THE EPISODE OF THE SELDON GOLD−MINE

Grant Allen

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ON our return to London, Charles and Marvillier had a difference of opinion on the subject of Medhurst.

Charles maintained that Marvillier ought to have known the man with the cropped hair was Colonel Clay, and ought never to have recommended him. Marvillier maintained that Charles had seen Colonel Clay half−a−dozen times, at least, to his own never; and that my respected brother−in−law had therefore nobody on earth but himself to blame if the roguc imposed upon him. The head detective had known Medhurst for ten years, he said, as a most respectable man, and even a ratepayer; he had always found him the cleverest of spies, as well he might be, indeed, on the familiar set−a−thief−to−catch−a−thief principle. However, the upshot of it all was, as usual—nothing. Marvillier was sorry to lose the services of so excellent a hand; but he had done the very best he could for Sir Charles, he declared; and if Sir Charles was not satisfied, why, he might catch his Colonel Clays for himself in future.

'So I will, Sey,' Charles remarked to me, as we walked back from the office in the Strand by Piccadilly. 'I won't trust any more to these private detectives. It's my belief they're a pack of thieves themselves, in league with the rascals they're set to catch, and with no more sense of honour than a *~ulu diamond−hand.'

'Better try the police,' I suggested, by way of being helpful. One must assume an interest in one's employer's business.

But Charles shook his head. 'No, no,' he said; 'I'm sick of all these fellows. I shall trust in future to my own sagacity. We learn by experience, Sey—and I've learned a thing or two. One of them is this: It's not enough to suspect everybody; you must have no preconceptions. Divest yourself entirely of every fixed idea if you wish to cope with a rascal of this calibre. Don't jump at conclusions. We should disbelieve everything, as well as distrust everybody. That's the road to success; and I mean to pursue it.'

So, by way of pursuing it, Charles retired to Seldon.

'The longer the man goes on, the worse he grows,' he said to me one morning. 'He's just like a tiger that has tasted blood. Every successful haul seems only to make him more eager for another. I fully expect now before long we shall see him down here.'

About three weeks later, sure enough, my respected connection received a communication from the abandoned swindler, with an Austrian stamp and a Vienna post−mark.

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  'MY DEAR VANDRIFT.—(After so long and so
varied an acquaintance we may surely drop the
absurd formalities of "Sir Charles" and "Colonel.")
I write to ask you a delicate question.  Can you
kindly tell me exactly how much I have received from
your various generous acts during the last three years?
I have mislaid my account−book, and as this is the
season for making the income tax return, I am
anxious, as an honest and conscientious citizen, to
set down my average profits out of you for the
triennial period.  For reasons which you will amply
understand, I do not this time give my private
address, in Paris or elsewhere; but if you will
kindly advertise the total amount, above the signature
"Peter Simple," in the Agony Column of the _Times_,
you will confer a great favour upon the Revenue
Commissioners, and also upon your constant friend
and companion,         CUTHBERT CLAY,
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'Practical Socialist.'

'Mark my word, Sey,' Charles said, laying the letter down, 'in a week or less the man himself will follow. This is his cunning way of trying to make me think he's well out of the country and far away from Seldon. That means he's meditating another descent. But he told us too much last time, when he was Medhurst the detective. He gave us some hints about disguises and their unmasking that I shall not forget. This turn I shall be even with him.'

On Saturday of that week, in effect, we were walking along the road that leads into the village, when we met a gentlemanly−looking man, in a rough and rather happy−go−lucky brown tweed suit, who had the air of a tourist. He was middle−aged, and of middle height; he wore a small leather wallet suspended round his shoulder; and he was peering about at the rocks in a suspicious manner Something in his gait attracted our attention.

'Good−morning,' he said, looking up as we passed; and Charles muttered a somewhat surly inarticulate, 'Good−morning.'

