

The Mexican Seer

The Illustrious Colonel Clay, Episode #1

by Grant Allen, 1848-1899

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My name is Seymour Wilbraham Wentworth. I am brother-in-law and secretary to Sir Charles Vandrift, the South African millionaire and famous financier. Many years ago, when Charlie Vandrift was a small lawyer in Cape Town, I had the (qualified) good fortune to marry his sister. Much later, when the Vandrift estate and farm near Kimberley developed by degrees into the Cloetedorp Golcondas, Limited, my brother-in-law offered me the not unremunerative post of secretary; in which capacity I have ever since been his constant and attached companion.

He is not a man whom any common sharper can take in, is Charles Vandrift. Middle height, square build, firm mouth, keen eyes—the very picture of a sharp

and successful business genius. I have only known one rogue impose upon Sir Charles, and that one rogue, as the Commissary of Police at Nice remarked, would doubtless have imposed upon a syndicate of Vidocq, Robert Houdin, and Cagliostro.

We had run across to the Riviera for a few weeks in the season. Our object being strictly rest and recreation from the arduous duties of financial combination, we did not think it necessary to take our wives out with us. Indeed, Lady Vandrift is absolutely wedded to the joys of London, and does not appreciate the rural delights of the Mediterranean littoral. But Sir Charles and I, though immersed in affairs when at home, both thoroughly enjoy the complete change from the City to the charming vegetation and pellucid air on the terrace at Monte Carlo. We *are* so fond of scenery. That delicious view over the rocks of Monaco, with the Maritime Alps in the rear, and the blue sea in front, not to mention the imposing Casino in the foreground, appeals to me as one of the most beautiful prospects in all Europe. Sir Charles has a sentimental attachment for the place. He finds it restores and freshens him, after the turmoil of London, to win a few hundreds at roulette in the course of an afternoon among the palms and cactuses and pure breezes of Monte Carlo. The country, say I, for a jaded intellect! However, we never on any account actually stop in the Principality itself. Sir Charles thinks Monte Carlo is not a sound address for a financier's letters. He prefers a comfortable hotel on the Promenade des Anglais at Nice, where he recovers health and renovates his nervous system by taking daily excursions along the coast to the Casino.

This particular season we were snugly ensconced at the Hôtel des Anglais. We had capital quarters on the first floor—salon, study, and bedrooms—and found on the spot a most agreeable cosmopolitan society. All Nice, just then, was ringing with talk about a curious impostor, known to his followers as the Great Mexican Seer, and supposed to be gifted with second sight, as well as with endless other supernatural powers. Now, it is a peculiarity of my able brother-in-law's that, when he meets with a quack, he burns to expose him; he is so keen a man of business himself that it gives him, so to speak, a disinterested pleasure to unmask and detect imposture in others. Many ladies at the hotel, some of whom had met and conversed with the Mexican Seer, were constantly telling us strange stories of his doings. He had disclosed to one the present whereabouts of a runaway husband; he had pointed out to another the numbers that would win at roulette next evening; he had shown a third the image on a screen of the man she had for years adored without his knowledge. Of course, Sir Charles didn't believe a word of it; but his curiosity was roused; he wished to see and judge for himself of the wonderful thought-reader.

„What would be his terms, do you think, for a private séance?” he asked of Madame Picardet, the lady to whom the Seer had successfully predicted the winning numbers.

„He does not work for money,” Madame Picardet answered, „but for the good of humanity. I'm sure he would gladly come and exhibit for nothing his miraculous faculties.”

„Nonsense!” Sir Charles answered. „The man must live. I'd pay him five guineas, though, to see him alone. What hotel is he stopping at?”

„The Cosmopolitan, I think,” the lady answered. „Oh no; I remember now, the Westminster.”

Sir Charles turned to me quietly. „Look here, Seymour,” he whispered. „Go round to this fellow’s place immediately after dinner, and offer him five pounds to give a private séance at once in my rooms, without mentioning who I am to him; keep the name quite quiet. Bring him back with you, too, and come straight upstairs with him, so that there may be no collusion. We’ll see just how much the fellow can tell us.”

I went as directed. I found the Seer a very remarkable and interesting person. He stood about Sir Charles’s own height, but was slimmer and straighter, with an aquiline nose, strangely piercing eyes, very large black pupils, and a finely-chiselled close-shaven face, like the bust of Antinous in our hall in Mayfair. What gave him his most characteristic touch, however, was his odd head of hair, curly and wavy like Paderewski’s, standing out in a halo round his high white forehead and his delicate profile. I could see at a glance why he succeeded so well in impressing women; he had the look of a poet, a singer, a prophet.

