

**Allan and the Holy Flower**

**By**

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## CHAPTER I

### BROTHER JOHN

I do not suppose that anyone who knows the name of Allan Quatermain would be likely to associate it with flowers, and especially with orchids. Yet as it happens it was once my lot to take part in an orchid hunt of so remarkable a character that I think its details should not be lost. At least I will set them down, and if in the after days anyone cares to publish them, well--he is at liberty to do so.

It was in the year--oh! never mind the year, it was a long while ago when I was much younger, that I went on a hunting expedition to the north of the Limpopo River which borders the Transvaal. My companion was a gentleman of the name of Scroope, Charles Scroope. He had come out to Durban from England in search of sport. At least, that was one of his reasons. The other was a lady whom I will call Miss Margaret Manners, though that was not her name.

It seems that these two were engaged to be married, and really attached to each other. Unfortunately, however, they quarrelled violently about another gentlemen with whom Miss Manners danced four consecutive dances, including two that were promised to her fiancé at a Hunt ball in Essex, where they all lived. Explanations, or rather argument, followed. Mr. Scroope said that he would not tolerate such conduct. Miss Manners replied that she would not be dictated to; she was her own mistress and

meant to remain so. Mr. Scroope exclaimed that she might so far as he was concerned. She answered that she never wished to see his face again. He declared with emphasis that she never should and that he was going to Africa to shoot elephants.

What is more, he went, starting from his Essex home the next day without leaving any address. As it transpired afterwards, long afterwards, had he waited till the post came in he would have received a letter that might have changed his plans. But they were high-spirited young people, both of them, and played the fool after the fashion of those in love.

Well, Charles Scroope turned up in Durban, which was but a poor place then, and there we met in the bar of the Royal Hotel.

"If you want to kill big game," I heard some one say, who it was I really forget, "there's the man to show you how to do it--Hunter Quatermain; the best shot in Africa and one of the finest fellows, too."

I sat still, smoking my pipe and pretending to hear nothing. It is awkward to listen to oneself being praised, and I was always a shy man.

Then after a whispered colloquy Mr. Scroope was brought forward and introduced to me. I bowed as nicely as I could and ran my eye over him. He was a tall young man with dark eyes and a rather romantic aspect (that was due to his love affair), but I came to the conclusion that I liked the cut of his jib. When he spoke, that conclusion was affirmed. I

always think there is a great deal in a voice; personally, I judge by it almost as much as by the face. This voice was particularly pleasant and sympathetic, though there was nothing very original or striking in the words by which it was, so to speak, introduced to me. These were:

"How do you do, sir. Will you have a split?"

I answered that I never drank spirits in the daytime, or at least not often, but that I should be pleased to take a small bottle of beer.

When the beer was consumed we walked up together to my little house on which is now called the Berea, the same in which, amongst others, I received my friends, Curtis and Good, in after days, and there we dined. Indeed, Charlie Scroope never left that house until we started on our shooting expedition.

Now I must cut all this story short, since it is only incidentally that it has to do with the tale I am going to tell. Mr. Scroope was a rich man and as he offered to pay all the expenses of the expedition while I was to take all the profit in the shape of ivory or anything else that might accrue, of course I did not decline his proposal.

Everything went well with us on that trip until its unfortunate end. We only killed two elephants, but of other game we found plenty. It was when we were near Delagoa Bay on our return that the accident happened.

We were out one evening trying to shoot something for our dinner, when between the trees I caught sight of a small buck. It vanished round a little promontory of rock which projected from the side of the kloof, walking quietly, not running in alarm. We followed after it. I was the first, and had just wriggled round these rocks and perceived the buck standing about ten paces away (it was a bush-bok), when I heard a rustle among the bushes on the top of the rock not a dozen feet above my head, and Charlie Scroope's voice calling:

"Look out, Quatermain! He's coming."

"Who's coming?" I answered in an irritated tone, for the noise had made the buck run away.

Then it occurred to me, all in an instant of course, that a man would not begin to shout like that for nothing; at any rate when his supper was concerned. So I glanced up above and behind me. To this moment I can remember exactly what I saw. There was the granite water-worn boulder, or rather several boulders, with ferns growing in their cracks of the maiden-hair tribe, most of them, but some had a silver sheen on the under side of their leaves. On one of these leaves, bending it down, sat a large beetle with red wings and a black body engaged in rubbing its antennæ with its front paws. And above, just appearing over the top of the rock, was the head of an extremely fine leopard. As I write to seem to perceive its square jowl outlined against the arc of the quiet evening sky with the saliva dropping from its lips.

