

SIMON IFF IN AMERICA

BY

EDWARD KELLY

No. 4. AN OLD HEAD ON YOUNG SHOULDERS

Mr. Simon Iff.

"My dear Sir,

It would give much pleasure to Mrs. Barker and myself if you would dine with us to-morrow night, May sixth, at The Pleasance. Seven o'clock precisely.

Very truly,

Andrew F. Barker."

This letter was written on the stationery of the Bank of Barker and Barker. Its president, who wrote it, was in fact the bank itself. He was one of the most formidable figures in American Finance. He was not spectacular; the public never heard his name; he had never lent it to any movement of dubious or speculative character. In Wall Street his name was a synonym for extreme conservatism. He was a 'gold-bug' of the deepest dye. He made no attacks upon any market. But in defence he was impregnable; the few who had dared to test his resources came out of the brief struggle with their own knocked about severely. His principle was a simple one indeed; it was to consider only

real, as opposed to market values. Once, in his early days, his copper holdings had dropped to derisory prices. At the conference of his scared colleagues he had sat silent, turning over the pages of a medical journal. Asked point blank for his opinions, he had said: "I see here that copper is an ingredient of Fehling's solution, which is used in testing for sugar in diabetes. I think we should buy some copper. It will always be useful." He was three millions to the good when the bear raid collapsed.

In his private life he was the same vigorous sensible, dominant personality. He never had trouble in his household, because he never allowed it. People called him truculent, but it was their mistake. He merely watched for possible germs of trouble, and sterilized them before they multiplied and grew. His wife and his children and his servants were devoted to him. They understood that he never needed a harsh word or action because he had gone out to meet the first causes which lead to such events.

His physical appearance was in complete harmony with these characteristics. He was tall, robust and athletic, six feet and seven inches in his socks, with the chest development of the Farnese Hercules. A heavy shock of hair, jet black, was all untouched by time. He wore a full beard, square-cut. But, mostly striking feature of all, his complexion was of a strange pallor. This was due, no

doubt, to a habit of life most singular in so physically gifted a man. He never took exercise. He ate most sparingly. He slept hardly at all. He hated the open air. He employed three confidential private secretaries, in shifts. They were his shadows. At any moment he might begin dictation.

His clothes were as remarkable as himself. Winter and summer, snow or shine, he wore always the same plain suit of grey. He had gone to his tailor, twenty years before Simon Iff's journey to America, chosen a cloth, and ordered the entire supply. Send me three suits every year, said he. He had arranged similarly for a supply of tall silk hats. For overcoat he wore always a vast Italian mantle. In this he would sleep, as often as not, lying in his long lounge basket chair. He had a small Turkish Bath in his house, and it was his rule to spend an hour daily in 'elimination', as his phrase was. He had never known an hour's ill health. His life was absorbed in his plans and his domestic affairs. All who were really familiar with him loved him as much as they respected him.

The result, curious enough even in this world of paradox, was that he had the name of a tyrant, a brute, a satyr, and a brigand. He was one of those men about whom strange stories gather, without a vestige of foundation. Perhaps the principal reason for this was envy; but he

certainly contributed to it by his detestation of words. No man, he held, had any right to intrude on the sacred solitude of another man's self-containing. Permission to speak once given, as by companionship at a meal, he was genial and even loquacious; but his wife would hardly have dared to telephone to the Bank if the house had been on fire.

It was this man who was not in his house when Simon Iff came, invited to dinner! Mrs. Barker apologized in the most charming style. "A sudden and inexorable call to Washington, Mr. Iff, at the last moment. Nobody less than the President, I am sure, could have made him break an appointment with you."

Simon expressed his regrets. "But the Signorina will be here, of course," continued Mrs. Barker, prattling. "I don't know how much my husband has told you - and he doesn't know her well, you see. She's really the most wonderful woman alive. Do you know, three years ago every doctor in Europe and America had given me up. I had had eight operations. And then I met Signorina Visconti. In a month I was well, and though it has taken me a long time to regain my full strength, I have never had the slightest return of the trouble. Isn't that wonderful?"

Simon Iff had a prejudice against all spiritual healers and their kin. He thought that bodily ills should be treated by bodily means, mental ills by mental means

moral ills by moral means, and so on. "Suum cuique!" he would exclaim. "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's!"

