

The Conduct of John Briggs

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Simon Iff bounded into the Hemlock Club. He was by all odds the oldest member of the club; but today he had the elasticity of a boy, and he was so radiant that some people would have sworn that they actually saw flashes of light about his head. He bounded up the great stairway of the club two steps at a time.

The porters relaxed their solemnity, for the man's exaltation was contagious. "So Simple Simon's back from one of 'is Great Magical Retirements again. I wonder wot in 'Eving's name 'e does." "I wisht I knew," replied the other. "The old boy's ninety, if 'e's a dy."

In the lunch-room the atmosphere was certainly in need of all the exhilaration it could find. There were only a dozen men present, and they were talking in whispers. The eldest of them, Sir Herbert Holborne ('Anging 'Olborne of the criminal classes) was neither speaking nor eating, though his lunch lay before him. He was drinking whiskey-and-soda in a steady business-like way, as a man does who has an important task to accomplish.

Simon Iff greeted them with a single comprehensive wave of the hand. "What's the news, dear man?" he asked his neighbor. "Are you all rehearsing a play of Wedekind's? Oh, a steak and a bottle of Nuits," he added to the waiter. "The old Nuits, the best Nuits, for I must give praise to Our Lady of the Starry Heavens!"

"You do not appear to require the stimulus of alcohol in any marked degree," observed Holborne, in his driest manner. "Stimulus!" cried Iff; "I don't take wine to stimulate. It is because I am stimulated, or rather,

fortified, that I drink wine. You must always drink what is in tune with your own soul. That's the Harmony of Diet! It is stupid and criminal to try to alter your soul by drugs. Let the soul be free, and use what suits it. Homeopathic treatment! So give me green tea when I am exquisite and æsthetic like a Ming Vase; coffee when I am high-strung and vigilant as an Arab; chocolate when I am feeling cosy and feminine; brandy when I am martial and passionate; and wine — oh, wine at all times! — but wine especially when I am bubbling over with spiritual ecstasy. Thus, my dear Holborne, I fulfil the apostolic injunction, 'Whatsoever ye do, whether ye eat or drink, do all to the glory of God!' Every meal is a sacrament to me. That's the simplicity of life! That's why they call me Simple Simon!"

The outburst brought his fellow-clubmen out of their apathy. One of them remarked that, while agreeing with the thesis, and admiring the force and beauty of its expression, it was unseasonable. He wished to tone down the exuberance of the old mystic, for the sake of the general feeling.

"Why, what is wrong?" said Iff more sedately. "Not that anything is ever really wrong; it's all illusion. But you evidently think there's a great deal amiss; and" — he looked round the table — "Sir Herbert seems to be at the bottom of it."

"I will ask you to spare me," spoke the judge; "this morning I was compelled to perform the most painful duty of my career. Tell him, Stanford!"

"Why, where have you been?" said James Stanford, a long lean lantern-jawed individual who filled the Chair of History at Oxford University.

"Oh, I've been everywhere and nowhere," replied Simon.

"But I suppose a historian would take the view — an utterly false and absurd view, by the way — that I have been sitting in my oratory at Abertarff, meditating, for the last two months. I have heard nothing of the world. Are we at war with the Republic of Andorra?"

Stanford leaned forward across the table, while the rest kept silent.

"You remember Briggs?"

"Knew him well at one time; haven't seen him for ten years or so."

"Well, this morning Holborne had to sentence him to death for the murder of his nephew."

"I say, Holborne, that's a bit thick," ejaculated Iff, rudely. "Just because you dislike the way he ties his neckties, to go and fit him out with a hemp cravat!"

"I am in no mood for your stupid jokes, Iff," retorted the Judge, severely. "I had no course but to give effect to the verdict of the jury, which they gave without leaving their seats."

"But your summing-up must have been a masterpiece of imbecility!"

"There was no defence, nor could be. Look here, Iff!" The judge broke out hotly. "I thought you knew men. Can't you see I'm all broken up over this? I knew Briggs intimately; I was exceedingly fond of him; this has been the shock of my life."

"Oh, well!" returned Iff, "it is done now, and the best thing we can do is to forget it. Listen to what happened to me at Abertarff! One of those nasty skulking tramps came round and set fire to my barn. Luckily the stream was flowing at the time — as it does all the time — but, seeing the danger, it directed its course against the fire, and extinguished it."

"Another miracle of Simple Simon!" sneered one of the younger men, who knew the old man chiefly from his reputation as a magician.