This was the last thing which I did perceive for a little while, since at that moment the leopard--we call them tigers in South Africa--dropped upon my back and knocked me flat as a pancake. I presume that it also had been stalking the buck and was angry at my appearance on the scene. Down I went, luckily for me, into a patch of mossy soil.

"All up!" I said to myself, for I felt the brute's weight upon my back pressing me down among the moss, and what was worse, its hot breath upon my neck as it dropped its jaws to bite me in the head. Then I heard the report of Scroope's rifle, followed by furious snarling from the leopard, which evidently had been hit. Also it seemed to think that I had caused its injuries, for it seized me by the shoulder. I felt its teeth slip along my skin, but happily they only fastened in the shooting coat of tough corduroy that I was wearing. It began to shake me, then let go to get a better grip. Now, remembering that Scroope only carried a light, single-barrelled rifle, and therefore could not fire again, I knew, or thought I knew, that my time had come. I was not exactly afraid, but the sense of some great, impending chance became very vivid. I remembered--not my whole life, but one or two odd little things connected with my infancy. For instance, I seemed to see myself seated on my mother's knee, playing with a little jointed gold-fish which she wore upon her watch-chain.

After this I muttered a word or two of supplication, and, I think, lost consciousness. If so, it can only have been for a few seconds. Then my

mind returned to me and I saw a strange sight. The leopard and Scroope were fighting each other. The leopard, standing on one hind leg, for the other was broken, seemed to be boxing Scroope, whilst Scroope was driving his big hunting knife into the brute's carcase. They went down, Scroope undermost, the leopard tearing at him. I gave a wriggle and came out of that mossy bed--I recall the sucking sound my body made as it left the ooze.

Close by was my rifle, uninjured and at full cock as it had fallen from my hand. I seized it, and in another second had shot the leopard through the head just as it was about to seize Scroope's throat.

It fell stone dead on the top of him. One quiver, one contraction of the claws (in poor Scroope's leg) and all was over. There it lay as though it were asleep, and underneath was Scroope.

The difficulty was to get it off him, for the beast was very heavy, but I managed this at last with the help of a thorn bough I found which some elephant had torn from a tree. This I used as a lever. There beneath lay Scroope, literally covered with blood, though whether his own or the leopard's I could not tell. At first I thought that he was dead, but after I had poured some water over him from the little stream that trickled down the rock, he sat up and asked inconsequently:

"What am I now?"

"A hero," I answered. (I have always been proud of that repartee.)

Then, discouraging further conversation, I set to work to get him back to the camp, which fortunately was close at hand.

When we had proceeded a couple of hundred yards, he still making inconsequent remarks, his right arm round my neck and my left arm round his middle, suddenly he collapsed in a dead faint, and as his weight was more than I could carry, I had to leave him and fetch help.

In the end I got him to the tents by aid of the Kaffirs and a blanket, and there made an examination. He was scratched all over, but the only serious wounds were a bite through the muscles of the left upper arm and three deep cuts in the right thigh just where it joins the body, caused by a stroke of the leopard's claws. I gave him a dose of laudanum to send him to sleep and dressed these hurts as best I could. For three days he went on quite well. Indeed, the wounds had begun to heal healthily when suddenly some kind of fever took him, caused, I suppose, by the poison of the leopard's fangs or claws.

Oh! what a terrible week was that which followed! He became delirious, raving continually of all sorts of things, and especially of Miss Margaret Manners. I kept up his strength as well as was possible with soup made from the flesh of game, mixed with a little brandy which I had. But he grew weaker and weaker. Also the wounds in the thigh began to suppurate.



The Kaffirs whom we had with us were of little use in such a case, so that all the nursing fell on me. Luckily, beyond a shaking, the leopard had done me no hurt, and I was very strong in those days. Still the lack of rest told on me, since I dared not sleep for more than half an hour or so at a time. At length came a morning when I was quite worn out. There lay poor Scroope turning and muttering in the little tent, and there I sat by his side, wondering whether he would live to see another dawn, or if he did, for how long I should be able to tend him. I called to a Kaffir to bring me my coffee, and just as I was lifting the pannikin to my lips with a shaking hand, help came.

