

BY GRANT ALLEN.



OW much precisely Charles dropped over the slump in Cloetedorps I never quite knew. But the incident left him dejected, limp, and dispirited.

"Hang it all, Sey," he said to me in the smoking-room, a few evenings later. "This Colonel Clay is enough to vex the patience of Job—and Job had large losses, too, if I recollect aright, from the Chaldeans and other big operators of the period."

"Three thousand camels," I murmured, recalling my dear mother's lessons; "all at one fell swoop; not to mention five hundred yoke of oxen, carried off by the Sabeans, then a leading firm of speculative cattle-dealers!"

"Ah, well," Charles meditated, aloud, shaking the ash from his cheroot into a Japanese tray—fine antique bronze-work. "There were big transactions in live-stock even then! Still, Job or no Job, the man is too much for me."

"The difficulty is," I assented, "you never know where to have him."

"Yes," Charles mused; "if he were always the same, like somebody's tea or a good brand of whisky, it would be easier, of course; you'd stand some chance of spotting him. But when a man turns up smiling every time in a different disguise, which fits him like a skin, and always apparently with the best credentials, why,

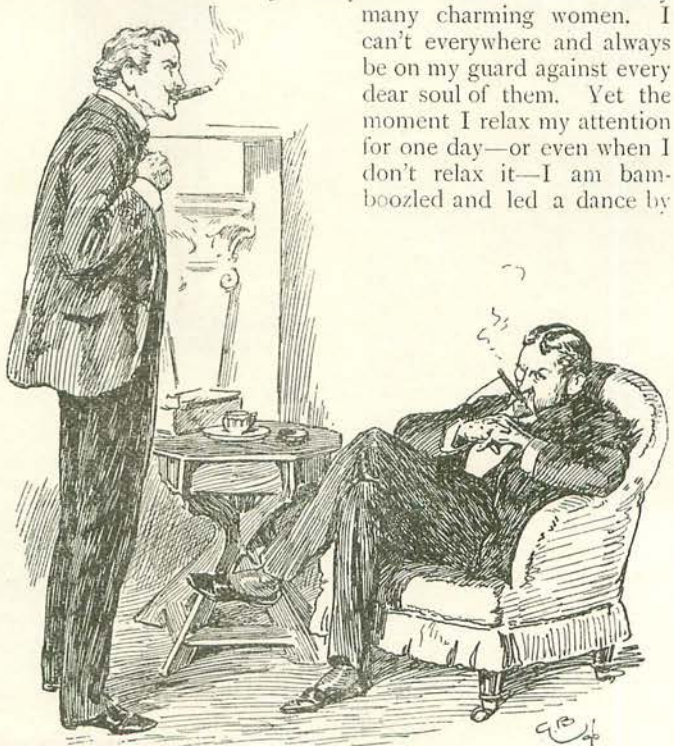
hang it all, Sey, there's no wrestling with him anyhow."

"Who could have come to us, for example, better vouched," I acquiesced, "than the Honourable David?"

"Exactly so," Charles murmured. "I invited him myself, for my own advantage. And he arrived with all the prestige of the Glen-Ellachie connection."

"Or the Professor?" I went on. "Introduced to us by the leading mineralogist of England." I had touched a sore point. Charles winced and remained silent.

"Then, women again," he resumed, after a painful pause. "I must meet in society many charming women. I can't everywhere and always be on my guard against every dear soul of them. Yet the moment I relax my attention for one day—or even when I don't relax it—I am bamboozled and led a dance by



"I AM BAMBOOZLED AND LED A DANCE."



that arch Mme. Picardet, or that transparently simple little minx, Mrs. Granton. She's the cleverest girl I ever met in my life, that hussy, whatever we're to call her. She's a different person each time; and, each time, hang it all, I lose my heart afresh to that different person."

I glanced round to make sure Amelia was well out of earshot.

"No, Sey," my respected connection went on, after another long pause, sipping his coffee pensively. "I feel I must be aided in this superhuman task by a professional unraveller of cunning disguises. I shall go to Marvillier's to-morrow—fortunate man, Marvillier—and ask him to supply me with a really good 'tec, who will stop in the house and keep an eye upon every living soul that comes near me. He shall scan each nose, each eye, each wig, each whisker. He shall be my watchful half, my unsleeping self; it shall be his business to suspect all living men, all breathing women. The Archbishop of Canterbury shall not escape for a moment his watchful regard; he will take care that royal princesses don't collar the spoons or walk off with the jewel-cases. He must see possible Colonel Clays in the guard of every train and the parson of every parish; he must detect the off-chance of a Mme. Picardet in every young girl that takes tea with Amelia, every fat old lady that comes to call upon Isabel. Yes, I have made my mind up. I shall go to-morrow and secure such a man at once at Marvillier's."

