## THE SCHEMES OF COUNEL CLAY

BEING EPISODES IN THE LIFE OF A MASTER ROGUE

BY GRANTALLEN

## OLD MASTER

NUMBER III

IKE most South Africans, Sir | careful?-whip. He finds the management Charles Vandrift is anything but sedentary. He hates siting down. He must always "trek." He cannot live without moving about freely. Six weeks in Mayfair at a time is as much as he can stand. Then he must run away incontinently for rest, and change to Scotland, Homburg, Monte Carlo, Biarritz. "I won't be a limpet on the rock," he says. Thus it came to pass that in the early Autumn we found aurselves stopping at the Metropole at the carlo as the carlo are stopping at the Metropole at the carlo as the carlo are stopping at the Metropole at the carlo as that in the early Autumn We to the Metropole at ourselves stopping at the Metropole at oblige; and the walls of Castle Seldon, our place in Ross-shire, are almost covered to the guard was actually entered now with seaders and with Organic place in too ting his horn to let passersnice little family party-Sir Charles and Amelia, myself and Isabel, with the suite as usual.

On the first Sunday morning after our arrival we strolled out, Charles and I-I regret to say during the hours allotted for divine service-on to the King's road, to get a whiff of fresh air, and a glimpse of the waves that were churning the channel. The two ladies (with their bonnets) had gone to church; but Sir Charles had risen late, fatigued from the week's toil, while I myself was suffering from a matutinal headsche, which I attributed to the close air of the billiard-room overnight, combined, perhaps, with the insidious effect of a brand of soda water to which I was little accustomed; I had used it to dilute my evening whisky. We were to meet our wives afterward at the church parade—an institution to which I believe both Amelia and Isabel attach even greater importance than to the sermon which precedes it.

the sermon which precedes it.

We sat down on a glass seat. Charles gazed inquiringly up and down the King's road, on the lookout for a boy with Sunday papers. At last one passed. "Observer," my brother-in-law called out laconically.

"Ain't got none," the boy answered, brandishing his bundle in our faces. "Ave a Referee or a Pink 'Un?"

Charles, however, is not a Refereeder.

"Ave a Referee or a Pink "Un?"

Charles, however, is not a Refereeder, while as to the Pink "Un, he considers it unsuitable for public perusal on Sunday morning. It may be read indoors, but in the open ale its blush betrays it. So he shook his head and muttered: "If you pass an Observer send him on here at once to me."

you pass an Observer send him on here at once to me."

A polite stranger who sat close to us turned round with a pleasant smile. "Would you allow me to offer you one?" he said, drawing a copy from his pocket. "I fancy I bought the last. There's a run on them today, you see, Important news this morning from the Transvaal."

Charles raised his evelyows and ac-

Transvaal."

Charles raised his eyebrows and accepted it, as I thought, just a trifis grumpily. So to remove the false impression his surliness might produce on so benevolent a mind, I entered into conversation with the polite stranger. He was a man of middle age and medium height, with a cultivated air and a pair of gold pince-nez; his eyes were sharp, his voice refined. He dropped into talk before long about distinguished people just then in Brighton. It was clear at once that he was hand in glove with many of the very best kind. We compared notes as to Nice, Rome, Florence, Cairo. Our new acquaintance had scores of friends in common with the it seemed; indeed our circles so us, it seemed; indeed, our circles so largely coincided that I wondered we had never happened till then to knock up against one another.

"And Sir Charles Vandrift, the great African millionaire," he said at last, "do you know anything about him? told he's at present down here at waved my hand toward the person

in question. This is Sir Charles Vandrift."

answered, with proprietary pride; "and I am his brother-in-law, Mr. Seymour Wentworth.

"Oh, indeed!" the stranger answered, with a curious air of drawing in his horns. I wondered whether he had just been going to pretend he knew Str Charles, or whether perchance he was on the point of saying something highuncomplimentary, and was glad to By this time, however, Charles laid

down the paper and chimed into our conversation. I could see at once from his mollified tone that the news from the Transvaal was favorable to his operations in Cloetedorp Golcondas. He was therefore in a friendly and affable temper. His whole manner changed at once. He grew polite in return to the polite stranger. Besides, we knew the man moved in the best society; he had acquaintances whom Amelia was most anxious to secure for her "at homes" in Mayfair—young Faith, the novelist, and Sir Richard Montrose, the great Arctic traveler. As for the painters, it was clear that he was sworn friends with the whole less of them. with the whole lot of them. He dined with academicians and gave weekly breakfasts to the members of the in-Now Amelia is particularly desirous that her salon should not be considered too exclusively financial and colitical in character. With a solid basis of M. P.'s and millionaires she loves a delicate undercurrent of literature, art, and the musical glasses. Ou new acquaintance was extremely com-municative. "Knows his place in so-ciety. Sey." Sir Charles said to me afterward, "and is therefore not afraid of talking freely, as so many people are who have doubts about their posi-We exchanged cards before rose. Our new friend's named turned out to be Dr. Edward Polperro. I inquired "In practice here?" though his garb belied it.

