

SIMON IFF IN AMERICA

By

Edward Kelly

(Aleister Crowley)

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No.1 WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Simon Iff was a magician. A magician is a superstitious idiot. Therefore, Simon Iff, travelling to America, carried nothing but a convenient handbag. Why? To carry more, said he, is to pretend that America is a long way away. This would be an insult to the ghost of Robert Stephenson, I do not mean Robert Louis Stevenson. It is not safe to insult Ghosts.

Now there were certain people who believed that the madness of "Simple Simon" was as carefully calculated as a Table of Logarithms, and those of this creed who happened to be in New York, at the Cunard Pier, just as he crossed the gangway from the 'Mauretania', were rejoiced to observe that his absurd fear of ghosts had saved him from any similar emotion in the presence of the Custom House Officials!

"Through already?" cried his friend, Keynes Aloysius Winble, of the "Literary Chyle", a native of Birmingham, England, and sometimes of Nairobi and a very minor college at Oxford, but esteemed by Simon on account of his astonishing talent for ecclesiasticism, his profound

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knowledge of foreign tongues, his atrocious insolence of manner, and his overmastering determination to get to the bottom of everything that came his way.

"My dear man!" replied Simon heartily, "I am 'through' on one condition - that you do not ask me to spell it t-h-r-u." This was his first and only criticism of the American continent. Like Hamlet, (there cracked a noble spirit) the rest is silence. "This way, then," cried Wimble, "this way for my tin Lizzie." Thus unassumingly did he refer to his tremendous roadster. The journalist was a Power in America. Without the 'Chylo' no one would have known what not to read. As nobody would have read anything, in any case, the value of the publication was universally agreed to be immense. Its circulation was beyond anything ever discovered by Harvey, and it paid its editors almost as well as if they were man-milliners or cooks.

"Thought I'd drive you to the cottage", said Wimble. "Lizzie's been eating her head off all the week. Besides, we have to pay a visit of condolence. Our local Saint has lost his wife in the most distressing circumstances. It appears that she took Bichloride of Mercury in mistake for Aspirin."

"Ah! the Chemist's Boy in Pickwick!"

"Don't joke! The old boy's the best fellow alive, and he's utterly broken up over it."

"I thought 'local Saint' was sarcastic, perhaps."

"Not a scrap. He's not ostentatious about it; but he does good everywhere, and is beloved by everybody."

"Religious?"

"Intensely so. Has a bluff frank way with him that you and I might think irreverent; but it's better than cant and hypocrisy. He's very highly thought of in the Presbyterian Church."

"Ah! a Scot?"

"Name of Burns. Phineas Calvin Zebodee Burns."

"No, no!" cried Simon Iff, "I don't like that. The man certainly poisoned his wife!"

Wimble roared with laughter. "Dear old England! I used to feel that way myself; but eight years here have put me hep to all the bughouse monikers. (You may as well begin to learn the language.) Where a Member of the United States Senate, finding himself named Hogg, can call his daughters Ina and Ura respectively, there's nothing in a name!"

"I've heard that. It's a stupid joke, of course."

"No; it actually happened. There's no background."

Anything can happen; anything. Anything!"

The car crossed the great Bridge, and gained new speed as the open country welcomed it. The day was frosty, and a black sky to Northward held snow in its shroud. The two friends fell to silence; then Wimble broke out into a passionate attack on the Belgians; for this was in 1911, before the year of the Great Enlightenment. He was not content to blame isolated officials for the atrocities of which his paper published weekly photographs; he proved that the fault lay in the inherent cruelty of the Belgian nature. He even blamed Cléo de Mérode and Anna Robinson, thus casting a slur upon Charlemagne and George Washington. Simon Iff did not appear particularly interested. "When I was in the Congo," was his only remark, "I had Boils. I ate standing for three weeks. Nobody sits down in the Congo!"

Presently the assailant of King Leopold desisted in favour of topographical information. "That," said he, pointing, "is the house of P.C.Z. Burns. Zee, not Zed, please! Inside and out, materially and spiritually, one of the best houses in the section."

"It is really quite delightful," said Iff, though he would probably at the moment have preferred a wattle hut in Annam.

"We shall lunch with Phineas, for it is two hours more to the Cottage. He has a perfect cook. Pray for Squab Soup, and a Celery Cream Broil of Saddle Rocks!"

"I have too long omitted these items from the Schedule of my daily Supplications."

