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Title: Robert Louis Stevenson

a Record, an Estimate, and a Memorial

Author: Alexander H. Japp

Release Date: May 5, 2007 [eBook #590]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ISO-646-US (US-ASCII)

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

A RECORD, AN ESTIMATE, AND A MEMORIAL

BY ALEXANDER H. JAPP, LL.D., F.R.S.E

AUTHOR OF "THOREAU: HIS LIFE AND AIMS"; "MEMOIR OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY";

"DE QUINCEY MEMORIALS," ETC., ETC.

WITH HITHERTO UNPUBLISHED LETTERS FROM R. L. STEVENSON IN FACSIMILIE . .

.

SECOND EDITION

NEW YORK

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

153-157 FIFTH AVENUE

1905

\_Printed in Great Britain\_.

{Robert Louis Stevenson, from a sketch in oils by Sir William B.

Richmond, K.G.B., R.A.: p0.jpg}

Dedicated to

C. A. LICHTENBERG, ESQ.

AND

Mrs LICHTENBERG,

OF VILLA MARGHERITA, TREVISO,

WITH MOST GRATEFUL REGARDS,

ALEXANDER H. JAPP.

19\_th\_ \_December\_ 1904.

PREFACE

A few words may here be allowed me to explain one or two points. First,

about the facsimile of last page of Preface to \_Familiar Studies of Men

and Books\_. Stevenson was in Davos when the greater portion of that work

went through the press. He felt so much the disadvantage of being there

in the circumstances (both himself and his wife ill) that he begged me to

read the proofs of the Preface for him. This illness has record in the

letter from him (pp. 28-29). The printers, of course, had directions to

send the copy and proofs of the Preface to me. Hence I am able now to

give this facsimile.

With regard to the letter at p. 19, of which facsimile is also given,

what Stevenson there meant is not the "three last" of that batch, but the

three last sent to me before--though that was an error on his part--he

only then sent two chapters, making the "eleven chapters now"--sent to me

by post.

Another point on which I might have dwelt and illustrated by many

instances is this, that though Stevenson was fond of hob-nobbing with all

sorts and conditions of men, this desire of wide contact and intercourse

has little show in his novels--the ordinary fibre of commonplace human

beings not receiving much celebration from him there; another case in

which his private bent and sympathies received little illustration in his

novels. But the fact lies implicit in much I have written.

I have to thank many authors for permission to quote extracts I have

used.

ALEXANDER H. JAPP.

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CHAPTER I--INTRODUCTION AND FIRST IMPRESSIONS

My little effort to make Thoreau better known in England had one result

that I am pleased to think of. It brought me into personal association

with R. L. Stevenson, who had written and published in \_The Cornhill

Magazine\_ an essay on Thoreau, in whom he had for some time taken an

interest. He found in Thoreau not only a rare character for originality,

courage, and indefatigable independence, but also a master of style, to

whom, on this account, as much as any, he was inclined to play the part

of the "sedulous ape," as he had acknowledged doing to many others--a

later exercise, perhaps in some ways as fruitful as any that had gone

before. A recent poet, having had some seeds of plants sent to him from

Northern Scotland to the South, celebrated his setting of them beside

those native to the Surrey slope on which he dwelt, with the lines--

"And when the Northern seeds are growing,

Another beauty then bestowing,

We shall be fine, and North to South

Be giving kisses, mouth to mouth."

So the Thoreau influence on Stevenson was as if a tart American

wild-apple had been grafted on an English pippin, and produced a wholly

new kind with the flavours of both; and here wild America and England

kissed each other mouth to mouth.

The direct result was the essay in \_The Cornhill\_, but the indirect

results were many and less easily assessed, as Stevenson himself, as we

shall see, was ever ready to admit. The essay on Thoreau was written in

America, which further, perhaps, bears out my point.

One of the authorities, quoted by Mr Hammerton, in \_Stevensoniana\_ says

of the circumstances in which he found our author, when he was busily

engaged on that bit of work:

"I have visited him in a lonely lodging in California, it was previous

to his happy marriage, and found him submerged in billows of

bed-clothes; about him floated the scattered volumes of a complete set

of Thoreau; he was preparing an essay on that worthy, and he looked at

the moment like a half-drowned man, yet he was not cast down. His

work, an endless task, was better than a straw to him. It was to

become his life-preserver and to prolong his years. I feel convinced

that without it he must have surrendered long since. I found

Stevenson a man of the frailest physique, though most unaccountably

tenacious of life; a man whose pen was indefatigable, whose brain was

never at rest, who, as far as I am able to judge, looked upon

everybody and everything from a supremely intellectual point of view."

{1}

We remember the common belief in Yorkshire and other parts that a man

could not die so long as he could stand up--a belief on which poor

Branwell Bronte was fain to act and to illustrate, but R. L. Stevenson

illustrated it, as this writer shows, in a better, calmer, and healthier

way, despite his lack of health.

On some little points of fact, however, Stevenson was wrong; and I wrote

to the Editor of \_The Spectator\_ a letter, titled, I think, "Thoreau's

Pity and Humour," which he inserted. This brought me a private letter

from Stevenson, who expressed the wish to see me, and have some talk with

me on that and other matters. To this letter I at once replied,

directing to 17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh, saying that, as I was soon to be

in that City, it might be possible for me to see him there. In reply to

this letter Mr Stevenson wrote:

"THE COTTAGE, CASTLETON OF BRAEMAR,

\_Sunday\_, \_August\_ (? \_th\_), 1881.

"MY DEAR SIR,--I should long ago have written to thank you for your

kind and frank letter; but, in my state of health, papers are apt to

get mislaid, and your letter has been vainly hunted for until this

(Sunday) morning.

"I must first say a word as to not quoting your book by name. It was

the consciousness that we disagreed which led me, I daresay, wrongly,

to suppress \_all\_ references throughout the paper. But you may be

certain a proper reference will now be introduced.

"I regret I shall not be able to see you in Edinburgh: one visit to

Edinburgh has already cost me too dear in that invaluable particular,

health; but if it should be at all possible for you to pass by

Braemar, I believe you would find an attentive listener, and I can

offer you a bed, a drive, and necessary food.

"If, however, you should not be able to come thus far, I can promise

two things. First, I shall religiously revise what I have written,

and bring out more clearly the point of view from which I regarded

Thoreau. Second, I shall in the preface record your objection.

"The point of view (and I must ask you not to forget that any such

short paper is essentially only a \_section through\_ a man) was this: I

desired to look at the man through his books. Thus, for instance,

when I mentioned his return to the pencil-making, I did it only in

passing (perhaps I was wrong), because it seemed to me not an

illustration of his principles, but a brave departure from them.

Thousands of such there were I do not doubt; still they might be

hardly to my purpose; though, as you say so, I suppose some of them

would be.

"Our difference as to 'pity,' I suspect, was a logomachy of my making.

No pitiful acts, on his part, would surprise me: I know he would be

more pitiful in practice than most of the whiners; but the spirit of

that practice would still seem to me to be unjustly described by the

word pity.

"When I try to be measured, I find myself usually suspected of a

sneaking unkindness for my subject, but you may be sure, sir, I would

give up most other things to be as good a man as Thoreau. Even my

knowledge of him leads me thus far.

"Should you find yourself able to push on so far--it may even lie on

your way--believe me your visit will be very welcome. The weather is

cruel, but the place is, as I daresay you know, the very \_wale\_ of

Scotland--bar Tummelside.--Yours very sincerely,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

{Manuscript letter by R.L.S.: p6.jpg}

Some delay took place in my leaving London for Scotland, and hence what

seemed a hitch. I wrote mentioning the reason of my delay, and

expressing the fear that I might have to forego the prospect of seeing

him in Braemar, as his circumstances might have altered in the meantime.

In answer came this note, like so many, if not most of his, indeed,

without date:--

THE COTTAGE, CASTLETON OF BRAEMAR.

(\_No date\_.)

"MY DEAR SIR,--I am here as yet a fixture, and beg you to come our

way. Would Tuesday or Wednesday suit you by any chance? We shall

then, I believe, be empty: a thing favourable to talks. You get here

in time for dinner. I stay till near the end of September, unless, as

may very well be, the weather drive me forth.--Yours very sincerely,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

I accordingly went to Braemar, where he and his wife and her son were

staying with his father and mother.

These were red-letter days in my calendar alike on account of pleasant

intercourse with his honoured father and himself. Here is my pen-and-ink

portrait of R. L. Stevenson, thrown down at the time:

Mr Stevenson's is, indeed, a very picturesque and striking figure. Not

so tall probably as he seems at first sight from his extreme thinness,

but the pose and air could not be otherwise described than as

distinguished. Head of fine type, carried well on the shoulders and in

walking with the impression of being a little thrown back; long brown

hair, falling from under a broadish-brimmed Spanish form of soft felt

hat, Rembrandtesque; loose kind of Inverness cape when walking, and

invariable velvet jacket inside the house. You would say at first sight,

wherever you saw him, that he was a man of intellect, artistic and

individual, wholly out of the common. His face is sensitive, full of

expression, though it could not be called strictly beautiful. It is

longish, especially seen in profile, and features a little irregular; the

brow at once high and broad. A hint of vagary, and just a hint in the

expression, is qualified by the eyes, which are set rather far apart from

each other as seems, and with a most wistful, and at the same time

possibly a merry impish expression arising over that, yet frank and

clear, piercing, but at the same time steady, and fall on you with a

gentle radiance and animation as he speaks. Romance, if with an

indescribable \_soupcon\_ of whimsicality, is marked upon him; sometimes he

has the look as of the Ancient Mariner, and could fix you with his

glittering e'e, and he would, as he points his sentences with a movement

of his thin white forefinger, when this is not monopolised with the

almost incessant cigarette. There is a faint suggestion of a

hair-brained sentimental trace on his countenance, but controlled, after

all, by good Scotch sense and shrewdness. In conversation he is very

animated, and likes to ask questions. A favourite and characteristic

attitude with him was to put his foot on a chair or stool and rest his

elbow on his knee, with his chin on his hand; or to sit, or rather to

half sit, half lean, on the corner of a table or desk, one of his legs

swinging freely, and when anything that tickled him was said he would

laugh in the heartiest manner, even at the risk of bringing on his cough,

which at that time was troublesome. Often when he got animated he rose

and walked about as he spoke, as if movement aided thought and

expression. Though he loved Edinburgh, which was full of associations

for him, he had no good word for its east winds, which to him were as

death. Yet he passed one winter as a "Silverado squatter," the story of

which he has inimitably told in the volume titled \_The Silverado

Squatters\_; and he afterwards spent several winters at Davos Platz,

where, as he said to me, he not only breathed good air, but learned to

know with closest intimacy John Addington Symonds, who "though his books

were good, was far finer and more interesting than any of his books." He

needed a good deal of nursery attentions, but his invalidism was never

obtrusively brought before one in any sympathy-seeking way by himself; on

the contrary, a very manly, self-sustaining spirit was evident; and the

amount of work which he managed to turn out even when at his worst was

truly surprising.

His wife, an American lady, is highly cultured, and is herself an author.

In her speech there is just the slightest suggestion of the American

accent, which only made it the more pleasing to my ear. She is heart and

soul devoted to her husband, proud of his achievements, and her delight

is the consciousness of substantially aiding him in his enterprises.

They then had with them a boy of eleven or twelve, Samuel Lloyd Osbourne,

to be much referred to later (a son of Mrs Stevenson by a former

marriage), whose delight was to draw the oddest, but perhaps half

intentional or unintentional caricatures, funny, in some cases, beyond

expression. His room was designated the picture-gallery, and on entering

I could scarce refrain from bursting into laughter, even at the general

effect, and, noticing this, and that I was putting some restraint on

myself out of respect for the host's feelings, Stevenson said to me with

a sly wink and a gentle dig in the ribs, "It's laugh and be thankful

here." On Lloyd's account simple engraving materials, types, and a small

printing-press had been procured; and it was Stevenson's delight to make

funny poems, stories, and morals for the engravings executed, and all

would be duly printed together. Stevenson's thorough enjoyment of the

picture-gallery, and his goodness to Lloyd, becoming himself a very boy

for the nonce, were delightful to witness and in degree to share.

Wherever they were--at Braemar, in Edinburgh, at Davos Platz, or even at

Silverado--the engraving and printing went on. The mention of the

picture-gallery suggests that it was out of his interest in the colour-

drawing and the picture-gallery that his first published story, \_Treasure

Island\_, grew, as we shall see.

I have some copies of the rude printing-press productions, inexpressibly

quaint, grotesque, a kind of literary horse-play, yet with a certain

squint-eyed, sprawling genius in it, and innocent childish Rabelaisian

mirth of a sort. At all events I cannot look at the slight memorials of

that time, which I still possess, without laughing afresh till my eyes

are dewy. Stevenson, as I understood, began \_Treasure Island\_ more to

entertain Lloyd Osbourne than anything else; the chapters being regularly

read to the family circle as they were written, and with scarcely a

purpose beyond. The lad became Stevenson's trusted companion and

collaborator--clearly with a touch of genius.

I have before me as I write some of these funny momentoes of that time,

carefully kept, often looked at. One of them is, "\_The Black Canyon\_;

\_or\_, \_Wild Adventures in the Far West\_: a Tale of Instruction and

Amusement for the Young, by Samuel L. Osbourne, printed by the author;

Davos Platz," with the most remarkable cuts. It would not do some of the

sensationalists anything but good to read it even at this day, since many

points in their art are absurdly caricatured. Another is "\_Moral

Emblems\_; \_a Collection of Cuts and Verses\_, by R. L. Stevenson, author

of the \_Blue Scalper\_, etc., etc. Printers, S. L. Osbourne and Company,

Davos Platz." Here are the lines to a rare piece of grotesque, titled \_A

Peak in Darien\_--

"Broad-gazing on untrodden lands,

See where adventurous Cortez stands,

While in the heavens above his head,

The eagle seeks its daily bread.

How aptly fact to fact replies,

Heroes and eagles, hills and skies.

Ye, who contemn the fatted slave,

Look on this emblem and be brave."

Another, \_The Elephant\_, has these lines--

"See in the print how, moved by whim,

Trumpeting Jumbo, great and grim,

Adjusts his trunk, like a cravat,

To noose that individual's hat;

The Sacred Ibis in the distance,

Joys to observe his bold resistance."

R. L. Stevenson wrote from Davos Platz, in sending me \_The Black Canyon\_:

"Sam sends as a present a work of his own. I hope you feel flattered,

for \_this is simply the first time he has ever given one away\_. I

have to buy my own works, I can tell you."

Later he said, in sending a second:

"I own I have delayed this letter till I could forward the enclosed.

Remembering the night at Braemar, when we visited the picture-gallery,

I hope it may amuse you: you see we do some publishing hereaway."

Delightfully suggestive and highly enjoyable, too, were the meetings in

the little drawing-room after dinner, when the contrasted traits of

father and son came into full play--when R. L. Stevenson would sometimes

draw out a new view by bold, half-paradoxical assertion, or compel

advance on the point from a new quarter by a searching question couched

in the simplest language, or reveal his own latest conviction finally, by

a few sentences as nicely rounded off as though they had been written,

while he rose and gently moved about, as his habit was, in the course of

those more extended remarks. Then a chapter or two of \_The Sea-Cook\_

would be read, with due pronouncement on the main points by one or other

of the family audience.

The reading of the book is one thing. It was quite another thing to hear

Stevenson as he stood reading it aloud, with his hand stretched out

holding the manuscript, and his body gently swaying as a kind of

rhythmical commentary on the story. His fine voice, clear and keen it

some of its tones, had a wonderful power of inflection and variation, and

when he came to stand in the place of Silver you could almost have

imagined you saw the great one-legged John Silver, joyous-eyed, on the

rolling sea. Yes, to read it in print was good, but better yet to hear

Stevenson read it.

CHAPTER II--\_TREASURE ISLAND\_ AND SOME REMINISCENCES

When I left Braemar, I carried with me a considerable portion of the MS.

of \_Treasure Island\_, with an outline of the rest of the story. It

originally bore the odd title of \_The Sea-Cook\_, and, as I have told

before, I showed it to Mr Henderson, the proprietor of the \_Young Folks'

Paper\_, who came to an arrangement with Mr Stevenson, and the story duly

appeared in its pages, as well as the two which succeeded it.

Stevenson himself in his article in \_The Idler\_ for August 1894

(reprinted in \_My First Book\_ volume and in a late volume of the

\_Edinburgh Edition\_) has recalled some of the circumstances connected

with this visit of mine to Braemar, as it bore on the destination of

\_Treasure Island\_:

"And now, who should come dropping in, \_ex machina\_, but Dr Japp, like

the disguised prince, who is to bring down the curtain upon peace and

happiness in the last act; for he carried in his pocket, not a horn or

a talisman, but a publisher, in fact, ready to unearth new writers for

my old friend Mr Henderson's \_Young Folks\_. Even the ruthlessness of

a united family recoiled before the extreme measure of inflicting on

our guest the mutilated members of \_The Sea-Cook\_; at the same time,

we would by no means stop our readings, and accordingly the tale was

begun again at the beginning, and solemnly redelivered for the benefit

of Dr Japp. From that moment on, I have thought highly of his

critical faculty; for when he left us, he carried away the manuscript

in his portmanteau.

"\_Treasure Island\_--it was Mr Henderson who deleted the first title,

\_The Sea-Cook\_--appeared duly in \_Young Folks\_, where it figured in

the ignoble midst without woodcuts, and attracted not the least

attention. I did not care. I liked the tale myself, for much the

same reason as my father liked the beginning: it was my kind of

picturesque. I was not a little proud of John Silver also; and to

this day rather admire that smooth and formidable adventurer. What

was infinitely more exhilarating, I had passed a landmark. I had

finished a tale and written The End upon my manuscript, as I had not

done since \_The Pentland Rising\_, when I was a boy of sixteen, not yet

at college. In truth, it was so by a lucky set of accidents: had not

Dr Japp come on his visit, had not the tale flowed from me with

singular ease, it must have been laid aside, like its predecessors,

and found a circuitous and unlamented way to the fire. Purists may

suggest it would have been better so. I am not of that mind. The

tale seems to have given much pleasure, and it brought (or was the

means of bringing) fire, food, and wine to a deserving family in which

I took an interest. I need scarcely say I mean my own."

He himself gives a goodly list of the predecessors which had found a

circuitous and unlamented way to the fire

"As soon as I was able to write, I became a good friend to the paper-

makers. Reams upon reams must have gone to the making of \_Rathillet\_,

\_The Pentland Rising\_, \_The King's Pardon\_ (otherwise \_Park

Whitehead\_), \_Edward Daven\_, \_A Country Dance\_, and \_A Vendetta in the

West\_. \_Rathillet\_ was attempted before fifteen, \_The Vendetta\_ at

twenty-nine, and the succession of defeats lasted unbroken till I was

thirty-one."

Another thing I carried from Braemar with me which I greatly prize--this

was a copy of \_Christianity confirmed by Jewish and Heathen Testimony\_,

by Mr Stevenson's father, with his autograph signature and many of his

own marginal notes. He had thought deeply on many subjects--theological,

scientific, and social--and had recorded, I am afraid, but the smaller

half of his thoughts and speculations. Several days in the mornings,

before R. L. Stevenson was able to face the somewhat "snell" air of the

hills, I had long walks with the old gentleman, when we also had long

talks on many subjects--the liberalising of the Scottish Church,

educational reform, etc.; and, on one occasion, a statement of his

reason, because of the subscription, for never having become an elder.

That he had in some small measure enjoyed my society, as I certainly had

much enjoyed his, was borne out by a letter which I received from the son

in reply to one I had written, saying that surely his father had never

meant to present me at the last moment on my leaving by coach with that

volume, with his name on it, and with pencilled notes here and there, but

had merely given it me to read and return. In the circumstances I may

perhaps be excused quoting from a letter dated Castleton of Braemar,

September 1881, in illustration of what I have said--

"MY DEAR DR JAPP,--My father has gone, but I think I may take it upon

me to ask you to keep the book. Of all things you could do to endear

yourself to me you have done the best, for, from your letter, you have

taken a fancy to my father.

"I do not know how to thank you for your kind trouble in the matter of

\_The Sea-Cook\_, but I am not unmindful. My health is still poorly,

and I have added intercostal rheumatism--a new attraction, which sewed

me up nearly double for two days, and still gives me 'a list to

starboard'--let us be ever nautical. . . . I do not think with the

start I have, there will be any difficulty in letting Mr Henderson go

ahead whenever he likes. I will write my story up to its legitimate

conclusion, and then we shall be in a position to judge whether a

sequel would be desirable, and I myself would then know better about

its practicability from the story-telling point of view.--Yours very

sincerely, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

A little later came the following:--

"THE COTTAGE, CASTLETON OF BRAEMAR.

(\_No date\_.)

"MY DEAR DR JAPP,--Herewith go nine chapters. I have been a little

seedy; and the two last that I have written seem to me on a false

venue; hence the smallness of the batch. I have now, I hope, in the

three last sent, turned the corner, with no great amount of dulness.

"The map, with all its names, notes, soundings, and things, should

make, I believe, an admirable advertisement for the story. Eh?

"I hope you got a telegram and letter I forwarded after you to

Dinnat.--Believe me, yours very sincerely, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

In the afternoon, if fine and dry, we went walking, and Stevenson would

sometimes tell us stories of his short experience at the Scottish Bar,

and of his first and only brief. I remember him contrasting that with

his experiences as an engineer with Bob Bain, who, as manager, was then

superintending the building of a breakwater. Of that time, too, he told

the choicest stories, and especially of how, against all orders, he

bribed Bob with five shillings to let him go down in the diver's dress.