We went on without saying more. 'Well, that's not Colonel Clay, anyhow,' I said, as we got out of earshot. 'For he accosted us first; and you may remember it's one of the Colonel's most marked peculiarities that, like the model child, he never speaks till he's spoken to—never begins an acquaintance. He always waits till we make the first advance; he doesn't go out of his way to cheat us; he loiters about till we ask him to do it.'

'Seymour,' my brother−in−law responded, in a severe tone, 'there you are, now, doing the very thing I warned you not to do! You're succumbing to a preconception. Avoid fixed ideas. The probability is this man is Colonel Clay. Strangers are generally scarce at Seldon. If he isn't Colonel Clay, what's he here for, I'd like to know? What money is there to be made here in any other way? I shall inquire about him.'

We dropped in at the Cromarty Arms, and asked good Mrs. M'Lachlan if she could tell us anything about the gentlemanly stranger. Mrs. M'Lachlan replied that he was from London, she believed, a pleasant gentleman enough; and he had his wife with him.

'Ha! Young? Pretty?' Charles inquired, with a speaking glance at me.

'Weel, Sir Charles, she'll no be exactly what you'd be ca'ing a bonny lass,' Mrs. M'Lachlan replied; 'but she's a guid body for a' that, an' a fine braw woman.'

'Just what I should expect,' Charles murmured, 'He varies the programme. The fellow has tried White Heather as the parson's wife, and as Madame Picardet, and as squinting little Mrs. Granton, and as Medhurst's accomplice; and now, he has almost exhausted the possibilities of a disguise for a really young and pretty woman; so he's playing her off at last as the riper product—a handsome matron. Clever, extremely clever; but—we begin to see through him.' And he chuckled to himself quietly.

Next day, on the hillside, we came upon our stranger again, occupied as before in peering into the rocks, and sounding them with a hammer. Charles nudged me and whispered, 'I have it this time. He's posing as a geologist.'

I took a good look at the man. By now, of course, we had some experience of Colonel Clay in his various disguises; and I could observe that while the nose, the hair, and the beard were varied, the eyes and the build remained the same as ever. He was a trifle stouter, of course, being got up as a man of between forty and fifty; and his forehead was lined in a way which a less consummate artist than Colonel Clay could easily have imitated. But I felt we had at least some grounds for our identification; it would not do to dismiss the suggestion of Clayhood at once as a flight of fancy.

His wife was sitting near, upon a bare boss of rock, reading a volume of poems. Capital variant, that, a volume of poems! Exactly suited the selected type of a cultivated family. White Heather and Mrs. Granton never used to read poems. But that was characteristic of all Colonel Clay's impersonations, and Mrs. Clay's too—for I suppose I must call her so. They were not mere outer disguises; they were finished pieces of dramatic study. Those two people were an actor and actress, as well as a pair of rogues; and in both their *roles they were simply inimitable.

As a rule, Charles is by no means polite to casual trespassers on the Seldon estate; they get short shrift and a summary ejection. But on this occasion he had a reason for being courteous, and he approached the lady with a bow of recognition. 'Lovely day,' he said, 'isn't it? Such belts on the sea, and the heather smells sweet. You are stopping at the inn, I fancy?'

'Yes,' the lady answered, looking up at him with a charming smile. ('I know that smile,' Charles whispered to me. 'I have succumbed to it too often.') 'We're stopping at the inn, and my husband is doing a little geology on the

hill here. I hope Sir Charles Vandrift won't come and catch us. He's so down upon trespassers. They tell us at the inn he's a regular Tartar.'

('Saucy minx as ever,' Charles murmured to me. 'She said it on purpose.') 'No, my dear madam,' he continued, aloud; ' you have been quite misinformed. I am Sir Charles Vandrift; and I am not a Tartar. If your husband is a man of science I respect and admire him. It is geology that has made me what I am to−day.' And he drew himself up proudly. 'We owe to it the present development of South African mining.'