Moreover, his experience had taught him that most of such people were quacks - some ignorant, some devilish - and he could never make up his mind which of those two classes was the more dangerous.

But when the little Italian lady arrived, he was instantly disarmed. She had not a milligramme of charlatanism in her whole being. She was rather short and divinely plump, the most exquisite Botticelli type he had ever seen in the flesh; and she might have served Eocaccio in his merriest mood. She bristled with beauty and brilliance. She was a lady to every tingling finger-tip, yet she had initiative without a shadow of suppression. As Simon shook hands with her, he realized that one would have to be very ill indeed not to feel the radiance of her vitality. Her laughing eyes and her full lips seemed to promise the temperament of Venus, but the high, pure, cloudless brow made one think rather of Diana. She implored Simon not to think of her as the celebrated healer, but as the unknown sculptor. She had never exhibited, but it was known that she worked night and day. Iff marvelled at her thumbs, modelled by years of masterful contest with clay and wax. It was clear that she had sublimated her natural

force into the creative energy of Art. All through dinner she kindled the whole world in the lightnings of her imagination; she flashed from wit to wisdom, and from roguishness to pathos. Was it wonderful that the magician, responsive, stimulated infinitely by the mere contagion of her person, felt that he himself had never appeared to better advantage?

No sooner was dinner at an end than she excused herself; she had to work on the foundation of 'a Bacchus and the Tiger', for which the model was to arrive at seven o'clock the next morning.

"The Bacchus or the Tiger?" asked Iff.

"Bacchus," she said - "Evoe ho! Evoe! The most wonderful boy in the world - one of those wine-stained languid types, like a spoiled girl! Evoe ho!"

She went out. It was as if a flame had swept through the room. It left the others feeling as saints feel when they sink back to the realization that they have enjoyed the Beatific Vision.

"Isn't she perfectly delightful?" cried Mrs. Barker. "Oh, do smoke!" and she took a cigarette to keep Biron's Larranaga in countenance. He waited till the butler had withdrawn before replying. Then he said slowly in a very serious voice: "A friend in need is a friend indeed."

"Oh, yes! Believe me, Mr. Iff, I should have been

in my grave these two years but for Flamella!"

"I moant to-night."

"Oh fisherman, oh fisherman!" You were perfectly amazing. To hear the pair of you, what a pleasure! What a match! Oh, you ought to marry Flamella!"

"Marriage has its grave anxieties."

"Don't be depressing!"

"Need I?" A long pause followed the incisive question.

"Mr Iff, you are right. There is something most terribly wrong. I've been crazy to tell you about it, but I wouldn't spoil your evening if I could help it. But you've seen through me, so I'll talk."

"You've been as plucky as women always are, in the big troubles. That's how I knew it was something ugly. And I could see you wanted to tell me, or I'd have held my peace."

"I told you a lie about Washington. I don't know where my husband is."

Iff nodded.

"I must explain some of his ways, to begin with. He's a very strange man - most strong, most loveable - but with ideas that in a lesser man would be fads. He said he had no time to learn the name of a new secretary, it was enough bother changing, anyhow, so they are always Mr. Morning,

Mr.Noon, and Mr.Night, according to whether they are on the eight o'clock, twelve o'clock, or four o'clock shift. Often I myself don't know their names. Well, early this morning Mr. Noon rang up and asked Mr.Morning to stay on till one o'clock, as he had a sick headache, and wanted a little extra time to get over it."

"Forgive me!" interrupted Simon, "but I want to say one word to give you confidence. You are a most wonderful woman. I won't guess whether Mr.Darker was the cause or the effect of that fact!"

"I don't understand."

"May I make a guess? What you have just told me has nothing whatever to do with the story."

"True," said the lady, in surprise. "How did you guess?"

"You had trouble to remember that you ought to tell me."

"Yes."

"And you told me - here's another guess - because you have trained your mind. You thought - rightly, as I judge - that the most apparently irrelevant irregularity might be pertinent on a day during which a great irregularity has occurred?"

She thought a moment. "I believe that was actually my reason. But it's subconscious."

"Just so."

"You have given me confidence, indeed, indeed!" she cried eagerly. "I know you'll tell me what has happened."