It arrived in a very strange shape. In front of our camp were two thorn trees, and from between these trees, the rays from the rising sun falling full on him, I saw a curious figure walking towards me in a slow, purposeful fashion. It was that of a man of uncertain age, for though the beard and long hair were white, the face was comparatively youthful, save for the wrinkles round the mouth, and the dark eyes were full of life and vigour. Tattered garments, surmounted by a torn kaross or skin rug, hung awkwardly upon his tall, thin frame. On his feet were veld-schoen of untanned hide, on his back a battered tin case was strapped, and in his bony, nervous hand he clasped a long staff made of the black and white wood the natives call unzimbiti, on the top of which was fixed a butterfly net. Behind him were some Kaffirs who carried cases on their heads.

I knew him at once, since we had met before, especially on a certain occasion in Zululand, when he calmly appeared out of the ranks of a hostile native impi. He was one of the strangest characters in all South Africa. Evidently a gentleman in the true sense of the word, none knew his history (although I know it now, and a strange story it is), except that he was an American by birth, for in this matter at times his speech betrayed him. Also he was a doctor by profession, and to judge from his extraordinary skill, one who must have seen much practice both in medicine and in surgery. For the rest he had means, though where they came from was a mystery, and for many years past had wandered about South and Eastern Africa, collecting butterflies and flowers.

By the natives, and I might add by white people also, he was universally supposed to be mad. This reputation, coupled with his medical skill, enabled him to travel wherever he would without the slightest fear of molestation, since the Kaffirs look upon the mad as inspired by God. Their name for him was "Dogeetah," a ludicrous corruption of the English word "doctor," whereas white folk called him indifferently "Brother John," "Uncle Jonathan," or "Saint John." The second appellation he got from his extraordinary likeness (when cleaned up and nicely dressed) to the figure by which the great American nation is typified in comic papers, as England is typified by John Bull. The first and third arose in the well-known goodness of his character and a taste he was supposed to possess for living on locusts and wild honey, or their local equivalents. Personally, however, he preferred to be addressed as "Brother John."

Oh! who can tell the relief with which I saw him; an angel from heaven could scarcely have been more welcome. As he came I poured out a second jorum of coffee, and remembering that he liked it sweet, put in plenty of sugar.

"How do you do, Brother John?" I said, proffering him the coffee.

"Greeting, Brother Allan," he answered--in those days he affected a kind of old Roman way of speaking, as I imagine it. Then he took the coffee, put his long finger into it to test the temperature and stir up the sugar, drank it off as though it were a dose of medicine, and handed back the tin to be refilled.

"Bug-hunting?" I queried.

He nodded. "That and flowers and observing human nature and the wonderful works of God. Wandering around generally."

"Where from last?" I asked.

"Those hills nearly twenty miles away. Left them at eight in the evening; walked all night."

"Why?" I said, looking at him.

"Because it seemed as though someone were calling me. To be plain, you, Allan."

"Oh! you heard about my being here and the trouble?"

"No, heard nothing. Meant to strike out for the coast this morning. Just as I was turning in, at 8.5 exactly, got your message and started. That's all."

"My message----" I began, then stopped, and asking to see his watch, compared it with mine. Oddly enough, they showed the same time to within two minutes.

"It is a strange thing," I said slowly, "but at 8.5 last night I did try to send a message for some help because I thought my mate was dying," and I jerked my thumb towards the tent. "Only it wasn't to you or any other man, Brother John. Understand?"

"Quite. Message was expressed on, that's all. Expressed and I guess registered as well."

I looked at Brother John and Brother John looked at me, but at the time we made no further remark. The thing was too curious, that is, unless he lied. But nobody had ever known him to lie. He was a truthful person, painfully truthful at times. And yet there are people who do not believe in prayer.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Mauled by leopard. Wounds won't heal, and fever. I don't think he can last long."

"What do you know about it? Let me see him."

Well, he saw him and did wonderful things. That tin box of his was full of medicines and surgical instruments, which latter he boiled before he used them. Also he washed his hands till I thought the skin would come off them, using up more soap than I could spare. First he gave poor Charlie a dose of something that seemed to kill him; he said he had that drug from the Kaffirs. Then he opened up those wounds upon his thigh and cleaned them out and bandaged them with boiled herbs. Afterwards, when Scroope came to again, he gave him a drink that threw him into a sweat and took away the fever. The end of it was that in two days' time his patient sat up and asked for a square meal, and in a week we were able to begin to carry him to the coast.