The lady blushed as one seldom sees a mature woman blush—but exactly as I had seen Madame Picardet and White Heather. 'Oh, I'm so sorry,' she said, in a confused way that recalled Mrs. Granton. 'Forgive my hasty speech. I—I didn't know you.'

('She did,' Charles whispered. 'But let that pass.') 'Oh, don't think of it again; so many people disturb the birds, don't you know, that we're obliged in self−defence to warn trespassers sometimes off our lovely mountains. But I do it with regret—with profound regret. I admire the—er—the beauties of Nature myself; and, therefore, I desire that all others should have the freest possible access to them—possible, that is to say, consistently with the superior claims of Property.'

'I see,' the lady replied, looking up at him quaintly. 'I admire your wish, though not your reservation. I've just been reading those sweet lines of Wordsworth's—

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And O, ye fountains, meadows, hills, and groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves.
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I suppose you know them?' And she beamed on him pleasantly.

'Know them?' Charles answered. 'Know them! Oh, of course, I know them. They're old favourites of mine—in fact, I adore Wordsworth.' (I doubt whether Charles has ever in his life read a line of poetry, except Doss Chiderdoss in the _Sporting Times_.) He took the book and glanced at them. 'Ah, charming, charming!' he said, in his most ecstatic tone. But his eyes were on the lady, and not on the poet.

I saw in a moment how things stood. No matter under what disguise that woman appeared to him, and whether he recognised her or not, Charles couldn't help falling a victim to Madame Picardet's attractions. Here he actually suspected her; yet, like a moth round a candle, he was trying his hardest to get his wings singed! I almost despised him with his gigantic intellect! The greatest men are the greatest fools, I verily believe, when there's a woman in question.

The husband strolled up by this time, and entered into conversation with us. According to his own account, his name was Forbes−Gaskell, and he was a Professor of Geology in one of those new−fangled northern colleges. He had come to Seldon rock−spying, he said, and found much to interest him. He was fond of fossils, but his special hobby was rocks and minerals. He knew a vast deal about cairngorms and agates and such−like pretty things, and showed Charles quartz and felspar and red cornelian, and I don't know what else, in the crags on the hillside. Charles pretended to listen to him with the deepest interest and even respect, never for a moment letting him guess he knew for what purpose this show of knowledge had been recently acquired. If we were ever to catch the man, we must not allow him to see we suspected him. So Charles played a dark game. He swallowed the geologist whole without question.

Most of that morning we spent with them on the hillside. Charles took them everywhere and showed them everything. He pretended to be polite to the scientific man, and he was really polite, most polite, to the poetical lady. Before lunch time we had become quite friends.

The Clays were always easy people to get on with; and, bar their roguery, we could not deny they were delightful companions. Charles asked them in to lunch. They accepted willingly. He introduced them to Amelia with sundry raisings of his eyebrows and contortions of his mouth. 'Professor and Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell,' he said, half−dislocating his jaw with his violent efforts. "They're stopping at the inn, dear. I've been showing them over the place, and they're good enough to say they'll drop in and take a share in our cold roast mutton;' which was a frequent form of Charles's pleasantry.

Amelia sent them upstairs to wash their hands—which, in the Professors case, was certainly desirable, for his fingers were grimed with earth and dust from the rocks he had been investigating. As soon as we were left alone

Charles drew me into the library.

'Seymour,' he said, 'more than ever there is a need for us strictly to avoid preconceptions. We must not make up our minds that this man is Colonel Clay—nor, again, that he isn't. We must remember that we have been mistaken in *both* ways in the past, and must avoid our old errors. I shall old myself in readiness for either event—and a policeman in readiness to arrest them, if neceSsary!'

'A capital plan,' I murmured. 'Still, if I may venture a suggestion, in what way are theSe two people endeavOuring to entrap us? They have no scheme on hand—no schloss, no amalgamation.'