"I will try."

"Mr. Barker always takes lunch at midday precisely, thus avoiding the crush of a later hour. It is Mr. Noon's duty to await him at the door of the private office from five minutes before the hour. They go together to lunch. Mr. Noon orders the meal while my husband goes to wash his hands. As a rule the tavern is empty, save for a stray customer or so, until twelve thirty. To-day there was a rather hilarious party of a dozen salesmen. They have met there weekly at 11.30 for the last three months. It's a kind of informal club."

"You are certainly a miracle for details. I suppose Mr. Morning told you all this?"

"Yes, in a memorandum which he sent to me by Mr. Noon. But I had a second account from Julius Barker. Well, Mr. Morning, assuming his absent colleague's duty - this had happened at odd times before - began to extract the gist of the telegrams in the evening papers, which he would retail to my husband at lunch. He became absorbed in this work. The waiter would of course not bring the lunch until Mr. Barker resumed his seat. Mr. Morning quite forgot the flight of time for awhile; then he awoke to it. His watch said twelve thirty-five. Instantly he thought of an accident - an apoplexy, perhaps. He ran up to the 'men's room'.

The attendant, who knew Mr. Barker well, of course, said that he had left, taking his coat and hat, twenty minutes or so before. The secretary returned to his seat, absolutely nonplussed. But, in the absence of orders to go, he decided to stay. He would be off duty at one o'clock; so he would eat his lunch, and report at the Bank at that hour. He did so. Mr. Noon was waiting, as in order. Where was Mr. Barker? The vice-president had seen him come into the bank. He remembered the minute, 12.20, as he himself was hurrying out to lunch, uptown, a trifle pressed for time. The cashier had seen Mr. Barker go into the vaults. He came out again a few minutes later, and went directly into the street, turning towards the tavern.

"This was all a little unusual, but perfectly satisfactory, so far. The alarm began at two thirty, when Mr. Berger, of Berger and Watts, called to complete the sale of an important block of real estate. The purchase price was two million, three hundred thousand dollars. At ten minutes past three Mr. Barker was still absent. His cousin and partner, Julius Barker, held hasty conference with the vice-president and Mr. Noon. Julius had full power to sign checks; it would never do to put off Mr. Berger. They decided to lie: "Mr. Barker has just telephoned. He has been delayed in the traffic, but is on his way now." Three o'clock; it was impossible to postpone a decision. Julius apologized, signed Mr. Berger's check, and got rid of him.

will be another little point in his game." Julius was perfectly satisfied. He drove out here, and told me the whole story."

"Has Julius any brains?"

"Oh, Mr. Iff, I see you agree with me, and I'm crazy with anxiety. I know Andrew, indeed I do."

"The whole story is utterly absurd. Your husband is the sanest and strongest financier in the city, and we are asked to believe that he's engaged in an absolutely melodramatic gamble."

"I telephoned to Mr. Teake. He said he would come out after dinner. Isn't that his car coming up now? Oh, if it were only Andrew!"

Simon Iff shook his head.

"Your husband would have telephoned." In fact, it was Commissioner Teake who was admitted. "The very man I wanted!" he cried, "you must help me to convince this dear lady that there's nothing amiss! Boys will be boys, ha! ha!"

"I'm sorry. I don't see it is that light at all."

Teake became suddenly sober, like a drunkard in fresh air. "Well, where is the light, then?"

"Mrs. Barker, may I talk this over with Mr. Teake? Take an hour's rest; we may come to some conclusion."

"You'll find me in the parlour," she acquiesced. "Order anything you need." She went away, paler than a foggy dawn.

He then gave the deed of sale to the cashier to place in the vaults. The man came back to Julius, and asked him to come down. The vaults had been robbed! Bills of various denominations, and negotiable securities, amounting to over six hundred thousand dollars in all, were missing. Julius simply told him to compile a list of what was gone, and to hold his tongue. He then went straight to Commissioner Teake, of the Police.

"It was not a simple matter. The men on guard had seen Andrew take the securities, as he had a perfect right to do. But it was utterly unreasonable and without motive. He went to Teake merely as to a man experienced in mysteries. Teake could only suggest an enquiry as to whether any of the securities had been negotiated.