He gave us a splendid description--finer, I think, than even that in his

\_Memories\_--of his sensations on the sea-bottom, which seems to have

interested him as deeply, and suggested as many strange fancies, as

anything which he ever came across on the surface. But the possibility

of enterprises of this sort ended--Stevenson lost his interest in

engineering.

{Manuscript letter by R.L.S.: p20.jpg}

Stevenson's father had, indeed, been much exercised in his day by

theological questions and difficulties, and though he remained a staunch

adherent of the Established Church of Scotland he knew well and

practically what is meant by the term "accommodation," as it is used by

theologians in reference to creeds and formulas; for he had over and over

again, because of the strict character of the subscription required from

elders of the Scottish Church declined, as I have said, to accept the

office. In a very express sense you could see that he bore the marks of

his past in many ways--a quick, sensitive, in some ways even a fantastic-

minded man, yet with a strange solidity and common-sense amid it all,

just as though ferns with the veritable fairies' seed were to grow out of

a common stone wall. He looked like a man who had not been without

sleepless nights--without troubles, sorrows, and perplexities, and even

yet, had not wholly risen above some of them, or the results of them. His

voice was "low and sweet"--with just a possibility in it of rising to a

shrillish key. A sincere and faithful man, who had walked very demurely

through life, though with a touch of sudden, bright, quiet humour and

fancy, every now and then crossing the grey of his characteristic

pensiveness or melancholy, and drawing effect from it. He was most frank

and genial with me, and I greatly honour his memory. {2}

Thomas Stevenson, with a strange, sad smile, told me how much of a

disappointment, in the first stage, at all events, Louis (he always

called his son Louis at home), had caused him, by failing to follow up

his profession at the Scottish Bar. How much he had looked forward,

after the engineering was abandoned, to his devoting himself to the work

of the Parliament House (as the Hall of the Chief Court is called in

Scotland, from the building having been while yet there was a Scottish

Parliament the place where it sat), though truly one cannot help feeling

how much Stevenson's very air and figure would have been out of keeping

among the bewigged, pushing, sharp-set, hard-featured, and even red-faced

and red-nosed (some of them, at any rate) company, who daily walked the

Parliament House, and talked and gossiped there, often of other things

than law and equity. "Well, yes, perhaps it was all for the best," he

said, with a sigh, on my having interjected the remark that R. L.

Stevenson was wielding far more influence than he ever could have done as

a Scottish counsel, even though he had risen rapidly in his profession,

and become Lord-Advocate or even a judge.

There was, indeed, a very pathetic kind of harking back on the might-have-

beens when I talked with him on this subject. He had reconciled himself

in a way to the inevitable, and, like a sensible man, was now inclined to

make the most and the best of it. The marriage, which, on the report of

it, had been but a new disappointment to him, had, as if by magic, been

transformed into a blessing in his mind and his wife's by personal

contact with Fanny Van der Griff Stevenson, which no one who ever met her

could wonder at; but, nevertheless, his dream of seeing his only son

walking in the pathways of the Stevensons, and adorning a profession in

Edinburgh, and so winning new and welcome laurels for the family and the

name, was still present with him constantly, and by contrast, he was

depressed with contemplation of the real state of the case, when, as I

have said, I pointed out to him, as more than once I did, what an

influence his son was wielding now, not only over those near to him, but

throughout the world, compared with what could have come to him as a

lighthouse engineer, however successful, or it may be as a briefless

advocate or barrister, walking, hardly in glory and in joy, the Hall of

the Edinburgh Parliament House. And when I pictured the yet greater

influence that was sure to come to him, he only shook his head with that

smile which tells of hopes long-cherished and lost at last, and of

resignation gained, as though at stern duty's call and an honest desire

for the good of those near and dear to him. It moved me more than I can

say, and always in the midst of it he adroitly, and somewhat abruptly,

changed the subject. Such penalties do parents often pay for the honour

of giving geniuses to the world. Here, again, it may be true, "the

individual withers but the world is more and more."

The impression of a kind of tragic fatality was but added to when

Stevenson would speak of his father in such terms of love and admiration

as quite moved one, of his desire to please him, of his highest respect

and gratitude to him, and pride in having such a father. It was most

characteristic that when, in his travels in America, he met a gentleman

who expressed plainly his keen disappointment on learning that he had but

been introduced to the son and not to the father--to the as yet but

budding author--and not to the builder of the great lighthouse beacons

that constantly saved mariners from shipwreck round many stormy coasts,

he should record the incident, as his readers will remember, with such a

strange mixture of a pride and filial gratitude, and half humorous

humiliation. Such is the penalty a son of genius often pays in heart-

throbs for the inability to do aught else but follow his destiny--follow

his star, even though as Dante says:--

"Se tu segui tua stella

Non puoi fallire a glorioso porto." {3}

What added a keen thrill as of quivering flesh exposed, was that Thomas

Stevenson on one side was exactly the man to appreciate such attainments

and work in another, and I often wondered how far the sense of Edinburgh

propriety and worldly estimates did weigh with him here.

Mr Stevenson mentioned to me a peculiar fact which has since been noted

by his son, that, notwithstanding the kind of work he had so successfully

engaged in, he was no mathematician, and had to submit his calculations

to another to be worked out in definite mathematical formulae. Thomas

Stevenson gave one the impression of a remarkably sweet, great

personality, grave, anxious, almost morbidly forecasting, yet full of

childlike hope and ready affection, but, perhaps, so earnestly taken up

with some points as to exaggerate their importance and be too

self-conscious and easily offended in respect to them. But there was no

affectation in him. He was simple-minded, sincere to the core; most

kindly, homely, hospitable, much intent on brotherly offices. He had the

Scottish \_perfervidum\_ too--he could tolerate nothing mean or creeping;

and his eye would lighten and glance in a striking manner when such was

spoken of. I have since heard that his charities were very extensive,

and dispensed in the most hidden and secret ways. He acted here on the

Scripture direction, "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand

doeth." He was much exercised when I saw him about some defects, as he

held, in the methods of Scotch education (for he was a true lover of

youth, and cared more for character being formed than for heads being

merely crammed). Sagacious, with fine forecast, with a high ideal, and

yet up to a certain point a most tolerant temper, he was a fine specimen

of the Scottish gentleman. His son tells that, as he was engaged in work

calculated to benefit the world and to save life, he would not for long

take out a patent for his inventions, and thus lost immense sums. I can

well believe that: it seems quite in keeping with my impressions of the

man. There was nothing stolid or selfishly absorbed in him. He bore the

marks of deep, true, honest feeling, true benevolence, and open-handed

generosity, and despite the son's great pen-craft, and inventive power,

would have forgiven my saying that sometimes I have had a doubt whether

the father was not, after all, the greater man of the two, though

certainly not, like the hero of \_In Memoriam\_, moulded "in colossal

calm."

In theological matters, in which Thomas Stevenson had been much and

deeply exercised, he held very strong views, leading decisively to ultra-

Calvinism; but, as I myself could well sympathise with such views, if I

did not hold them, knowing well the strange ways in which they had gone

to form grand, if sometimes sternly forbidding characters, there were no

cross-purposes as there might have been with some on that subject. And

always I felt I had an original character and a most interesting one to

study.

This is another very characteristic letter to me from Davos Platz:

"CHALET BUOL, DAVOS, GRISONS,

SWITZERLAND. (\_No date\_.)

"MY DEAR DR JAPP,--You must think me a forgetful rogue, as indeed I

am; for I have but now told my publisher to send you a copy of the

\_Familiar Studies\_. However, I own I have delayed this letter till I

could send you the enclosed. Remembering the night at Braemar, when

we visited the picture-gallery, I hoped they might amuse you.

"You see we do some publishing hereaway.

"With kind regards, believe me, always yours faithfully,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

"I shall hope to see you in town in May."

The enclosed was the second series of \_Moral Emblems\_, by R. L.

Stevenson, printed by Samuel Osbourne. My answer to this letter brought

the following:

"CHALET-BUOL, DAVOS,

\_April\_ 1\_st\_, 1882.

"MY DEAR DR JAPP,--A good day to date this letter, which is, in fact,

a confession of incapacity. During my wife's wretched illness--or I

should say the worst of it, for she is not yet rightly well--I

somewhat lost my head, and entirely lost a great quire of corrected

proofs. This is one of the results: I hope there are none more

serious. I was never so sick of any volume as I was of that; I was

continually receiving fresh proofs with fresh infinitesimal

difficulties. I was ill; I did really fear, for my wife was worse

than ill. Well, 'tis out now; and though I have already observed

several carelessnesses myself, and now here is another of your

finding--of which indeed, I ought to be ashamed--it will only justify

the sweeping humility of the preface.

"Symonds was actually dining with us when your letter came, and I

communicated your remarks, which pleased him. He is a far better and

more interesting thing than his books.

"The elephant was my wife's, so she is proportionately elate you

should have picked it out for praise from a collection, let us add, so

replete with the highest qualities of art.

"My wicked carcass, as John Knox calls it, holds together wonderfully.

In addition to many other things, and a volume of travel, I find I

have written since December ninety Cornhill pp. of Magazine

work--essays and stories--40,000 words; and I am none the worse--I am

better. I begin to hope I may, if not outlive this wolverine upon my

shoulders, at least carry him bravely like Symonds or Alexander Pope.

I begin to take a pride in that hope.

"I shall be much interested to see your criticisms: you might perhaps

send them on to me. I believe you know that I am not dangerous--one

folly I have not--I am not touchy under criticism.

"Sam and my wife both beg to be remembered, and Sam also sends as a

present a work of his own.--Yours very sincerely,

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON."

As indicating the estimate of many of the good Edinburgh people of

Stevenson and the Stevensons that still held sway up to so late a date as

1893, I will here extract two characteristic passages from the letters of

the friend and correspondent of these days just referred to, and to whom

I had sent a copy of the \_Atalanta\_ Magazine, with an article of mine on

Stevenson.

"If you can excuse the garrulity of age, I can tell you one or two

things about Louis Stevenson, his father and even his grandfather,

which you may work up some other day, as you have so deftly embedded

in the \_Atalanta\_ article that small remark on his acting. Your paper

is pleasant and modest: most of R. L. Stevenson's admirers are

inclined to lay it on far too thick. That he is a genius we all

admit; but his genius, if fine, is limited. For example, he cannot

paint (or at least he never has painted) a woman. No more could

Fettes Douglas, skilful artist though he was in his own special line,

and I shall tell you a remark of Russel's thereon some day. {4} There

are women in his books, but there is none of the beauty and subtlety

of womanhood in them.

"R. L. Stevenson I knew well as a lad and often met him and talked

with him. He acted in private theatricals got up by the late

Professor Fleeming Jenkin. But he had then, as always, a pretty guid

conceit o' himsel'--which his clique have done nothing to check. His

father and his grandfather (I have danced with his mother before her

marriage) I knew better; but 'the family theologian,' as some of R. L.

Stevenson's friends dabbed his father, was a very touchy theologian,

and denounced any one who in the least differed from his extreme

Calvinistic views. I came under his lash most unwittingly in this way

myself. But for this twist, he was a good fellow--kind and

hospitable--and a really able man in his profession. His father-in-

law, R. L. Stevenson's maternal grandfather, was the Rev. Dr Balfour,

minister of Colinton--one of the finest-looking old men I ever

saw--tall, upright, and ruddy at eighty. But he was marvellously

feeble as a preacher, and often said things that were deliciously,

unconsciously, unintentionally laughable, if not witty. We were near

Colinton for some years; and Mr Russell (of the \_Scotsman\_), who once

attended the Parish Church with us, was greatly tickled by Balfour

discoursing on the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife, remarking that

Mrs P-'s conduct was 'highly improper'!"

The estimate of R. L. Stevenson was not and could not be final in this

case, for \_Weir of Hermiston\_ and \_Catriona\_ were yet unwritten, not to

speak of others, but the passages reflect a certain side of Edinburgh

opinion, illustrating the old Scripture doctrine that a prophet has

honour everywhere but in his own country. And the passages themselves

bear evidence that I violate no confidence then, for they were given to

me to be worked into any after-effort I might make on Stevenson. My

friend was a good and an acute critic who had done some acceptable

literary work in his day.

CHAPTER III--THE CHILD FATHER OF THE MAN

R. L. Stevenson was born on 13th November 1850, the very year of the

death of his grandfather, Robert Stevenson, whom he has so finely

celebrated. As a mere child he gave token of his character. As soon as

he could read, he was keen for books, and, before very long, had read all

the story-books he could lay hands on; and, when the stock ran out, he

would go and look in at all the shop windows within reach, and try to

piece out the stories from the bits exposed in open pages and the

woodcuts.

He had a nurse of very remarkable character--evidently a paragon--who

deeply influenced him and did much to form his young mind--Alison

Cunningham, who, in his juvenile lingo, became "Cumy," and who not only

was never forgotten, but to the end was treated as his "second mother."

In his dedication of his \_Child's Garden of Verses\_ to her, he says:

"My second mother, my first wife,

The angel of my infant life."

Her copy of \_Kidnapped\_ was inscribed to her by the hand of Stevenson,

thus:

"TO CUMY, FROM HER BOY, THE AUTHOR.

SKERRYVORE, 18\_th\_ \_July\_ 1888."

Skerryvore was the name of Stevenson's Bournemouth home, so named after

one of the Stevenson lighthouses. His first volume, \_An Inland Voyage\_

has this pretty dedication, inscribed in a neat, small hand:

"MY DEAR CUMY,--If you had not taken so much trouble with me all the

years of my childhood, this little book would never have been written.

Many a long night you sat up with me when I was ill. I wish I could

hope, by way of return, to amuse a single evening for you with my

little book. But whatever you think of it, I know you will think

kindly of

THE AUTHOR."

"Cumy" was perhaps the most influential teacher Stevenson had. What she

and his mother taught took effect and abode with him, which was hardly

the case with any other of his teachers.

"In contrast to Goethe," says Mr Baildon, "Stevenson was but little

affected by his relations to women, and, when this point is fully gone

into, it will probably be found that his mother and nurse in

childhood, and his wife and step-daughter in later life, are about the

only women who seriously influenced either his character or his art."

(p. 32).

When Mr Kelman is celebrating Stevenson for the consistency and

continuity of his undogmatic religion, he is almost throughout

celebrating "Cumy" and her influence, though unconsciously. Here, again,

we have an apt and yet more striking illustration, after that of the good

Lord Shaftesbury and many others, of the deep and lasting effect a good

and earnest woman, of whom the world may never hear, may have had upon a

youngster of whom all the world shall hear. When Mr Kelman says that

"the religious element in Stevenson was not a thing of late growth, but

an integral part and vital interest of his life," he but points us back

to the earlier religious influences to which he had been effectually

subject. "His faith was not for himself alone, and the phases of

Christianity which it has asserted are peculiarly suited to the spiritual

needs of many in the present time."

We should not lay so much weight as Mr Kelman does on the mere number of

times "the Divine name" is found in Stevenson's writings, but there is

something in such confessions as the following to his father, when he

was, amid hardship and illness, in Paris in 1878:

"Still I believe in myself and my fellow-men and the God who made us

all. . . . I am lonely and sick and out of heart. Well, I still hope;

I still believe; I still see the good in the inch, and cling to it. It

is not much, perhaps, but it is always something."

Yes, "Cumy" was a very effective teacher, whose influence and teaching

long remained. His other teachers, however famous and highly gifted, did

not attain to such success with him. And because of this non-success

they blamed him, as is usual. He was fond of playing truant--declared,

indeed, that he was about as methodic a truant as ever could have

existed. He much loved to go on long wanderings by himself on the

Pentland Hills and read about the Covenanters, and while yet a youth of

sixteen he wrote \_The Pentland Rising\_--a pamphlet in size and a piece of

fine work--which was duly published, is now scarce, and fetches a high

price. He had made himself thoroughly familiar with all the odd old

corners of Edinburgh--John Knox's haunts and so on, all which he has

turned to account in essays, descriptions and in stories--especially in

\_Catriona\_. When a mere youth at school, as he tells us himself, he had

little or no desire to carry off prizes and do just as other boys did; he

was always wishing to observe, and to see, and try things for

himself--was, in fact, in the eyes of schoolmasters and tutors something

of an \_idler\_, with splendid gifts which he would not rightly apply. He

was applying them rightly, though not in their way. It is not only in

his \_Apology for Idlers\_ that this confession is made, but elsewhere, as

in his essay on \_A College Magazine\_, where he says, "I was always busy

on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two

books in my pocket, one to read and one to write in!"

When he went to College it was still the same--he tells us in the

funniest way how he managed to wheedle a certificate for Greek out of

Professor Blackie, though the Professor owned "his face was not familiar

to him"! He fared very differently when, afterwards his father, eager

that he should follow his profession, got him to enter the civil

engineering class under Professor Fleeming Jenkin. He still stuck to his

old courses--wandering about, and, in sheltered corners, writing in the

open air, and was not present in class more than a dozen times. When the

session was ended he went up to try for a certificate from Fleeming

Jenkin. "No, no, Mr Stevenson," said the Professor; "I might give it in

a doubtful case, but yours is not doubtful: you have not kept my

classes." And the most characteristic thing--honourable to both men--is

to come; for this was the beginning of a friendship which grew and

strengthened and is finally celebrated in the younger man's sketch of the

elder. He learned from Professor Fleeming Jenkin, perhaps unconsciously,

more of the \_humaniores\_, than consciously he did of engineering. A

friend of mine, who knew well both the Stevenson family and the Balfours,

to which R. L. Stevenson's mother belonged, recalls, as we have seen, his

acting in the private theatricals that were got up by the Professor, and

adds, "He was then a very handsome fellow, and looked splendidly as Sir

Charles Pomander, and essayed, not wholly without success, Sir Peter

Teazle," which one can well believe, no less than that he acted such

parts splendidly as well as looked them.

\_Longman's Magazine\_, immediately after his death, published the

following poem, which took a very pathetic touch from the circumstances

of its appearance--the more that, while it imaginatively and finely

commemorated these days of truant wanderings, it showed the ruling

passion for home and the old haunts, strongly and vividly, even not

unnigh to death:

"The tropics vanish, and meseems that I,

From Halkerside, from topmost Allermuir,

Or steep Caerketton, dreaming gaze again.

Far set in fields and woods, the town I see

Spring gallant from the shallows of her smoke,

Cragg'd, spired, and turreted, her virgin fort

Beflagg'd. About, on seaward drooping hills,

New folds of city glitter. Last, the Forth

Wheels ample waters set with sacred isles,

And populous Fife smokes with a score of towns,

There, on the sunny frontage of a hill,

Hard by the house of kings, repose the dead,

My dead, the ready and the strong of word.

Their works, the salt-encrusted, still survive;

The sea bombards their founded towers; the night

Thrills pierced with their strong lamps. The artificers,

One after one, here in this grated cell,

Where the rain erases and the rust consumes,

Fell upon lasting silence. Continents

And continental oceans intervene;

A sea uncharted, on a lampless isle,

Environs and confines their wandering child

In vain. The voice of generations dead

Summons me, sitting distant, to arise,

My numerous footsteps nimbly to retrace,

And all mutation over, stretch me down

In that denoted city of the dead."

CHAPTER IV--HEREDITY ILLUSTRATED

At first sight it would seem hard to trace any illustration of the

doctrine of heredity in the case of this master of romance. George

Eliot's dictum that we are, each one of us, but an omnibus carrying down

the traits of our ancestors, does not appear at all to hold here. This

fanciful realist, this naive-wistful humorist, this dreamy mystical

casuist, crossed by the innocent bohemian, this serious and genial

essayist, in whom the deep thought was hidden by the gracious play of wit

and phantasy, came, on the father's side, of a stock of what the world

regarded as a quiet, ingenious, demure, practical, home-keeping people.

In his rich colour, originality, and graceful air, it is almost as though

the bloom of japonica came on a rich old orchard apple-tree, all out of

season too. Those who go hard on heredity would say, perhaps, that he

was the result of some strange back-stroke. But, on closer examination,

we need not go so far. His grandfather, Robert Stevenson, the great

lighthouse-builder, the man who reared the iron-bound pillar on the

destructive Bell Rock, and set life-saving lights there, was very intent

on his professional work, yet he had his ideal, and romantic, and

adventurous side. In the delightful sketch which his famous grandson

gave of him, does he not tell of the joy Robert Stevenson had on the

annual voyage in the \_Lighthouse Yacht\_--how it was looked forward to,

yearned for, and how, when he had Walter Scott on board, his fund of

story and reminiscence all through the tour never failed--how Scott drew

upon it in \_The Pirate\_ and the notes to \_The Pirate\_, and with what

pride Robert Stevenson preserved the lines Scott wrote in the lighthouse

album at the Bell Rock on that occasion:

"PHAROS LOQUITUR

"Far in the bosom of the deep

O'er these wild shelves my watch I keep,

A ruddy gem of changeful light

Bound on the dusky brow of night.

The seaman bids my lustre hail,

And scorns to strike his timorous sail."

And how in 1850 the old man, drawing nigh unto death, was with the utmost

difficulty dissuaded from going the voyage once more, and was found

furtively in his room packing his portmanteau in spite of the protests of

all his family, and would have gone but for the utter weakness of death.

