



## AN AFRICAN MILLIONAIRE.

EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF THE ILLUSTRIOUS COLONEL CLAY.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

(Continued from page 453.)

Charles withered me with a fierce scowl of undisguised contempt. "Wentworth," he said once more, "you are a fool!" Then he relapsed into silence.

"But you declined to sell out," I said.

"He gazed at me fixedly. "Is it likely," he asked at last, "I would tell you if I meant to sell out, or that I'd sell out openly through Finglmore, my usual broker? Why, all the world would have known, and Golcondas would have been finished. As it is, I don't desire to tell an ass like you exactly how much I've lost. But I did sell out, and some unknown operator bought in at once, and closed for ready money, and has sold again this morning; and after all that has happened, it will be impossible to track him. He didn't wait for the account—he settled up instantly. And he sold in like manner. I know now what has been done, and how cleverly it has all been disguised and covered, but the most I am going to tell you to-day is just this—it's by far the biggest haul Colonel Clay has made out of me. He could retire on it if he liked. My one hope is it may satisfy him for life; but then no man has ever had enough of making money."

"You sold out!" I exclaimed. "You, the Chairman of the Company! You deserted the ship! And how about your trust? How about the widows and orphans confided to you?"

Charles rose and faced me. "Seymour Wentworth," he said, in his most solemn voice, "you have lived with me for years and had every advantage. You have seen high finance. Yet you ask me that question! It's my belief you will never, never understand business!"

## VII.

## THE EPISODE OF THE ARREST OF THE COLONEL.

How 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 Sabaeans, 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 Horniman's tea or a good brand of whiskey, 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 Honorable 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 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 ear-shot.

"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. You've heard, of course, of the Bertillon system of measuring and registering criminals."

"I have," I answered. "And it's excellent as far as it goes."

"But, like Mrs. Glasse's juggled hare, it all depends upon the initial step. 'First catch your criminal.' Now, we have never caught Colonel Clay, and until we secure him we cannot register him by the Bertillon method. Besides, even if we had once caught him and duly noted the shape of his nose, his chin, his ears, his forehead, of what use would that be against a man who turns up with a fresh face each time, and can mould his features into whatever form he likes, to deceive and foil us?"

"Never mind, Sey," my brother-in-law said. "I was told that Dr. Frank Beddersley was the best exponent of the Bertillon system now living in England; and to Beddersley I shall go. Or, rather, I'll invite him here to lunch to-morrow."

So we wrote a polite invitation to Dr. Beddersley, who pursued the method professionally, asking him to come and lunch with us at Mayfair at two next day.

Dr. Beddersley came—a dapper little man, with pent-house eyebrows, and keen, small eyes, whom I suspected at sight of being Colonel Clay himself in another of his clever polymorphic embodiments. He was clear and concise. His manner was scientific. He told us at once that though the Bertillon method was of little use till the expert had seen the criminal once, yet if we had consulted him earlier he might probably have saved us some serious disasters. "A man so ingenious as this," he said, "would no doubt have studied Bertillon's principles himself, and would take every possible means to prevent recognition by them. Therefore you might almost disregard the nose, the chin, the moustache, the hair, all of which are capable of such easy alteration. But there remain some features which are more likely to persist—height, shape of head, neck, build, and fingers; the timbre of the voice, the color of the iris. Even these, again, may be partially disguised or concealed. The way the hair is dressed, the amount of padding, a high collar round the throat, a dark line about the eyelashes, may do more to alter the appearance of a face than you could readily credit."

"So we know," I answered.

"The voice, again," Dr. Beddersley continued. "The voice itself may be most fallacious. The man is no doubt a clever mimic. He could, perhaps, compress or enlarge his larynx. And I judge from what you tell me that he took characters each time which compelled him largely to alter and modify his tone and accent."

"Yes," I said. "As the Mexican Seer, he had, of course, a Spanish intonation. As the little curate, he was a cultivated North-countryman. As David Granton, he spoke gentlemanly Scotch. As Von Lebenstein, naturally, he was a South German, trying to express himself in French. As Professor Schleiermacher, he was a North German speaking broken English."

"Quite so," Dr. Beddersley answered. "That is just what I should expect. Now, the question is, do you know him to be one man, or is he really a gang? Is he a name for a syndicate? Have you seen photographs of Colonel Clay himself in any of his disguises?"