"The whole street knew about it! A dozen different men, perfectly unknown, had thrown large blocks of stock into the market. The wildest rumours were afloat. The principal stock attacked had fallen four points. The whole thing was utterly unexpected, and everything fell in sympathy. It was a crazy hour. You know there's trouble brewing in Morocco? Every one jumped to the solution - bad news from Paris!

Teake dismissed the whole affair with a laugh. "Your cousin has a little coup in hand," he said. "Of course he's keeping out of the way; he doesn't want the reporters at him. And if the news of his disappearance leaks out, it

"Now, young man," said Iff at once, "you've been making a very great fool of yourself. We must clear this thing up right away; it looks dreadfully bad to me."

"Why shouldn't the old boy have a little flutter on his own?"

"Because he isn't an old boy; he's a middle-aged man. Now tell me, is there any bad news from Paris?"

"Washington says not. They're sure it will blow over."

"Morning, Noon, and Night are here, I hope. Oh yes, she would be sure to arrange that. Let's have them in -- no, let's look in on them!"

The butler, summoned, directed them to the billiard-room. The three men were playing pool, listlessly, not talking.

Simon observed them intently. They reminded him, whimsically enough, of the Three Gardeners in Alice in Wonderland. They had the effect of pasteboard; they were as unreal as their names. The personality of Barker had overshadowed them completely, had left them high and dry, jetsam of the ocean of humanity. They had no orders any more; there was therefore no reason why they should do anything whatever! So they played pool without even trying to play it. They all looked up simultaneously; but Night, being technically on duty, advanced first to greet the guests

and effected the introductions very simply and suavely.

Physically, they differed a good deal. Morning, slight and dapper, was tall and dark. He was obviously suffering from lack of sleep, and strain on the nerves. Noon was short, remarkably short, but sturdy, with somewhat sparse red hair. He seemed a little elated at being well outside the case. A sick headache is usually its own reward, like virtue, which it resembles strongly in many other ways.

Night was taller even than Morning, a pale blonde type, very handsome, but full of sober energy.

"I want to ask you some questions," began Teake, sitting on the big Chesterfield and crossing his legs. "I may inform you, as a starter, that I've looked up your records, and your movements, and you all seem to be candidates for stained glass windows. So let's get plenty of action in the film! Anything strange in Mr. Barker's behaviour of late?"

Morning shook his head. Noon pursed his lips tightly. Night smiled.

"Come across!"

"Well," volunteered Night, "I think there may be a little shorsky lafawn."

"I don't think there's anything in that," said Noon. Shielding his employer, reflected Teake; and con-

concentrated his energies on Night. This youth was however quite unable to contribute anything definite; he became more and more confused as he went on; in the end he amounted to an "impression".

Teake now went through the events of the day with each man in turn. Their accounts were most unsatisfactorily satisfactory. The enquiry did not elicit a single new fact, or cast doubt upon a single old one.

Morning's movements were known at the Bank; Noon was still in bed at twelve thirty, according to his wife, the landlady who called for the rent, and the servant who cleaned the apartment, so that he must have gone straight to the Bank in a taxi, as in fact he did, by the driver's story. Night had also slept till one o'clock, as was his custom, and then dined at his boarding-house.

Teake got up, disgruntled. "May as well go and sample that port," he growled. "Ever see such a rotten case? Not a thing to take hold of." He lurched off, with Simon Iff in his wake.

"I rather thought these young men were deliciously illuminating - very beacons in our darkness - but alas! they blaze above a dangerous lee shore."

"Well, I'll drink the port, and you'll tell me the story."

The good Commissioner was for the first time a little piqued.

"You're angry with yourself, not with me," said Iff, answering his tone rather than his words, "just as Mr. Night, being himself a woman-fancier, thought he saw just that trait in his hero."

"O ho! so that's the way the cat jumps!"

"But Noon, who has some real brains, of a sort, tried to give, by denying it, the same impression as Night by affirming it."

"That's so."

"Had Barker any enemies?"

"I think not. Every one who doesn't know him swears he hates him; but in his own circle he is popular."

Teake suddenly interrupted himself.

"Did you say 'has' or 'had'?" he added, with curious violence.

"It is possibly not the correct American usage, but I said 'had' !"