His father was also a splendid engineer; was full of invention and

devoted to his profession, but he, too, was not without his romances, and

even vagaries. He loved a story, was a fine teller of stories, used to

sit at night and spin the most wondrous yarns, a man of much reserve, yet

also of much power in discourse, with an aptness and felicity in the use

of phrases--so much so, as his son tells, that on his deathbed, when his

power of speech was passing from him, and he couldn't articulate the

right word, he was silent rather than use the wrong one. I shall never

forget how in these early morning walks at Braemar, finding me

sympathetic, he unbent with the air of a man who had unexpectedly found

something he had sought, and was fairly confidential.

On the mother's side our author came of ministers. His maternal

grandfather, the Rev. Dr Balfour of Colinton, was a man of handsome

presence, tall, venerable-looking, and not without a mingled authority

and humour of his own--no very great preacher, I have heard, but would

sometimes bring a smile to the faces of his hearers by very naive and

original ways of putting things. R. L. Stevenson quaintly tells a story

of how his grandfather when he had physic to take, and was indulged in a

sweet afterwards, yet would not allow the child to have a sweet because

he had not had the physic. A veritable Calvinist in daily action--from

him, no doubt, our subject drew much of his interest in certain

directions--John Knox, Scottish history, the '15 and the '45, and no

doubt much that justifies the line "something of shorter-catechist," as

applied by Henley to Stevenson among very contrasted traits indeed.

But strange truly are the interblendings of race, and the way in which

traits of ancestors reappear, modifying and transforming each other. The

gardener knows what can be done by grafts and buddings; but more

wonderful far than anything there, are the mysterious blendings and

outbursts of what is old and forgotten, along with what is wholly new and

strange, and all going to produce often what we call sometimes

eccentricity, and sometimes originality and genius.

Mr J. F. George, in \_Scottish Notes and Queries\_, wrote as follows on

Stevenson's inheritances and indebtedness to certain of his ancestors:

"About 1650, James Balfour, one of the Principal Clerks of the Court

of Session, married Bridget, daughter of Chalmers of Balbaithan,

Keithhall, and that estate was for some time in the name of Balfour.

His son, James Balfour of Balbaithan, Merchant and Magistrate of

Edinburgh, paid poll-tax in 1696, but by 1699 the land had been sold.

This was probably due to the fact that Balfour was one of the

Governors of the Darien Company. His grandson, James Balfour of

Pilrig (1705-1795), sometime Professor of Moral Philosophy in

Edinburgh University, whose portrait is sketched in \_Catriona\_, also

made a Garioch [Aberdeenshire district] marriage, his wife being

Cecilia, fifth daughter of Sir John Elphinstone, second baronet of

Logie (Elphinstone) and Sheriff of Aberdeen, by Mary, daughter of Sir

Gilbert Elliot, first baronet of Minto.

"Referring to the Minto descent, Stevenson claims to have 'shaken a

spear in the Debatable Land and shouted the slogan of the Elliots.' He

evidently knew little or nothing of his relations on the Elphinstone

side. The Logie Elphinstones were a cadet branch of Glack, an estate

acquired by Nicholas Elphinstone in 1499. William Elphinstone, a

younger son of James of Glack, and Elizabeth Wood of Bonnyton, married

Margaret Forbes, and was father of Sir James Elphinstone, Bart., of

Logie, so created in 1701. . . .

"Stevenson would have been delighted to acknowledge his relationship,

remote though it was, to 'the Wolf of Badenoch,' who burned Elgin

Cathedral without the Earl of Kildare's excuse that he thought the

Bishop was in it; and to the Wolf's son, the Victor of Harlaw [and] to

his nephew 'John O'Coull,' Constable of France. . . . Also among

Tusitala's kin may be noted, in addition to the later Gordons of

Gight, the Tiger Earl of Crawford, familiarly known as 'Earl Beardie,'

the 'Wicked Master' of the same line, who was fatally stabbed by a

Dundee cobbler 'for taking a stoup of drink from him'; Lady Jean

Lindsay, who ran away with 'a common jockey with the horn,' and

latterly became a beggar; David Lindsay, the last Laird of Edzell [a

lichtsome Lindsay fallen on evil days], who ended his days as hostler

at a Kirkwall inn, and 'Mussel Mou'ed Charlie,' the Jacobite ballad-

singer.

"Stevenson always believed that he had a strong spiritual affinity to

Robert Fergusson. It is more than probable that there was a distant

maternal affinity as well. Margaret Forbes, the mother of Sir James

Elphinstone, the purchaser of Logie, has not been identified, but it

is probable she was of the branch of the Tolquhon Forbeses who

previously owned Logie. Fergusson's mother, Elizabeth Forbes, was the

daughter of a Kildrummy tacksman, who by constant tradition is stated

to have been of the house of Tolquhon. It would certainly be

interesting if this suggested connection could be proved." {5}

"From his Highland ancestors," says the \_Quarterly Review\_, "Louis

drew the strain of Celtic melancholy with all its perils and

possibilities, and its kinship, to the mood of day-dreaming, which has

flung over so many of his pages now the vivid light wherein figures

imagined grew as real as flesh and blood, and yet, again, the ghostly,

strange, lonesome, and stinging mist under whose spell we see the

world bewitched, and every object quickens with a throb of infectious

terror."

Here, as in many other cases, we see how the traits of ancestry reappear

and transform other strains, strangely the more remote often being the

strongest and most persistent and wonderful.

"It is through his father, strange as it may seem," says Mr Baildon,

"that Stevenson gets the Celtic elements so marked in his person,

character, and genius; for his father's pedigree runs back to the

Highland clan Macgregor, the kin of Rob Roy. Stevenson thus drew in

Celtic strains from both sides--from the Balfours and the Stevensons

alike--and in his strange, dreamy, beautiful, and often far-removed

fancies we have the finest and most effective witness of it."

Mr William Archer, in his own characteristic way, has brought the

inheritances from the two sides of the house into more direct contact and

contrast in an article he wrote in \_The Daily Chronicle\_ on the

appearance of the \_Letters to Family and Friends\_.

"These letters show," he says, "that Stevenson's was not one of those

sunflower temperaments which turn by instinct, not effort, towards the

light, and are, as Mr Francis Thompson puts it, 'heartless and happy,

lackeying their god.' The strains of his heredity were very

curiously, but very clearly, mingled. It may surprise some readers to

find him speaking of 'the family evil, despondency,' but he spoke with

knowledge. He inherited from his father not only a stern Scottish

intentness on the moral aspect of life ('I would rise from the dead to

preach'), but a marked disposition to melancholy and hypochondria.

From his mother, on the other hand, he derived, along with his

physical frailty, a resolute and cheery stoicism. These two elements

in his nature fought many a hard fight, and the besieging forces from

without--ill-health, poverty, and at one time family dissensions--were

by no means without allies in the inner citadel of his soul. His

spirit was courageous in the truest sense of the word: by effort and

conviction, not by temperamental insensibility to fear. It is clear

that there was a period in his life (and that before the worst of his

bodily ills came upon him) when he was often within measurable

distance of Carlylean gloom. He was twenty-four when he wrote thus,

from Swanston, to Mrs Sitwell:

"'It is warmer a bit; but my body is most decrepit, and I can just

manage to be cheery and tread down hypochondria under foot by work. I

lead such a funny life, utterly without interest or pleasure outside

of my work: nothing, indeed, but work all day long, except a short

walk alone on the cold hills, and meals, and a couple of pipes with my

father in the evening. It is surprising how it suits me, and how

happy I keep.'

"This is the serenity which arises, not from the absence of fuliginous

elements in the character, but from a potent smoke-consuming faculty,

and an inflexible will to use it. Nine years later he thus admonishes

his backsliding parent:

"'MY DEAR MOTHER,--I give my father up. I give him a parable: that

the Waverley novels are better reading for every day than the tragic

\_Life\_. And he takes it back-side foremost, and shakes his head, and

is gloomier than ever. Tell him that I give him up. I don't want no

such a parent. This is not the man for my money. I do not call that

by the name of religion which fills a man with bile. I write him a

whole letter, bidding him beware of extremes, and telling him that his

gloom is gallows-worthy; and I get back an answer--. Perish the

thought of it.

"'Here am I on the threshold of another year, when, according to all

human foresight, I should long ago have been resolved into my

elements: here am I, who you were persuaded was born to disgrace

you--and, I will do you the justice to add, on no such insufficient

grounds--no very burning discredit when all is done; here am I

married, and the marriage recognised to be a blessing of the first

order. A1 at Lloyd's. There is he, at his not first youth, able to

take more exercise than I at thirty-three, and gaining a stone's

weight, a thing of which I am incapable. There are you; has the man

no gratitude? . . .

"'Even the Shorter Catechism, not the merriest epitome of religion,

and a work exactly as pious although not quite so true as the

multiplication table--even that dry-as-dust epitome begins with a

heroic note. What is man's chief end? Let him study that; and ask

himself if to refuse to enjoy God's kindest gifts is in the spirit

indicated.'

"As may be judged from this half-playful, half-serious remonstrance,

Stevenson's relation to his parents was eminently human and beautiful.

The family dissensions above alluded to belonged only to a short but

painful period, when the father could not reconcile himself to the

discovery that the son had ceased to accept the formulas of Scottish

Calvinism. In the eyes of the older man such heterodoxy was for the

moment indistinguishable from atheism; but he soon arrived at a better

understanding of his son's position. Nothing appears more

unmistakably in these letters than the ingrained theism of Stevenson's

way of thought. The poet, the romancer within him, revolted from the

conception of formless force. A personal deity was a necessary

character in the drama, as he conceived it. And his morality, though

(or inasmuch as) it dwelt more on positive kindness than on negative

lawlessness, was, as he often insisted, very much akin to the morality

of the New Testament."

Anyway it is clear that much in the interminglings of blood we \_can\_

trace, may go to account for not a little in Stevenson. His peculiar

interest in the enormities of old-time feuds, the excesses, the

jealousies, the queer psychological puzzles, the desire to work on the

outlying and morbid, and even the unallowed and unhallowed, for purposes

of romance--the delight in dealing with revelations of primitive feeling

and the out-bursts of the mere natural man always strangely checked and

diverted by the uprise of other tendencies to the dreamy, impalpable,

vague, weird and horrible. There was the undoubted Celtic element in him

underlying what seemed foreign to it, the disregard of conventionality in

one phase, and the falling under it in another--the reaction and the

retreat from what had attracted and interested him, and then the return

upon it, as with added zest because of the retreat. The confessed

Hedonist, enjoying life and boasting of it just a little, and yet the

Puritan in him, as it were, all the time eyeing himself as from some

loophole of retreat, and then commenting on his own behaviour as a

Hedonist and Bohemian. This clearly was not what most struck Beerbohm

Tree, during the time he was in close contact with Stevenson, while

arranging the production of \_Beau Austin\_ at the Haymarket Theatre, for

he sees, or confesses to seeing, only one side, and that the most

assertive, and in a sense, unreal one:

"Stevenson," says Mr Tree, "always seemed to me an epicure in life. He

was always intent on extracting the last drop of honey from every

flower that came in his way. He was absorbed in the business of the

moment, however trivial. As a companion, he was delightfully witty;

as a personality, as much a creature of romance as his own creations."

This is simple, and it looks sincere; but it does not touch 'tother side,

or hint at, not to say, solve the problem of Stevenson's personality. Had

he been the mere Hedonist he could never have done the work he did. Mr

Beerbohm Tree certainly did not there see far or all round.

Miss Simpson says:

"Mr Henley recalls him to Edinburgh folk as he was and as the true

Stevenson would have wished to be known--a queer, inexplicable

creature, his Celtic blood showing like a vein of unknown metal in the

stolid, steady rock of his sure-founded Stevensonian pedigree. His

cousin and model, 'Bob' Stevenson, the art critic, showed that this

foreign element came from the men who lit our guiding lights for

seamen, not from the gentle-blooded Balfours.

"Mr Henley is right in saying that the gifted boy had not much humour.

When the joke was against himself he was very thin-skinned and had a

want of balance. This made him feel his honest father's sensible

remarks like the sting of a whip."

Miss Simpson then proceeds to say:

"The R. L. Stevenson of old Edinburgh days was a conceited,

egotistical youth, but a true and honest one: a youth full of fire and

sentiment, protesting he was misunderstood, though he was not. Posing

as 'Velvet Coat' among the slums, he did no good to himself. He had

not the Dickens aptitude for depicting the ways of life of his adopted

friends. When with refined judgment he wanted a figure for a novel,

he went back to the Bar he scorned in his callow days and then drew in

\_Weir of Hermiston\_."

CHAPTER V--TRAVELS

His interest in engineering soon went--his mind full of stories and

fancies and human nature. As he had told his mother: he did not care

about finding what was "the strain on a bridge," he wanted to know

something of human beings.

No doubt, much to the disappointment and grief of his father, who wished

him as an only son to carry on the traditions of the family, though he

had written two engineering essays of utmost promise, the engineering was

given up, and he consented to study law. He had already contributed to

College Magazines, and had had even a short spell of editing one; of one

of these he has given a racy account. Very soon after his call to the

Bar articles and essays from his pen began to appear in \_Macmillan's\_,

and later, more regularly in the \_Cornhill\_. Careful readers soon began

to note here the presence of a new force. He had gone on the \_Inland

Voyage\_ and an account of it was in hand; and had done that tour in the

Cevennes which he has described under the title \_Travels with a Donkey in

the Cevennes\_, with Modestine, sometimes doubting which was the donkey,

but on that tour a chill caught either developed a germ of lung disease

already present, or produced it; and the results unfortunately remained.

He never practised at the Bar, though he tells facetiously of his one

brief. He had chosen his own vocation, which was literature, and the

years which followed were, despite the delicacy which showed itself, very

busy years. He produced volume on volume. He had written many stories

which had never seen the light, but, as he says, passed through the

ordeal of the fire by more or less circuitous ways.

By this time some trouble and cause for anxiety had arisen about the

lungs, and trials of various places had been made. \_Ordered South\_

suggests the Mediterranean, sunny Italy, the Riviera. Then a sea-trip to

America was recommended and undertaken. Unfortunately, he got worse

there, his original cause of trouble was complicated with others, and the

medical treatment given was stupid, and exaggerated some of the symptoms

instead of removing them, All along--up, at all events, to the time of

his settlement in Samoa--Stevenson was more or less of an invalid.

Indeed, were I ever to write an essay on the art of wisely "laying-to,"

as the sailors say, I would point it by a reference to R. L. Stevenson.

For there is a wise way of "laying-to" that does not imply inaction, but

discreet, well-directed effort, against contrary winds and rough seas,

that is, amid obstacles and drawbacks, and even ill-health, where passive

and active may balance and give effect to each other. Stevenson was by

native instinct and temperament a rover--a lover of adventure, of strange

by-ways, errant tracts (as seen in his \_Inland Voyage\_ and \_Travels with

a Donkey through the Cevennes\_--seen yet more, perhaps, in a certain

account of a voyage to America as a steerage passenger), lofty mountain-

tops, with stronger air, and strange and novel surroundings. He would

fain, like Ulysses, be at home in foreign lands, making acquaintance with

outlying races, with

"Cities of men,

And manners, climates, councils, governments:

Myself not least, but honoured of them all,

Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy."

If he could not move about as he would, he would invent, make fancy serve

him instead of experience. We thus owe something to the staying and

restraining forces in him, and a wise "laying-to"--for his works, which

are, in large part, finely-healthy, objective, and in almost everything

unlike the work of an invalid, yet, in some degree, were but the devices

to beguile the burdens of an invalid's days. Instead of remaining in our

climate, it might be, to lie listless and helpless half the day, with no

companion but his own thoughts and fancies (not always so pleasant

either, if, like Frankenstein's monster, or, better still like the imp in

the bottle in the \_Arabian Nights\_, you cannot, once for all liberate

them, and set them adrift on their own charges to visit other people), he

made a home in the sweeter air and more steady climate of the South

Pacific, where, under the Southern Cross, he could safely and

beneficially be as active as he would be involuntarily idle at home, or

work only under pressure of hampering conditions. That was surely an

illustration of the true "laying-to" with an unaffectedly brave, bright

resolution in it.

CHAPTER VI--SOME EARLIER LETTERS

Carlyle was wont to say that, next to a faithful portrait, familiar

letters were the best medium to reveal a man. The letters must have been

written with no idea of being used for this end, however--free, artless,

the unstudied self-revealings of mind and heart. Now, these letters of

R. L. Stevenson, written to his friends in England, have a vast value in

this way--they reveal the man--reveal him in his strength and his

weakness--his ready gift in pleasing and adapting himself to those with

whom he corresponded, and his great power at once of adapting himself to

his circumstances and of humorously rising superior to them. When he was

ill and almost penniless in San Francisco, he could give Mr Colvin this

account of his daily routine:

"Any time between eight and half-past nine in the morning a slender

gentleman in an ulster, with a volume buttoned into the breast of it,

maybe observed leaving No. 608 Bush and descending Powell with an

active step. The gentleman is R. L. Stevenson; the volume relates to

Benjamin Franklin, on whom he meditates one of his charming essays. He

descends Powell, crosses Market, and descends in Sixth on a branch of

the original Pine Street Coffee-House, no less. . . . He seats himself

at a table covered with waxcloth, and a pampered menial of High-Dutch

extraction, and, indeed, as yet only partially extracted, lays before

him a cup of coffee, a roll, and a pat of butter, all, to quote the

deity, very good. A while ago, and R. L. Stevenson used to find the

supply of butter insufficient; but he has now learned the art to

exactitude, and butter and roll expire at the same moment. For this

rejection he pays ten cents, or fivepence sterling (0 pounds 0s. 5d.).

"Half an hour later, the inhabitants of Bush Street observed the same

slender gentleman armed, like George Washington, with his little

hatchet, splitting kindling, and breaking coal for his fire. He does

this quasi-publicly upon the window-sill; but this is not to be

attributed to any love of notoriety, though he is indeed vain of his

prowess with the hatchet (which he persists in calling an axe), and

daily surprised at the perpetuation of his fingers. The reason is

this: That the sill is a strong supporting beam, and that blows of the

same emphasis in other parts of his room might knock the entire shanty

into hell. Thenceforth, for from three hours, he is engaged darkly

with an ink-bottle. Yet he is not blacking his boots, for the only

pair that he possesses are innocent of lustre, and wear the natural

hue of the material turned up with caked and venerable slush. The

youngest child of his landlady remarks several times a day, as this

strange occupant enters or quits the house, 'Dere's de author.' Can

it be that this bright-haired innocent has found the true clue to the

mystery? The being in question is, at least, poor enough to belong to

that honourable craft."

Here are a few letters belonging to the winter of 1887-88, nearly all

written from Saranac Lake, in the Adirondacks, celebrated by Emerson, and

now a most popular holiday resort in the United States, and were

originally published in \_Scribner's Magazine\_. . . "It should be said

that, after his long spell of weakness at Bournemouth, Stevenson had gone

West in search of health among the bleak hill summits--'on the Canadian

border of New York State, very unsettled and primitive and cold.' He had

made the voyage in an ocean tramp, the \_Ludgate Hill\_, the sort of craft

which any person not a born child of the sea would shun in horror.

Stevenson, however, had 'the finest time conceivable on board the

"strange floating menagerie."'" Thus he describes it in a letter to Mr

Henry James:

"Stallions and monkeys and matches made our cargo; and the vast

continent of these incongruities rolled the while like a haystack; and

the stallions stood hypnotised by the motion, looking through the port

at our dinner-table, and winked when the crockery was broken; and the

little monkeys stared at each other in their cages, and were thrown

overboard like little bluish babies; and the big monkey, Jacko,

scoured about the ship and rested willingly in my arms, to the ruin of

my clothing; and the man of the stallions made a bower of the black

tarpaulin, and sat therein at the feet of a raddled divinity, like a

picture on a box of chocolates; and the other passengers, when they

were not sick, looked on and laughed. Take all this picture, and make

it roll till the bell shall sound unexpected notes and the fittings

shall break loose in our stateroom, and you have the voyage of the

\_Ludgate Hill\_. She arrived in the port of New York without beer,

porter, soda-water, curacoa, fresh meat, or fresh water; and yet we

lived, and we regret her."

He discovered this that there is no joy in the Universe comparable to

life on a villainous ocean tramp, rolling through a horrible sea in

company with a cargo of cattle.

"I have got one good thing of my sea voyage; it is proved the sea

agrees heartily with me, and my mother likes it; so if I get any

better, or no worse, my mother will likely hire a yacht for a month or

so in the summer. Good Lord! what fun! Wealth is only useful for two

things: a yacht and a string quartette. For these two I will sell my

soul. Except for these I hold that 700 pounds a year is as much as

anybody can possibly want; and I have had more, so I know, for the

extra coins were of no use, excepting for illness, which damns

everything. I was so happy on board that ship, I could not have

believed it possible; we had the beastliest weather, and many

discomforts; but the mere fact of its being a tramp ship gave us many

comforts. We could cut about with the men and officers, stay in the

wheel-house, discuss all manner of things, and really be a little at

sea. And truly there is nothing else. I had literally forgotten what

happiness was, and the full mind--full of external and physical

things, not full of cares and labours, and rot about a fellow's

behaviour. My heart literally sang; I truly care for nothing so much

as for that.

"To go ashore for your letters and hang about the pier among the

holiday yachtsmen--that's fame, that's glory--and nobody can take it

away."

At Saranac Lake the Stevensons lived in a "wind-beleaguered hill-top hat-

box of a house," which suited the invalid, but, on the other hand,

invalided his wife. Soon after getting there he plunged into \_The Master

of Ballantrae\_.

