So I thought,’ said Meddin.

“And looking round he saw that there were few hiding-places left, now that the wood was gone, and it could not be many hours before someone would see the satyr. What was to be done? The question perplexed Meddin, for a reason that I find it rather hard to make clear. Briefly, then, at the dawn of this century there was a certain system of civilization in England, remnants of which still survive; and it had its definite rules. For instance, if a newcomer in any neighbourhood called first on an oldcomer, the act was classed with burglaries: nobody ever did call thus on an older resident, but, if anyone had, that is how it would have been looked on. That was one of the rules. The rules were not written out, because everyone knew them. And another of the rules, which everyone knew instinctively, but which was never even mentioned, let alone written, because no one ever contemplated a breach of it, was that you did not keep a satyr in your garden.

“‘Well, hide now,’ said Meddin. ‘You’d better get into this rhododendron bush, while I get you some clothes.’

“‘Don’t wear clothes,’ said the satyr.

“‘Then you don’t eat food,’ said Meddin.

“‘Roots?’ said the satyr.

“‘Yes, plenty of roots,’ said Meddin. For he had a heap of potatoes in a shed, and several tulip bulbs.

“So the satyr took a dive into the rhododendron, and Meddin went to get him some clothes.

“‘Lucy,’ he said when he got back to the house and found his sister waiting for news, ‘you know those things Corot used to put into his landscapes.’

“‘Satyrs?’ she said.

“‘Yes,’ replied Meddin. ‘I wonder if he ever saw one.’

“‘No,’ said Lucy, ‘they’re all nonsense.’

“‘Well, there’s one in the garden now,’ said her brother.

“‘In the garden now?’ said Lucy.

“‘Yes,’ said Meddin, ‘in the rhododendron. And it’s only a matter of time before one of the neighbours will see it.’

“Lucy saw at once that her brother really meant it, so she saved time on exclamations or wonder, and got her mind instantly to the thing that really mattered, which was to protect the respectability of their garden. If a neighbour should see that satyr, or even anything half so odd, she knew that their house would not be a place at which anybody would call. And if no one called on you; well, you would not be much better than this thing, whatever it was, in the garden. They must hide the satyr; that was clear to both of them; or the satyr would drag them down.

“‘No clothes of course,’ said Meddin.

“‘No,’ said Lucy.

“‘We’ve got that old suit that Thomas had.’

“For they had had an odd man to do the work of the house, but had sent him away for economy. Such fluctuations depended upon the sale of pictures. And now they had only a cook, and a charwoman occasionally.

“They got the old suit out, and some hyacinth bulbs, that had been intended for pots in a window, and were the nearest roots to hand: Meddin knew they were edible, because pheasants had come to his garden in the days of the wood and had always gone for those bulbs. And with the suit of clothes and a handful of bulbs he went back to the rhododendron. The boots of his former employé had walked away with that odd man, so Meddin had to bring an old pair of his own. He hoped that the rule would apply to the satyr that seemed to apply to tramps, which was that any pair of old boots always fitted. And so it fortunately did. But he had the greatest difficulty with the suit of clothes; for not only had the satyr never put on any clothes before, but the breeches were tight for him. Well, he got them on eventually, and back they came to the house and Meddin took the satyr straight up to his room and said: ‘Now shave off that beard.’

“But he might just as well have told a goat to shave, as of course he soon realized; and then he shaved off the satyr’s small pointed beard himself and carefully clipped the tufts from the tops of his ears, while the satyr munched the bulbs.

“‘I expect you’d have got many already if I’d planted them out in the garden,’ said Meddin as he pointed at the last of his hyacinth bulbs, which was already sprouting.

“‘Yes,’ said the satyr. ‘They’re good.’

“Then they came downstairs to the parlour, the satyr hobbling uncomfortably, for of course no boots could have really fitted him; boots

were for him a concealment, not a fit. He wanted to take them off, but curtly received from Meddin the words that he heard so often at this period that at a later date he took them for his motto: 'It can't be done.'

“‘What do you think of him now?’ said Meddin to Lucy. And to the satyr, ‘This is my sister.’

“Lucy held out her hand to the satyr, and he licked it. That was only one of a thousand things that they taught him not to do later. They brought him into the dining-room there and then, and taught him to hand them dishes while they had supper; and from that very hour they both of them concentrated on hiding away all traces by which the neighbours might guess that they kept a satyr. Their work was difficult and, though they got an odd man for no wages, who seemed delighted to work for them and who could be fed on much cheaper roots than the bulbs of tulips and hyacinths, it would have been a relief to get rid of him. But whenever the question of sending him back arose, as at first it often did, there came the answer at once, ‘But the wood is gone.’ So they kept their secret and lived in perpetual fear, either because they were too kind-hearted to get rid of the satyr, or because they couldn't think of a way to do it.

“One day when Lucy was not in the room Meddin said to the satyr: ‘Were there any nymphs in the wood?’

“‘Oh, yes,’ said the satyr.

“‘What happened to them?’ asked Meddin.

“‘They ran,’ said the satyr and began to cry, so that Meddin could get no more information about them.

“It had dog-like gratitude and was perpetually willing, so that they were even able to teach it to make tea for them, though it was always afraid of fire. As for appearance, which counted so much in those days, as to some extent it does still, its clumsiness in boots, and the tight breeches, were drawbacks, but on the other hand its face was distinctly handsome, and its eyes were alert and so were most of its movements. With the beard gone and the ears clipped there was only the light-brown skin to hint that this was a creature of the woods, and it was barely a hint.

“I gather there was tension and strain on the two Meddins for some time; and then one anxious day the Vicar's wife called. They saw her at the door ringing the bell.

“‘It is Mrs. Speldridge,’ said Lucy.

“‘What shall we do?’ said Meddin.

“‘Make it answer the door,’ said Lucy. ‘It’s got to start somewhere. And look here, we must stop calling it it.’

“So the satyr opened the door and did it quite well, asking, as they had taught it to ask, ‘Who shall I say?’ in its forest accent. And then it brought in tea, carrying everything in with the grace which goes with strength.

“‘Our man is always basking in the sun, Mrs. Speldridge,’ said Meddin.

“‘Whenever we let him off for a moment,’ said Lucy, ‘he always goes out and basks.’

“‘I haven’t seen him in church,’ said Mrs. Speldridge.

“‘Of course he must go,’ said Meddin.

“‘Yes, of course,’ said Lucy.

“‘I was wondering,’ said Mrs. Speldridge, and she launched out into a parochial matter, and the talk was for a while of bazaars and of Lady Rillswood, who ran them, and the satyr came in and out two or three times, doing just as he had been told; and everything went well. And when it showed Mrs. Speldridge out, always turning towards her, as one should to a lady, in spite of the tight breeches she saw no sign of a tail.

“And so the Meddins were left over the remnants of tea in triumph. It was perhaps more wonderful that there had been no suspicion in their own kitchen; but they had not expected there would be, and they were right. They knew Mrs. Smew’s attitude to any man in the kitchen: with every odd man they had had, it was always the same.

“‘What do you think of him?’ Lucy had asked her straight out, the day after the satyr came.

“‘Looks like the devil, and probably is,’ said Mrs. Smew and went on with her work.

“It was just the same attitude she had taken with Thomas, when he had worn those breeches; and Lucy was satisfied. That she was satisfied did not mean that the fear had entirely lifted. I think I mentioned that at the beginning of this century you could not possibly keep a satyr in your garden. They were keeping one in the house; and had he not been so docile, so grateful and so obedient, but had gone about in the village, as other odd men did, discovery would have come immediately. There is a great deal to be said for convention; and I am not at all sure that it would not save the world

from the disasters that seem to be coming. There was only one convention in those days really; the convention that you did the thing that was done, and that nothing else was possible. But the convention grew old and wore out, or the world grew too strong for it. Of course there were exceptions, and here was one of them, two people on whom the Vicar's wife called once a year hiding a common satyr in the house. Never a day passed but that the Meddins talked it all over; and they never found a way of getting rid of their satyr, and they never felt quite safe."

"I don't know that people objected to satyrs so much at the end of the Victorian era," said Terbut, who was quite as old as Jorkens. "You see satyrs in every kind of ornament, and in hundreds of pictures of that period. You mentioned Corot yourself."

"Yes," said Jorkens. "But satyrs at a distance, satyrs far away among willows, as Corot painted them, satyrs high up on walls, or in poems or fanciful pictures, satyrs as fabulous things. But here was one in the house, opening the door for you, handing round plates. That is quite a different thing. There are many romantic things that cannot be tolerated for a moment in a parlour; certainly not in a parlour to which a vicar's wife would ever come again if they were, or any of her husband's parishioners. And, you know, there was a great deal to be said for their point of view. Well, here they were, Meddin and his sister, with their problem, and they would have done well to have concentrated all their attention on it, for to hide that satyr was not an easy problem. And for a while they did concentrate all their attention upon it; and then one day the artist broke out in Meddin and he insisted on painting the satyr. It was a risky business, whatever way you looked at it: first of all there was the danger of being found out while at it, for of course he stripped the satyr, and he painted it out in his orchard. And then there was the evidence that the picture provided against the Meddin household; for anybody could see that the picture was done from life, and quite close, and that it was no imaginary thing such as a fanciful painter might put into one of his landscapes. Lucy implored him not to do it, but Meddin was adamant: he had seen the light one day on the satyr's skin, and had formed the idea that he must paint him at all costs. And paint him he did. He got him hidden by a trunk in the orchard, the great bole of an old tree, and only went out with the satyr to paint late in the evening. The little dark beard of course had to go in from memory, but the dim light on the satyr's skin and on the mossy trunk beside him made a picture that would have been hung in any exhibition, had Meddin dared to show it. He noticed in those evenings that birds on their way home had no fear of the satyr, and

would go as close to him as they would to a horse, and stay there undisturbed, till they saw Meddin.

“To avoid tiring the satyr by keeping it standing too long Meddin used to allow it, or him, as they now called it, to grub up bulbs for a bit, so long as he kept himself hidden. Lucy all that time was full of alarm and implored her brother never to paint the satyr again, and when the picture was finished he gave the promise that she had found it impossible to cajole him to give her before.

“The brother and sister discussed the question of food for the satyr.

“‘I’d like to extend his range of diet a bit,’ said Meddin. ‘We owe him a bit more than tulip-bulbs for all the work he is doing for us.’

“For he worked in the garden for them as well as in the house, and cut up wood for the fire and carried in buckets of water.

“‘It’s not our tulip-bulbs that I grudge him,’ said Lucy. ‘It’s our respectability. It’s everything. Who would ever call on either of us again if they knew that we kept a satyr?’

“‘Oh, that’s all right,’ said Meddin. ‘He isn’t a satyr any longer.’

“‘Isn’t a satyr?’ said Lucy.

“‘Not in those trousers,’ said Meddin. ‘And not unless Mrs. Speldridge says he is.’

“‘Someone will see him one of these days,’ she said, ‘slinking about in the orchard, and they’ll see what he is, and say that we keep a satyr.’

“‘No, no, they won’t,’ said Meddin reassuringly. But he felt the fear too.

“Noticing some resemblance in the satyr’s habits to those of the badger, Meddin decided to try him with honey; and this, provided that it was offered him in the comb, the satyr ate with delight.

“‘He must have a name, of course,’ said Meddin.

“‘He has got Thomas’ clothes,’ said Lucy; ‘he can have his name too.’

“‘I’ll tell him,’ said Meddin.

“So the satyr became Thomas. He worked all day; he waited at table, cleaned up after, washed Meddin’s brushes in turpentine and then in soap and water, did everything that used to be done by the charwoman, looked after the garden; in fact did the work of two men and two women, and all for no wages. Yet Meddin had to work too. For instance he could not trust the

thing with a razor, and dare not let its hair grow; so he shaved the satyr every morning himself. And all the while Meddin and Lucy were constantly inventing devices that should prevent the neighbours from finding out the secret their house hid. And it's all very well to be critical of those people's conventions, but I doubt if many of you would care to call at a house in which they kept a perfectly wild satyr; for, however much they had dressed him and shaved him, you don't alter the character of any woodland thing by keeping it for a few days in a house. More than once during those days Lucy had said: 'I only wish we could take him back to a wood.'

"And Meddin had replied: 'There aren't any left.'

"'We could find one further off,' insisted Lucy.

"'Oh, we can't get rid of Thomas,' Meddin said.

"'I suppose not,' said Lucy, and sighed. And the clouds of anxiety that hope had lifted for a few seconds came down upon her again. And Meddin was under the same cloud too. They did not often travel beyond the village of Rillswood, and had nowhere to go if they did. If Rillswood refused to call on them, they could be exiled as well in their garden as in the remote lands to which Romans or Greeks sent their exiles. And they knew well enough that a house that kept a satyr was not a house on which Rillswood people would call. And so things were for some days, uncertain and full of anxieties. Those warm Spring evenings, and the birds singing happily, gave no hint of the fears that hid in the hearts of the Meddins. And then one day the thunderbolt seemed to be over their heads. A note for Lucy came by hand after breakfast. It asked if Lady Rillswood would find them in, if she came to tea that afternoon. Lady Rillswood was the widow of the man who had bought the Rillswood estate, which she was now developing. She was good-looking and energetic; indeed she had ample energies for all the activities that the village of Rillswood needed, and all these she largely directed. She did not admit to being forty, nor did she look it. Rumour spoke often of her re-marriage, but, with a curious deficiency in anything so well-informed as rumour, it had never yet named a new husband. She loomed as a thunderbolt threatening to ruin the Meddins, because not only had Lady Rillswood travelled widely, but she had actually all round her in her house all kinds of antique marbles; and Lucy knew well enough and so did Meddin, that, however simple Mrs. Speldridge might be, Lady Rillswood would know a satyr the moment she saw one. And if Lady Rillswood gave up calling on them that would be the exile I spoke of. I do not mean that it would have mattered if she had not called on them for ten years, but if she had any reason for not doing so, that reason would get out, and no one else



in Rillswood would go near them. Well, they drilled the satyr the whole morning, and after they had had lunch they felt more easy about him. So willing, alert and active was he, and even intelligent in a woodland sort of way, that but for the tight breeches and the very alien profile and the tanned skin, he would have seemed the perfect servant; and, after all, the profile was a very fine one and the sun-tanned skin was handsome, if only it did not remind people of a satyr. This is how Meddin summed it all up to Lucy as tea-time drew near: ‘She’s got to notice him first, then she’s got to see what he is, and then she’s got to prove it.’

“But comfort that was not real was rejected by Lucy. ‘She’ll only have to say it,’ she said. ‘No one will ask Lady Rillswood to prove it.’

“This was true, for it was not only that she owned all Rillswood, but she actively worked all its committees and leagues, so much that neither of the Meddins knew for what purpose she was coming to see them; nor did they ever find out for certain.

“ ‘She’ll not notice Thomas,’ said Meddin again.

“And then Lady Rillswood arrived. And the first thing they saw was that her eyes were fixed on the satyr, as it showed her into the parlour. Then it had to bring in the tea; but the moment that Lucy heard the step of the satyr she turned to Lady Rillswood and said, ‘We think that my brother does such clever pictures. But we are afraid that they might not interest you. But we would be so glad if you cared to look at them.’

“Lady Rillswood did not run all Rillswood by not being interested in things that her neighbours had to show. She got up at once and was away with Meddin before the satyr returned to the room. Suddenly a dark thought came to Lucy: could Alfred (that was her brother) be trusted to keep the new picture hid? She rose, and hurried after them. Lady Rillswood was charmed with all the pictures she saw; and then she turned to one with its face to the wall saying, ‘And may I see that one?’

“ ‘Oh, that one’s unfinished, Lady Rillswood,’ said Lucy.

“And Lady Rillswood turned away, seeing by Lucy’s attitude, and hearing by the tone of her voice, before she had finished her sentence, that she did not want that picture to be looked at. She was walking out of the studio. And then Meddin blurted out: ‘Oh, that one. I really think you might like it. The light of a late evening on brown skin. And an apple-tree too, an old one with lichen on it. I think you might like it.’

“And he went to the picture.

“‘I think,’ said Lucy, but she found no more to say, and felt that she stood upon the edge of her world, and that the edge was crumbling. The words checked Meddin, but his hand had already gone to the canvas, and he saw no way of telling Lady Rillswood that he did not mean to show it her after all.

“‘The light, you see,’ he said, ‘on . . .’

“‘Yes, charming,’ said Lady Rillswood.

“Then they came back to the parlour. Meddin watched his guest at the tea-table, and her eyes seemed full of thought. He could not make out whether she knew or not. But to Lucy one thing was certain, and that was that if Lady Rillswood saw the satyr again, after seeing that picture, any doubts that she might yet have would be gone for ever. And she could not think of any means of keeping Thomas out of the way in their little house. And so she sat there helpless. Meddin, from whom I had a full account of all this, has not the slightest remembrance of what they talked of all tea-time, but he remembers very vividly that all the time he was wondering when the satyr would next appear. And then Lady Rillswood said, ‘If I might ask for my carriage.’

“And there was nothing to do but to ring the bell. And the satyr came hopping in. Lady Rillswood took one glance at him. Worse than that, it turned its back on her; or at any rate allowed her to see behind it, the tight breeches and the trace of its tail. Meddin saw that, and Lucy saw it, and both knew Lady Rillswood knew everything.

“Lady Rillswood said goodbye to them both with all her usual charm. Then they sat there looking greyly into the future, barely speaking a word to each other.

“I think it’s good for people to look at ruin sometimes, and then to turn away from the dark chasm to find all the world more radiant, as Alfred and Lucy did.”

“What happened?” I asked Jorkens, for he was sitting quite silent.

“She married it almost at once,” said Jorkens.

“Who? What?” said Terbut.

“Lady Rillswood married the satyr,” said Jorkens. “I believe she was extraordinarily happy with him, till she died three or four years ago. And, as for him, you saw it go by just now.”

## Chapter 13

### THE FANCY MAN

WE were talking one day in the Billiards Club, as we often do, about nothing in particular, when the conversation took a turn towards unselfishness in general. If everyone lived an unselfish life, we said, the world would derive advantages which we were about to describe; when Jorkens joined in.

“Have any of you had your very spirit laid bare,” he asked, “to the lash of a ferocious tongue, till you felt that your immortal soul was only fit for the ash-pit?”

“Well, I don’t think,” one of us was beginning, “that I quite . . .”

And Jorkens said: “Well, I have, and it was on an occasion when I was doing a really unselfish thing, something solely for the good of another person, from which I could gain no possible advantage, and over which I took a great deal of trouble; and that’s what I got for it. And it taught me to be rather careful about interfering in other people’s affairs. Unselfishness is all very well, but that’s what it taught me. I don’t say I’ve never done things that people might find fault with; but I do say that never in my life have I had such a slating. I can tell you, I could almost hear my soul whimper. I never felt so worthless and derelict; and all because I’d blundered along behind an unselfish impulse. It took me days of hard work, and that’s what I got for it. That is all I got for it, and I can tell you, that if any of you had ever heard anything like it, you’d have felt as worthless and miserable as I did myself. It was really . . .”

“Tell us about it,” said one of us.

“Well,” said Jorkens, “do you know Upper Lipfold Street? No. Well, it’s a very ordinary street, a bit north of the Park, and some people I know used to live there, some people called Anwell. I often used to look in for a cup of tea. Yes, just ordinary tea. And one day I looked in a bit later than usual, a little after six, and stayed perhaps twenty minutes, one autumn evening; when, just as I was about to go, I heard a low sound like wailing, that seemed to come from the next house, a quiet moaning that never rose any louder. Soft though it was, it penetrated the evening, clear to the room in which we were having tea, and, in gaps in our conversation, was unmistakable moaning. None of my friends in that house took any notice of

it. That's queer, I thought; queer as the sound itself. And they certainly took no notice, and went on talking again. The fading light of the evening, the queer sound, and the odd way in which it passed in that room without comment, impressed me almost as much as a ghost might have done. At first I didn't like to refer to anything which the Anwells made so obvious a point of not noticing; but in the end my curiosity got the better of me, and I asked one of the girls straight out what the noise was. And over the puddles of cold tea in the cups, and scraps of broken buns, they all told me this story.

“‘Oh, that,’ said the first girl. ‘That’s the woman next door.’

“‘Miss Ellington,’ said another.

“‘Yes,’ said my hostess, ‘I’m afraid she always does it at this time of the evening.’

“‘Of course it’s earlier as the year grows later,’ said another of the daughters. And soon their comments blended into the main thread of her story, which was a very simple one. And this is what it was. A man had deserted her. I never quite knew when, for I only made out the story from the various separate comments. And I never knew how far the affair had gone. They were certainly never married. But evidently it had gone far enough. He had deserted her, and she remembered him still, especially at evening, when light is divided between gloaming and lamps, which I guessed was perhaps the time when they used to meet. I was rather horrified by the completeness of the brief story, or account, as I gathered it from remarks rising here and there round the tea-table, and by the matter-of-fact way in which they took it, and above all by the fact that no one had rushed to help this unhappy woman, living alone next door with I think two servants.

“‘But how did it happen?’ I asked.

“‘He went abroad,’ said Mrs. Anwell finally.

“‘And I could see that they all accepted this as an irrevocable act.