"Guess that message of yours saved Brother Scroope's life," said old John, as he watched him start.

I made no answer. Here I may state, however, that through my own men I inquired a little as to Brother John's movements at the time of what he called the message. It seemed that he had arranged to march towards

the coast on the next morning, but that about two hours after sunset suddenly he ordered them to pack up everything and follow him. This they did and to their intense disgust those Kaffirs were forced to trudge all night at the heels of Dogeetah, as they called him. Indeed, so weary did they become, that had they not been afraid of being left alone in an unknown country in the darkness, they said they would have thrown down their loads and refused to go any further.

That is as far as I was able to take the matter, which may be explained by telepathy, inspiration, instinct, or coincidence. It is one as to which the reader must form his own opinion.

During our week together in camp and our subsequent journey to Delagoa Bay and thence by ship to Durban, Brother John and I grew very intimate, with limitations. Of his past, as I have said, he never talked, or of the real object of his wanderings which I learned afterwards, but of his natural history and ethnological (I believe that is the word) studies he spoke a good deal. As, in my humble way, I also am an observer of such matters and know something about African natives and their habits from practical experience, these subjects interested me.

Amongst other things, he showed me many of the specimens that he had collected during his recent journey; insects and beautiful butterflies neatly pinned into boxes, also a quantity of dried flowers pressed between sheets of blotting paper, amongst them some which he told me were orchids. Observing that these attracted me, he asked me if I would

like to see the most wonderful orchid in the whole world. Of course I said yes, whereon he produced out of one of his cases a flat package about two feet six square. He undid the grass mats in which it was wrapped, striped, delicately woven mats such as they make in the neighbourhood of Zanzibar. Within these was the lid of a packing-case. Then came more mats and some copies of The Cape Journal spread out flat. Then sheets of blotting paper, and last of all between two pieces of cardboard, a flower and one leaf of the plant on which it grew.

Even in its dried state it was a wondrous thing, measuring twenty-four inches from the tip of one wing or petal to the tip of the other, by twenty inches from the top of the back sheath to the bottom of the pouch. The measurement of the back sheath itself I forget, but it must have been quite a foot across. In colour it was, or had been, bright golden, but the back sheath was white, barred with lines of black, and in the exact centre of the pouch was a single black spot shaped like the head of a great ape. There were the overhanging brows, the deep recessed eyes, the surly mouth, the massive jaws--everything.

Although at that time I had never seen a gorilla in the flesh, I had seen a coloured picture of the brute, and if that picture had been photographed on the flower the likeness could not have been more perfect.

"What is it?" I asked, amazed.

"Sir," said Brother John, sometimes he used this formal term when excited, "it is the most marvellous Cypripedium in the whole earth, and, sir, I have discovered it. A healthy root of that plant will be worth £20,000."

"That's better than gold mining," I said. "Well, have you got the root?"

Brother John shook his head sadly as he answered:

"No such luck."

"How's that as you have the flower?"

"I'll tell you, Allan. For a year past and more I have been collecting in the district back of Kilwa and found some wonderful things, yes, wonderful. At last, about three hundred miles inland, I came to a tribe, or rather, a people, that no white man had ever visited. They are called the Mazitu, a numerous and warlike people of bastard Zulu blood."

"I have heard of them," I interrupted. "They broke north before the days of Senzangakona, two hundred years or more ago."

"Well, I could make myself understood among them because they still talk a corrupt Zulu, as do all the tribes in those parts. At first they wanted to kill me, but let me go because they thought that I was mad. Everyone thinks that I am mad, Allan; it is a kind of public delusion,



whereas I think that I am sane and that most other people are mad."

"A private delusion," I suggested hurriedly, as I did not wish to discuss Brother John's sanity. "Well, go on about the Mazitu."

"Later they discovered that I had skill in medicine, and their king, Bausi, came to me to be treated for a great external tumour. I risked an operation and cured him. It was anxious work, for if he had died I should have died too, though that would not have troubled me very much," and he sighed. "Of course, from that moment I was supposed to be a great magician. Also Bausi made a blood brotherhood with me, transfusing some of his blood into my veins and some of mine into his. I only hope he has not inoculated me with his tumours, which are congenital. So I became Bausi and Bausi became me. In other words, I was as much chief of the Mazitu as he was, and shall remain so all my life."

