

## **GIL BLAS AND DR. SANGRADO**

*By Alain Rene Le Sage*

As I was on my way, who should come across me but Dr. Sangrado, whom I had not seen since the day of my master's death. I took the liberty of touching my hat. He knew me in a twinkling.

"Heyday!" said he, with as much warmth as his temperament would allow him, "the very lad I wanted to see; you have never been out of my thought. I have occasion for a clever fellow about me, and pitched upon you as the very thing, if you can read and write."

"Sir," replied I, "if that is all you require, I am your man."

"In that case," rejoined he, "we need look no further. Come home with me; you will be very comfortable; I shall behave to you like a brother. You will have no wages, but everything will be found you. You shall eat and drink according to the true scientific system, and be taught to cure all diseases. In a word, you shall rather be my young Sangrado than my footman."

I closed in with the doctor's proposal, in the hope of becoming an Esculapius under so inspired a master. He carried me home forthwith, to install me in my honorable employment; which honorable employment consisted in writing down the name and residence of the patients who sent for him in his absence. There had indeed been a register for this purpose, kept by an old domestic; but she had not the gift of spelling accurately, and wrote a most perplexing hand. This account I was to keep. It might truly be called a bill of mortality; for my members all went from bad to worse during the short time they continued in this system. I was a sort of bookkeeper for the other world, to take places in the stage, and to see that the first come were the first served. My pen was always in my hand, for Dr. Sangrado had more practise than any physician of his time in Valladolid. He had got

into reputation with the public by a certain professional slang, humored by a medical face, and some extraordinary cures more honored by implicit faith than scrupulous investigation.

He was in no want of patients, nor consequently of property. He did not keep the best house in the world; we lived with some little attention to economy. The usual bill of fare consisted of peas, beans, boiled apples, or cheese. He considered this food as best suited to the human stomach; that is to say, as most amenable to the grinders, whence it was to encounter the process of digestion. Nevertheless, easy as was their passage, he was not for stopping the way with too much of them; and, to be sure, he was in the right. But though he cautioned the maid and me against repletion in respect of solids, it was made up by free permission to drink as much water as we liked. Far from prescribing us any limits in that direction, he would tell us sometimes:

"Drink, my children; health consists in the pliability and moisture of the parts. Drink water by pailfuls; it is a universal dissolvent; water liquefies all the salts. Is the course of the blood a little sluggish? This grand principle sets it forward. Too rapid? Its career is checked."

Our doctor was so orthodox on this head that, though advanced in years, he drank nothing himself but water. He defined old age to be a natural consumption which dries us up and wastes us away; on this principle he deplored the ignorance of those who call wine "old men's milk." He maintained that wine wears them out and corrodes them; and pleaded with all the force of his eloquence against that liquor, fatal in common both to the young and old--that friend with a serpent in its bosom--that pleasure with a dagger under its girdle.

In spite of these fine arguments, at the end of a week I felt an ailment which I was blasphemous enough to saddle on the universal dissolvent and the new-fangled diet. I stated my symptoms to my master, in the

hope that he would relax the rigor of his regimen and qualify my meals with a little wine; but his hostility to that liquor was inflexible.

"If you have not philosophy enough," said he, "for pure water, there are innocent infusions to strengthen the stomach against the nausea of aqueous quaffings. Sage, for example, has a very pretty flavor; and if you wish to heighten it into a debauch, it is only mixing rosemary, wild poppy, and other simples with it--but no compounds!"

In vain did he sing the praise of water, and teach me the secret of composing delicious messes. I was so abstemious that, remarking my moderation, he said:

"In good sooth, Gil Blas, I marvel not that you are no better than you are; you do not drink enough, my friend. Water taken in a small quantity serves only to separate the particles of bile and set them in action; but our practise is to drown them in a copious drench. Fear not, my good lad, lest a superabundance of liquid should either weaken or chill your stomach; far from thy better judgment be that silly fear of unadulterated drink. I will insure you against all consequences; and if my authority will not serve your turn, read Celsus. That oracle of the ancients makes an admirable panegyric on water; in short, he says in plain terms that those who plead an inconstant stomach in favor of wine, publish a libel on their own viscera, and make their constitution a pretense for their sensuality."

As it would have been ungentle in me to run riot on my entrance into the medical career, I pretended thorough conviction; indeed, I really thought there was something in it. I therefore went on drinking water on the authority of Celsus; or, to speak in scientific terms, I began to drown the bile in copious drenches of that unadulterated liquor; and though I felt my self more out of order from day to day, prejudice won the cause against experience. It is evident therefore that I was in the right road to the practise of physic.

Yet I could not always be insensible to the qualms which increased in my frame, to that degree as to determine me on quitting Dr. Sangrado. But he invested me with a new office which changed my tone.

"Hark you, my child," said he to me one day; "I am not one of those hard and ungrateful masters who leave their household to grow gray in service without a suitable reward. I am well pleased with you, I have a regard for you; and without waiting till you have served your time, I will make your fortune. Without more ado, I will initiate you in the healing art, of which I have for so many years been at the head. Other physicians make the science to consist of various unintelligible branches; but I will shorten the road for you, and dispense with the drudgery of studying natural philosophy, pharmacy, botany, and anatomy. Remember, my friend, that bleeding and drinking warm water are the two grand principles--the true secret of curing all the distempers incident to humanity.

