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THE SCRUTINIES OF SIMON IFF.

By EDWARD KELLY.

No. 4.—The Conduct of John Briggs.

Simon Iff bounded into the Hemlock Club. He was by all odds the oldest member of the club; but to-day 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 Aber-tarff, 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,