'Seymour,' my brother−in−law answered in his board−room style, 'you are a great deal too previous, as Medhurst used to say—I mean, Colonel Clay in his character as Medhurst. In the first place, these are early days; our friends have not yet developed their intentions. We may find before long they have a property to sell, or a company to promote, or a concession to exploit in South Africa or elsewhere. Then again, in the second place, we don't always spot the exact nature of their plan until it has burst in our hands, so to speak, and revealed its true character. What could have seemed more transparent than Medhurst, the detective, till he ran away with our notes in the very moment of triumph? What more innocent than White Heather and the little curate, till they landed us with a couple of Amelia's own gems as a splendid bargain? I will not take it for granted any man is not Colonel Clay, merely because I don't happen to spot the particular scheme he is trying to work against me. The rogue has so many schemes, and some of them so well concealed, that up to the moment of the actual explosion you fail to detect the presence of moral dynamite. Therefore, I shall proceed as if there were dynamite everywhere. But in the third place—and this is very important—you mark my words, I believe I detect already the lines he will work upon. He's a geologist, he says, with a taste for minerals. Very good. You see if he doesn't try to persuade me before long he has found a coal mine, whose locality he will disclose for a trifling consideration; or else he will salt the Long Mountain with emeralds, and claim a big share for helping to discover them; or else he will try something in the mineralogical line to do me somehow. I see it in the very transparency of the fellow's face; and I'm determined this time neither to pay him one farthing on any pretext, nor to let him escape me!'

We went in to lunch. The Professor and Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell, all smiles, accompanied us. I don't know whether it was Charles's warning to take nothing for granted that made me do so—but I kept a close eye upon the suspected man all the time we were at table. It struck me there was something very odd about his hair. It didn't seem quite the same colour all over. The locks that hung down behind, over the collar of his coat, were a trifle lighter and a trifle grayer than the black mass that covered the greater part of his head. I examined it carefully. The more I did so, the more the conviction grew upon me: he was wearing a wig. There was no denying it!

A trifle less artistic, perhaps, than most of Colonel Clay's get−ups; but then, I reflected (on Charles's principle of taking nothing for granted), we had never before suspected Colonel Clay himself, except in the one case of the Honourable David, whose red hair and whiskers even Madame Picardet had admitted to be absurdly false by her action of pointing at them and tittering irrepressibly. It was possible that in every case, if we had scrutinised our man closely, we should have found that the disguise betrayed itself at once (as Medhurst had suggested) to an acute observer.

The detective, in fact, had told us too much. I remembered what he said to us about knocking off David Granton's red wig the moment we doubted him; and I positively tried to help myself awkwardly to potato−chips, when the footman offered them, so as to hit the supposed wig with an apparently careless brush of my elbow. But it was of no avail. The fellow seemed to anticipate or suspect my intention, and dodged aside carefully, like one well accustomed to saving his disguise from all chance of such real or seeming accidents.

I was so full of my discovery that immediately after lunch I induced Isabel to take our new friends round the home garden and show them Charles's famous prize dahlias, while I proceeded myself to narrate to Charles and Amelia my observations and my frustrated experiment.

'It is a wig,' Amelia assented. 'I spotted it at once. A very good wig, too, and most artistically planted. Men don't notice these things, though women do. It is creditable to you, Seymour, to have succeeded in detecting it.'

Charles was less complimentary. 'You fool,' he answered, with that unpleasant frankness which is much too common with him. 'Supposing it is, why on earth should you try to knock it off and disclose him? What good would it have done? If it is a wig, and we spot it, that's all that we need. We are put on our guard; we know with whom we have now to deal. But you can't take a man up on a charge of wig−wearing. The law doesn't interfere with it. Most respectable men may sometimes wear wigs. Why, I knew a promoter who did, and also the director

of fourteen companies! What we have to do next is, wait till he tries to cheat us, and then—pounce down upon him. Sooner or later, you may be sure, his plans will reveal themselves.'