„I have come round,” I said, „to ask whether you will consent to give a séance at once in a friend’s rooms; and my principal wishes me to add that he is prepared to pay five pounds as the price of the entertainment.”

Señor Antonio Herrera—that was what he called himself—bowed to me with impressive Spanish politeness. His dusky olive cheeks were wrinkled with a smile of gentle contempt as he answered gravely—

„I do not sell my gifts; I bestow them freely. If your friend—your anonymous friend—desires to behold the cosmic wonders that are wrought through my hands, I am glad to show them to him. Fortunately, as often happens when it is necessary to convince and confound a sceptic (for that your friend is a sceptic I feel instinctively), I chance to have no engagements at all this evening.” He ran his hand through his fine, long hair reflectively. „Yes, I go,” he continued, as if addressing some unknown presence that hovered about the ceiling; „I go; come with me!” Then he put on his broad sombrero, with its crimson ribbon, wrapped a cloak round his shoulders, lighted a cigarette, and strode forth by my side towards the Hôtel des Anglais.

He talked little by the way, and that little in curt sentences. He seemed buried in deep thought; indeed, when we reached the door and I turned in, he walked a step or two farther on, as if not noticing to what place I had brought him. Then he drew himself up short, and gazed around him for a moment. „Ha, the Anglais,” he said—and I may mention in passing that his English, in spite of a slight southern accent, was idiomatic and excellent. „It is here, then; it is here!” He was addressing once more the unseen presence.

I smiled to think that these childish devices were intended to deceive Sir Charles Vandrift. Not quite the sort of man (as the City of London knows) to be taken in by hocus-pocus. And all this, I saw, was the cheapest and most commonplace conjurer’s patter.

We went upstairs to our rooms. Charles had gathered together a few friends to watch the performance. The Seer entered, wrapt in thought. He was in evening dress, but a red sash round his waist gave a touch of picturesqueness and a dash of colour. He paused for a moment in the middle of the salon, without letting his

eyes rest on anybody or anything. Then he walked straight up to Charles, and held out his dark hand.

„Good-evening,” he said. „You are the host. My soul’s sight tells me so.”

„Good shot,” Sir Charles answered. „These fellows have to be quick-witted, you know, Mrs. Mackenzie, or they’d never get on at it.”

The Seer gazed about him, and smiled blankly at a person or two whose faces he seemed to recognise from a previous existence. Then Charles began to ask him a few simple questions, not about himself, but about me, just to test him. He answered most of them with surprising correctness. „His name? His name begins with an S, I think—You call him Seymour.” He paused long between each clause, as if the facts were revealed to him slowly. „Seymour—Wilbraham—Earl of Strafford. No, not Earl of Strafford! Seymour Wilbraham Wentworth. There seems to be some connection in somebody’s mind now present between Wentworth and Strafford. I am not English. I do not know what it means. But they are somehow the same name, Wentworth and Strafford.”

He gazed around, apparently for confirmation. A lady came to his rescue.

„Wentworth was the surname of the great Earl of Strafford,” she murmured gently; “and I was wondering, as you spoke, whether Mr. Wentworth might possibly be descended from him.”

„He is,” the Seer replied instantly, with a flash of those dark eyes. And I thought this curious; for though my father always maintained the reality of the relationship, there was one link wanting to complete the pedigree. He could not make sure that the Hon. Thomas Wilbraham Wentworth was the father of Jonathan Wentworth, the Bristol horse-dealer, from whom we are descended.

„Where was I born?” Sir Charles interrupted, coming suddenly to his own case.

The Seer clapped his two hands to his forehead and held it between them, as if to prevent it from bursting. “Africa,” he said slowly, as the facts narrowed down, so to speak. „South Africa; Cape of Good Hope; Jansenville; De Witt Street. 1840.”

„By Jove, he’s correct,” Sir Charles muttered. „He seems really to do it. Still, he may have found me out. He may have known where he was coming.”

„I never gave a hint,” I answered; „till he reached the door, he didn’t even know to what hotel I was piloting him.”

The Seer stroked his chin softly. His eye appeared to me to have a furtive gleam in it. „Would you like me to tell you the number of a bank-note inclosed in an envelope?” he asked casually.