The car passed through magnificent wrought brass gates swung upon marble pillars, and entered a long avenue of trees. It was evident that love had made a paradise, not money alone. Simple Simon expressed his pleasure.

"Yet Burns lives a life of Spartan Simplicity. Here at least, wealth has not corrupted Republican manners." "Was that what I saw on the boat?" murmured the magician.

Wimble displayed the renegade's obstinacy. "There's something fine and big about the frankness of these people; there are a few Anglophile snobs, but the real American is a man all through. And Burns is one of the best of them."

The man himself was pacing the terrace of the house when the car drew up before the door. His whole attitude denoted dejection, even agony; yet one could see that he had braced himself to meet his sorrow. "It is the Will of God" was written on the face that he lifted to see whose importunity disturbed his grief. By

his side waddled a somewhat self-important little man, a chubby good-humored parson dressed in rusty black cloth, his face rubicund and plump, attitude rather like that of Monsieur Rostand's chanticlerc, who believes that he has just caused the sun to rise. His fingers gripping an oblong of drab paper.

"My dear Wimble," cried the little fellow, running forward as Iff and his host alighted, "you have arrived at the psychological moment!" Our friend's munificence has surpassed itself; we are to have a Memorial Hospital. He has given me a check for a million dollars!"

"It is very touching," remarked Simon Iff. "It reminds me of the Sultan who built the Taj Mahal."

"I didn't know they had hospitals in Turkey," said the little minister.

"No?" said Simon Iff, politely.

Phineas Burns walked up, greeted Wimble with subdued warmth, and extended a hearty hand to Simon. The conversation became general for a few moments; presently the Presbyterian went away, hugging his check, and Burns asked them to be seated in the library. "I want you to stay over dinner," he said; "it is full two hours to our friend's cottage. And I should like you to meet my daughter. I am no physician for such grief as hers;

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I beg you to do all in your power to distract her thoughts from our bereavement."

Simon Iff liked even the word 'dinner' as applied to the midday meal; it smacked of that Republican simplicity which his chance companions on the Mauretania had somehow missed.

The door opened, and a slight girl came in. Her father was repeated in her. His tallness, his leanness, his narrow brow, his thin lips, his pale complexion, his solemnity, his nervous tension; all these were already marked in the child of fifteen years old. But what most struck the old mystic was the extreme misery in her eyes. Burns himself had none of that; rather was his eye moist, genial, and humorous. And Iff saw too that she moved as if under some most powerful constraint. So unpleasant was the impression that he was shocked into silence. Burns left the room, making an excuse about 'ten minutes with my secretary'; Wimble started an animated conversation with the girl, whose name was Claudine, and Iff never stirred. But his face darkened and darkened as the conversation went on. Only after some minutes did he seem to pull himself together. "I think we shall have snow soon. There is a heavy black sky to windward," he said, addressing himself pointedly to Claudine. "Don't you think so?" The girl hesitated. "I shouldn't

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be at all surprised," she answered at last. Simon Iff did not reply. He rose abruptly, clapping his hand to his forehead, and went out on to the terrace. Wimble was cynically amused. Was his old friend in 'love at first sight?' He had always had the reputation of an ultra-English aplomb - and here he was, violently agitated about absolutely nothing. However, he went on talking to Claudine.

Iff, on the terrace, was literally kicking his way from nowhere to nowhere. A lank gentleman with a little black bag came up to him. "Excuse me, Sir," he said, "can I do anything for you? I'm a doctor, and you look to me in pretty bad shape nervously."

"Nerves still holding out," replied Iff grimly. "I only landed this morning. But you can help me - if you were in attendance on the late Mrs. Burns. You were?"

"Surely."

"She died of Mercury Bichloride poisoning?"

"Surely."

The doctor was silent. "I ask," pursued Simon Iff, "because, in England, don't you know, Bichloride of Mercury doesn't grow on bushes." He had been warned that he would be expected to say "don't you know" as often as possible, and was trying to behave.

"I never thought to inquire," replied the doctor at last. "Do you mind if I put that down in my notebook?" said Simon joyfully. "It's a wonderful phrase. It explains the world as nothing else does. 'I never thought to inquire.' Columbus did, don't you know? which shows that there are two sides to every question." The doctor thought that the old man was decidedly in need of his skill.

"You never prescribed Mercury for any one in the house?"

"Certainly not."

"Ah!"

"What are you suggesting?"

"Nothing. I was waiting for you."

"Well, good morning."

"Good morning."