So we concocted an excellent scheme to keep them under constant observation, lest they should slip away again, as they did from the island. First of all, Amelia was to ask them to come and stop at the castle, on the ground that the rooms at the inn were uncomfortably small. We felt sure, however, that, as on a previous occasion, they would refuse the invitation, in order to be able to slink off unperceived, in case they should find themseles apparently suspected. Should they decline, it was arranged that Amelia should take a room at the Cromarty Arms as long as they stopped there, and report upon their movements; while, during the day, we would have the house watched by the head gillie's son, a most intelligent young man, who could be trusted, with true Scotch canniness, to say nothing to anybody.

To our immense surprise, Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell accepted the invitation with the utmost alacrity. She was profuse in her thanks, indeed; for she told us the Arms was an ill−kept house, and the cookery by no means agreed with her husband's liver. It was sweet of us to invite them; such kindness to perfect strangers was quite unexpected. She should always say that nowhere on earth had she met with so cordial or friendly a reception as at Seldon Castle. But—she accepted, unreservedly.

'It *can't* be Colonel Clay,' I remarked to Charles. 'He would never have come here. Even as David Granton, with far more reason for coming, he wouldn't put himself in our power: he preferred the security and freedom of the Cromarty Arms.'

'Say,' my brother−in−law said sententiously, 'you're incorrigible. You *will* persist in being the slave of prepossessions. He may have some good reason of his own for accepting. Wait till he shows his hand—and then, we shall understand everything.'

So for the next three weeks the Forbes−Gaskells formed part of the house−party at Seldon. I must say, Charles paid them most assiduous attention. He positively neglected his other guests in order to keep close to the two new−comers. Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell noticed the fact, and commented on it. 'You are really too good to us, Sir Charles,' she said 'I'm afraid you allow us quite to monopolise you!'

But Charles, gallant as ever, replied with a smile, 'We have you with us for so short a time, you know!' Which made Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell blush again that delicious blush of hers.

During all this time the Professor went on calmly and persistently mineralogising. 'Wonderful character!' Charles said to me. 'He works out his parts so well! Could anything exceed the picture he gives one of scientific ardour?' And, indeed, he was at it, morning, noon, and night. 'Sooner or later,' Charles observed, 'something practical must come of it.'

Twice, meanwhile, little episodes occurred which are well worth notice. One day I was out with the Professor on the Long Mountain, watching him hammer at the rocks, and a little bored by his performance, when, to pass the time, I asked him what a particular small water−worn stone was. He looked at it and smiled. 'If there were a little more mica in it,' he said, 'it would be the characteristic gneiss of ice−borne boulders, hereabouts. But there isn't *quite* enough.' And he gazed at it curiously.

'Indeed,' I answered, 'it doesn't come up to sample, doesn't it?'

He gave me a meaning look. 'Ten per cent,' he murmured in a slow, strange voice; 'ten per cent is more usual.'

I trembled violently. Was he bent, then, upon ruining me? 'If you betray me——' I cried, and broke off.

'I beg your pardon,' he said. He was all pure innocence.

I reflected on what Charles had said about taking nothing for granted, and held my tongue prudently.

The other incident was this. Charles picked a sprig of white heather on the hiil one afternoon, after a picnic lunch, I regret to say, when he had taken perhaps a glass more champagne than was strictly good for him. He was not exactly the worse for it, but he was excited, good−humoured, reckless, and lively. He brought the sprig to Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell, and handed it to her, ogling a little. 'Sweets to the sweet,' he murmured, and looked at her meaningly. 'White heather to White Heather.' Then he saw what he had done, and checked himself instantly.

Mrs. Forbes−Gaskell coloured up in the usual manner. 'I—I don't quite understand,' she faltered.

Charles scrambled out of it somehow. 'White heather for luck,' he said, 'and—the man who is privileged to give a piece of it to you is surely lucky.'

She smiled, none too well pleased. I somehow felt she suspected us of suspecting her.

However, as it turned out, nothing came, after all, of the untoward incident.