"If you please, Sir Charles," Césarine interposed, pushing her head through the portière, "her ladyship says, will you and Mr. Wentworth remember that she goes out with you both this evening to Lady Carisbrooke's?"

"Bless my soul," Charles cried, "so she does! And it's now past ten! The carriage will be at the door for us in another five minutes!"

Next morning, accordingly, Charles drove round to Marvillier's. The famous detective listened to his story with glistening eyes;

then he rubbed his hands and purred. "Colonel Clay!" he said; "Colonel Clay! That's a very tough customer! The police of Europe are on the look-out for Colonel Clay. He is wanted in London, in Paris, in Berlin. It is *le Colonel Caoutchouc* here, *le Colonel Caoutchouc* there; till one begins to ask, at last, *is there any Colonel Caoutchouc*, or is it a convenient class name invented by the Force to cover a gang of undiscovered sharpers? However, Sir Charles, we will do our best. I will set on the track without delay the best and cleverest detective in England."

"The very man I want," Charles said. "What name, Marvillier?"

The principal smiled. "Whatever name you like," he said. "He isn't particular. Medhurst he's called at home. *We* call him Joe. I'll send him round to your house this afternoon for certain."

"Oh, no," Charles said, promptly, "you won't; or Colonel Clay himself will come instead of him. I've been sold too often. No casual strangers! I'll wait here and see him."

"But he isn't in," Marvillier objected.

Charles was firm as a rock. "Then send and fetch him."

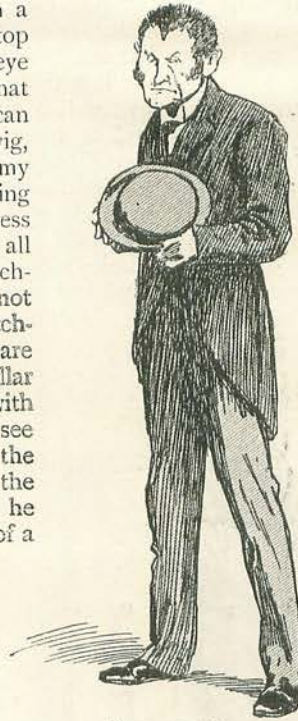
In half an hour, sure enough, the detective arrived. He was an odd-looking, small man, with hair cut short and standing straight up all over his head, like a Parisian waiter. He had quick, sharp eyes, very much like a ferret's; his nose was a pressed, his lips thin and bloodless. A scar marked his left cheek—made by a sword-cut, he said, when engaged

one day in arresting a desperate French smuggler, disguised as an officer of *Chasseurs d'Afrique*. His mien was resolute. Altogether, a quainter or 'cuter little man it has never yet been my lot to set eyes on. He walked in with a brisk step, eyed Charles up and down, and then, without much formality, asked for what he was wanted.

"This is Sir Charles Vandrift, the great diamond king," Marvillier said, introducing us.

"So I see," the man answered.

"Then you know me?" Charles asked.



"MEDHURST."



"I wouldn't be worth much," the detective replied, "if I didn't know everybody. And *you're* easy enough to know; why; every boy in the street knows you."

"Plain spoken!" Charles remarked.

"As you like it, sir," the man answered in a respectful tone. "I endeavour to suit my dress and behaviour on every occasion to the taste of my employers."

"Your name?" Charles asked, smiling.

"Joseph Medhurst, at your service. What sort of work? Stolen diamonds? Illicit diamond-buying?"

"No," Charles answered, fixing him with his eye. "Quite another kind of job. You've heard of Colonel Clay?"

Medhurst nodded. "Why, certainly," he said; and, for the first time, I detected a lingering trace of American accent. "It's my business to know about him."

"Well, I want you to catch him," Charles went on.

Medhurst drew a long breath. "Isn't that rather a large order?" he murmured, surprised.

Charles explained to him exactly the sort of services he required. Medhurst promised to comply. "If the man comes near you, I'll spot him," he said, after a moment's pause. "I can promise you that much. I'll pierce any disguise. I should know in a minute whether he's got up or not. I'm death on wigs, false moustaches, artificial complexions. I'll engage to bring the rogue to book if I see him. You may set your mind at rest that, while *I'm* about you, Colonel Clay can do nothing without my instantly spotting him."

"He'll do it," Marvillier put in. "He'll do it, if he says it. He's my very best hand. Never knew any man like him for unravelling and unmasking the cleverest disguises."

"Then he'll suit me," Charles answered, "for *I* never knew any man like Colonel Clay for assuming and maintaining them."