Simon Iff drifted back to the library, and gazed blankly at the books. There was a wilderness of theology, a sobriety of 'classical' English and American novelists, nothing modern. At the end of the shelves was a strong-room door, and the old man looked upon it with a wistful eye.

"Where is your father's place of business?" he asked Claudine.

"Wall and Vine," she said, after a pause.

"He must be a very busy man to make so much money?"

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Another pause. "Oh yes!"

"I hope he never brings his business home?" Still
hesitation from Claudine. "Oh yes! he has an office
at the other end of the house, where he works at night,
sometimes."

"I think we shall have snow."

Wimble was thoroughly irritated by Iff's imbecility,
and might have said something but for the return of
Burns, who took them to the dining-room.

The conversation took the subdued turn natural
to a house of mourning. Once the bereaved husband
spoke in low tones of his dead wife's goodness. He
hardly touched his soup. The second course was a planked
shad. Wimble in a few well-chosen phrases introduced
this remarkably excellent fish, and instanced its
delicacy of flavour as an example of the effeteness of
Europe. As it happened, however, the shad was abominably
cooked. It was impossible to avoid remark. "Mary was
so beloved by all," explained the host; "nothing has
gone right in the house since she passed over." Simon
Iff hated people "passing over" or "being taken from us"
when they had merely died, for he hated every kind of
camouflage. He observed his host narrowly. It struck
him that his words were entirely false. Unless his

whole power of psychology were at fault, the man was boiling over with impotent anger. It was quite incommensurable emotion, out of all relation with any visible circumstance.

"I understand, Mr. Burns," he said slowly, "that the servant problem is very acute in America."

He kept the conversation to this subject throughout lunch, to the despair of Wimble, who tried again and again to change the topic. The victory was Iff's, and he crowned it by inducing their host to suggest a visit through the kitchens, to inspect the labour-saving devices in use in America.

Simon Iff thought that mechanical perfection might have been more fortunately attained had the cost in morale been less severe. The cook was a quadroon woman of thirty, muscular, high bosomed, with a strong, even a domineering face. Her sensual mouth and arrogant eyes told of selfish passions never restrained. She made her independence felt, even to the strangers. In Europe her manner would have been called self-assertive; Wimble whispered to Iff that the price of liberty was eternal vigilance. "Yes," said Iff, "but 'Halt, friend, and give the countersign' becomes a little wearing after awhile. I think I'll consult that doctor, after all." "We can do that," said Wimble laughingly, "on our way to the Cottage."

Once in the automobile and well away from the house, Iff sat up and began to take notice. "Do me a favour, Wimble," he said. "Let us dine in the city. I want to spend half an hour there first of all with a new and unexpected but I trust much-to-be-valued friend."

"Why, what's the big idea?"

"I want a chat with the Commissioner of Police."

"Wha-a-at?"

"About this murder, you know."

"Murder?"

"Mrs. Burns."

"Good-night!"

"Didn't you expect this? I had an idea that my fame had crossed the Atlantic."

"Yes, but I thought you were the real thing, not a Sunday Magazine Detective!"

"Come! you've seen all the people, and you know all the facts. Can't you put two and two together?"

"They only make four."

"Oh, this case has some very mysterious sides to it. For example, there are two things of unknown origin in it."

"As?"

"One: Bichloride of Mercury. The doctor couldn't suggest

how that got into the house."

"It might have come in fifty ways; it doesn't implicate anybody."

"Yes, but there's a thing that only came in one way, and implicates somebody very much."

"That's?"

"Claudine."

"She's the child of her parents, isn't she?"

"The name, I mean."

"Americans are always giving odd names to children. Why, we discussed that already."

"We did. Didn't it mean anything to you?" "Ira Hogg" and "Ura Hogg": does that tell you nothing about the father?"

"Peculiar sense of humour."

"Precisely. Now then, what about Claudine? Any 'free association' about Claudine?"

"Why, Willy, of course." "Claudine en ménage," "Claudine s'en va" - that's all, though, I think."

"Right. Willy, naughty French novels. Now then, that's a curious name for a stern Puritan father to give to his daughter, isn't it?"

"Possibly a relative of that name."

"Possibly. But how does that connect with an unexplained

supply of Mercury? In your imagination, I mean."

"All this is the most far-fetched, fantastic stuff. Better argue frankly that Funny Ass sounds fishy!" If bore up under the foul blow.

"Consider Claudine herself. I say it's Wednesday, and she takes thought before admitting it. What does that mean?"

"Mannerism."

"Suppression resulting from years of brutal tyranny."