"Oh, no! medical," he answered. "I am an LL.D., don't you know. I interest myself in art, and buy to some extent for the National Gallery." The very man for Amelia's "at Sir Charles snapped at him

"I've brought my four-inhand down here with me," he said, in his best friendly manner, "and we think of tooling over tomorrow to Lewes. If you'd care to take a seat I'm sure Lady Vandrift would be charmed to see you.

"You're very kind," the doctor said, n so casual an introduction. I'm sure I shall be delighted." We start from the Metropole at

10:30," Charles went on. T shall be there. Good morning. And with a satisfied smile he rose and left us, nodding.

We returned to the lawn, to Amelia and Isabel. Our new friend passed us once or twice. Charles stopped him and introduced him. He was walking with two ladies, most elegantly dressed in rather peculiar Amelia was taken at first sight by his manner. "One could see glance," she said, "he was a per son of culture and of real distinction. wonder whether he could bring the P. R. A. to my Parliamentary 'at home'

on Wednesday fortnight?"

of two leaders and two wheelers fills his hands for the moment, both literally and figuratively, leaving very little time for general conversation. Lady Belleisle of Beacon bloomed beside him on the box (her bloom is perennial, and applied by her maid). Dr. Polyarra convents the

pity a fine work of art like that, once brought into the country, should be allowed to go out of it. Some patriotic patron of the fine arts ought to buy it for this own house, or else munificently present it to the nation.

next week with a capital L, and Sir Charles was so taken aback that he felt

Dr. Polperro, in spite of his too pro-Dr. Polperro, in spite of his too pronouncedly artistic talk, proved on closer
view a most agreeable companion. He
diversified his art cleverly with anecdotes and scandals; he told us exactly
which famous painters had married their
cooks, and which had only married their
models; and otherwise showed himself
a most diverting talker. Among other
things, however, he happened to mention
once that he had recently discovered a
genuine Rembrandt—a quite undoubted
Rembrandt, which had remained for
years in the keeping of a certain obscure
Dutch family. It had always been allowed to be a masterpiece of the painter, lowed to be a masterplece of the painter, but it had seldom been seen for the last half century save by a few intimate acquaintances. It was a portrait of one Maria Vanrenen of Haarlem, and he had bought it of her descendants at Gouda,

In Holland.

I saw Charles prick up his ears, though he took no open notice. This Maria Vanrenen, as it happened, was a remote collateral ancestress of the Vandrifts before they emigrated to the Cape in 1780; and the existence of the portrait, though not its whereabouts, was well known in the family. Isabel had often mentioned it. If it was to be had at anything like a reasonable price it would be a splendid thing for the boys (Sir Charles, I ought to say, has two sons at Eton) to possess an undoubted portrait of an ancessess an undoubted portrait of an ancesses. sess an undoubted portrait of an ances

sess an undoubted portrait of an ancestress by Rembrandt.

Dr. Polperro talked a great deal after that about this valuable find. He had tried to sell it at first to the National gallery, but, though the directors admired the work immensely, and admitted its genuineness, they regretted that the funds at their disposal this year did not permit them to accourse so important. on Wednesday fortnight.

Next day at 10:30 we started on our drive. Our team has been considered the best in Sussex. Charles is an excellent, though somewhat anxious or, might I say better, somewhat to was in treaty at present with the Louvre and with Berlin. Still, it was a to be careful."

chardsons. This result was first arrived at by a singular accident. Sir Charles wanted a leader—for his coach, you understand—and told an artistic friend so. The artistic friend brought him a Leader next week with a capital L, and Sir Charles was so taken aback that he felt. Charles was so taken aback that he felt driving. I gathered from his doing so ashamed to confess the error. So he was turned unawares into a patron of painting.