"Young man!" replied Simon, "I drink to your better understanding — and your better manners. (Waiter, bring me another bottle of this Nuits!) I shall need much wine." He fixed his small oblique eyes terribly on the offender. "The difference between you and me is this," he continued. "I don't believe the silly story I have just told you; whereas you all do believe the silly story Stanford has just told me."

"Come, come!" said Stanford, "it is stupid to talk like this. You haven't heard the evidence. You're simply defending Briggs because you think you know him; because you think you know that he wouldn't have done such a thing."

"Oh, no!" said the mystic, "all men are capable of every kind of evil intention. But some are incapable of carrying such intentions into effect, just as a paralytic cannot walk, although he may desire infinitely to do so."

"There was no difficulty about this murder. It was a quite plain shooting."

"If you'll tell me the facts, I'll prove to you how you are wrong."

"I wish you could, damn it!" interjected Holborne. "Stanford has made a very special study of this case. He has been in court all the time, and he has verified every piece of evidence by independent research."

"My university asked me to watch the case," explained Stanford. "As you know, I am a barrister as well as a historian. Briggs, of course, was at Magdalen with me, though I never knew him well. The Vice-Chancellor begged me to leave no stone unturned to discover a flaw in the procedure, or in the case for the Crown. I failed utterly."

"Have you your notes with you?" asked Holborne. Stanford nodded. "Suppose we adjourn to the smoking-room? They will take some time to read."

"This is a lovely piece of luck," remarked Iff, as they filtered into the adjoining room. "I come back from my isolation, fairly bursting for distraction, and I walk right into the heart of a first-class fairy story." But he was quite unable to communicate his spirit to the other men; he seemed more of a crank than ever; they liked him, and his theories amused them; but they knew better than to apply mysticism to the hard facts of life.

Simon Iff took the armchair of the Senior in front of the great fire of logs, remarking laughingly that he was the presiding judge. Holborne took the ingle seat, that

he might watch the mystic's face. But Iff playfully adopted an air of benevolent neutrality, which we may suppose that he conceived to go well with his position. His second bottle of Burgundy stood on a table before him, with a cup of the admirable coffee of the Hemlock Club. This was almost in the nature of a tribute, for a supply of it was sent to the club every year by the Shereef of Mecca, in memory of Sir Richard Burton, who had been a member of the club. His small pale face was almost hidden by a Partaga Rothschild, in which he appeared more engrossed than in the story which Stanford proceeded to unfold.

The latter prefaced his remarks by an apology. "This is a very simple and very sordid story; in fact, I have rarely met anything so bald." "And unconvincing," murmured Simon Iff. "I shall give you only facts," continued the historian. "Plain, unquestionable facts. I shall not try to tell a story: I shall give you the bare bones of the case. You can reconstruct your animal in the approved fashion."

"Good," said the old magician. "You won't omit any essential facts, will you, there's a dear man?"

"Of course not. Don't I know my business?"

"I'm sure of it. Your acknowledged eminence ——."

"Oh, don't rag! This is a serious affair."

"Dr. Stanford will now read his memorandum."

"I begin," announced Stanford.

"One. History of the parties concerned. John Briggs, aged forty-three, was Professor of Engineering at the Owens College, Manchester, but resigned his chair five years ago in order to devote himself more closely to experimental work. Peter Clark, aged twenty-four, the murdered man, was the son of Briggs' only sister Ann. Both his parents were dead. Neither he nor Briggs have any near relatives living.

"Two. The scene of the crime.

"Briggs lives with an old butler and housekeeper (man and wife), but otherwise entirely alone, in a house

on Marston Moor in Yorkshire. It stands in its own grounds, which extend to three hundred acres. Detached from the house is a large laboratory, where Briggs was accustomed to work, and often to sleep. His lunch was usually brought to him there on a tray, and sometimes his dinner. In fact, it may be said almost that he lived in the laboratory.

"This room has two doors, one towards the house, the other away from it. There are no other houses within several miles.

"Briggs had one ruling passion, the fear of interruption in his work. As tramps of a rather dangerous type infested the district, he had, after a violent scene with one of them four and a half years ago, purchased a Webley revolver. This weapon had lain loaded on his desk from that day to the day of the murder. It was seen there on the morning of that day by the butler when he went with the professor's breakfast. It was this weapon which was used to kill Clark.

"Three. Relations between Briggs and Clark.

