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You Cannot Afford to Miss One of These!

The Treasure of Franchard.

By ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

(CONTINUED.)

Many and many were the talks they had together, and health and moderation proved the subject of the doctor's discourses. To these he lovingly returned. "I had you," he would say, "by the green pastures. My system, my beliefs, my maxims, my habits, are resumed in one phrase—to avoid excess. Blessed nature, healthy, temperate nature, abhors and exterminates excess. Human law, in this matter, imitates at a great distance her provisions; and we must strive to supplement the efforts of the law. Yes, boy, we must be a law to ourselves and for our neighbors—like arrants—armed, emphatic, tyrannous law. If you see a scrupulous human ruin snuffing, dash him from his nest. The judge, though 'twere an admission of disease, is less offensive to me than either the doctor or the priest. Above all, the doctor—the doctor—the purport and garb of his pharmacopoeia! Pure air—from the neighborhood of a pine-forest, the most salutary and medicinal of all, adulterated wine, and the reflection of an unsophisticated spirit in the presence of the works of nature—these are the best medical appliances and the best religious comforts. Devote yourself to these. Hark! there are the bells of Bourton (the wind is in the north, it will be fair). How clear and airy is the sound! The nerves are harmonized and quieted; the mind attuned to silence; and observe how easily and regularly beats the heart! Your unlightened doctor would do nothing in these situations; and yet you yourself perceive they are a part of health. Did you remember your opinions this morning? Good. Chinchona also is a work of nature; it is, after all, only the bark of a tree which we might gather for our medicine; and the most efficacious and pleasant that surround our path! The river runs by the garden end, our bath, our cooling, and with a little wine most wholesome. The district is notorious for its salubrity; rheumatism is the only great complaint, and myself have never had a touch of it. I tell you—and my opinion is based upon the oldest, clearest processes of research—if, if you desired to leave this home of pleasures, it would be the duty, it would be the privilege of our best friend to prevent us with a pistol bullet.

One beautiful June day they sat upon the hill outside the village. The river, as blue as heaven, shone here and there among the foliage. The indefatigable bird, and the cuckoo, flickered about Greta's church tower. A healthy wind blew from over the forest, and the sound of innumerable millions of millions of green leaves was abroad in the air, and filled the ear with something between whisper and speech and singing. It seemed as if every blade of grass must hide a cello; and the whole rang merrily with their luscious tones. Dr. Despres saw all the colors of the rainbow in a moment; the stable universe appeared to be about capering with him. "Cause," said he, affecting deliberation after an obvious pause—"because I have formed my life for my present opinion. It is the good for men of my years to be violently displeased from their habits." The doctor breathed hard, and fell into taciturnity for the afternoon. As for the boy, he was delighted with the revelation of his doubts; even wondering that he had not foreseen the obvious and concrete nature of his faith in the doctor was a stout piece of goods. Despres was inclined to be a shot in the eye; but he was a doctor, and he would not. He would not remark on the warmth of his feelings; Anastasia, with inflaming cheeks and a loose, flustered smile, dabbed upon all sorts of topics, and he feebly and indifferently replied. But the adopted stable boy did not permit himself to entertain a doubt that savored of ingratitude. It is quite true that a man may be a second father to you, and yet take too much to drink; but his best nature as ever sit in us accept each other with words, the adopted stable boy bowed himself with silence.

CHAPTER V. THE BLUE VASE. THE DOCTOR'S TRAVEL. The doctor's carriage was a two-wheeled gig with a hood, a kind of vehicle in much favor among country doctors. On how many roads has not one seen it, a great way off between the poplars—in how many village streets, tied to a gate post! This sort of chariot is affected, particularly at the trot, by a kind of pitching movement to and fro across the axle, which well entitles it to the style of a Noddy. The hood describes a considerable arc against the landscape, with a solemnly abrupt effect on the contemplative pedestrian. To ride in such a carriage cannot be numbered among the things that appertain to glory; but I have no doubt it may be useful in liver complaint. Hence, perhaps, its wide popularity among physicians. One morning, Jean-Marie led forth the doctor's noddy, opened the gate and mounted to the driving seat. The doctor followed, arrayed from top to toe in spotless linen, armed with an immense flesh-colored umbrella, and girl with a botanical case on a ball; and the equipage drove off smartly in a breeze of its own provocation. They were bound for Franchard, to collect plants, with an eye to the "Comparative Pharmacopoeia." rattling on the open roads, and they came to the borders of the forest and struck into an unfrequented track; the noddy was softly over the sand, with an accompaniment of snapping twigs. There was a great, green, softly murmuring cloud of congenial foliage overhead. In the arched

