

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 Abertarf! 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 at-