"These were extremely hostile. Clark was rather a wild youth, and Briggs blamed him for the death of his mother, to whom Briggs was devotedly attached. Her son's conduct had grieved and impoverished her; she had broken down nervously; and in this weak condition a chill had proved fatal to her. It had been aggravated by the deliberate neglect of Peter Clark, who had refused to call in a doctor until too late. Briggs had been heard to say that he hated one man only, and that was his nephew. On one occasion he said to him, before witnesses, 'If the sheriff balks, Peter, I hope I shall be there to do his work for him.' There was thus the greatest possible animus.

"Four. Financial relations of the parties.

"The Briggs Family Settlement disposes of the sum of ninety-four thousand pounds. From one-sixth part of this Briggs drew an income; Clark, on the death of his parents, was entitled to a similar amount. The balance was held in trust for the next generation; that is, if either

Briggs or Clark had children, the fund would be divided among these on their attaining majority. If Briggs died without children, the income would accumulate with the bulk of the fund in expectation of heirs to Clark; but if Clark died first, Briggs, as sole survivor of the earlier generation, would enjoy the income at present paid to Clark in addition to his own. Thus Briggs would find his income doubled if Clark died, while, if Briggs died, Clark could only benefit indirectly through his children, if he ever had any. Thus we see that Briggs had a strong financial motive for the murder; whereas Clark would gain nothing whatever. Nor had Clark any other motive for killing Briggs: on the contrary, he was always hoping to conciliate his uncle, and get him to help him, both directly and in a financial way, and indirectly through his influence. The bearing of this will be seen later, when we touch upon the actual circumstances of the crime.

"Briggs had been making some elaborate experiments in connection with aircraft, and was in great need of money. Eight months earlier he had mortgaged his house, down to the Old Red Sandstone. This emphasizes the motive for the act.

"Five. Conditions immediately antecedent to the murder.

"Clark had been staying in the neighborhood, and had pestered his uncle intolerably. On one occasion he had come into the laboratory while the professor was eating his lunch. The butler, who was present, says that this was exactly two weeks before the murder. He remembers the date, because it was a Sunday, and lunch had been late, owing to his having been over the moor to church.

"He swears that he heard the professor say the following words: 'Mark me, Peter. At the house I don't mind so much; but if you come bothering me here, I shall most assuredly have recourse to assassination.' With that he had risen, gone over to his desk, taken up the revolver, and tapped it, nodding his head repeatedly. The boy, thoroughly scared, had slunk out of the laboratory.

"Six. The day of the murder.

"This was a Sunday. Briggs had again passed the night in the laboratory. The butler had gone over to church, leaving his wife at home. She heard the clock strike twelve, the signal for her to prepare lunch. Immediately afterwards she was startled by the sound of a shot; but she was not particularly alarmed, as small explosions frequently occurred in the laboratory.

"This fixes the moment of the crime within one or two minutes, and the medical evidence confirms it.

"She expected her husband to return at 12:15; he did not do so. She went out to look for him, and saw him driving towards the house with another man, who proved subsequently to be the vicar of the parish. Reassured, she returned to her kitchen.

"The butler, with the vicar, drove to the house, took out the horse, and went over together to the laboratory.

"This is what they saw. The professor was stooping over the body of Clark. He was apparently in deep thought, and seemed undecided as to what to do. The men were shocked into silence, and had the fullest opportunity of watching the actions of Briggs.

"He remained motionless for some little while; ultimately he laid down his revolver, which was still in his hand, and picked up a Brown automatic, which was firmly grasped in that of Clark. This was done with the evident intention of representing the death of Clark as the result of suicide.

"This latter weapon, although loaded, had not been discharged; the Webley had been fired recently, and the empty shell was still in the chamber; as appeared later. It was a Webley bullet which killed Clark; it had been fired from a very close range, estimated at two yards by the experts.

"The vicar now interrupted by a shocked exclamation. Briggs remained intent upon the automatic, looking at it as if it were some strange new object.

"The professor looked up as the two men approached him.

He waved a hand. 'Go away! go away!' was his only remark. "The vicar sent the butler to fetch the police and a doctor; he himself remained on guard. Briggs went over to his desk, put the automatic on one side, and buried his head in his hands. It was clear to the vicar that he was stunned by the realization of what he had done.

