

heaven's sake leave him alone! He's the biggest thing since Turner; if he keeps on growing, the planet won't hold him."

"My mind is quite made up," returned Simon Iff, coldly. "If the lunch is still on, suppose we take a taxi. If you don't mind, we'll have a private room at the Café de la Paix. We shall need to go rather deeply into this matter."

III.

Simon Iff would not talk at all of anything but old times in Paris until after lunch, when the decks were cleared of all but the three Cs—coffee, cigars, and cognac. Then he cleared his throat.

"As you have heard me say about a million times, Jack, 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.' Failure to observe this precept is the root of all human error. It is our right and duty—the two are one, as Eliphaz Levi very nearly saw—to expand upon our own true centre, to pursue the exact orbit of our destiny. To quit that orbit is to invite collisions. Suppose it to be my illusion to think it my will to pass through that closed window. I bump my head; I cut my face; I finally make a mess on the boulevard. Or, I think it my will to steal my neighbor's watch. I am caught; police-court, prison, and general disaster. Merely the result of my ignorance in regard to my true destiny. Failure in life and especially criminal failure; collision. Then where is the original collision? In myself. There is a conflict between my conscious will and my unconscious will, between the sophisticated babble of reason and the still small voice of the soul. Poe had quite an idea of this, with his 'Imp of the Perverse'; Ibsen, the greatest of all realists, a more detailed conception, with his 'troll'; but both imagined that consciousness was right and the Inner Light wrong. Now that is a mere assumption, and we mystics, who know that Light, know better. It is the first task of every man who would not only be himself, but understand himself, to make the union or harmony between these two, perfect. Now of course most men, so far as the main path of their lives is concerned, never find these two forces in conflict, never become aware of them at all. The troubles of genius are principally due to a recognition of this truer Light, and of its apparent incompatibility with the conscious will, or perhaps of a realization that they cannot execute their will, because of the pressure of circumstance upon them. Hence the well-earned celebrity of the Artistic Temperament. Frequently we observe that the artist, unable to fulfil himself in his art, turns to vice of one kind or another. It is as if a sculptor, in a gesture of impatience with his Venus, dabbed a handful of clay on her nose, and made her look like an elephant!"

"If you knew how often I've done just that thing!" laughed Major.

"Well" continued the mystic, "to come to the murder of this boy Harry——"

"I see where you're driving," broke in Jack Flynn. "And as I'm sure you noticed the perfect nonchalance of de Bry when he showed us that picture, you are going to prove that he did it unconsciously, or at least that it's all so natural to him that he has no sense of it."

"You would find out what I am going to prove if you would let me do it," said Simon, in some ill-

humor. Major had felt ashamed of himself for smiling; he was genuinely concerned about his great new artist.

"To come to the murder of this boy Harry," repeated the magician, "we notice two things. First, the general surroundings. Storm, isolation, the wild weird atmosphere of the Scottish Highlands—enough to send any man, with an original touch of madness, over the line. Second, the nature of the murder itself; it is in perfect keeping with the setting. Its details are elaborate. It is not an ordinary murder, but the murder of—a—I can't find the right word."

Major broke in grimly: "The murder of a great mind gone wrong? Of such a mind as conceived, and such a hand as executed, those masterpieces? Oh my God!"

"Your interruptions will not alter the facts of the case, or my deductions; pray let me proceed! Besides, there is still one step to take before we arrive at any such conclusion. I want you to remember a peculiar fact about the French Revolution. Here we find a whole set of people, educated, intelligent, complex, and above all humanitarian, who suddenly indulge in wholesale massacre. This, like the crime we are discussing, was a perverse crime. It was not at all in accordance with the general will of the Revolutionists, which was simply Social Justice.

"But they had been thwarted for generations; thwarting was in their blood, as it were; and when they came to action, they became perverse. Thus—I beg you to believe—it is not merely the artistic temperament which produces these horrible crimes; it is simply any temperament which is suppressed long enough. It is more usual to find this manifested in artists, because they are advanced people who understand pretty well what their will is, who suffer more keenly, in consequence, from the thwarting of that will, especially as they usually perceive only too keenly the fact that it is the errors and stupidities of other people, people who have strayed far from their own orbits, that cause the thwarting in question. I will ask you to consider the case of a man who makes friends of spiders. Oh, you say, that is after he has been in the Bastille for twenty years. Precisely. He may have been a very bad man; he may himself have thwarted his own fundamental impulses of love; but the complete suppression of that instinct for so many years results in its peeping out at last, and taking an unnatural form. There are plenty of similar instances which will occur to you. In the case of the French Revolution, we must also consider the question of atavism. Humanitarian as the leaders were, their forefathers had been inured to fire and sword since the dawn of the race. It was the primitive tribal passion that broke out in them, after centuries of suppression. So you get the same phenomenon in both the man and the race." Simon paused.

"That boy," said Major, "has one of the greatest souls ever incarnated on this planet, and I won't believe he did it."

"Your courage is splendid," replied Simple Simon, "but your beliefs do not invalidate the conclusions of science. *E pur si muove.*"

"Is that all?" asked Flynn.

"For shame, Jack," cried the mystic; "I have hardly begun. But I perceive that the light is failing; we had better end this conversation in the presence of André de Bry." Major paid the bill;