"No thought have I now apart from it, and I have got along up to page

ninety-two of the draught with great interest. It is to me a most

seizing tale: there are some fantastic elements, the most is a dead

genuine human problem--human tragedy, I should say rather. It will be

about as long, I imagine, as \_Kidnapped\_. . . . I have done most of

the big work, the quarrel, duel between the brothers, and the

announcement of the death to Clementina and my Lord--Clementina,

Henry, and Mackellar (nicknamed Squaretoes) are really very fine

fellows; the Master is all I know of the devil; I have known hints of

him, in the world, but always cowards: he is as bold as a lion, but

with the same deadly, causeless duplicity I have watched with so much

surprise in my two cowards. 'Tis true, I saw a hint of the same

nature in another man who was not a coward; but he had other things to

attend to; the Master has nothing else but his devilry."

His wife grows seriously ill, and Stevenson has to turn to household

work.

"Lloyd and I get breakfast; I have now, 10.15, just got the dishes

washed and the kitchen all clean, and sit down to give you as much

news as I have spirit for, after such an engagement. Glass is a thing

that really breaks my spirit; and I do not like to fail, and with

glass I cannot reach the work of my high calling--the artist's."

In the midst of such domestic tasks and entanglements he writes \_The

Master\_, and very characteristically gets dissatisfied with the last

parts, "which shame, perhaps degrade, the beginning."

Of Mr Kipling this is his judgment--in the year 1890:

"Kipling is by far the most promising young man who has appeared

since--ahem--I appeared. He amazes me by his precocity and various

endowments. But he alarms me by his copiousness and haste. He should

shield his fire with both hands, 'and draw up all his strength and

sweetness in one ball.' ('Draw all his strength and all his sweetness

up into one ball'? I cannot remember Marvell's words.) So the

critics have been saying to me; but I was never capable of--and surely

never guilty of--such a debauch of production. At this rate his works

will soon fill the habitable globe, and surely he was armed for better

conflicts than these succinct sketches and flying leaves of verse? I

look on, I admire, I rejoice for myself; but in a kind of ambition we

all have for our tongue and literature I am wounded. If I had this

man's fertility and courage, it seems to me I could heave a pyramid.

"Well, we begin to be the old fogies now, and it was high time

\_something\_ rose to take our places. Certainly Kipling has the gifts;

the fairy godmothers were all tipsy at his christening. What will he

do with them?"

Of the rest of Stevenson's career we cannot speak at length, nor is it

needful. How in steady succession came his triumphs: came, too, his

trials from ill-health--how he spent winters at Davos Platz, Bournemouth,

and tried other places in America; and how, at last, good fortune led him

to the South Pacific. After many voyagings and wanderings among the

islands, he settled near Apia, in Samoa, early in 1890, cleared some four

hundred acres, and built a house; where, while he wrote what delighted

the English-speaking race, he took on himself the defence of the natives

against foreign interlopers, writing under the title \_A Footnote to

History\_, the most powerful \_expose\_ of the mischief they had done and

were doing there. He was the beloved of the natives, as he made himself

the friend of all with whom he came in contact. There, as at home, he

worked--worked with the same determination and in the enjoyment of better

health. The obtaining idea with him, up to the end, as it had been from

early life, was a brave, resolute, cheerful endeavour to make the best of

it.

"I chose Samoa instead of Honolulu," he told Mr W. H. Trigg, who reports

the talk in \_Cassells' Magazine\_, "for the simple and eminently

satisfactory reason that it is less civilised. Can you not conceive that

it is awful fun?" His house was called "Vailima," which means Five

Waters in the Samoan, and indicates the number of streams that flow by

the spot.

CHAPTER VII--THE VAILIMA LETTERS

The Vailima Letters, written to Mr Sidney Colvin and other friends, are

in their way delightful if not inimitable: and this, in spite of the idea

having occurred to him, that some use might hereafter be made of these

letters for publication purposes. There is, indeed, as little trace of

any change in the style through this as well could be--the utterly

familiar, easy, almost child-like flow remains, unmarred by

self-consciousness or tendency "to put it on."

In June, 1892, Stevenson says:

"It came over me the other day suddenly that this diary of mine to you

would make good pickings after I am dead, and a man could make some

kind of a book out of it, without much trouble. So for God's sake

don't lose them, and they will prove a piece of provision for 'my

floor old family,' as Simele calls it."

But their great charm remains: they are as free and gracious and serious

and playful and informal as before. Stevenson's traits of character are

all here: his largeness of heart, his delicacy, his sympathy, his fun,

his pathos, his boylike frolicsomeness, his fine courage, his love of the

sea (for he was by nature a sailor), his passion for action and adventure

despite his ill-health, his great patience with others and fine

adaptability to their temper (he says that he never gets out of temper

with those he has to do with), his unbounded, big-hearted hopefulness,

and fine perseverance in face of difficulties. What could be better than

the way in which he tells that in January, 1892, when he had a bout of

influenza and was dictating \_St Ives\_ to his stepdaughter, Mrs Strong, he

was "reduced to dictating to her in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet"?--and

goes on:

"The amanuensis has her head quite turned, and believes herself to be

the author of this novel [\_and is to some extent\_.--A.M.] and as the

creature (!) has not been wholly useless in the matter [\_I told you

so\_!--A.M.] I propose to foster her vanity by a little commemoration

gift! . . . I shall tell you on some other occasion, and when the A.M.

is out of hearing, how \_very\_ much I propose to invest in this

testimonial; but I may as well inform you at once that I intend it to

be cheap, sir--damned cheap! My idea of running amanuenses is by

praise, not pudding, flattery, and not coins."

Truly, a rare and rich nature which could thus draw sunshine out of its

trials!--which, by aid of the true philosopher's stone of cheerfulness

and courage, could transmute the heavy dust and clay to gold.

His interests are so wide that he is sometimes pulled in different and

conflicting directions, as in the contest between his desire to aid

Mataafa and the other chiefs, and his literary work--between letters to

the \_Times\_ about Samoan politics, and, say, \_David Balfour\_. Here is a

characteristic bit in that strain:

"I have a good dose of the devil in my pipestem atomy; I have had my

little holiday outing in my kick at \_The Young Chevalier\_, and I guess

I can settle to \_David Balfour\_, to-morrow or Friday like a little

man. I wonder if any one had ever more energy upon so little

strength? I know there is a frost; . . . but I mean to break that

frost inside two years, and pull off a big success, and Vanity

whispers in my ear that I have the strength. If I haven't, whistle

owre the lave o't! I can do without glory, and perhaps the time is

not far off when I can do without corn. It is a time coming soon

enough, anyway; and I have endured some two and forty years without

public shame, and had a good time as I did it. If only I could secure

a violent death, what a fine success! I wish to die in my boots; no

more Land of Counterpane for me. To be drowned, to be shot, to be

thrown from a horse--ay, to be hanged, rather than pass again through

that slow dissolution."

He would not consent to act the invalid unless the spring ran down

altogether; was keen for exercise and for mixing among men--his native

servants if no others were near by. Here is a bit of confession and

casuistry quite \_a la\_ Stevenson:

"To come down covered with mud and drenched with sweat and rain after

some hours in the bush, change, rub down, and take a chair in the

verandah, is to taste a quiet conscience. And the strange thing that

I mark is this: If I go out and make sixpence, bossing my labourers

and plying the cutlass or the spade, idiot conscience applauds me; if

I sit in the house and make twenty pounds, idiot conscience wails over

my neglect and the day wasted."

His relish for companionship is indeed strong. At one place he says:

"God knows I don't care who I chum with perhaps I like sailors best,

but to go round and sue and sneak to keep a crowd together--never!"

If Stevenson's natural bent was to be an explorer, a mountain-climber, or

a sailor--to sail wide seas, or to range on mountain-tops to gain free

and extensive views--yet he inclines well to farmer work, and indeed, has

to confess it has a rare attraction for him.

"I went crazy over outdoor work," he says at one place, "and had at

last to confine myself to the house, or literature must have gone by

the board. \_Nothing\_ is so interesting as weeding, clearing, and path-

making: the oversight of labourers becomes a disease. It is quite an

effort not to drop into the farmer; and it does make you feel so

well."

The odd ways of these Samoans, their pride of position, their vices,

their virtues, their vanities, their small thefts, their tricks, their

delightful \_insouciance\_ sometimes, all amused him. He found in them a

fine field of study and observation--a source of fun and fund of

humanity--as this bit about the theft of some piglings will sufficiently

prove:

"Last night three piglings were stolen from one of our pig-pens. The

great Lafaele appeared to my wife uneasy, so she engaged him in

conversation on the subject, and played upon him the following

engaging trick: You advance your two forefingers towards the sitter's

eyes; he closes them, whereupon you substitute (on his eyelids) the

fore and middle fingers of the left hand, and with your right (which

he supposes engaged) you tap him on the head and back. When you let

him open his eyes, he sees you withdrawing the two forefingers. 'What

that?' asked Lafaele. 'My devil,' says Fanny. 'I wake um, my devil.

All right now. He go catch the man that catch my pig.' About an hour

afterwards Lafaele came for further particulars. 'Oh, all right,' my

wife says. 'By-and-by that man be sleep, devil go sleep same place.

By-and-by that man plenty sick. I no care. What for he take my pig?'

Lafaele cares plenty; I don't think he is the man, though he may be;

but he knows him, and most likely will eat some of that pig to-night.

He will not eat with relish.'"

Yet in spite of this R. L. Stevenson declares that:

"They are a perfectly honest people: nothing of value has ever been

taken from our house, where doors and windows are always wide open;

and upon one occasion when white ants attacked the silver chest, the

whole of my family treasure lay spread upon the floor of the hall for

two days unguarded."

Here is a bit on a work of peace, a reflection on a day's weeding at

Vailima--in its way almost as touching as any:

"I wonder if any one had ever the same attitude to Nature as I hold,

and have held for so long? This business fascinates me like a tune or

a passion; yet all the while I thrill with a strong distaste. The

horror of the thing, objective and subjective, is always present to my

mind; the horror of creeping things, a superstitious horror of the

void and the powers about me, the horror of my own devastation and

continual murders. The life of the plants comes through my finger-

tips, their struggles go to my heart like supplications. I feel

myself blood-boltered; then I look back on my cleared grass, and count

myself an ally in a fair quarrel, and make stout my heart."

Here, again, is the way in which he celebrates an act of friendly

kindness on the part of Mr Gosse:

"MY DEAR GOSSE,--Your letter was to me such a bright spot that I

answer it right away to the prejudice of other correspondents or--dants

(don't know how to spell it) who have prior claims. . . . It is the

history of our kindnesses that alone makes this world tolerable. If

it were not for that, for the effect of kind words, kind looks, kind

letters, multiplying, spreading, making one happy through another and

bringing forth benefits, some thirty, some fifty, some a thousandfold,

I should be tempted to think our life a practical jest in the worst

possible spirit. So your four pages have confirmed my philosophy as

well as consoled my heart in these ill hours."

CHAPTER VIII--WORK OF LATER YEARS

Mr Hammerton, in his \_Stevensoniana\_ (pp. 323-4), has given the humorous

inscriptions on the volumes of his works which Stevenson presented to Dr

Trudeau, who attended him when he was in Saranac in 1887-88--very

characteristic in every way, and showing fully Stevenson's fine

appreciation of any attention or service. On the \_Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde\_

volume he wrote:

"Trudeau was all the winter at my side:

I never saw the nose of Mr Hyde."

And on \_Kidnapped\_ is this:

"Here is the one sound page of all my writing,

The one I'm proud of and that I delight in."

Stevenson was exquisite in this class of efforts, and were they all

collected they would form indeed, a fine supplement and illustration of

the leading lesson of his essays--the true art of pleasing others, and of

truly pleasing one's self at the same time. To my thinking the finest of

all in this line is the legal (?) deed by which he conveyed his birthday

to little Miss Annie Ide, the daughter of Mr H. C. Ide, a well-known

American, who was for several years a resident of Upolo, in Samoa, first

as Land Commissioner, and later as Chief Justice under the joint

appointment of England, Germany, and the United States. While living at

Apia, Mr Ide and his family were very intimate with the family of R. L.

Stevenson. Little Annie was a special pet and protege of Stevenson and

his wife. After the return of the Ides to their American home, Stevenson

"deeded" to Annie his birthday in the following unique document:

I, ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, advocate of the Scots Bar, author of \_The

Master of Ballantrae\_ and \_Moral Emblems\_, civil engineer, sole owner

and patentee of the palace and plantation known as Vailima, in the

island of Upolo, Samoa, a British subject, being in sound mind, and

pretty well, I thank you, in mind and body;

In consideration that Miss Annie H. Ide, daughter of H. C. Ide, in the

town of Saint Johnsbury, in the County of Caledonia, in the State of

Vermont, United States of America, was born, out of all reason, upon

Christmas Day, and is, therefore, out of all justice, denied the

consolation and profit of a proper birthday;

And considering that I, the said Robert Louis Stevenson, have attained

the age when we never mention it, and that I have now no further use

for a birthday of any description;

And in consideration that I have met H. C. Ide, the father of the said

Annie H. Ide, and found him as white a land commissioner as I require,

I have transferred, and do hereby transfer, to the said Annie H. Ide,

all and whole of my rights and privileges in the 13th day of November,

formerly my birthday, now, hereby and henceforth, the birthday of the

said Annie H. Ide, to have, hold, exercise, and enjoy the same in the

customary manner, by the sporting of fine raiment, eating of rich

meats, and receipt of gifts, compliments, and copies of verse,

according to the manner of our ancestors;

And I direct the said Annie H. Ide to add to the said name of Annie H.

Ide the name of Louisa--at least in private--and I charge her to use

my said birthday with moderation and humanity, \_et tamquam bona filia

familias\_, the said birthday not being so young as it once was and

having carried me in a very satisfactory manner since I can remember;

And in case the said Annie H. Ide shall neglect or contravene either

of the above conditions, I hereby revoke the donation and transfer my

rights in the said birthday to the President of the United States of

America for the time being.

In witness whereof I have hereto set my hand and seal this 19th day of

June, in the year of grace eighteen hundred and ninety-one.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON. [Seal.]

\_Witness\_, LLOYD OSBOURNE.

\_Witness\_, HAROLD WATTS.

He died in Samoa in December 1894--not from phthisis or anything directly

connected with it, but from the bursting of a blood-vessel and suffusion

of blood on the brain. He had up to the moment almost of his sudden and

unexpected death been busy on \_Weir of Hermiston\_ and \_St Ives\_, which he

left unfinished--the latter having been brought to a conclusion by Mr

Quiller-Couch.

CHAPTER IX--SOME CHARACTERISTICS

In Stevenson we lost one of the most powerful writers of our day, as well

as the most varied in theme and style. When I use the word "powerful," I

do not mean merely the producing of the most striking or sensational

results, nor the facility of weaving a fascinating or blood-curdling

plot; I mean the writer who seemed always to have most in reserve--a

secret fund of power and fascination which always pointed beyond the

printed page, and set before the attentive and careful reader a strange

but fascinating \_personality\_. Other authors have done that in measure.

There was Hawthorne, behind whose writings there is always the wistful,

cold, far-withdrawn spectator of human nature--eerie, inquisitive, and, I

had almost said, inquisitorial--a little bloodless, eerie, weird, and

cobwebby. There was Dr Wendell Holmes, with his problems of heredity, of

race-mixture and weird inoculation, as in \_Elsie Venner\_ and \_The

Guardian Angel\_, and there were Poe and Charles Whitehead. Stevenson, in

a few of his writings--in one of the \_Merry Men\_ chapters and in \_Dr

Jekyll and Mr Hyde\_, and, to some extent, in \_The Master of

Ballantrae\_--showed that he could enter on the obscure and, in a sense,

weird and metaphysical elements in human life; though always there was,

too, a touch at least of gloomy suggestion, from which, as it seemed, he

could not there wholly escape. But always, too, there was a touch that

suggests the universal.

Even in the stories that would be classed as those of incident and

adventure merely, \_Treasure Island\_, \_Kidnapped\_, and the rest, there is

a sense as of some unaffected but fine symbolism that somehow touches

something of possibility in yourself as you read. The simplest narrative

from his hand proclaimed itself a deep study in human nature--its motives

tendencies, and possibilities. In these stories there is promise at once

of the most realistic imagination, the most fantastic romance, keen

insights into some sides of human nature, and weird fancies, as well as

the most delicate and dainty pictures of character. And this is

precisely what we have--always with a vein of the finest autobiography--a

kind of select and indirect self-revelation--often with a touch of

quaintness, a subdued humour, and sweet-blooded vagary, if we may be

allowed the word, which make you feel towards the writer as towards a

friend. He was too much an artist to overdo this, and his strength lies

there, that generally he suggests and turns away at the right point, with

a smile, as you ask for \_more\_. Look how he sets, half slyly, these

words into the mouth of David Balfour on his first meeting with Catriona

in one of the steep wynds or closes off the High Street of Edinburgh:

"There is no greater wonder than the way the face of a young woman

fits in a man's mind, and stays there, and he never could tell you

why: it just seems it was the thing he wanted."

Take this alongside of his remark made to his mother while still a

youth--"that he did not care to understand the strain on a bridge" (when

he tried to study engineering); what he wanted was something with human

nature in it. His style, in his essays, etc., where he writes in his own

person, is most polished, full of phrases finely drawn; when he speaks

through others, as in \_Kidnapped\_ and \_David Balfour\_, it is still fine

and effective, and generally it is fairly true to the character, with

cunning glimpses, nevertheless, of his own temper and feeling too. He

makes us feel his confidants and friends, as has been said. One could

almost construct a biography from his essays and his novels--the one

would give us the facts of his life suffused with fancy and ideal colour,

humour and fine observation not wanting; the other would give us the

history of his mental and moral being and development, and of the traits

and determinations which he drew from along a lengthened line of

progenitors. How characteristic it is of him--a man who for so many

years suffered as an invalid--that he should lay it down that the two

great virtues, including all others, were cheerfulness and delight in

labour.

One writer has very well said on this feature in Stevenson:

"Other authors have struggled bravely against physical weakness, but

their work has not usually been of a creative order, dependent for its

success on high animal spirits. They have written histories, essays,

contemplative or didactic poems, works which may more or less be

regarded as 'dull narcotics numbing pain.' But who, in so fragile a

frame as Robert Louis Stevenson's, has retained such indomitable

elasticity, such fertility of invention, such unflagging energy, not

merely to collect and arrange, but to project and body forth? Has any

true 'maker' been such an incessant sufferer? From his childhood, as

he himself said apropos of the \_Child's Garden\_, he could 'speak with

less authority of gardens than of that other "land of counterpane."'

There were, indeed, a few years of adolescence during which his health

was tolerable, but they were years of apprenticeship to life and art

('pioching,' as he called it), not of serious production. Though he

was a precocious child, his genius ripened slowly, and it was just

reaching maturity when the 'wolverine,' as he called his disease,

fixed its fangs in his flesh. From that time forward not only did he

live with death at his elbow in an almost literal sense (he used to

carry his left arm in a sling lest a too sudden movement should bring

on a haemorrhage), but he had ever-recurring intervals of weeks and

months during which he was totally unfit for work; while even at the

best of times he had to husband his strength most jealously. Add to

all this that he was a slow and laborious writer, who would take more

pains with a phrase than Scott with a chapter--then look at the

stately shelf of his works, brimful of impulse, initiative, and the

joy of life, and say whether it be an exaggeration to call his

tenacity and fortitude unique!"

Samoa, with its fine climate, prolonged his life--we had fain hoped that

in that air he found so favourable he might have lived for many years, to

add to the precious stock of innocent delight he has given to the

world--to do yet more and greater. It was not to be. They buried him,

with full native honours as to a chief, on the top of Vaea mountain, 1300

feet high--a road for the coffin to pass being cut through the woods on

the slopes of the hill. There he has a resting-place not all unfit--for

he sought the pure and clearer air on the heights from whence there are

widest prospects; yet not in the spot he would have chosen--for his heart

was at home, and not very long before his death he sang, surely with

pathetic reference now:

"Spring shall come, come again, calling up the moorfowl,

Spring shall bring the sun and rain, bring the bees and flowers,

Red shall the heather bloom over hill and valley,

Soft flow the stream thro' the even-flowing hours;

Fair the day shine, as it shone upon my childhood--

Fair shine the day on the house with open door;

Birds come and cry there, and twitter in the chimney--

But I go for ever and come again no more."

CHAPTER X--A SAMOAN MEMORIAL OF R. L. STEVENSON

A few weeks after his death, the mail from Samoa, brought to Stevenson's

friends, myself among the number, a precious, if pathetic, memorial of

the master. It is in the form of "A Letter to Mr Stevenson's Friends,"

by his stepson, Mr Lloyd Osbourne, and bears the motto from Walt Whitman,

"I have been waiting for you these many years. Give me your hand and

welcome." Mr Osbourne gives a full account of the last hours.