It was arranged accordingly that Medhurst should take up his residence in the house for the present, and should be described to the servants as assistant secretary. He came that very day, with a marvellously small port-manteau. But from the moment he arrived, we noticed that Césarine took a violent dislike to him.

Medhurst was a most efficient detective. Charles and I told him all we knew about the

various shapes in which Colonel Clay had "materialized," and he gave us in turn many valuable criticisms and suggestions. Why, when we began to suspect the Honourable David Granton, had we not, as if by accident, tried to knock his red wig off? Why, when the Reverend Richard Peplow Brabazon first discussed the question of the paste diamonds, had we not looked to see if any of Amelia's unique gems were missing? Why, when Professor Schleiermacher made his bow to assembled science at Lancaster Gate, had we not strictly inquired how far he was



"CÉSARINE TOOK A VIOLENT DISLIKE TO HIM."

personally known beforehand to Sir Adolphus Cordery and the other mineralogists? He supplied us also with several good hints about false hair and make-up; such as that Schleiermacher was probably much shorter than he looked, but by imitating a stoop with padding at his back he had produced the illusion of a tall bent man, though in reality no bigger than the little curate or the Graf von Lebenstein. High



heels did the rest; while the scientific keenness we noted in his face was doubtless brought about by a trifle of wax at the end of the nose, giving a peculiar tilt that is extremely effective. In short, I must frankly admit, Medhurst made us feel ashamed of ourselves. Sharp as Charles is, we realized at once he was nowhere in observation beside the trained and experienced senses of this professional detective.

The worst of it all was, while Medhurst was with us, by some curious fatality, Colonel Clay stopped away from us. Now and again, to be sure, we ran up against somebody whom Medhurst suspected; but after a short investigation (conducted, I may say, with admirable cleverness), the spy always showed us the doubtful person was really some innocent and well-known character, whose antecedents and surroundings he elucidated most wonderfully. He was a perfect marvel, too, in his faculty of suspicion. He suspected everybody. If an old friend dropped in to talk business with Charles, we found out afterwards that Medhurst had lain concealed all the time behind the curtain, and had taken short-hand notes of the whole conversation, as well as snap-shot photographs of the supposed sharper, by means of a kodak. If a fat old lady came to call upon Amelia, Medhurst was sure to be lurking under the ottoman in the drawing-room, and carefully observing, with all his eyes, whether or not she was really Mme. Picardet, padded. When Lady Tresco brought her four plain daughters to an "At home" one night, Medhurst, in evening dress, disguised as a waiter, followed them each round the room with obtrusive ices, to satisfy himself just how much of their complexion was real, and how much was patent rouge and Bloom of Ninon. He doubted whether Simpson, Sir Charles's valet, was not Colonel Clay in plain clothes; and he had half an idea that Césarine herself was our saucy White Heather in an alternative avatar. We pointed out to him in vain that Simpson had often been present in the very same room with David Granton, and that Césarine had dressed Mrs. Brabazon's hair at Lucerne: this partially satisfied him, but only partially. He remarked that Simpson might double both parts with somebody else unknown; and that as for Césarine, she might well have a twin sister who took her place when she was Mme. Picardet.

Still, in spite of all his care—or because of all his care—Colonel Clay stopped away for

whole weeks together. An explanation occurred to us. Was it possible he knew we were guarded and watched? Was he afraid of measuring swords with this trained detective?

If so, how had he found it out? I had an inkling, myself—but, under all the circumstances, I did not mention it to Charles. It was clear that Césarine intensely disliked this new addition to the Vandrift household. She would not stop in the room where the detective was, or show him common politeness. She spoke of him always as "that odious man, Medhurst." Could she have guessed, what none of the other servants knew, that the man was a spy in search of the Colonel? I was inclined to believe it. And then, it dawned upon me that Césarine had known all about the diamonds and their story; that it was Césarine who took us to see Schloss Lebenstein; that it was Césarine who posted the letter to Lord Craig-Ellachie! If Césarine was in league with Colonel Clay, as I was half inclined to surmise, what more natural than her obvious dislike to the detective who was there to catch her principal? What more simple for her than to warn her fellow-conspirator of the danger that awaited him if he approached this man, Medhurst?

However, I was too much frightened by the episode of the cheque to say anything of my nascent suspicions to Charles. I waited rather to see how events would shape themselves.