„Go out of the room,” Sir Charles said, „while I pass it round the company.”

Señor Herrera disappeared. Sir Charles passed it round cautiously, holding it all the time in his own hand, but letting his guests see the number. Then he placed it in an envelope and gummed it down firmly.

The Seer returned. His keen eyes swept the company with a comprehensive glance. He shook his shaggy mane. Then he took the envelope in his hands and gazed at it fixedly. “AF, 73549,” he answered, in a slow tone. “A Bank of England note for fifty pounds—exchanged at the Casino for gold won yesterday at Monte Carlo.”

„I see how he did that,” Sir Charles said triumphantly. „He must have changed it there himself; and then I changed it back again. In point of fact, I remember seeing a fellow with long hair loafing about. Still, it’s capital conjuring.”

„He can see through matter,” one of the ladies interposed. It was Madame Picardet. „He can see through a box.” She drew a little gold vinaigrette, such as our grandmothers used, from her dress-pocket. „What is in this?” she inquired, holding it up to him.

Señor Herrera gazed through it. „Three gold coins,” he replied, knitting his brows with the effort of seeing into the box: „one, an American five dollars; one, a French ten-franc piece; one, twenty marks, German, of the old Emperor William.”

She opened the box and passed it round. Sir Charles smiled a quiet smile.

„Confederacy!” he muttered, half to himself. „Confederacy!”

The Seer turned to him with a sullen air. „You want a better sign?” he said, in a very impressive voice. „A sign that will convince you! Very well: you have a letter in your left waistcoat pocket—a crumpled-up letter. Do you wish me to read it out? I will, if you desire it.”

It may seem to those who know Sir Charles incredible, but, I am bound to admit, my brother-in-law coloured. What that letter contained I cannot say; he only answered, very testily and evasively, „No, thank you; I won’t trouble you. The exhibition you have already given us of your skill in this kind more than amply suffices.” And his fingers strayed nervously to his waistcoat pocket, as if he was half afraid, even then, Señor Herrera would read it.

I fancied, too, he glanced somewhat anxiously towards Madame Picardet.

The Seer bowed courteously. „Your will, señor, is law,” he said. „I make it a principle, though I can see through all things, invariably to respect the secrecies and sanctities. If it were not so, I might dissolve society. For which of us is there who could bear the whole truth being told about him?” He gazed around the room. An unpleasant thrill supervened. Most of us felt this uncanny Spanish American knew really too much. And some of us were engaged in financial operations.

„For example,” the Seer continued blandly, „I happened a few weeks ago to travel down here from Paris by train with a very intelligent man, a company promoter. He had in his bag some documents—some confidential documents”; he glanced at Sir Charles. „You know the kind of thing, my dear sir: reports from experts—from mining engineers. You may have seen some such; marked *strictly private*.”

„They form an element in high finance,” Sir Charles admitted coldly.

„Pre-cisely,” the Seer murmured, his accent for a moment less Spanish than before. „And, as they were marked *strictly private*, I respect, of course, the seal of confidence. That’s all I wish to say. I hold it a duty, being intrusted with such powers, not to use them in a manner which may annoy or incommode my fellow-creatures.”

„Your feeling does you honour,” Sir Charles answered, with some acerbity. Then he whispered in my ear: „Confounded clever scoundrel, Sey; rather wish we hadn’t brought him here.”

Señor Herrera seemed intuitively to divine this wish, for he interposed, in a lighter and gayer tone—

„I will now show you a different and more interesting embodiment of occult power, for which we shall need a somewhat subdued arrangement of surrounding lights. Would you mind, señor host—for I have purposely abstained from reading your name on the brain of any one present—would you mind my turning down

this lamp just a little? ... So! That will do. Now, this one; and this one. Exactly! that's right." He poured a few grains of powder out of a packet into a saucer. "Next, a match, if you please. Thank you!" It burnt with a strange green light. He drew from his pocket a card, and produced a little ink-bottle. „Have you a pen?" he asked.

I instantly brought one. He handed it to Sir Charles. „Oblige me," he said, „by writing your name there." And he indicated a place in the centre of the card, which had an embossed edge, with a small middle square of a different colour.

Sir Charles has a natural disinclination to signing his name without knowing why. „What do you want with it?" he asked. (A millionaire's signature has so many uses.)

„I want you to put the card in an envelope," the Seer replied, „and then to burn it. After that, I shall show you your own name written in letters of blood on my arm, in your own handwriting."