"You mean he's dead?"

"I'd risk a dollar on it."

"Why?"

"Because he's not the type of man to go insane."

"Right."

"He had no mental liabilities, so to speak; but he was bound to come to a bad end sooner or later, through his pitiful moral weakness."

"Say, have you got any mental liabilities of your own?"

This chap is our shining example of Force of Character."

"Well, in one way, of course. He did manage to put a suit of armour on the poor old woman!"

"I don't get you one little bit."

"An athlete doesn't wear corsets. You don't put bars and struts to shore up a sound building."

"Try again!"

"If you want steam to exert pressure you have to confine it; you don't have to put an iron jacket on a steel bar. If a piston had a will of its own, you wouldn't have to fix it in a cylinder."

"How do you mean? You're using a soft drill yourself on this ivory dome!"

"Well, this is the way I see it. Andrew V. Barker was a man of routine. He had all the virtues. That's the mark of a man without virtue. Barker couldn't trust himself, so he made a machine to confine his energies to proper channels. He forced all that loose steam to work in only the one direction. A real man doesn't have to sign the pledge; it's the weak drunkard who is helped by that. A real nation doesn't need restrictive laws, prohibition, and God knows what other degenerate follies. A free people doesn't keep on shouting "Liberty"; a chaste people howling over the Poverty of women or rather Luncheon."

"Good old England!"

"Well, don't you know, we do rather notice something

wrong! This Barker, to resume, is so afraid of failing to use his time well that he even invents this ridiculous morning, noon, and night business."

"That's a funny idea."

"Now it's easy to keep yourself from being run over by a railway train, because it runs on rails. Also, you can be sure to catch your railway train, because all you have to do is to wait by the line till it passes. If it runs to schedule, you can make all sorts of plans to do what you want to that train. An automobile isn't so easy to avoid or to attack. Its movements may not suit your ideas.

"And so it is with men. A creative artist is a strong man with a will of his own. You never know what he may do next. And so we find that the world has an instinctive fear of him. He's an incalculable force. But the man of habit is strong only in so far as his habits furnish him with armour. So all that one who wishes to attack him has to do is to find the weak place in the armour. This was why rapier displaced battle-axe and broadsword. The elastic, active, willed, invisible defence proved stronger than the immobile plate of mail. Here's a guess for you; in the next war these impregnable concrete and steel fortresses of Brialmont will crumple like eggshells; the best defence will be the thin red line of heroes. It's always happening; the old stone castles were no good as soon as people invented a mobile artillery instead of the old catapult and battering-ram."

"So you think somebody has been getting after Barker."

"Sure of it! Barker would never have trusted himself to gamble. Suppose he had really had some secret tip from Paris, he would have refused to win on the 'sure thing'. He would have said, 'I daren't break my principles. The first win will tempt me to a second flutter - until one day I plunge on a rotten tip, and go under, as I've seen so many poor devils of gamblers do!' Eh? Then, even if he had decided to take the dive, he would still have got the money in a regular way. He wouldn't have called attention to the game by breaking his routine. So I'm perfectly sure that the man who took the money was not Andrew P. Barker."

"But, Good God, who could possibly hope to personate him? The most familiarly conspicuous and eccentric figure in New York!"

"That Italian cloak would be an asset as far as the figure goes. And he always wore a suit of the same cloth, always the same singular pattern of top hat. Then the beard is a great help."

"But his extraordinary stature! There aren't fifty men in the whole of the United States who could be mistaken for him, however well disguised, even in twilight."

"Ah, by taking thought one may add a cubit to one's stature."

"About an inch, perhaps, with special boots. More, and the walk would be thrown out."

"Quite so. I'm not clear on this, mind, yet, but the personation is helped once more by his habits. An impostor, well advised as to Barker's routine, would know that no one would dare speak to him. Every rigid defence has its weak spot. Conspirators could play up to him with absolute safety. He would never do anything unusual which would disturb them."

"Well, on that hypothesis he's been murdered or at least kidnapped. They have to have his keys. It could have been done in the street, with a car. I think I'll get busy, and look out for a very tall man." Teake rose, and rang for his coat and hat.

"No," said Simon Iff, "on my hypothesis, you should look for a very short man."