"Oh nonsense, she's a happy, care-free, charming child."

"It's as much as her life's worth to be anything else. Look at her eyes!"

"Rats!"

"Next, that shad."

"Well?"

"Badly cooked - I suppose the cook - oh bunk!"

"On the contrary, bed, I hope, for me to-night. But did you observe that our philanthropic friend excused the cook on account of her desolation at 'poor Mary's' death - and that he was inwardly boiling?"

"I did. He was sensitive, no doubt, about the quality of his hospitality; but his good heart forbade him to blame any one."

"Wimble, you are a very young and very innocent child."

I like you. Here is a harsh tyrannical type, a terrible fellow both in his business and in his home; but he daren't blame his cook when he had every right to do so. I can only explain that attitude by guilt and fear. You, on the contrary, are mother's darling."

"You are yourself a loveable character - especially if asleep."

"That however rarely occurs."

"Well, here's Headquarters."

The Commissioner was delighted to meet the famous Simon Iff. And what could he do for him?

Mr.Iff would like a photograph of Phineas Burns shown to every doctor of high reputation in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia, with a query as to whether he had come for treatment; and if so, for what?

The Commissioner was amazed. "I shall have to ask for something more than that," he said slowly.

"Very good," said Simon Iff. "I prefer a charge of murder in the first degree."

"On what grounds?" asked the Chief.

"Well, he called his daughter Claudine." said Simple Simon.

"English Law?" queried the Commissioner.

"There's more than that. He hides his feelings in the matter of planked shad, and Claudine hides her feelings

in every matter, and the cook doesn't hide her feelings at all."

"You can't tell that to the Grand Jury."

"I know it. That's why I want the Evidence of the doctor. Once I get that, I'll show you a little of our Thirty-Third Degree."

"Damn it, I'll do it for the fun of the thing!"

"That's all I do it for, don't you know?" Simon Iff remembered his manners just in time, and clinched the Commissioner's opinion that he had to do with a crazy Englishman.

A week later Simon Iff received the information that Phineas Burns was undoubtedly the Godfrey Smith who had been under the treatment of Dr. James Gregg Tardie of Philadelphia for ten years past. Dr. Tardie had prescribed the Bichloride of Mercury in small doses for months at a time. And would Mr. Iff favour the Commissioner with a visit?

Mr. Iff conferred the favour requested.

"We found out some more while we were on the job," said the big man. "Burns has been leading Some Double Life all these years. 'Black' seems to be the bug in his dome. You've given me confidence, I'll admit; but it's still a long way to that Grand Jury and the little arm-chair with the pop."

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"Oh, no!" said Simon. "It's as easy as falling off a log. Leave it," he added with an embarrassed blush, "leave it to your Uncle Dudley." And then he added "don't you know?" in a spasm of modest confusion.

"Surely."

Iff decided that he had passed the test.

"But what exactly do you propose to do?"

"Just put it to him nicely and simply, don't you know?"

"I do not. But, "don't you know," he's liable to throw you out."

"Yes, I would like to have you come down with me. I think if you were there he'd listen quietly because he wouldn't quite know what your presence implied. My knowing the name of Tardie will be another little scare. But all I need is that he should listen; and he'll listen - if only just to call my bluff!"

"And you're only nine high!"

"The number nine, according to the Pythagoreans, is sacred, and attains the summits of philosophy."

"Very good. I certainly want to sit in to the game."

They went down to Burns' house, and found him alone. He greeted the Commissioner with just the proper feeling. Iff asked for a special interview 'on important business', and came straight to the point.

"I want to say my say," he began, "Before my friend here says his. I have only one remark to make, which is this: The wages of sin is death."

Burns smiled, and lighted a cigar. This fanatic amused him. But he restrained an early impulse to answer anything.

"Whatsoever a man soweth," went on the mystic, "that shall he also reap. He that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption. Doctor Tardio tells me . . ."

Simon Iff broke off as he saw that Burns had let his cigar go out. He waited for him to relight it. The Commissioner noticed how great an effort it cost him.

Iff did not have to lie; he switched off from an indicative to an apodeictic proposition. "A man of your nervous tension is particularly liable to end with locomotor ataxia, general paralysis of the insane, or softening of the brain."

Burns took no second chance with his cigar. He puffed vigorously.

"It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. You indulge in secret your desire toward an inferior race, as you deem it - and you end by finding yourself in the power of your own cook."

Burns smoked more easily. A slight smile touched his lips. But Simon Iff was watching his eyes; there

was no smile in them.