“‘But did he marry someone else?’ I asked.

“‘No,’ they said. ‘No, I don’t think he married.’

“‘Only went abroad?’ I asked.

“‘Yes, he went abroad,’ they said.

“‘But good gracious,’ said I, ‘abroad isn’t another planet. The world’s mapped and there are railways round it, and such things as cables and

telegraphs. Good heavens! he ought to be found.'

" 'He is abroad,' they said.

" 'But what's his name?' I asked.

" 'And they told me that. It was Bannesley.

" 'But what did he do?' I asked.

" 'He was an engineer, they told me.

" 'But what kind of an engineer?'

" 'An electrical engineer, they thought.

" 'Well,' I said, 'then he isn't living in the wilds of Africa. He is in a civilized country, and he is in a town. There is nothing for an electrical engineer to do in the Sahara, or in the swamps of the Nile. He can be traced, and he ought to be.'

" 'And that didn't seem to have occurred to any of them. Well, I got quite worked up about it: it was their apathy that stung me as much as anything: the thing had been going on for years, and they had done nothing about it. One of them knew someone who had actually seen the man, and I got his description from her, tall and upright, with a neat rather bright moustache, blue eyes and a plausible way with him. Well, I determined to find him and show him what he had done, and make him put it right somehow. And I blustered out of the house, contemptuous of their apathy. And yet they were right; one can't interfere with other people's affairs in the way that I was going to do.

" 'Well, I had two things to do, now that I was committed to my wild scheme; one was to get an introduction to Miss Ellington, and the other was to find Bannesley. I really found the first the harder job of the two, but eventually I got to know some people that knew her. And I called there and had tea with her quite early. She was tall and dark and good-looking, and had eyes that seemed sad with thought; but she was perfectly sane, and of course I made a point of leaving before the twilight came on.

" 'Bannesley, I had gathered from the Anwells, was clever; so I reasoned that he would not have worked at his electrical engineering without making some sort of a name that, though unknown to the rest of us, would not be unknown to every electrical engineer. For this reason I went to the one electrical engineer that I knew, and asked him if he had ever heard of Bannesley. He said he had not, but that he would enquire at his club, a club whose members were mostly engineers. And for a while that got me no

further, for my friend said that no one he knew in his club seemed to have heard of Bannesley, so that my hint that he should invite me to his club fell upon barren ground. What he did do, however, was to tell me the name of a little restaurant, where electrical engineers often had lunch. Other people went there too; but all through London there are little places like this, whose clientele is mainly one thing or another; with some it is painters, with some it is journalists, with others there is a sprinkling of young poets; and so on. With Hiro's it was electrical engineers. So to Hiro's I went. The place was dingy and small, the waiters were friendly, and the food was extremely good. And there I had my lunch every day for a month. I got to know a good many engineers in that time, and none of them seemed to have heard of the name of Bannesley. And by the end of the month I had got to know the proprietor, whose habit it was to go to one or two tables each day, to see that his guests were getting on all right; and by the end of a year he would get to know everyone who frequented his restaurant, and to know most of them pretty well. It was he that I asked one day if any traveller or foreigner among his customers had ever mentioned the name of Bannesley. And he said: 'Bannesley? Why, Bannesley. Yes, he used to come here.'

"At last I was on the track.

"'Do you know what country he went to?' I asked the proprietor.

"'Bannesley?' he said. 'He lives in Oland Street.'

"'What? In London?' I asked.

"'Yes, that's where he lives,' said he; 'in Oland Street; about half way up among the even numbers. But what do you want with him?'

"'I want to see him,' I said.

"'He's not much to see,' said the proprietor.

"And then he went over to another table, at which one of his old customers had just sat down.

"So that you see that, after a month of conversation with various men, all aimed at the same point and all perfectly vain, I had suddenly found out what I wanted to know. And Oland Street was no more than half a mile away from me. I was a little puzzled by the proprietor's remark that my fancy man was not much to see; but I could not trouble with any more questions a busy man, for he ran that little restaurant very personally. In any case I had found out all that I wanted to know.

“There are only eighty doors in Oland Street. So of even numbers there are only forty; and I started at number 18. I had only enquired at three doors, when I came to the lodging of Bannesley. Oland Street, if you know it, is not much to look at; I mean on the outside. But inside, the passages into which one looked when any of those three doors was opened were dingy and dark and untidy; and the passage of 22 led to a dingier staircase. Up this I was showed three flights by the maid, of whom I had asked of Bannesley. She knocked at the door, and a voice rather weary and cross said ‘Come in’; and just as the door opened there seemed, though it may have been fancy, to stray from the room a drifting puff of its atmosphere, that chilled either body or spirit—I don’t know which. It carried both dust and damp, that don’t usually float together, and the odour of stale tobacco; and I shivered as I went in; though whether the shiver came from the stale damp touching my skin or from a certain feeling of ruin that may have oppressed the soul, I don’t know, as I told you.

“ ‘Gent to see you,’ said the maid and withdrew.

“And there was this man Bannesley, with a pen that on closer view was all corroded, which he was lifting out of an inkpot, as he turned his head towards us from the table at which he sat on a cheap chair. A heap of closely-written notepaper looked very like begging letters. And the table was as old and melancholy as the chair, and the ink seemed to have shrunk down to the very bottom of the inkpot and to be slowly turning solid. It would be more to the point perhaps to describe Bannesley to you. Well, he was just the figure that cast these shadows; the damp and the stale tobacco, the shrivelling ink and the corroded pen, the bare boards and the untidiness seemed emanations of the dejected spirit that looked at me through the eyes that were turned my way, blue eyes among red rims. I could not tell how old he was; that depended on the pace at which alcohol works, and of course it varies immensely. Yes, that was his trouble. There were one or two ragged white patches in the moustache that had been auburn, and his face was thick with the fat that does not come from eating; and he looked wearily at me and said, ‘What is it?’

“Well, what was it? All my plans crashed on that undusted floor. Was I to bring this ragged object into a decent house, to comfort any woman? Let alone to the altar. Why, the beadle would hardly have let him into the church.

“ ‘Well, the fact is,’ I said, ‘I’ve come to the wrong room.’

“And as I spoke a new plan flashed into my head; and I thought it a gorgeous plan and believed I would save Miss Ellington.

“‘But you’re Mr. Bannesley, aren’t you?’ I added at once.

“‘Yes,’ he said wearily. ‘What is it?’

“‘A friend of mine wanted to see you,’ I said, ‘and I’ll tell you when we get there.’

“And then I thought of making an appointment; but there was something so shifty about him that I did not trust him to keep any appointment, and besides that, I didn’t know where his memory would be when the next drinking-bout came up; it might be gone like a fully-opened flower under a thunderstorm. So I asked him to come with me there and then, casually adding, ‘We might have a drink on the way.’ Well, if you went to hell to look for a soul you’d probably have to get a devil to bring it to you; and in the same way I drove Bannesley to Upper Lipfold Street in charge, as it were, of a drink. Miss Ellington was in: I don’t believe she ever went out. It was about four o’clock, and the maid said she would see us. I hurried Bannesley upstairs behind the maid, and arm-in-arm we were shown into Miss Ellington; and I just said to her, ‘I have brought Mr. Bannesley,’ leaving her to see for herself the kind of creature he was. And then two things surprised me. The first of them was that this man for whom Miss Ellington had been wailing away her life did not even recognize her; and, as he had not caught her name when I spoke to the maid at the door, he did not know who she was. And the other thing that surprised me was, that the girl gazed and gazed at him and never spoke. Bannesley was silent because he did not know what was happening, and was probably too fuddled to find out. And I was silent because her own silence awed me. And this went on for a long time, and still she gazed at Bannesley. And, when it seemed that it would never end, I just turned to Bannesley and said, ‘That’s enough;’ and I turned him round with my left hand and, putting my right between his shoulder-blades, I shoved him out of the room, and shut the door. She raised a hand for an instant as though to stop him; then dropped it hopelessly, as though knowing from old experience that she had no power to keep him. I heard him shuffle away, and the street door slammed.

“‘Now,’ I said to her, ‘you see what he has fallen to. Now you see the creature he is. May I implore you, Miss Ellington, not to waste one more of your charming thoughts on so depraved a waster.’

“And that’s where I got my thanks. That’s where the gratitude was shown to me for my absolutely and purely unselfish work for two months,



when I had thought of nothing else but Miss Ellington's good. She turned on me and she spoke to me. She told me that I had interfered with her most sacred emotions; which was true. She told me that I was jealous of a better man; which was not. She told me that I was utterly unworthy to black Bannesley's boots; and I only thought afterwards that I might have said that nobody had done that for a month. But I could think of nothing under the lash of her tongue. She was only beginning. She said that nothing that was noble or manly or cultured could be sacred to me; that I myself, at my best, was all that I had called Bannesley; and that my best was far behind me. She compared me for five minutes with that drunken wreck, and the whole time unfavourably. Heavens! If I had turned to drink as that man Bannesley did, I would have been dead long ago, like him. But I wanted a drink after that, and I want one now."

"Waiter," I said, and called for what was needed; but it was some while before Jorkens' cheery nature shone out again through the memory of what had been said to him, when his guiding hand had so hopefully strayed to the tiller of a rudder already lashed.

## Chapter 14

# THE LION AND THE UNICORN

WE had heard no story from Jorkens at the Billiards Club for some considerable time. For one thing he had been sleeping a good deal more after lunch, and for another we have all of us been a good deal occupied lately, deciding among ourselves what the Government ought to do. And then one day a rather noisy young fellow, who had got hold of some sort of humorous picture of a lion and a unicorn fighting, practically woke up Jorkens to say to him, "I suppose you have often seen that sort of thing."

Jorkens took the paper with the representation of the two animals standing on their hind legs, adorned, if I remember rightly, with boxing-gloves, and looked at it for a while in disapproving silence.

Then, "That's not the way a lion fights," he said.

"Oh, doesn't he?" mumbled the young member.

"No," said Jorkens. "What the lion does is to get as low down to the ground as he can and then crawl along very slowly through the grasses; very slowly indeed. Of course there are always long grasses where lions live, for without plenty of grass there would be no antelopes, and without antelopes there's no lion. For a good deal of the time he is quite motionless; just watching. And then his opportunity comes. When that happens he makes a rush, and anything within fifty yards of him then is too late to start. You can gallop past him well within fifty yards, and he won't catch your horse; but anything standing still within that distance, once he has started his rush, will never gallop again. Of course he tires fairly soon, but within that first fifty yards there is no more fatigue in him than there is in an arrow in the early part of its flight. He is a pretty fast beast. Well, when he comes up with whatever he is after he doesn't go about with his head up like that: he goes on his hind legs certainly, but he gets one paw on a shoulder and another perhaps on the nose, and has his jaws down on to the animal's neck. That neck is pretty soon broken; and away the lion goes, dragging his dinner home."

"What kind of animal does he do that to?" I asked Jorkens; for I wanted to get the picture clear in my mind.

“Oh, any animal,” said Jorkens, “except a rhinoceros, which he rather avoids; and of course he has nothing to say to an elephant. But he will kill even a buffalo that way, and as for the roan, the oryx or any great antelope, they are no more than mice to him; no more than mice would be if he were a common cat, which in many ways he resembles. He goes straight for the shoulder, instead of prancing about as he is in that absurd drawing, then leans forward and snaps the neck. Sometimes when he meets with man he is a little puzzled for the sixteenth part of a second, making out where the shoulder is, up there in the air where we keep it, instead of putting it under the weight of the forward part of the body. I think he delays that long sometimes, before making his last spring. And that gives a man time to insure that it will be his last; or it may not, according to the man. That’s how a lion fights; and a very short fight it usually is; not a stroll round like this.”

And he handed back the paper.

“But, Jorkens,” said the young man, “you haven’t told us how the unicorn fights.”

“The unicorn,” said Jorkens. “The unicorn. The unicorn merely waits and dodges the lion, by stepping aside just at the right moment. He is quicker than the lion, you see. He has to be, or there wouldn’t be any unicorns. And that frightful rush carries the lion past him. Of course the lion whips round and tries again; and the same thing happens. Gradually the lion gets angry, and out of breath. And the more out of breath he is, the more in a hurry he is to finish off the unicorn. His rushes get shorter and shorter, and his judgment weaker as he gets more and more heated. Of course if he didn’t get the unicorn with that first rush from the grasses; and he never does; he is not going to get him when he is hot and flustered and angry. And still the unicorn’s stepping back, always at the right moment; and all the time he is waiting. After a while the high grasses are all beaten down around them, because the lion is always making his rush from a different point, owing to the unicorn moving slightly; so that you get a very good view of the fight, if you happen to be anywhere near. Sometimes the lion gives short snarling barks, but he doesn’t waste his time roaring. And then there comes the panting lumbering rush that the unicorn has been waiting for, and which he knows will be the lion’s last. The unicorn steps back as he stepped before, but instead of dancing away after that step, with a swerve like a horse shying, he comes forward again with his horn. The two movements are as neat as two flashes of lightning, one following the other closely, upon a summer’s night. And that horn is through the ribs of the lion and touching his other side. Any man who has seen that thrust must have good eyesight.”

Noticing that Jorkens' mouth had been getting a little dry as he talked, I called to a waiter who was wandering near; and Jorkens was soon correcting the slight inconvenience.

One of us had shot lions in Africa. He was sitting a little way off, and was making remarks in an undertone to one or two members near him. I did not hear what he said, and nor did Jorkens. I thought that Jorkens had no more to say and that he would soon go to sleep again. But he looked up from the glass that I had been instrumental in bringing him, and said in a bright clear voice: "Many a man comes home with a lion-skin with a neat round hole through the side, which he says was made by a bullet. You can take your choice. You can believe him or me."

The lion-hunter had no more to say, and Jorkens returned to his sleep.

## Chapter 15

### A DOUBTFUL STORY

FRANKLY, I disbelieve this story. I tell it merely as a tale, and not as a chronicle of an actual event that occurred in the varied life of Jorkens. Do not misunderstand me: there is no falsehood involved on the part of Jorkens, as I look at it. It is simply that he has been perpetually vexed by annoying suggestions of doubt: trivial exceptions have been taken to incidents in his tales, absurd arguments have been put forward to disprove them and, though in every case without success, they have irritated Jorkens. Many of these doubts were only uttered by way of a joke, but once the thing became a joke it repeated itself, as jokes often do, and to disbelieve Jorkens in the Billiards Club was held by some to be funny. Well, as I look at it, Jorkens one day said to himself: "If they are so damned incredulous I'll give them something to be incredulous about." So when a young fellow called Piffen, speaking about a werewolf, said to Jorkens, "I suppose you've seen odder things than that;" Jorkens said, "Yes, lots odder."

And then began this story, which I told Jorkens straight out I did not entirely believe.

"I was on a holiday in Greece," said Jorkens.

"On a holiday from what?" said Terbut.

"From the ivory-market," Jorkens said. "It was in a part of Greece called Arcady; very wild and rocky; and as I was walking up a hill by a little track, looking at the flowers, for it was about half flowers and half bare rock, right in the middle of Spring, I suddenly saw a dark shape, more the colour of chestnut than anything, which I took to be some sort of goat. And then I saw that it wasn't, though what it was I couldn't quite make out. If I'd had a rifle I would have stalked it; but, as it was, I walked quietly towards it. I had only a walking-stick. I was down wind of it and it did not move, except to twitch its ears. When I got near enough to see its ears, I could see its horns quite clearly. Horns are what interest me most in any wild animal, as I never shoot anything with poor horns; they are no good as a trophy and so it is no use shooting. This thing had very poor horns, smooth and pale grey and looking very much worn. I rather lost interest then, but I still had my curiosity; and, as I had no gun, curiosity was the more important impulse of the two, for I couldn't have got those horns, however much they had interested me. I was

within twenty yards before it noticed me, the humped shape crouched in the sun, flicking off occasional flies with a twitch of its ears. Then it looked up with a quick wild look and spoke to me. Yes, spoke to me. And what surprised me even more than its speaking was that I understood what it said. I had been some weeks in Greece, and could not make head or tale of their language yet. Years ago I was what you call educated, and they had taught me Greek, and I thought I knew it still. But the Greek they talked in Greece was a jargon of which I could make nothing. This thing, however, was speaking perfectly good Greek to me, the first I had heard since I landed. And I answered him, a bit haltingly at first; and then it all came back to me, the old Doric Greek, the language of Homer, with the genitive ending in *oio* instead of *ou*. What were we talking about? Oh, just the usual things that travellers enquire of each other when they meet in wild lands. And then I saw that he was feeble and lonely, and querulous because he was no longer at the centre of things, as he had been when Greece was mighty, and he had lived there all his life. Yes, he was Pan.”

And this is the point at which for the first time in my life, I disbelieved Jorkens; this is the point at which I caution my readers that, though they may use their own taste, I for one should regard this as merely a tale. Certainly Jorkens had seen something; that was clear to me when he spoke of the horns worn thin and grey, for I remember having seen the very same with Barbary sheep at the Zoo; he had seen something, but *what* is another matter.

“He was Pan,” Jorkens continued, “Pan old and discontented, and wanting more than anything to be at the centre of things again, as when Greece had been the pivot of all the world.

“‘Well, that’s London,’ I said. ‘High deeds, as you call them, aren’t coming here again. If you want to be anywhere that matters at all, you’ll have to come to London.’

“Pan twitched his ears at a fly and asked me where London was. I told him. But I said, ‘You can’t come there looking like that.’ For I didn’t see how I could disguise him, and he looked awful as he was.

“And then he began a long and doleful story about how things were no longer as they were, the sort of tale that one often hears, or the general effect of it, though the words were different, as well as being in Greek. It’s always heart-rending to hear those tales, and the effect is doubled or trebled when the tale is told by a god. And the upshot of it was that he implored me, for the sake of the old language and the gods and heroes who talked it, in fact in

the name of everything that would appeal to a classical scholar, as I suppose I once was in a way, to take him from all this loneliness and the rocky deserted altars, to wherever life still was lived with a sense of triumph.

“‘Well, London,’ I said. ‘London’s the only place. But you’ll have to make yourself invisible. If you’re a god you can surely do that much.’

“‘No,’ said Pan, ‘no longer. No longer even that.’

“And he was beginning his old sad story again about loneliness and about being deserted by all the world, and about growing feebler and feebler the more that the world forgot him. I could see he was about to start it all over again, by the way that he puckered his face.

“So I said, ‘Yes, yes. I’ll take you to London; but somehow or other you’ll have to become invisible. Concentrate on it, and see what you can do. I couldn’t take you to London, as you are.’

“When I put it like that to him he concentrated and sat quite still for a while, and the flies buzzed round his head all undisturbed. And then he gave a great sigh and spread out his hands and said, ‘I can do nothing now, Master.’

“You see how low he had fallen, to call a man Master. I just shook my head: I couldn’t take him to London like that. It would have been impossible.

“And then an idea came to him, sitting forlornly there. ‘I will ask the old gods,’ he said.

“Well, we arranged to meet in a day or two at the same place; and he scampered off, I suppose to Mount Olympus. He may have been old and feeble and disconsolate, as he said, but when he went away over those rocks he went like a two-year-old; some dust and a sound of gravel, and he was galloping over those valleys at the pace of a young ibex.

“We met two days after at that very spot. I was a bit late, and I heard plaintive but very beautiful piping. I have heard pipes before, in India and Africa, but never so beautiful. Did I tell you that he always carried reed pipes? He put them in his mouth when he galloped.

“Well, I came up, and he looked sorrowfully at me. I suppose he had begun to think I was not coming, and had been brooding upon the thought that he was forsaken again, and it took him a few moments to get over his brooding. And then he told me he had been to the old gods, and even they could do little now; but they had given him the gift of invisibility, though the

miracle would only work temporarily and he could not be invisible for ever, or even for long.

“Well, that meant it would have to be a motor. I couldn’t take him on a ship, if he was to come popping into view every few minutes and scaring passengers; he would have simply been caught and shut up.

“I found out that he really could vanish: he disappeared while I spoke to him, and could remain invisible quite a long time; once, as long as a quarter of an hour. On those occasions I had to hold his pipes for him, as they, for some reason, would not vanish. Then I arranged about a motor. I bought a Ford in Athens and sold it at Ostend, and we travelled across Europe by night, hiding Pan by day, and when I couldn’t hide him he vanished. But I didn’t let him vanish very much, as his mournful story of changed times and the weakening of all great powers, had made me inclined to mistrust the force of the old gods, and I did not know when it might fail; and I feared that Pan, all of a sudden clear to the naked eye, might be on my hands at some awkward moment. The scenery of Europe is superb.”

What I said at this point to Jorkens is of no interest: I do not remember my exact words. But the important thing is that I interrupted him at exactly the right moment, without which we should have had no more of this story, but a vivid description, instead, of scenery that is well enough known; if only to annoy Terbut, who has never travelled and is rather jealous of Jorkens because he has.

“Well, as you say,” said Jorkens, “we were heading for Ostend. And you are perfectly right; we got there. I had some rugs for the car and I wrapped those over Pan, and really he looked no more muffled up or untidy than some travellers I have seen going on board ships. He merely looked foreign and cold and afraid of the sea.