"Well, he's not short any more!"

Teake laughed heartily at his play on words, and thought it safer to explain it. "Six hundred thousand or so! And the squeeze of the bear raid! Some haul!" He went down the steps of the house.

"By the way, dine with me to-morrow night?" cried Iff.

"Right."

"I'll 'phone you time and place."

"Single-track mind," mused Iff, when he had gone.

"He never even waited to hear my theory of Morning, Noon, and Night, and their very interesting revelations."

He went upstairs, and told Mrs. Barker that commissioner Teake thought her husband had been kidnapped. Some one must

have known that he would leave the Bank that day with that money on him - perhaps the party to whom he intended to pay it.

This pious fraud accomplished, the mystic returned to his apartment, and spent the night in meditation upon the Four Formless States, ending with that which is "not Nothing, and yet neither P nor p!" At ten o'clock, however, he was at the Tavern where Barker always lunched. In his hand was a gripsack. "I want you to look after this," he said to the attendant, "and have you got a place where I could dress for dinner? I want a table for six thirty."

"Sure; there's a dressing/^{room}in here." He led the way through the 'men's room'. A little corridor gave access to four private rooms, small but comfortably furnished, and fitted with all toilet accessories.

"Keep this for me. Six o'clock," said Simon Iff. "And tell the head waiter to book me a table for four at six thirty." Then he went out to a telephone booth. Leake promised to be punctual.

He then called up Mr. Moon. "Mr. Barker has been found," he said; "he had a lapse of memory, and is not quite recovered. but he has asked me to tell you to take up your duties at six thirty to-night, at the usual table in the Tavern. Please tell Mr. Night and Mr. Morning to report at the Pleasance at their regular hours."

Simon Iff was looking at the second hand of his watch,

Twenty seconds elapsed before the reply came. "I'm very glad to hear your news, Mr. Iff. I will be on hand at six twenty-five."

The mystic hung up the receiver. "Yes," he mused, "the young man may well be astonished."

Lastly he rang up Signorina Visconti, and asked her to join the little party - to celebrate the return of the banker. The girl was frankly and spontaneously overjoyed. Iff told her that he was motoring out to convey the glad intelligence to Mrs. Barker. Indeed, he went to the Plesance; but his errand was another. He broke it to the widow that she need have no hope.

The three guests were punctual to the moment. Iff ordered dinner to be served. "Oughtn't we to wait for Mr. Barker?" suggested Moon. "He will not be here," replied Simon; "I will explain his absence." He applied himself to his oysters with a will. The others followed his example, but it was a poor pretence. The nerves of all three were terribly on edge. Simon Iff ate and drank remorselessly, now and again speaking of the weather, or asking some question about American customs or politics. By the time he had lighted his cigar the social atmosphere was impossible.

"I will now keep my promise. I will explain the absence of Mr. Barker. As I told you last night, Deake, he was a moral weakling. He had strong passions - even horrible

vices, one might say, if one were conventional - and he was afraid of them, as he was afraid of everything else. So he pigeon-holed them. 'I must be absolutely safe,' he thought, I doubt not; 'I will give ten minutes daily of my time to this indulgence, And I will choose a time and place where no one can possibly suspect me.' So he took one of the dressing-rooms upstairs for his house of assignation. Hardly anybody comes here before twelve thirty; the attendant, well bribed, could easily slip anyone through without suspicion being aroused. He chose his secretaries for their sympathy with his ideas, and made them his accomplices. So much you and Mr. Night were good enough to tell me, don't you know, with that 'shershby lafann' talk. Besides I knew it all before. The weak character was enough to inform anyone who happens to have read the works of Doctor Sigismund Freud. I was looking already for something of the sort when your appearance and manner brought the fullest confirmation." He smiled pleasantly at Mr. Noon.

"What has this to do with Mr. Barker's absence?" said the Italian girl. "Has he eloped?"

"I think he must have lost his head," replied Simon, lightly. It was quite ten seconds before he obtained an echo to his laughter.