of the forest the air retained the freshness of the night. The athletic bearing of the trees, each carrying its leafy mountain, pleased the mind like many statues and the lines of the trunk led the eye admiringly upward to where the extreme leaves sparkled in a patch of sun. Squalls heaped in the air. It was a proper spot for a devotee of the goddess Hygieia. "Have you been to Franchard, Jean-Marie?" inquired the doctor. "I fancy not." "Never," replied the boy. "A rain man, my good doctor," continued Despres, adopting his expository voice; "the ruin of a hermitage and chapel. History tells us much of Franchard; how the recluse was often slain by robbers; how he lived on a most insufficient diet; how he was expected to pass his days in prayer. A letter is preserved, addressed to one of these solitaires by the superior of his order, full of admirable hygienic advice; bidding him go from his book to praying, and so back again, for variety's sake, and when he was weary of both to stroll about his garden and observe the honey bees. It is to this day my own system. You must often have remarked me leaving the 'Pharmacopoeia'—often even in the middle of a phrase—to come forth in the fresh air. I repeat the words of that letter from my heart; he was a man of thought on the most important subjects, but I cannot imagine you to have excelled in your profession," said the doctor, admiring the boy's gravity. "Do you ever laugh?" "No, sir," replied the doctor. "I laugh often. I am very fond of jokes." "Singular being!" said Despres. "But I diverge to perceive a thousand ways that I grow old, Franchard was at length destroyed in the English wars, the same that leveled Franchard. But—here is the point—the hermit for there were already more than one had foreseen the danger and carefully concealed the sacrificial vessels. These vessels were of monstrous value, Jean-Marie—monstrous value—precious, we may say; especially works of exquisite material. And now, mark me, they have never been found. The rights of Franchard, these vessels were digging hard by the ruins. Suddenly—look!—the spade hit upon an obstacle, which, they represented more to another; imagine how their hearts bounded, how their color came and went. It was a coffer, and a coffer, Jean-Marie, is the place of buried treasure! They tore it open like famished beasts. Alas! it was not the treasure; only some priestly robes, which, at the touch of the setting all fell upon themselves and instantly melted into dust. The perception of these good-fellows turned cold upon them, Jean-Marie, it will plague my reputation, if there was anything like a cutting wind, one or other had a guess as to his trouble." "I should like to have seen them turning into dust," said Despres. "Oh, yes, I should have cared so greatly." "You have no imagination," cried the doctor. "What?" demanded the doctor. "Dwell on the idea—a good treasure lying in the earth for centuries; the material for a giddy, rapturous, and aching of the head; dresses and exquisite pictures unseen; the sweetest galloping horse not stirring a hoof, the finest of horses, with their heads in the faculty of smiles, not smiling; cards, dice, opera singing, orchestras, castles, beautiful parks and the place of sharp rapier, and all other things, all lying unborn in a coffin—and the stupid trees growing up in the sunlight, with their heads in the earth, and one franc!" "It is only money," replied Jean-Marie. "I would do harm." "Oh, come!" cried Despres, "that is philosophy; it is not a matter of the eye, it is not just now, and besides, it is not only money as you call it; there are works of art in the world; Anastasia, with inflaming cheeks like a child. You were very correct, quoting my words out of all logical connection, like a paragon." "And at any rate, we have nothing to do with it; returned the boy submissively. They struck the Route Ronde at that moment; and the sudden change to the rattling caseway combined, with the doctor's irritation, to keep him silent. The noddy jiggled forward, as if it were looking on silently, as if it had something on its mind. The Quadrilateral was passed; then came Franchard. The doctor, leaning on the little solitary inn and went forth strolling. The gorge was dyed deep with heather; the rocks and the hills had fallen in the sun. A great humming of bees about the flowers disposed Jean-Marie to sleep, and he set down a quantity of heather, while the doctor went briskly to and fro, with quick turns, cutting his trips. The boy's head had fallen a little forward, his eyes were closed, his fingers had fallen lax about his knees when a sudden cry called him to his feet. It was a strange sound, thin and brief; it fell dead, and silence returned as though it had never been interrupted. He had not recognized the doctor's voice; but there was no one else in all the valley, it was plain that the doctor had given utterance to the sound. He looked right and left, and there was Despres, standing in a niche between two bowlers, and looking round at his adopted son with a countenance as white as paper. "A viper!" cried Jean-Marie, running toward him. "A viper! You are bitten!" The doctor came down heavily out of the cliff, and advanced in silence to meet the boy, whom he took roughly by the shoulder. "I have found it," he said, with a gasp. "A viper!" said Jean-Marie. Despres had a fit of unnatural gaiety, which the rocks took up and mimicked. "A viper!" he repeated emphatically. "Well—yes—a viper. And here," he added, suddenly, showing his right hand, which he had hitherto concealed behind his back—"there is one of the bulls."