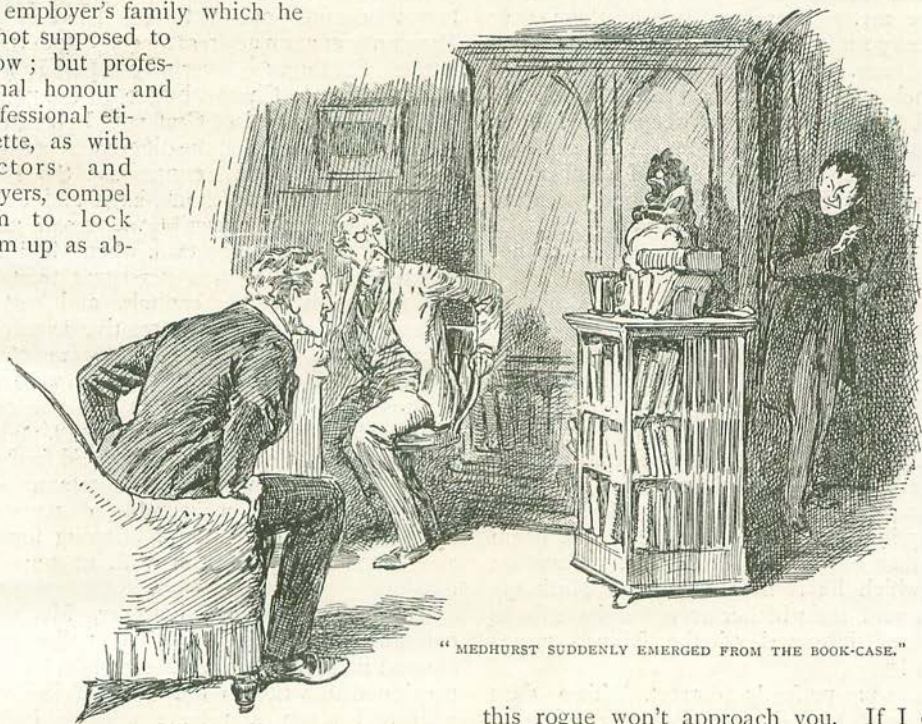
After a while, Medhurst's vigilance grew positively annoying. More than once he came to Charles with reports and shorthand notes distinctly distasteful to my excellent brother-in-law. "The fellow is getting to know too much about us," Charles said to me one day. "Why, Sey, he spies out everything. Would you believe it, when I had that confidential interview with Brookfield the other day, about the new issue of Golcondas, the man was under the easy-chair, though I searched the room beforehand to make sure he wasn't there; and he came to me afterwards with full notes of the conversation, to assure me he thought Brookfield—whom I've known for ten years—was too tall by half an inch to be one of Colonel Clay's impersonations."

"Oh, but, Sir Charles," Medhurst cried, emerging suddenly from the book-case, "you must never look upon *anyone* as above suspicion, merely because you've known him for ten years or thereabouts. Colonel Clay



may have approached you at various times under many disguises. He may have built up this thing gradually. Besides, as to my knowing too much, why, of course, a detective always learns many things about his employer's family which he is not supposed to know; but professional honour and professional etiquette, as with doctors and lawyers, compel him to lock them up as ab-

seemed put upon his mettle. He redoubled his vigilance in every direction. "It's not my fault," he said, plaintively, one day, "if my reputation's so good that, while I'm near you,



"MEDHURST SUDDENLY EMERGED FROM THE BOOK-CASE."

solute secrets in his own bosom. You need never be afraid I will divulge one jot of them. If I did, my occupation would be gone, and my reputation shattered."

Charles looked at him, appalled. "Do you dare to say," he burst out, "you've been listening to my talk with my brother-in-law and secretary?"

"Why, of course," Medhurst answered. "It's my business to listen, and to suspect everybody. If you push me to say so, how do I know Colonel Clay is not—Mr. Wentworth?"

Charles withered him with a look. "In future, Medhurst," he said, "you must never conceal yourself in a room where I am, without my leave and knowledge."

Medhurst bowed politely. "Oh, as you will, Sir Charles," he answered; "that's *quite* at your own wish. Though how can I act as an efficient detective, any way, if you insist upon tying my hands like that, beforehand?"

Again I detected a faint American flavour. After that rebuff, however, Medhurst

this rogue won't approach you. If I can't catch him, at least I keep him away from coming near you!"

A few days later, however, he brought Charles some photographs. These he produced with evident pride. The first he showed us was a vignette of a little parson. "Who's that, then?" he inquired, much pleased.

We gazed at it, open-eyed. One word rose to our lips simultaneously: "Brabazon!"

"And how's this for high?" he asked again, producing another—the photograph of a gay young dog in a Tyrolese costume.

We murmured, "Von Lebenstein!"

"And this?" he continued, showing us the portrait of a lady with a most fetching squint.

We answered with one voice, "Little Mrs. Granton!"

Medhurst was naturally proud of this excellent exploit. He replaced them in his pocket-book with an air of just triumph.

"How did you get them?" Charles asked.