"That might be useful," I said, reflectively, "but go on."

"I learned that on the western boundary of the Mazitu territory were great swamps; that beyond these swamps was a lake called Kirua, and beyond that a large and fertile land supposed to be an island, with a mountain in its centre. This land is known as Pongo, and so are the people who live there."

"That is a native name for the gorilla, isn't it?" I asked. "At least so a fellow who had been on the West Coast told me."

"Indeed, then that's strange, as you will see. Now these Pongo are supposed to be great magicians, and the god they worship is said to be a gorilla, which, if you are right, accounts for their name. Or rather," he went on, "they have two gods. The other is that flower you see there. Whether the flower with the monkey's head on it was the first god and suggested the worship of the beast itself, or vice versa, I don't know. Indeed I know very little, just what I was told by the Mazitu and a man who called himself a Pongo chief, no more."

"What did they say?"

"The Mazitu said that the Pongo people are devils who came by the secret channels through the reeds in canoes and stole their children and women, whom they sacrificed to their gods. Sometimes, too, they made raids upon them at night, 'howling like hyenas.' The men they killed and the women and children they took away. The Mazitu want to attack them but cannot do so, because they are not water people and have no canoes, and therefore are unable to reach the island, if it is an island. Also they told me about the wonderful flower which grows in the place where the ape-god lives, and is worshipped like the god. They had the story of it from some of their people who had been enslaved and escaped."

"Did you try to get to the island?" I asked.

"Yes, Allan. That is, I went to the edge of the reeds which lie at the

end of a long slope of plain, where the lake begins. Here I stopped for some time catching butterflies and collecting plants. One night when I was camped there by myself, for none of my men would remain so near the Pongo country after sunset, I woke up with a sense that I was no longer alone. I crept out of my tent and by the light of the moon, which was setting, for dawn drew near, I saw a man who leant upon the handle of a very wide-bladed spear which was taller than himself, a big man over six feet two high, I should say, and broad in proportion. He wore a long, white cloak reaching from his shoulders almost to the ground. On his head was a tight-fitting cap with lappets, also white. In his ears were rings of copper or gold, and on his wrists bracelets of the same metal. His skin was intensely black, but the features were not at all negroid. They were prominent and finely-cut, the nose being sharp and the lips quite thin; indeed of an Arab type. His left hand was bandaged, and on his face was an expression of great anxiety. Lastly, he appeared to be about fifty years of age. So still did he stand that I began to wonder whether he were one of those ghosts which the Mazitu swore the Pongo wizards send out to haunt their country.

"For a long while we stared at each other, for I was determined that I would not speak first or show any concern. At last he spoke in a low, deep voice and in Mazitu, or a language so similar that I found it easy to understand.

"Is not your name Dogeetah, O White Lord, and are you not a master of medicine?"

"Yes,' I answered, 'but who are you who dare to wake me from my sleep?'

"Lord, I am the Kalubi, the Chief of the Pongo, a great man in my own land yonder.'

"Then why do you come here alone at night, Kalubi, Chief of the Pongo?'

"Why do you come here alone, White Lord?' he answered evasively.

"What do you want, anyway?' I asked.

"O! Dogeetah, I have been hurt, I want you to cure me,' and he looked at his bandaged hand.

"Lay down that spear and open your robe that I may see you have no knife.'

"He obeyed, throwing the spear to some distance.

"Now unwrap the hand.'

"He did so. I lit a match, the sight of which seemed to frighten him greatly, although he asked no questions about it, and by its light examined the hand. The first joint of the second finger was gone. From the appearance of the stump which had been cauterized and was tied

tightly with a piece of flexible grass, I judged that it had been bitten off.

"What did this?' I asked.

"Monkey,' he answered, 'poisonous monkey. Cut off the finger, O Dogeetah, or tomorrow I die.'

"Why do you not tell your own doctors to cut off the finger, you who are Kalubi, Chief of the Pongo?'

"No, no,' he replied, shaking his head. 'They cannot do it. It is not lawful. And I, I cannot do it, for if the flesh is black the hand must come off too, and if the flesh is black at the wrist, then the arm must be cut off.'

