

BY JULES VERNE.*

I.



WISH! It is the wind, let loose.

Swash! It is the rain, falling in torrents.

This shrieking squall bends down the trees of the Volsinian coast, and hurries on, flinging itself against the sides of the mountains of Crimma. Along the whole length of the littoral are high rocks, gnawed by the billows of the vast Sea of Megalocrida.

Swish! swash!

Down by the harbour nestles the little town of Luktrop; perhaps a hundred houses, with green palings, which defend them indifferently from the wild wind; four or five hilly streets—ravines rather than streets—paved with pebbles and strewn with ashes thrown from the active cones in the background. The volcano is not far distant; it is called the Vauglor. During the day it sends forth sulphurous vapours; at night, from time to time, great outpourings of flame. Like a lighthouse carrying a hundred and fifty kertzets, the Vauglor indicates the port of Luktrop to the coasters, felzans, verliches, and balanzas, whose keels furrow the waters of Megalocrida.

On the other side of the town are ruins

dating from the Crimmarian era. Then a suburb, Arab in appearance, much like a casbah, with white walls, domed roofs, and sun-scorched terraces, which are all rothing but accumulations of square stones thrown together at random. Veritable dice are these, whose numbers will never be effaced by the rust of Time.

Among others we notice the Six-four, a name given to a curious erection, having six openings on one side and four on the other.

A belfry overlooks the town, the square belfry of Saint Philfilena, with bells hung in the thickness of the walls, which sometimes a hurricane will set in motion. That is a bad sign; the people tremble when they hear it.

Such is Luktrop. Then come the scattered habitations in the country, set amid heath and broom, as in Brittany. But this is not Brittany. Is it in France? I do not know. Is it in Europe? I cannot tell. At all events, do not look for Luktrop on any map.

II.

RAT-TAT! A discreet knock is struck upon the narrow door of Six-four, at the left corner of the Rue Messaglière. This is one of the most comfortable houses in Luktrop—if such a word is known there—one of the richest, if gaining some millions of

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fretzers, by hook or by crook, constitutes riches.

The rat-tat is answered by a savage bark, in which is much of lupine howl, as if a wolf should bark. Then a window is opened above the door of Six-four, and an ill-tempered voice says, "Deuce take people who come bothering here!"

A young girl, shivering in the rain wrapped in a thin cloak, asks if Dr. Trifulgas is at home.

"He is, or he is not, according to circumstances."

"I want him to come to my father, who is dying."

"Where is he dying?"

"At Val Karnion, four kertzses from here."

"And his name?"

"Vort Kartif."

"Vort Kartif, the herring-salter?"

"Yes; and if Dr. Trifulgas——"

"Dr. Trifulgas is not at home."

And the window is closed with a slam, while the swishes of the wind and the swashes of the rain mingle in a deafening uproar.

III.

A HARD man, this Dr. Trifulgas, with little compassion, and attending no one unless paid cash in advance. His old Hurzof, a mongrel of bulldog and spaniel, would have had more feeling than he. The house called Six-four admitted no poor, and opened only to the rich. Further, it had a regular tariff: so much for a typhoid fever, so much for a fit, so much for a pericarditis, and for other complaints which doctors invent by the dozen. Now, Vort Kartif, the herring-salter, was a poor man, and of low degree. Why should Dr. Trifulgas have taken any trouble, and on such a night?

"Is it nothing that I should have had to get up?" he murmured, as he went back to bed; "that alone is worth ten fretzers."

Hardly twenty minutes had passed, when the iron hammer was again struck on the door of Six-four.

Much against his inclination the doctor left his bed, and leaned out of his window.

"Who is there?" he cried.

"I am the wife of Vort Kartif."

"The herring-salter of Val Karnion?"

"Yes; and, if you refuse to come, he will die."

"All right; you will be a widow."

"Here are twenty fretzers."

"Twenty fretzers for going to Val Karnion, four kertzses from here! Thank you! Be off with you!"

And the window was closed again. Twenty fretzers! A grand fee! Risk a cold or lumbago for twenty fretzers, especially when to-morrow one has to go to Kiltreno to visit the rich Edzingov, laid up with gout,

which is valued at fifty fretzers the visit! With this agreeable prospect before him, Dr. Trifulgas slept more soundly than before.

