

THE EPISODE OF THE JAPANNED DISPATCH-BOX

Grant Allen

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'SEY,' my brother-in-law said next spring, 'I'm sick and tired of London! Let's shoulder our wallets at once, and I will to some distant land, where no man doth me know.'

'Mars or Mercury?' I inquired; 'for, in our own particular planet, I'm afraid you'll find it just a trifle difficult for Sir Charles Vandrift to hide his light under a bushel.'

'Oh, I'll manage it,' Charles answered. 'What's the good of being a millionaire, I should like to know, if you're always obliged to "behave as sich"? I shall travel **incog.** I'm dog-tired of being dogged by these endless impostors.'

And, indeed, we had passed through a most painful winter. Colonel Clay had stopped away for some months, it is true, and for my own part, I will confess, since it wasn't **my** place to pay the piper, I rather missed the wonted excitement than otherwise. But Charles had grown horribly and morbidly suspicious. He carried out his principle of 'distrusting everybody and disbelieving everything,' till life was a burden to him. He spotted impossible Colonel Clays under a thousand disguises; he was quite convinced he had frightened his enemy away at least a dozen times over, beneath the varying garb of a fat club waiter, a tall policeman, a washerwoman's boy, a solicitor's clerk, the Bank of England beadle, and the collector of water-rates. He saw him as constantly, and in as changeful forms, as mediaeval saints used to see the devil. Amelia and I really began to fear for the stability of that splendid intellect; we foresaw that unless the Colonel Clay nuisance could be abated somehow, Charles might sink by degrees to the mental level of a common or ordinary Stock-Exchange plunger.

So, when my brother-in-law announced his intention of going away **incog.** to parts unknown, on the succeeding Saturday, Amelia and I felt a flush of relief from long-continued tension. Especially Amelia who was not going with him.

'For rest and quiet,' he said to us at breakfast, laying down the *_Morning Post_*, 'give **me** the deck of an Atlantic liner! No letters; no telegrams. No stocks; no shares. No *_Times_*; no *_Saturday_*. I'm sick of these papers!'

'The *_World_* is too much with us,' I assented cheerfully. I regret to say, nobody appreciated the point of my quotation.

Charles took infinite pains, I must admit, to ensure perfect secrecy. He made me write and secure the best state-rooms main deck, amidships under my own name, without mentioning his, in the *Etruria*, for New York, on her very next voyage. He spoke of his destination to nobody but Amelia; and Amelia warned Cesarine, under pains and penalties, on no account to betray it to the other servants. Further to secure his **incog.**, Charles assumed the style and title of Mr. Peter Porter, and booked as such in the *Etruria* at Liverpool.

The day before starting, however, he went down with me to the City for an interview with his brokers in Adam's Court, Old Broad Street. Finglemore, the senior partner, hastened, of course, to receive us. As we entered his private room a good-looking young man rose and lounged out. 'Halloa, Finglemore,' Charles said, 'that's that scamp of a brother of yours! I thought you had shipped him off years and years ago to China?'

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'So I did, Sir Charles,' Finglemore answered, rubbing his hands somewhat nervously. 'But he never went there. Being an idle young dog, with a taste for amusement, he got for the time no further than Paris. Since then, he's hung about a bit, here, there, and everywhere, and done no particular good for himself or his family. But about three or four years ago he somehow "struck ile": he went to South Africa, poaching on your preserves; and now he's back again rich, married, and respectable. His wife, a nice little woman, has reformed him. Well, what can I do for you this morning?'

Charles has large interests in America, in Santa Fe and Topekas, and other big concerns; and he insisted on taking out several documents and vouchers connected in various ways with his widespread ventures there. He meant to go, he said, for complete rest and change, on a general tour of private inquiry New York, Chicago, Colorado, the mining districts. It was a millionaire's holiday. So he took all these valuables in a black japanned dispatch-box, which he guarded like a child with absurd precautions. He never allowed that box out of his sight one moment; and he gave me no peace as to its safety and integrity. It was a perfect fetish. 'We must be cautious,' he said, 'Sey, cautious! Especially in travelling. Recollect how that little curate spirited the diamonds out of Amelia's jewel-case! I shall not let this box out of my sight. I shall stick to it myself, if we go to the bottom.'