"He wrote hard all that morning of the last day; his half-finished

book, \_Hermiston\_, he judged the best he had ever written, and the

sense of successful effort made him buoyant and happy as nothing else

could. In the afternoon the mail fell to be answered--not business

correspondence, for this was left till later--but replies to the long,

kindly letters of distant friends received but two days since, and

still bright in memory. At sunset he came downstairs; rallied his

wife about the forebodings she could not shake off; talked of a

lecturing tour to America that he was eager to make, 'as he was now so

well'; and played a game of cards with her to drive away her

melancholy. He said he was hungry; begged her assistance to help him

make a salad for the evening meal; and, to enhance the little feast he

brought up a bottle of old Burgundy from the cellar. He was helping

his wife on the verandah, and gaily talking, when suddenly he put both

hands to his head and cried out, 'What's that?' Then he asked

quickly, 'Do I look strange?' Even as he did so he fell on his knees

beside her. He was helped into the great hall, between his wife and

his body-servant, Sosimo, losing consciousness instantly as he lay

back in the armchair that had once been his grandfather's. Little

time was lost in bringing the doctors--Anderson of the man-of-war, and

his friend, Dr Funk. They looked at him and shook their heads; they

laboured strenuously, and left nothing undone. But he had passed the

bounds of human skill. He had grown so well and strong, that his

wasted lungs were unable to bear the stress of returning health."

Then 'tis told how the Rev. Mr Clarke came and prayed by him; and how,

soon after, the chiefs were summoned, and came, bringing their fine mats,

which, laid on the body, almost hid the Union jack in which it had been

wrapped. One of the old Mataafa chiefs, who had been in prison, and who

had been one of those who worked on the making of the "Road of the Loving

Heart" (the road of gratitude which the chiefs had made up to Mr

Stevenson's house as a mark of their appreciation of his efforts on their

behalf), came and crouched beside the body and said:

"I am only a poor Samoan, and ignorant. Others are rich, and can give

Tusitala {6} the parting presents of rich, fine mats; I am poor, and

can give nothing this last day he receives his friends. Yet I am not

afraid to come and look the last time in my friend's face, never to

see him more till we meet with God. Behold! Tusitala is dead;

Mataafa is also dead. These two great friends have been taken by God.

When Mataafa was taken, who was our support but Tusitala? We were in

prison, and he cared for us. We were sick, and he made us well. We

were hungry, and he fed us. The day was no longer than his kindness.

You are great people, and full of love. Yet who among you is so great

as Tusitala? What is your love to his love? Our clan was Mataafa's

clan, for whom I speak this day; therein was Tusitala also. We mourn

them both."

A select company of Samoans would not be deterred, and watched by the

body all night, chanting songs, with bits of Catholic prayers; and in the

morning the work began of clearing a path through the wood on the hill to

the spot on the crown where Mr Stevenson had expressed a wish to be

buried. The following prayer, which Mr Stevenson had written and read

aloud to his family only the night before, was read by Mr Clarke in the

service:

"We beseech thee, Lord, to behold us with favour, folk of many

families and nations, gathered together in the peace of this roof;

weak men and women, subsisting under the covert of Thy patience. Be

patient still; suffer us yet a while longer--with our broken purposes

of good, with our idle endeavours against evil--suffer us a while

longer to endure, and (if it may be) help us to do better. Bless to

us our extraordinary mercies; if the day come when these must be

taken, have us play the man under affliction. Be with our friends; be

with ourselves. Go with each of us to rest: if any awake, temper to

them the dark hours of watching; and when the day returns to us, our

Sun and Comforter, call us up with morning faces and with morning

hearts--eager to labour--eager to be happy, if happiness shall be our

portion; and if the day be marked for sorrow, strong to endure it.

"We thank Thee and praise Thee, and in the words of Him to whom this

day is sacred, close our oblations."

Mr Bazzet M. Haggard, H.B.M., Land-Commissioner, tells, by way of

reminiscence, the story of "The Road of Good Heart," how it came to be

built, and of the great feast Mr Stevenson gave at the close of the work,

at which, in the course of his speech, he said:

"You are all aware in some degree of what has happened. You know

those chiefs to have been prisoners; you perhaps know that during the

term of their confinement I had it in my power to do them certain

favours. One thing some of you cannot know, that they were

immediately repaid by answering attentions. They were liberated by

the new Administration. . . . As soon as they were free men--owing no

man anything--instead of going home to their own places and families,

they came to me. They offered to do this work (to make this road) for

me as a free gift, without hire, without supplies, and I was tempted

at first to refuse their offer. I knew the country to be poor; I knew

famine threatening; I knew their families long disorganised for want

of supervision. Yet I accepted, because I thought the lesson of that

road might be more useful to Samoa than a thousand bread-fruit trees,

and because to myself it was an exquisite pleasure to receive that

which was so handsomely offered. It is now done; you have trod it to-

day in coming hither. It has been made for me by chiefs; some of them

old, some sick, all newly delivered from a harassing confinement, and

in spite of weather unusually hot and insalubrious. I have seen these

chiefs labour valiantly with their own hands upon the work, and I have

set up over it, now that it is finished the name of 'The Road of

Gratitude' (the road of loving hearts), and the names of those that

built it. 'In perpetuam memoriam,' we say, and speak idly. At least,

as long as my own life shall be spared it shall be here perpetuated;

partly for my pleasure and in my gratitude; partly for others

continually to publish the lesson of this road."

And turning to the chiefs, Mr Stevenson said:

"I will tell you, chiefs, that when I saw you working on that road, my

heart grew warm; not with gratitude only, but with hope. It seemed to

me that I read the promise of something good for Samoa; it seemed to

me as I looked at you that you were a company of warriors in a battle,

fighting for the defence of our common country against all aggression.

For there is a time to fight and a time to dig. You Samoans may

fight, you may conquer twenty times, and thirty times, and all will be

in vain. There is but one way to defend Samoa. Hear it, before it is

too late. It is to make roads and gardens, and care for your trees,

and sell their produce wisely; and, in one word, to occupy and use

your country. If you do not, others will. . . .

"I love Samoa and her people. I love the land. I have chosen it to

be my home while I live, and my grave after I am dead, and I love the

people, and have chosen them to be my people, to live and die with.

And I see that the day is come now of the great battle; of the great

and the last opportunity by which it shall be decided whether you are

to pass away like those other races of which I have been speaking, or

to stand fast and have your children living on and honouring your

memory in the land you received of your fathers."

Mr James H. Mulligan, U.S. Consul, told of the feast of Thanksgiving Day

on the 29th November prior to Mr Stevenson's death, and how at great

pains he had procured for it the necessary turkey, and how Mrs Stevenson

had found a fair substitute for the pudding. In the course of his speech

in reply to an unexpected proposal of "The Host," Mr Stevenson said:

"There on my right sits she who has but lately from our own loved

native land come back to me--she to whom, with no lessening of

affection to those others to whom I cling, I love better than all the

world besides--my mother. From the opposite end of the table, my

wife, who has been all in all to me, when the days were very dark,

looks to-night into my eyes--while we have both grown a bit older--with

undiminished and undiminishing affection.

"Childless, yet on either side of me sits that good woman, my

daughter, and the stalwart man, my son, and both have been and are

more than son and daughter to me, and have brought into my life mirth

and beauty. Nor is this all. There sits the bright boy dear to my

heart, full of the flow and the spirits of boyhood, so that I can even

know that for a time at least we have still the voice of a child in

the house."

Mr A. W. Mackay gives an account of the funeral and a description of the

burial-place, ending:

"Tofa Tusitala! Sleep peacefully! on thy mountain-top, alone in

Nature's sanctity, where the wooddove's note, the moaning of the waves

as they break unceasingly on the distant reef, and the sighing of the

winds in the distant tavai trees chant their requiem."

The Rev. Mr Clarke tells of the constant and active interest Mr Stevenson

took in the missionaries and their work, often aiding them by his advice

and fine insight into the character of the natives; and a translation

follows of a dirge by one of the chiefs, so fine that we must give it:

I.

"Listen, O this world, as I tell of the disaster

That befell in the late afternoon;

That broke like a wave of the sea

Suddenly and swiftly, blinding our eyes.

Alas for Loia who speaks tears in his voice!

\_Refrain\_--Groan and weep, O my heart, in its sorrow.

Alas for Tusitala, who rests in the forest!

Aimlessly we wait, and sorrowing. Will he again return?

Lament, O Vailima, waiting and ever waiting!

Let us search and inquire of the captain of ships,

'Be not angry, but has not Tusitala come?'

II.

"Teuila, sorrowing one, come thou hither!

Prepare me a letter, and I will carry it.

Let her Majesty Victoria be told

That Tusitala, the loving one, has been taken hence.

\_Refrain\_--Groan and weep, O my heart, etc., etc.

III.

"Alas! my heart weeps with anxious grief

As I think of the days before us:

Of the white men gathering for the Christmas assembly!

Alas for Aolele! left in her loneliness,

And the men of Vailima, who weep together

Their leader--their leader being taken.

\_Refrain\_--Groan and weep, O my heart, etc., etc.

IV.

"Alas! O my heart! it weeps unceasingly

When I think of his illness

Coming upon him with fatal swiftness.

Would that it waited a glance or a word from him,

Or some token, some token from us of our love.

\_Refrain\_--Groan and weep, O my heart, etc., etc.

V.

"Grieve, O my heart! I cannot bear to look on

All the chiefs who are there now assembling:

Alas, Tusitala! Thou art not here!

I look hither and thither in vain for thee.

\_Refrain\_--Groan and weep, O my heart, etc., etc."

And the little booklet closes with Mr Stevenson's own lines:

"REQUIEM.

Under the wide and starry sky,

Dig the grave and let me lie;

Glad did I live and gladly die,

And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:

'Here he lies where he longed to be;

Home is the sailor, home from sea;

And the hunter home from the hill.'"

Every touch tells here was a man, with heart and head, with soul and mind

intent on the loftiest things; simple, great,

"Like one of the simple great ones gone

For ever and ever by.

His character towered after all far above his books; great and beautiful

though they were. Ready for friendship; from all meanness free. So,

too, the Samoans felt. This, surely, was what Goethe meant when he

wrote:

"The clear head and stout heart,

However far they roam,

Yet in every truth have part,

Are everywhere at home."

His manliness, his width of sympathy, his practicality, his range of

interests were in nothing more seen than in his contributions to the

history of Samoa, as specially exhibited in \_A Footnote to History\_ and

his letters to the \_Times\_. He was, on this side, in no sense a dreamer,

but a man of acute observation and quick eye for passing events and the

characters that were in them with sympathy equal to his discernments. His

portraits of certain Germans and others in these writings, and his power

of tracing effects to remote and underlying causes, show sufficiently

what he might have done in the field of history, had not higher voices

called him. His adaptation to the life in Samoa, and his assumption of

the semi-patriarchal character in his own sphere there, were only tokens

of the presence of the same traits as have just been dwelt on.

CHAPTER XI--MISS STUBBS' RECORD OF A PILGRIMAGE

Mrs Strong, in her chapter of \_Table Talk in Memories of Vailima\_, tells

a story of the natives' love for Stevenson. "The other day the cook was

away," she writes, "and Louis, who was busy writing, took his meals in

his room. Knowing there was no one to cook his lunch, he told Sosimo to

bring him some bread and cheese. To his surprise he was served with an

excellent meal--an omelette, a good salad, and perfect coffee. 'Who

cooked this?' asked Louis in Samoan. 'I did,' said Sosimo. 'Well,' said

Louis, 'great is your wisdom.' Sosimo bowed and corrected him--'Great is

my love!'"

Miss Stubbs, in her \_Stevenson's Shrine\_; \_the Record of a Pilgrimage\_,

illustrates the same devotion. On the top of Mount Vaea, she writes, is

the massive sarcophagus, "not an ideal structure by any means, not even

beautiful, and yet in its massive ruggedness it somehow suited the man

and the place."

"The wind sighed softly in the branches of the 'Tavau' trees, from out

the green recesses of the 'Toi' came the plaintive coo of the

wood-pigeon. In and out of the branches of the magnificent 'Fau' tree,

which overhangs the grave, a king-fisher, sea-blue, iridescent, flitted

to and fro, whilst a scarlet hibiscus, in full flower, showed up royally

against the gray lichened cement. All around was light and life and

colour, and I said to myself, 'He is made one with nature'; he is now,

body and soul and spirit, commingled with the loveliness around. He who

longed in life to scale the height, he who attained his wish only in

death, has become in himself a parable of fulfilment. No need now for

that heart-sick cry:--

"'Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,

Say, could that lad be I?'

No need now for the despairing finality of:

"'I have trod the upward and the downward slope,

I have endured and done in the days of yore,

I have longed for all, and bid farewell to hope,

And I have lived, and loved, and closed the door.'

"Death has set his seal of peace on the unequal conflict of mind and

matter; the All-Mother has gathered him to herself.

"In years to come, when his grave is perchance forgotten, a rugged

ruin, home of the lizard and the bat, Tusitala--the story-teller--'the

man with a heart of gold' (as I so often heard him designated in the

Islands), will live, when it may be his tales have ceased to interest,

in the tender remembrance of those whose lives he beautified, and

whose hearts he warmed into gratitude."

The chiefs have prohibited the use of firearms or other weapons on Mount

Vaea, "in order that the birds may live there undisturbed and unafraid,

and build their nests in the trees around Tusitala's grave."

Miss Stubbs has many records of the impression produced on those he came

in contact with in Samoa--white men and women as well as natives. She

met a certain Austrian Count, who adored Stevenson's memory. Over his

camp bed was a framed photograph of R. L. Stevenson.

"So," he said, "I keep him there, for he was my saviour, and I wish

'good-night' and 'good-morning,' every day, both to himself and to his

old home." The Count then told us that when he was stopping at

Vailima he used to have his bath daily on the verandah below his room.

One lovely morning he got up very early, got into the bath, and

splashed and sang, feeling very well and very happy, and at last

beginning to sing very loudly, he forgot Mr Stevenson altogether. All

at once there was Stevenson himself, his hair all ruffled up, his eyes

full of anger. "Man," he said, "you and your infernal row have cost

me more than two hundred pounds in ideas," and with that he was gone,

but he did not address the Count again the whole of that day. Next

morning he had forgotten the Count's offence and was just as friendly

as ever, but--the noise was never repeated!

Another of the Count's stories greatly amused the visitors:

"An English lord came all the way to Samoa in his yacht to see Mr

Stevenson, and found him in his cool Kimino sitting with the ladies,

and drinking tea on his verandah; the whole party had their feet bare.

The English lord thought that he must have called at the wrong time,

and offered to go away, but Mr Stevenson called out to him, and

brought him back, and made him stay to dinner. They all went away to

dress, and the guest was left sitting alone in the verandah. Soon

they came back, Mr Osbourne and Mr Stevenson wearing the form of dress

most usual in that hot climate a white mess jacket, and white

trousers, but their feet were still bare. The guest put up his

eyeglass and stared for a bit, then he looked down upon his own

beautifully shod feet, and sighed. They all talked and laughed until

the ladies came in, the ladies in silk dresses, befrilled with lace,

but still with bare feet, and the guest took a covert look through his

eyeglass and gasped, but when he noticed that there were gold bangles

on Mrs Strong's ankles and rings upon her toes, he could bear no more

and dropped his eyeglass on the ground of the verandah breaking it all

to bits."

Miss Stubbs met on the other side of the island a photographer who told

her this:

"I had but recently come to Samoa," he said, "and was standing one day

in my shop when Mr Stevenson came in and spoke. 'Man,' he said, 'I

tak ye to be a Scotsman like mysel'.'

"I would I could have claimed a kinship," deplored the photographer,

"but, alas! I am English to the backbone, with never a drop of Scotch

blood in my veins, and I told him this, regretting the absence of the

blood tie."

"'I could have sworn your back was the back of a Scotsman,' was his

comment, 'but,' and he held out his hand, 'you look sick, and there is

a fellowship in sickness not to be denied.' I said I was not strong,

and had come to the Island on account of my health. 'Well, then,'

replied Mr Stevenson, 'it shall be my business to help you to get

well; come to Vailima whenever you like, and if I am out, ask for

refreshment, and wait until I come in, you will always find a welcome

there.'"

At this point my informant turned away, and there was a break in his

voice as he exclaimed, "Ah, the years go on, and I don't miss him

less, but more; next to my mother he was the best friend I ever had: a

man with a heart of gold; his house was a second home to me."

Stevenson's experience shows how easy it is with a certain type of man,

to restore the old feudal conditions of service and relationship.

Stevenson did this in essentials in Samoa. He tells us how he managed to

get good service out of the Samoans (who are accredited with great

unwillingness to work); and this he \_did\_ by firm, but generous, kindly,

almost brotherly treatment, reviving, as it were, a kind of clan

life--giving a livery of certain colours--symbol of all this. A little

fellow of eight, he tells, had been taken into the household, made a pet

of by Mrs Strong, his stepdaughter, and had had a dress given to him,

like that of the men; and, when one day he had strolled down by himself

as far as the hotel, and the master of it, seeing him, called out in

Samoan, "Hi, youngster, who are you?" The eight-year-old replied, "Why,

don't you see for yourself? I am one of the Vailima men!"

The story of the \_Road of the Loving Heart\_ was but another fine

attestation of it.

CHAPTER XII--HIS GENIUS AND METHODS

To have created a school of idolaters, who will out and out swear by

everything, and as though by necessity, at the same time, a school of

studious detractors, who will suspiciously question everything, or throw

out suggestions of disparagement, is at all events, a proof of greatness,

the countersign of undoubted genius, and an assurance of lasting fame. R.

L. Stevenson has certainly secured this. Time will tell what of virtue

there is with either party. For me, who knew Stevenson, and loved him,

as finding in the sweet-tempered, brave, and in some things, most

generous man, what gave at once tone and elevation to the artist, I would

fain indicate here my impressions of him and his genius--impressions that

remain almost wholly uninfluenced by the vast mass of matter about him

that the press now turns out. Books, not to speak of articles, pour

forth about him--about his style, his art, his humour and his

characters--aye, and even about his religion.

Miss Simpson follows Mr Bellyse Baildon with the \_Edinburgh Days\_, Miss

Moyes Black comes on with her picture in the \_Famous Scots\_, and

Professor Raleigh succeeds her; Mr Graham Balfour follows with his\_

Life\_; Mr Kelman's volume about his Religion comes next, and that is

reinforced by more familiar letters and \_Table Talk\_, by Lloyd Osbourne

and Mrs Strong, his step-children; Mr J. Hammerton then comes on handily

with \_Stevensoniana\_--fruit lovingly gathered from many and far fields,

and garnered with not a little tact and taste, and catholicity; Miss

Laura Stubbs then presents us with her touching \_Stevenson's Shrine\_:

\_the Record of a Pilgrimage\_; and Mr Sidney Colvin is now busily at work

on his \_Life of Stevenson\_, which must do not a little to enlighten and

to settle many questions.

Curiosity and interest grow as time passes; and the places connected with

Stevenson, hitherto obscure many of them, are now touched with light if

not with romance, and are known, by name at all events, to every reader

of books. Yes; every place he lived in, or touched at, is worthy of full

description if only on account of its associations with him. If there is

not a land of Stevenson, as there is a land of Scott, or of Burns, it is

due to the fact that he was far-travelled, and in his works painted many

scenes: but there are at home--Edinburgh, and Halkerside and Allermuir,

Caerketton, Swanston, and Colinton, and Maw Moss and Rullion Green and

Tummel, "the \_wale\_ of Scotland," as he named it to me, and the

Castletown of Braemar--Braemar in his view coming a good second to

Tummel, for starting-points to any curious worshipper who would go the

round in Scotland and miss nothing. Mr Geddie's work on \_The Home

Country of Stevenson\_ may be found very helpful here.

1. It is impossible to separate Stevenson from his work, because of the

imperious personal element in it; and so I shall not now strive to gain

the appearance of cleverness by affecting any distinction here. The

first thing I would say is, that he was when I knew him--what pretty much

to the end he remained--a youth. His outlook on life was boyishly genial

and free, despite all his sufferings from ill-health--it was the pride of

action, the joy of endurance, the revelry of high spirits, and the sense

of victory that most fascinated him; and his theory of life was to take

pleasure and give pleasure, without calculation or stint--a kind of

boyish grace and bounty never to be overcome or disturbed by outer

accident or change. If he was sometimes haunted with the thought of

changes through changed conditions or circumstances, as my very old

friend, Mr Charles Lowe, has told even of the College days that he was

always supposing things to undergo some sea-change into something else,

if not "into something rich and strange," this was but to add to his

sense of enjoyment, and the power of conferring delight, and the luxuries

of variety, as boys do when they let fancy loose. And this always had,

with him, an individual reference or return. He was thus constantly, and

latterly, half-consciously, trying to interpret himself somehow through

all the things which engaged him, and which he so transmogrified--things

that especially attracted him and took his fancy. Thus, if it must be

confessed, that even in his highest moments, there lingers a touch--if no

more than a touch--of self-consciousness which will not allow him to

forget manner in matter, it is also true that he is cunningly conveying

traits in himself; and the sense of this is often at the root of his

sweet, gentle, naive humour. There is, therefore, some truth in the

criticisms which assert that even "long John Silver," that fine pirate,

with his one leg, was, after all, a shadow of Stevenson himself--the

genial buccaneer who did his tremendous murdering with a smile on his

face was but Stevenson thrown into new circumstances, or, as one has

said, Stevenson-cum-Henley, so thrown as was also Archer in \_Weir of

Hermiston\_, and more than this, that his most successful women-folk--like

Miss Grant and Catriona--are studies of himself, and that in all his

heroes, and even heroines, was an unmistakable touch of R. L. Stevenson.

Even Mr Baildon rather maladroitly admits that in Miss Grant, the Lord

Advocate's daughter, \_there is a good deal of the author himself

disguised in petticoats\_. I have thought of Stevenson in many suits,

beside that which included the velvet jacket, but--petticoats!