When we arrived at Lewis we put up

when we arrived at Lewis we put up our horses at the inn, and Charles or-dered a lunch on his wonted scale of princely magnificence. Meanwhile we wandered, two and two, about the town and castie. I annexed Lady Belleisle, who is at least amusing. Charles drew me aside before starting. "Look here, Sey," he said, "we must be very careful. me aside before starting. "Look here, Sey," he said, "we must be very careful. This man Polperro is a chance acquaintance. There is nothing an astute rogue can take one in over more easily than an old master. If the Rembrandt is genuine I ought to have it; if it really represents Maria Vanrenen, it's a duty I owe to the boys to buy it. But I've been done twice lately, and I won't be done a third time. We must so to work earticuste." me. We must go to work cautiously "You are right," I answered. "N

"If this man's an imposter," Charles went on—"and in spite of what he says about the National gallery and so forth, we knew nothing of him—the story he told is just the sort of one such a felmore seers and curates!" low would trump up in a moment to de-ceive me. He could easily learn who I was-I'm a well-known figure; he knew I was in Brighton, and he may have been sitting on that glass seat on Sun-day on purpose to entrap me."
"He introduced your name," I said, "and the moment he found out who I

was he plunged into talk with me."
"Yes," Charles continued. "He may have learned about the portrait of Maria Vanrenen, which my grandmoth-er always said was preserved at Gouda; and indeed, I myself have often mentioned it; as you doubtless remem-ber. If so, what more natural, say, for a rogue than to begin talking about the portrait in that innocent way to Amelia? If he wants a Rembrandt, I believe they can be turned out to order to any amount in Birmingham. The moral of all which is, it behooves us

booked him at once for her "At Home" on Wednesday week, and he promised to introduce her to several artistic and

Iterary celebrities.
That evening, however, about 7:30, Charles and I strolled out together on the King's road for a blow before din-We dine at 8. The air was de very smart and exclusive, with a big bow window. There, in evening dress, lights burning and blind up, sat our friend, Dr. Polperro, with a lady facing him, young, graceful and pretty. A bottle of champagne stood open before hi.m He was helping himself plentifully to hothouse grapes, and full of good humor. It was clear he and the lady were occupied in the intense en-joyment of some capital joke, for they looked queerly at one another, and ourst now and again into merry peals

I drew back. So did Sir Charles. One idea 'passed at once through both our minds. I murmured "Colonel Clay!" He answered, "And Madame Picardet!"
They were not in the least like the
Rev. Richard and Mrs. Brabazon. But that clinched the matter. Nor did I see a sign of the aquiline nose or the Mex-lcan seer. Still, I had learnt by then to discount appearances. If these were or discount appearances. If these were indeed the famous sharper and his wile or accomplice, we must be very careful. We were forewarned this time. Supposing he had the audacity to try a third trick of the sort upon us we had him under our thumbs. Only, we must take steps to prevent his dexterously alipping through our fingers.

through our fingers. "He can wriggle like an eil," said the Commissary at Nice. We both recalled those words, and laid our plans deep to

prevent the man's wriggling away from us on this third occasion.

"I tell you what it is, Sey," my brother-in-law said, with impressive slowness.

"This time we must deliberately lay ourselves out to be swindled. We must propose of our own accord to buy the plants. pose of our own accord to buy the pic-ture, making him guarantee it in writing as a genuine Rembrandi, and taking care to tie him down by most stringent conditions. But we must seem at the same

and knew all about everybody. Amelia avoid precipitancy, but we'll avoid delay, booked him at once for her "At Home" too. We must hold our hands off till too. We must hold our names on the he's actually accepted and pocketed the money; and then we must nab him instantly, and walk him off to the local Bow stantly, and walk him off campaign. street. That's my plan of campaign. Meanwhile, we should appear all trustful innocence and confiding gullelessness." In pursuance of this cell-laid scheme

we called next day on Dr. Polperro at his hotel, and were introduced to his wife, a dainty little woman, in whom we affected not to recognize that arch Mad-ame Picardet or that simple "White Heather," The doctor talked charmingly (as usual) about art—what a well-informed rascal he was, to be sure!-- and Sir Charles expressed some interest in the supposed Rembrandt. Our new friend was delighted; we could see by his wellsuppressed eagerness of tone that he knew us at once for probable purchasers. He would run up to town next day, he said, and bring down the portrait. And, in effect, when Charles and I took our wonted places in the Pullman next morning, on our way to the half-yearly meating at Cloetedorp Golcondas, there was our doctor, leaning back in his armchair as if the car belonged to him. Charles

gave me an expressive look. "Does it in style," he whispered,
"doesn't he? Takes it out of my five
thousand, or discounts the amount he
means to chouse me of with his spurlous