“I got a cabin and hid him there, and he did not have to vanish until we got to England. Well, it had been dark when we went on board, but there was too much daylight here to risk a taxi, and a train was out of the question; and I can’t go buying Fords every day, so I decided that the only thing was to walk. And so I told Pan. He brightened up a bit at that, for he never took to machinery of any kind and didn’t much like the sea, in fact looking at his mournful face as we got ashore and hearing myself talk Greek to him, I was oddly reminded of that stupendous line of Homer that has the thunder and hiss of the sea in it, where he tells of a man walking downcast along the shore:

Βῆ δ’ ἀκέων παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης.



“But when I suggested walking he brightened up, and away we went over the downs. Going through the town of course he had to vanish, and we avoided roads. In the open country, and even in fields, we were very little molested, and Pan did not have to vanish more than once every mile or two. Dogs were the only nuisance, but they stood no chance with Pan; and however disconsolate and weary he seemed, he took gates with an easy stride that it was a joy to watch, or hedges or anything else. Dogs were left far behind; so was I for that matter. But Pan always waited for me. He seemed to enjoy those short gallops, for there was almost a smile on his face when I came up panting to where he was quietly waiting, flicking at flies with his ears. It was spring in Kent, a very lovely time, and the pear was all in blossom round farmsteads where I went to buy food. We slept mostly in haystacks, and once in a hazel wood. I still had the motor-rugs with me, with which I had wrapped up Pan; I carried them on my arm, and used them at night to keep warm. Pan seemed to keep warm anyhow. Only once he got out of hand, and blew his pipes late in the evening beside a farm, where he had seen some girls going home. The effect was very curious; they came running out of the house towards the little wood at the edge of which we were, and I broke off a thin bough from a hazel at once and beat Pan over the shoulders with it and made him run away, and followed after him as fast as I could. Soon it was quite dark, and that trouble was over.

“We passed across the Weald from the South Downs, and came to the North Downs and to the chalk again, whose soil and rolling slopes Pan rather liked, finding them good to gallop on. Of course I was younger in those days, but even so I was often out of breath. And I had to keep sight of him all the time: you couldn’t tell what he would do at any moment; and in England of all places. And then one day the whole of the country altered; there were more gardens, more roofs, more roads: we had got past Bromley, and this was the shadow of London.

“‘Now behave yourself,’ I said. ‘We are coming to the centre of things.’”

“I didn’t know how to address a god; whether to call him your Holiness or merely your Reverence; but both seemed so inappropriate to him, that in the end I merely called him Pan.

“‘Behave yourself, Pan,’ I said.

“But I needn’t have, for very soon the outskirts of the great town were around us frowning, and Pan was awed by it all and a little frightened. Of course he had frequently to vanish now, but he came out of it every five minutes or so; and, when we had actually got to the town, I had to think

what to do. And it took me some time to think. And thinking wouldn't have been any good either, if I hadn't seen a cart loaded with vegetables on its way into Covent Garden. I saw at once that another such opportunity for getting Pan right into London might not occur for some days, and I hurriedly told him what he had to do. He was vanished at the time, and I told him to jump into the cart while he was still vanished, and cover himself with cauliflowers, and I would come for him at the end of the journey. All this he did very easily: a jump on to the cart was nothing to Pan, and he covered himself up as I told him. The bump of Pan's landing there worried the carter, but there was nothing to see. I walked for two or three miles behind the cart to make sure that it was going to Covent Garden market, though of course there was nowhere else for it to go; and when I saw that it was taking all the turns that led there, I went up to the carter and asked him the way to Covent Garden, so as to make quite sure of the road he was going to take.

“‘Why, that's where we're going,’ he said.

“And he told me the way. He was going by Vauxhall Bridge.

“Then I jumped into a taxi and went on ahead and had a drink or two on the way, which I felt I needed.

“I didn't go all the way to Covent Garden; for soon I was wondering exactly what to show Pan, and I did not want to get him too far away from parks or squares, where he might be able to hide. I had promised to show him the centre of things, and that might be the House of Commons, but Pan didn't care much for talk; music was more in his line, but there was no opera on just then at Covent Garden: I decided to show him Knightsbridge, the steady stream of traffic flowing perpetually; it was before the days of red lights. So I waited for the cart at Vauxhall Bridge and got Pan to jump out invisible. I told him what to do, and some people heard me; but, as I was talking Doric Greek to a heap of cauliflowers, they merely thought me mad and paid no more attention. I got him as far as Eaton Square, when I saw a very distinct shadow beside me, for Pan was coming out of his invisibility. I made him jump over the railings and get in among some lilac and hide there for a while. He was very docile, this waif lost from his own centuries. What he was like when he had worshippers I don't know. Very soon he was able to make himself invisible again: I saw the brown outline suddenly fade in the lilacs. Then he jumped over the railings, and came on with me towards Knightsbridge, passing through Belgrave Square. And in Belgrave Square I made him hide again, on the side nearest to Knightsbridge: there he went visible again, and then invisible. Then we went on, and we got into Knightsbridge by the Albert Gate, while his invisibility lasted. And this was

what I had set out to show him. I don't know quite what there is in a large crowd moving rapidly, or in noise and all the rest of it, but it impressed Pan, and he knew that it was as I had promised, and that he was once more at the centre of things. And yet the centre of things was clearly not what it used to be, and somehow Pan saw at a glance there would be no reverence for him, and nothing was as he had hoped; and, as he looked at that unending stream coming in from the great West road or going out from the city, invisible as he was he began to whimper. It was difficult enough to prevent him from being jostled, impossible to prevent these whimperings being heard.

“‘What do you want?’ I asked in very clumsy Doric.

“Everyone heard me; and one man knew what language I was talking; I saw that from the way he looked at me, a sort of half-humorous, half-friendly look, that seemed to sum me up as, ‘Probably been at Oxford. A little drunk.’ But it was no use bothering about what people thought of me: I had Pan on my hands, and he would be visible soon.

“‘What do you want?’ I asked him sharply again.

“‘Green things. Green things,’ said Pan.

“‘Not so loud,’ I said.

“‘And quiet,’ added Pan.

“I hustled him across Knightsbridge: the Park was the only place for him. I don't know if any of you have ever experienced a situation so full of embarrassment; at any moment they might all hear him, and at any moment he might become visible. I don't know if you can think of an explanation that I could have given if he had. I simply couldn't think of one at all. He was perfectly naked.

“And not only would visibility soon overtake him again, but he was not likely to make any effort to stop it, for he did not like to see his pipes in my hand, and was yearning to hold them again. I got him to the Park and to that funny little valley, where a heron fishes a lake the size of a hearth-rug and rabbits live among shrubs that cover a quarter of an acre with all the air of a forest. There I got him to jump over the railings, and he was a shadow as he went over them, but luckily nobody saw it, although it frightened the ducks. And as soon as I could do so unobserved, I threw his pipes after him. There leaning on the railings with people watching me all the time I put on a thoughtful air, and tried to sound as if I was quoting Greek poetry. Actually of course I was talking to Pan. What I said to him was, ‘You must stay in there whenever you're visible. I'll get you food. What food do you prefer?’

“ ‘Corn,’ said Pan.

“ ‘Very well,’ I said. ‘Corn it shall be. But you’re not to show yourself. Time was, when men saw you they died. But the world’s moved since then, and it’s rather the other way about. Not that they’d kill you, but it’s rather the other way round than otherwise.’

“All this was very hard to say in obsolete Greek; but I said it, and he understood it, and I went to get him some corn.

“ ‘Is it allowed to feed the rabbits in there?’ I asked of a park-keeper.

“ ‘Well, it’s allowed,’ said the park-keeper. ‘But it’s not usually done, and if it were anything untidy it would have to be stopped. What kind of food were you thinking of giving them?’

“ ‘Corn,’ I said.

“ ‘Well, there wouldn’t probably be any harm in corn,’ he said. ‘But then on the other hand . . .’

“I interrupted him then with profuse thanks, and I threw in a big paper-bagful over the railings before he had time to stop me. Next day it was all eaten up, so he let me do it again.

“I think Pan was happy in that tiny kingdom, for I think the heron and ducks and rabbits all knew it was Pan, so that he kept a little court there. Sometimes he played to them in spite of my efforts to make him stop, and the effect on all within hearing was very noticeable. And though I got him to play very softly, and the notes did not travel far, yet the behaviour of people near to that little enclosure must have been commented on; for after a couple of days I certainly noticed two men reading newspapers by the light of every lamp, where there had been only one, which of course showed me that Scotland Yard had begun to take an interest. And on top of that Pan whispered to me one evening, as I was leaning over those railings, that the miracle that the old gods had made for him was weakening. This was undoubtedly true; for, watching a patch of fur that I could just see in the bushes, I saw him take half a minute to go off. He didn’t stay in the little enclosure all night, but roamed quietly about the Park; and once or twice he was chased. It was obvious that, if he could no longer become invisible at once, there would be no way of escaping notice. And what would happen if they found him I couldn’t guess. And of course I made it out even worse than it was to Pan.

“ ‘You must be quiet,’ I said, ‘and you must be invisible.’

“But Pan hated being quiet, and could no longer be sure of being invisible.

“‘Then you must be decently dressed,’ I said.

I needn't tell you what that meant; it meant of course Morning Dress, and spats and a silk hat, with lavender kid gloves, a walking-stick and an eye-glass, and of course a decent shave. I needn't tell you all that, but it took a long time to explain it to Pan, in the language of Homer. Well, I went to a ready-made tailor, a haberdasher and a hatter, and got everything for him. I went to a boot-maker too. I knew he wouldn't like boots, but morning dress with hooves was simply out of the question. It cost me a good deal, but I had to do it. And I had to take them all to the little valley by night, and wait nearly an hour for a chance to drop them over unseen; and then explain to Pan how to put them on, which took me twenty minutes, with a detective watching me all the time, late though it was, or perhaps for that very reason.

“Next morning I came back and took him away from the shrubbery, and tied his tie properly and smartened him up a bit; and there he was, a foreign gentleman taking a walk in the Park, a very foreign gentleman indeed, but there is no law against that. I think the birds and the rabbits of the little glade were sorry when Pan jumped over the railings and left them. I always fancied that there was a bit of mystery about that spot, perhaps a fancy remembered from childhood. But it was no fancy while Pan was there; there really was an air of mystery over it, such as Nature scarcely reveals in her innermost haunts. I can't define it, but it was very mysterious indeed, and when Pan jumped back to the path the mystery went put like a light. One bit of luck we had, coming away from the shrubbery, and that was that the detectives were watching me, instead of looking at Pan, because they had heard me talking Greek. That gave us a respite just when we wanted it, because Pan had dressed himself, I won't say divinely, but certainly like nothing on earth; and before I had done a lot to his collar and tie and bootlaces, out on the grass where there were not so many people, he would have been recognized if anyone had had any sense.

“Well, when I had done all that, we went for a walk, and I explained to Pan that the time had come to make plans, and the first plan of all was that he must rely no longer on invisibility: a thing like that must work perfectly, I explained, or be left alone altogether. He quite agreed, and even agreed to wear boots, though they hurt him to walk and made galloping out of the question; but, as I made clear to him then, you do not have to gallop in London. For one who was two thousand years out of date, he got the point wonderfully quickly.

“Well, you do not walk long in Hyde Park without seeing the Serpentine; and to the Serpentine we soon came, walking slowly, to spare the cramped hooves of Pan. And there he went down on all fours to look at himself in the water, to see if his awkwardness was as bad as it felt. And so he saw himself dressed as we dress when we put on our very best. And Pan burst into tears. I couldn’t see that it was as bad as all that, but there was no stopping his weeping. People were looking at us, so I hurried Pan away, holding him tightly, just above the elbow, to steady his steps in spite of the boots, for which he was never shaped, and to prevent him escaping and attracting more notice. It was a distinctly awkward walk, and he would not stop crying. I even noticed that a policeman was following us, and not only that, but he came right up to us. The man’s suspicions somehow communicated themselves to me; ill-treating a foreign gentleman, they seemed to say. I turned to the policeman and said, ‘He has had a good deal of trouble.’

“‘What kind of trouble, might I ask?’ the policeman enquired.

“‘Domestic trouble,’ I said; and Pan went on weeping.

“And I loosed my grip from his arm as I spoke, so as to show that he was not actually a slave; but I would never have done so had I not been sure that those boots would prevent him from galloping, for I wouldn’t trust him in that obstinate mood. The policeman gave us no more trouble then, but Pan sobbed on. And then I saw that I must get him right away, and that a town was not the place for him: Yorkshire I thought was more the place; up on the high moors. He had his pipes now, clutching them closely, and they gave a queer look to his tail-coat and neat waistcoat. I was hurrying away from the Park as fast as his boots would allow, and as we went I explained to him that we were going to Yorkshire, and that he need wear that kit no more there, if it made him cry. And at that Pan dried his tears but began to speak mournfully of what he had been, and of what he looked like now, dressed in the smartest clothes that I had been able to buy for him, and as he talked he dropped into hexameters, and from that he began to cry. In any case people looked at us, and they looked far more with Pan making all that noise again. I talked about Yorkshire then, about the wild moors with the heat running over the heather, and valleys far down beneath them gleaming in sunlight; I told him it was far from the centre of things, far from our loud noise and far from our complications, and that there he could throw away all the clothes I had bought him. Only he must wear a hat. I had to explain guns to him and told him that there would be sportsmen in Yorkshire, and that to wear a hat was essential.”

“A hat? Why a hat?” said Terbut.

“Good Lord,” said Jorkens, “you don’t shoot anything wearing a hat. Even in war you pick helmets. A hat was essential. And so I told Pan.

“We had got a long way from the Park before we came to a clump of lilac in which Pan could conveniently hide; a little square that I did not know the name of. Vanishing was a thing no longer to be relied on when it couldn’t be done neatly, and with clothes on the thing was impossible, for the old gods seemed only to have any power over what was divine in Pan, and now even that power was weakening. I made him hop over the railings into the lilac as soon as no one was watching, and we tried the vanishing trick there, and I saw, from the time that it took his face and hands to vanish, how fast the power of the old gods was fading; and, as for his clothes and his spats, they would not vanish at all. To undress and vanish clumsily would have been altogether too risky, and it would have taken half an hour to dress him again. So I went off then to get another Ford, for I had walked quite enough with Pan. Luckily I was able to hire one this time; and with that and a bag of corn, and some decent food for myself, we set off towards Yorkshire and got to the moors before nightfall, averaging thirty. There was a moor that I knew, which I thought would suit him ideally, a moor with steep ravines running into it, with short grass grazed by sheep, and patches of deep bracken and old birch-trees gazing into the valleys, and all the rest was heather as far as the eye could see. Grouse were there on the black soil strewn with minute white gravel, badgers passed that way along tiny tracks, or a lark went over singing, and perhaps a shepherd came by once in a week, and hares went loitering past; nothing to make Pan cry. Far down below in the other lands, where heather does not flower, I remembered fields of corn flashing in sunlight; it would suit Pan ideally; as soon as the corn was ripe he would be able to help himself, and I felt sure that there were more edible roots and good green things in Yorkshire than there are on the rugged and less favoured hills of Arcady. So I pointed out to him the nearest stream; which was rather fussy of me when you come to think of it, for I might have trusted Pan to be able to find water; and I took away his perfectly good clothes, leaving only his tall hat, and I left him sitting beside a Roman road that there was up there on the moor, a wide smooth lawn of grass going proudly straight through the heather; more of Pan’s date than some things, and yet no more his style of thing really than Hyde Park, for it stood pre-eminently for civilization, and he for all that was wild. Yet one thing he had indeed in common with that grand road, for the road and Pan had fallen on evil days, to be powers that Time had forgotten. His pipes were in his hand as I left him there; but he lifted them to put them into his mouth, and I saw that he was about to scamper along the road. And if in those gallops he did

not find in what barns they stored corn, and a great deal more besides, he was not Pan. I left him gazing down that wide straight road, so ancient like himself; and that was the last I saw of him.”

I have expressed doubts of this story, but it is fair to Jorkens to add a certain corroboration, which came pat on a question by Terbut. “Well, is he still there?” said Terbut. “Should we see him if we went up there?”

“No,” said Jorkens. “I can tell you what became of him.”

And tell us he did; and I must say that what he told us was distinctly like Pan. You could not imagine him settling down with, say, a mill-hand out on her holiday, and one could hardly imagine him quite alone. Like to like would be a sort of corroboration, while some incompatible mate would seem to disprove the whole story. He must have found somebody, and I was wondering who. Jorkens told us.

“I had had enough of Pan and I went to Yorkshire no more; but a friend of mine who went to those very valleys, where sheep graze under the moor, had a talk up there with a shepherd; and this shepherd was telling him of storms that sometimes came to the gills, as they call those grassy valleys shut in between two moors; and one night, it seems, there had come a frightful storm, blowing the wool of his sheep as flat as if they were sheared, and then soaking them all and filling the becks to the brim. The shepherd was out with his sheep, for fear that his lambs would be drowned. Huge shapes were riding over the arable lands from the South, and striking the sides of those hills and rearing upwards and sweeping over the moor. And Pan through it all was blowing those pipes of his; at least the shepherd heard music such as he had never heard since childhood, and even as a child he had only imagined it. And there were frightful flashes of lightning, and there had come a Valkyrie. And, the moment she heard his pipes, she rode straight for Pan. And Pan leaped up and gazed at her, with his pipes in his left hand; and then he took one great stride and threw his hat away, and flung his right arm over her horse’s withers, and almost at once they were rushing across the moor, his huge shape glowering dark by the white Valkyrie, as he went leaping alongside, and her grey horse shining beneath her. And so the wild pair swept away to the North, and, as the shepherd thinks, right out of England.”

We thought over the story awhile; no-one had much to say; the only contribution coming, I remember, from Terbut: “Did the shepherd your friend got acquainted with,” he asked Jorkens, “drink any whiskey that night?”



“Whiskey?” said Jorkens. “I tell you he was out on a perfectly frightful night. He couldn’t have lived if he hadn’t.”

## Chapter 16

# JORKENS LOOKS FORWARD

I DON'T remember if Jorkens has ever looked forward into the future, to take an interest in forthcoming political events, or to guess at their probability. A glass of whiskey seems usually to stimulate his memory, so that he usually looks backwards. But the other day somebody introduced a cocktail into our club, and Jorkens, though he despises them, tried one for the sake of experiment; and I think it was that that gave his mind a trend in the opposite direction to the one that it usually takes, that is to say towards an appreciation of the immediate future. It was a day in 1938 towards the end of the first week in July, and we chanced to be talking about the Eton-and-Harrow match. It was, if I remember right, on the first day of the match, and Jorkens was wearing a buttonhole of a rather uncertain blue. There are probably several phases of his life which will always remain unknown to us, and I have never entirely been clear as to what school he went to. Somebody remarked: "I hope Harrow wins, it's about time."

And Jorkens looked up with some considerable vigour, and said: "I don't think you fully realize what you are saying."

"Why not?" said the other man, who was incidentally an old Etonian.

"I don't think you realize what you are saying," said Jorkens, "because I don't think you have quite worked out what would happen."

"If Harrow won?" said the other man.

"Yes," said Jorkens.

"What would happen?" asked the old Etonian.

"Well," said Jorkens, "to begin with, after thirty years without a win at Lord's, the pent-up enthusiasm of Harrovians would be very considerable. There would be bound to be a demonstration. Things like that of course one has seen at Lord's before; but this would be something such as one has never seen there. The enthusiasm would be indescribable, and altogether beyond the control of the police."

"Well, they could draft in more," said the other man.

"They might send a few," said Jorkens, "but a few would be quite ineffective, and they could never get a really big force there in time."

“They can move them very quickly nowadays,” said the old Etonian.

“Things happen very suddenly in those matches,” said Jorkens; “and, once the boys had got control of the ground, it might take hours to get it away from them. It is my opinion that the police would be beaten completely; and, if that were to happen, there would be questions in the House that very night. Very difficult questions to answer. You see Marylebone is part of the Metropolis, and to allow any body of men, or boys, to take control of it would almost look like a menace to the capital. In any other country the leading Harrow boy in such a situation would probably declare himself dictator. But we don’t have dictators here. The Government, however, would be sure to go out over it. And with things as they are in Europe just now, you know what would happen then.”

“Well, what would happen?” said one of us.

“The Sanjak of Novibazaar,” said Jorkens, “would slip over his frontier at once. He is that sort of man, and is only waiting for that sort of opportunity. I happen to know him quite well. In fact I used to call him plain Jack, and he always called me Lloyd George, because it was the only English name he knew.”

I put down these words, not so much for the sake of the summary of the political situation in Europe, as to trace the wayward path of a cocktail through Jorkens’ curious mind, which had seldom been illuminated by this short and modern beverage.

“Well, when the Sanjak marches,” continued Jorkens, “it is pretty well known by everybody that the Grand Mogul of Ruritania will stop him, and that will mean the war that they were all practising for from 1914 to 1918. They will have up-to-date weapons this time.”

“And who will win, Jorkens?” asked a young fellow in a cheerful voice, stimulated either by disbelief in Jorkens’ prophecy or by a cocktail that he too had been trying.

“Oh, there won’t be any winning,” said Jorkens, “except for the machines. The machines will simply win against man. Man will get blotted out.”