"Jean-Marie saw a dirty platter, coated with earth." "That?" said he. "It is a platter." "It is a coach and horses," cried the doctor. "Boy," he continued, growing warmer, "I plucked away a great deal of man from between those bowlers, and disclosed a crevice; and when I looked in, what do you suppose I saw? I saw a house in Paris with a court and garden, I saw my wife sitting with diamonds, I saw myself a deputy, I saw you—well, I—I saw your future; he condescended rather feebly, 'I have just discovered America,' he added. "But what is it?" asked the boy. "The Treasure of Franchard," cried the doctor; and throwing his brown straw hat upon the ground, he whooped like an Indian and sprang upon Jean-Marie, whom he suffocated with embraces and belted with tears. Then he flung himself down among the heather and once more laughed until the valley rang. But the boy had now an interest of his own;—his interest. No sooner was he released from the doctor's accolade than he ran to the bowlers, seeing into the niche, and, thrusting down, he saw the crevice, drew

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forth, one after another, crusted with the earth of ages, the flagons, candlesticks and patens of the hermitage of Franchard. A basket came last, tightly shut and very heavy.

"Oh, what fun!" he cried. "But when he looked back at the doctor, who had followed close behind and was silently observing the words that fell from his lips, Despres was once more the color of ashes; his lip worked and trembled; a sort of bestial grin possessed him.

"This is childish," he said. "I lose precious time. Back to the inn, harness the trap and bring it to you bank. Run for your life, and remember—not one whisper. I stay here to watch."

Jean-Marie did as he was bid, though not without surprise. The noddy was brought round to the spot indicated, and the two gradually transported the treasure from their place of concealment to the boat below the driving seat. Once it was all stowed the doctor recovered his gaiety.

"I pay my grateful duties to the genius of this dell," he said. "Oh, for a live coal, a better and a jar of country wine! I am in the vein for sacrifice, for a superb libation. Well, and why not? We are at Franchard, English pale ale is to be had—not classical indeed, but excellent. Boy, we shall drink it."

"But I thought it was so unwholesome," said Jean-Marie, "and very bad, besides."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" exclaimed the doctor, gaily. "To the inn!"

And he stepped into the noddy, testing his head with an elastic, youthful air. The horse was turned, and in a few seconds they drew up beside the palls of the inn garden.

"Here, near the stable, so that we may keep an eye upon things."

They tied the horse, and entered the garden, the doctor singing, now in fantastic high notes, now producing deep reverberations from his chest. He took a seat, rapped loudly on the table, assailed the waiter with witticisms; and when the bottle of beer was at length produced, far more champagne with gas than the most delicious champagne, he filled out a long glassful of froth and pushed it over to Jean-Marie. "Drink," he said, "drink deep."

"I would rather not," faltered the boy, true to his training.

"What?" thundered Despres. "I am afraid of it," said Jean-Marie, "my stomach."

"Take it or leave it," interrupted Despres fiercely; "but understand it once for all there is nothing so contemptible as a prejudice."

Here was a new lesson. The boy sat bemused, looking at the glass but not tasting it, while the doctor emptied and refilled his own, as first with cloudy brew, but gradually yielding to the sun, the healthy, prickling beverage and his own predisposition to be happy.

"Once in a way," he said, at last, by way of a concession to the boy's more rigorous attitude, "once in a way, and at so critical a moment, this ale is a nectar for the gods. The habit, indeed, is debasing; wine, the juice of the grape, is the true drink of the Franchards, as I have often had occasion to point out, and I do not know that I can blame you for refusing this outlandish stimulant. You can have some wine and cakes. Is the bottle empty? Well, we will have pity on your glass."

The beer being done, the doctor chafed bitterly while Jean-Marie finished his cakes. "I burn to be gone," he said, looking at his watch. "Good God, how slow you eat! And yet to eat slowly was his own particular prescription, the main secret of longevity!"

His martyrdom, however, reached and ended at last; the pair resumed their places in the buggy, and Despres, leaning luxuriously back, announced his intention of proceeding to Fontainebleau.

"To Fontainebleau?" repeated Jean-Marie. "The doctor was always measured," said the doctor. "On!"

The doctor was driven through the glades of paradise; the air, the light, the shining leaves, the very movements of the golden, seemed to fall in time with his golden meditations; with his head thrown back, he dreamed a series of funny visions, ale and pleasure dancing in his veins. At last he spoke.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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