"Yes, this marvelous secret which I reveal to you, and which nature, beyond the reach of my colleagues, has not been able to conceal from me, is comprehended in these two articles, namely, bleeding and drenching. Here you have the sum total of my philosophy; you are thoroughly bottomed in medicine, and may raise yourself to the summit of fame on the shoulders of my long experience. You may enter into partnership at once, by keeping the books in the morning and going out to visit patients in the afternoon. While I dose the nobility and clergy, you shall labor in your vocation among the lower orders; and when you have felt your ground a little, I will get you admitted into our body. You are a philosopher, Gil Blas, though you have never graduated; the common herd of them, though they have graduated in due form and order, are likely to run out the length of their tether without knowing their right hand from their left."

I thanked the doctor for having so speedily enabled me to serve as his deputy; and by way of acknowledging his goodness, promised to follow his system to the end of my career, with a magnanimous

indifference about the aphorisms of Hippocrates. But that engagement was not to be taken to the letter. This tender attachment to water went against the grain, and I had a scheme for drinking wine every day snugly among the patients. I left off wearing my own suit a second time to take up one of my master's and look like an experienced practitioner. After which I brought my medical theories into play, leaving those it might concern to look to the event.

I began on an alguazil (constable) in a pleurisy; he was condemned to be bled with the utmost rigor of the law, at the same time that the system was to be replenished copiously with water. Next I made a lodgment in the veins of a gouty pastry-cook, who roared like a lion by reason of gouty spasms. I stood on no more ceremony with his blood than with that of the alguazil, and laid no restriction on his taste for simple liquids. My prescriptions brought me in twelve reales (shillings)--an incident so auspicious in my professional career that I only wished for the plagues of Egypt on all the hale citizens of Valladolid.

I was no sooner at home than Dr. Sangrado came in. I talked to him about the patients I had seen, and paid into his hands eight reales of the twelve I had received for my prescriptions.

"Eight reales!" said he, as he counted them. "Mighty little for two visits! But we must take things as we find them." In the spirit of taking things as he found them, he laid violent hands on six of the coins, giving me the other two. "Here, Gil Blas," continued he, "see what a foundation to build upon. I make over to you the fourth of all you may bring me. You will soon feather your nest, my friend; for, by the blessing of Providence, there will be a great deal of ill-health this year."

I had reason to be content with my dividend; since, having determined to keep back the third part of what I recovered in my rounds, and afterward touching another fourth of the remainder, then half of the

whole, if arithmetic is anything more than a deception, would become my perquisite. This inspired me with new zeal for my profession.

The next day, as soon as I had dined, I resumed my medical paraphernalia and took the field once more. I visited several patients on the list, and treated their several complaints in one invariable routine. Hitherto things had gone well, and no one, thank Heaven, had risen up in rebellion against my prescriptions. But let a physician's cures be as extraordinary as they will, some quack or other is always ready to rip up his reputation.

I was called in to a grocer's son in a dropsy. Whom should I find there before me but a little black-looking physician, by name Dr. Cuchillo, introduced by a relation of the family. I bowed round most profoundly, but dipped lowest to the personage whom I took to have been invited to a consultation with me.

He returned my compliment with a distant air; then, having stared me in the face for a few seconds, "Sir," said he, "I beg pardon for being inquisitive; I thought I was acquainted with all my brethren in Valladolid, but I confess your physiognomy is altogether new. You must have been settled but a short time in town."

I avowed myself a young practitioner, acting as yet under direction of Dr. Sangrado.

"I wish you joy," replied he politely; "you are studying under a great man. You must doubtless have seen a vast deal of sound practise, young as you appear to be."

He spoke this with so easy an assurance that I was at a loss whether he meant it seriously, or was laughing at me. While I was conning over my reply, the grocer, seizing on the opportunity, said:

"Gentlemen, I am persuaded of your both being perfectly competent in your art; have the goodness without ado to take the case in hand, and devise some effectual means for the restoration of my son's health."

Thereupon the little pulse-counter set himself about reviewing the patient's situation; and after having dilated to me on all the symptoms, asked me what I thought the fittest method of treatment.

"I am of opinion," replied I, "that he should be bled once a day, and drink as much warm water as he can swallow."

At these words, our diminutive doctor said to me, with a malicious simper, "And so you think such a course will save the patient?"

"Not a doubt of it," exclaimed I in a confident tone; "it must produce that effect, because it is a certain method of cure for all distempers. Ask Señor Sangrado."

"At that rate," retorted he, "Celsus is altogether in the wrong; for he contends that the readiest way to cure a dropsical subject is to let him almost die of hunger and thirst."

"Oh, as for Celsus," interrupted I, "he is no oracle of mine; he is as fallible as the meanest of us; I often have occasion to bless myself for going contrary to his dogmas."

"I discover by your language," said Cuchillo, "the safe and sure method of practise Dr. Sangrado instils into his pupils! Bleeding and drenching are the extent of his resources. No wonder so many worthy people are cut off under his direction!"