We did not go to the bottom. It is the proud boast of the Cunard Company that it has 'never lost a passenger's life'; and the captain would not consent to send the Etruria to Davy Jones's locker, merely in order to give Charles a chance of sticking to his dispatch-box under trying circumstances. On the contrary, we had a delightful and uneventful passage; and we found our fellow-passengers most agreeable people. Charles, as Mr. Peter Porter, being freed for the moment from his terror of Colonel Clay, would have felt really happy, I believe had it not been for the dispatch-box. He made friends from the first hour (quite after the fearless old fashion of the days before Colonel Clay had begun to embitter life for him) with a nice American doctor and his charming wife, on their way back to Kentucky. Dr. Elihu Quackenboss that was his characteristically American name had been studying medicine for a year in Vienna, and was now returning to his native State with a brain close crammed with all the latest bacteriological and antiseptic discoveries. His wife, a pretty and piquant little American, with a tip-tilted nose and the quaint sharpness of her countrywomen, amused Charles not a little. The funny way in which she would make room for him by her side on the bench on deck, and say, with a sweet smile, 'You sit right here, Mr. Porter; the sun's just elegant,' delighted and flattered him. He was proud to find out that female attention was not always due to his wealth and title; and that plain Mr. Porter could command on his merits the same amount of blandishments as Sir Charles Vandrift, the famous millionaire, on his South African celebrity.

During the whole of that voyage, it was Mrs. Quackenboss here, and Mrs. Quackenboss there, and Mrs. Quackenboss the other place, till, for Amelia's sake, I was glad she was not on board to witness it. Long before we sighted Sandy Hook, I will admit, I was fairly sick of Charles's two-stringed harp Mrs. Quackenboss and the dispatch-box.

Mrs. Quackenboss, it turned out, was an amateur artist, and she painted Sir Charles, on calm days on deck, in all possible attitudes. She seemed to find him a most attractive model.

The doctor, too, was a precious clever fellow. He knew something of chemistry and of most other subjects, including, as I gathered, the human character. For he talked to Charles about various ideas of his, with which he wished to 'liven up folks in Kentucky a bit,' on his return, till Charles conceived the highest possible regard for his intelligence and enterprise. 'That's a go-ahead fellow, Sey!' he remarked to me one day. 'Has the right sort of grit in him! Those Americans are the men. Wish I had a round hundred of them on my works in South Africa!'

That idea seemed to grow upon him. He was immensely taken with it. He had lately dismissed one of his chief superintendents at the Cloetedorp mine, and he seriously debated whether or not he should offer the post to the smart Kentuckian. For my own part, I am inclined to connect this fact with his expressed determination to visit his South African undertakings for three months yearly in future; and I am driven to suspect he felt life at Cloetedorp would be rendered much more tolerable by the agreeable society of a quaint and amusing American lady.

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'If you offer it to him,' I said, 'remember, you must disclose your personality.'

'Not at all,' Charles answered. 'I can keep it dark for the present, till all is arranged for. I need only say I have interests in South Africa.'

So, one morning on deck, as we were approaching the Banks, he broached his scheme gently to the doctor and Mrs. Quackenboss. He remarked that he was connected with one of the biggest financial concerns in the Southern hemisphere; and that he would pay Elihu fifteen hundred a year to represent him at the diggings.

'What, dollars?' the lady said, smiling and accentuating the tip-tilted nose a little more. 'Oh, Mr. Porter, it ain't good enough!'

'No, pounds, my dear madam,' Charles responded. 'Pounds sterling, you know. In United States currency, seven thousand five hundred.'

'I guess Elihu would just jump at it,' Mrs. Quackenboss replied, looking at him quizzically.

The doctor laughed. 'You make a good bid, sir,' he said, in his slow American way, emphasising all the most unimportant words: '*but* you overlook one element. I *am* a man of science, not a speculator. I *have* trained myself for medical work, at considerable cost, *in* the best schools of Europe, and I do not propose *to* fling away the results of much arduous labour *by* throwing myself out elastically into a new line of work *for* which my faculties *may* not perhaps equally adapt me.'

('How thoroughly American!' I murmured, in the background.)

Charles insisted; all in vain. Mrs. Quackenboss was impressed; but the doctor smiled always a sphinx-like smile, and reiterated his belief in the unfitness of mid-stream as an ideal place for swopping horses. The more he declined, and the better he talked, the more eager Charles became each day to secure him. And, as if on purpose to draw him on, the doctor each day gave more and more surprising proofs of his practical abilities. 'I *am* not a specialist,' he said. 'I just ketch the drift, appropriate the kernel, *and* let the rest slide.'