"Unfortunately, no," Charles replied. "But the police at Nice showed us two. Perhaps we might borrow them."

"Until we get them," Dr. Beddersley said, "I don't know that we can do anything. But if you can once give me two distinct photographs of the real man, no matter how much disguised, I could tell you whether they were taken from one person, and, if so, I think I could point out certain details in common which might aid us to go upon."

All this was at lunch. Amelia's niece, Dolly Lingfield, was there, as it happened; and I chanced to note a most guilty look stealing over her face all the while we were talking. Suspicious as I had learned to become by this time, however, I did not suspect Dolly of being in league with Colonel Clay, but I confess I wondered what her blush could indicate. After lunch, to my surprise, Dolly called me away from the rest into the library. "Uncle Seymour," she said to me (the dear child calls me Uncle Seymour, though of course I am not in any way related to her), "I have some photographs of Colonel Clay, if you want them."

"You?" I cried, astonished. "Why, Dolly, how did you get them?"

For a minute or two she showed some little hesitation in telling me. At last she whispered, "You won't be angry if I confess?" (Dolly is just nineteen, and remarkably pretty.)

"My child," I said, "why should I be angry? You may confide in me implicitly." (With a blush like that, who on earth could be angry with her?)

"And you won't tell Aunt Amelia or Aunt Isabel?" she inquired, somewhat anxiously.

"Not for worlds," I answered. (As a matter of fact, Amelia and Isabel are the least people in the world to whom I should dream of confiding anything that Dolly might tell me.)

Well, I was stopping at Seldon, you know, when Mr. David Granton was there. Dolly went on; or, rather, when that scamp pretended he was David Granton; and—and—you won't be angry with me, will you?—one day I took a snapshot with my kodak at him and Aunt Amelia!

"Why, what harm was there in that?" I asked, bewildered. The wildest stretch of fancy could hardly conceive that the Honorable David had been *firting* with Amelia.

Dolly colored still more deeply. "Oh, you know Bertie Winslow!" she said. "Well, he's interested in photography—and—and also in me. And he's invented a process, which isn't of the slightest practical use, he says, but its peculiarity is that it reveals textures. At least, that's what Bertie calls it. It makes things come out so. And he gave me some plates of his own for my kodak—half a dozen or more—and I took Aunt Amelia with them."

"I still fail to see," I murmured, looking at her comically.

"Oh, Uncle Seymour," Dolly cried. "How blind you men are! If Aunt Amelia knew she would never forgive me. Why, you must understand. The—rings, you know, and the—pink powder!"

"Oh, it comes out, then, in the photograph?" I inquired.

"Comes out! I should think so! It's like little black spots all over Auntie's face. Such a guy as she looks in it!"

"And Colonel Clay is in them too?"

"Yes; I took them when he and Auntie were talking together, without either of them noticing. And Bertie developed them. I've three of David Granton. Three beauties—most successful!"

"Any other character?" I asked, seeing business ahead.

Dolly hung back, still redder. "Well, the rest are with Aunt Isabel," she answered, after a struggle.

"My dear child," I replied, hiding my feelings as a husband. "I will be brave. I will bear up even against that last misfortune!"

Dolly looked up at me pleadingly. "It was here in London," she went on, "when I was last with Auntie. Lebenstein was dining at the house, and I took him twice, *tete-a-tete* with Aunt Isabel!"

"Isabel does not paint," I murmured, stoutly.

Dolly hung back again. "No, but—her hair!" she suggested, in a faint voice.

"Its color," I admitted, "is in places assisted by a—well, you know, a restorer."

Dolly broke into a mischievous sly smile. "Yes, it is," she continued. "And oh, Uncle Sey, where the restorer has—er—restored it, you know, it comes out in the photograph with a sort of brilliant iridescent metallic sheen on it!"

"Bring them down, my dear," I said, gently patting her head with my hand. In the interests of justice, I thought it best not to frighten her.

Dolly brought them down. They seemed to me poor things, yet well worth trying. We found it possible, on further confabulation, by the simple aid of a pair of scissors, so to cut each in two that all trace of Amelia and Isabel was obliterated. Even so, however, I judged it best to call Charles and Dr. Beddersley to a private consultation in the library with Dolly, and not to submit the mutilated photographs to public inspection by their joint subjects. Here, in fact, we had five patchy portraits of the redoubtable Colonel, taken at various angles, and in characteristic unstudied attitudes. A child had outwitted the cleverest sharper in Europe!