Next day Charles burst upon me, triumphant. 'Well, he has shown his hand!' he cried. 'I knew he would. He has come to me to−day with—what do you think?—a fragment of gold, in quartz, from the Long Mountain.'

'No!' I exclaimed.

'Yes,' Charles answered. 'He says there's a vein there with distinct specks of gold in it, which might be worth mining. When a man begins *that* way you know what he's driving at! And what's more, he's got up the subject beforehand; for he began saying to me there had long been gold in Sutherlandshire—why not therefore in Ross−shire? And then he went at full into the comparative geology of the two regions.'

'This is serious,' I said. 'What will you do?'

'Wait and watch,' Charles answered; 'and the moment he develops a proposal for shares in the syndicate to work the mine, or a sum of money down as the price of his discovery—get in the police, and arrest him.'

For the next few days the Professor was more active and ardent than ever. He went peering about the rocks on every side with his hammer. He kept on bringing in little pieces of stone, with gold specks stuck in them, and talking learnedly of the 'probable cost of crushing and milling.' Charles had heard all that before; in point of fact, he had assisted at the drafting of some dozens of prospectuses. So he took no notice, and waited for the man with the wig to develop his proposals. He knew they would come soon; and he watched and waited. But, of course, to draw him on he pretended to be interested.

While we were all in this attitude of mind, attending on Providence and Colonel Clay, we happened to walk down by the shore one day, in the opposite direction from the Seamew's Island. Suddenly we came upon the Professor linked arm−in−arm with—Sir Adolphus Cordery! They were wrapped in deep talk, and appeared to be most amicable.

Now, naturally, relations had been a trifle strained between Sir Adolphus and the house of Vandrift since the incident of the Slump; but under the present circumstances, and with such a matter at stake as the capture of Colonel Clay, it was necessary to overlook all such minor differences. So Charles managed to disengage the Professor from his friend, sent Amelia on with Forbes−Gaskell towards the castle, and stopped behind, himself, with Sir Adolphus and me, to clear up the question.

'Do you know this man, Cordery?' he asked, with some little suspicion.

'Know him? Why, of course I do,' Sir Adolphus answered. 'He's Marmaduke Forbes−Gaskell, of the Yorkshire College, a very distinquished man of science. First−rate mineralogist—perhaps the best (*but* one) in England.' Modesty forbade him to name the exception.

'But are you sure it's he?' Charles inquired, with growing doubt. 'Have you known him before? This isn't a second case of Schleiermachering me, is it?'

'Sure it's he?' Sir Adolphus echoed. 'Am I sure of myself? Why, I've known Marmy Gaskell ever since we were at Trinity together. Knew him before he married Miss Forbes of Glenluce, my wife's second cousin, and hyphenated his name with hers, to keep the property in the family. Know them both most intimately. Came down here to the inn because I heard that Marmy was on the prowl among these hills, and I thought he had probably found something good to prowl after—in the way of fossils.'

'But the man wears a wig!' Charles expostulated.

'Of course,' Cordery answered. 'He's as bald as a bat—in front at least—and he wears a wig to cover his baldness.'

'It's disgraceful,' Charles exclaimed; 'disgraceful—taking us in like that.' And he grew red as a turkey−cock.

Sir Adolphus has no delicacy. He burst out laughing.

'Oh, I see,' he cried out, simply bursting with amusement. 'You thought Forbes−Gaskell was Colonel Clay in disguise! Oh, my stars, what a lovely one!'

'You, at least, have no right to laugh,' Charles responded, drawing himself up and growing still redder. 'You led me once into a similar scrape, and then backed out of it in a way unbecoming a gentleman. Besides,' he went on, getting angrier at each word, 'this fellow, whoever he is, has been trying to cheat me on his own account. Colonel Clay or no Colonel Clay, he's been salting my rocks with gold−bearing quartz, and trying to lead me on into an absurd speculation!'