Youth is autocratic, and can show a grand indifferency: it goes for what

it likes, and ignores all else--it fondly magnifies its favourites, and,

after all, to a great extent, it is but analysing, dealing with and

presenting itself to us, if we only watch well. This is the secret of

all prevailing romance: it is the secret of all stories of adventure and

chivalry of the simpler and more primitive order; and in one aspect it is

true that R. L. Stevenson loved and clung to the primitive and elemental,

if it may not be said, as one distinguished writer has said, that he even

loved savagery in itself. But hardly could it be seriously held, as Mr

I. Zangwill held:

"That women did not cut any figure in his books springs from this same

interest in the elemental. Women are not born, but made. They are a

social product of infinite complexity and delicacy. For a like reason

Stevenson was no interpreter of the modern. . . . A child to the end,

always playing at 'make-believe,' dying young, as those whom the gods

love, and, as he would have died had he achieved his centenary, he was

the natural exponent in literature of the child."

But there were subtly qualifying elements beyond what Mr Zangwill here

recognises and reinforces. That is just about as correct and true as

this other deliverance:

"His Scotch romances have been as over-praised by the zealous Scotsmen

who cry 'genius' at the sight of a kilt, and who lose their heads at a

waft from the heather, as his other books have been under-praised. The

best of all, \_The Master of Ballantrae\_, ends in a bog; and where the

author aspires to exceptional subtlety of character-drawing he befogs

us or himself altogether. We are so long weighing the brothers

Ballantrae in the balance, watching it incline now this way, now that,

scrupulously removing a particle of our sympathy from the one brother

to the other, to restore it again in the next chapter, that we end

with a conception of them as confusing as Mr Gilbert's conception of

Hamlet, who was idiotically sane with lucid intervals of lunacy."

If Stevenson was, as Mr Zangwill holds, "the child to the end," and the

child only, then if we may not say what Carlyle said of De Quincey:

"\_Eccovi\_, that child has been in hell," we may say, "\_Eccovi\_, that

child has been in unchildlike haunts, and can't forget the memory of

them." In a sense every romancer is a child--such was Ludwig Tieck, such

was Scott, such was James Hogg, the Ettrick Shepherd. But each is

something more--he has been touched with the wand of a fairy, and knows,

at least, some of Elfin Land as well as of childhood's home.

The sense of Stevenson's youthfulness seems to have struck every one who

had intimacy with him. Mr Baildon writes (p. 21 of his book):

I would now give much to possess but one of Stevenson's gifts--namely,

that extraordinary vividness of recollection by which he could so

astonishingly recall, not only the doings, but the very thoughts and

emotions of his youth. For, often as we must have communed together,

with all the shameless candour of boys, hardly any remark has stuck to

me except the opinion already alluded to, which struck me--his elder

by some fifteen months--as very amusing, that at sixteen 'we should be

men.' \_He of all mortals\_, \_who was\_, \_in a sense\_, \_always still a

boy\_!"

Mr Gosse tells us:

"He had retained a great deal of the temperament of a child, and it

was his philosophy to encourage it. In his dreary passages of bed,

when his illness was more than commonly heavy on him, he used to

contrive little amusements for himself. He played on the flute, or he

modelled little groups and figures in clay."

2. One of the qualifying elements unnoted by Mr Zangwill is simply this,

that R. L. Stevenson never lost the strange tint imparted to his youth by

the religious influences to which he was subject, and which left their

impress and colour on him and all that he did. Henley, in his striking

sonnet, hit it when he wrote:

"A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,

Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,

\_And something of the Shorter Catechist\_."

\_Something\_! he was a great deal of Shorter Catechist! Scotch Calvinism,

its metaphysic, and all the strange whims, perversities, and questionings

of "Fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute," which it inevitably

awakens, was much with him--the sense of reprobation and the gloom born

of it, as well as the abounding joy in the sense of the elect--the

Covenanters and their wild resolutions, the moss-troopers and their dare-

devilries--Pentland Risings and fights of Rullion Green; he not only

never forgot them, but they mixed themselves as in his very breath of

life, and made him a great questioner. How would I have borne myself in

this or in that? Supposing I had been there, how would it have been--the

same, or different from what it was with those that were there? His work

is throughout at bottom a series of problems that almost all trace to

this root, directly or indirectly. "There, but for the grace of God,

goes John Bradford," said the famous Puritan on seeing a felon led to

execution; so with Stevenson. Hence his fondness for tramps, for scamps

(he even bestowed special attention and pains on Villon, the poet-scamp);

he was rather impatient with poor Thoreau, because he was a purist

solitary, and had too little of vice, and, as Stevenson held, narrow in

sympathy, and too self-satisfied, and bent only on self-improvement. He

held a brief for the honest villain, and leaned to him brotherly. Even

the anecdotes he most prizes have a fine look this way--a hunger for

completion in achievement, even in the violation of fine humane feeling

or morality, and all the time a sense of submission to God's will.

"Doctor," said the dying gravedigger in \_Old Mortality\_, "I hae laid

three hunner an' fower score in that kirkyaird, an' had it been His

wull," indicating Heaven, "I wad hae likeit weel to hae made oot the

fower hunner." That took Stevenson. Listen to what Mr Edmond Gosse

tells of his talk, when he found him in a private hotel in Finsbury

Circus, London, ready to be put on board a steamer for America, on 21st

August, 1887:

"It was church time, and there was some talk of my witnessing his

will, which I could not do because there could be found no other

reputable witness, the whole crew of the hotel being at church.

'This,' he said, 'is the way in which our valuable city hotels--packed

no doubt with gems and jewellery--are deserted on a Sunday morning.

Some bold piratical fellow, defying the spirit of Sabbatarianism,

might make a handsome revenue by sacking the derelict hotels between

the hours of ten and twelve. One hotel a week would enable such a man

to retire in course of a year. A mask might perhaps be worn for the

mere fancy of the thing, and to terrify kitchen-maids, but no real

disguise would be needful.'"

I would rather agree with Mr Chesterton than with Mr Zangwill here:

"Stevenson's enormous capacity for joy flowed directly out of his

profoundly religious temperament. He conceived himself as an

unimportant guest at one eternal and uproarious banquet, and instead

of grumbling at the soup, he accepted it with careless gratitude. . .

. His gaiety was neither the gaiety of the pagan, nor the gaiety of

the \_bon vivant\_. It was the greater gaiety of the mystic. He could

enjoy trifles because there was to him no such thing as a trifle. He

was a child who respected his dolls because they were the images of

the image of God, portraits at only two removes."

Here, then, we have the child crossed by the dreamer and the mystic, bred

of Calvinism and speculation on human fate and chance, and on the mystery

of temperament and inheritance, and all that flows from

these--reprobation, with its dire shadows, assured Election with its

joys, etc., etc.

3. If such a combination is in favour of the story-teller up to a certain

point, it is not favourable to the highest flights, and it is alien to

dramatic presentation pure and simple. This implies detachment from

moods and characters, high as well as low, that complete justice in

presentation may be done to all alike, and the one balance that obtains

in life grasped and repeated with emphasis. But towards his leading

characters Stevenson is unconsciously biassed, because they are more or

less shadowy projections of himself, or images through which he would

reveal one or other side or aspect of his own personality. Attwater is a

confessed failure, because it, more than any other, testifies this: he is

but a mouth-piece for one side or tendency in Stevenson. If the same

thing is not more decisively felt in some other cases, it is because

Stevenson there showed the better art o' hidin', and not because he was

any more truly detached or dramatic. "Of Hamlet most of all," wrote

Henley in his sonnet. The Hamlet in Stevenson--the self-questioning,

egotistic, moralising Hamlet--was, and to the end remained, a something

alien to bold, dramatic, creative freedom. He is great as an artist, as

a man bent on giving to all that he did the best and most distinguished

form possible, but not great as a free creator of dramatic power.

"Mother," he said as a mere child, "I've drawed a man. Now, will I draw

his soul?" He was to the end all too fond to essay a picture of the

soul, separate and peculiar. All the Jekyll and Hyde and even Ballantrae

conceptions came out of that--and what is more, he always mixed his own

soul with the other soul, and could not help doing so.

4. When; therefore, I find Mr Pinero, in lecturing at Edinburgh, deciding

in favour of Stevenson as possessed of rare dramatic power, and wondering

why he did not more effectively employ it, I can't agree with him; and

this because of the presence of a certain atmosphere in the novels, alien

to free play of the individualities presented. Like Hawthorne's, like

the works of our great symbolists, they are restricted by a sense of some

obtaining conception, some weird metaphysical \_weird\_ or preconception.

This is the ground "Ian MacLaren" has for saying that "his kinship is not

with Boccaccio and Rabelais, but with Dante and Spenser"--the ground for

many remarks by critics to the effect that they still crave from him

"less symbol and more individuality"--the ground for the Rev. W. J.

Dawson's remark that "he has a powerful and persistent sense of the

spiritual forces which move behind the painted shows of life; that he

writes not only as a realist but as a prophet, his meanest stage being

set with eternity as a background."

Such expressions are fullest justification for what we have here said: it

adds, and can only add, to our admiration of Stevenson, as a thinker,

seer, or mystic, but the asserting sense of such power can only end in

lessening the height to which he could attain as a dramatic artist; and

there is much indeed against Mr Pinero's own view that, in the dramas, he

finds that "fine speeches" are ruinous to them as acting plays. In the

strict sense overfine speeches are yet almost everywhere. David Balfour

could never have writ some speeches attributed to him--they are just R.

L. Stevenson with a very superficial difference that, when once detected,

renders them curious and quaint and interesting, but not dramatic.

CHAPTER XIII--PREACHER AND MYSTIC FABULIST

In reality, Stevenson is always directly or indirectly preaching a

sermon--enforcing a moral--as though he could not help it. "He would

rise from the dead to preach a sermon." He wrote some first-rate fables,

and might indeed have figured to effect as a moralist-fabulist, as truly

he was from beginning to end. There was a bit of Bunyan in him as well

as of AEsop and Rousseau and Thoreau--the mixture that found coherency in

his most peculiarly patient and forbearing temper is what gives at once

the quaintness, the freedom, and yet the odd didactic something that is

never wanting. I remember a fable about the Devil that might well be

brought in to illustrate this here--careful readers who neglect nothing

that Stevenson wrote will remember it also and perhaps bear me out here.

But for the sake of the young folks who may yet have some leeway to make

up, I shall indulge myself a little by quoting it: and, since I am on

that tack, follow it by another which presents Stevenson in his favourite

guise of quizzing his own characters, if not for his own advantage

certainly for ours, if we would in the least understand the fine moralist-

casuistical qualities of his mind and fancy:

THE DEVIL AND THE INNKEEPER

Once upon a time the devil stayed at an inn, where no one knew him,

for they were people whose education had been neglected. He was bent

on mischief, and for a time kept everybody by the ears. But at last

the innkeeper set a watch upon the devil and took him in the act.

The innkeeper got a rope's end.

"Now I am going to thrash you," said the inn-keeper.

"You have no right to be angry with me," said the devil. "I am only

the devil, and it is my nature to do wrong."

"Is that so?" asked the innkeeper.

"Fact, I assure you," said the devil.

"You really cannot help doing ill?" asked the innkeeper.

"Not in the smallest," said the devil, "it would be useless cruelty to

thrash a thing like me."

"It would indeed," said the innkeeper.

And he made a noose and hanged the devil.

"There!" said the innkeeper.

The deeper Stevenson goes, the more happily is he inspired. We could

scarcely cite anything more Stevensonian, alike in its humour and its

philosophy, than the dialogue between Captain Smollett and Long John

Silver, entitled \_The Persons of the Tale\_. After chapter xxxii. of

\_Treasure Island\_, these two puppets "strolled out to have a pipe before

business should begin again, and met in an open space not far from the

story." After a few preliminaries:

"You're a damned rogue, my man," said the Captain.

"Come, come, Cap'n, be just," returned the other. "There's no call to

be angry with me in earnest. I'm on'y a character in a sea story. I

don't really exist."

"Well, I don't really exist either," says the Captain, "which seems to

meet that."

"I wouldn't set no limits to what a virtuous character might consider

argument," responded Silver. "But I'm the villain of the tale, I am;

and speaking as one seafaring man to another, what I want to know is,

what's the odds?"

"Were you never taught your catechism?" said the Captain. "Don't you

know there's such a thing as an Author?"

"Such a thing as a Author?" returned John, derisively. "And who

better'n me? And the p'int is, if the Author made you, he made Long

John, and he made Hands, and Pew, and George Merry--not that George is

up to much, for he's little more'n a name; and he made Flint, what

there is of him; and he made this here mutiny, you keep such a work

about; and he had Tom Redruth shot; and--well, if that's a Author,

give me Pew!"

"Don't you believe in a future state?" said Smollett. "Do you think

there's nothing but the present sorty-paper?"

" I don't rightly know for that," said Silver, "and I don't see what

it's got to do with it, anyway. What I know is this: if there is sich

a thing as a Author, I'm his favourite chara'ter. He does me fathoms

better'n he does you--fathoms, he does. And he likes doing me. He

keeps me on deck mostly all the time, crutch and all; and he leaves

you measling in the hold, where nobody can't see you, nor wants to,

and you may lay to that! If there is a Author, by thunder, but he's

on my side, and you may lay to it!"

"I see he's giving you a long rope," said the Captain. . . .

Stevenson's stories--one and all--are too closely the illustrations by

characters of which his essays furnish the texts. You shall not read the

one wholly apart from the other without losing something--without losing

much of the quaint, often childish, and always insinuating personality of

the writer. It is this if fully perceived which would justify one

writer, Mr Zangwill, if I don't forget, in saying, as he did say, that

Stevenson would hold his place by his essays and not by his novels. Hence

there is a unity in all, but a unity found in a root which is ultimately

inimical to what is strictly free dramatic creation--creation, broad,

natural and unmoral in the highest sense just as nature is, as it is to

us, for example, when we speak of Shakespeare, or even Scott, or of

Cervantes or Fielding. If Mr Henley in his irruptive if not spiteful

\_Pall Mall Magazine\_ article had made this clear from the high critical

ground, then some of his derogatory remarks would not have been quite so

personal and offensive as they are.

Stevenson's bohemianism was always restrained and coloured by this. He

is a casuistic moralist, if not a Shorter Catechist, as Mr Henley put it

in his clever sonnet. He is constantly asking himself about moral laws

and how they work themselves out in character, especially as these

suggest and involve the casuistries of human nature. He is often a

little like Nathaniel Hawthorne, but he hardly follows them far enough

and rests on his own preconceptions and predilections, only he does not,

like him, get into or remain long in the cobwebby corners--his love of

the open air and exercise derived from generations of active lighthouse

engineers, out at all times on sea or land, or from Scottish ministers

who were fond of composing their sermons and reflecting on the

backwardness of human nature as they walked in their gardens or along the

hillsides even among mists and storms, did something to save him here,

reinforcing natural cheerfulness and the warm desire to give pleasure.

His excessive elaboration of style, which grew upon him more and more,

giving throughout often a sense of extreme artificiality and of the self-

consciousness usually bred of it, is but another incidental proof of

this. And let no reader think that I wish here to decry R. L. Stevenson.

I only desire faithfully to try to understand him, and to indicate the

class or group to which his genius and temperament really belong. He is

from first to last the idealistic dreamy or mystical romancer, and not

the true idealist or dealer direct with life or character for its own

sake. The very beauty and sweetness of his spirit in one way militated

against his dramatic success--he really did not believe in villains, and

always made them better than they should have been, and that, too, on the

very side where wickedness--their natural wickedness--is most

available--on the stage. The dreamer of dreams and the Shorter

Catechist, strangely united together, were here directly at odds with the

creative power, and crossed and misdirected it, and the casuist came in

and manoeuvred the limelight--all too like the old devil of the mediaeval

drama, who was made only to be laughed at and taken lightly, a buffoon

and a laughing-stock indeed. And while he could unveil villainy, as is

the case pre-eminently in Huish in the \_Ebb-Tide\_, he shrank from

inflicting the punishments for which untutored human nature looks, and

thus he lost one great aid to crude dramatic effect. As to his poems,

they are intimately personal in his happiest moments: he deals with

separate moods and sentiments, and scarcely ever touches those of a type

alien to his own. The defect of his child poems is distinctly that he is

everywhere strictly recalling and reproducing his own quaint and wholly

exceptional childhood; and children, ordinary, normal, healthy children,

will not take to these poems (though grown-ups largely do so), as they

would to, say, the \_Lilliput Levee\_ of my old friend, W. B. Rands. Rands

showed a great deal of true dramatic play there within his own very

narrow limits, as, at all events, adults must conceive them.

Even in his greatest works, in \_The Master of Ballantrae\_ and \_Weir of

Hermiston\_, the special power in Stevenson really lies in subduing his

characters at the most critical point for action, to make them prove or

sustain his thesis; and in this way the rare effect that he might have

secured \_dramatically\_ is largely lost and make-believe substituted, as

in the Treasure Search in the end of \_The Master of Ballantrae\_. The

powerful dramatic effect he might have had in his \_denouement\_ is thus

completely sacrificed. The essence of the drama for the stage is that

the work is for this and this alone--dialogue and everything being only

worked rightly when it bears on, aids, and finally secures this in happy

completeness.

In a word, you always, in view of true dramatic effect, see Stevenson

himself too clearly behind his characters. The "fine speeches" Mr Pinero

referred to trace to the intrusion behind the glass of a

part-quicksilvered portion, which cunningly shows, when the glass is

moved about, Stevenson himself behind the character, as we have said

already. For long he shied dealing with women, as though by a true

instinct. Unfortunately for him his image was as clear behind

\_Catriona\_, with the discerning, as anywhere else; and this, alas! too

far undid her as an independent, individual character, though traits like

those in her author were attractive. The constant effort to relieve the

sense of this affords him the most admirable openings for the display of

his exquisite style, of which he seldom or never fails to make the very

most in this regard; but the necessity laid upon him to aim at securing a

sense of relief by this is precisely the same as led him to write the

overfine speeches in the plays, as Mr Pinero found and pointed out at

Edinburgh: both defeat the true end, but in the written book mere art of

style and a naivete and a certain sweetness of temper conceal the lack of

nature and creative spontaneity; while on the stage the descriptions,

saving reflections and fine asides, are ruthlessly cut away under sheer

stage necessities, or, if left, but hinder the action; and art of this

kind does not there suffice to conceal the lack of nature.

More clearly to bring out my meaning here and draw aid from comparative

illustration, let me take my old friend of many years, Charles Gibbon.

Gibbon was poor, very poor, in intellectual subtlety compared with

Stevenson; he had none of his sweet, quaint, original fancy; he was no

casuist; he was utterly void of power in the subdued humorous twinkle or

genial by-play in which Stevenson excelled. But he has more of dramatic

power, pure and simple, than Stevenson had--his novels--the best of

them--would far more easily yield themselves to the ordinary purposes of

the ordinary playwright. Along with conscientiousness, perception,

penetration, with the dramatist must go a certain indescribable common-

sense commonplaceness--if I may name it so--protection against vagary and

that over-refined egotism and self-confession which is inimical to the

drama and in which the Stevensonian type all too largely abounds for

successful dramatic production. Mr Henley perhaps put it too strongly

when he said that what was supremely of interest to R. L. Stevenson was

Stevenson himself; but he indicates the tendency, and that tendency is

inimical to strong, broad, effective and varied dramatic presentation.

Water cannot rise above its own level; nor can minds of this type go

freely out of themselves in a grandly healthy, unconscious, and

unaffected way, and this is the secret of the dramatic spirit, if it be

not, as Shelley said, the secret of morals, which Stevenson, when he

passed away, was but on the way to attain. As we shall see, he had risen

so far above it, subdued it, triumphed over it, that we really cannot

guess what he might have attained had but more years been given him. For

the last attainment of the loftiest and truest genius is precisely

this--to gain such insight of the real that all else becomes subsidiary.

True simplicity and the abiding relief and enduring power of true art

with all classes lies here and not elsewhere. Cleverness, refinement,

fancy, and invention, even sublety of intellect, are practically nowhere

in this sphere without this.

CHAPTER XIV--STEVENSON AS DRAMATIST

In opposition to Mr Pinero, therefore, I assert that Stevenson's defect

in spontaneous dramatic presentation is seen clearly in his novels as

well as in his plays proper.

In writing to my good friend, Mr Thomas M'Kie, Advocate, Edinburgh,

telling him of my work on R. L. Stevenson and the results, I thus

gathered up in little the broad reflections on this point, and I may

perhaps be excused quoting the following passages, as they reinforce by a

new reference or illustration or two what has just been said:

"Considering his great keenness and force on some sides, I find R. L.

Stevenson markedly deficient in grip on other sides--common sides,

after all, of human nature. This was so far largely due to a dreamy,

mystical, so far perverted and, so to say, often even inverted

casuistical, fatalistic morality, which would not allow him scope in

what Carlyle would have called a healthy hatred of fools and

scoundrels; with both of which classes--vagabonds in strictness--he

had rather too much of a sneaking sympathy. Mr Pinero was

wrong--totally and incomprehensibly wrong--when he told the good folks

of Edinburgh at the Philosophical Institution, and afterwards at the

London Birkbeck Institution, that it was lack of concentration and

care that made R. L. Stevenson a failure as a dramatist. No: it was

here and not elsewhere that the failure lay. R. L. Stevenson was

himself an unconscious paradox--and sometimes he realised it--his

great weakness from this point of view being that he wished to show

strong and original by making the villain the hero of the piece as

well. Now, \_that\_, if it may, by clever manipulation and dexterity,

be made to do in a novel, most certainly it will not do on the

stage--more especially if it is done consciously and, as it were, of

\_malice prepense\_; because, for one thing, there is in the theatre a

very varied yet united audience which has to give a simultaneous and

immediate verdict--an audience not inclined to some kinds of

overwrought subtleties and casuistries, however clever the technique.

