The Artistic Temperament

Part of the Scrutinies of Simon Iff *series and originally published in the October 1917 edition of* The International *under the pseudonym of "Edward Kelly."*

I.

Jack Flynn was the centre of a happy group of artists. They were seated upon the terrace of the Café d'Alençon to drink the apéritif; for although November was upon Paris, the Sun still remembered his beloved city, and fed it with light and warmth.

Flynn had come over from London for a week to see the Autumn Salon, and to gossip with his old friends. The conversation was naturally of Art, and, like the universe itself, had neither beginning nor end, being self-created by its own energy, so rolled easily through the Aeons in every combination of beauty.

But half of beauty is melancholy, a subtle subcurrent of sadness; and on this particular occasion it was visible, giving a grey tone to the most buoyant rhapsodies. The talkers were in fact subdued and restrained; each spoke gaily, yet stood upon his guard, as if there were some subject near his consciousness which he must be careful not to broach.

It was a curiously distinguished group. Two of the men wore the Légion d'Honneur; the elder of the two, who looked more like a soldier or a diplomat than a painter, seemed to be the object of constant solicitude on the part of the younger, whose ruddy, cheerful, ironic face was like a picture by Franz Hals — but a Franz Hals in the mood of Rabelais. He seemed particularly anxious lest the other should say something unfortunate, but he should really have been looking round the corner, for there was where the danger lay.

Round that corner, all arms and legs, came swinging the agile body of no less a person than the mystic, Simon Iff.

His first greeting was the bombshell! "Ah ha!" he cried, grasping the hand of the elder of the two décorês, "and how's the dear old Sea?" For the person addressed happened to be famous all over the world as a marine painter. The younger man sprang to his feet. "Just don't mention the sea, please, for a few months!" he said in Simon's ear. It was unnecessary. Even in the general joy at the return of an old friend, Iff's quick apprehension could not fail to detect a suppressed spasm of pain on every face.

The mystic turned and greeted the man who had interrupted him with honest gladness; then his other hand shot out to Flynn. "I've been out of the world all summer," he cried, shaking hands all round, "in a hermitage after my own heart. Fancy a castle dating from the crusades, on the very edge of a glacier, and every practicable route barred against the world, the flesh, and the devil, in the shape of tourists, tables d'hôte, and newspapers!"

"You look thirty!" declared one of the men. "And I feel twenty," laughed the magician; "what do you say to a little dinner at Lapérouse? I want to walk across the Luxembourg to a feast, as I've done any time these fifty years!"

As it happened, only two of the party were free; Major, the young man with the button, and Jack Flynn.

After some quiet chat the three strolled off together, arm in arm, down the Boulevard Montparnasse.

When they reached the Avenue de l'Observatoire, they turned down that noble grove. Here, at all hours of day and night, is a stately solitude. Intended for gaiety, devised as a symbol of gaiety by the most frivolous age of all time, it has become by virtue of age the very incarnation of melancholy grandeur. It seems almost to lament that eighteenth century which fathered it.

Before they had passed into this majesty more than an hundred yards, the mystic said abruptly: “What’s the trouble?”

“Haven’t you really seen a paper for six months?” countered Flynn.

“Of course I haven’t. You know my life; you know that I retire, whenever I am able, from this nightmare illusion of matter to a world of reality. So tell me your latest evil dream!”

“Evil enough!” said Major, “it doesn’t actually touch us, but it’s a narrow escape. We only heard the climax three days ago; so it’s a green wound, you see.”

“Yet it doesn’t touch you.”

“No; but it touches Art, and that’s me, all right!”

“Will you tell me the story?”

“I’ll leave that to Flynn. He’s been on the trail all the time.”

“I was even at the trial,” said Flynn.

“Come, come,” laughed Iff, “all these riddles.”

“I’ll make them clear enough — all but the one. Now, no interruptions! I have the thing orderly in my mind.”

“Five: four: three: two: one: gun!”

“The place is a small rocky islet off the west coast of Scotland, by name Dubhbheagg. A few fisher-folk live there; nobody else. There is one landing-place, and one only, even in calm weather; in a storm it is inaccessible altogether. Overlooking this quay is a house perched on the cliff; an old stone mansion. The proprietor is one of our sacred guild, and spends most of his time in Central Asia or Central Africa or Central America or Central Australia — anything to be central! — and he lets the house to anyone who is fool enough to pay the price.