"But the vicar made a supreme effort. He went over, put his hand on his shoulder and shook him roughly. 'Man,' he cried, 'Don't you realize what you have done?' Briggs answered: 'By God, you bet I do.' This is the only intelligible remark that has been drawn from him. A plain confession. Then silence.

"Seven. Subsequent events.

"It has proved impossible to rouse the professor from his apathy. He has made no defence of any kind. He remains crouched and inattentive; when addressed he merely repeats: 'Go away! go away!' He would not even plead when brought into the court: he said nothing when he was sentenced this morning.

"The reason for this course of conduct is evident. He is a man of the acutest intelligence, and realizing that he was caught practically in the act, is relying for escape upon simulation of dementia. We investigated the point on his behalf, supplying him with writing materials as if it were part of the prison routine. After a short time he seized on them with apparent eagerness. Here is what he wrote: 'Revolve — gyre — explode — balance — soul — wings — action and reaction.' Under that he drew a thick line. The rest of the sheet is covered with abstruse mathematical formulae, evidently intended to impress us still further with the idea of madness; but although they are unintelligible to the mathematicians to whom they have been submitted, they are, wherever they can be understood at all, perfectly correct. He is certainly not insane. With great

shrewdness, on the contrary, he has chosen just the one chance of saving his neck."

Stanford paused.

"Is that all?" asked Simon Iff.

"All?" cried Holborne. "Could any case be more complete? Two strong motives for murder, one of them urgent. Expressed intention to commit it; caught in the act of endeavoring to set up a defence; confession of the crime immediately afterwards; a subsequent attitude compatible only with the simulation of insanity. There isn't a link missing."

"No, but I think there's a missing link!" snapped Simon Iff.

"In heaven's name, where are your brains, all of you? Look here; let me repeat that story, word for word, only instead of 'Professor Briggs' let us say 'the cabbage,' or 'the antelope,' wherever his name occurs. You wouldn't suspect them, would you? And I assure you that Briggs is just as incapable of pulling a gun on a man as either of those! It simply would not occur to him to do it."

"My dear man," said Holborne, "we all appreciate your attitude, I assure you; but facts are chiefls that winna ding."

"Ah, facts!" cried the mystic, with as near a sneer as he ever allowed himself. "Now look out, Stanford, I'm going to pump lead into you! You promised me two things: to give me all the essential facts, and to give me nothing but the facts. You are doubly perjured, you lost wretch!"

"Come, come, I say! I think I've given you an absolutely full and fair account."

"No: Omission number one. You don't say why he resigned from Owens College."

"Yes, I do; he wanted to prosecute his experiments with less distraction."

"Just half the fact; I happen to know that he was forced to resign."

"What?"

"They simply could not get him to lecture. Either he would not go down to the classroom at all, or else he would forget all about the class, and start hieroglyphics on the blackboard!"

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Why, the problem is the man's mind. You say nothing about his mind. You don't even tell us the most important thing of all; which is, what is he thinking of at this moment?"

"Wondering if he'll dodge the noose," put in the young man who had previously laughed at Simon Iff.

"Oh, no!" flashed back the mystic, "with death so near him, he must be thinking of really important things — perhaps even of you!"

"That would at least explain his dejection," he added musingly. "Having crushed it, let us pass on to my next point. You actually permitted yourself to draw deductions which are quite unjustifiable. You say that he exchanged pistols with the corpse, evidently to set up a defence of suicide. Evident to whom? You see, you fatally neglect the calibre of Briggs' mind. To me, it seems much more likely that he was quite preoccupied with some other matter. You judge him by yourselves. You assume that he killed Clark, and then argue. 'But if I had killed Clark, I should be thinking solely of how to escape.' I say that if he did kill Clark, two seconds later his mind would have returned to the problems on which it had previously been at work. You men don't understand concentration: Briggs does. Besides all this, if he was going to put up the suicide theory, why not do it? He did not know that they had seen him change the weapons."

"Hang it all, he confessed to the vicar."

"That was my next point; he did nothing of the sort. He told the parson, emphatically, that he realized what he had done. But what was that? No word of

any murder! The question is what he did do, and what he is doing now."

"You're super-subtle," said the Judge. "I wish you were right, but there's nothing in it."

"Stick to the point! What does his whole attitude, from the very moment of discovery, indicate? Simply this, that he is busy."

"Busy!" It was a general shout of derision. "Busy! with his throat in a noose! Busy!"

"I ask your pardon, Stanford," said the magician quietly; "you are the historian here, and I beg you to correct me if I have my facts wrong. At the siege of Syracuse ——" "The Siege of Syracuse?" The company became hilarious, despite themselves.

