

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 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 things. 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, inclosed 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, unset, 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.