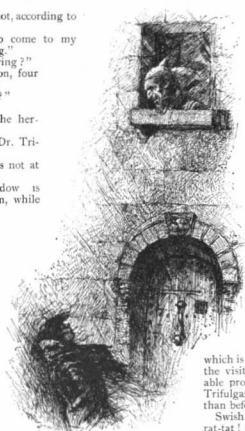
Swish! Swash! and then rat-tat! rat-tat! rat-tat! To the noises of the squall were now added three blows of the knocker, struck by a more decided hand. The doctor slept. He woke, but in a fearful humour. When he opened the window the storm came in like a charge of shot.

"I am come about the herring-salter."

"That wretched herring-salter again!"

"I am his mother."

"May his mother, his wife, and his daughter perish with him!"



"DEUCE TAKE PEOPLE WHO COME BOTHERING HERE!"

"He has had an attack——"

"Let him defend himself."

"Some money has been paid us," continued the old woman, "an instalment on the house sold to the camondeur Doutrup, of the Rue Messaglière. If you do not come, my granddaughter will no longer have a father, my daughter-in-law a husband, myself a son."

It was piteous and terrible to hear the old woman's voice—to know that the wind was freezing the blood in her veins, that the rain was soaking her very bones beneath her thin flesh.

"A fit! why, that would be two hundred fretzers!" replied the heartless Trifulgus.

"We have only a hundred and twenty."

"Good-night," and the window was again closed. But, after due reflection, it appeared that a hundred and twenty fretzers for an hour and a half on the road, plus half an hour of visit, made a fretzer a minute. A small profit, but still, not to be despised.

Instead of going to bed again, the doctor slipped into his coat of valveter, went down in his wading boots, stowed himself away in his great coat of lurtaine, with his *sou-routet* on his head, and his mufflers on his hands. He left his lamp lighted close to his pharmacopœia, open at page 197. Then, pulling the door of Sixty-four, he paused on the threshold. The old woman was there, leaning on her stick, bowed down by her eighty years of misery.

"The hundred and twenty fretzers."

"Here is the money; and may God multiply it for you a hundredfold!"

"God! Who ever saw the colour of His money?"

The doctor whistled for Hurzof, gave him a small lantern to carry, and took the road towards the sea. The old woman followed.

V.

WHAT swishy-swashy weather! The bells of St. Phililena are all swinging by reason of the gale. A bad sign! But Dr. Trifulgus is not superstitious. He believes in nothing—not even in his own science, except for what it brings him in. What weather, and also what a road!

Pebbles and ashes; the pebbles slippery with seaweed, the ashes crackling with iron refuse. No other light than that from Hurzof's lantern, vague and uncertain. At times jets of flame from Vauglor uprear themselves, and in the midst of them appear great comical silhouettes. In truth no one knows what is in the depths of those unfathomable craters. Perhaps spirits of the other world, which volatilise themselves as they come forth.

The doctor and the old woman follow the curves of the little bays of the littoral.

The sea is white with a livid whiteness—a mourning white. It sparkles as it throws off the crests of the surf, which seem like outpourings of glow-worms.

These two persons go on thus as far as the turn in the road between sandhills, where the brooms and the reeds clash together with a shock like that of bayonets.

The dog had drawn near to his master, and seemed to say to him, "Come, come! a hundred and twenty fretzers for the strong box! That is the way to make a fortune. Another rood added to the vineyard; another dish added to our supper; another meat pie for the faithful Hurzof.



"HERE IS THE MONEY."

Let us look after the rich invalids, and look after them—according to their purses!"

At that spot the old woman pauses. With her trembling finger she points out among the shadows a reddish light. There is the house of Vort Kartif, the herring-salter.

"There?" said the doctor.

"Yes," said the old woman.

"Hurrah!" cries the dog Hurzof.

A sudden explosion from the Vauglor, shaken to its very base. A sheaf of lurid flame springs up to the zenith, forcing its way through the clouds. Dr. Trifulgas is hurled to the ground. He swears roundly, picks himself up, and looks about him.

The old woman is no longer there. Has she disappeared through some fissure of the earth, or has she flown away on the wings of the mist? As for the dog, he is there still, standing on his hind legs, his jaws apart, his lantern extinguished.