“What, no survivors at all?” said someone else.

“I don’t think so,” said Jorkens. “So you see we should be more careful in times like these about making suggestions.”

“Yes, I see your point,” the old Etonian said. “And who do you think would take the place of man on this planet, if things turned out as you say?”

“Well, I don’t quite know,” said Jorkens “But I rather think grey squirrels.”

## Chapter 17

# JORKENS AMONG THE GHOSTS

“I SUPPOSE you’ve seen lots of ghosts,” said a young member of our club one day to Jorkens.

Of course he meant to imply that the tales that Jorkens had told us at different times were rather along the borders of credibility, in those dim places in which ghost-stories might be expected to flourish.

“No,” said Jorkens, “I have never seen a ghost.”

“Not?” said the other.

“No,” said Jorkens. “I’ve heard them of course, but I have never actually seen one.”

“Why of course?” asked Terbut.

“Well, knocking about the world as I have done,” said Jorkens, “one comes sooner or later pretty near to most things. There are not many things the world has to show, that I have not been somewhere near at one time or another. I have been in the next room to a ghost. I might even say that for a moment I had been in the same room with one. But they are queer elusive things, that always move when you move; and I never actually saw one.”

“What did it sound like?” asked Terbut.

“Sweeping,” said Jorkens. “Sweeping floors with a broom. And sometimes hammering nails into a wall, to hang a picture. And poking a fire and raking out ashes; and doors shutting, and long skirts swishing, and somebody looking for something that had been mislaid in a drawer.”

“Not very romantic,” said Terbut.

“No,” said Jorkens. “Just common daily things, but haunting with just as much vigour as any romantic ghost that you ever read of. In fact that’s how I was sure it was a ghost: if it had been doing romantic things, I might have suspected that someone was pulling my leg; but hammering nails into walls and sweeping floors, there could be no trick about that; no one would make it so dull.”

“And how did you know that it wasn’t housemaids at work?” asked Terbut.

“I knew,” said Jorkens.

“But how?” Terbut repeated.

“The house was empty,” said Jorkens.

“Tell us the story,” I said.

“Well, if you like,” said Jorkens.

And nobody said anything to the contrary. It was a dull afternoon, after lunch, with an autumn evening approaching, and none of us, I think, had anything else to do, except to go out to offices and attend to a bit of business; and we all of us felt that we would sooner hear a ghost-story. And so Jorkens began.

“I wanted to rent a cottage for a few weeks in the country: one room and a kitchen was all I needed. I wanted rest and quiet; that was all. Well, I found the quiet all right: I found it in some folds of the South downs. By far the loudest sound was the whirr of the wind in the trees, where there were any trees; and, where there were not, the principal sound was the chirrup of grasshoppers, and perhaps an occasional skylark, and sometimes a dog barking on the other side of two valleys. The quiet was all right, but I couldn't find a cottage quite small enough. And then one day a house-agent, to whom I went in a little town, offered me quite a large house; large compared to a two-roomed cottage.

“‘That wouldn't do at all,’ I said.

“‘Why not?’ he asked.

“‘I only want to pay half-a-crown a week,’ I said.

“‘You can have it for that,’ he told me.

“‘Drains?’ I asked.

“‘No, the drains are all right,’ he answered. ‘But some people find it a little noisy.’

“‘What's the noise?’ I asked.

“‘It seems quiet enough to me,’ he said. ‘But some people hear it, or say they do.’

“‘Hear what?’ I asked.

“‘I'm sure I don't know,’ he said.

“‘I like it quiet,’ I told him.

“‘Well, we can’t put in sound-proof doors and windows,’ he answered, ‘for half-a-crown a week.’

“I saw the point of that, and I said no more. And he motored me over to see the house. It had nearly twenty rooms in it, counting everything. Small ones of course, but a very nice little house, and silent as a cemetery at night; and half-a-crown a week for the rent. I jumped at it. And I went in next day, doing my own cooking, and arranging with a charwoman to come once a week from a village two miles away. I went there in the morning and the sounds were as I told you, grasshoppers on the overgrown lawn, the wind in a few trees, and very rarely the distant voice of a dog, which probably belonged to the charwoman.

“It wasn’t until the afternoon, just after I had made a pot of tea for myself, that the other noises began. I heard them faintly at first; and gradually they passed the various points, when one wonders if one heard a sound at all, when one cannot make out quite what the sound was, when one wondered if it was really what one thought it; and then unmistakably sweeping. I didn’t tell that charwoman to come until Friday, I said to myself; and went into the next room to see what she was doing. There was no charwoman there; and the sweeping receded to the far door as I entered, and went to another room. I followed, and the sweeping went faintly, but hurriedly, out through another door. Then I came back and finished my tea, and I very soon heard the broom at work on the carpet again. And not only that, but I heard other brooms going, taking up the tune from each other as grasshoppers do. I got up again, and went through all the rooms, and not a broom was sweeping. I sat quite still and listened, and counted as many as six brooms. Of course I didn’t like it; and a phrase of the house-agent’s came to me without any comfort: ‘What do you expect for half-a-crown a week?’

“Once I heard a nail being hammered into the wall in the very next room, and jumped up and went there at once, and there was no-one there. I remember the bark of the very distant dog coming over the downs then; and, faint though it was, there was a reality in the sound of it for which I felt intensely thankful. Then I went through the whole house, room after room, and still there was no-one there.

“If it had happened at night I could never have stood it, but as the afternoon wore on the sweeping ceased. Then a chill seemed to fall on the little neglected house and there came sounds of the poking of fires, and those were the only sounds that troubled me any more till night came. And with night it was perfectly quiet, after the boom of the shutting of shutters on the ground floor had died away. There were no shutters on the top floor. I

went to bed early, and lay awake a long time with the door locked, which is of course a silly precaution to take against ghosts, and waited to hear more voices haunting the house. And none came.

“There was nothing like electric light in the house, and I kept my one candle burning; and some while after midnight I must have gone to sleep suddenly, and the candle burnt itself out.

“In the bright morning I was called by footsteps. You might think that I started awake with a pretty good jump, but I didn’t: the steps were so quiet and usual, so natural and so ordinary, that they only just awoke me; and it was only by noticing that no hot water had been placed on the mouldering wash-hand-stand, that I knew that I had not been called by a live housemaid. There was a lot of raking of fires going on; but, as soon as I got down to the kitchen to boil an egg, for which I had to light the fire all over again. . . .”

“What do you mean by all over again?” asked Terbut.

“Well,” said Jorkens, “I had the impression that the kitchen fire had been lighted already, and that the ashes of the old one had been all raked out. But it was not so. It was just as I had left it the day before, and the rest of the kitchen seemed to me just as it had been left by the ages. Of course my fancies were a little bit over-excited, and it may not have been as untidy as all that. The noise in the morning was perfectly dreadful; sweeping in every room, sounds of feet scurrying, and heavy noises booming up chimneys from grates, while I ate my egg. The whole house promised rest, and each room whispered of quiet among its old curtains, but I had no quiet all that morning.

“It was obviously ghosts, and I knew that the house-agent could help me no more than the plumber. I decided that the clergyman would be the man, and to him I went, over at the village where my charwoman lived. I was lucky enough to meet him in the street, which was a lot easier than going up to his house and ringing the bell. And I asked him at once if he would mind giving me some advice; and, as of course it was his job to do that kind of thing, he said he would. We walked slowly back to his vicarage. He did not know much of my little house, having taken over that parish some while after the last owner had died; then it had been let, and tenants stayed a very short time, and the rent came down and down until it reached the figure at which I had found it, of half-a-crown a week. He was a tall man about fifty, with a greyish moustache, and I told him the whole story of the house on our way to the vicarage. And then he brought me inside, and we sat in his smoking-room and he made me tell him everything all over again. And then



he sat and thought for a long while. And at last he said: ‘I always try to be as practical as I possibly can. I have to be. If I weren’t, I couldn’t run a village cricket-club, and about twelve other organizations, that you have never heard of, and that wouldn’t interest you if you had. But it is not my job to be a materialist. Well then, you’ve got ghosts up at that house. I have heard rumours of it before. But what you have told me leaves no doubt of it. And they are pretty restless. Going on all the morning, you tell me.’

“‘Yes, hard at it,’ I said.

“‘Well, then,’ he said, ‘there must have been trouble in the house, and perhaps it affected the air, so that spirits can’t rest in it. You can’t tell what may trouble the air: look at wireless.’

“‘But why so many of them?’ I asked. ‘I heard six brooms going at once. And they can’t have had six housemaids in a little house like that.’

“‘Not at the same time,’ he said. ‘But you don’t know how far the trouble went back, or how long it lasted.’

“‘I never thought of that,’ I said. ‘But what can I do? I want to stay there and have quiet. And I can’t have that with the housemaids tearing round all the morning, and almost in the very room in which I am sitting.’

“‘No,’ he said, ‘no. It seems as if the air must have got all jagged and worried. You’ll have to patch it up, I suppose.’

“‘Patch it up?’ I said.

“‘Yes, little kindnesses of various sorts,’ he said. ‘Quite small things will sometimes do it.’

“‘What sort of things?’ I asked.

“‘But he was thinking away by himself and hardly seemed to hear me.

“‘Little things that might soothe bygone years,’ he said. ‘Small kindnesses that might take the edge off old worries. You must look at it practically, you know. You have to be far more practical with ghosts than you do with a football-team. Just a few kindnesses. Do what you can. And do it in a practical way.’

“And, practical though he probably was, the problem that I had brought him seemed to have sunk him almost in a reverie, so that when I thanked him he seemed hardly to hear me, and he said goodbye to me with a look on his face as though he pondered problems far deeper than that which I brought. Thinking things over, I went to the old charwoman and asked her if

she could come that very afternoon, and she said she would; so I bought a bottle of champagne at the grocer's, and when she came I gave her champagne instead of tea. She drank the whole bottle that afternoon and was enormously delighted with it, and ran through all the rooms singing. I got a very bad name in the village over that champagne, but I have often had a bad name before; for the more you travel, the more prejudices you meet. But what is much more to the point, and is in fact the whole point of the story, the weary sweeping ceased and quiet came back to the house, and I had a month of it for only ten shillings. Obviously that does not include what I paid to the grocer."

## Chapter 18

# ELEPHANT SHOOTING

WE were talking one day in the club of the various wonders of Africa, and even doubting some of them, when Jorkens joined the discussion, not having heard the actual details, but merely voices expressing their disagreement or doubt. "If there is anything you want to know about Africa, I think I can tell you," said Jorkens. "I don't say I've seen everything myself, but either in the forests of Kenya or in liners' smoking-rooms I think I've seen or heard of pretty well everything Africa has to show."

"Have you heard of the four-tusked elephant?" one of us asked him, a man called Ellary who had been up the Nile.

Jorkens knew of Ellary's travels, and appeared to pay some attention to his question, as he would hardly have done to Terbut.

"Yes," said Jorkens. "I never got one. But I've certainly heard of him."

"That's interesting," said Ellary.

"It is in a way," said Jorkens.

And then we got the story of the four-tusked elephant, of which the Billiards Club hitherto had had only rumours. "There was a man called Skarget," he said, "who had been an elephant-hunter in Kenya. He did a fair business in ivory. I knew him quite well. And then one day he got malaria, and while he was lying in the reed-hut that he lived in near the Northern Guaso Nyero, a native had come to him with the story of the four-tusked elephant, claiming that he had seen it. And the story had somehow got on Skarget's mind, as it would never have done if his temperature had been under a hundred, and he had given up hunting ordinary elephants and concentrated on the rumour of the four-tusker. Of course it was only a rumour; that's all these natives' stories ever are; but he had concentrated on it for a year. And all that time he had given up shooting ordinary tusks. The four-tusker may have carried over five hundred pounds of ivory on him; and I've no doubt he did, for he was immensely old and his tusks were enormous; but look at all the ivory he could have got in a year if he had gone on shooting ordinary tusks. But he wouldn't. Nothing but the four-tusker would do for him. And the idea of shooting this animal, which no white man had ever seen, remained with him when he recovered from

malaria. It was a crazy idea. He was giving up tons of ivory for the chance of getting five hundred pounds or so. Anyone would have recognized the idea as due to delirium, and Skarget should have done so as soon as his temperature went down. Instead of which he stuck to it for a year, and at the end of that time the rumour had become more definite information. I knew him about that time: I was going through East Africa, and I came on his hut suddenly one evening in an open space in the forest, and he gave me a cup of tea. His talk was of nothing at all but the four-tusked elephant. I never met a man so completely obsessed. Of course it was the malaria that had done it, and the strange story coming to him just when his temperature was probably 105, and he was worrying about his ivory walking about in the forest while he was in bed and unable to go and collect it. The idea of getting the four-tusked elephant with its five hundred pounds of ivory had found him in that condition, and got hold of him and had never let him go. His room was littered with papers, on which every report of the elephant that any native had brought had been written down by him during the past year, and he had plaster casts of its feet.”

“Then it was really there,” said Ellary.

“Oh, yes,” said Jorkens. “It was only a native’s rumour at first, told to a man in delirium. But he had investigated and enquired, and before a year had passed he had been shewn its tracks, and had poured the plaster into them himself. They were enormous feet, bigger than anything I had thought possible; and from all accounts the tusks were on the same lines. Other white men were after it; and natives too, for that matter; but there was a curious thing about the four-tusked elephant, and that is that Bwana Tembu, as the Kikuyus called him, was immensely old and, amongst all the other elephants, immensely venerated, and, whenever danger approached, the other bulls all got round him and galloped away escorting him. And Bwana Tembu was immensely wise, and always knew when any danger threatened. The Kikuyus used to think that the bulls that escorted him got to know that danger was coming by watching him, and not by looking out for it for themselves. On the other hand they must have done a good deal of scouting, or Bwana Tembu could never have remained as he did, out of sight of any white man. Not many Kikuyus saw him either, but some did; and by the time I met Skarget we had pretty well sifted the irresponsible chatters from hunters who knew what they were talking about and could be trusted. That of course took some doing, because there are natives who rely purely upon imagination, as others rely upon legend, and as others again rely on accurate observation of trails that are far too faint for a white man to see. There was nothing of course very faint about the trail of Bwana Tembu, but even there

it was as well to have an observant eye, so as not to mistake his tracks for those of other large elephants. In mud the size of the tracks is sometimes greatly enlarged, so that a very careless observer might possibly confuse those of an ordinary bull-elephant with those whose enormous casts I had seen in plaster lying about the floor of Skarget's hut.

“Skarget was very fussy about his papers, as a man with one idea often is; and the moment I touched one of them, to see what the Kikuyus had been telling him, he looked up sharply and said: ‘I wouldn't touch those papers. You never quite know where a cobra takes cover.’

“He was quite right, for the litter of notes was pretty deep; and if they had lain there long, as they seemed to have done, they might well have been as good a home for a cobra as the reeds of the walls, in which they usually live.

“The position was this at the time when I met Skarget: the Bwana Tembu's tracks were definitely identified, and the Kikuyus knew the track by which he often went to get water at a lake that there was in the forest. Skarget had careful notes of that, and at first sight it only seemed a matter of waiting by the track until Bwana Tembu came by. But then the whole thing was complicated by some curious information, which Skarget told me was corroborated by copious notes, that he had made after sifting over a hundred stories; and that is, that whenever a white man was after him with a rifle, Bwana Tembu got to know it. Various stories gave various reasons; some suggested a system of scouting by all the other elephants, which undoubtedly took great care of Bwana Tembu, and had been seen doing so by the Kikuyus; but the best accounts, and the ones that Skarget relied on, attributed it to the enormous sagacity of Bwana Tembu himself. And in a brooding sort of way, like a man living alone, Skarget had got the idea of putting his own sagacity against that of the elephant. He certainly did a lot of hard thinking, as one of the heaps of notes, which was nothing but plans, testified; but the mistake he probably made was in overlooking the fact that the intelligence of the ordinary elephant is not so very far behind that of man's; for instance mahouts in India talk to them, and the elephants understand; it is not so hard to credit that, considering the enormous size of the brain. Well, on top of that, this elephant Bwana Tembu had lived to an enormous age, enormous even for an elephant, to whom a hundred years is nothing, and it must have acquired an enormous amount of experience. It might have occurred to Skarget that with all that experience, and starting not so very far behind intellectually, it might in the course of a couple of centuries have got ahead of Skarget. But that I don't think he ever supposed

for a moment. For one thing he was far too much taken up with his plans, to trouble to think what the elephant might be doing, except of course what he had planned that it would do, which was to go by its usual track to the lake in the forest, some day when Skarget would be waiting for it. And yet one plan he made had a certain amount of sense in it, and that was the plan that he acted on. He told me all about it over our tea in the hut. That is a thing I rather like about Africa, a man will talk to another about his business, when he has only known him five minutes, and even about the business that may be the aim of his whole life, as getting the Bwana Tembu had by now become to Skarget. Of course you see fewer white men in Africa than you do in London, and see them for a much shorter time; so that, when you meet a man crossing your trail in a forest, if you are ever to talk to anyone about your private affairs, then is the time to do it, before he goes on into the dark of the trees and you never see him again, and perhaps see no more white men for several weeks. So Skarget told me his plan. It was simply this: innumerable Kikuyus had told him that the Bwana Tembu got to know as soon as a white man was after him with a rifle; he had cross-examined them and compared their evidence and found that it was so. How the Bwana Tembu got to know it, it might have taken him another year to find out; and, getting no ivory all that time, for he would shoot nothing until he got the Bwana Tembu, his resources would have been about at an end. So he very sensibly had decided to accept what all these Kikuyus had found out for him, without wasting time on wondering why it was so. No other white man knew why it was so; and, by accepting the obvious fact without more ado, Skarget felt that he had got ahead of the lot of them. And in a way he had, and he knew it, and the idea made him very pleased with himself; and that is, I think, how the elephant got ahead of him. He was thinking too much of his own sagacity, and not enough of the sagacity of the Bwana Tembu. He told me all his plans. He was going to take his rifle into the forest, a double-barrelled .470, and was going to fix it up in the track of the Bwana Tembu, pointing the way he would come when he went to the lake to get water. Then he was going back to his hut for a while, and later on he would walk into the forest without a rifle and climb a tree near the trail. He seemed to set a lot of store by going back to the forest unarmed. 'I don't know how they know that one has a rifle,' he said. 'But the Kikuyus know that they do know, so there is an end of it. Rooks know a man with a gun right enough, and elephants have a lot more brains than rooks.'

"The trap was a simple one, a string tied to both triggers and running across the track in such a way that when the elephant touched it he would tauten the string and both barrels would go into him from two or three yards

away. He was going to climb a tree behind the rifle and watch the track from there, and he had some bundles of hay with him and a box of matches, and if he saw the wrong elephant coming he was going to light the hay and throw it down, so as to turn him back. All he had to do then was to wait for the Bwana Tembu, and let him come when he came. Of course he had the rifle pointing so that it would about get its heart, and with the two bullets in it he felt sure that it would not be likely to go very far. Even if it did he would put twenty or thirty Kikuyus on to the blood-trail and, so he told me, they would soon get Bwana Tembu. Well, of course, I could see no sense in a business man neglecting all the tusks that he might have got for a year, in order to get four big ones, and with no end of difficulty. As a sportsman I could understand it, but Skarget wasn't a sportsman; for, if he had been, he would not, among other things, have tried to get an elephant with a trap. So I couldn't make very much of Skarget, though his plan looked as if it might work; and I had my cup of tea and left his hut, and that was the last I saw of him."

"You didn't stop to see how he got on," said Ellary.

"There were five hundred pounds of ivory concerned in it," said Jorkens, "and it was the man's business. He was willing enough to talk to me, but he didn't want a partner. We all have friends in the City, but they don't take us into their offices with them. It's the same with ivory as it is with jute, or anything that men do business with in the City. They don't ask you to help them at it. I don't suppose they ever will. When the lion lies down with the lamb it may be all different, but meanwhile . . ."

"What happened, Jorkens?" I said.

"I never heard till years afterwards," answered Jorkens. "And then one day I was in a Union-Castle liner in the Red Sea, and it was too hot to do anything except to lie in a deck-chair, and listen to anybody who felt that it was not too hot to talk. And talk began, and headed towards Africa, which was where we were all going; and, among many tales, there came up the tale of the four-tusked elephant. And then a man who had lived amongst the Kikuyus and who knew their own language, in which they seem to speak more openly than they do in Swahili, told us the story of Skarget. And I have little doubt that it was true. For it bore out all that Skarget had told me himself, and tallied with the arrogance of the man, through which he had quite overlooked the intelligence that an elephant might have acquired in over two hundred years. Besides, it was too hot to lie: the man was leaning back in a long chair, telling us things he remembered, and making no effort. Skarget had laid the trap with the string and the rifle, with the barrel pointing

along the track, just as he told me he would, and had climbed a tree behind it and was watching for Bwana Tembu. And the enormous elephant came, with his four huge tusks. And he saw the rifle and string and knew that it was a trap, and saw Skarget watching him up in the tree, only a few feet out of his reach. And he pulled up the rifle with his trunk and waved it in the air, and the Kikuyu that saw it all thought he was going to smash it, as he had once seen an elephant do with a rifle before. But Bwana Tembu was no such fool: he knew all about rifles. He knew where the triggers were and what they were for, and he could touch them with the delicate end of his trunk. Well, well, it taught Skarget not to be so sure.”