Sir Charles took the pen. If the signature was to be burned as soon as finished, he didn't mind giving it. He wrote his name in his usual firm clear style—the writing of a man who knows his worth and is not afraid of drawing a cheque for five thousand.

„Look at it long," the Seer said, from the other side of the room. He had not watched him write it.

Sir Charles stared at it fixedly. The Seer was really beginning to produce an impression.

„Now, put it in that envelope," the Seer exclaimed.

Sir Charles, like a lamb, placed it as directed.

The Seer strode forward. „Give me the envelope," he said. He took it in his hand, walked over towards the fireplace, and solemnly burnt it. „See—it crumbles into ashes," he cried. Then he came back to the middle of the room, close to the green light, rolled up his sleeve, and held his arm before Sir Charles. There, in blood-red letters, my brother-in-law read the name, *Charles Vandrift*, in his own handwriting!

„I see how that's done," Sir Charles murmured, drawing back. „It's a clever delusion; but still, I see through it. It's like that ghost-book. Your ink was deep green; your light was green; you made me look at it long; and then I saw the same thing written on the skin of your arm in complementary colours."

„You think so?" the Seer replied, with a curious curl of the lip.

„I'm sure of it," Sir Charles answered.

Quick as lightning the Seer again rolled up his sleeve. „That's your name," he cried, in a very clear voice, „but not your whole name. What do you say, then, to my right? Is this one also a complementary colour?" He held his other arm out. There, in sea-green letters, I read the name, *Charles O'Sullivan Vandrift*. It is my brother-in-law's full baptismal designation; but he has dropped the O'Sullivan for many years past, and, to say the truth, doesn't like it. He is a little bit ashamed of his mother's family.

Charles glanced at it hurriedly. „Quite right," he said, „quite right!" But his voice was hollow. I could guess he didn't care to continue the séance. He could see through the man, of course; but it was clear the fellow knew too much about us to be entirely pleasant.

„Turn up the lights,” I said, and a servant turned them. „Shall I say coffee and benedictine?” I whispered to Vandrift.

„By all means,” he answered. „Anything to keep this fellow from further impertinences! And, I say, don’t you think you’d better suggest at the same time that the men should smoke? Even these ladies are not above a cigarette—some of them.”

There was a sigh of relief. The lights burned brightly. The Seer for the moment retired from business, so to speak. He accepted a partaga with a very good grace, sipped his coffee in a corner, and chatted to the lady who had suggested Strafford with marked politeness. He was a polished gentleman.

Next morning, in the hall of the hotel, I saw Madame Picardet again, in a neat tailor-made travelling dress, evidently bound for the railway-station.

„What, off, Madame Picardet?” I cried.

She smiled, and held out her prettily-gloved hand. „Yes, I’m off,” she answered archly. „Florence, or Rome, or somewhere. I’ve drained Nice dry—like a sucked orange. Got all the fun I can out of it. Now I’m away again to my beloved Italy.”

But it struck me as odd that, if Italy was her game, she went by the omnibus which takes down to the train de luxe for Paris. However, a man of the world accepts what a lady tells him, no matter how improbable; and I confess, for ten days or so, I thought no more about her, or the Seer either.

At the end of that time our fortnightly pass-book came in from the bank in London. It is part of my duty, as the millionaire’s secretary, to make up this book once a fortnight, and to compare the cancelled cheques with Sir Charles’s counterfoils. On this particular occasion I happened to observe what I can only describe as a very grave discrepancy—in fact, a discrepancy of 5000 pounds. On the wrong side, too. Sir Charles was debited with 5000 pounds more than the total amount that was shown on the counterfoils.

I examined the book with care. The source of the error was obvious. It lay in a cheque to Self or Bearer, for 5000 pounds, signed by Sir Charles, and evidently paid across the counter in London, as it bore on its face no stamp or indication of any other office.

I called in my brother-in-law from the salon to the study. „Look here, Charles,” I said, „there’s a cheque in the book which you haven’t entered.” And I handed it to him without comment, for I thought it might have been drawn to settle some little loss on the turf or at cards, or to make up some other affair he didn’t desire to mention to me. These things will happen.

He looked at it and stared hard. Then he pursed up his mouth and gave a long low „*Whew!*” At last he turned it over and remarked, „I say, Sey, my boy, we’ve just been done jolly well brown, haven’t we?”

I glanced at the cheque. „How do you mean?” I inquired.