If \_The Master of Ballantrae\_ (which has some highly dramatic scenes

and situations, if it is not in itself substantially a drama) were to

be put on the stage, the playwright, if wisely determined for success,

would really have--not in details, but in essential conception--to

kick R. L. Stevenson in his most personal aim out of it, and take and

present a more definite moral view of the two villain-heroes

(brothers, too); improve and elevate the one a bit if he lowered the

other, and not wobble in sympathy and try to make the audience wobble

in sympathy also, as R. L. Stevenson certainly does. As for \_Beau

Austin\_, it most emphatically, in view of this, should be re-writ--re-

writ especially towards the ending--and the scandalous Beau tarred and

feathered, metaphorically speaking, instead of walking off at the end

in a sneaking, mincing sort of way, with no more than a little

momentary twinge of discomfort at the wreck and ruin he has wrought,

for having acted as a selfish, snivelling poltroon and coward, though

in fine clothes and with fine ways and fine manners, which only, from

our point of view, make matters worse. It is, with variations I

admit, much the same all through: R. L. Stevenson felt it and

confessed it about the \_Ebb-Tide\_, and Huish, the cockney hero and

villain; but the sense of healthy disgust, even at the vile Huish, is

not emphasised in the book as it would have demanded to be for the

stage--the audience would not have stood it, and the more mixed and

varied, the less would it have stood it--not at all; and his relief of

style and fine or finished speeches would not \_there\_ in the least

have told. This is demanded of the drama--that at once it satisfies a

certain crude something subsisting under all outward glosses and

veneers that might be in some a lively sense of right and wrong--the

uprisal of a conscience, in fact, or in others a vague instinct of

proper reward or punishment, which will even cover and sanction

certain kinds of revenge or retaliation. The one feeling will emerge

most among the cultured, and the other among the ruder and more

ignorant; but both meet immediately on beholding action and the limits

of action on the demand for some clear leading to what may be called

Providential equity--each man undoubtedly rewarded or punished,

roughly, according to his deserts, if not outwardly then certainly in

the inner torments that so often lead to confessions. There it is--a

radical fact of human nature--as radical as any reading of trait or

determination of character presented--seen in the Greek drama as well

as in Shakespeare and the great Elizabethan dramatists, and in the

drama-transpontine and others of to-day. R. L. Stevenson was all too

casuistical (though not in the exclusively bad sense) for this; and so

he was not dramatic, though \_Weir of Hermiston\_ promised something

like an advance to it, and \_St Ives\_ did, in my idea, yet more."

The one essential of a \_dramatic\_ piece is that, by the interaction of

character and incident (one or other may be preponderating, according to

the type and intention of the writer) all naturally leads up to a crisis

in which the moral motives, appealed to or awakened by the presentation

of the play, are justified. Where this is wanting the true leading and

the definite justification are wanting. Goethe failed in this in his

\_Faust\_, resourceful and far-seeing though he was--he failed because a

certain sympathy is awakened for Mephistopheles in being, so to say,

chivied out of his bargain, when he had complied with the terms of the

contract by Faust; and Gounod in his opera does exactly for "immediate

dramatic effect," what we hold it would be necessary to do for R. L.

Stevenson. Goethe, with his casuistries which led him to allegory and

all manner of overdone symbolisms and perversions in the Second Part, is

set aside and a true crisis and close is found by Gounod through simply

sending Marguerite above and Faust below, as, indeed, Faust had agreed by

solemn compact with Mephistopheles that it should be. And to come to

another illustration from our own times, Mr Bernard Shaw's very clever

and all too ingenious and over-subtle \_Man and Superman\_ would, in my

idea, and for much the same reason, be an utterly ineffective and weak

piece on the stage, however carefully handled and however clever the

setting--the reason lying in the egotistic upsetting of the "personal

equation" and the theory of life that lies behind all--tinting it with

strange and even \_outre\_ colours. Much the same has to be said of most

of what are problem-plays--several of Ibsen's among the rest.

Those who remember the Fairy opera of \_Hansel and Gretel\_ on the stage in

London, will not have forgotten in the witching memory of all the charms

of scenery and setting, how the scene where the witch of the wood, who

was planning out the baking of the little hero and heroine in her oven,

having "fatted" them up well, to make sweet her eating of them, was by

the coolness and cleverness of the heroine locked in her own oven and

baked there, literally brought down the house. She received exactly what

she had planned to give those children, whom their own cruel parents had

unwittingly, by losing the children in the wood, put into her hands.

Quaint, naive, half-grotesque it was in conception, yet the truth of all

drama was there actively exhibited, and all casuistic pleading of excuses

of some sort, even of justification for the witch (that it was her

nature; heredity in her aworking, etc., etc.) would have not only been

out of place, but hotly resented by that audience. Now, Stevenson, if he

could have made up his mind to have the witch locked in her own oven,

would most assuredly have tried some device to get her out by some fairy

witch-device or magic slide at the far end of it, and have proceeded to

paint for us the changed character that she was after she had been so

outwitted by a child, and her witchdom proved after all of little effect.

He would have put probably some of the most effective moralities into her

mouth if indeed he would not after all have made the witch a triumph on

his early principle of bad-heartedness being strength. If this is the

sort of falsification which the play demands, and is of all tastes the

most ungrateful, then, it is clear, that for full effect of the drama it

is essential to it; but what is primary in it is the direct answering to

certain immediate and instinctive demands in common human nature, the

doing of which is far more effective than no end of deep philosophy to

show how much better human nature would be if it were not just quite thus

constituted. "Concentration," says Mr Pinero, "is first, second, and

last in it," and he goes on thus, as reported in the \_Scotsman\_, to show

Stevenson's defect and mistake and, as is not, of course, unnatural, to

magnify the greatness and grandeur of the style of work in which he has

himself been so successful.

"If Stevenson had ever mastered that art--and I do not question that

if he had properly conceived it he had it in him to master it--he

might have found the stage a gold mine, but he would have found, too,

that it is a gold mine which cannot be worked in a smiling, sportive,

half-contemptuous spirit, but only in the sweat of the brain, and with

every mental nerve and sinew strained to its uttermost. He would have

known that no ingots are to be got out of this mine, save after

sleepless nights, days of gloom and discouragement, and other days,

again, of feverish toil, the result of which proves in the end to be

misapplied and has to be thrown to the winds. . . . When you take up a

play-book (if ever you do take one up) it strikes you as being a very

trifling thing--a mere insubstantial pamphlet beside the imposing bulk

of the latest six-shilling novel. Little do you guess that every page

of the play has cost more care, severer mental tension, if not more

actual manual labour, than any chapter of a novel, though it be fifty

pages long. It is the height of the author's art, according to the

old maxim, that the ordinary spectator should never be clearly

conscious of the skill and travail that have gone to the making of the

finished product. But the artist who would achieve a like feat must

realise its difficulties, or what are his chances of success?"

But what I should, in little, be inclined to say, in answer to the

"concentration" idea is that, unless you have first some firm hold on the

broad bed-rock facts of human nature specially appealed to or called

forth by the drama, you may concentrate as much as you please, but you

will not write a successful acting drama, not to speak of a great one. Mr

Pinero's magnifications of the immense effort demanded from him must in

the end come to mean that he himself does not instinctively and with

natural ease and spontaneity secure this, but secures it only after great

conscious effort; and hence, perhaps, it is that he as well as so many

other modern playwrights fall so far behind alike in the amount turned

out, and also in its quality as compared with the products of many

playwrights in the past.

The problem drama, in every phase and turn of it, endeavours to dispense

with these fundamental demands implied in the common and instinctive

sense or consciousness of the mass of men and women, and to substitute

for that interest something which will artificially supersede it, or, at

any rate, take its place. The interest is transferred from the crises

necessarily worked up to in the one case, with all of situation and

dialogue directed to it, and without which it would not be strictly

explicable, to something abnormal, odd, artificial or inverted, or

exceptional in the characters themselves. Having thus, instead of

natural process and sequence, if we may put it so, the problem dramatist

has a double task--he must gain what unity he can, and reach such crises

as he may by artificial aids and inventions which the more he uses the

more makes natural simplicity unattainable; and next he must reduce and

hide as far as he can the abnormality he has, after all, in the long run,

created and presented. He cannot maintain it to the full, else his work

would become a mere medical or psychological treatise under the poorest

of disguises; and the very necessity for the action and reaction of

characters upon each other is a further element against him. In a word

no one character can stand alone, and cannot escape influencing others,

and also the action. Thus it is that he cannot isolate as a doctor does

his patient for scientific examination. The healthy and normal must come

in to modify on all sides what is presented of unhealthy and abnormal,

and by its very presence expose the other, while at the same time it, by

its very presence, ministers improvement, exactly as the sunlight

disperses mist and all unhealthy vapours, germs, and microbes.

The problem dramatist, in place of broad effect and truth to nature, must

find it in stress of invention and resource of that kind. Thus care and

concentration must be all in all with him--he must never let himself go,

or get so interested and taken with his characters that \_they\_, in a

sense, control or direct him. He is all too conscious a "maker" and must

pay for his originality by what in the end is really painful and

overweighted work. This, I take it, is the reason why so many of the

modern dramatists find their work so hard, and are, comparatively, so

slow in the production of it, while they would fain, by many devices,

secure the general impression or appeal made to all classes alike by the

natural or what we may call spontaneous drama, they are yet, by the

necessity of subject matter and methods of dealing with it, limited to

the real interest of a special class--to whom is finally given up what

was meant for mankind--and the troublesome and trying task laid on them,

to try as best they may to reconcile two really conflicting tendencies

which cannot even by art be reconciled but really point different ways

and tend to different ends. As the impressionist and the pre-Raphaelite,

in the sister-art of painting cannot be combined and reconciled in one

painter--so it is here; by conception and methods they go different ways,

and if they \_seek\_ the same end, it is by opposing processes--the

original conception alike of nature and of art dictating the process.

As for Stevenson, it was no lack of care or concentration in anything

that he touched; these two were never lacking, but because his subtlety,

mystical bias and dreaminess, and theorising on human nature made this to

him impossible. He might have concentrated as much as he pleased,

concentrated as much as even Mr Pinero desires, but he would not have

made a successful drama, because he was Robert Louis Stevenson, and not

Mr Pinero, and too long, as he himself confessed, had a tendency to think

bad-heartedness was strength; while the only true and enduring joy

attainable in this world--whether by deduction from life itself, or from

\_impressions\_ of art or of the drama, is simply the steady, unassailable,

and triumphant consciousness that it is not so, but the reverse, that

goodness and self-sacrifice and self-surrender are the only strength in

the universe. Just as Byron had it with patriotism:--

"Freedom's battle once begun,

Bequeathed from bleeding sire to son,

Tho' baffled oft is ever won."

To go consciously either in fiction or in the drama for bad-heartedness

as strength, is to court failure--the broad, healthy, human heart, thank

Heaven, is so made as to resent the doctrine; and if a fiction or a play

based on this idea for the moment succeeds, it can only be because of

strength in other elements, or because of partial blindness and partially

paralysed moral sense in the case of those who accept it and joy in it.

If Mr Pinero directly disputes this, then he and I have no common

standing-ground, and I need not follow the matter any further. Of

course, the dramatist may, under mistaken sympathy and in the midst of

complex and bewildering concatenations, give wrong readings to his

audience, but he must not be always doing even that, or doing it on

principle or system, else his work, however careful and concentrated,

will before long share the fate of the Stevenson-Henley dramas

confessedly wrought when the authors all too definitely held

bad-heartedness was strength.

CHAPTER XV--THEORY OF GOOD AND EVIL

We have not hitherto concerned ourselves, in any express sense, with the

ethical elements involved in the tendency now dwelt on, though they are,

of necessity, of a very vital character. We have shown only as yet the

effect of this mood of mind on dramatic intention and effort. The

position is simply that there is, broadly speaking, the endeavour to

eliminate an element which is essential to successful dramatic

presentation. That element is the eternal distinction, speaking broadly,

between good and evil--between right and wrong--between the secret

consciousness of having done right, and the consciousness of mere

strength and force in certain other ways.

Nothing else will make up for vagueness and cloudiness here--no technical

skill, no apt dialogue nor concentration, any more than "fine speeches,"

as Mr Pinero calls them. Now the dramatic demand and the ethical demand

here meet and take each other's hands, and will not be separated. This

is why Mr Stevenson and Mr Henley--young men of great talent,

failed--utterly failed--they thought they could make a hero out of a

shady and dare-devil yet really cowardly villain generally--and failed.

The spirit of this is of the clever youth type--all too ready to forego

the moral for the sake of the fun any day of the week, and the unthinking

selfishness and self-enjoyment of youth--whose tender mercies are often

cruel, are transcendent in it. As Stevenson himself said, they were

young men then and fancied bad-heartedness was strength. Perhaps it was

a sense of this that made R. L. Stevenson speak as he did of the \_Ebb-

Tide\_ with Huish the cockney in it, after he was powerless to recall it;

which made him say, as we have seen, that the closing chapters of \_The

Master of Ballantrae\_ "\_shame\_, \_and perhaps degrade\_, \_the beginning\_."

He himself came to see then the great error; but, alas! it was too late

to remedy it--he could but go forward to essay new tales, not backward to

put right errors in what was done.

Did Mr William Archer have anything of this in his mind and the

far-reaching effects on this side, when he wrote the following:

"Let me add that the omission with which, in 1885, I mildly reproached

him--the omission to tell what he knew to be an essential part of the

truth about life--was abundantly made good in his later writings. It

is true that even in his final philosophy he still seems to me to

underrate, or rather to shirk, the significance of that most

compendious parable which he thus relates in a letter to Mr Henry

James:--'Do you know the story of the man who found a button in his

hash, and called the waiter? "What do you call that?" says he.

"Well," said the waiter, "what d'you expect? Expect to find a gold

watch and chain?" Heavenly apologue, is it not?' Heavenly, by all

means; but I think Stevenson relished the humour of it so much that he

'smiling passed the moral by.' In his enjoyment of the waiter's

effrontery, he forgot to sympathise with the man (even though it was

himself) who had broken his teeth upon the harmful, unnecessary

button. He forgot that all the apologetics in the world are based

upon just this audacious paralogism."

Many writers have done the same--and not a few critics have hinted at

this: I do not think any writer has got at the radical truth of it more

directly, decisively, and clearly than "J. F. M.," in a monthly magazine,

about the time of Stevenson's death; and the whole is so good and clear

that I must quote it--the writer was not thinking of the drama specially;

only of prose fiction, and this but makes the passage the more effective

and apt to my point.

"In the outburst of regret which followed the death of Robert Louis

Stevenson, one leading journal dwelt on his too early removal in

middle life 'with only half his message delivered.' Such a phrase may

have been used in the mere cant of modern journalism. Still it set

one questioning what was Stevenson's message, or at least that part of

it which we had time given us to hear.

"Wonderful as was the popularity of the dead author, we are inclined

to doubt whether the right appreciation of him was half as wide. To a

certain section of the public he seemed a successful writer of boys'

books, which yet held captive older people. Now, undoubtedly there

was an element (not the highest) in his work which fascinated boys. It

gratified their yearning for adventure. To too large a number of his

readers, we suspect, this remains Stevenson's chief charm; though even

of those there were many able to recognise and be thankful for the

literary power and grace which could serve up their sanguinary diet so

daintily.

"Most of Stevenson's titles, too, like \_Treasure Island\_, \_Kidnapped\_,

and\_ The Master of Ballantrae\_, tended to foster delusion in this

direction. The books were largely bought for gifts by maiden aunts,

and bestowed as school prizes, when it might not have been so had

their titles given more indication of their real scope and tendency.

"All this, it seems to us, has somewhat obscured Stevenson's true

power, which is surely that of an arch-delineator of 'human nature'

and of the devious ways of men. As we read him we feel that we have

our finger on the pulse of the cruel politics of the world. He has

the Shakespearean gift which makes us recognise that his pirates and

his statesmen, with their violence and their murders and their

perversions of justice, are swayed by the same interests and are

pulling the same strings and playing on the same passions which are at

work in quieter methods around ourselves. The vast crimes and the

reckless bloodshed are nothing more nor less than stage effects used

to accentuate for the common eye what the seer can detect without

them.

"And reading him from this standpoint, Stevenson's 'message' (so far

as it was delivered) appears to be that of utter gloom--the creed that

good is always overcome by evil. We do not mean in the sense that

good always suffers through evil and is frequently crucified by evil.

That is only the sowing of the martyr's blood, which is, we know, the

seed of the Church. We should not have marvelled in the least that a

genius like Stevenson should rebel against mere external 'happy

endings,' which, being in flat contradiction to the ordinary ways of

Providence, are little short of thoughtless blasphemy against

Providence. But the terrible thing about the Stevenson philosophy of

life is that it seems to make evil overcome good in the sense of

absorbing it, or perverting it, or at best lowering it. When good and

evil come in conflict in one person, Dr Jekyll vanishes into Mr Hyde.

The awful Master of Ballantrae drags down his brother, though he seems

to fight for his soul at every step. The sequel to \_Kidnapped\_ shows

David Balfour ready at last to be hail-fellow-well-met with the supple

Prestongrange and the other intriguers, even though they had forcibly

made him a partner to their shedding of innocent blood.

"Is it possible that this was what Stevenson's experience of real life

had brought him? Fortunate himself in so many respects, he was yet

one of those who turn aside from the smooth and sunny paths of life,

to enter into brotherly sympathy and fellowship with the disinherited.

Is this, then, what he found on those darker levels? Did he discover

that triumphant hypocrisy treads down souls as well as lives?

"We cannot doubt that it often does so; and it is well that we should

see this sometimes, to make us strong to contend with evil before it

works out this, its worst mischief, and to rouse us from the easy

optimist laziness which sits idle while others are being wronged, and

bids them believe 'that all will come right in the end,' when it is

our direct duty to do our utmost to make it 'come right' to-day.

"But to show us nothing but the gloomy side, nothing but the weakness

of good, nothing but the strength of evil, does not inspire us to

contend for the right, does not inform us of the powers and weapons

with which we might so contend. To gaze at unqualified and inevitable

moral defeat will but leave us to the still worse laziness of

pessimism, uttering its discouraging and blasphemous cry, 'It does not

matter; nothing will ever come right!'

"Shakespeare has shown us--and never so nobly as in his last great

creation of \_The Tempest\_--that a man has one stronghold which none

but himself can deliver over to the enemy--that citadel of his own

conduct and character, from which he can smile supreme upon the foe,

who may have conquered all down the line, but must finally make pause

there.

"We must remember that \_The Tempest\_ was Shakespeare's last work. The

genuine consciousness of the possible triumph of the moral nature

against every assault is probably reserved for the later years of

life, when, somewhat withdrawn from the passions of its struggle, we

become those lookers-on who see most of the game. Strange fate is it

that so much of our genius vanishes into the great silence before

those later years are reached!"

Stevenson was too late in awakening fully to the tragic error to which

short-sighted youth is apt to wander that "bad-heartedness is strength."

And so, from this point of view, to our sorrow, he too much verified

Goethe's saw that "simplicity (not artifice) and repose are the acme of

art, and therefore no youth can be a master." In fact, he might very

well from another side, have taken one of Goethe's fine sayings as a

motto for himself:

"Greatest saints were ever most kindly-hearted to sinners;

Here I'm a saint with the best; sinners I never could hate." {7}

Stevenson's own verdict on \_Deacon Brodie\_ given to a \_New York Herald\_

reporter on the author's arrival in New York in September 1887, on the

\_Ludgate Hill\_, is thus very near the precise truth: "The piece has been

all overhauled, and though I have no idea whether it will please an

audience, I don't think either Mr Henley or I are ashamed of it. \_But we

were both young men when we did that\_, \_and I think we had an idea that

bad-heartedness was strength\_."

If Mr Henley in any way confirmed R. L. Stevenson in this perversion, as

I much fear he did, no true admirer of Stevenson has much to thank him

for, whatever claims he may have fancied he had to Stevenson's eternal

gratitude. He did Stevenson about the very worst turn he could have

done, and aided and abetted in robbing us and the world of yet greater

works than we have had from his hands. He was but condemning himself

when he wrote some of the detractory things he did in the \_Pall Mall

Magazine\_ about the \_Edinburgh Edition\_, etc. Men are mirrors in which

they see each other: Henley, after all, painted himself much more

effectively in that now notorious \_Pall Mall Magazine\_ article than he

did R. L. Stevenson. Such is the penalty men too often pay for wreaking

paltry revenges--writing under morbid memories and narrow and petty

grievances--they not only fail in truth and impartiality, but inscribe a

kind of grotesque parody of themselves in their effort to make their

subject ridiculous, as he did, for example, about the name Lewis=Louis,

and various other things.

R. L. Stevenson's fate was to be a casuistic and mystic moralist at

bottom, and could not help it; while, owing to some kink or twist, due,

perhaps, mainly to his earlier sufferings, and the teachings he then

received, he could not help giving it always a turn to what he himself

called "tail-foremost" or inverted morality; and it was not till near the

close that he fully awakened to the fact that here he was false to the

truest canons at once of morality and life and art, and that if he

pursued this course his doom was, and would be, to make his endings

"disgrace, or perhaps, degrade his beginnings," and that no true and

effective dramatic unity and effect and climax was to be gained. Pity

that he did so much on this perverted view of life and world and art: and

well it is that he came to perceive it, even though almost too

late:--certainly too late for that full presentment of that awful yet

gladdening presence of a God's power and equity in this seeming tangled

web of a world, the idea which inspired Robert Browning as well as

Wordsworth, when he wrote, and gathered it up into a few lines in \_Pippa

Passes\_:

"The year's at the spring,

And day's at the morn;

Morning's at seven;

The hillsides dew-pearled;

The lark's on the wing;

The snail's on the thorn:

God's in His heaven,

All's right with the world.