“But what happened to Skarget?” said Ellary.

“Bwana Tembu shot him,” said Jorkens.



## Chapter 19

# AFRICAN MAGIC

CONVERSATION is sometimes very bright at the Billiards Club. We cover all kinds of fields in the course of a week or so. And, whether or not the information is always accurate, I have learned all kinds of things there on all manner of subjects. But on one particular afternoon things were certainly very dull there. I don't know why it was: I am not a meteorologist. But certainly there was depression in the air: something odd coming from Iceland perhaps. Or it may have been a financial depression, coming from the city, and affecting some of our members. Whatever it was, one of us deliberately directed such talk as there was, the ruins of our conversation, towards the forests of Africa; and more than one of us joined in at once. This of course implicated Jorkens in a story; and a very good thing we did, for the drizzle upon the window-pane was making the light even greyer, while it was still too early to draw the curtains and turn on our own lights, and a change was what we all needed.

"They've a lot of magic among their witchdoctors, haven't they?" said someone to Jorkens.

"I'll tell you about that," he said.

And tell us he did. And I can't help thinking that his explanation of the whole business is probably the correct one.

"I knew a man called Killet," he said to us, "who first told me about it, and it was a queer story. I met him at a dinner-party in Khartoum, where one dines in the garden, where they plant rose-trees to remind them of England, though the heat always withers them up by the end of January. He told me the story after dinner, sitting in our little circle of light, with the black mass of the shrubs beyond us, and the palm-trees lifting their darkness against the sky. He told me that in the Umgogo country he had met a witch-doctor. And the man was dancing about rattling the bones that he wore, and Killet had asked him if he could actually show him some magic. Then the witch-doctor had put on a mask and had done some more dancing, but that had not impressed Killet. When the witch-doctor found that he could not impress him that way, he blew a horn. Then he had squatted down and beaten a small drum. None of these things had impressed Killet, so then he said he would vanish. Well then he made Killet sit down, and he lit a fire and got the

smoke all drifting towards Killet and kept the far side of it himself, and did vanish sure enough. Still Killet was not impressed. Then the witch-doctor had said that he would make three men vanish. And he did this in the same way.

“‘I see,’ I said, ‘the whole thing’s bunkum. He dodged away when the smoke was in your eyes.’”

“‘No,’ said Killet. And he leaned forward and tapped me on the knee, and he was perfectly sober. ‘It’s genuine,’ he said. ‘It’s the most wonderful thing in Africa.’”

The table was being cleared and the lights were taken away, and I knew he was staring at me, though I could not see his eyes in the cool night.

“‘The most wonderful thing in Africa,’ he repeated.

“‘But he only dodged you when you couldn’t see through the smoke,’ I said again.

“‘No,’ he said. ‘It’s genuine. I didn’t believe him either. I thought as you do. And the witch-doctor knew what I was thinking. ‘Then I will stay by the fire and you shall vanish,’ he said. It took me some time to understand him. I was in an odd, queer, unmistakable chair, made of timber and reeds, and he said that I should vanish in my chair, while he remained by the fire. I told him to go ahead.’”

“‘It doesn’t seem to make sense,’ I said to Killet.

“‘But it was sense,’ he said. ‘He told me to come to the same spot next day, at an hour before noon. He just pointed to the sky, as they do in those parts of Africa when talking about the time. The sun always rises at six and sets at six, so you know just where it will be at any hour. I came to the spot as he said, when the sun was an hour short of the zenith. And he had his little bonfire all ready, but not lighted, and the queer chair was just downwind of it, a couple of yards away. And I sat in the chair and he danced up to the fire, singing some song in a language of none of the tribes that I knew, and lighted the fire and walked away from it. All this was in a clearing of the tall grass, of about fifteen yards diameter. He had a couple of natives with him, who stood one on each side of him, watching me; and the witch doctor went on singing. Last time these three men had vanished. This time he said it was going to be me. And of course I had no idea what he meant to do. But he did it. It wasn’t ordinary woodsmoke. I don’t know what it was. But it did not make me cough, as the smoke the day before had done; in fact it was rather pleasant. I could see him quite clearly through the smoke, and was

wondering what on earth he was going to do. I remember I was enjoying the novelty of the thing, although I had only a very faint hope that I was really going to see anything marvellous. I was quite comfortable in my chair, and the smoke was not in the least troubling me, when all of a sudden I heard him say "You vanish."

"I most certainly had vanished. I was in the same chair, and the sun was in the same part of the sky; but there was no fire, and I had changed my entire landscape. There was no landmark I recognized. To make a long story short, I found some natives, asked them where I was, told them where I wanted to go, promised to pay them and engaged them as porters, and we set off on a long safari back to where I had come from. We got there, but it took me between three weeks and a month. I had been moved by magic about four hundred miles.'

"Well, I cross-examined Killet a good deal, because that kind of thing interests me. But he stuck to his statement; and, what is more, I could see that he was speaking the truth."

"How could you know that?" one or two of us asked. For in a matter like this we naturally wanted all the corroboration we could get; and the whole story seemed to depend on the veracity of Killet.

"Well," said Jorkens, "there are various stages, when a man takes a drink. Killet was perfectly sober; but there comes a moment at dinner, wherever there is decent wine being served, when even a cunning fellow will give up any intention to fool you, even if he wants to, to start with. I can't say exactly how one tells when that stage is reached, but one can tell; and I could tell it with Killet. And yet I couldn't entirely credit that he had done that four hundred miles in the time he said, which was of course no time at all. I believed the man, you see, but not his story. That was why I cross-examined him. Well, I got enough details from him to have tested his story if I had been on the spot; but I wasn't. The Umgogo country was a long way away, and I was not going in that direction. But I remembered Killet; his story interested me; and I had jotted down on paper not only the names of all such places as he had mentioned, but even the name of the witch-doctor, which was Mwa. And then one day, years later, some rather tiresome things happened. I had a good deal of dividends due to me on the first of July, really a considerable sum; and they none of them paid. And that happened to be the very date that a lot of men, to whom I owed various small sums, all united to dun me. I wouldn't have minded one or two of them, but, when they were all at it together, it became very tiresome. I gave them all the same answer, which was of course the true one; simply that my

dividends weren't paying. And they all gave me the same answer, as though they were in collusion. It was a silly answer, not worth repeating. But it made me consider very carefully which of two courses to take: whether to put such money as I could scrape together into partially satisfying them, or whether to go abroad for a bit, to see if it would blow over. And the more I thought of it the more I saw, from the way they had been behaving, that they were not the kind of people that would allow themselves to be partially satisfied. They had only themselves to blame, and I chose the other course. Well, time was that men could get away from people like that by moving from one village to another; but, the way things are to-day, it's no more good to go to the South of France or Italy than it is to cross over on to the opposite pavement when you see one of them coming. So I went to Africa. Not Khartoum of course: I told you they grow roses there, which means that they have seedsmen's catalogues, and information goes the other way equally well, and they would have known I was there at once. No, I went a long way south of that: I went to the Umgogo country. And while I was there I decided to go and find out what kind of story Killet had got hold of, and to find this witch-doctor and see what he could really do. I went to the very place that Killet had gone to, and there I asked for Mwa. And in a couple of days Mwa knew that I wanted him. He came up to my boma one evening, when the hyenas were howling; that is to say just after sunset. A boma is the circle of thorny branches that one throws down round one's camp, and which is supposed to keep off lions. It wasn't much of a camp: one old tent, and a few bundles of firewood for burning at night, and a shelter three feet high for my two or three porters and cook. I couldn't run to anything more just then. He stole up to my boma like a grey shadow, for he was all smeared with wood-ash, and asked me what I wanted. 'I want to see someone vanish,' I said.

"'I vanish you,' he replied, coming straight to his *chef d'œuvre*, for he probably saw that I didn't think much of him, and that I would not be impressed with anything less.

"'No,' I said.

"It wasn't that I didn't want to see his best bit of work; but I looked at it like this: Killet had sat in that chair, and seemed to be speaking the truth; if I sat there I should see what Killet saw, and be no wiser than he was. That is the way I looked at it; and I think I was right.

"'I vanish myself,' he said then.

"'No,' I said. 'Another bwana.'

“Another white man, you know. It’s a funny thing about Africa, but wherever you are, if you look long enough, you can always find a white man. I didn’t look more than a week, and sure enough I found one. I saw a fire one night on a hill a mile away, and I went over next morning and found him. He was a shiftless-looking devil named Jickson; and I saw at once, from a look he had in his eye, that he was after ivory. Well, I didn’t ask him his business, except just for politeness, and he said he was collecting butterflies. ‘Nothing heavier than that?’ I asked. ‘No,’ he said; ‘that was all.’ ‘Pretty things,’ I said. And so they are. And then I got down to what I wanted Jickson to do, which was to sit where Killet had sat, while I watched. I told him there was more money in it than in butterflies. I meant ivory, but I said butterflies, and of course he knew what I meant. I told him what Killet had told me, and we worked out a plan to tell Europe something it didn’t know, and we meant to make a good deal out of it. And so we should have. They’d have come pouring in to hear a thing like that, and paid to come. We might have taken the Albert Hall. There’d have been thousands in it, I could have sent a couple of complimentary tickets each to all those fellows who were bothering me, and they would never have asked me for a cheque. They wouldn’t have dared, when they saw all that money coming in. It’s only when you’re down that they come round you with their accounts, like flies round a dying man. Damn them!”

“What happened, Jorkens?” I asked.

“What happened,” said Jorkens, “was this: I knew that Mwa wouldn’t want anyone hanging round watching his tricks; no conjurer would. So when I found out from Mwa where his magic circle was, the beaten bit of ground in the high grass, of which Killet had told me, I went to look round for the nearest bit of cover, from which I could get a good view without being seen. There was plenty of cover about of course, high grass in which all kinds of things could hide, but no hill for a quarter of a mile. That hill, however, was a very good one, nice and steep, with trees on top. And hiding behind a tree with a pair of Zeiss glasses, I decided I could see a good deal. And so I could: from that hill I could see not only the Umgogo River, which came quite close, though it couldn’t be seen over the grass from the place where Mwa did his tricks; but I could see long reaches of it shining.

Mwa chose the same time as he had chosen with Killet, and the same odd chair that Killet described to me; reeds for the seat and back, and the framework made of some kind of timber that does not grow here, and looking as though it were polished for years by the palms of African hands. It was all got ready the day before, and that night Jickson had supper with

me outside my little tent and we talked of all the money that we were going to make.

“ ‘Better than butterflies,’ I said again. ‘Europe will pay through the nose for its curiosity.’

“And, mind you, I believed in this African magic myself; but I wanted to see how it worked, so as to be able to tell them at the Albert Hall, and so as to corroborate Jickson.

“Next morning I went off early and Jickson went to the chair, and I never took my glasses off him once he was in it. I told you I had a splendid view; I could see a clear fifteen miles of the Umgogo River, sweeping down through the heart of Africa at a good ten knots. Jickson could see nothing of that from where he sat. Mwa lighted a fire, and the smoke drifted in Jickson’s face, and I could see from the way he sat, perfectly comfortable and still, that it was as Killet had said and there was nothing unpleasant in this smoke. The witch-doctor danced a bit, but the man on each side of him and Jickson in his chair were all so quiet that I was astonished when I suddenly saw the two men run forward, and several others rise out of the high grass, and pick Jickson up and carry him off at a run, still sitting in that odd chair. Jickson never moved head or hand, and I saw that he must be asleep. They made straight for the Umgogo River and a huge canoe shot out with twenty rowers in it, and ten of them started rowing all they knew, going down with that rapid current. And between stream and rowing they were gone out of that stretch of river that I could see in under an hour, a good fifteen miles. As only ten men were rowing, I imagine they did it in shifts. I wondered where they were going. Of course I couldn’t interfere. I had a rifle with me; one always has in Africa; but I couldn’t rescue Jickson from the men that were carrying his chair, at a quarter of a mile, with that: I’d just as likely have relieved him of all his earthly troubles. Mwa was dusting his hands and walking slowly away, and I thought for a moment of going and questioning him pretty severely. But on second thoughts I said to myself ‘No. Killet came back, and the best chance is to leave Jickson to come back the same way.’

“And I was right. He did come back. He came back in twenty-five days; just about the time Killet had said. I stayed there all the time; and one day Jickson walked up to my boma. He was looking just the same as usual, tired and rather ineffective, and with that shifty look in his eye that I have always noticed with men who are after ivory.

“ ‘Well, you are back,’ I said.

“‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘and it is the most wonderful experience I have ever had; pure African magic. It will thrill London.’

“‘No good,’ I said.

“‘No good?’ he gasped at me.

“‘No good,’ I repeated. ‘I saw how it was done.’

“‘But I went four hundred miles in a second,’ he said.

“‘How did you time it?’ I asked.

“‘By the sun,’ he said. ‘It hadn’t moved while I made that wonderful journey.’

“That is what Killet had said.

“‘Do you know the day of the week?’ I asked.

“But one doesn’t much bother about the days of the week in those parts of Africa, and Jickson brushed the question aside.

“‘You went to sleep,’ I said.

“‘Sleep?’ he repeated.

“‘It wasn’t honest smoke,’ I told him.

“‘It smelt rather pleasant,’ he said.

“Pleasant! I daresay. But things that are pleasant are not always so very good for us. Waiter! Another whiskey. I fancy I’ve been talking a good deal; and I feel rather dry. Well, we went into the whole matter and found out just what had happened. And it must have been the same with Killet. With that current, and those men rowing like hell, they must have done about fifteen miles an hour, and they must have landed him twenty-four hours later and carried him out of sight of the river and put him into his chair and brought him round. And there was the sun when he opened his eyes, still at eleven o’clock.

“Yes, that’s African magic; fooling the white man. And very good they are at it too. A drug that can keep you unconscious for twenty-four hours is nothing out of the way for an African drug. They’ve worse ones than that in the forests along the equator; drugs that can let in the long sleep through a scratch that you would not notice. I may say it wasn’t four hundred miles; that was an exaggeration of Killet’s; but it was a very long way, and it wasn’t far short of it, the way Killet travelled, on the journey coming back; and it was about the same with Jickson. He and I parted when we saw that

there was no money in it for either of us. I never told Mwa that I had found him out: that was a bit of information that I kept to myself. I hadn't come to Africa to tell Mwa what I knew, or what I did not know."

"And what about the trouble over your debts?" asked Terbut.

"Oh, that blew over," said Jorkens.



## Chapter 20

# JORKENS CONSULTS A PROPHET

IT was the usual thing at the Billiards Club, a thing that happens too often: Jorkens was known to be coming up the stairs, and one or two members, simply with the deliberate intention of getting the conversation where he was unlikely to join in, that is to say away from Africa or any of the wilder lands, had chosen philosophy for their discussion. Free will or destiny was the general trend of their argument. I found it merely dull. But the moment Jorkens heard them, his eye brightened up.

“There is a lot to be said for destiny,” said Jorkens, “but you can’t ignore free will.”

“What do you mean?” said one of the philosophers.

And then Terbut joined in.

“Do you know anything about either of them?” he said.

“Yes,” said Jorkens. “As it happens I do. I thought I knew about one of them, and it turned out I didn’t, but I had quite a considerable experience of the other. I’ll tell you about it. It was like this. I was a good deal interested in destiny, not so much from the point of view from which you are looking at it, but as a practical proposition. I said to myself, things are bound to happen, and there’s no stopping them; and if one could find out someone who knew what those things were, there’d be a great deal of money in it. And, mind you, it was not I that was having wild fancies about it: plenty of people claimed to know the future, and do so still. Well, I investigated the claims of one of them. I went to him and I said, ‘You foretell the future?’

“‘I do,’ he said.

“‘Can you tell what is going to win the Derby?’ I asked.

“‘I can,’ he said.

“Well, it wasn’t the Derby that I wanted to know about, it was a race-meeting a long way from here, but it served my purpose just as well, and I asked him if he could tell me what was going to win that. So he brought out a lot of silks and began unwrapping them, all of them different colours; and when he had taken off about nine of them, there was a crystal, not quite smooth, but lightly carved on the surface with things like leaves; rather like

an artichoke. Then he lit a powder in a little agate saucer, which made a smoke with a queer smell and made everything dim all round, but not the crystal. The crystal remained as bright as ever. When he moved it slightly in his hand things moved in the crystal: you could see them quite clearly. And then he told me the name of the horse that would win that race, and the name of the second and the third. He did more than that, he showed me the actual race in the crystal with the three horses leading it past the post and their colours clear and distinct. Now, that was a queer thing to do. The horses were unmistakable: I recognized all three of them afterwards; but, to make sure, I jotted down the colours that the jockeys were wearing. He let me see that race again and again. It was clear and bright, in spite of the smoke all round me; in fact the grass was greener than it ever is naturally, and the colours the jockeys wore were more like enamel than silk. But you simply couldn't mistake them. Of course I paid him; I paid him a good deal; in fact the blackguard demanded £5, and wouldn't take less. But, after all, the information was worth it. Then I got out of the room as fast as I could, away from the scented smoke, to breathe the fresh air, and because I didn't like the fellow at all. I had the name of the winning horse from the conjurer's lips, and I had seen the race with my own eyes. Did I tell you that he let me see the race over and over again, so that I got the colours quite clear? I bought some coloured chinks and jotted down sketches of them. I very soon found what the horses were, and who their owners were and what their colours; and the colours I had seen in the crystal were perfectly right. Well, do you know, I didn't have a penny on that race. I just went and watched it. And there were the horses, every single one of them, just as I had seen them in the crystal. And the man was perfectly right about the name of the winner, and of the second and third. It was an odd and surprising experience to see that race in the crystal repeated before my eyes, all the horses I had seen, all the colours and even the exact distances between each, which I had noticed in the crystal and made rough notes of. I was a good deal surprised, but I didn't waste any time wondering: I saw that I was on a good thing, and I went straight back to that rather sinister fellow that burned the scented smoke. I said, 'I want to see another race, and I will give you £10 this time.' I did that so as not to have any argument as to whether or not he would show me another, for I knew now that it was an excessively good thing. Well, he burned the smoke again in the agate saucer while he held the crystal in his hand; and the room grew dim once more and the crystal shone brighter and I saw another race. Again he told me the names of the three winners, and again I jotted them down and made little sketches of all the colours with the coloured pencils, which I had in my pocket this time. It was a big race, a very big one, and it was coming on in about three weeks' time.

Well, I concentrated on the winner. Of course I could have got fabulous odds, if I had backed all those three horses to come in in the right order, but I didn't want to give too much away: I didn't want people to suspect that I had had dealings with a clairvoyant, and so to find out that my bet was a bet on a certainty. I had a good deal of money in those days, and I concentrated on the winner. I put all the money I had on him, spreading it over various bookies, and I borrowed a good deal more; and the odds were six to one. What with the cash I had borrowed and what with the stuff I owned, I stood to be ten times richer on the afternoon of that race than I had been on the same morning. I am not going to tell you what race it was; because, if what I tell you gets out, I don't want some fellow to get up and say that that's not the way races are run there. They are run in that way of course, only I don't want to say so.

“The day before I made my final arrangements with the bookies I went back to the damned fellow with the crystal and scented smoke, to ask him if he was sure of what he had been talking about, that is to say that Pullover would win that race, with a jockey wearing blue and yellow hoops. He said he knew well what he was talking about, and that that horse would win. And he asked me if the other race had not gone exactly as he had predicted, which of course made me look rather silly and quite unreasonably anxious. But it was then that he touched on a topic that I think you were just talking about. He said that free will was some sort of force that was almost equal, I think he said, to destiny; and that if I were to take a gun and shoot the horse as he came by, or injure it severely before the race, then of course it would not win, but that according to the will and the actions of everybody else in the world, and every horse, that horse would win the race. Only two men, he and I, knew anything of the future, as far as that horse was concerned: he certainly would do nothing whatever, and took an oath accordingly, and, provided that I exerted no free will against what was planned for the horse, it was destined that it must win. He also repeated the names of the second and third, with which I had nothing to do, for the reason that I have told you. The whole thing seemed very reasonable and, indeed, obvious. Of course if I took violent measures against whatever was ordained, the thing could not happen; just as, if you divert a river, it won't go its old way to the sea; but leave it alone, and it will.

“The day of the race I went and saw the horses in the ring. And I had seen every one of them in the crystal. The colours of three of the jockeys I had of course sketched in coloured pencil, and I had the sketch in my pocket. And there the three jockeys were, all walking about. The winner was

absolutely unmistakable, even without the blue and yellow hoops: he was a bright chestnut with a clear white star on his forehead.