„Why, the Seer,” he replied, still staring at it ruefully. „I don’t mind the five thou., but to think the fellow should have gammoned the pair of us like that—ignominious, I call it!”

„How do you know it’s the Seer?” I asked.

„Look at the green ink,” he answered. „Besides, I recollect the very shape of the last flourish. I flourished a bit like that in the excitement of the moment, which I don't always do with my regular signature.”

„He's done us,” I answered, recognising it. „But how the dickens did he manage to transfer it to the cheque? This looks like your own handwriting, Charles, not a clever forgery.”

„It is,” he said. „I admit it—I can't deny it. Only fancy his bamboozling me when I was most on my guard! I wasn't to be taken in by any of his silly occult tricks and catch-words; but it never occurred to me he was going to victimise me financially in this way. I expected attempts at a loan or an extortion; but to collar my signature to a blank cheque—atrocious!”

„How did he manage it?” I asked.

„I haven't the faintest conception. I only know those are the words I wrote. I could swear to them anywhere.”

„Then you can't protest the cheque?”

„Unfortunately, no; it's my own true signature.”

We went that afternoon without delay to see the Chief Commissary of Police at the office. He was a gentlemanly Frenchman, much less formal and red-tapey than usual, and he spoke excellent English with an American accent, having acted, in fact, as a detective in New York for about ten years in his early manhood.

„I guess,” he said slowly, after hearing our story, „you've been victimised right here by Colonel Clay, gentlemen.”

„Who is Colonel Clay?” Sir Charles asked.

„That's just what I want to know,” the Commissary answered, in his curious American-French-English. „He is a Colonel, because he occasionally gives himself a commission; he is called Colonel Clay, because he appears to possess an india-rubber face, and he can mould it like clay in the hands of the potter. Real name, unknown. Nationality, equally French and English. Address, usually Europe. Profession, former maker of wax figures to the Musée Grévin. Age, what he chooses. Employs his knowledge to mould his own nose and cheeks, with wax additions, to the character he desires to personate. Aquiline this time, you say. Hein! Anything like these photographs?”

He rummaged in his desk and handed us two.

„Not in the least,” Sir Charles answered. „Except, perhaps, as to the neck, everything here is quite unlike him.”

„Then that's the Colonel!” the Commissary answered, with decision, rubbing his hands in glee. „Look here,” and he took out a pencil and rapidly sketched the outline of one of the two faces—that of a bland-looking young man, with no expression worth mentioning. „There's the Colonel in his simple disguise. Very good. Now watch me: figure to yourself that he adds here a tiny patch of wax to his nose—an aquiline bridge—just so; well, you have him right there; and the chin, ah, one touch: now, for hair, a wig: for complexion, nothing easier: that's the profile of your rascal, isn't it?”

„Exactly,” we both murmured. By two curves of the pencil, and a shock of false hair, the face was transmuted.

„He had very large eyes, with very big pupils, though,” I objected, looking close; „and the man in the photograph here has them small and boiled-fishy.”

„That’s so,” the Commissary answered. „A drop of belladonna expands—and produces the Seer; five grains of opium contract—and give a dead-alive, stupidly-innocent appearance. Well, you leave this affair to me, gentlemen. I’ll see the fun out. I don’t say I’ll catch him for you; nobody ever yet has caught Colonel Clay; but I’ll explain how he did the trick; and that ought to be consolation enough to a man of your means for a trifle of five thousand!”

„You are not the conventional French office-holder, M. le Commissaire,” I ventured to interpose.

„You bet!” the Commissary replied, and drew himself up like a captain of infantry. „Messieurs,” he continued, in French, with the utmost dignity, „I shall devote the resources of this office to tracing out the crime, and, if possible, to effectuating the arrest of the culpable.”

We telegraphed to London, of course, and we wrote to the bank, with a full description of the suspected person. But I need hardly add that nothing came of it.

Three days later the Commissary called at our hotel. “Well, gentlemen,” he said, “I am glad to say I have discovered everything!”

„What? Arrested the Seer?” Sir Charles cried.

The Commissary drew back, almost horrified at the suggestion.

„Arrested Colonel Clay?” he exclaimed. „Mais, monsieur, we are only human! Arrested him? No, not quite. But tracked out how he did it. That is already much—to unravel Colonel Clay, gentlemen!”

„Well, what do you make of it?” Sir Charles asked, crestfallen.