"I forget who conquered it; it doesn't matter; but whoever he was, he gave orders that the great geometer Archimedes should be spared. The soldiers found him drawing figures in the sand, and asked him who he was; but he only said: "Get away! Get away! I'm busy!" And they killed him. Waiter! Let me have another cigar and some more coffee!"

The Judge was a little impressed. "This is an amusing theory," he said, "though I'm damned if I can believe it. How do you propose to develop it?"

"Will you help me?"

"You bet I will."

"Well, I want a copy of that jargon of Stanford's about 'wings'; and I want five minutes alone with Briggs in the condemned cell."

"Here's the paper," said the historian.

"I'll get you an order from the home secretary this afternoon. I'll go now. If you can do anything, all England will have to thank you." This from 'Anging Olborne.

"Oh, I can't do anything; but I think Briggs can."

"Ah, you think he's shielding someone!" put in the objectionable young man for the third time.

Simon Iff lit his cigar with deliberation. "I shall certainly be obliged to you," he replied with studied courtesy, "if you will recommend me some of the lighter types of sentimental detective fiction. Time often hangs heavy on one's hands in London, for one cannot always be certain" (he rose and bowed to the young man) "of enjoying such very entertaining and illuminative conversation."

"Look here, Iff," said Holborne; "come with me, and we'll see the Home Secretary right away." They left the room together.

Two hours later, Simon Iff, armed with authority, was in the condemned cell. The professor was seated on the floor, his head sunk deeply on his breast, his hands playing feverishly in his long sandy hair.

The old mystic went close up to him. "Briggs!" he cried aloud. "I'm Iff. You know me! I won't keep you a moment; but this is damned important."

The professor gave no sign that he had heard. "I thought not," said Simon.

The magician proceeded to insert his thumbs under the armpits of his old friend, and began to tickle him. Briggs wriggled violently, but only murmured: "Get away!"

"I knew he was innocent," said Simon gleefully to himself. "But I see there is only one way to get him to talk."

He sat down very positively in front of his victim, and began to recite from the paper in his hand, "Resolve!" "Gyre!" "Explode!" "Action and reaction!" "Balance!" "Soul!" "Wings!" Briggs looked up suddenly, savagely. "You'll never do it!" went on the magician. "You thought you did; but you didn't, and you never will. It's hopeless! Resolve — gyre — explode!"

"Damn you; get out!" said Briggs.

"Taking G as 31 point 2," continued the torturer, "and Pi as 3 point 24156, and *e* as ——" Briggs sprang to his feet. "You can't! You're getting it all wrong. Curse you! Curse you!" he yelled.

"You'll never do it! You'll never do it!" went on Simon implacably. "Sin Theta plus Cos Theta equals twice the root of minus eight! You'll never do it! You'll never do it!"

"Are you the devil come to torture me before my time?"

"Good. No. I'm Simon Iff. And all I want to know is — how long do you need to finish your problem?"

"Oh, get out! Get out!"

"Seven times six is forty-four, and ——"

"Get out!"

"Log one plus X equals X, minus half X squared plus a third X cubed plus ——"

"Minus, you dolt!" shrieked Briggs. "For God's sake, stop! "You're putting me all out!"

"Some people are going to disturb you very soon by hanging you." He squeezed the professor's windpipe till he gasped.

"Tell me how long you need to finish the problem, and I'll go, and I'll see you have all you need, and no disturbance."

"A month, six weeks. Oh, go, there's a good fellow!" Simon Iff went out without another word. He had an appointment to meet 'Anging 'Olborne for dinner.

"Well, I had to put him to the torture," said the magician; "but I got him to say one rational sentence. Now I want you to trust me in this. Get the execution postponed for a month. Don't disturb old Briggs. Let him have anything he calls for, in reason; he'll need little. As soon as he talks rationally again, you and I will go and see him in the cell. I can promise you this thing is going to clear up like a day in spring. April showers bring May flowers."

Just five weeks later Holborne telephoned to Simon Iff to come round to his house. "Briggs has woken up," he said; "for the last week he has been working with drawing materials which he had asked for. Suddenly he swept the whole thing aside and looked up at the

warden. 'Who the devil are you?' he said. 'And where's the lab. Gone?' They rang me up at once. Let's get down."

They found Briggs pacing his cell in a rage. "This is an outrage!" he cried when he saw his friends, "a damned outrage! I shall write to the Times!"