“This summer it was rented by the president of the Royal Academy.”

“What’s that?” said Iff, sharply.

“The Royal Academy,” explained Flynn, “is an institution devised by divine Providence for the detection

of British Artists. It brings them into notice by ostentatiously rejecting their works. The president is Lord Cudlipp."

"Wasn't he a Joseph Thorne, or some such name?" asked Simon Iff.

"Thornton, I think. Ennobled thirteen years ago," corrected Flynn.

"It was Thornley," insisted the sculptor, Major.

"Yes, Thornley; I remember now. I know him slightly; and I knew his father before him; an M.P. and a biscuit manufacturer," exclaimed the mystic.

"A pity the son didn't follow the father," murmured Major. "I feel sure that his biscuits would have been delightful!"

"You're interrupting the court," protested the editor. "To proceed. Here we have Cudlipp in the Big House of Dubhbheagg, with a man and wife to cook for him, both old servants, with him thirty years. There are also his son Harry his daughter Eleanor, her companion-maid, and — a man from the Quarter!"

"This Quarter?"

"Up in Montrouge his studio is, I think, one of those lost cottages with a garden in the middle of a block of houses. Well, this man, or rather boy, he's not 20 yet, is, or wants to be, a marine painter like Cudlipp —"

"God forbid!" groaned Major.

"Shut up! the boy's name is André de Bry; he's half French, half English, I believe, a pretty hot combination."

"So I've noticed," remarked Iff, as they turned into Lapérouse, crept up the narrow stair, and found a table by the window in the Salle des Miroirs.

"Harry and Eleanor were born seventeen years ago, twins ——"

"Which is dead?" interrupted Iff. The others stared.

"Excuse an old man's vanity!" laughed the mystic. "I really have to show off sometimes! You see, I know Jack's passion for precision of language. He wouldn't

say the simple thing, ‘They are twins,’ or ‘They are seventeen years old,’ and he wouldn’t say ‘They were twins,’ or ‘were seventeen years old,’ so I knew that one, and one only, was dead.”

“I hope your acuteness will continue through dinner,” laughed the editor. “We need it. Now, then, to business. Cudlipp had sort of adopted André de Bry, used him to prepare his bigger canvases, and so on. De Bry had fallen in love with Eleanor. She returned his passion. De Bry was hopelessly poor — no, not hopelessly, for he had a rich uncle, who had a fad of independence. He wouldn’t give André a farthing; but if the boy succeeded in making himself a career, he promised to leave him every penny he had. The family is noble, much better than Cudlipp’s; so the boy was not a bad match for Eleanor, and, contingently, a very good one. He and Harry were perfectly good friends. There was, in short, no element of disagreement worth notice. The days passed pleasantly, either in painting or fishing, and the evenings in games. One can hardly imagine a more harmonious group.

“On the 18th of August the yacht, which supplied the island with stores from the mainland, called and left provisions for the party. To avert false conjecture from the start, I may say that it is absolutely impossible that some mysterious stowaway could have landed from the yacht and hidden somewhere on the island. The police subsequently went through the place with a fine tooth comb. It is thirty miles from the nearest land, is barely a quarter of a mile in its greatest length, has neither a cave nor a tree on it. So don’t talk about that! Well, the yacht weighed anchor on the afternoon of the 18th; that night a storm came up from the Atlantic, and raged for a whole week. It is physically impossible that anyone should have landed on the rock during that period. Furthermore, the Big House stands on a quite unclimbable pinnacle — I’m a rock climber, as you know, and I went to see it, and there’s not a crack anywhere.

It was only connected with the rest of the island by a wooden bridge of the cantilever type; and the violence of the wind was such that on the second night of the storm it carried it away. This was inconvenient for them, as will be seen; but it simplifies the matter a good deal for us. Well, on the 25th the storm abated, and the fishermen were about to put to sea when they observed Lord Cudlipp on the edge of the cliff, firing his shotgun. Seeing he was noticed, he signalled and shouted to them to come up. He met them, so far as he could, at the chasm where the bridge had been. 'There has been murder done here,' he said shortly, 'take this message and telegraph it at once.' He flung a stone to them, with a paper wrapped about it. The telegram asked for the police; also for a gang of men with materials to build up the bridge. The following noon relief arrived.