"I sat down on my camp stool and reflected. Really I was waiting for the sun to rise, since it was useless to attempt an operation in that light. The man, Kalubi, thought that I had refused his petition and became terribly agitated.

"Be merciful, White Lord,' he prayed, 'do not let me die. I am afraid to die. Life is bad, but death is worse. O! If you refuse me, I will kill myself here before you and then my ghost will haunt you till you die also of fear and come to join me. What fee do you ask? Gold or ivory or slaves? Say and I will give it.'

"Be silent,' I said, for I saw that if he went on thus he would throw himself into a fever, which might cause the operation to prove fatal. For the same reason I did not question him about many things I should have liked to learn. I lit my fire and boiled the instruments--he thought I was making magic. By the time that everything was ready the sun was up.

"Now,' I said, 'let me see how brave you are.'

"Well, Allan, I performed that operation, removing the finger at the base where it joins the hand, as I thought there might be something in his story of the poison. Indeed, as I found afterwards on dissection, and can show you, for I have the thing in spirits, there was, for the blackness of which he spoke, a kind of mortification, I presume, had crept almost to the joint, though the flesh beyond was healthy enough. Certainly that Kalubi was a plucky fellow. He sat like a rock and never even winced. Indeed, when he saw that the flesh was sound he uttered a great sigh of relief. After it was all over he turned a little faint, so I gave him some spirits of wine mixed with water which revived him.

"O Lord Dogeetah,' he said, as I was bandaging his hand, 'while I live I am your slave. Yet, do me one more service. In my land there is a terrible wild beast, that which bit off my finger. It is a devil; it kills us and we fear it. I have heard that you white men have magic weapons which slay with a noise. Come to my land and kill me that wild

beast with your magic weapon. I say, Come, Come, for I am terribly afraid,' and indeed he looked it.

"No,' I answered, 'I shed no blood; I kill nothing except butterflies, and of these only a few. But if you fear this brute why do you not poison it? You black people have many drugs.'

"No use, no use,' he replied in a kind of wail. 'The beast knows poisons, some it swallows and they do not harm it. Others it will not touch. Moreover, no black man can do it hurt. It is white, and it has been known from of old that if it dies at all, it must be by the hand of one who is white.'

"A very strange animal,' I began, suspiciously, for I felt sure that he was lying to me. But just at that moment I heard the sound of my men's voices. They were advancing towards me through the giant grass, singing as they came, but as yet a long way off. The Kalubi heard it also and sprang up.

"I must be gone,' he said. 'None must see me here. What fee, O Lord of medicine, what fee?'

"I take no payment for my medicine,' I said. 'Yet--stay. A wonderful flower grows in your country, does it not? A flower with wings and a cup beneath. I would have that flower.'

"'Who told you of the Flower?' he asked. 'The Flower is holy. Still, O White Lord, still for you it shall be risked. Oh, return and bring with you one who can kill the beast and I will make you rich. Return and call to the reeds for the Kalubi, and the Kalubi will hear and come to you.'

"Then he ran to his spear, snatched it from the ground and vanished among the reeds. That was the last I saw, or am ever likely to see, of him."

"But, Brother John, you got the flower somehow."

"Yes, Allan. About a week later when I came out of my tent one morning, there it was standing in a narrow-mouthed, earthenware pot filled with water. Of course I meant that he was to send me the plant, roots and all, but I suppose he understood that I wanted a bloom. Or perhaps he dared not send the plant. Anyhow, it is better than nothing."

"Why did you not go into the country and get it for yourself?"

"For several reasons, Allan, of which the best is that it was impossible. The Mazitu swear that if anyone sees that flower he is put to death. Indeed, when they found that I had a bloom of it, they forced me to move to the other side of the country seventy miles away. So I thought that I would wait till I met with some companions who would accompany me. Indeed, to be frank, Allan, it occurred to me that you were the sort of man who would like to interview this wonderful beast



that bites off people's fingers and frightens them to death," and Brother John stroked his long, white beard and smiled, adding, "Odd that we should have met so soon afterwards, isn't it?"

"Did you?" I replied, "now did you indeed? Brother John, people say all sorts of things about you, but I have come to the conclusion that there's nothing the matter with your wits."

Again he smiled and stroked his long, white beard.