Sir Adolphus exploded. 'Oh, this is too good,' he cried. 'I must go and tell Marmy!' And he rushed off to where Forbes−Gaskell was seated on a corner of rock with Amelia.

As for Charles and myself, we returned to the house. Half an hour later Forbes−Gaskell came back, too, in a

towering temper.

'What is the meaning of this, sir?' he shouted out, as soon as he caught sight of Charles. 'I'm told you've invited my wife and myself here to your house in order to spy upon us, under the impression that I was Clay, the notorious swindler!'

'I thought you were,' Charles answered, equally angry. 'Perhaps you may be still! Anyhow, you're a rogue, and you tried to bamboozle me!'

Forbes−Gaskell, white with rage, turned to his trembling wife. 'Gertrude,' he said, 'pack up your box and come away from these people instantly. Their pretended hospitality has been a studied insult. They've put you and me in a most ridiculous position. We were told before we came here—and no doubt with truth—that Sir Charles Vandrift was the most close−fisted and tyrannical old curmudgeon in Scotland. We've been writing to all our fiiends to say ecstatically that he was, on the contrary, a most hospitable, generous, and large−hearted gentleman. And now we find out he's a disgusting cad, who asks strangers to his house from the meanest motives, and then insults his guests with gratuitous vituperation. It is well such people should hear the plain truth now and again in their lives: and it therefore gives me the greatest pleasure to tell Sir Charles Vandrift that he's a vulgar bounder of the first water. Go and pack your box, Gertrude! I'll run down to the Cromarty Arms, and order a cab to carry us away at once from this inhospitable sham castle.'

'You wear a wig, sir; you wear a wig,' Charles exclaimed, half−choking with passion. For, indeed, as Forbes−Gaskell spoke, and tossed his head angrily, the nature of his hair−covering grew painfully apparent. It was quite one−sided.

'I do, sir, that I may be able to shake it in the face of a cad!' the Professor responded, tearing it off to readjust it; and, suiting the action to the word, he brandished it thrice in Charles's eyes; after which he darted from the room, speechless with indignation.

As soon as they were gone, and Charles had recovered breath sufficiently to listen to rational conversation, I ventured to observe, 'This comes of being too sure! We made one mistake. We took it for granted that because a man wears a wig, he mUst be an impostor—which does not necessarily follow. We forgot that not Colonel Clays alone have false coverings to their heads, and that wigs may sometimes be worn from motives of pure personal vanity. In fact, we were again the slaves of preconceptions.'

I looked at him pointedly. Charles rose before he replied. 'Seymour Wentworth,' he said at last, gazing down upon me with lofty scorn, 'your moralising is ill−timed. It appears to me you entirely misunderstand the position and duties of a private secretary!*

The oddest part of it all, however, was this—that Charles, bcing convinced Forbes−Gaskell, though he wasn't Colonel Clay, had been fraudulently salting the rocks with gold, with intent to deceive, took no further notice of the alleged discoveries. The consequence was that Forbes−Gaskell and Sir Adolphus went elsewhere with the secret; and it was not till after Charles had sold the Seldon Castle estate (which he did shortly afterward, the place having somehow grown strangely distasteful to him) that the present 'Seldon Eldorados, Limited,' were put upon the market by Lord Craig−Ellachie, who purchased the place from him. Forbes−Gaskell, as it happened, had reported to Craig−Ellachie that he had found a lode of high−grade ore on an estate unnamed, which he would particularise on promise of certain contingent claims to founder's shares; and the old lord jumped at it. Charles sold at grouse−moor prices; and the consequence is that the capital of the Eldorados is yielding at present very fair returns, even after allowing for expenses of promotion—while Charles has been done out of a good thing in gold−mines!

But, remembering 'the position and duties of a private secretary,' I refrained from pointing out to him at the time that this loss was due to a fixed idea—though as a matter of fact it depended upon Charles's strange preconception that the man with the wig, whoever he might be, was trying to diddle him.