“I watched the race. And the second horse that I had seen in the crystal, white with red spots, and the third horse, green jacket and cap with white sleeves, were coming along nicely; but the odd thing was that my winner suddenly went a bit short far out in the country, and I saw him through my glasses dropping back. When the man had said ‘if you shoot the horse, he won’t win,’ I had said to the damned fellow, ‘Do you think I should be such a fool?’ But I had done a more foolish thing really. I had backed the horse too heavily for the bookies. They couldn’t afford to let him win. If I said that that jockey with his blue and yellow hoops had received any money from them, he would turn out to be still alive and would sue me for libel. But he had a young family; and a thousand-pound note comes in wonderfully handy in bringing up two or three children. Yes, the second horse was first, and the third horse was second, and then came the field: the race was wonderfully like what I had seen in the crystal, only that my chestnut horse with the white star, ridden by blue and yellow hoops, was right back with a little bunch that came cantering past at the end. Of course it was all my own fault: I’d played free will against destiny. And, as I was never able to make out in what proportions they work, I never had anything to do with that kind of thing any more.”

## Chapter 21

# A MATTER OF BUSINESS

SUMMER had gone, and the brighter part of the autumn, and it was dark again in the Billiards Club by the time lunch was over, as though the fog had come down our little street before anyone had noticed he was about, and had peered in at our window.

“For the Lord’s sake,” said someone, “tell us something about some country that is not entirely shrouded in darkness.”

“I’ve seen several such countries,” said Jorkens. “Lived amongst them for years.”

“Tell us what you were doing,” said someone.

“Business, mostly,” said Jorkens.

And at the word business one or two of our members who work in the City, when they are not taking a rest at the Billiards Club, woke up or sat up and asked Jorkens what kind of business.

“Various kinds,” said Jorkens. “Some small, some big. One of the biggest bits of business I ever saw, I was only indirectly concerned in. I had lent a man a fiver, and he was going to repay it at a thousand per cent when his deal came off. What the deal was I didn’t know at the time. I invested the money in the man, not in the deal. And he was the kind of man whose deals come off much oftener than once in ten; so that it might really have paid you to lend him money at 500 per cent, let alone at a thousand. He was pretty good in the City of London, but he recognized early that he would have competitors there, and among them even some that, for all he knew, might have abilities as good as his own. So he travelled a pretty long way, and worked where in matters of business he was not likely to have his plans upset by some sharper intellect. He was the kind of man to whom you couldn’t help lending a fiver, that is to say if you were the kind of man he was looking for. He had an unerring eye for the man with whom to do business. He knew exactly the man to whom business was a strange and mysterious force no more to be understood by a man to whom it had not secretly been revealed than Greek could be understood by a man who had never learned it. The kind of man he wanted is rather hard to define.”

“A mug,” interrupted Terbut.

“It is a vulgar word,” said Jorkens, “and not exactly the one I was seeking, but anyway Moocher could do business. He had no money and borrowed a fiver of me, and borrowed from a good many other people; investing he called it. And the business he was concerned with at the moment was floating a new kind of cheese, a thing called Chewit. He had the cheese all ready, and had raised £3,000. And then he suddenly realized that at the pace that the money was coming in he would never have enough money to advertise Chewit, as a thing like that would have to be advertised. It would have taken more like thirty thousand to make people begin to eat Chewit, and another hundred thousand to keep them at it for a year. So he dropped Chewit with a dull thud, and turned at once to a new scheme. And that was the scheme that was to bring me back my fiver, and nine more of them with it. In the city of Chichagua he went straight to the office of its biggest firm, pushing a hand-cart with a roll of light wire on it, and asked to see the manager. And he was shown up at once. That is one of the things that Moocher could do. It may seem a small thing; but, if you want to make a great fortune, that is about half way to it; and, if you haven’t that knack or ability you will never make anything in business at all. I cannot define the knack: there was a very great deal of mystery about him for one thing; and, when you began to penetrate his mystery, you began to see at the edges of it whatever you were most interested in yourself. For instance the firm of Gonzalez, to which Moocher went, were interested in getting a contract from the government, to make a lot of artillery; and, when Moocher called, he refused to tell the janitor anything, because his business was much too secret; and, when the secretary came, he hinted at war; and, after a great deal more mystery, artillery began to emerge from his hints, like the nose of a mouse in a corner. And so he got taken up to the fifteenth story, with a little case in his hand, leaving his hand-cart below, beside the main door, and saw the manager and told him that in these days of scientific wonders it was not entirely an impossibility that Mars or some other planet might declare war on us, while we on our side were utterly unprepared. The bald statement does not sound the kind of thing that the manager of a big firm would be likely to listen to, but there was an honesty oozing out of Moocher, such as only dishonest men have. They need it. If one of them looks just ordinarily honest, somebody says ‘We had better test him, to make sure.’ And almost at once he is found out. So a crook has to seem so honest, that it is sheer impiety to suggest making any test.

“‘But how do you suggest that we should prepare against such a thing as that?’ asked the manager.

“‘That is what I have called about,’ said Moocher. ‘Others will have to invent a gun capable of sending a shell as far as Mars. They should be able to do that. There is one already that can send its shell far outside Earth’s fifty miles of atmosphere. But I have invented an explosive which, if packed into a fair-sized shell, could wreck the planet Mars.

“‘Wreck it?’ said the manager of Gonzalez.

“‘Certainly,’ said Moocher.

“‘But, but, but,’ began the manager.

“‘You will naturally demand proofs,’ said Moocher. ‘And these I have with me.’

“He produced a pill-box, so small that the fears of the manager were slightly allayed; and in the pill-box was a little soft yellow pill, no larger than an ordinary pellet of shot, a number 6 shot, you know.

“Then he opened the case he had brought, and took out a little electric battery, and a packet of cotton-wool with some chemical on it.

“‘Put this pill-box,’ he said, ‘in the cotton-wool and lay it in any convenient place that you may choose. I have a mile of wire downstairs on a drum. Take it with you, unrolling it as you go, and connect the wires with this end of the cotton-wool. A spark will ignite it there; and, if you choose a place in sight of one of your windows, you will see a very big explosion when I press down this knob.’

“They had three windows looking out all over the town, and a fine view from their fifteenth storey.

“‘But what will explode?’ asked the manager.

“‘This pellet,’ said Moocher. ‘It will make a crater a hundred yards across, and very deep; and, if you put a hundred thousand of them into a shell, the crater will be a hundred thousand times larger, wherever that shell drops; roughly 10,000 kilometres; quite enough to smash a small planet.’

At this point the manager of Gonzalez began to see that he was up against a very big thing. You may wonder at his believing Moocher like this, but there was that persuasive air about Moocher that all crooks have; and, anyway, he had his proofs with him.

“‘But what . . . ?’ he began, and then stopped.

“What the manager was going to say was, ‘But what if the thing bursts on *our* planet?’

“But he did not continue, because it is a bad thing in business to let the other man know what you are frightened about.

“‘I should like to consult my partners,’ he said instead.

“Moocher said he would be charmed to meet them. And the manager rang, and a clerk came in and showed in two or three more men.

“Again Moocher explained, and there was rather a silence. Moocher looked cheerfully out of all the windows, admiring the view.

“‘You have only to choose a convenient place,’ he said.

“Well, they were all of them frightened of what Moocher might do with a big lump of his explosive, and none of them were frightened of the little soft yellow pellet. And of course there was doubt too, running in and out among their fears. With things like that, and the persuasive Moocher urging them to choose a convenient spot, it was not long before the ends of two wires were brought upstairs and fitted on to Moocher’s little battery; while a clerk pushed a hand-cart with the rest of the wires, unrolling as they went, and the firm of Gonzalez followed out of the town. They had chosen, without any assistance from Moocher, a green space seen from their northern window just under a mile away; on which were no houses. The city went more than a mile in that direction, but there was this fairly wide space of rather marshy ground. In the middle of it they had decided to put down the pill-box, in its cushion of cotton-wool, and to fix the wires to it and return to their office. They got everything fixed up in twenty minutes; while Moocher sat in the office talking with one of the clerks, whom he completely charmed, for he was always charming to everybody, never knowing who might not be useful to him, or when he might not need him. Then the firm of Gonzalez hired a faraka, as they call their horse vehicles there, and drove back to the office.

“‘You have the wires connected?’ asked Moocher.

“‘Yes,’ they said.

“‘And you are all ready?’ he asked.

“‘Certainly,’ they replied.

“‘Where have you put the pellet?’ he asked them. For they had not told him. And they pointed out the place to him from their north window.

“‘Then, shall I press the knob?’ he asked.

“‘Do so,’ said the firm of Gonzalez.



“There was the sort of explosion that we associate more with Europe, than with anything in the tropical part of America. A tiny flash came from the cotton wool, and instantly they saw a wide fountain of black earth forcing upward a cloud of smoke with immense rapidity. Dead silence, as the partners stood gazing and scarcely breathing. And then a boom and a great rush of air, and the windows of Chichagua tinkling to the ground.

“‘A frightful explosion,’ they said, looking at their own shattered windows.

“‘Just a sample,’ said Moocher. ‘But what we are concerned with is an explosion a hundred thousand times greater. You see what it might be like, gentlemen. It is mathematical. You merely multiply by a hundred thousand. I hope you may see your way to purchasing my invention.’

“There was quite a silence before anybody asked the obvious question: ‘At what price?’

“‘Five million American dollars,’ said Moocher.

“‘At the present moment,’ said the manager, ‘at this particular date, our firm have not so much at their disposal.’

“The statement was untrue, but it need have been no more than the opening of a perfectly reasonable discussion. Moocher, however, preferred to take it as being a definite statement of fact, and, without any argument whatever, he packed up his little electric battery and, saying farewell to them all very politely, walked out of the room. One of them called after him something about ‘perhaps on a later occasion,’ and at any rate got his address, so that they were not left with this awful menace without any possibility of taking some steps to meet it. And that was the end of that day’s business.

“A few days later there was a pretty large meeting. Naturally the city was interested: they had all had their windows shattered. Moocher attended, carrying a pretty large bag this time, and in the bag was a really big lump of the same stuff as the soft yellow pellet.

“‘No smoking, please, gentlemen,’ he said to the meeting.

“They looked up rather surprised; not so much because they mostly smoke cigars in those parts as a matter of course, as because they were many of them important citizens, while Moocher had drifted into their city from nowhere.

“‘I have a good deal of bangite in this bag,’ he explained.

“‘A, a considerable amount?’ questioned somebody.

“‘Sufficient to wreck a planet,’ said Moocher pleasantly.

“The cigars went out at once, but there was a fire in the grate some distance away from the platform, where Moocher was seated with his bag on the table before him; for it was just in the middle of their short winter. More than one voice said falteringly: ‘But there’s a fire in the room.’

“Moocher opened his big bag again and took from it the kind of cover that is sometimes put over large cheeses, a big porcelain thing with a handle, and foolish designs painted on it.

“‘A spark is not likely to fly as far as this,’ he said pleasantly, ‘but I have brought this in case.’ And he covered up his big lump of bangite with it.

“And then the chairman arose, to express in a few words the uneasiness of everyone in that room about the safety of our planet, while such an explosive existed as was capable of making the explosion that they had all heard and felt, with a speck no larger than a grain of number 6 shot. Moocher rose and smiled.

“‘My price,’ he said, ‘gentlemen, is five million American dollars.’

“Hands twitched towards hip-pockets, but did no more than twitch, for no one dared fire a revolver in that room, especially when Moocher lifted the cover by a few inches, as though in answer to some of their thoughts. It was purely a matter of business. And they began to bargain. Moocher wasn’t too hard on them, and he let them off a fifth of the sum. And the bargainers seemed to be coming together nicely, and our old planet seemed about to be saved, when a bewhiskered farmer went right up to the platform.

“‘You say it would blow up the planet,’ he asked.

“‘Any planet,’ said Moocher in his most polished manner.

“‘Taxes and wars and strikes,’ muttered the farmer. ‘I guess I am about tired of this old planet anyway.’

“And he grabbed the bangite before Moocher could stop him, and strode past wondering rows of seated men, and threw it into the fire. Many men said afterwards what they had been prepared to do, but as a matter of fact they all sat perfectly still and perfectly silent, and all stopped breathing. When they did breathe again they breathed in the smell of about the worst cheese that ever threatened the market. Yes, that’s what the bangite was. It was Chewit. Moocher never wasted anything. If he could have got that muck

on the market he might have made £100,000 by it in a year, but he was after bigger money now, and in a shorter time; and, if it hadn't been for that damned farmer, he'd have got it. His wires had connected with the cotton-wool all right, but he had a friend watching for the flash in the cotton-wool; and, the moment the friend saw that, he shoved down another knob in a little battery, which sent a spark along another wire to the few tons of gun-cotton which Moocher had buried under the spot where they put the pill-box. That's how he'd spent the £3,000 which he had been some weeks in raising."

"But how on earth did he know," asked Terbut, "where they had put the pill-box? You said to us that they never told him where they were going to put it."

"How did he know?" said Jorkens. "He watched them out of a window. He was on the fifteenth story and could see the whole city; and his friend below could see which window Moocher was standing at. There was nowhere possible much short of a mile, and the wires were no longer than that. They weren't going to have the explosion among the houses. The only possible places were this green marsh that you could see from the north window, and a green mound that you could see from the west window, and a barely possible site that you could see looking out of the third. Moocher buried a small portion of gun-cotton there; but the bulk of what he had bought he buried in the other two places. I suppose Moocher made some sign to his friend from the window, and the friend must have run on ahead to wherever he had his battery, and sat waiting to see the flash in the cotton-wool.

"Of course Moocher did no more business in Chichagua. But he wouldn't have borne any malice. That kind of man, you know, can always find a job somewhere."

## Chapter 22

# THE INVENTION OF THE AGE

WE were talking to-day in the Club on trivial topics, when Jorkens, the great traveller, who had told us at different times of so many of the wonders of Africa, related one of his most extraordinary experiences from somewhere no further away than Cavendish Square.

What we had been talking of was inventions, a conversation originating, so far as I can remember, from some member grinding coffee into his soup from a pepper-mill. We had come from this point to much bigger inventions, when Jorkens said: "The greatest inventions of all are never accepted by the world."

He broke in with so much vehemence that some of us tried to give examples. What about wireless, we asked, and nitrotoluol? But we gave our examples weakly, and Jorkens swept them aside.

"Good enough in their way," he said; "but the greatest of all are always rejected. Swift flashes from brilliant minds, illuminating matter too brightly for ordinary men to be able to bear to look at it. The great inventions dazzle them and they blindly let them go by."

"Well," said the first of us who was able to make any headway against the vehement energy with which Jorkens poured out his opinion, "what kind of great invention has ever not been accepted?"

"I'll tell you," said Jorkens. "There was a man who lived up at the end of Wigmore Street and he was a dentist; and, being a man of genius at the same time, he decided to put his genius into dentistry. And he made this astonishing invention. To begin with he had noticed that people's front teeth varied a good deal, whereas all sets of false teeth are always the same. So that the first thing he decided to do was to make false teeth that looked like the real ones. A very simple idea. But when he got their shape right he began to get interested in their texture, and every single thing about them; and it was at that point that his inventions began to grow less simple. He hadn't been working three years when he achieved some astonishing realisms; and his dentures were so like teeth that after a while they actually began to decay. That is to say if people ate the kind of food that decays ordinary teeth. Well, that did no harm to the business, for people came to have them stopped in the ordinary way; and, when Stobley's patients

brought them back to him to be stopped, he naturally pointed out how like they were to real teeth, even in their infirmities. Yes, Stobley was his name, a name quite unknown to science, and yet he made this invention that for sheer incredibility is only equalled by television. I happen to know a good deal about it, because I went to Stobley myself and he supplied me with that very thing, a row of half a dozen new teeth. That's what they really were, new teeth: they didn't look like false teeth. They didn't look like them either in shape or colour. And in a few years' time one or two of them began to decay; and I went to Stobley and he stopped them. They had to be stopped in one's mouth, just like ordinary teeth, for Stobley used to fix them in permanently. And one day that I went I found Stobley very excited. He had been perfecting his teeth, in order to stop decay. You see they were so like ordinary teeth, that they decayed like them. And then one day Stobley had arrived at the conclusion that they decayed too easily, because they were dead; and that if he could make them more like live teeth, they would last very much longer, as live teeth do."

"What do you mean by live teeth?" said Terbut.

"I mean the ordinary difference," said Jorkens, "between a tooth that has had a nerve killed and one that is still healthy. The healthy ones keep much longer; and Stobley saw that the more he could make his teeth like to them, the better they would be likely to last. The supplying of a nervous system to each tooth was by far the most intricate part of his wonderful invention. The wires, or whatever he used, were incredibly delicate; and I believe he vivified them by some sort of electrical energy, though how he got all that into his row of teeth and sham gum was always a mystery to me. Well, he gave me a row of his new teeth in place of the others, and fixed them in, and they were certainly wonderful teeth; they bit like real teeth, and they shone like them, and you certainly couldn't have told them from the ones that people grow, however closely you looked. And a few more years went by, and then one of them began to decay, in spite of this arrangement of his for making it to all intents and purposes a live tooth. I noticed it one night. And there was a very curious thing about it, which I could hardly believe, until it was quite unmistakable, which showed me what an almost magical inventor the man must be. It was, as I told you, as wonderful as television. I lay awake for about an hour thinking of it. And I lay awake the whole of the next night. And the morning after that I went round to Stobley and I said to him: "You are the most wonderful scientist. Not only the most wonderful dentist, but the most wonderful scientist in the world."

"And so he was.

“Stobley was smiling all over. He knew exactly what I had come about: two or three other patients had come to tell him the same thing during the last few weeks. And he knew that he had done it. No man can surpass Nature, and Stobley wasn't fool enough to try. But he knew that he had drawn up level with her. He knew that he had created natural teeth. And I saw that look you so seldom see on the face of any man, the look that comes from some supreme achievement in the work to which that man has devoted his life. And that was all the satisfaction he got from it. Do you think the public would support him? Do you think they cared anything for researches as profound as those of Marconi? Or for the invention that that one man achieved in all the ages? Not a bit of it. They went their own way, with their own teeth, till they rotted; and then with sets of false teeth, just the same as the next man's, all turned out by the million. They wouldn't touch Stobley's teeth, equal though they were, in even minutest detail, to Nature's very own. It is the way of the world.”

“But if Stobley's teeth were as good as all that,” said Terbut, “why didn't people take to them?”

“They ached,” said Jorkens.

## Chapter 23

# THE SULTAN, THE MONKEY AND THE BANANA

I NOTICED the other day in the Billiards Club a new form of concerted action prejudicial to Jorkens. I had noticed before, and have gone so far as to set down in writing, a deliberate effort of some of the members to take the conversation on to ground where it had been wrongly supposed that Jorkens would be unable to follow. His experience of life, however, has been too wide for the narrow scope of these efforts, which have never yet prevented him from telling an apposite story. For this reason certain members of our club have invented new tactics, the result of which was that on the day in question, the moment that the approach of Jorkens was signalled, one of our members, called Jerrup, immediately started upon a premeditated story. And it certainly prevented Jorkens from telling one. This being so, I fear there is nothing for my pen to do but to remain idle, or to tell Jerrup's story. What he said was this, plunging rapidly into his story because Jorkens was just coming in: "I knew a house-agent once, who did an enormous amount of business: he was one mass of energy, and never stopped working: and, for that matter, he met a man who worked just as hard as himself; but that he would never credit; and that is rather the point of the story. Ankin was the name of the house-agent, and the man he met was called Peters. And Ankin used to tell a story about his meeting with Peters; he told it off and on for eight years, and that's how I got to hear it. I don't mean that he told it any more than other people tell things; but on suitable occasions, when the King's health had been drunk, and other appropriate toasts, and the special toasts that were relevant to the occasion, and cigars were about half-way smoked, and men began to talk a good deal to their neighbours; why then, as often as not, Ankin would tell this story. It was a story merely to illustrate, with as much modesty as remains to any of us, when the champagne has been round a few times and the liqueurs are there, how neat and quick he was at his own business. He used to tell how a boy named Peters came into his office, having just passed his medical examination and wanting to set up in London as a doctor; and Ankin had offered him a consulting-room in Harley Street at a very big price. Peters had said it was too much, and Ankin had talked to him something like this: 'If you really know much about your profession, say so. But if perhaps you don't, just look what this room that I

have to offer is worth to you. You take it; you are right in the middle of Harley Street; and you become a specialist. Look what you can charge then. You will scarcely notice that rental.’ And Peters had admitted that he didn’t know much, but could not see how a room in Harley Street would make him know any more. ‘That’s not the question,’ Ankin had said. ‘In Harley Street you will be accepted as a specialist, and your fees can be fixed accordingly.’

“‘But what should I be a specialist in?’ said young Peters. ‘I only meant to set up as a general practitioner.’

“‘In the heart,’ replied Ankin. And that was what he always used to think was the funniest part of his story. ‘It’s about our most important organ, isn’t it? Everyone wants to keep that right. You set up as a heart-specialist.’