Arrived in town, we went to work at once. We set a private detective from Marvillier's to watch our friend, and from him we learned that the so-called doctor dropped in for a picture that day at a dealer's in the West End (I suppress the name, having a judicious fear of the law of libel ever before my eyes), a dealer who was known to be mixed up before then in several shady or disreputable transactions. Though, to be sure, my experience has been that picture dealers are-picture dealers. Horses rank first in my mind as begetters and producers of unscrupulous agents, but pictures ran them a very good second. Anyhow, we them a very good second. Anyhow, we found out that our distinguished art critic picked up his Rembrandt at this dealer's shop and came down with it in his care the same night to Brighton.

over, he showed us by documentary evidence that the real portrait of Maria Van-renen, had, as a matter of fact, been brought to England five years before and sold to Sir J. H. Tomlinson, the well known connoisseur, for £8000. Dr. Pol-perro's picture was, therefore, at best either a replica by Rembrandt, or else, more probably, a copy by a pupil, or most likely of all, a mere modern forgery. We were thus well prepared to fasten

our charge of criminal conspiracy upon the self-styled doctor. But in order to make assurance still more certain, we threw out vague hints to him that the portrait of Miss Maria Vanrenen might really be elsewhere, and even suggested in his hearing that it might not improbably have got into the hands of that omnivorous collector, Sir J. H. Tomlin-son. But the vender was proof against son. But the vender was proof against all such attempts to decry his goods. He had the effrontery to brush away the documentary evidence and to declare that Sir J. H. Tominson (one of the most learned and astute picture buyers in Eng-land) had been smartly imposed upon by a needy Dutch artist with a talent for forgery. The real Maria Vanrenen, he declared and swore, was the one he of-fered us. "Success has turned the man's head," Charles said to me, well pleased. "He thinks we will swallow any obvious lie he chooses to paim off upon us. But the bucket has come once too often to the well. This time we checkmate him." It was a mixed metaphor, I admit, but Sir Charless' tropes are not always entirely superior to criticism. So we pretended to believe our man and

accepted his assurances. Next came the question of price. This was warmly debated, for form's sake only. Sir J. H. Tomlinson had paid £5000 for his genuine Maria. The doctor demanded £10,000 for his spurious one. There was really no reason why we should highly and discussed. reason why we should higgle and dispute for Charles meant merely to give his check for the sum and then to arrest the fellow; but still, we thought it best for the avoidance of suspicion to make a show of resistance, and we at last beat him down to 9000 guineas. For this amount he was to give us a written warranty that the work he sold us was a genuine Rem-brandt, that it represented Maria Van-In order not to act precipitately, and so renen of Haarlem, and that he had bought

from that good lady's descendents at Gouda, in Holland.

It was capitally done. We arranged the thing to perfection. We had a constable in waiting in our rooms at the Metropole, and we settled that Dr. Polperro was to call at the hotel at a certain fixed hour to sign the warranty and receive his money. A regular agreement on sound stamped paper was drawn out between us. At the appointed time the "party of the first part" came, having already given us over possession of the portrait. Charles pity a fine work of art like that, once brought into the country, should be allowed to go out of it. Some patriotic patron of the fine arts ought to buy it for this own house, or else munificently present it to the nation.

All the time Charles said nothing. But I could feel him cogliating. He even looked behind him once, near a difficult corner (while the guard was actually engaged in tooting his horn to let passers clothes, detectives from the police sta-tion, stood as men servants and watched the windows. We feared lest had already done at Nice and in Paris. The moment he had pocketed his monye with a smile of triumph, I advanced to him rapidly. I had in my posses-sion a pair of handcuffs. Before he knew , what was happening I had slipped them on his wrists and secured them dexterously, while the Constable stepped forward.

"We have got you this time!" I cried. "We know who you are. Dr. Polperro. You are Colonel Clay, alias Senor An-tonio Herrera, alias the Rev. Richard Peploe Brabazon."

Pepice Brabazon.

I never saw any man so astonished
in my life! He was utterly flabbergasted. Charles thought he must have
expected to get clear away at once. and that this prompt action on our part had taken the fellow so much by surprise as to simply unman him. He gazed about him as if he hardly real-lzed what was happening.

"Are these two raving maniacs," he asked, at last, "or what do they mean by this nonsensical gibberish about Anonio Herrera?"

The Constable laid his hand on the

risoner's shoulder.

"It's all right, my man," he said.

"We've got warrants out against you, i arrest you, Edward Polperro, allas the Rev. Blehard Peploe Brabazon, on a charge of obtaining money under false pretenses from Sir Charles Vandrift, K. C. M. G., M. P., on his sworn beformation now here subscribed to." For Charles had had the thing drawn out in readiness be-

Our prisoner drew himself up. tere, officer," i.e said, in an offended one, "there'se some mistake here in this matter. I have never given an allas at any time in my life. How do you know this is Sir Charles Vandrift? It may be a case of bullying personation. My be-lief is, though, they're a pair of escaped matics."
"Wo'll see about that tomorrow." the

"We'll see about that tomorrow." the constable said, collaring him. "At present you've got to go off with me quietly to the station, where these gentlemen will enter up the charge against you."