"Now, how should we attack this person, if we wish? We know exactly what he will do at any moment - and we have a

matter of ten minutes or so daily when he is - in his way - off his guard. Ten minutes when he has contracted out of the regular protection which a police society affords its members! Some genius conceives the idea of killing him and personating him, taking his keys, and robbing his Bank. The only weak moment in the man's day is this fatal ten minutes. So the attack is timed accordingly. But the attendant must suspect nothing. Therefore the body has to be disposed of. Difficulty Number One. You can't carry the corpse of a giant out of a public restaurant without causing comment. Difficulty Number Two. You can't look like Andrew P. Barker. However, our genius put the two difficulties together, and made one case of them. It's a case of an old head on young shoulders." Again he laughed pleasantly, and again the others forced their courtesy to echo him.

"Now, to play the part of Barker, we need some one who knows the Bank like the palm of his hand - for he may not be able to see very well."

"Why?" said Teake.

"A technical difficulty, merely technical. I dare say there was a clever dodge to obviate it. To proceed, our friend must know Barker and his little ways very well. Possibly Morning, Noon, or Night. Why? All three have alibis, true. But a man in bed with sick headache in a darkened room - couldn't we get away with a wax work bust?"

"Are you accusing me?" asked Noon, with a face as black as a thunder cloud.

"Of course not. I'm merely theorizing. You forget altogether that you're a very short man - a full head shorter than Barker, I should judge." Again he rippled audibly, and again his guests automatically copied him.

"Now suppose that we had a surgeon of exceptional skill waiting in the dressing-room with Mr.Noon. Barker arrives, and is killed with a single blow. Our surgeon has a water-proof sheet, and all sorts of paraphernalia, ready in the dressing-room next door. They take in the corpse. He cuts off the head, stops the bleeding with paraffin wax or some such simple device, and fits in into the framework which has been fitted to the head and shoulders of our young friend here. The difficulty of the stature and the likeness disappears at a stroke. The cloak completes the device, and off marches Mr.Noon to do his work at the Bank, while the surgeon divides the trunk and limbs, and packs them away into the sample-cases of our convenient salesman. The surgeon, possibly enough, drives off in a closed car, picks up Noon, removes the disguise, goes home and destroys the traces. Each salesman gets rid of his trophy easily enough - one twelfth of a two-hundred-pound man is only a little over thirty pounds - there are fifty ways of working it. Then Noon distributes the swag, and they are all separately offering the stock on the market before one o'clock.

He had been addressing the ceiling, but now he turned his eyes on Commissioner Teake.

"Have I explained Mr. Barker's absence to your satisfaction?"

"You sure have. I think I'll take Mr. Noon along with me. There will be no trouble in getting evidence."

Noon smiled. He knew that Iff's accusation had been merely guess-work. But Teake, once started, went on like a steam-roller.

"We happen to have had all this dope on Barker for ten years. If Mr. Iff could guess that right, I'll take the rest of the guess on trust, and work it up. Come along, Mr. Noon."

The young man followed with a grin. Teake was plainly puzzled by his attitude.

The Italian girl smiled. "A most charming surprise dinner, Mr. Iff! It was really perfectly wonderful. But now I must get home to Bacchus - will you take me?"

"I had hoped you would allow me."

"She asked him up into her studio, and threw off her wraps. Simon was more fascinated than ever with her beauty and vivacity.

"I'm going to tease you," she said.

"I hope so."

"So you dare put me off, like that wooden Teake, with a half-finished story? And poor Mr. Noon! Really, it's too

had to play such a joke on a creature like that!"

"Yes, I thought I should like to finish the story in less unimaginative surroundings."

"I should really like to know how you deduced what you did."

"You should be ashamed to be envious. Creation's far finer than analysis - and you are an artist!"

"I shall not quote 'Intentions' against you."

"Well, there was no difficulty at all in seeing what had occurred. Step one: Barker wasn't the man at the Bank. Therefore someone else was. Step two: Time and place became extremely limited. Step three: Moon's manner in the billiard room showed that he knew something. I saw at once that his alibi was shaky. A wax model. Then where was he? Personating Barker. To succeed he must have either a very large stature or - a very small one, and another wax model. Then I saw that no wax would deceive people in the street or in the Bank for a second. Disguise is cut out, as soon as one cuts out the tall man. Then what could resemble Barker's living head? Obviously, his dead one!