Medhurst's look was mysterious. "Sir Charles," he answered, drawing himself up, "I must ask you to trust me awhile in this



matter. Remember, there are people whom you decline to suspect. I have learned that it is always those very people who are most dangerous to capitalists. If I were to give you the names now, you would refuse to believe me. Therefore, I hold them over discreetly for the moment. One thing, however, I say. I *know* to a certainty where Colonel Clay is at this present speaking. But I will lay my plans deep, and I hope before long to secure him. You shall be present when I do so; and I shall make him confess his personality openly. More than that you cannot reasonably ask. I shall leave it to *you*, then, whether or not you wish to arrest him."

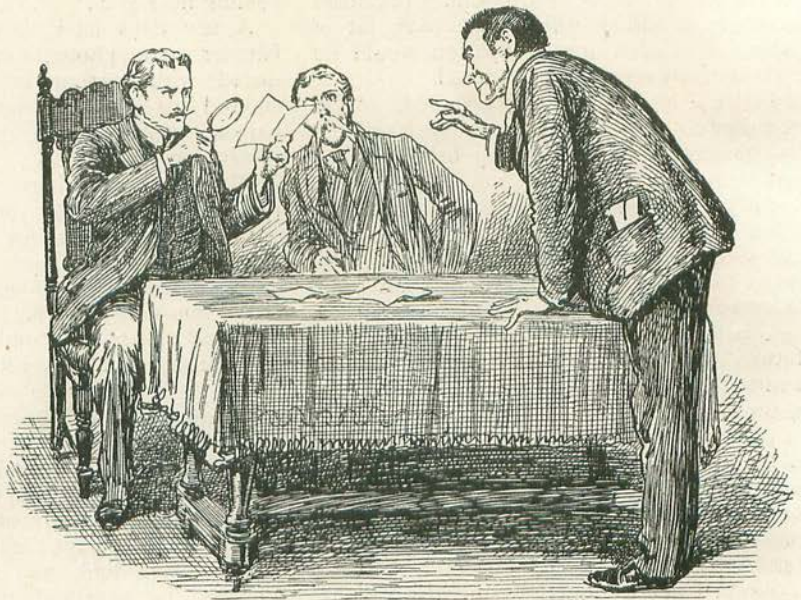
Charles was considerably puzzled, not to say piqued, by this curious reticence; he begged hard for names; but Medhurst was adamant. "No, no," he replied; "we detectives have our own just pride in our profession. If I told you now, you would probably spoil all by some premature action. You are too open and impulsive! I will mention this alone: Colonel Clay will be shortly in Paris, and before long will begin from that city a fresh attempt at defrauding you, which he is now hatching. Mark my words, and see whether or not I have been kept well informed of the fellow's movements!"

He was perfectly correct. Two days later, as it turned out, Charles received a "confidential" letter from Paris, purporting to come from the head of a second-rate financial house with which he had had dealings over the Craig-Ellachie Amalgamation—by this time, I ought to have said, an accomplished union. It was a letter of small importance in itself—a mere matter of detail; but it paved the way, so Medhurst thought, to some later development of more serious character. Here once more the

man's singular foresight was justified. For, in another week, we received a second communication, containing other proposals of a delicate financial character, which would have involved the transference of some two thousand pounds to the head of the Parisian firm at an address given. Both these letters Medhurst cleverly compared with those written to Charles before, in the names of Colonel Clay and of Graf von Lebenstein. At first sight, it is true, the differences between the two seemed quite enormous: the Paris hand was broad and black, large and bold; while the earlier manuscript was small, neat, thin, and gentlemanly. Still, when Medhurst pointed out to us certain persistent twists in the formation of his capitals, and certain curious peculiarities in the relative length of his *l*'s, his *l*'s, his *b*'s, and his *h*'s, we could see for ourselves he was right; both were the work of one hand, writing in the one case with a sharp-pointed nib, very small, and in the other with a quill, very large and freely.

This discovery was *most* important. We stood now within measurable distance of catching Colonel Clay, and bringing forgery and fraud home to him without hope of evasion.

To make all sure, however, Medhurst communicated with the Paris police, and showed us their answers. Meanwhile, Charles continued to write to the head of the firm, who had given a private address in the



"THE DISCOVERY WAS MOST IMPORTANT."



Rue Jean Jacques, alleging, I must say, a most clever reason why the negotiations at this stage should be confidentially conducted. But one never expected from Colonel Clay anything less than consummate cleverness. In the end, it was arranged that we three were to go over to Paris together, that Medhurst was to undertake, under the guise of being Sir Charles, to pay the two thousand pounds to the pretended financier, and that Charles and I, waiting with the police outside the door, should, at a given signal, rush in with our forces and secure the criminal.