The moment Beddersley's eye fell upon them a curious look came over his face. "Why, these," he said, "are taken on Herbert Winslow's method, Miss Lingfield."

"Yes," Dolly admitted, timidly. "They are. He's—a friend of mine, don't you know; and—he gave me some plates that just fitted my camera."

Beddersley gazed at them steadily. Then he turned to Charles. "And this young lady," he said, "has quite unintentionally and unconsciously succeeded in tracking Colonel Clay to earth at last. They are genuine photographs of the man—as he is—without the disguises!"

"They look to me most blotchy," Charles murmured. "Great black lines down the nose, and such spots on the cheek; too!"

"Exactly," Beddersley put in. "Those are *differences in texture*. They show just how much of the man's face is human flesh."

"And how much wax," I ventured.

"Not wax," the expert answered, gazing close. "This is some harder mixture. I should guess, a composition of gutta-percha and India rubber, which takes color well and hardens when applied, so as to lie quite evenly and resist heat or melting. Look here—that's an artificial scar, filling up a real hollow; and this is an added bit to the tip of the nose; and those are shadows, due to inserted cheek pieces within the mouth to make the man look fatter!"

"Why, of course," Charles cried. "India rubber it must be. That's why in France they call him *le Colonel Caoutchouc*!"

"Can you reconstruct the real face from them?" I inquired, anxiously.

Dr. Beddersley gazed hard at them. "Give me an hour or two," he said, "and a box of water colors. I think by that time—putting two and two together—I can eliminate the false

and build up for you a tolerably correct idea of what the actual man himself looks like."

We turned him into the library for a couple of hours, with the materials he needed, and by teatime he had completed his first rough sketch of the elements common to the two faces. He brought it out to us in the drawing-room. I glanced at it first. It was a curious countenance, slightly wanting in definiteness, and not unlike those "composite photographs" which Mr. Galton produces by exposing two negatives on the same sensitized paper for ten seconds or so consecutively. Yet it struck me at once as containing something of Colonel Clay in every one of his many representations. The little curate in real life did not recall the Seer, nor suggest Count Von Lebenstein or Professor Schleiermacher. Yet in this compound face, produced only from photographs of David Granton and Lebenstein, I could distinctly trace a certain underlying likeness to every one of the forms which the impostor had assumed for us. In other words, though he could make up so as to mask the likeness to his other characters, he could not make up so as to mask the likeness to his own personality. He could not wholly get rid of his native build and his genuine features.

Besides these striking suggestions of the Seer and the curate, however, I felt vaguely conscious of having seen and observed *the man himself* whom the water color represented, at some time, somewhere. It was not at Nice; it was not at Seldon; it was not at Meran. I believed I had been in a room with him somewhere in London.

Charles was looking over my shoulder. He gave a sudden little start. "Why, I know that fellow!" he cried. "You recollect him, Sey; he's Finglmore's brother!"

Then I remembered at once where it was that I had seen him—at the broker's in the city.

"You will arrest him!" I asked.

"Can I, on this evidence?"

"We might bring it home to him."

Charles mused for a moment. "We shall have nothing against him," he said slowly, "except in so far as we can swear to his identity. And that may be difficult."

Just at that moment the footman brought in tea. Charles wondered, apparently, whether the man, who had been with us at Seldon when Colonel Clay was David Granton, would recollect the face or recognize having seen it. "Look here, Dudley," he said, holding up the water color, "do you know that person?"

Dudley gazed at it a moment. "Certainly, sir," he answered, briskly.

"Who is it?" Amelia asked. We expected him to answer, "Count von Lebenstein," or "Mr. Granton."

Instead of that, he replied, to our utter surprise, "That's Cesarine's young man, my lady."

"Cesarine's young man?" Amelia repeated, taken aback.

"Oh, Dudley, surely you must be mistaken!"

"No, my lady," Dudley replied, in a tone of conviction. "He comes to see her quite regular; he has come to see her, off and on, from time to time, ever since I've been in Sir Charles's service."