He could do anything, it really seemed, from shoeing a mule to conducting a camp-meeting; he was a capital chemist, a very sound surgeon, a fair judge of horseflesh, a first class euchre player, and a pleasing baritone. When occasion demanded he could occupy a pulpit. He had invented a cork-screw which brought him in a small revenue; and he was now engaged in the translation of a Polish work on the 'Application of Hydrocyanic Acid to the Cure of Leprosy.'

Still, we reached New York without having got any nearer our goal, as regarded Dr. Quackenboss. He came to bid us good-bye at the quay, with that sphinx-like smile still playing upon his features. Charles clutched the dispatch-box with one hand, and Mrs. Quackenboss's little palm with the other.

'*Don't* tell us,' he said, 'this is good-bye for ever!' And his voice quite faltered.

'I guess so, Mr. Porter,' the pretty American replied, with a telling glance. 'What hotel do you patronise?'

'The Murray Hill,' Charles responded.

'Oh my, ain't that odd?' Mrs. Quackenboss echoed. 'The Murray Hill! Why, that's just where we're going too, Elihu!'

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The upshot of which was that Charles persuaded them, before returning to Kentucky, to diverge for a few days with us to Lake George and Lake Champlain, where he hoped to over-persuade the recalcitrant doctor.

To Lake George therefore we went, and stopped at the excellent hotel at the terminus of the railway. We spent a good deal of our time on the light little steamers that ply between that point and the road to Ticonderoga. Somehow, the mountains mirrored in the deep green water reminded me of Lucerne; and Lucerne reminded me of the little curate. For the first time since we left England a vague terror seized me. *Could* Elihu Quackenboss be Colonel Clay again, still dogging our steps through the opposite continent?

I could not help mentioning my suspicion to Charles who, strange to say, pooh-poohed it. He had been paying great court to Mrs. Quackenboss that day, and was absurdly elated because the little American had rapped his knuckles with her fan and called him 'a real silly.'

Next day, however, an odd thing occurred. We strolled out together, all four of us, along the banks of the lake, among woods just carpeted with strange, triangular flowers trilliums, Mrs. Quackenboss called them and lined with delicate ferns in the first green of springtide.

I began to grow poetical. (I wrote verses in my youth before I went to South Africa.) We threw ourselves on the grass, near a small mountain stream that descended among moss-clad boulders from the steep woods above us. The Kentuckian flung himself at full length on the sward, just in front of Charles. He had a strange head of hair, very thick and shaggy. I don't know why, but, of a sudden, it reminded me of the Mexican Seer, whom we had learned to remember as Colonel Clay's first embodiment. At the same moment the same thought seemed to run through Charles's head; for, strange to say, with a quick impulse he leant forward and examined it. I saw Mrs. Quackenboss draw back in wonder. The hair looked too thick and close for nature. It ended abruptly, I now remembered, with a sharp line on the forehead. Could this, too, be a wig? It seemed very probable.

Even as I thought that thought, Charles appeared to form a sudden and resolute determination. With one lightning swoop he seized the doctor's hair in his powerful hand, and tried to lift it off bodily. He had made a bad guess. Next instant the doctor uttered a loud and terrified howl of pain, while several of his hairs, root and all, came out of his scalp in Charles's hand, leaving a few drops of blood on the skin of the head in the place they were torn from. There was no doubt at all it was not a wig, but the Kentuckian's natural hirsute covering.

The scene that ensued I am powerless to describe. My pen is unequal to it. The doctor arose, not so much angry as astonished, white and incredulous. 'What did you do that for, any way?' he asked, glaring fiercely at my brother-in-law. Charles was all abject apology. He began by profusely expressing his regret, and offering to make any suitable reparation, monetary or otherwise. Then he revealed his whole hand. He admitted that he was Sir Charles Vandrift, the famous millionaire, and that he had suffered egregiously from the endless machinations of a certain Colonel Clay, a machiavellian rogue, who had hounded him relentlessly round the capitals of Europe. He described in graphic detail how the impostor got himself up with wigs and wax, so as to deceive even those who knew him intimately; and then he threw himself on Dr. Quackenboss's mercy, as a man who had been cruelly taken in so often that he could not help suspecting the best of men falsely. Mrs. Quackenboss admitted it was natural to have suspicions 'Especially,' she said, with candour, 'as you're not the first to observe the notable way Elihu's hair seems to originate from his forehead,' and she pulled it up to show us. But Elihu himself sulked on in the dumps: his dignity was offended. '*If* you wanted to know,' he said, 'you might as well have asked me. Assault and battery is not the right way to test whether citizen's hair is primitive or acquired.'