We went over accordingly, and spent the night at the Grand, as is Charles's custom. The Bristol, which I prefer, he finds too quiet. Early next morning we took a *fiacre* and drove to the Rue Jean Jacques. Medhurst had arranged everything in advance with the Paris police, three of whom, in plain clothes, were waiting at the foot of the staircase to assist us. Charles had further provided himself with two thousand pounds, in notes of the Bank of France, in order that the payment might be duly made, and no doubt arise as to the crime having been perpetrated as well as meditated—in the former case, the penalty would be fifteen years; in the latter, three only. He was in very high spirits. The fact that we had tracked the rascal to earth at last, and were within an hour of apprehending him, was in itself enough to raise his

courage greatly. We found, as we expected, that the number given in the Rue Jean Jacques was that of an hotel, not a private residence. Medhurst went in first, and inquired of the landlord whether our man was at home, at the same time informing him of the nature

of our errand, and giving him to understand that if we effected the capture by his friendly aid, Sir Charles would see that the expenses incurred on the swindler's bill were met in full, as the price of his assistance. The landlord bowed; he expressed his deep regret, as M. le Colonel—so we heard him call him—was a most amiable person, much liked by the household; but justice, of course, must have its way; and, with a regretful sigh, he undertook to assist us.

The police remained below, but Charles and Medhurst were each provided with a pair of handcuffs. Remembering the Polperro case, however, we determined to use them with the greatest caution. We would only put them on in case of violent resistance. We crept up to the door where the miscreant was housed. Charles handed

the notes in an open envelope to Medhurst, who seized them hastily, and held them in his hands in readiness for action. We had a sign concerted. Whenever he sneezed—which he could do in the most natural manner—we were to open the door, rush in, and secure the criminal!

He was gone for some minutes. Charles and I waited outside in breathless expectation. Then Medhurst sneezed. We flung the door open at once, and burst in upon the creature.

Medhurst rose as we did so. He pointed with his finger. "This is Colonel Clay!" he said; "keep him

well in charge while I go down to the door for the police to arrest him!"

A gentlemanly man, about middle height, with a grizzled beard, and a well-assumed military aspect, rose at the same moment. The envelope in which Charles had placed



"BREATHLESS EXPECTATION."



the notes lay on the table before him. He clutched it nervously. "I am at a loss, gentlemen," he said, in an excited voice, "to account for this interruption." He spoke with a tremor, yet with all the politeness to which we were accustomed in the little curate and the Honourable David.

"No nonsense!" Charles exclaimed, in his authoritative way. "We know who you are. We have found you out this time. You are Colonel Clay. If you attempt to resist—take care—I will handcuff you!"

The military gentleman gave a start. "Yes, I am Colonel Clay," he answered. "On what charge do you arrest me?"

Charles was bursting with wrath. The fellow's coolness seemed never to desert him. "You are Colonel Clay!" he muttered. "You have the unspeakable effrontery to stand there and admit it?"

"Certainly," the Colonel answered, growing hot in turn. "I have done nothing to be ashamed of. What do you mean by this conduct? How dare you talk of arresting me?"

Charles laid his hand on the man's shoulder. "Come, come, my friend," he said. "That sort of bluff won't go down with us. You know very well on what charge I arrest you; and here are the police to give effect to it."

He called out "Entrez!" The police entered the room. Charles explained as well as he could in most doubtful Parisian what they were next to do. The Colonel drew himself up in an indignant attitude. He turned and addressed them in excellent French.

"I am an officer in the service of Her Britannic Majesty," he said. "On what ground do you venture to interfere with me, messieurs?"

The chief policeman explained. The Colonel turned to Charles. "Your name, sir?" he inquired.

"You know it very well," Charles answered. "I am Sir Charles Vandrift; and, in spite of your clever disguise, I can instantly recognise you. I know your eyes and ears. I can see the same man who cheated me at Nice, and who insulted me on the island."

"You Sir Charles Vandrift!" the rogue cried. "No, no, sir, you are a madman!" He looked round at the police. "Take care what you do!" he cried. "This is a raving maniac. I had business just now with Sir Charles Vandrift, who quitted the room as these gentlemen entered. This person is mad, and you, monsieur, I doubt not," bowing to me, "you are, of course, his keeper."

"Do not let him deceive you," I cried to the police, beginning to fear that with his usual incredible cleverness the fellow would even now manage to slip through our fingers. "Arrest him, as you are told. We will take the responsibility." Though I trembled when I thought of that cheque he held of mine.

The chief of our three policemen came forward and laid his hand on the culprit's shoulder. "I advise you, M. le Colonel," he said, in an official voice, "to come with us quietly for the present. Before the *jugé d'instruction* we can enter at length into all these questions."

The Colonel, very indignant still—and acting the part marvellously—yielded and went along with them.