They carried him off protesting charles and I signed the charge sheet, and the officer locked him up to await his examination next day before the magistrate. We were half afraid even now the fellow would manage somehow to get out on ball and give us the slip in spite of everything; and, indeed, he protested in on ball and give us the slip in spite of everything; and, indeed, he protested in the most violent manner against the the most violent manner against the treatment to which we were subjecting "a gentleman in his position." But Charles took care to tell the police it was all right; that he was a dangerous and peculiarly slippery criminal, and that on ne account must they let him go on any pretext whatever till he had been properly examined before the magistrates.

We learned at the hotel that night, curiously enough, that there really was a curiously enough, that there really was a Dr. Polperro, a distinguished art critic, whose name, we didn't doubt, our impos-

whose name, we don't doubt, our impos-tor had been assuming.

Next morning when we reached the court an inspector met us with a very long face. "Look here, gentlemen," he said, "I'm afraid you've committed a very serious blunder. You've made a precious bad mess of it. You've got yourselves into a scrape, and, what's worse, you've got us into one also. You were a deal too smart with your sworn information. We've made inquiries about this gentlewe've made inquiries about this gentle-man, and we find the account he gives of himself is perfectly correct. His name is Polperro: he's a well-known art critis and collector of pictures, employed abroad by the National Gallery. He was formerly an official in the South Kensington Mu-seum, and he's a C. B. and LL. D., very highly respected. You've made a sad mis-take, that's where it is, and you'll prob-ably have to answer a charge of false ably have to answer a charge of false imprisonment, in which I'm afraid you have also involved our own department."

Charles gasped with horror. "You havn't let him out," he cried, "on those absurd representations? You haven't let him out," he was a surface and the surf

him slip through your hands as you did
that murderer fellow?"
"Let him slip through our hands?" the
inspector cried. "I only wish he would.
There's no chance of that, unfortunately.
He's in the court there this moment,
breathing out fire and slaughter against
your both, and ward have to rester the you both; and we're here to protect you if he should happen to fall upon you. He's been locked up all night on your mistaken affidavits, and naturally mistaken affidavits, and, naturally enough, he's mad with anger," "If you haven't let him go, I'm satis-fled," Charles answered. 'He's a fox for

unning. Where is he? Let me see him." We went into the court. There we saw our prisoner conversing amicably in the most decided way with the magistrate (who, it seems was a personal friend of his), and Charles at once went up and spoke to them. Dr. Polperro turned round and glared at him through him pince-nex.
"The only possible explanation of this

person's extraordinary and incredible conduct," he said, "is that he must be mad-and his secretary equally so. He made my acquaintance, unasked, on a glass seat on the King's Road; invited me to go on his coach to Lewes; volunteered to buy a valuable picture of me, and then at the last moment, unaccountably gave me in charge on this silly and preposter ous trumped-up accusation. I demand a summons for false imprisonment." Suddenly it began to dawn upon us that

Suddenly it began to dawn upon us that the tables were turned. By degrees it came out that we had made a mistake. Dr. Polperro was really the person he represented himself to be, and had been always. His picture, we found out, was the real Maria Vanrenen, and a genuing Rembrandt, which he had merely dethe roal Maria vancenen, and a genuine Rembrandt, which he had merely deposited for cleaning and restoring at the auspicious dealer's. Sir. J. H. Tomlinson had been imposed upon and cheated by a cunning Dutchman; his picture, though also an undoubted Rembrandt, was not the Maria, and was an inferior specimen lu bad preservation. The authority we had consulted turned out to the ority we had consulted turned out to be an ignorant, self-sufficient quack. The Maria, however, was valued by other ex-perts at no more than 5000 or 6000 guineas. Charles wanted to cry off his bargain, but Dr. Polperro naturally would not hear of it. The agreement was a legally binding instrument, and what passed in Charles' mind at the moment had nothing to do with the written contract. Our adversary only consented to forego the action for false imprisonment on condition that Charles inserted a printed apology in the Times, and paid him £500 compensation for damage to character. So that was the end of our well planned attempt to airest the swindler. Not quite the end, however, for, of course, after this, the whole affair got by degrees into the papers. Dr. Polperro,

(Concluded on Page 11.)