"The rest of the story needs little detail. It is as astonishingly simple as it is perplexing. The naked body of the boy Harry was found on the morning of the 23rd in the big room used by the other men as a studio — Harry and Eleanor took not the slightest interest in art. Death had been caused by a small deep wound in the femoral artery; a penknife might have made it. But there was no blood; and at the post-mortem was revealed the utterly astonishing fact that there was no blood in the whole body — when I say no blood, I mean, not enough for a rabbit! It had been systematically drained. I need hardly tell you that the whole island went wild with stories of vampires and witches; I won't bother you with that sort of rubbish.

"But the horror of the circumstances cannot be easily matched. Imagine to yourselves that lonely crag, itself a monument of desolation, towering from sea to sky, bleak, bare, barren and heartless as sea and sky themselves. Such a place has always bred strange stories — and strange crimes.

"But think of the feelings of the people in the house, one of them certainly a murderer!

“However, the police were easily able to narrow down the possibilities. The boy had been chloroformed or otherwise rendered unconscious, without doubt, for there could have been no struggle. The wound was clean, and obviously inflicted by someone with first rate anatomical knowledge. It was, too, a highly civilized crime, so to speak.

“This really restricted the field of inquiry to the two painters. Common sense excluded the father, whose main hope of an illustrious line was thus cut off. On the other hand, de Bry was a doubtful character. In Paris he had been accustomed to frequent the lowest haunts — the sort of place one finds in these little streets about here — and as a matter of fact, he was usually called the ‘Apache’ as a sort of nickname. But no one had ever heard of anything very definite, except an alleged duel with knives in a shop off the Boulevard St. Germain called Tout à la Joie, a low drinking cellar. This came out in court later, and sounded nasty, though it was proven that he had been attacked without provocation, and the police had not even arrested him. Still, a man so ready with a knife — it impressed the jury badly, I could see that.

“To cut a long story short, they arrested André. He refused to enter the witness box; he had no story to tell; nor, indeed, had any of the others. Harry had gone to bed alive; he was found dead in the morning. No quarrel anywhere. No motive for anybody.

“The jury was out for twenty-four hours; they came back with that joy which only Scotland offers to its jurymen — the Verdict of the Sitter on the Fence: “Not proven.” They all thought he did it, but they couldn’t make up their minds to hang him; so there was the way out. Therefore, André de Bry is at large again; and, by the same token, I came over on the boat with him. He was muffled to the eyes, but I knew him. So he’s probably within a mile of us at this minute.”

“What do you think of the story?” asked Major, a little anxiously.

“Oh, I agree with the natives,” replied the mystic, laughingly, to the astonishment of his hearers. “Excuse my referring to the fact that I’m a professional Magus — still, you should not be surprised if I tell you that I hold to the theory of vampires and werewolves and sirens and the rest of the dear creatures!”

“Be serious, master!” urged Flynn, using a title which he knew would put the mystic on his honor.

“My dear lad, I believe this murder was done by someone whom none of them knew to have been there.”

“But how could he have got away?”

“Vanished whence he came.”

“A haunted house? Damn it, something in your tone makes my blood run cold.”

“Well,” slowly answered the mystic, “possibly, in a sense, a haunted house.”

Major called the waiter to bring another bottle of Burgundy.

“Have you really formed a theory about the case?” asked Flynn. “To me it’s absolutely beyond reason.”

“Beneath it, beneath it! Ah well, no matter! As a fact, I have not made up my mind. How can I, till I’ve seen this chap’s pictures?”

“You think there was some motive of jealousy?” snapped out Major.

“I don’t think at all till I’ve seen them. Look here! do you know his work?”

“No; he hasn’t shown anything. He’s an absolute kid, you know. But Tite saw a thing of his in some studio or other, and Tite said it was damned bad. So I dare say it’s pretty decent stuff.”

“Where’s his studio?”

“Don’t know,” answered the sculptor. “I’ll find out tonight, if you’re really set on this. May I call for you in the morning? We’ll go up together; perhaps you’ll let

me make it déjeuner — you'll come, of course, Jack — as I've been shouting for Burgundy at your dinner, you shall shout for Claret at my lunch!"