"When will he be coming again?" Charles asked, breathless.

"He's downstairs now, sir," Dudley answered, unaware of the bombshell he was flinging into the midst of a respectable family.

Charles rose excitedly and put his back against the door. "Secure that man," he said to me, sharply, pointing with his finger.

"What man?" I asked, amazed. "Colonel Clay! The young man who's downstairs now with Cesarine?"

"No," Charles answered, with decision; "Dudley!"

I laid my hand on the footman's shoulder, not understanding what Charles meant. Dudley, terrified, drew back, and would have rushed from the room; but Charles, with his back against the door, prevented him.

"I—I've done nothing to be arrested, Sir Charles," Dudley cried, in abject terror, looking appealingly at Amelia. "It wasn't me as cheated you. And he certainly didn't look it."

"I daresay not," Charles answered. "But you don't leave this room till Colonel Clay is in custody. No, Amelia, no; it's no use your speaking to me. What he says is true. I see it all now. This villain and Cesarine have long been accomplices! The man's downstairs with her now. If we let Dudley quit the room he'll go down and tell them, and before we know where we are that slippery cel will have wriggled through our fingers, as he always wriggles. He is Finglmore; he is Cesarine's young man; and unless we arrest him now, without one minute's delay, he'll be off to Madrid or St. Petersburg by this evening!"

"You are right," I answered. "It is now or never!"

"Dudley," Charles said, in his most authoritative voice, "stop here till we tell you you may leave the room. Amelia and Dolly, don't let that man stir from where he's standing. If he does, restrain him. Seymour and Dr. Beddersley, come down with me to the servants' hall. I suppose that's where I shall find this person, Dudley!"

"N—no, sir," Dudley stammered out, half beside himself with fright. "He's in the housekeeper's room, sir!"

We went down to the lower regions in a solid phalanx of three. On the way we met Simpson (Sir Charles's valet), and also the butler, whom we pressed into the service. At the door of the housekeeper's room we paused, strategically. Voices came to us from within. One was Cesarine's; the other had a ring that reminded me at once of Lebenstein and the Seer, of David Granton and the little curate. They were talking together in French; and now and then we caught the sound of stifled laughter.

We opened the door. "*Est-il drôle, donc, ce vieux?*" the man's voice was saying.

"*C'est à mourir de rire*," Cesarine's voice responded.

We burst in upon them, red-handed.

Cesarine's young man rose, with his hat in his hand, in a respectful attitude. It reminded me of the little curate, in his humblest moments as the disinterested pastor.

With a sign to me to do likewise, Charles laid his hand firmly on the young man's shoulder. I looked in the fellow's face. There could be no denying it—Cesarine's young man was Paul Finglmore, our broker's brother.

"Paul Finglmore," Charles said severely, "otherwise Cuthbert Clay, I arrest you on several charges of theft and conspiracy!"

The young man glanced around him. He was surprised and perturbed, but, even so, his inexhaustible coolness never once deserted him. "What, five to one?" he said, counting us over. "Has law and order come down to this? Five respectable rascals to arrest one poor beggar of a *chevalier d'industrie*!"

"Hold his hands, Simpson!" Charles cried, trembling lest his enemy should escape him.

Paul Finglmore drew back even while we held his shoulders. "No, not you, sir," he said to the man, haughtily. "Don't dare to lay your hands upon me! Send for a constable if you wish, Sir Charles Vandrift, but I decline to be taken into custody by a valet!"

"Go for a policeman," Dr. Beddersley said to Simpson, standing forward.

The prisoner eyed him up and down. "Oh, Dr. Beddersley!" he said, relieved. It was evident he knew him. "If you've tracked me strictly in accordance with Bertillon's methods, I don't mind so much. I will not yield to fools; I yield to science. I didn't think this diamond king had sense enough to apply to you. He's the most gullible old ass I ever met in my life. But if it's you who have tracked me down, I can only submit to it."

Charles held to him with a fierce grip. "Mind he doesn't break away, Sey," he cried. He's playing his old game. Distrust the man's patter!"

"Take care," the prisoner put in. "Remember Dr. Polperro! On what charge do you arrest me?"

Charles was bubbling with indignation. "You cheated me at Nice," he said; "at Meran; at Paris!"

[TO BE CONTINUED.]