

Presently he explained. "Have you heard," said he, "that a great doctor, a man called Verkerrsen, has been investigating the long life of the Hungarians, and attributes it to the quantities of sour milk that they drink?"

I had not heard.

"Yes," he went on. "The whole matter is explained in an article in the *Medical Journal*. You had better read it." He took a sip from the tumbler, and made a horrible grimace. "Ugh!" he said, "but I think the Hungarian sour milk must be nicer than the sour milk of London. Ugh! Disgusting. But I *must* take it, I suppose."

He loved theories above everything else, and went on sipping heroically till he finished the glass. Then he jumped to his feet, and arched his biceps, and smote proudly on his chest. "Ah!" he cried, "it was worth it. I feel better already. Let's have supper."

Supper was brought in, admirably cooked, and laid on the study table. We sat down to it with the elderly housekeeper. The novelist, restored by sour milk to ebullient health, was as happy as could be, joking now with her, now with me, talking most joyfully. Something crossed his mind, when he was half way through his soup, but it was no more than the shadow of a bird flying over a flower-bed in the sunlight. He bent towards me. "I say," he said, "my