"I'm at Bourcier's, 50 rue Vavin, as always," said Simon Iff. "The best house, and the best people, in all Paris. Come round at nine."

"Right. Meet me there, Flynn. It's a great hunt, the truth!"

"With a hunter like Simple Simon, you'll find it so," said Flynn, enthusiastically.

II.

The next morning saw the three friends tramping it up the Boulevard Raspail, past the great calm glory of the unconquered Lion de Belfort, along the busy Boulevard de Montrouge, and so to the very hem of Paris, the "fortifs" dear to the Apache. Here they turned west, and came presently to an old wine shop, through which lay the entrance to the studio of de Bry.

He was already at work in his little garden; an old man, leaning on a spade, was posing for him.

Major advanced and offered his card. "Monsieur de Bry! I feel sure you will pardon me. I am a Sociétaire of the Beaux Arts; I have heard that your work is excellent, and I am here with two friends of the most distinguished to ask the honor of looking at it."

"Mr. Major!" cried the boy, as he put his brushes down in his eagerness — at first he had not recognized the great man — "indeed, the honor is altogether mine. But I've nothing worth seeing, I assure you."

Major introduced his friends. De Bry, telling the model to rest, led the party into the studio. With infinite diffidence the boy began to show his work.

In a few minutes Major, with his hands thrust deep into his trousers' pockets, and his head thrown back, was reduced to utter silence. Simon Iff, who was watching him as well as the pictures, smiled his

grimmest smile. The editor, inured to small talk by his profession, made the conversation. "It's all beginnings," said the boy, "but this is more what I've tried for. I did it in the summer." The mystic noticed with a darkening face that he seemed to speak of that summer as if it had held nothing but a holiday.

The canvas showed the rock of Dubhbheagg amidst the breakers. It had been painted from a boat on a clear day. The sky was blue; a flight of wildfowl gave life to the picture. But the rock itself was more vital than the birds. It seemed the image of some great lost God of solitude, eternally contemplative, eternally alone. It was more melancholy than Dürer's master-work, or Thomson's interpretation of it. And de Bry had not used the materials of melancholy, or images of death; he had merely painted a rock just as it was when he saw it. Yet he had made it a creature of cosmic life, as significant and vital as the universe itself — and as lonely and inexorable.

Simon Iff spoke for the first time. "Is that picture for sale?" he asked. "Yes," said the painter, rather eagerly. They noticed that he looked ill.

"Probably hasn't had a meal since that damned affair," thought Major. "How much?" very stiffly from Simple Simon.

The painter hesitated. "Would you give me fifty francs for it?" he asked timidly.

The mystic rose to his feet, and shook his stick in the boy's face. "No, you damned young scoundrel, I will not!" he roared. "How dare you ask such a price?"

The boy shrank back; he expected that the old man would strike him.

"Do you know who I am?" thundered Simon. "I'm the chairman of the Art Committee of the Hemlock Club! That's the trouble with you artists; you're blacklegs, every one of you. Offering a thing like that for fifty francs and pulling down the price of everything but the old Masters! Answer me straight now; how much is it worth?"

The boy was too taken aback to reply.

"Have you ever seen a worse thing offered for ten thousand francs?" asked Simon, cynically.

"Oh yes!" he stammered at last.

"I'll give you fifteen thousand. Here's a thousand on account; I'll send a cheque for the balance this afternoon. Send the picture to Simon Iff, 50, rue Vavin. And, if you've nothing to do, come and see me as soon as the light fails this afternoon. Yes, bring the picture round in a fiacre. About 5, then!"

He thrust a big thousand franc note in the boy's hand, and withdrew stormily from the studio.

The others followed him; but Major stopped a moment. "Did you like my bust of Rodin?" asked the sculptor. The boy was still too bewildered to do more than nod. "I'll send you a bronze, if you'd care to have it. And come and see me, any time you care to, and particularly any time you need a friend." De Bry grasped the offered hand in silence.

The others had reached the street when Major caught them. "I hope you don't mean mischief by that boy," he said to Iff. "I seem to smell a trap. For 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 C's — 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 Eliphas 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 fulfill 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; and they went across Paris to the old magician's little studio in the Rue Vavin.

It was a small room, and very simply furnished; but the paintings and sculptures would have made the fame of any museum. Each was the gift of a master to Simon Iff.

