"Then, what clue could you have about who he was?"
"Only as much as we can deduce."
"From his hat?"
"Precisely."
"But you are joking. What can you gather from this old battered felt?"

"Here is my lens. You known my methods. What can you gather yourself about the man who has worn this hat?"

I took the tattered object in my hands and turned it over. It was an ordinary black hat of the usual round shape, hard and very worn. The lining had been of red silk but was discoloured. There was no maker's name, but the initials "H.B." were scrawled upon one side. It was pierced in the brim for a hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. It was cracked, very dusty and spotted in several places, although someone had tried to hide the discoloured patches by smearing them with ink.

"I can see nothing," I said, handing it back to my friend.

"On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see."

"Then tell me what you can tell from this hat?"

He picked it up and gazed at it. "It is obvious that the man was very clever. Also that he was fairly rich within the last three years, although he has now become poor. He had foresight, but he has now become poor. He had foresight, but has
less now than he once had. This points to a moral step backwards, which taken with the fall in his fortunes, seems to show that some evil influence, probably drink, was at work on him. There is also the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him."

"My dear Holmes~"

"He has still some self-respect", continued Holmes. "He is a man who leads a sedentary life, goes out little, is not in good physical condition, is middle-aged, has grizzled hair which he has had cut within the last few days. He puts lime cream on his hair. These are the most obvious facts. Also, it is improbable that he has gas laid on in his house."

"You are certainly joking, Holmes," I said. I must be very stupid, but I am quite unable to follow you. For example, how did you guess that the man was clever?"

In reply, Holmes put the hat on his head. It came right over the forehead and settled on the bridge of his nose.

"A man with so large a brain must have something in it," he said. "The fall in his fortunes, then?"

"This hat is three years old," said Holmes. "These flat brims became fashionable then. It is a hat of the very best quality. Look at the band of ribbed silk and the excellent lining. If this man could afford to buy so expensive a hat three years ago and has had no hat since, then he has certainly gone down in the world."
"Well, that is clear enough. But how about the foresight and the moral step backwards?"

Holmes laughed. "Here is the foresight," he said, putting his finger on the little disc and loop of the hat-securer. "They are never sold on hats. If this man ordered one, it is a sign of a certain amount of foresight, since he went out of his way to take this precaution against the wind. But we see that he has broken the elastic and has not troubled to replace it. It is obvious that he has less foresight now than he once had. On the other hand, he has tried to hide some of the stains on the felt, by covering them with ink. This is a sign that he has not quite lost his self-respect."

"The further points, that he is middle-aged, that his hair is grizzled, that it has been recently cut and that he uses lime cream, are all to be gathered from a close examination of the lower part of the lining. The lens shows a number of hair ends, clean cut by the scissors of the barber. There is a distinct smell of lime cream. This dust is not the dust of the street, but the fluffy brown dust of the house, showing that it has been hung up indoors most of the time. The marks of moisture on the inside show that the wearer perspired freely and could hardly be in good physical condition."

"But his wife -- you said she no longer loved him."

"This hat has not been brushed for weeks."

"No, he was bringing home the goose as a present for his wife. Remember the card on the bird's leg."

"You have an answer to everything. But how do you know there was no gas in his house?"
Holmes replied that the number of tallow stains on the hat made him guess that the man often walked upstairs with a candle in one hand and his hat in the other.

"Well, it is very clever," I said, laughing. "But as there has been no crime, it seems rather a waste of energy."