"No defamation!" interrupted I, with some acrimony. "A member of the faculty had better not begin throwing stones. Come, come, my learned doctor, patients can get to the other world without bleeding

and warm water; and I question whether the most deadly of us has ever signed more passports than yourself. If you have any crow to pluck with Señor Sangrado, publish an attack on him; he will answer you, and we shall soon see who will have the best of the battle."

"By all the saints in the calendar," swore he in a transport of passion, "you little know whom you are talking to! I have a tongue and a fist, my friend; and am not afraid of Sangrado, who with all his arrogance and affectation is but a ninny."

The size of the little death-dealer made me hold his anger cheap. I gave him a sharp retort; he sent back as good as I brought, till at last we came to fisticuffs. We had pulled a few handfuls of hair from each other's head before the grocer and his kinsman could part us. When they had brought this about, they feed me for my attendance and retained my antagonist, whom they thought the more skilful of the two.

Another adventure succeeded close on the heels of this. I went to see a huge singer in a fever. As soon as he heard me talk of warm water, he showed himself so adverse to this specific as to fall into a fit of swearing. He abused me in all possible shapes, and threatened to throw me out of the window. I was in a greater hurry to get out of his house than to get in.

I did not choose to see any more patients that day, and repaired to the inn where I had agreed to meet Fabricio. He was there first. As we found ourselves in a tippling humor, we drank hard, and returned to our employers in a pretty pickle; that is to say, so-so in the upper story. Señor Sangrado was not aware of my being drunk, because he took the lively gestures which accompanied the relation of my quarrel with the little doctor for an effect of the agitation not yet subsided after the battle. Besides, he came in for his share in my report; and, feeling himself nettled by the insults of Cuchillo--



"You have done well, Gil Blas," said he, "to defend the character of our practise against this little abortion of the faculty. So he takes upon him to set his face against watery drenches in dropsical cases? An ignorant fellow! I maintain, I do, in my own person, that the use of them may be reconciled to the best theories. Yes, water is a cure for all sorts of dropsies, just as it is good for rheumatisms and the green sickness. It is excellent, too, in those fevers where the effect is at once to parch and to chill; and even miraculous in those disorders ascribed to cold, thin, phlegmatic, and pituitous humors. This opinion may appear strange to young practitioners like Cuchillo, but it is right orthodox in the best and soundest systems; so that if persons of that description were capable of taking a philosophical view, instead of crying me down, they would become my most zealous advocates."

In his rage, he never suspected me of drinking; for to exasperate him still more against the little doctor, I had thrown into my recital some circumstances of my own addition. Yet, engrossed as he was by what I had told him, he could not help taking notice that I drank more water than usual that evening.

In fact, the wine had made me very thirsty. Any one but Sangrado would have distrusted my being so very dry as to swallow down glass after glass; but, as for him, he took it for granted in the simplicity of his heart that I had begun to acquire a relish for aqueous potations.

"Apparently, Gil Blas," said he, with a gracious smile, "you have no longer such a dislike to water. As Heaven is my judge, you quaff it off like nectar! It is no wonder, my friend; I was certain you would before long take a liking to that liquor."

"Sir," replied I, "there is a tide in the affairs of men; with my present lights I would give all the wine in Valladolid for a pint of water."

This answer delighted the doctor, who would not lose so fine an opportunity of expatiating on the excellence of water. He undertook to

ring the changes once more in its praise; not like a hireling pleader, but as an enthusiast in a most worthy cause.

"A thousand times," exclaimed he, "a thousand and a thousand times of greater value, as being more innocent than all our modern taverns, were those baths of ages past, whither the people went, not shamefully to squander their fortunes and expose their lives by swilling themselves with wine, but assembling there for the decent and economical amusement of drinking warm water. It is difficult to admire enough the patriotic forecast of those ancient politicians who established places of public resort where water was dealt out gratis to all comers, and who confined wine to the shops of the apothecaries, that its use might be prohibited save under the direction of physicians. What a stroke of wisdom! It is doubtless to preserve the seeds of that antique frugality, emblematic of the golden age, that persons are found to this day, like you and me, who drink nothing but water, and are persuaded they possess a prevention or a cure for every ailment, provided our warm water has never boiled; for I have observed that water when it is boiled is heavier, and sits less easily on the stomach."

While he was holding forth thus eloquently, I was in danger more than once of splitting my sides with laughing. But I contrived to keep my countenance; nay, more, to chime in with the doctor's theory. I found fault with the use of wine, and pitied mankind for having contracted an untoward relish for so pernicious a beverage. Then, finding my thirst not sufficiently allayed, I filled a large goblet with water, and, after having swilled it like a horse--

"Come, sir," said I to my master, "let us drink plentifully of this beneficial liquor. Let us make those early establishments of dilution you so much regret live again in your house."

He clapped his hands in ecstasy at these words, and preached to me for a whole hour about suffering no liquid but water to pass my lips. To confirm the habit, I promised to drink a large quantity every

evening; and to keep my word with less violence to my private inclinations, I went to bed with a determined purpose of going to the tavern every day.