"Step four: Limitation of time and space help us to cast the persons of the drama, and to pick the scenery. When I went down to the Tavern this morning I took my grip in the fullest confidence that I should find a locale suitable for a murder. Mr. Morning's Story of the Twelve Jolly Salesman went very nicely with Teake's Tale of the Twelve Jolly

Stock-dumpers. The disposition of corpses and stocks is made easier by the Great Economical Principle of Division of Labour. Need I say more?"

"About the - dramatic personae?"

"Oh, the mask of Noon? Yes, somebody had to make that, and somebody had to do that brilliant bit of rough dissection against time. And somebody had to devise the whole scheme - a lovely mixture of the ghastly and the grotesque - the finest gargoyle on the Black Cathedral of Crime!" Well possibly one person might have done all three. Personally, I think so."

Signorina Visconti rose slowly from her chair.

"I wonder if you'd care to see my work - my other work."

She pulled the damp cloth from the clay bust. Simon Iff jumped from his chair: The figure was a head of Christ, the conventional Italian type in all externals. But the mouth wore a smile Satanic in mad morriment, and the eyes glared with a cold ferocity which was only the more fearful for their sardonic triumph.

The girl's laughter rang brilliant through the room.

"I asked you here because I knew you knew, and I thought I had better appeal to your better feelings. Noon will hold his tongue until he hears from me; but you must tip off that ass Teake, or he'll blurt something out."

"I imagine so." Simple Simon was slightly inclined to

asperity, whose source he did not seek to trace.

"But it won't do. Observe, I shall come out into the lime light."

"I imagine so."

"But, my dear master, you are not in Europe. This is the State of New York."

"I believe so."

"You have not been here long. So I suppose you want to read the story of the Bad Banker and the Wronged Woman; or the Martyred Maiden's Madness."

"Oh!" said Simon Iff.

"With all your penetration, you have missed one vital fact. I have a pituitary body."

"So has everybody."

"But mine is hypo-hypertrophied; that is, of normal size. Consequently, I can do anything without knowing it; but that can only happen once in my life. So I'm not only innocent, but I can never do it again. The greatest alienists in the country will swear to this nonsense, partly for the fee, but most of all for the advertisement."

"I see," said Simon Iff, very slowly and painfully.

"All you can do is to hush up the whole affair. Surely Moon's grin surprised you? Mrs. Barker is the dearest old lady; why should she find out what her adored husband was?"

"Thank you. May I use your telephone? I'll tell Toake it was just a practical joke."

"English humour?"

"That's it," said Simon, and called the number. By the way, why did you do it?"

"For fun."

"American humour?"

"I see no joke there. Look once again at my God!"

"Hullo! That you, Teake? Simon Iff speaking. Let that chap Moon go now; the joke's gone far enough. Yes, J.O.K.E., joke. English humour. Yes, too bad; but I'll explain when I see you. All right; twelve thirty. Don't be too cross; I really wanted to show you something. You were a bit hasty; to-morrow I'll tell you what really happened. Good-night!" He hung up.

"And now I must leave you, most fascinating of assassins!"

"Yes; I fear you have a long night before you, thinking out an alternative theory for poor old Teake! But drop in whenever you feel lonesome - I suppose you wouldn't come to pose? You have a miraculous head. A little sad - three months now, isn't it? Pan in Scotia, perhaps?"

"It appears that the esprit de corps of Olympus prevents even hostile deities from quarrelling when they meet on their travels in the remoter and less hospitable planets."

"Gods that pass in the night, and bump each other in passing, should say, Please excuse it! Boy"

"The phraseology is perfect." He took his hat.

"I want you to come and see me. Really, really, really, there's nothing, nothing nothing to enjoy here. So what could the poor girl do?"

"I think I understand. But I should continue my travels, if I were you."

Suddenly she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him passionately. Then she sat down and began to cry.

Simon Iff stroked her hair gently; then he let himself out.

"What a lot of stars! he murmured to himself.

"Probably all different, and certainly all necessary. No sutor ultra crepidam - who am I to judge a genius? Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do; I'd better think out that story for Teake, or I shall find myself planning something atrocious. 'A deed of blood, and fire, and flames, was meat and drink to Simple James.' Be wary, Simple Simon!"

And, lest he should fall into temptation, he decided to wind up the evening at Jack's.