The Commissary sat down and gloated over his discovery. It was clear a well-planned crime amused him vastly. „In the first place, monsieur,” he said, “disabuse your mind of the idea that when monsieur your secretary went out to fetch Señor Herrera that night, Señor Herrera didn’t know to whose rooms he was coming. Quite otherwise, in point of fact. I do not doubt myself that Señor Herrera, or Colonel Clay (call him which you like), came to Nice this winter for no other purpose than just to rob you.”

„But I sent for him,” my brother-in-law interposed.

„Yes; he meant you to send for him. He forced a card, so to speak. If he couldn’t do that I guess he would be a pretty poor conjurer. He had a lady of his own—his wife, let us say, or his sister—stopping here at this hotel; a certain Madame Picardet. Through her he induced several ladies of your circle to attend his séances. She and they spoke to you about him, and aroused your curiosity. You may bet your bottom dollar that when he came to this room he came ready primed and prepared with endless facts about both of you.”

„What fools we have been, Sey,” my brother-in-law exclaimed. „I see it all now. That designing woman sent round before dinner to say I wanted to meet him; and by the time you got there he was ready for bamboozling me.”

„That’s so,” the Commissary answered. „He had your name ready painted on both his arms; and he had made other preparations of still greater importance.”

„You mean the cheque. Well, how did he get it?”

The Commissary opened the door. “Come in,” he said. And a young man entered whom we recognised at once as the chief clerk in the Foreign Department of the Crédit Marseillais, the principal bank all along the Riviera.

„State what you know of this cheque,” the Commissary said, showing it to him, for we had handed it over to the police as a piece of evidence.

„About four weeks since—” the clerk began.

„Say ten days before your séance,” the Commissary interposed.

„A gentleman with very long hair and an aquiline nose, dark, strange, and handsome, called in at my department and asked if I could tell him the name of Sir Charles Vandrift’s London banker. He said he had a sum to pay in to your credit, and asked if we would forward it for him. I told him it was irregular for us to receive the money, as you had no account with us, but that your London bankers were Darby, Drummond, and Rothenberg, Limited.”

„Quite right,” Sir Charles murmured.

„Two days later a lady, Madame Picardet, who was a customer of ours, brought in a good cheque for three hundred pounds, signed by a first-rate name, and asked us to pay it in on her behalf to Darby, Drummond, and Rothenberg’s, and to open a London account with them for her. We did so, and received in reply a cheque-book.”

„From which this cheque was taken, as I learn from the number, by telegram from London,” the Commissary put in. „Also, that on the same day on which your cheque was cashed, Madame Picardet, in London, withdrew her balance.”

„But how did the fellow get me to sign the cheque?” Sir Charles cried. „How did he manage the card trick?”

The Commissary produced a similar card from his pocket. „Was that the sort of thing?” he asked.

„Precisely! A facsimile.”

„I thought so. Well, our Colonel, I find, bought a packet of such cards, intended for admission to a religious function, at a shop in the Quai Massena. He cut out the centre, and, see here—” The Commissary turned it over, and showed a piece of paper pasted neatly over the back; this he tore off, and there, concealed behind it, lay a folded cheque, with only the place where the signature should be written showing through on the face which the Seer had presented to us. „I call that a neat trick,” the Commissary remarked, with professional enjoyment of a really good deception.

„But he burnt the envelope before my eyes,” Sir Charles exclaimed.

„Pooh!” the Commissary answered. „What would he be worth as a conjurer, anyway, if he couldn’t substitute one envelope for another between the table and the fireplace without your noticing it? And Colonel Clay, you must remember, is a prince among conjurers.”

„Well, it’s a comfort to know we’ve identified our man, and the woman who was with him,” Sir Charles said, with a slight sigh of relief. „The next thing will be, of course, you’ll follow them up on these clues in England and arrest them?”

The Commissary shrugged his shoulders. „Arrest them!” he exclaimed, much amused. „Ah, monsieur, but you are sanguine! No officer of justice has ever succeeded in arresting le Colonel Caoutchouc, as we call him in French. He is as slippery as an eel, that man. He wriggles through our fingers. Suppose even we caught him, what could we prove? I ask you. Nobody who has seen him once can ever swear to him again in his next impersonation. He is impayable, this good

Colonel. On the day when I arrest him, I assure you, monsieur, I shall consider myself the smartest police-officer in Europe.”

„Well, I shall catch him yet,” Sir Charles answered, and relapsed into silence.