"Where's Medhurst?" Charles inquired, glancing round as we reached the door. "I wish he had stopped with us."

"You are looking for Monsieur, your friend?" the landlord inquired, with a side bow to the Colonel. "He has gone away in a *fiacre*. He asked me to give this note to you."

He handed us a twisted note. Charles opened and read it. "Invaluable man!" he cried. "Just hear what he says, Sey: 'Having secured Colonel Clay, I am off now again on the track of Mme. Picardet. She was lodging in the same house. She has just driven away; I know to what place; and I am after her to arrest her. In blind haste, MEDHURST.' That's smartness, if you like. Though, poor little woman, I think he might have left her."

"Does a Mme. Picardet stop here?" I inquired of the landlord, thinking it possible she might have assumed again the same old alias.

He nodded assent. "*Oui, oui, oui*," he answered. "She has just driven off, and monsieur your friend has gone posting after her."

"Splendid man!" Charles cried. "Marvillier was quite right. He is the prince of detectives!"

We hailed a couple of *fiacres*, and drove off, in two detachments, to the *jugé d'instruction*. There Colonel Clay continued to brazen it out, and asserted that he was an officer in the Indian Army, home on six months' leave, and spending some weeks in Paris. He even declared he was known at the Embassy, where he had a cousin-an *Attaché*; and he asked that this gentleman should be sent for at once from our Ambassador's to identify him. The *jugé d'instruction* insisted that this must be done; and Charles



waited in very bad humour for the foolish formality. It really seemed as if, after all, when we had actually caught and arrested our man, he was going by some cunning device to escape us.

After a delay of more than an hour, during which Colonel Clay fretted and fumed quite as much as we did, the *Attaché* arrived. To our horror and astonishment, he proceeded to salute the prisoner most affectionately.

"Halloa, Algy!" he cried, grasping his hand; "what's up? What do these ruffians want with you?"

It began to dawn upon us, then, what Medhurst had meant by "suspecting everybody": the real Colonel Clay was no common adventurer, but a gentleman of birth and high connections!

The Colonel glared at us. "This fellow declares he's Sir Charles Vandrift," he said, sulkily. "Though, in fact, there are two of them. And he accuses me of forgery, fraud, and theft, Bertie."

superior smile. "This is Colonel Clay," he answered, "of the Bengal Staff Corps."

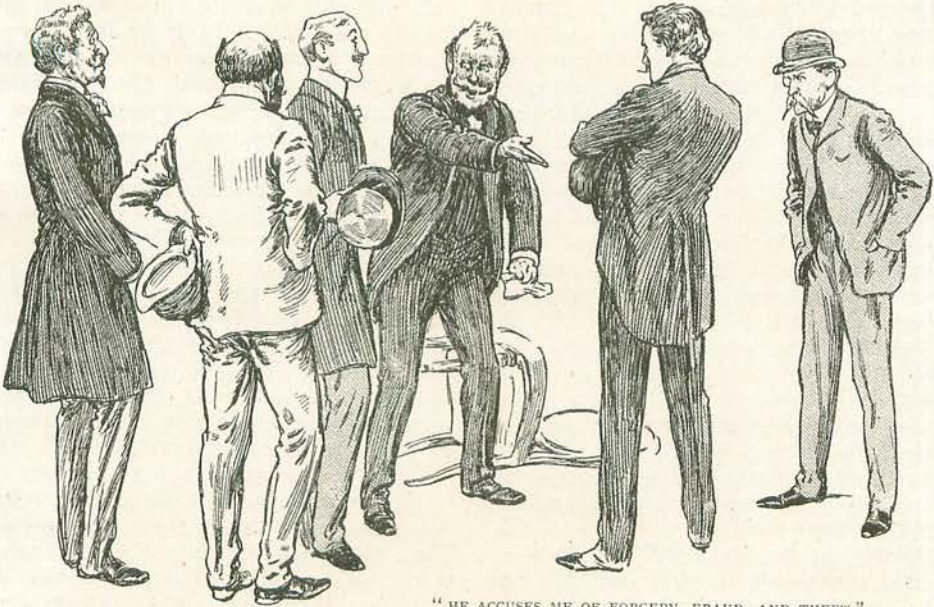
It began to strike us there was something wrong somewhere.

"But he has cheated me, all the same," Charles said—"at Nice two years ago, and many times since; and this very day he has tricked me out of two thousand pounds in French bank-notes, which he has now about him!"

The Colonel was speechless. But the *Attaché* laughed. "What he has done to-day, I don't know," he said; "but if it's as apocryphal as what you say he did two years ago, you've a thundering bad case, sir; for he was then in India, and I was out there, visiting him."

"Where are the two thousand pounds?" Charles cried. "Why, you've got them in your hand! You're holding the envelope!"