"You'd better talk to us first," said Holborne. "I may say that all England has been waiting to hear from you for some months."

"I should say so," retorted Briggs; "and you may go and tell them that I did it! Alone I did it!" "Are we not talking at cross purposes?" suggested the mystic mildly. "Our mundane minds are preoccupied with the small matter of the murder of Peter Clark. And I don't think you did that."

"Who? I. Of course not. Don't be so silly!"

"Well, you were there. We should really be grateful if you would tell us who did do it."

"That fool Marshall, of course."

"Marshal?" said the mystic.

"The farmer down by Saffield. Peter had seduced his wife.

"He tracked the boy up here — I mean up there; I can't realize this isn't my lab., you know, just yet. Followed him into the lab. Peter drew an automatic. Marshall got my Webley, and fired while the boy was hesitating. Then he threw down the gun, and went out."

"Don't you think you might have explained this before?" said Holborne. "Do you realize that you've been convicted for murder; if it hadn't been for Iff here, we'd have hanged you a fortnight ago."

"How could I?" said Briggs irritably. "You don't understand."

"Well, explain later. We'll get you a free pardon as soon as possible. I may tell you that Marshall fell down a quarry the same night as the murder. He must have been half insane. But we never connected his death

with your case. Anyhow, I'll see to it that you get out by tomorrow, and we'll celebrate it at the club. Perhaps you would make us a little speech, and tell us what you've been doing all these months."

"All right. But I've got to see Williams right away."

"Williams!" said Simon Iff. "So that is what it was, was it? I'll tell him today to come right down and see you; and we'll have him up to the dinner tomorrow, and we'll all live happy ever after!"

Two days later Briggs was on his feet at a great and special gathering of the Hemlock Club. Simon Iff was on his best behavior, except that he would drink only tea, saying that his mood was exquisite and aesthetic like a Ming Vase. Briggs, as the guest of honor, was seated on the right of the president of the club, on whose other hand sat Rear-Admiral Williams, a trusted member of the Secret Committee of Public Defense, which is known to just a few people in London as a liaison between Navy and Army, and a background to both.

The professor was no orator, but he did not lack encouragement. "I want to thank you all very much," he said. "Of course we can't tell you just what this thing is, but Admiral Williams has been good enough to say that it's all right as far as he can see, and that ought to be good enough for us all. He's a jolly good fellow, Williams, and I wish we had a few more like him. I mean I'm glad we've got a lot more like him. Oh hang it! that's not what I mean either. I'm no speaker, you know; but anyhow I thought you'd like to hear just how I came to think of this damned thing. You see I was working that morning — just finished verifying Mersenne's statement for p equals 167, rather a tricky proof, but awfully jolly, so my mind was absolutely clear and empty. Well, here comes the Watts and the Kettle business. That poor devil Marshall runs in after Peter, right on his heels. Peter draws; I didn't notice particularly, Marshall gets my Webley and fires. I see it revolve and explode. See! Two ideas, revolve and explode.

Nothing in that. Well, then Peter stays on his feet, quite a while, though he was dead. So I thought of reflex balance; you know, the automatic dodge in our soles; it goes wrong when you get locomotor ataxia. Then he gives a gasp, and puts his arms out, like wings: and then I thought of his soul flying away. Nothing in that. Well, then, Plummer throws down my Webley by the body and runs out. I picked up the gun, because its proper place was on my desk; I'm a man of precision in such matters; but to get to the desk I had to cross Clark's body, which should not have been there at all. It brought me up with a jerk. I stood by it, I dare say for a long time. Now here's the funny part. I was thinking, or rather something inside me was thinking, for I don't know to this minute who was thinking, or what. The next thing I remember, I was picking the automatic out of Peter's hand; and my mind clove to the contrast with the revolver, the way in which recoil is used to reload and recock the Brown. Then all the pieces of my mind flew together. I became conscious of an idea. I would make a duplex rotating engine to act as a gyroscope, with a system of automatic balances, operated by the recoil of the explosions in the engine. In other words, I had the idea for a self-balancing aeroplane, a true mechanical bird. When the vicar asked me if I realized what I had done, I naturally replied: "By God, I should think I did," or something of the sort. After that I got more and more absorbed in the details of the problem — can you wonder that I could think of nothing else? I remember nothing but a great deal of irritating talk around me, though with long intervals of most blessed silence. Then I woke up to find myself in the condemned cell! I want to tell you all how much I appreciate your kindness, and I thank you all very much."