“And Peters did. And he went away to Harley Street and paid the big rental, and Ankin never supposed for an instant that he was a man with energies equal to his own. Ankin entirely forgot Peters’ name, clearly as he remembered the incident. Of course the name was of no interest to him, any more than Peters’ job was; for he was only interested in his own business. And after about eight years at his business, doing thousands of deals like that, and keeping at it and making a big success of it and never giving himself a rest, he wore himself out. So he went to a doctor, who advised him to rest; but he wouldn’t do that. And then one day a friend said to him, ‘An ordinary doctor will never do you any good. You ought to see a specialist, and he’ll put you right.’ For Ankin’s heart was affected. So back went Ankin to his doctor, and began a circuitous talk which he had intended to end with the announcement that he was going away to try a specialist. But he hadn’t got very far when the doctor himself recommended a specialist, and was not in the least offended with Ankin’s wish to consult one. For he not only gave him the best specialist’s name, but earnestly gave him good advice up to the moment they parted. The advice was partly a repetition of his neglected advice to rest, but chiefly a rather earnest warning to avoid any kind of shock. And so they parted, and Ankin went away with the name of the specialist and his address on a half-sheet. The name of Peters conveyed nothing to him, nor even did the address, for he had handled thousands such in his furious career as a house-agent. He put people into houses with the speed of a poacher putting ferrets down rabbit-holes, and all his memory held of them was bright and laughable incidents like the story he told about Peters. ‘He’ll put you right,’ were his doctor’s last words to him on the doorstep. ‘But no shocks, you know. They wouldn’t do at all.’

During the last few months Ankin had not told that story quite so much; there was something about it that seemed a bit too close to him, and, seen



close, it wasn't so funny; also he attended fewer suitable occasions, for he didn't feel so well as he used to on the day after. But he remembered the tale well enough.

“Well, away went Ankin to Harley Street; and the mere going there rather quickened his pulses, though not to the extent that his slight agitation could be possibly described as shock. The shock came when he saw Peters, his last hope, and recognized him. That was like catching a lifebuoy thrown to him in the deep sea, and finding that it was lead. For Peters to him was never the great scientist that his industry had made him during the last eight years; Peters to him was only a small figure in a business deal, and a dupe at that. And the shock was instantly fatal.”

“An instructive story,” said Jorkens, “in a way. But nothing to the story of the Sultan, the monkey, and the banana.”

And try as we would, and did, not only on that day but often afterwards, we never persuaded Jorkens to tell that story.

## Chapter 24

### PUNDLETON'S AUDIENCE

MUCH as I deprecate the entire incident, I relate an episode that occurred at the Billiards Club because, when the whole story is sifted, there may remain, for all I know, something of value to science. It is not for me to say whether Smerthkins' story is true or false: the thing can easily be tested by others. Scientists can accept or reject it, as they have to do almost every day with information that may be laid before them. The reason that I deprecate the whole incident is that it was nothing better than a plot to ridicule Jorkens. There are those in the Club who, without the least scientific training, and without making proper investigation, even if they were qualified to do so, disbelieve a great many of the data which are brought by Jorkens from time to time to our gatherings. Jorkens, the day before, had told one of his stories, which I may or may not have recorded; and, when I went in for lunch, I found a little group of members who had evidently got a story all ready, and were waiting for Jorkens to come. I was sitting not far from the door, and very soon I heard someone coming up the stairs, whom I knew by the breathing to be Jorkens.

"Look out," I said. "Here's Jorkens."

For they were actually mentioning his name at the time, and one does not want a row in the Club. Well, the moment I said that, one of them leaned back in his chair and began to tell a story, and the others turned towards him with various expressions on their faces signifying scientific interest. Smerthkins was his name, a man who, I believe, counts for a certain amount in the city, though I don't quite know what he does.

"I met a man recently who had been to Mars," he said.

"Mars?" said one of his group.

"Yes, Mars," he said just as Jorkens walked in. "And he told me a little about the country there, and what he told me was very interesting; but unfortunately he was suffering frightfully from overwork when he got there, so that his wits were trembling at the point of balance and very easily toppled over, and some sort of shock that he got in Mars turned out to have been too much for them."

"How did he get there?" asked Jorkens.

And after that he sat still, listening rather moodily, as he often did when anyone else was telling a story.

“That I can’t tell you, unfortunately,” said Smerthkins. “I can tell you what the shock was that upset him, and I can tell you how he overworked himself, and I can even tell you something of the landscape of Mars; but unfortunately that is about all, because his wits were pretty badly upset by the shock and a good deal of his memory went with them.”

“Very naturally,” said Terbut, who, though not one of the group round Smerthkins, was evidently giving his support to the tale from a feeling of rivalry with Jorkens.

“What overworked him?” said Jorkens, though not audibly to anyone but me, and I repeated his question. I must say that I thought that the answer to it would give some kind of clue as to how the man got to Mars. But it turned out to have nothing to do with it.

“What overworked him,” said Smerthkins, “was the realization that, more than Domesday Book and Magna Charta to us, with Homer and much of our history thrown in, would be his own first words to the people of Mars. His speech to them on arrival would be the very first message they ever received from Earth. Pundleton was his name, and of course he thought that in Mars it was certain to be immortal. He trusted their philologists to understand what he said; probably not at once, but, when they had taken it down and studied it, he had complete confidence that a race so far wiser than us would easily deal with the problem, seeing how far ahead of us the people of Mars must be on account of their smaller planet having cooled ages earlier. ‘I counted,’ Pundleton told me, ‘on two or three million years of progress beyond anything we have attained. And look,’ he said to me, ‘how we have progressed in the last hundred.’ Well, I hope we have. His realization of the enormous importance of his message in the archives of Mars drove him to prepare his speech with pains such as no-one has probably ever taken with any speech on earth. He consulted countless histories; he read, as he told me, all the greatest poetry in the world, and I’ve no doubt that he read all he knew of, and he dipped into law and science and I know not what else besides; and then he wrote out his speech, working night after night until all hours, and when he had done that he learned the whole thing by heart. And I was able to check a good deal of the truth of that, for he reeled off pages of it to me without any hesitation, and it certainly did contain a lot of law and history and poetry, mixed up with a very great deal from every branch of science. He had undoubtedly undertaken a great deal of labour before even writing his speech. When I

knew him he was shut up and much of his mind had completely gone, though he still had his speech verbatim, and the memory of the shock that unhinged him; and so it was difficult for me to make out exactly what Pundleton's character had been before he became upset; but I should say that he was a rather pompous person, with a rather meticulous way of doing things. And once his pomposity had decided for him that his speech on Mars would be of world-wide importance at the time and would be treasured in their history for ever, his meticulous industry drove him to make a speech that he thought would be worthy of history."

"Ridiculous," muttered Jorkens.

"I didn't agree with the man at all," said Smerthkins. "But, at the same time, I have occasionally had to make a speech at a small dinner, and I know how it gets on your mind. Supposing, instead of a dinner-party, you expect a whole planet is going to listen, why, then . . ."

"Quite so," said Terbut.

"Well he took this enormous trouble," went on Smerthkins, "and it pretty well wore him out; and on top of that the difficulty of getting to Mars can be no light job. How on earth he managed it I don't know. It is one of our greatest contemporary tragedies that we can never get that from him now. Nothing at all remains in his memory but that rather tiresome speech, and the shock he received on Mars, which ended his intellect. After that he does not remember how he got back. I believe he remembers something of his getting there, but he won't say. Of his getting back he remembers no more than a dream of a year ago. Everything has been completely blank with him since the shock."

"And what was the shock?" asked Jorkens.

"Well," said Smerthkins, "he had had this terrific work, of which I have told you, and he had done it for a people that were to be two or three million years in advance of our wisest. Call it hero-worship, or snobbery, or what you will, but he had got towards this people an almost dog-like attitude, and it grew on him until he must have been practically blind to anything in the universe but his own pomposity and the splendour of the intellect of this glorious Martial race. And when he got there he found this race. He travelled great distances, so as to find the largest audience; and he was well able to travel, because everything seemed to him so light on Mars after our heavier planet, and a walk of a hundred miles was nothing to him. But his audience were the same wherever he went. Nothing but mushrooms. Intelligent

mushrooms, he admits. He made his speech at last, and he saw them all leaning towards him. But, after all, nothing but mushrooms.”

“Very interesting,” said Terbut. “Don’t you think so, Jorkens?”

And we all turned to Jorkens then, to see what he would make of it.

“Very probable,” said Jorkens. “But I don’t see anything out of the ordinary in it.”

“Oh, well,” said Terbut, and thought for a while, but thought of nothing better to say than, “Perhaps you wouldn’t.”

## Chapter 25

# THE FIGHT IN THE DRAWING-ROOM

“WE were talking about London drawing-rooms,” said Terbut, as Jorkens entered the Club.

We were not doing anything of the sort, and I am sorry to say that it was but another attempt, too often made in the Billiards Club, to turn the conversation so far away from the centre of Africa that there would be no chance for Jorkens to join in. The one ray of light that shines on the situation, the one thing mitigating this unsporting device, is that I have never known it to be successful.

Jorkens caught Terbut’s remark as deftly as a juggler catches a billiard cue, and twisting it round returned it, in the form of a story, to Terbut and all of us.

“A London drawing-room,” said Jorkens, “a London drawing-room. I never hear of one of them without thinking of one of the most desperate struggles I ever had.”

“With big game, I suppose,” said Terbut.

“Yes,” said Jorkens, “with one of those huge Alsations, dangerous at any time, but doubly so when pampered, for nothing ruins a dog’s temper like making a pampered pet of it, and this was the most pampered brute that I ever saw. I had been invited to come to tea with a woman, in the way that one sometimes is; just the kind of woman that keeps that kind of pet and makes it more self-indulgent than herself. Unfortunately I accepted her invitation, and arrived at the exact hour at which she asked me. Of course she was late. And her parlourmaid showed me in and asked me to wait. And there was the dog. As soon as the parlourmaid left, the dog got up from his corner in the far end of the drawing-room and came for me. He came for me slowly with his hackles rising, and walking apparently on the tips of his toes. The dog was old and fat, but he had magnificent teeth, a huge Alsatian. I could see he was pampered up to the very limit, and I knew that the temper of a dog like that would be something no stranger could deal with. It was not only his fat that showed me he had been pampered, but he had a collar studded with large semi-precious stones; and, if that was not enough, his toe nails had all been painted pink. The pampered brute came for me, baring his huge teeth, that were sharp and horribly shining. It was no use saying Good

dog to a brute like that; flight was the only thing, but the door was just too far off. I began moving backwards slowly; and then he sprang. He sprang at me in a lazy and pampered manner, but he got me down at once, for his weight was enormous. I shouted, but there was no use in that, for the woman who had invited me was at the top of the house, putting finishing touches to her dress or her lips, and the parlourmaid was in the basement. The only thing to do was to try to hold the brute off until somebody chose to come. And it was not in the least easy. I got hold of his throat and pushed. To squeeze it was quite impossible: it was just a huge roll of fat, through which I could no more get at his wind-pipe than I could have strangled a hippopotamus. He was slow of course, or I should never have been able to get hold of his throat, slow and unhealthy and lazy; but pampering that had deprived him of his activity had given him his bad temper and his great weight, and I can tell you that twelve stone of Alsatian stimulated by really bad temper is something that it takes an athlete to deal with. And I was not an athlete at that time, whatever I may have been when I was younger.

“Well, I held off his jaws with both hands, but they were coming nearer and nearer, and still no sign of anyone at the door. I can tell you that those jaws looked unpleasant at any time, and worse and worse as they came nearer. I could see their sharp points, and their brightness close to my face was almost dazzling. His growls had stopped and he was just breathing at me, and coming down closer and closer to my throat with all the enormous weight that he had got from over-eating for years and years. A feeling came to me very vividly now, that no one was coming to help me: my call for help and the growls of the dog had evidently not been heard, and there was nothing that I could think of to bring my hostess; the hour of our appointment had not brought her, so I could think of nothing in particular that would; unpunctuality cannot be calculated by any method known to man. I tried to kick the brute with my knees, but again I met rolls of fat, and very soon realized that all the rest of his vitals were as well wrapped up as his wind pipe. And all the while those teeth were coming nearer, as my elbows bent under his descending weight. Lazy and slow though he was, I could see no end but one to it. When I felt that I could hold off his jaws only very little longer, I began to wonder what it would feel like when the teeth met in my throat. Would I die from loss of blood, or should I be throttled? Would the pain be sharp or dull? Would the end be sudden or slow? And naturally I looked at those teeth for an answer; and now they were no more than six inches away. And as I looked at the bright sharp points of them, it suddenly struck me, as trivial things will at moments of great intensity, that such bright sharp teeth were queer in so old a dog. No-one was near the

door, no step on the stairs, and I remained with my lonely reflections as to why this brute at his age had the teeth of a two-year-old dog; all but two at the back. Old and pampered, and yet with these perfect teeth, except for a pair of old molars above and below. Pampered! That gave me the clue. The very thing that fond woman would have done. I didn't know it was possible, but evidently she had done it. And the realization of it saved my life."

"Done what?" said Terbut.

"False teeth," said Jorkens, "She had had the pampered brute equipped with two rows of false teeth. They can do it with us, and I suppose they can do it with dogs. Anyway that was what she had done. I expect it cost her hundreds. They would be sure to make a woman like that pay them a pretty penny. But she must have paid more for the collar, and she probably enjoyed writing the cheque, and only wanted to do still more for the brute, though she couldn't be punctual for me. Oh, well, you can never tell what a woman will do with her fancy. The moment I saw what they were I slipped the two rows out with the greatest ease, leaving only the two pairs of molars, that were perfectly flat with age and unsuitable food. His temper almost immediately turned to mere surliness, when he saw that he was no longer able to bite me, and he soon took his huge weight off, and I was glad to be rid of it; and he went growling away to the corner from which he had come. And, soon after, the woman came in.

" 'I hope Fido hasn't been rude to you,' she said.

" 'Not at all,' I told her.

"I knew it was no use complaining to her of the brute. I did better than that; I had his teeth in my pocket. And the fat brute couldn't tell her what I had done. Ten minutes later they were in the mud of the Thames. I can tell you it was a pretty near thing; and to hear of a London drawing-room makes me thirsty even yet."

"Oh, all right," said Terbut. "Get him a whiskey."



## Chapter 26

# THE IVORY POACHER

“**P**OACHING,” said Jorkens one day at the club, “is a low disgusting trick. It can be a most infernal nuisance, and ought to be stopped.”

One of us had probably mentioned the word, poaching, though I don't know who; but Jorkens' motive for breaking out as he did was not so much what anyone may have said, as the fact that he had recently acquired a little house in the country with a few acres attached to it, which were so overrun with rabbits and covered with brambles that he had probably got them cheap. Very likely he did not really mind the neighbouring villagers snaring his rabbits, for he is a good-natured fellow; but there are men who cannot resist groaning aloud under a landowner's burdens, when they are just new to him, and Jorkens is probably one of these.

“They shouldn't do it,” said one of us, Slippet by name; and, as often happens in clubs, he hit the nail on the head, for the words appeased Jorkens; and, in a much quieter voice, the old traveller said, “If they want to poach, let them poach properly, and not take another man's rabbits.”

And then he was silent.

I could see that Terbut was pondering, and for that matter I was a little puzzled myself.

“What do you call poaching properly?” Terbut asked then.

But no answer came from Jorkens; for almost the moment that his wrath had subsided, as it always does very quickly, soothed no doubt by the apt words of Slippet, he fell asleep in his chair. I ought perhaps to have mentioned that it was twenty minutes or so after we had most of us finished lunch. I waited some while in the club, for I thought I knew what Terbut was going to do, and I believed it would lead to a story; and, chronicling the varied experiences of Jorkens, as my habit now is, I am careful not to neglect such opportunities. And sure enough I was right, for Jorkens after a while gurgled and moved his head, and suddenly opened both of his blue eyes wide.

“What do you call poaching properly?” Terbut asked him at once.

“Why, poaching in Africa,” said Jorkens, “and leaving other men's rabbits alone. Africa's not like Surrey, and poaching does no harm there.

They may have rules against it, in fact they have, but poaching in Africa doesn't hurt other men's rabbits; and I wish the men that poach on my land would go there."

"What do you poach in Africa?" asked Terbut.

"Ivory," answered Jorkens.

"So that's what you've been up to," Terbut said.

"Not at all," said Jorkens. "I never did any myself. And I never said I did. I was only speaking of what is generally done there by those with a taste for poaching."

"Can you tell us anything about it?" asked Terbut.

"As an onlooker," said Jorkens, "I can. As a purely chance onlooker. I happened to meet a man who was a considerable ivory-poacher. I should have had nothing to do with him if he'd poached rabbits; elephants belong to nobody; so he shot considerable numbers. His difficulty was to get the tusks out of the country. Easy enough to shoot them, and easy enough to hide them, but as soon as he started moving them about Africa he risked meeting a game-warden; and, as for getting them to civilization, Customs officers would come to the ivory there like wasps to jam, when you have tea out-of-doors. And in addition to that the game-wardens knew about him, though they didn't know exactly where he was and he had his ivory buried. As a matter of fact he was camped by the Bahr-el-Arab, a river that flows into the Bahr-el-Gazal, which flows into the Bahr-el-Gebel by Lake No, which is a reach of the White Nile. I happened to meet him purely by chance, when I was wandering about in Africa."

"What were you looking for?" asked Terbut.

"The view," replied Jorkens.

So unsatisfactory was this answer, that Terbut pursued it no further, and Jorkens continued his story.

"I found him in a small camp by the Bahr-el-Arab," said Jorkens, "just a tent for himself, and some canvas shelters for a dozen arabs. He met me some way out from his camp, a tall man with a dark moustache that was beginning to grey a little bit just at the ends, where occasionally he chewed it. He was evidently anxious to keep me away from his camp, a wish that I always respect, because, if you annoy men in the middle of Africa during the heat of the day, they are often quick to invent a pretext for shooting, that would never occur to them in a cooler country. And why annoy them, in any

case? So as soon as I saw that he wanted me not to see his camp I walked away with him from the river, and talked as we went, and it wasn't long before we were very good friends. There are times when there comes over me a sudden weariness of Africa, while at other times a weariness of London and all other large cities is equally pronounced in me. At the time of which I am telling it was a weariness of Africa that had recently overtaken me, and I learned that he was soon starting for Cairo, and seemed quite willing to take me with him; only, for the next few days, for purely business reasons, he would consider it a particular favour if I could make it convenient to keep a few miles away from his camp. To this of course I readily acceded, and at the end of a few days I walked down to the river again from the little camp that I had on the higher ground, whistling as I went and walking quite slowly; and out came Wudd (that was the fellow's name) quite pleased to see me. I found that he had a dahabeah under the bank, that is to say a small sailing ship; and he said he was going to Cairo. Well, I was very pleased to hear that, for I had been a long time in the middle of Africa, keeping company with the anopheles mosquito, and hyenas and snakes and ticks, and I felt that a little civilization would be just the thing for me; and to get to Cairo, travelling cheap, as I was doing just then, with a donkey and a few Dinkas, would have taken me the best part of a year. So as soon as Wudd offered me a berth in his dahabeah, I jumped at it; and off I started that day, with him and his Arabs, for Cairo. It was a lonely part of the world, distinctly lonely: one saw that from the way the Mrs. Gray's Cob came and stared at one from only a little further away than a man can throw a spear; and the reed-buck seemed to know nothing of white men either. I was quite glad to leave it.

“I said to Wudd as we started down the river, ‘What are you doing on the Bahr-el-Arab?’

“And he said, ‘Collecting butterflies.’

“And then he asked me what I was doing.

“‘Collecting moths,’ I said.

“‘Where are your moths?’ he asked.

“‘Where are your butterflies?’ I asked Wudd.

“We understood each other perfectly then.

“The boat seemed rather low in the water, but it was overcrowded with all those Arabs, as well as having a big load of logs. I hadn't much to do, going idly down that river, except to watch scarlet birds flashing across it,

and the white fish-eagles sitting watching on branches, and the moon-coloured water turning to opal at evening, and to wonder why Wudd was going from good elephant-country to Cairo with a lot of Arabs and a load of logs. And to my astonishment I found they were ambach wood, logs cut up into lengths of one or two feet. What is astonishing about ambach wood is that a good stout log of it, thirty or forty feet long, can easily be lifted with one hand: it looks like timber, but is in fact merely pith. I wondered why Wudd wanted to take it to Cairo. And it was the only cargo he carried, except for the sacks of flour that were to provide food for his Arabs for a couple of thousand miles. Another thing that struck me was that the dahabeah seemed to be made of good oak that, from its colour, seemed to be about a hundred years old; and oak does not grow on the Nile.

“‘That’s a fine grain,’ I said, pointing to one of the beams; which was perfectly true.

“‘Yes, it’s a nice bit of timber,’ said Wudd.

“‘And somehow I saw that he was going to say no more about it.

“‘We came in a day or two to the Bahr-el-Gazal, sailing past red-trunked trees and mimosa bushes, with the small round bloom of the mimosa shining like a far-away tiny sun; and I noticed a good many saws and hammers on board, and got the idea that the Arabs had been building the ship for Wudd. I talked to them a good deal at first, but Wudd didn’t like it, as I noticed from the way that he butted in when I was asking an Arab what he did with a very large hammer that I saw lying beside him: ‘It’s for stunning the butterflies,’ said Wudd.

“‘One day the wind dropped for five hours and we went ashore for a bit, and saw rows of pits in the grey mud dried by the sun, the tracks of galloping elephants.

“‘Interesting beasts,’ I said.

“‘I’ve not been to the Zoo for a long time,’ was all that Wudd had to say.