The Colonel produced it. "This envelope," he said, "was left with me by the man with short stiff hair, who came just before you, and who announced himself as Sir Charles



"HE ACCUSES ME OF FORGERY, FRAUD, AND THEFT."

The *Attaché* stared hard at us. "This is Sir Charles Vandrift," he replied, after a moment. "I remember hearing him make a speech once at a City dinner. And what charge have you to prefer, Sir Charles, against my cousin?"

"Your cousin?" Charles cried. "This is Colonel Clay, the notorious sharper!"

The *Attaché* smiled a gentlemanly and

Vandrift. He said he was interested in tea in Assam, and wanted me to join the board of directors of some bogus company. These are his papers, I believe," and he handed them to his cousin.

"Well, I'm glad the notes are safe, anyhow," Charles murmured, in a tone of relief, beginning to smell a rat. "Will you kindly return them to me?"



The *Attaché* turned out the contents of the envelope. They proved to be prospectuses of bubble companies of the moment, of no importance.

"Medhurst must have put them there," I cried "and decamped with the cash."

Charles gave a groan of horror. "And Medhurst is Colonel Clay!" he exclaimed, clapping his hand to his forehead.

"I beg your pardon, sir," the Colonel interposed. "I have but one personality, and no aliases."

It took quite half an hour to explain this imbroiglio. But as soon as all was explained, in French and English, to the satisfaction of ourselves and the *juge d'instruction*, the real Colonel shook hands with us, in a most forgiving way, and informed us that he had more than once wondered, when he gave his name at shops in Paris, why it was often received with such grave suspicion. We instructed the police that the true culprit was Medhurst, whom they had seen with their own eyes, and whom we urged them to pursue with all expedition. Meanwhile, Charles and I, accompanied by the Colonel and the *Attaché*—"to see the fun out," as they said—called at the Bank of France for the purpose of stopping the notes immediately. It was too late, however. They had been presented at once, and cashed in gold, by a pleasant little lady in an American costume, who was afterwards identified by the hotel-keeper (from our description) as his lodger, Mme. Picardet. It was clear she had taken rooms in the same hotel, to be near the Indian Colonel; and it was *she* who had received and sent the letters. As for our foe, he had vanished into space, as always.

Two days later we received the usual insulting communication on a sheet of Charles's own dainty note. Last time he wrote it was on Craig-Ellachie paper: this time, like the wanton lapwing, he had got himself another crest.

"Most Perspicacious of Millionaires!—"

"Said I not well, as Medhurst, that you must distrust everybody? And the one man you never dreamt of distrusting was—Medhurst. Yet see how truthful I was! I told you I knew where Colonel Clay was living—and I *did* know, exactly. I promised to take you to Colonel Clay's rooms, and to get him arrested for you—and I kept my promise. I even exceeded your expectations; for I gave

you *two* Colonel Clays instead of one—and you took the wrong man—that is to say, the real one. This was a neat little trick; but it cost me some trouble.

"First, I found out there *was* a real Colonel Clay, in the Indian Army. I also found out he chanced to be coming home on leave this season. I might have made more out of him, no doubt; but I disliked annoying him, and preferred to give myself the fun of this peculiar mystification. I therefore waited for him to reach Paris, where the police arrangements suited me better than in London. While I was looking about, and delaying operations for his return, I happened to hear you wanted a detective. So I offered myself as out of work to my old employer, Marvillier, from whom I have had many good jobs in the past; and there you get, in short, the kernel of the Colonel.

"Naturally, after this, I can never go back as a detective to Marvillier's. But, on the large scale on which I have learned to work since I first had the pleasure of making your delightful acquaintance, this matters little. To say the truth, I begin to feel detective work a cut or two below me. I am now a gentleman of means and leisure. Besides, the extra knowledge of your movements which I have acquired in your house has helped still further to give me various holds upon you. So the fluke will be true to his own pet lamb. To vary the metaphor, you are not fully shorn yet.

"Remember me most kindly to your charming family, give Wentworth my love, and tell Mlle. Césarine I owe her a grudge which I shall never forget. She clearly suspected me. You are much too rich, dear Charles; I relieve your plethora. I bleed you financially. Therefore I consider myself

"Your sincerest friend,

"CLAY-BRABAZON-MEDHURST,

"Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons."

Charles was threatened with apoplexy. This blow was severe. "Whom can I trust," he asked, plaintively, "when the detectives themselves, whom I employ to guard me, turn out to be swindlers? Don't you remember that line in the Latin grammar—something about, 'Who shall watch the watchers?' I think it used to run, '*Quis custodes custodiet ipsos?*'"

But I felt this episode had at least disproved my suspicions of poor Césarine.