'It was an impulse,' Charles pleaded; 'an instinctive impulse!'

'Civilised man restrains his impulses,' the doctor answered. 'You have lived too long in South Africa, Mr. Porter I mean, Sir Charles Vandrift, if that's the right way *to* address such a gentleman. You appear to *have* imbibed the habits *and* manners of the Kaffirs you lived among.'

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For the next two days, I will really admit, Charles seemed more wretched than I could have believed it possible for him to be on somebody else's account. He positively grovelled. The fact was, he saw he had hurt Dr. Quackenboss's feelings, and much to my surprise he seemed truly grieved at it. If the doctor would have accepted a thousand pounds down to shake hands at once and forget the incident in my opinion Charles would have gladly paid it. Indeed, he said as much in other words to the pretty American for he could not insult her by offering her money. Mrs. Quackenboss did her best to make it up, for she was a kindly little creature, in spite of her roguishness; but Elihu stood aloof. Charles urged him still to go out to South Africa, increasing his bait to two thousand a year; yet the doctor was immovable. 'No, no,' he said; 'I had half decided *to* accept your offer *till* that unfortunate impulse; but that settled the question. *As* an American citizen, I decline *to* become the representative *of* a British nobleman who takes such means *of* investigating questions which affect the hair and happiness *of* his fellow-creatures.'

I don't know whether Charles was most disappointed at missing the chance of so clever a superintendent for the mine at Cloetedorp, or elated at the novel description of himself as 'a British nobleman;' which is not precisely our English idea of a colonial knighthood.

Three days later, accordingly, the Quackenbosses left the Lakeside Hotel. We were bound on an expedition up the lake ourselves, when the pretty little woman burst in with a dash to tell us they were leaving. She was charmingly got up in the neatest and completest of American travelling-dresses. Charles held her hand affectionately. 'I'm sorry it's good-bye,' he said. 'I have done my best to secure your husband.'

'You couldn't have tried harder than I did,' the little woman answered, and the tip-tilted nose looked quite pathetic; 'for I just hate to be buried right down there in Kentucky! However, Elihu is the sort of man a woman can neither drive nor lead; so we've got to put up with him.' And she smiled upon us sweetly, and disappeared for ever.

Charles was disconsolate all that day. Next morning he rose, and announced his intention of setting out for the West on his tour of inspection. He would recreate by revelling in Colorado silver lodes.

We packed our own portmanteaus, for Charles had not brought even Simpson with him, and then we prepared to set out by the morning train for Saratoga.

Up till almost the last moment Charles nursed his dispatch-box. But as the 'baggage-smashers' were taking down our luggage, and a chambermaid was lounging officiously about in search of a tip, he laid it down for a second or two on the centre table while he collected his other immediate impedimenta. He couldn't find his cigarette-case, and went back to the bedroom for it. I helped him hunt, but it had disappeared mysteriously. That moment lost him. When we had found the cigarette-case, and returned to the sitting-room lo, and behold! the dispatch-box was missing! Charles questioned the servants, but none of them had noticed it. He searched round the room not a trace of it anywhere.

'Why, I laid it down here just two minutes ago!' he cried. But it was not forthcoming.

'It'll turn up in time,' I said. 'Everything turns up in the end including Mrs. Quackenboss's nose.'

'Seymour,' said my brother-in-law, 'your hilarity is inopportune.'

To say the truth, Charles was beside himself with anger. He took the elevator down to the 'Bureau,' as they call it, and complained to the manager. The manager, a sharp-faced New Yorker, smiled as he remarked in a nonchalant way that guests with valuables were required to leave them in charge of the management, in which case they were locked up in the safe and duly returned to the depositor on leaving. Charles declared somewhat excitedly that he had been robbed, and demanded that nobody should be allowed to leave the hotel till the dispatch-box was

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discovered. The manager, quite cool, and obtrusively picking his teeth, responded that such tactics might be possible in an hotel of the European size, putting up a couple of hundred guests or so; but that an American house, with over a thousand visitors many of whom came and went daily could not undertake such a quixotic quest on behalf of a single foreign complainant.

That epithet, 'foreign,' stung Charles to the quick. No Englishman can admit that he is anywhere a foreigner. 'Do you know who I am, sir?' he asked, angrily. 'I am Sir Charles Vandrift, of London a member of the English Parliament.'

'You may be the Prince of Wales,' the man answered, 'for all I care. You'll get the same treatment as anyone else, in America. But if you're Sir Charles Vandrift,' he went on, examining his books, 'how does it come you've registered as Mr. Peter Porter?'