“‘A wind got up and we went on board again. I should say that the little ship, unloaded, was two tons, or a trifle over, and we were a bit cramped. The Arabs had a drum, and they sang a good deal, all in a bunch at the forward end of the ship. In the heat of the day they slept. But they sang all the evening, and the man with the drum kept time to the song, while the river turned to an opal. And the stars came out, and the Arabs still sang on, singing the song of the Nile. I don’t know what they call the song, but it is

the only one I have heard from the Sudd to the Mediterranean, a song of rejoicing sung with mournful voices, like children singing in prison to greet an inrush of sunlight, a slow song, with drum-beats growing faster and faster. I'd sing it to you, but that I cannot bear to hear it in London; it makes me so yearn for Africa."

"We quite understand," said Terbut. But for which, I think, Jorkens would have sung to us.

"The water was now a mile wide," Jorkens went on, "though the channel of the Bahr-el-Gazal was no more than fifty yards: marshes lay left and right of us, where, if we went for a walk, the water was sometimes up to our knees and sometimes up to our waists, unless we came on a hidden stream, and then we would go to our necks, with the blue water-lilies shining in front of our faces. And pythons lay there, coiled on tussocks of reed, waiting for the chance of a meal on a white-eared cob or a waterbuck. After a walk of that sort one spread one's clothes on the little deck in the sun, and they were dry in half an hour. There was a cabin in which there was just room for Wudd and me, sitting down: the grain of the wood seemed especially fine in there, and I've seen many oak panellings that had not half so fine an appearance. We were sailing east, and a north wind was blowing. We only went ashore when we wanted food, and I shot a tiang once every two or three days, a sort of red cow with a long black face: the meat wouldn't keep more than two days. Once I shot a wart-hog. I put the first shot right through his ribs, but he charged me for all that, and it took me three more cartridges to stop him. It was a nice bit of bacon. The Arabs didn't like having the pig on board, as they regard all forms of bacon as being accursed; so after one good meal we threw the rest away, keeping only his four tusks, two blunt ones ten inches long and two little razors.

"'The only bit of ivory on board,' I said to Wudd.

"'Yes,' he answered.

"'Funny,' I said. For I couldn't get out of my head that he had ivory somewhere, though the ship was quite empty and the pile of logs seemed to hide nothing, nor the sacks of flour that were heaped in the bows.

"'Why funny?' he asked.

"'I was only wondering,' I said.

"'Well, look here,' said Wudd. 'Wonder all you like on the Bahr-el-Gazal, but don't do any wondering when we get to the White Nile, for I

always look on that as practically civilized, and we don't know whom we might meet and I don't want to start any of them wondering.'

" 'I quite understand,' I said.

"But what I didn't understand was where the ivory was. It was perfectly clear to me by now that Wudd was an extremely shrewd fellow, the kind of man who is born to be one of three things: something in the City, something on the turf, or an ivory poacher, the kind of man whose father before him probably never thought any other profession worth taking up except one of those three. One evening when we were smoking and the Arabs were singing and the river was like a long aquamarine I said to Wudd straight out: 'Where is the ivory?'

"And Wudd was silent awhile, and then he said: 'I might have a bit in my pocket.' And he looked out at the sky ahead, where the first star was appearing, with his pipe in his hand and a glow going up from the bowl, and after a while he said: 'Or on the other hand I might not.'

"The more I looked round the dahabeah to see any possible place of hiding it, the more the mystery grew. And then we came to that liquid blue beryl they call Lake No, which changed with the changing of evening into many other semi-precious stones. In dead silence, but for the flapping of our sail, a huge fish leapt out of the lake and came down on the waters with a resounding crash. What it leapt at I never noticed, but it seemed to me that an eagle would be the only appropriate bait for such a fish to rise at, though I did not actually see one. We left that fish behind us leaping and falling, and by dawn next day we had come to the Bahr-el-Gebel. Wudd was getting uneasy now. 'This is the White Nile,' he said, 'and that's almost civilization. We might come across a white man at any time.'

" 'And what if we do?' I asked.

"Wudd looked at me curiously. 'I don't like them,' he said.

" 'Look here,' I said, 'I've been in your boat for a fortnight and I haven't found your ivory; and I'm not so blind either. Who do you think is going to find it?'

" 'There's a lot in what you say,' he replied.

"And I think he cheered up a bit then.

"The North wind held and we still sailed eastwards, and we sat in a couple of canvas chairs all day, looking out for the smoke of a steamer, and none appeared.

“‘You’ve noticed nothing queer about this ship?’ said Wudd.

“‘No,’ I said. ‘Why?’

“‘Because there’s nothing queer about it,’ he answered.

“‘Perhaps there’s a slight smell of paint in the cabin,’ I said. ‘But I don’t call that queer.’

“‘Don’t give way to fancies like that,’ he answered sharply. ‘I knew a man once who thought he smelt a cheese soufflé all along the Bahr-el-Zeraf, and his temperature very soon went to 105. It’s a bad thing to let yourself develop such fancies: it means that the anopheles mosquito is winning.’

“‘I didn’t see what had excited him, but I just said, ‘Very well; I didn’t smell any paint.’

“‘And he said, ‘That’s right.’ And we went on gazing away down the Bahr-el-Gebel, and saw nothing but hippos.

“‘Wudd certainly had a beautiful grain in his timber, and he was touchily proud of it, and would never let me knock out the bowl of my pipe on any part of his ship. How many hippos we saw there is no telling, for they live on the bottom of the river and come up to breathe when they feel like it, so that they are never all of them up at the same time, but we passed through large herds of them. You’ve never seen a hippo looking in the least like a horse, Terbut?’”

“‘No, I don’t think I have,” said Terbut.

“‘But the Greeks, who knew that river, named them well enough,” went on Jorkens, “when they called them river-horses, for what you see of a hippo’s head, from eye to nostril as he lies in the water, is quite like the head of a horse, except for the size, and size of course is only a matter of distance. All night they try to roar like lions, and really do it very well, considering that they are only a variety of large pig.

“‘I didn’t count the days, they just slid away like the water. One day Wudd tied up under an oleander, and I went ashore with one of the Arabs and shot a roan antelope. The reason I took the Arab with me was not that he was a hunter; in fact I had found out by now that he was only a ship-builder: I took him so that he could perform the last rites over the antelope, before the poor brute died, as otherwise none of the Arabs would have eaten the meat, and I only shot it so as to provide food for us all. On another day I got two Rufifrons gazelle, with their foreheads all saffron with powder-pollen, from rubbing their horns against the mimosa branches. But mostly I sat in

the shadow of the sail, talking to Wudd about everything except ivory, and the Arabs smoked or sang. We passed Bahr-el-Zeraf and the Sobat River, and slanted more to the North; and still the North wind held, and we tacked about the river and sometimes drifted. One day we came to Fashoda and the river ran still more northward, and a few days after that we were sailing due North, so far as we could with a North wind in our faces. And then one day we saw the smoke of a steamer, coming up the river ahead of us, and Wudd said: 'You've got over that feeling you had, that there was a smell of cheese soufflé?'

"And I said, 'Quite.'

"The steamer, which was a most genuine antique, was a paddle-steamer with only one paddle, and a barge was lashed alongside it to prevent it sinking when the North wind blew it over. Wudd took out a bundle of air-cushions that lay flat in a drawer in the cabin and began to blow them out, and gave one to each of the Arabs as he did so. They evidently knew what to do with them, for they put them at once under their robe-like clothes, which fattened them up considerably.

"'It will save his time in the end,' said Wudd to me.

"'Whose time?' I asked.

"'The game-warden's,' said Wudd. 'Their time is precious to them, though I don't know what they do with it; and if he got the idea that we were a bit low in the water he might waste his time trying to find what we carried. I don't say we are low in the water, but those fine fat fellows will help to account for it if he gets the idea that we are.'

"'All right,' I said, 'I'll have one of them too, if you've got a spare one.'

"'Thanks very much,' he said. And he gave me a spare one. Of course I've put on a bit of weight since then, but it made a lot of difference in those days. I didn't like the look of myself at all, but that's what you have to get used to as time goes by. Well, I slipped in the air-cushion and undid a lot of buttons, and I still had no idea where he carried his ivory.

"Wudd was right about the game-warden: he was on board the steamer all right, and it drew up alongside and the game-warden greeted Wudd cheerfully, and then said, 'Got any heads or anything?'

"'No,' said Wudd, 'only butterflies.'

"'Mind if I come on board and have a look at them?' asked the game-warden.



“‘Glad to show them you,’ Wudd replied. And, sure enough, he had a box full of butterflies, a wooden box lined with cork, and a fine sight they were.

“‘A very nice collection,’ said the game-warden. ‘Got anything else?’

“‘No, nothing else,’ said Wudd. ‘But take a look while you’re here.’

“‘Well, thanks,’ said the game-warden. ‘Perhaps I will.’ And he took a look among the sacks of flour, and went through the heap of ambach wood. ‘It’s one of the formalities I have to go through with,’ he said. ‘I do it with every ship.’

“‘I quite understand,’ said Wudd. ‘Take your time about it.’

“‘I think I’ve about finished,’ said the game-warden. ‘You know, they were saying in Khartoum that you had two tons of ivory.’

“‘As much as that?’ said Wudd. ‘It’s strange how people talk.’

“‘Yes, isn’t it?’ said the game-warden.

“‘I was in South Africa once,’ said Wudd, ‘and they said that I had two tons of diamonds.’

“‘And had you?’ asked the game-warden.

“‘So you aren’t interested only in game,’ said Wudd.

“‘That is of course my principal interest,’ the game-warden replied.

“‘And what interest brought you all this way to meet me?’ asked Wudd.

“‘To see your butterflies,’ said the game-warden.

“‘Have another look at them,’ said Wudd.

“‘I think I’ll be going on now,’ said the game-warden.

“The dahabeah and the steamer were fastened alongside and he went slowly over the side and climbed on board his steamer, with a great many wistful glances along our decks as he went.

“Wudd and I looked at each other till the steamer had gone so far on its journey back to Khartoum that we could no longer see the game-warden standing on the deck looking back at us.

“‘Well, he didn’t find it,’ I said to Wudd then.

“‘He saw a nice collection of butterflies,’ replied Wudd. ‘What more did he want?’

“‘We’ve known each other for some weeks now,’ I said. ‘And I think you might tell me.’

“‘As a child,’ said Wudd, ‘I was wonderfully talkative, but somehow one learns in business not to talk very much; at least not in the ivory business. So, if I were in ivory, I expect I should talk very little. And if I’m not, there’s nothing to talk about. That’s how it is.’

“‘I see,’ said I.

“‘I wonder if he’s ever noticed the shoebill,’ said Wudd, as he looked reflectively at one of the most remarkable birds in the world, standing upon the bank and watching us going by.

“‘Who?’ I asked.

“‘That game-warden from Khartoum,’ Wudd answered.

“‘Why?’ I said.

“‘He didn’t strike me as very observant,’” said Wudd.

“Now the bill of the shoebill is as large as a polo-boot, and he’s common along the White Nile.

“‘I expect he’s noticed one of them by now,’ I said.

“‘I doubt it,’ said Wudd.

“This was also rather a slur on me; for I’d noticed nothing as yet. Two tons of ivory! This wasn’t like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, it was like looking for a haystack on a lawn, and not being able to find it; for, though I couldn’t see where he’d hidden it, I’d picked up enough about men by that time to be sure that Wudd had it somewhere about him. I’d plenty of time to think it over, tacking and drifting about the White Nile, with only Wudd and a dozen Arabs to talk to, and never meeting a soul except tall Shillooks, going by in their long canoes, till we passed the Shillook country and came to the grey Dinkas, men smeared all over with wood-ash to keep the mosquitoes away, and dressed in a necklace of light-blue beads and a feather. The North wind dropped at last and we got a better one, but it was a slow journey among idle days. When we left the country of roan antelope, waterbuck and tiang, I fed the men upon geese, manœuvring on shore till I got on the flank of a flock along the bank of the river and enfilading it with my rifle; and sometimes Wudd took a hand with a 12-bore. And then the desert began to appear: trees grew fewer, and all vegetation sparser, until bare sand appeared and the waters of illusion shone instead of the marshes, of which we had seen so much.

“‘They’ll take another good look at my cargo when we get to Khartoum,’ said Wudd.

“‘You’re a wonderful man,’ I said.

“‘I’m a fair painter,’ he answered.

“‘Painter!’ I said. ‘You were a butterfly-hunter just now. And I daresay you are very good at both. But to palm two tons of ivory as you are doing in an empty ship and with your sleeves rolled up to the elbow is really marvellous. I think you are the greatest man I ever met; and I knew Maskelyne.’

“‘Well, well,’ said Wudd. ‘I like to give what entertainment I can. But it’s a very suspicious world.’

“‘What I don’t see,’ I said, ‘is, if you’ve got it buried further up the river, how and when you are going to get it.’

“‘And,’ Wudd answered, ‘if there weren’t a great many things that most men didn’t see, there’d be no chance for anybody to do a bit of business.’

“‘I wonder where you’ll sell it,’ I said.

“‘In the Levant,’ said Wudd.

“‘And I wonder how you’ll get it there,’ I continued.

“But the Arabs, who had seen their desert again, and who seemed to be cheered by the false smiles of its mirages, were singing so loudly now that I did not hear his answer.

“We passed the tree under which Gordon used to sit when he walked out of Khartoum; and we came to the city itself and lowered our sail and anchored. And it was exactly as Wudd had said, they came to look over his ship, three of them this time. Very politely, but very thoroughly, the whole heap of logs was ransacked and the bags of flour and the cabin; and then their boatman who had rowed them out to us fell overboard from his boat and came up on the other side of Wudd’s dahabeah. The three men who were inspecting the boat were much too anxious for the man’s safety and did much to help him to get on board, which is absurd with anyone born by the banks of the Nile, because they all swim like otters.

“‘Pity he didn’t drown,’ muttered Wudd.

“It was fairly evident to me that the man had been taking a look under the keel. I could see that much, but I couldn’t see where Wudd kept his ivory.

“They passed his ship, and let him leave Khartoum, and on we went through a thousand miles of desert. The work we had at the cataracts was awful: there are six of them, counting the barrage at Aswan, and we had to find donkeys to drag the ship, and we used logs as rollers and we all shoved and hauled, as well as the donkeys, and got the damned thing round and into the water again; and Wudd would never wait, but got to work as soon as we came to a cataract, even if it was in the middle of the day; and the hot rocks scorched us and mirages laughed at us till we got to the water again and all lay on the deck. I think he had a fear that it couldn’t be done, and he wouldn’t stop for a moment in case he had time to think, and, if he did that, he knew that the fear would win.

“‘For God’s sake sell the thing, or sink it,’ I said, ‘and get another dahabeah cheap on the other side of the cataract.’

“But he wouldn’t listen to reason. They were six awful experiences, and between the fifth and the last we came to Abu Simbul. You may think that I had got into pretty low company, travelling with a suspected ivory-poacher, and twelve Arabs who were evidently his accomplices, and I may have had the same sort of feeling at first myself; but when I saw Abu Simbul I felt that whatever brought me there fulfilled some higher purpose than poaching ivory, for to have seen Abu Simbul is an event not only in a lifetime, but one that is worth waiting for through three or four lifetimes, if the guess that the Hindus make at what none of us knows should turn out to be right. It is a temple in the dark of a hill, carved out of the very heart of the hill itself, with four gods cut out of the hillside at its doors, and four gods at its altar in the deeps of the rock. You entered, if you were an Egyptian four thousand years ago, in the dark before dawn, and walked into the blackness till the stars disappeared from you, and went on in the cold and dark far into the hill. And there no doubt the priests talked or chanted to you, though I haven’t any idea what they said or sang, but I know that after a while a most astounding thing happened, for I have seen it myself, and it takes your breath away: a greyness came to the darkness under the hill, and before you could either expect it or believe it, the sun, the bright African sun, shone on the altar, and you saw four gods that sat there as at a table, looking at you and blushing. When I saw that, I said, ‘Wudd has his uses. Fate sent him to show me this.’”

“You’re not imagining all this, are you?” said Terbut.

“Couldn’t do it,” said Jorkens. “Only one man could ever imagine it, and he’s dead; the man who carved Abu Simbul out of the hill for Pharaoh.

We went on, with our mysterious and invisible cargo, all through the wonders of history; we went where Roman soldiers had been, and Greek traders before them, bringing to Europe the doctrine of immortality, and curious tales for Herodotus; we went through a land that must have been green and fertile, to support the splendour of Rameses; we were all the while in a valley haunted with the enchantment of stories so strange, that often I found myself on the point of disbelieving even the word of History and putting the story of Egypt away among gorgeous fairy tales; and always at that moment some temple used to appear, telling the story again in solid stone, blurred by the mason-wasp and defaced by religious anger, but calmly surviving the centuries. There was nothing larger than ducks to be shot now; but we often bought a sheep, and the Arabs cut its throat after hurriedly asking its pardon, and feasted and were all happy. And all those weeks I sat talking with Wudd, and never got at the secret of his ivory. For a thousand miles the sakieh creaked its song at us, the oldest song in the world, the song of man's effort, with an ox to help him, to get water up from a well; for a thousand miles the same saffron dawn shone in the sky on our right, always over a clump of palm-trees sheltering some little village from the sight of bare desert all round it, where a few pale columns of smoke went into the clear fresh air, to show that men would soon be up in the morning and that women were cooking already. One day we heard the soft plip-plop of a screw round a bend of the river in the early morning: we were drifting again with the North wind in our faces, and when the steamer came round the bend it was nearly on us. The helmsman steered clear of us in a rather blasé way, as though he had been dodging dahabeahs all the way from Cairo, as I expect he probably had. But he did not quite steer clear of us, and grazed our port side as he passed. I never saw anyone more angry than Wudd, and I seldom heard such language as he poured out at the *Reis* of the steamer, cursing him till his ship was far out of hearing.

“‘What’s the matter?’ I asked. For collisions along the Nile are no more commented on than jolts in a restaurant car.

“‘Matter?’ said Wudd. ‘He’s spoiled my timbers.’

“‘Your what?’ I asked.

“‘My timbers,’ shouted Wudd, coming quite near to me and roaring it in my ear.

“‘Oh; your timbers,’ I said. And as yet I had no suspicion.

Wudd tied up to the bank at once and went to the cabin, and got out a box of oil-paints and a bottle of turpentine and took a look at the graze on

his port side. And then he got the Arabs to dig a place out of the bank, in which he could stand and paint the side of his ship.

The Nile, I may say, for the last few hundred miles of its journey, runs pretty well all the way under a six-foot cliff of dry mud, with Arab boys loitering along it chewing a sugar-cane, and now and then a traveller on a donkey, or a woman in a blue robe. I saw a big white splash where the steamer hit us, when I got out and looked, but I could see no other damage. And Wudd, with a palette over his left thumb, had already started to paint a dark grain on it. He was certainly a marvellous craftsman, and I saw what he meant then, one day when I had called him a great man, a thousand miles or so further up the river, and he had told me he was a painter. He might have been working all his life in a genuine antique shop. Very likely he had: it is a tricky trade and would just have suited Wudd. Well, as I watched him in sheer admiration, he looked over his shoulder and saw me.

“‘Leave my work alone,’ he snapped, ‘and get on with yours.’

“‘What’s mine?’ I asked.

“‘Smoking a pipe,’ said Wudd.

“‘Oh?’ I said, not thinking of anything better to say at the moment, as often happens to most of us.

“‘Well, I never saw you do anything else,’ said Wudd.

“I said no more to him then and went for a walk, as it is no use continuing that kind of argument. I walked as far as a little crop of green wheat, that shone in the distance with the astonishing glow which green has at the edge of a desert, and there I saw four or five egrets walking beside the wheat, their white shapes flashing against it with the brightness of pure light. And Wudd, when I got back, had just finished his painting. It was a superb piece of work. Where there had been a flash of white twice the size of the palm of a hand there was nothing but a bit of well-seasoned oak, with the grain of it gleaming out through the dark of the old timber. Well, it didn’t take more than that to give me a clue; and a clue is all you want to puzzle out anything. The whole problem had been to me hitherto like a word of three letters in a cross-word; but when you have read the clue, ‘an Australian bird,’ it doesn’t take you very long to see EMU. It was just like that with Wudd’s painting. I thought I had better tell him that I had got it.

“‘You ought to paint miniatures,’ I said.

“‘Miniatures?’ said Wudd. ‘Why?’

“ ‘They always paint on ivory,’ I replied.

“ ‘Fine palm-tree that,’ said Wudd.

“ ‘Very fine indeed,’ said I.

“It wasn’t the first time I had seen an ivory ship: there’s a shop in Old Bond Street that used to have two in the window, and very pretty they looked; but it was the first time I had seen one of that size.

“I haven’t much more to tell. We went down that dream of a river, and parted at Cairo.

“ ‘You’re not going to do any talking about those miniatures?’ Wudd said to me.

“ ‘Certainly not,’ I said. ‘And I am very much obliged for the lift.’

“And Wudd sailed on with only three men to help him, heading for the Levant. And I had other business to see to. And before that year was out, happening to get in touch with the ivory market, I heard that Wudd had sold two and a half tons of ivory somewhere in the Levant; just broke up his ship and sold it. I wonder if some miniature-painter is painting on any bits of it now.

## THE END

### TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *Jorkens Has a Large Whiskey* by Lord Dunsany]