He sat down suddenly, exhausted and embarrassed. "I hope I said the right thing. I'm such an ass," he whispered to his neighbor. But the applause reassured him.

A little later the president turned to the old magician. "I'm sure we are all keenly interested to hear how Mr. Iff solved this case, and saved his friend — our friend — and helped him to do this great thing for England. I will call upon him to say a few words to us." Iff rose rather awkwardly. "I'm afraid of boring you," he said; "you know I'm a bit of a crank, with theories about the tendencies of the mind."

"Go on! Go on!" came from every quarter.

"Well, it's like this. If we get full of alcohol — any of us — too often and too steadily and too long — we begin to see rats and serpents and such things. We don't see horses and elephants. That is, our minds are machines which run in grooves, narrow grooves, mostly. We can't think what we like, and how we like; we have to think as we have been taught to think, or as our whole race has been taught to think by aeons of experience. So I know that there are certain ways of thought in which a given man cannot think, however obvious such ways might seem to another man. For instance, imagine a man of high lineage and education and wealth. By some accident he is stranded penniless in a far city. He is actually starving. He revolves the situation in his mind. He exerts his whole intelligence to meet the problem. But what does he do? There are thousands of ways of making money. He could get a job at the docks; he could obtain relief at a charitable organization — no such method occurs to him at all. He does not look through the want advertisements in the papers. His one idea is to go to his consul or some person of position, explain his situation, and make a highly dignified loan. Perhaps he is too proud even to do that; ultimately it strikes him to pledge his jewelry. A thief in a similar position is equally limited; he looks about him merely for an opportunity to steal.

"Similarly, an Alpine guide will despair and die on a quite easy mountain if it be unfamiliar. It is the flower of biological success to be able to adapt oneself to one's

conditions without effort. The whole of human anatomy is in accord with these theses. The brain is merely a more elaborate thinking machine than the rest of the body. The spinal cord thinks, in its own fashion. Even such simple organs as those which operate digestion have their own type of thought; and narrow indeed is the groove in which they move. A bee, enclosed in an empty flower pot, held against a window pane, will beat itself to death against the glass, though it could escape quite easily at the other end, if it were only capable of thinking outside its groove; similarly, the alimentary canal is so convinced that its sole duty is peristaltic action that it will insanely continue this movement when rest would save the man attached to it from a lingering and agonizing death. We are all highly specialized and not particularly intelligent machines.

“In the matter of crime these remarks are peculiarly applicable; outside quite obvious things like picking pockets, you have merely to describe a crime to the police; they will tell you that five or six men only, in a city of as many millions, could have done it. Swindling has as much individuality and style as writing poetry — and it is infinitely more respectable! But I digress. With regard to this case, I knew at once that however much our friend here might have wanted to get rid of his nephew, it simply was not in him to do it. It is not a question of his moral outfit, but of his mental equipment. But much more interesting than this, which is, or should be, obvious to us all, is this point: How did I manage to communicate with the man, absorbed as he was in some world beyond ordinary ken? I found him quite insensible to direct appeal. His situation? He did not know that there was any situation. I tickled him. His body responded automatically, but his mind was wholly disconnected by an act of his very highly trained will, and was merely conscious of an irritation and disturbance.

“So I determined to talk to his mind on its own plane. I knew from the so-called confession to the vicar

that he was acutely conscious of having done something. I suspected that something to be of the nature of the solution of a problem; and by his continued abstraction, I knew that he had only got a general idea, and was at work on the details. So I told him that he would never do it, again and again. I knew that he must have had many moments of despair. It woke him up; the voice of his particular devil — we all of us have one; he always tells us to give up, that it's hopeless, that we shall never do it — that voice became material in mine; so he responded with curses. But that was not enough; to rouse him further I began to attack his mind by quoting mathematical formulae incorrectly. I knew that must upset his calculation, confuse him, rouse him to contradiction. The plan succeeded; he had been deaf — physically deaf, to all intents and purposes — to all other remarks; but to an attack on the fortress in which he was shut up he was bound to reply. I forced him to come to terms by refusing to stop the torture. He was distracted, upset, uncertain whether two and two still made four. In this way I made him tell me how long he needed to finish his work; and it was then easy to arrange a reprieve to allow him to finish his work. I'm sorry; I hope I have not bored you." And he sat down abruptly.