"We shall wait for the young man," said the mystic, as they seated themselves; "you will see that I have no difficulty in forcing him to confess."

"I'll never believe it," insisted Major.

"Don't believe it till you hear it!" was the abrupt retort.

IV.

A quarter of an hour elapsed; then the slim figure of the boy appeared. In his arms was the picture.

Simon took it and placed it upon the mantel. Major was right; there was nothing in the room to equal it. The magician went to his desk, and wrote out a check for fourteen thousand francs, which he handed to the young painter. "If you would sign this receipt?" De Bry complied.

"Do not go!" said Simon. "I have much to say to you. You really like the picture? You think it worthy of you?"

"I wouldn't have sold it if I didn't"

"Yet you were in sore straits? You were denying yourself food to pay your model?"

"I shouldn't have sold it to you if I didn't think it mine."

"That too is worthy. But now, sit down. There are others to consider in this matter. I am going to ask my friends to remain absolutely silent while we talk."

"I know what you are going to say," said the boy. "I think it unnecessary and cruel."

"Wait till I have done. It is not only necessary and kind, but it is very urgent."

"I can't refuse the first man who has appreciated my work."

“Listen while I tell you a story. Many years ago I knew a man named Thornley, a wealthy manufacturer of biscuits. He had one son, Joseph. He asked me one day to recommend a tutor for the lad. I told him of a clergyman named Drew, a man of deep scholarship, great culture, and intense love of art. He worked on the ambition of Joseph Thornley, and the boy, after a year’s tuition from Drew, decided to be a painter. The tutor died suddenly; but the boy’s ambition remained. He persuaded his father to let him go to various art schools, where he studied incessantly, with the most praiseworthy diligence.”

“Damn it!” roared Major, “he had no more capacity for art than this chair I am sitting on!”

“I asked you not to interrupt,” returned Simon mildly. “I never said he had! To continue. Backed with ample wealth and influence, and fortified with determination to succeed, Thornley’s career was one long series of triumphs. Although primarily a marine painter, he also did other work, notably portraits. His picture of the king in the uniform of a British Admiral caught the public taste more than any other of his efforts. It was in that year that he was not only elected to the presidency of the Royal Academy of Arts, but raised to the peerage with the title of Baron Cudlipp. His only sorrow was the death of his wife two years after the birth of his children.”

The magician turned to André. “Good! Now — how did you spend the week of the great storm?”

“Billiards, mostly,” stammered André, taken by surprise.

“Chess, too, and some card games. I sketched, of course, nearly all day. Eleanor had some needlework. Poor Harry was very bored; he did nothing much.”

“And Cudlipp buried himself a good deal in anthropology?”

“Yes; he had Frazer’s ‘Golden Bough’ all the time — —” The boy broke off, and stared. “How did you know that?” he said, aghast.

“A little bird told me,” said Simon lightly.

All of a sudden Major sprang to his feet. “Then Cudlipp killed his son,” he shouted, “Oh! Simple Simon, what a fool I’ve been!” And he suddenly broke down in spasm on spasm of sobs.

“I promised these gentlemen,” said Simon, taking no notice of the outburst, “that I would force a confession from you this afternoon. I think this is the moment. Come, we are all attention.”

“I certainly cannot hear this senseless slander against my protector without ——”

“Hush!” said Simon. “I told you this matter was urgent. I meant what I said. You must catch the nine o’clock train for London.”

“Why?” said the boy, defiantly; “who are you to say this?”

“I am a person who is going to put a letter in the post in an hour’s time; and you had better arrive before the letter.”

“I don’t understand.”

“I was explaining to these gentlemen at lunch that all crime was the result of conflict; that perverse crime, in particular, was caused by conflict of the conscious and unconscious wills.”

“Don’t you see?” said Major, mastering himself, “it couldn’t be you. You were supremely happy; you had the girl you loved; you had found yourself as an artist. But Cudlipp had thwarted his own inner will all his life; he was meant to bake biscuits; and he had forced himself to do those eye-destroying horrors. But — go on, master! — I still don’t see the whole story.”