"Nevertheless, we will go on," mutters Dr. Trifulgas. The honest man has been paid his hundred and twenty fretzers, and he must earn them.

herring-salter's house; the old woman pointed to it with her finger; no mistake is possible. Through the whistling swishes and the dashing swashes, through the uproar of the tempest, Dr. Trifulgas tramps on with hurried steps. As he advances, the house becomes more distinct, being isolated in the midst of the landscape.

It is very remarkable how much it resembles that of Dr. Trifulgas, the Six-four of Luktrop. The same arrangement of windows, the same little arched door. Dr. Trifulgas hastens on as fast as the gale allows him. The door is ajar; he has but to push it. He pushes it, he enters, and the wind roughly closes it behind him. The dog Hurzof, left outside, howls, with intervals of silence.

Strange! One would have said that Dr. Trifulgas had come back to his own house. And yet he has not wandered; he has not even taken a turning. He is at Val Karnion, not at Luktrop. And yet, here is the same low, vaulted passage, the same wooden staircase, with high banisters, worn away by the constant rubbing of hands.

He ascends.

He reaches the landing. Beneath the door a faint light filters through, as in Six-four. Is it a delusion? In the dimness he recognises his room—the yellow sofa, on the right the old chest of pear-wood, on the left the brass-bound strong box, in which he intended to deposit his hundred and twenty fretzers. There is his arm-chair, with the leathern cushions;

there is his table, with its twisted legs, and on it, close to the expiring lamp, his pharmacopœia, open at page 197.

"What is the matter with me?" he murmurs.

What is the matter with him? Fear! His pupils are dilated; his body is contracted, shrivelled; an icy perspiration freezes his skin—every hair stands on end.

But hasten! For want of oil, the lamp



"SHE POINTED OUT A REDDISH LIGHT."

VI.

ONLY a luminous speck at the distance of half a kertz. It is the lamp of the dying—perhaps of the dead. Of course, it is the

expires; and also the dying man! Yes, there is the bed—his own bed—with posts and canopy; as wide as it is long, shut in by heavy curtains. Is it possible that this is the pallet of a wretched herring-salter? With a quaking hand Dr. Trifulgas seizes the curtains; he opens them; he looks in.

The dying man, his head uncovered, is motionless, as if at his last breath. The doctor leans over him—

Ah! what a cry, to which, outside, responds an unearthly howl from the dog.

The dying man is not the herring-salter, Vort Kartif—it is Dr. Trifulgas; it is *he*, whom congestion has attacked—

he himself! Cerebral apoplexy, with sudden accumulation of serosity in the cavities of the brain, with paralysis of the body on the side opposite that of the seat of the lesion.

Yes, it is *he*, who was sent for, and for whom a hundred and twenty fretzers have been paid. *He* who, from hardness of heart, refused to attend the herring-salter—*he* who is dying.

Dr. Trifulgas is like a madman, he knows himself lost. At each moment the symptoms increase. Not only all the functions of the organs slacken, but the lungs and the heart cease to act. And yet he has not quite lost consciousness. What can be done? Bleed! If he hesitates, Dr. Tri-

fulgas is dead. In those days they still bled; and then, as now, medical men cured all those apoplectic patients who were not going to die.

Dr. Trifulgas seizes his case, takes out his lancet, opens a vein in the arm of his double. The blood does not flow. He rubs his chest violently—his own breathing grows slower. He warms his feet with hot bricks—his own grow cold.

Then his double lifts himself, falls back, and draws one last breath. Dr. Trifulgas, notwithstanding all that his science has taught him to do, *dies beneath his own hands.*

VII.

In the morning a corpse was found in the house Six-four—that of Dr.

Trifulgas. They put him in a coffin, and carried him with much pomp to the cemetery of Luktrop, whither he had sent so many others—in a professional manner.

As to old Hurzof, it is said that, to this day, he haunts the country with his lantern alight, and howling like a lost dog. I do not know if that be true; but strange things happen in Volsinia, especially in the neighbourhood of Luktrop.

And, again, I warn you not to hunt for that town

on the map. The best geographers have not yet agreed as to its latitude—nor even as to its longitude.



"DR. TRIFULGAS SEIZES THE CURTAINS."