Charles grew red with embarrassment. The difficulty deepened.

The dispatch-box, always covered with a leather case, bore on its inner lid the name 'Sir Charles Vandrift, K.C.M.G.,' distinctly painted in the orthodox white letters. This was a painful contretemps: he had lost his precious documents; he had given a false name; and he had rendered the manager supremely careless whether or not he recovered his stolen property. Indeed, seeing he had registered as Porter, and now 'claimed' as Vandrift, the manager hinted in pretty plain language he very much doubted whether there had ever been a dispatch-box in the matter at all, or whether, if there were one, it had ever contained any valuable documents.

We spent a wretched morning. Charles went round the hotel, questioning everybody as to whether they had seen his dispatch-box. Most of the visitors resented the question as a personal imputation; one fiery Virginian, indeed, wanted to settle the point then and there with a six-shooter. Charles telegraphed to New York to prevent the shares and coupons from being negotiated; but his brokers telegraphed back that, though they had stopped the numbers as far as possible, they did so with reluctance, as they were not aware of Sir Charles Vandrift being now in the country. Charles declared he wouldn't leave the hotel till he recovered his property; and for myself, I was inclined to suppose we would have to remain there accordingly for the term of our natural lives and longer.

That night again we spent at the Lakeside Hotel. In the small hours of the morning, as I lay awake and meditated, a thought broke across me. I was so excited by it that I rose and rushed into my brother-in-law's bedroom. 'Charles, Charles!' I exclaimed, 'we have taken too much for granted once more. Perhaps Elihu Quackenboss carried off your dispatch-box!'

'You fool,' Charles answered, in his most unamiable manner (he applies that word to me with increasing frequency); 'is *that* what you've waked me up for? Why, the Quackenbosses left Lake George on Tuesday morning, and I had the dispatch-box in my own hands on Wednesday.'

'We have only their word for it,' I cried. 'Perhaps they stopped on –and walked off with it afterwards!'

'We will inquire to-morrow,' Charles answered. 'But I confess I don't think it was worth waking me up for. I could stake my life on that little woman's integrity.'

We *did* inquire next morning with this curious result: it turned out that, though the Quackenbosses had left the Lakeside Hotel on Tuesday, it was only for the neighbouring Washington House, which they quitted on Wednesday morning, taking the same train for Saratoga which Charles and I had intended to go by. Mrs. Quackenboss carried a small brown paper parcel in her hands in which, under the circumstances, we had little difficulty in recognising Charles's dispatch-box, loosely enveloped.

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Then I knew how it was done. The chambermaid, loitering about the room for a tip, was Mrs. Quackenboss! It needed but an apron to transform her pretty travelling-dress into a chambermaid's costume; and in any of those huge American hotels one chambermaid more or less would pass in the crowd without fear of challenge.

'We will follow them on to Saratoga,' Charles cried. 'Pay the bill at once, Seymour.'

'Certainly,' I answered. 'Will you give me some money?'

Charles clapped his hand to his pockets. 'All, all in the dispatch-box,' he murmured.

That tied us up another day, till we could get some ready cash from our agents in New York; for the manager, already most suspicious at the change of name and the accusation of theft, peremptorily refused to accept Charles's cheque, or anything else, as he phrased it, except 'hard money.' So we lingered on perforce at Lake George in ignoble inaction.

'Of course,' I observed to my brother-in-law that evening, 'Elihu Quackenboss was Colonel Clay.' 'I suppose so,' Charles murmured resignedly. 'Everybody I meet seems to be Colonel Clay nowadays except when I believe they *are*, in which case they turn out to be harmless nobodies. But who would have thought it was he after I pulled his hair out? Or after he persisted in his trick, even when I suspected him which, he told us at Seldon, was against his first principles?'

A light dawned upon me again. But, warned by previous ebullitions, I expressed myself this time with becoming timidity. 'Charles,' I suggested, 'may we not here again have been the slaves of a preconception? We thought Forbes-Gaskell was Colonel Clay for no better reason than because he wore a wig. We thought Elihu Quackenboss wasn't Colonel Clay for no better reason than because he didn't wear one. But how do we know he *ever* wears wigs? Isn't it possible, after all, that those hints he gave us about make-up, when he was Medhurst the detective, were framed on purpose, so as to mislead and deceive us? And isn't it possible what he said of his methods at the Seamew's island that day was similarly designed in order to hoodwink us?'