“I haven’t told you all the facts yet. Cudlipp’s family was originally Armenian, for one thing, the offshoot of some old Babylonian tribe. Then there was the ‘Golden Bough’ with its detailed description of various savage rites, especially the sacrifice of the first-born, an idea, by the way, which the Jews only adopted at third or fourth hand from older and autochthonous races. Then the

newspapers were filled with long arguments about the Chesidim and ritual murder, the trial of that man somewhere in Russia — can't think of his name — begins with a B — was on at this time. Well, when the suppressed genius of the man for baking biscuits — which may be a passion like another — when that broke out, probably under the strain of the long storm, and the wildness of the whole scene, and possibly some sudden realization that this boy here could paint, and he himself never could, why, then his brain snapped. The recent impressions combined with some far strain of atavism, and he resolved upon the murder."

"I still can't see why murder," said Flynn. "Why should not this biscuit-baking genius go into the kitchen and bake biscuits?"

"I want you to recognize the fact, you dear good simple soul, that madmen are a thousand times more logical than the sane. The conclusions of normal men are always balanced by other considerations; we criticize our ideas of proper tailoring, for example, in the spotlight of our check books. The madman doesn't. He wants clothes; he thinks of nothing else; so he goes down to Savile Row and orders a dozen sable overcoats and thirty dress suits. It's much more logical, if logic were all!

"So Cudlipp reasoned something like this, as I imagine; 'I've wasted forty years trying to paint when I ought to have been baking biscuits; now I must make up for lost time.' How to do that? The madman's reason finds it easy. The connection between gold and copper coins is an arbitrary one, isn't it? Yes. Well, if I haven't got a barrow-load of coppers, I can give you a fist full of sovereigns, and it's just as good. The whole idea of primitive magic (which he had been reading, remember!) rests on arbitrary substitution. The king must die every year, or the sun won't come back — there's an arbitrary connection, to begin with, though it's based on false reasoning, or rather on correct reasoning

from false observation. Now the king doesn't want to die; so he takes a criminal, labels him king, and kills him. Everyone is happy. So this man seeks to satisfy his genius, suppressed for forty years, in a night. Surely it must be through some monstrous act of violence and horror! That is madman's logic. Then, as I said before, some ancestral memory in the subconscious self influenced his recent impression, and that gave the form to the idea. It is also conceivable that he had a real purpose, thought that the sacrifice of the first-born might enable him to become a painter. Gilles de Retz murdered over 800 children in his endeavor to make gold. But of this theory I have no evidence. However, the rest stands."

André de Bry listened with white lips to this speech.

"Now will you confess?" asked the magician, with mild persistence.

"I don't see why I should."

"Because you are still looking at the past. Can't you foresee the future?"

"Ought I to kill myself?"

"Be serious, sir!" reprimanded Simon. "I see that I must tell you more. So far, I have told you how I know that Cudlipp killed his son, and how he came to do it. You may or may not know why he did it, but you must know that he did it, if only by a process of exclusion. Then — what will he do next?" The boy began to smile. "Oh, Eleanor is with an aunt," he said; "she's safe enough."

"Now we begin to confess, indirectly," continued Simon. "But what will he do? Is he conscious of his act? You see, I must know all. I was already sure that you would never have left Eleanor in danger. But there are other problems."

"I'm beaten," said André. "I'll tell you all I know."

"Good."

V.

It was I who discovered the body of poor Harry; for I had risen with the first light, intending to paint. I needn't go into the events of that day, much; it was all suspicion, perfectly hellish. I haven't your reasoning powers, Mr. Iff, and I didn't think he had done it, particularly. He pretended to suspect me, of course. We can see now, thanks to you, that his whole life has been one long hypocrisy, that he has been pretending to be an artist, just like any other fraud. His deadly earnestness about it only made it worse; I see that now. But I didn't see it then; to me he was just a bad painter, and I looked no deeper. Well, by dinner time our nerves were all on edge; Eleanor's, naturally, more than any. After dinner I said I would go to bed, meaning to snatch an hour's sleep, and then to watch Eleanor's door all night. I had told her to have her companion in her room — the poor old lady was glad enough to have company, you can imagine.