"He that, being often reprov'd, hardeneth his neck,
shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy."

Simon Iff shut his mouth like the snapping of a trap.

Burns, unmoved, smoked his cigar steadily to the end. Then he crushed the fire of the butt upon a silver ash-tray. Then he went to the door of the strong room and opened it. From a drawer he took a heavy revolver, and deliberately blew away the top of his skull.

The Commissioner was on his feet, gasping. A second glance assured him that the man was dead. He turned upon Iff with a mixture of awe and horror.

The mystic, in his turn, had drawn a long black cigar from his case, and was lighting it with a hand that did not tremble in the least.

"My dear man!" was all the Commissioner could say.

"You want to know, of course? Come Here!"

The magician stepped across the body, and opened one of the drawers in the strong room at random. It was full of photographs. "Pah!" cried Teakie in disgust. "Observe!" said Simon, returning to his easy chair. "When I came here I had no idea at all that the death of Mrs. Burns was anything beyond the accident it appeared.

But the moment Claudine stepped into the room I understood from her manner that she had been bullied secretly and subtly until she was afraid to express herself in the simplest matter without thought, earnest thought, as to whether it might not get her into trouble. Yet a mask was always put upon the truth; she and her mother were always obliged to exhibit a 'happy home', an 'ideal American family life'. I began to understand the hard brutality of the man from that as well as from his success in business. I know also that he had expressed his own vices in the naming of his daughter after an immoral woman. Of course he would not have dared to use any name which the general public would have connected with lasciviousness, such as Cleopatra. He chose a name to which not one American in a million would attach any significance whatever. Returning to the mother, then what must her life have been with such a man? I began to suspect suicide rather than accident. So I asked the family doctor whence the Mercury had come. He could not tell me. "Claudine" gave me a clue.

Before I could go further, lunch arrived. I found this hard brutal cynical sensual man, annoyed at his cook's blunders, making excuses for her. Fear, I thought! What else could explain the situation? So I

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contrived to see the cook, and found an ambitious and intriguing woman, a woman of almost a male quality of lust, grasping at power like Browning's John the Pannonian. Then I perceived what influence might have forced him, with the Mercury ready to his hand, to murder. Oh, a safe murder! Who would suspect him of having such a drug? Who would guess, when he had been so careful as to go to Philadelphia to consult a physician under an assumed name? Even were the Mercury traced to him, still an accident! "Poor woman, she took my tablets in mistake for hers!"

"Yes, yes!" said the Commissioner "I follow. I understood your train of reason before we came here. But how in God's name" - he crossed himself - "did you come to suppose that the hardest-headed man in America would fall for all that stuff from the Bible? Man, it isn't common sense!"

Simple Simon smiled with wide-open, childish eyes. "But, my dear, Commissioner, think of his name! Phineas Calvin Zebodee! Don't you know who Phineas was? He 'stood for the Lord' when all Israel 'went an-whoring after Moab' or something. And Zebodee, the father of James and John, the "Sons of Thunder." There's your religious atmosphere! And Calvin! Why, the boy sucked

in Calvin with his mother's milk. He was born and bred to that one great idea of inexorable fate. Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small, and all that, don't you know? On the top of that, too, what do we know of the father who named him? A narrow bigot, who repressed his son's normal instincts, and named him after a tyrant like himself, but with a passionate revolt against enforced chastity seeping at the very base of his nervous system! Well, the lust side of him was the art side too; he naturally dramatized the Fate that his other side assured him must one day fall upon him, and he saw that Fate in my person when I quietly reminded him of what penalties he had incurred."

The Commissioner sat awhile in silence. Suddenly he shook himself like a dog. "I suppose I'd better get after that cook," he said, mechanically.

"Spare yourself the pains and the humiliation," said Simon, "He will have left her every penny -- you don't have one chance in a million."

"True; but can't we do something for Claudine?"

"We can get back to New York, and dine at the Club. Claudine will be either a courtesan or a pun, and we can't help in either case."

"We can get back to New York; in fact I must; but somehow I don't feel like dinner."

And so it came about that Simon Iff dined that night with Wimble;
the only explanation that he would give was most unsatisfactory.

"It's my idiotic vanity, child!" he said, with his eighth crème de cacao; "I said to you jokingly that a man with a name like that was bound to have poisoned his wife, and so of course I had to prove it. I think I will have another Corona Corona."

Wimble, who always pretended to be excessively mean, pretended to writhe; but the waiter brought the cigar.

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