'That is so obvious, Sey,' my brother-in-law observed, in a most aggrieved tone, 'that I should have thought any secretary worth his salt would have arrived at it instantly.'

I abstained from remarking that Charles himself had not arrived at it even now, until I told him. I thought that to say so would serve no good purpose. So I merely went on: 'Well, it seems to me likely that when he came as Medhurst, with his hair cut short, he was really wearing his own natural crop, in its simplest form and of its native hue. By now it has had time to grow long and bushy. When he was David Granton, no doubt, he clipped it to an intermediate length, trimmed his beard and moustache, and dyed them all red, to a fine Scotch colour. As the Seer, again, he wore his hair much the same as Elihu's; only, to suit the character, more combed and fluffy. As the little curate, he darkened it and plastered it down. As Von Lebenstein, he shaved close, but cultivated his moustache to its utmost dimensions, and dyed it black after the Tyrolese fashion. He need never have had a wig; his own natural hair would throughout have been sufficient, allowing for intervals.'

'You're right, Sey,' my brother-in-law said, growing almost friendly. 'I will do you the justice to admit that's the nearest thing we have yet struck out to an idea for tracking him.'

On the Saturday morning a letter arrived which relieved us a little from our momentary tension. It was from our enemy himself but most different in tone from his previous bantering communications:

'Saratoga, Friday.

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'SIR CHARLES VANDRIFT Herewith I return your dispatch-box, intact, with the papers untouched. As you will readily observe, it has not even been opened.

'You will ask me the reason for this strange conduct. Let me be serious for once, and tell you truthfully.

'White Heather and I (for I will stick to Mr. Wentworth's judicious sobriquet) came over on the Etruria with you, intending, as usual, to make something out of you. We followed you to Lake George for I had "forced a card," after my habitual plan, by inducing you to invite us, with the fixed intention of playing a particular trick upon you. It formed no part of our original game to steal your dispatch-box; that I consider a simple and elementary trick unworthy the skill of a practised operator. We persisted in the preparations for our coup, till you pulled my hair out. Then, to my great surprise, I saw you exhibited a degree of regret and genuine compunction with which, till that moment, I could never have credited you. You thought you had hurt my feelings; and you behaved more like a gentleman than I had previously known you to do. You not only apologised, but you also endeavoured voluntarily to make reparation. That produced an effect upon me. You may not believe it, but I desisted accordingly from the trick I had prepared for you.

'I might also have accepted your offer to go to South Africa, where I could soon have cleared out, having embezzled thousands. But, then, I should have been in a position of trust and responsibility and I am not *quite* rogue enough to rob you under those conditions.

'Whatever else I am, however, I am not a hypocrite. I do not pretend to be anything more than a common swindler. If I return you your papers intact, it is only on the same principle as that of the Australian bushranger, who made a lady *a present* of her own watch because she had sung to him and reminded him of England. In other words, he did not take it from her. In like manner, when I found you had behaved, for once, like a gentleman, contrary to my expectation, I declined to go on with the trick I then meditated. Which does not mean to say I may not hereafter play you some other. *That* will depend upon your future good behaviour.

'Why, then, did I get White Heather to purloin your dispatch-box, with intent to return it? Out of pure lightness of heart? Not so; but in order to let you see I really meant it. If I had gone off with no swag, and then written you this letter, you would not have believed me. You would have thought it was merely another of my failures. But when I have actually got all your papers into my hands, and give them up again of my own free will, you must see that I mean it.

'I will end, as I began, seriously. My trade has not quite crushed out of me all germs or relics of better feeling; and when I see a millionaire behave like a man, I feel ashamed to take advantage of that gleam of manliness.

'Yours, with a tinge of penitence, but still a rogue,

CUTHBERT CLAY.'

The first thing Charles did on receiving this strange communication was to bolt downstairs and inquire for the dispatch-box. It had just arrived by Eagle Express Company. Charles rushed up to our rooms again, opened it feverishly, and counted his documents. When he found them all safe, he turned to me with a hard smile. 'This letter,' he said, with quivering lips, 'I consider still more insulting than all his previous ones.'

But, for myself, I really thought there was a ring of truth about it. Colonel Clay was a rogue, no doubt a most unblushing rogue; but even a rogue, I believe, has his better moments.

And the phrase about the 'position of trust and responsibility' touched Charles to the quick, I suppose, in re the Slump in Cloetedorp Golcondas. Though, to be sure, it was a hit at me as well, over the ten per cent commission.