"Eleanor's manner to me had been strange beyond words; but I only thought that it meant that she suspected me. However, when I said I was going to bed, she jumped up: 'Do play me a hundred up first!' she cried; 'I'll go mad if you don't.' We went into the billiard room together. She closed the door, and put her back to it. 'André,' she cried, 'I've been insane about this all day; but I'm in a fearful position. Only — I can't let you go to bed. I must tell you. Papa did it.' I caught her in my arms, for she was falling. In a moment she recovered. 'Last night,' she went on, 'I woke with frightful dreams — and I found my nose was bleeding. I lit my candle, and got up to get water. Then I knew suddenly that something was wrong with Harry. I always have known; it's the twin sympathy.' " "Damnation!" interrupted Simple Simon in a fury, "I'm getting old. I ought to have known that she knew."

"You've done well enough, sir," said André; "it's been like a miracle to me to hear you. Eleanor went on: 'The moment my nose stopped bleeding I took my black kimono, and went down to Harry's room. The door was open. I slipped in. It was dark. At that instant I saw the studio door open.' (They were right opposite, Mr. Iff.) 'I knew there would be all kinds of trouble if I were caught wandering about the house at that time of night. I kept still. I could see through the crack of the door. Papa was silhouetted against the light in the studio. He had a wash hand basin, carrying it carefully. I heard him give a short harsh laugh, and say aloud: 'Now I begin to live.' 'He went down the little corridor by Harry's room.' (It leads to a pepper-box turret. Harry's room has a window on to that corridor.) 'I went to the side window. I saw papa throw the basin over the cliff. Then he went back, and down the main corridor to his room. I felt for Harry in his bed. He wasn't there. I found matches. The room was empty. I went into the lighted studio. I saw Harry at once, and knew he was dead. I fainted. When I came to myself I was in my own bedroom. I must have walked there without knowing. A few minutes later, I suppose, the alarm came. Forgive me; I ought to have told you before; you must have suffered fearfully. But ——' I stopped her. 'It's best, I think, that you have told me now,' I said, 'we must save him. We must be on our guard, and do nothing.' We noted Cudlipp's conduct. It became clear that he would hide his crime to the end, even to letting me be hanged for it. I told her that I would never speak to her again if she interfered, that I would die for the honor of her family. I made her swear by her dead mother. I doubted at first if he were aware of what he had done, but his manner left no doubt. For instance, he made no inquiry into the mystery of the basin missing from his room, and never spoke of it in court. So we knew."

“You’re a very noble and very wrong-headed young man,” said Simon; “you don’t really think we can leave things as they are, do you? Observe what is happening now. The explosion in the man’s brain once over, habit has resumed its sway. He’s the hypocritical bourgeois once more — but with the memory of that most fearful deed to lash him. If I know anything of men, it will prey upon his mind; and we shall have either another murder, or, more likely, suicide. Your sacrifice and Eleanor’s will be useless. This is what has to be done: You and I will go to London together tonight. In the morning we will confide in two alienists. We will all go to Cudlipp House; the doctors will certify him insane; he must consent to our terms. He must put himself in the charge of a medical attendant and a male nurse, and he must go away with them, so that he never returns.

“The newspapers will be told that the shock of recent events has undermined his health, and that he has been ordered a complete change of scene.

“We shall then go to Eleanor, and tell her what has been done; you will marry her here in Paris; I will arrange with the Consulate for secrecy; and you will yourself seek change of scene for a year or so. You, Major, will supply him with money if he needs it; you can get rid of some of those canvases, I suppose?”

Major nodded. “And you, Flynn, will invent a way up those cliffs, and a story about a maniac vampire, ending with his confession and suicide, to round it off nicely; we must clear this lad of that ghastly ‘not proven’ business.”

“That is a job,” said Flynn, “which I shall most thoroughly enjoy doing. But now you must all come and dine with me; we have no time to lose, if we mean to catch that nine o’clock train.”

VI.

Two years later a certain pretty French Countess was enthusiastic, at the Salon des Beaux Arts, over the six South Sea Island pictures of a new Sociétaire. “André de Bry?” she said to her escort, the great sculptor Major; “isn’t that the young man who was accused of poor Bibi Sangsue’s last murder?”

“The maniac vampire! Yes; the fools! As if anyone could mistake Bibi’s handiwork!”

“Truth is certainly stranger than fiction; Bibi’s career sounds like the wildest imagination. Doesn’t it?”

“It does,” said Major solemnly. “But perhaps you knew him?”

“At one time,” murmured the Countess, with a blush and a droop of the eyelids, “at one time — well — rather intimately!”

“I,” said Major, “knew only his father and mother!”