. . . . . . . . . . . .

"All service ranks the same with God,

If now, as formerly he trod

Paradise, His presence fills

Our earth, each only as God wills

Can work--God's puppets best and worst,

Are we; there is no last or first."

It shows what he might have accomplished, had longer life been but

allowed him.

CHAPTER XVI--STEVENSON'S GLOOM

The problem of Stevenson's gloom cannot be solved by any commonplace cut-

and-dried process. It will remain a problem only unless (1) his original

dreamy tendency crossed, if not warped, by the fatalistic Calvinism which

was drummed into him by father, mother, and nurse in his tender years, is

taken fully into account; then (2) the peculiar action on such a nature

of the unsatisfying and, on the whole, distracting effect of the bohemian

and hail-fellow-well-met sort of ideal to which he yielded, and which has

to be charged with much; and (3) the conflict in him of a keenly social

animus with a very strong egotistical effusiveness, fed by fancy, and

nourished by the enforced solitariness inevitable in the case of one who,

from early years up, suffered from painful, and even crushing, disease.

His text and his sermon--which may be shortly summed in the following

sentence--be kind, for in kindness to others lies the only true pleasure

to be gained in life; be cheerful, even to the point of egotistic self-

satisfaction, for through cheerfulness only is the flow of this incessant

kindliness of thought and service possible. He was not in harmony with

the actual effect of much of his creative work, though he illustrated

this in his life, as few men have done. He regarded it as the highest

duty of life to give pleasure to others; his art in his own idea thus

became in an unostentatious way consecrated, and while he would not have

claimed to be a seer, any more than he would have claimed to be a saint,

as he would have held in contempt a mere sybarite, most certainly a vein

of unblamable hedonism pervaded his whole philosophy of life. Suffering

constantly, he still was always kindly. He encouraged, as Mr Gosse has

said, this philosophy by every resource open to him. In practical life,

all who knew him declared that he was brightness, naive fancy, and

sunshine personified, and yet he could not help always, somehow, infusing

into his fiction a pronounced, and sometimes almost fatal, element of

gloom. Even in his own case they were not pleasure-giving and failed

thus in essence. Some wise critic has said that no man can ever write

well creatively of that in which in his early youth he had no knowledge.

Always behind Stevenson's latest exercises lies the shadow of this as an

unshifting background, which by art may be relieved, but never refined

away wholly. He cannot escape from it if he would. Here, too, as George

MacDonald has neatly and nicely said: We are the victims of our own past,

and often a hand is put forth upon us from behind and draws us into life

backward. Here was Stevenson, with his half-hedonistic theories of life,

the duty of giving pleasure, of making eyes brighter, and casting

sunshine around one wherever one went, yet the creator of gloom for us,

when all the world was before him where to choose. This fateful shadow

pursued him to the end, often giving us, as it were, the very

justificative ground for his own father's despondency and gloom, which

the son rather too decisively reproved, while he might have sympathised

with it in a stranger, and in that most characteristic letter to his

mother, which we have quoted, said that it made his father often seem, to

him, to be ungrateful--"\_Has the man no gratitude\_?" Two selves thus

persistently and constantly struggled in Stevenson. He was from this

point of view, indeed, his own Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, the buoyant, self-

enjoying, because pleasure-conferring, man, and at the same time the

helpless yet fascinating "dark interpreter" of the gloomy and

gloom-inspiring side of life, viewed from the point of view of dominating

character and inherited influence. When he reached out his hand with

desire of pleasure-conferring, lo and behold, as he wrote, a hand from

his forefathers was stretched out, and he was pulled backward; so that,

as he has confessed, his endings were apt to shame, perhaps to degrade,

the beginnings. Here is something pointing to the hidden and secret

springs that feed the deeper will and bend it to their service.

Individuality itself is but a mirror, which by its inequalities

transforms things to odd shapes. Hawthorne confessed to something of

this sort. He, like Stevenson, suffered much in youth, if not from

disease then through accident, which kept him long from youthful company.

At a time when he should have been running free with other boys, he had

to be lonely, reading what books he could lay his hands on, mostly

mournful and puritanic, by the borders of lone Sebago Lake. He that hath

once in youth been touched by this Marah-rod of bitterness will not

easily escape from it, when he essays in later years to paint life and

the world as he sees them; nay, the hand, when he deems himself freest,

will be laid upon him from behind, if not to pull him, as MacDonald has

said, into life backward, then to make him a mournful witness of having

once been touched by the Marah-rod, whose bitterness again declares

itself and wells out its bitterness when set even in the rising and the

stirring of the waters.

Such is our view of the "gloom" of Stevenson--a gloom which well might

have justified something of his father's despondency. He struggles in

vain to escape from it--it narrows, it fatefully hampers and limits the

free field of his art, lays upon it a strange atmosphere, fascinating,

but not favourable to true dramatic breadth and force, and spontaneous

natural simplicity, invariably lending a certain touch of weakness,

inconsistency, and inconclusiveness to his endings; so that he himself

could too often speak of them afterwards as apt to "shame, perhaps to

degrade, the beginnings." This is what true dramatic art should never

do. In the ending all that may raise legitimate question in the

process--all that is confusing, perplexing in the separate parts--is met,

solved, reconciled, at least in a way satisfactory to the general, or

ordinary mind; and thus such unity is by it so gained and sealed, that in

no case can the true artist, whatever faults may lie in portions of the

process-work, say of his endings that "they shame, perhaps degrade, the

beginning." Wherever this is the case there will be "gloom," and there

will also be a sad, tormenting sense of something wanting. "The evening

brings a 'hame';" so should it be here--should it especially be in a

dramatic work. If not, "We start; for soul is wanting there;" or, if not

soul, then the last halo of the soul's serene triumph. From this side,

too, there is another cause for the undramatic character, in the stricter

sense of Stevenson's work generally: it is, after all, distressful,

unsatisfying, egotistic, for fancy is led at the beck of some

pre-established disharmony which throws back an abiding and irremovable

gloom on all that went before; and the free spontaneous grace of natural

creation which ensures natural simplicity is, as said already, not quite

attained.

It was well pointed out in \_Hammerton\_, by an unanonymous author there

quoted (pp. 22, 23), that while in the story, Hyde, the worse one, wins,

in Stevenson himself--in his real life--Jekyll won, and not Mr Hyde. This

writer, too, might have added that the Master of Ballantrae also wins as

well as Beau Austin and Deacon Brodie. R. L. Stevenson's dramatic art

and a good deal of his fiction, then, was untrue to his life, and on one

side was a lie--it was not in consonance with his own practice or his

belief as expressed in life.

In some other matters the test laid down here is not difficult of

application. Stevenson, at the time he wrote \_The Foreigner at Home\_,

had seen a good deal; he had been abroad; he had already had experiences;

he had had differences with his father about Calvinism and some other

things; and yet just see how he applies the standard of his earlier

knowledge and observation to England--and by doing so, cannot help

exaggerating the outstanding differences, always with an almost

provincial accent of unwavering conviction due to his early associations

and knowledge. He cannot help paying an excessive tribute to the

Calvinism he had formally rejected, in so far as, according to him, it

goes to form character--even national character, at all events, in its

production of types; and he never in any really effective way glances at

what Mr Matthew Arnold called "Scottish manners, Scottish drink" as

elements in any way radically qualifying. It is not, of course, that I,

as a Scotsman, well acquainted with rural life in some parts of England,

as with rural life in many parts of Scotland in my youth, do not heartily

agree with him--the point is that, when he comes to this sort of

comparison and contrast, he writes exactly as his father would or might

have done, with a full consciousness, after all, of the tribute he was

paying to the practical outcome on character of the Calvinism in which he

so thoroughly believed. It is, in its way, a very peculiar thing--and

had I space, and did I believe it would prove interesting to readers in

general, I might write an essay on it, with instances--in which case the

Address to the Scottish Clergy would come in for more notice, citation

and application than it has yet received. But meanwhile just take this

little snippet--very characteristic and very suggestive in its own

way--and tell me whether it does not justify and bear out fully what I

have now said as illustrating a certain side and a strange uncertain

limitation in Stevenson:

"But it is not alone in scenery and architecture that we count England

foreign. The constitution of society, the very pillars of the empire,

surprise and even pain us. The dull neglected peasant, sunk in

matter, insolent, gross and servile, makes a startling contrast to our

own long-legged, long-headed, thoughtful, Bible-loving ploughman. A

week or two in such a place as Suffolk leaves the Scotsman gasping. It

seems impossible that within the boundaries of his own island a class

should have been thus forgotten. Even the educated and intelligent

who hold our own opinions and speak in our own words, yet seem to hold

them with a difference or from another reason, and to speak on all

things with less interest and conviction. The first shock of English

society is like a cold plunge." {8}

As there was a great deal of the "John Bull element" {9} in the little

dreamer De Quincey, so there was a great deal, after all, of the rather

conceited Calvinistic Scot in R. L. Stevenson, and it is to be traced as

clearly in certain of his fictions as anywhere, though he himself would

not perhaps have seen it and acknowledged it, as I am here forced now to

see it, and to acknowledge it for him.

CHAPTER XVII--PROOFS OF GROWTH

Once again I quote Goethe:

"Natural simplicity and repose are the acme of art, and hence it

follows no youth can be a master."

It has to be confessed that seldom, if ever, does Stevenson naturally and

by sheer enthusiasm for subject and characters attain this natural

simplicity, if he often attained the counterfeit presentment--artistic

and graceful euphony, and new, subtle, and often unexpected

concatenations of phrase. Style is much; but it is not everything. We

often love Scott the more that he shows loosenesses and lapses here, for,

in spite of them, he gains natural simplicity, while not seldom

Stevenson, with all his art and fine sense of verbal music, rather misses

it. \_The Sedulous Ape\_ sometimes disenchants as well as charms; for

occasionally a word, a touch, a turn, sends us off too directly in search

of the model; and this operates against the interest as introducing a new

and alien series of associations, where, for full effect, it should not

be so. And this distraction will be the more insistent, the more

knowledge the reader has and the more he remembers; and since Stevenson's

first appeal, both by his spirit and his methods, is to the cultured and

well read, rather than to the great mass, his "sedulous apehood" only the

more directly wars against him as regards deep, continuous, and lasting

impression; where he should be most simple, natural and spontaneous; he

also is most artificial and involved. If the story-writer is not so much

in earnest, not so possessed by his matter that this is allowed to him,

how is it to be hoped that we shall be possessed in the reading of it?

More than once in \_Catriona\_ we must own we had this experience, directly

warring against full possession by the story, and certain passages about

Simon Lovat were especially marked by this; if even the first

introduction to Catriona herself was not so. As for Miss Barbara Grant,

of whom so much has been made by many admirers, she is decidedly clever,

indeed too clever by half, and yet her doom is to be a mere \_deus ex

machina\_, and never do more than just pay a little tribute to Stevenson's

own power of \_persiflage\_, or, if you like, to pay a penalty, poor lass,

for the too perfect doing of hat, and really, really, I could not help

saying this much, though, I do believe that she deserved just a wee bit

better fate than that.

But we have proofs of great growth, and nowhere are they greater than at

the very close. Stevenson died young: in some phases he was but a youth

to the last. To a true critic then, the problem is, having already

attained so much--a grand style, grasp of a limited group of characters,

with fancy, sincerity, and imagination,--what would Stevenson have

attained in another ten years had such been but allotted him? It has

over and over again been said that, for long he \_shied\_ presenting women

altogether. This is not quite true: \_Thrawn Janet\_ was an earlier

effort; and if there the problem is persistent, the woman is real. Here

also he was on the right road--the advance road. The sex-question was

coming forward as inevitably a part of life, and could not be left out in

any broad and true picture. This element was effectively revived in

\_Weir of Hermiston\_, and "Weir" has been well said to be sadder, if it

does not go deeper than \_Denis Duval\_ or \_Edwin Drood\_. We know what

Dickens and Thackeray could do there; we can but guess now what Stevenson

would have done. "Weir" is but a fragment; but, to a wisely critical and

unprejudiced mind, it suffices to show not only what the complete work

would have been, but what would have inevitably followed it. It shows

the turning-point, and the way that was to be followed at the

cross-roads--the way into a bigger, realer, grander world, where realism,

freed from the dream, and fancy, and prejudice of youth, would glory in

achieving the more enduring romance of manhood, maturity and humanity.

Yes; there was growth--undoubted growth. The questioning and severely

moral element mainly due to the Shorter Catechism--the tendency to

casuistry, and to problems, and wistful introspection--which had so

coloured Stevenson's art up to the date of \_The Master of Ballantrae\_,

and made him a great essayist, was passing in the satisfaction of assured

insight into life itself. The art would gradually have been transformed

also. The problem, pure and simple, would have been subdued in face of

the great facts of life; if not lost, swallowed up in the grandeur,

pathos, and awe of the tragedy clearly realised and presented.

CHAPTER XVIII--EARLIER DETERMINATIONS AND RESULTS

Stevenson's earlier determination was so distinctly to the symbolic, the

parabolic, allegoric, dreamy and mystical--to treatment of the world as

an array of weird or half-fanciful existences, witnessing only to certain

dim spiritual facts or abstract moralities, occasionally inverted

moralities--"tail foremost moralities" as later he himself named

them--that a strong Celtic strain in him had been detected and dwelt on

by acute critics long before any attention had been given to his

genealogy on both sides of the house. The strong Celtic strain is now

amply attested by many researches. Such phantasies as \_The House of

Eld\_, \_The Touchstone\_, \_The Poor Thing\_, and \_The Song of the Morrow\_,

published along with some fables at the end of an edition of \_Dr Jekyll

and Mr Hyde\_, by Longman's, I think, in 1896, tell to the initiated as

forcibly as anything could tell of the presence of this element, as

though moonshine, disguising and transfiguring, was laid over all real

things and the secret of the world and life was in its glamour: the

shimmering and soft shading rendering all outlines indeterminate, though

a great idea is felt to be present in the mind of the author, for which

he works. The man who would say there is no feeling for symbol--no

phantasy or Celtic glamour in these weird, puzzling, and yet on all sides

suggestive tales would thereby be declared inept, inefficient--blind to

certain qualities that lie near to grandeur in fanciful literature, or

the literature of phantasy, more properly.

This power in weird and playful phantasy is accompanied with the gift of

impersonating or embodying mere abstract qualities or tendencies in

characters. The little early sketch written in June 1875, titled \_Good

Content\_, well illustrates this:

"Pleasure goes by piping: Hope unfurls his purple flag; and meek

Content follows them on a snow-white ass. Here, the broad sunlight

falls on open ways and goodly countries; here, stage by stage,

pleasant old towns and hamlets border the road, now with high sign-

poles, now with high minster spires; the lanes go burrowing under

blossomed banks, green meadows, and deep woods encompass them about;

from wood to wood flock the glad birds; the vane turns in the variable

wind; and as I journey with Hope and Pleasure, and quite a company of

jolly personifications, who but the lady I love is by my side, and

walks with her slim hand upon my arm?

"Suddenly, at a corner, something beckons; a phantom finger-post, a

will o' the wisp, a foolish challenge writ in big letters on a brand.

And twisting his red moustaches, braggadocio Virtue takes the perilous

way where dim rain falls ever, and sad winds sigh. And after him, on

his white ass, follows simpering Content.

"Ever since I walk behind these two in the rain. Virtue is all

a-cold; limp are his curling feather and fierce moustache. Sore

besmirched, on his jackass, follows Content."

The record, entitled \_Sunday Thoughts\_, which is dated some five days

earlier is naive and most characteristic, touched with the phantastic

moralities and suggestions already indicated in every sentence; and rises

to the fine climax in this respect at the close.

"A plague o' these Sundays! How the church bells ring up the sleeping

past! I cannot go in to sermon: memories ache too hard; and so I hide

out under the blue heavens, beside the small kirk whelmed in leaves.

Tittering country girls see me as I go past from where they sit in the

pews, and through the open door comes the loud psalm and the fervent

solitary voice of the preacher. To and fro I wander among the graves,

and now look over one side of the platform and see the sunlit meadow

where the grown lambs go bleating and the ewes lie in the shadow under

their heaped fleeces; and now over the other, where the rhododendrons

flower fair among the chestnut boles, and far overhead the chestnut

lifts its thick leaves and spiry blossom into the dark-blue air. Oh,

the height and depth and thickness of the chestnut foliage! Oh, to

have wings like a dove, and dwell in the tree's green heart!

. . . . . . . .

"A plague o' these Sundays! How the Church bells ring up the sleeping

past! Here has a maddening memory broken into my brain. To the door,

to the door, with the naked lunatic thought! Once it is forth we may

talk of what we dare not entertain; once the intriguing thought has

been put to the door I can watch it out of the loophole where, with

its fellows, it raves and threatens in dumb show. Years ago when that

thought was young, it was dearer to me than all others, and I would

speak with it always when I had an hour alone. These rags that so

dismally trick forth its madness were once the splendid livery my

favour wrought for it on my bed at night. Can you see the device on

the badge? I dare not read it there myself, yet have a guess--'\_bad

ware nicht\_'--is not that the humour of it?

. . . . . . . . .

"A plague o' these Sundays! How the Church bells ring up the sleeping

past! If I were a dove and dwelt in the monstrous chestnuts, where

the bees murmur all day about the flowers; if I were a sheep and lay

on the field there under my comely fleece; if I were one of the quiet

dead in the kirkyard--some homespun farmer dead for a long age, some

dull hind who followed the plough and handled the sickle for

threescore years and ten in the distant past; if I were anything but

what I am out here, under the sultry noon, between the deep chestnuts,

among the graves, where the fervent voice of the preacher comes to me,

thin and solitary, through the open windows; \_if I were what I was

yesterday\_, \_and what\_, \_before God\_, \_I shall be again to-morrow\_,

\_how should I outface these brazen memories\_, \_how live down this

unclean resurrection of dead hopes\_!"

Close associated with this always is the moralising faculty, which is

assertive. Take here the cunning sentences on \_Selfishness and Egotism\_,

very Hawthornian yet quite original:

"An unconscious, easy, selfish person shocks less, and is more easily

loved, than one who is laboriously and egotistically unselfish. There

is at least no fuss about the first; but the other parades his

sacrifices, and so sells his favours too dear. Selfishness is calm, a

force of nature; you might say the trees were selfish. But egotism is

a piece of vanity; it must always take you into its confidence; it is

uneasy, troublesome, seeking; it can do good, but not handsomely; it

is uglier, because less dignified, than selfishness itself."

If Mr Henley had but had this clear in his mind he might well have quoted

it in one connection against Stevenson himself in the \_Pall Mall

Magazine\_ article. He could hardly have quoted anything more apparently

apt to the purpose.

In the sphere of minor morals there is no more important topic.

Unselfishness is too often only the most exasperating form of

selfishness. Here is another very characteristic bit:

"You will always do wrong: you must try to get used to that, my son.

It is a small matter to make a work about, when all the world is in

the same case. I meant when I was a young man to write a great poem;

and now I am cobbling little prose articles and in excellent good

spirits. I thank you. . . . Our business in life is not to succeed,

but to continue to fail, in good spirits."

Again:

"It is the mark of good action that it appears inevitable in the

retrospect. We should have been cut-throats to do otherwise. And

there's an end. We ought to know distinctly that we are damned for

what we do wrong; but when we have done right, we have only been

gentlemen, after all. There is nothing to make a work about."

The moral to \_The House of Eld\_ is incisive writ out of true

experience--phantasy there becomes solemn, if not, for the nonce,

tragic:--

"Old is the tree and the fruit good,

Very old and thick the wood.

Woodman, is your courage stout?

Beware! the root is wrapped about

Your mother's heart, your father's bones;

And, like the mandrake, comes with groans."

The phantastic moralist is supreme, jauntily serious, facetiously

earnest, most gravely funny in the whole series of \_Moral Emblems\_.

"Reader, your soul upraise to see,

In yon fair cut designed by me,

The pauper by the highwayside

Vainly soliciting from pride.

Mark how the Beau with easy air

Contemns the anxious rustic's prayer

And casting a disdainful eye

Goes gaily gallivanting by.

He from the poor averts his head . . .

He will regret it when he's dead."

Now, the man who would trace out step by step and point by point, clearly

and faithfully, the process by which Stevenson worked himself so far free

of this his besetting tendency to moralised symbolism or allegory into

the freer air of life and real character, would do more to throw light on

Stevenson's genius, and the obstacles he had had to contend with in

becoming a novelist eager to interpret definite times and character, than

has yet been done or even faithfully attempted. This would show at once

Stevenson's wonderful growth and the saving grace and elasticity of his

temperament and genius. Few men who have by force of native genius gone

into allegory or moralised phantasy ever depart out of that fateful and

enchanted region. They are as it were at once lost and imprisoned in it

and kept there as by a spell--the more they struggle for freedom the more

surely is the bewitching charm laid upon them--they are but like the fly

in amber. It was so with Ludwig Tieck; it was so with Nathaniel

Hawthorne; it was so with our own George MacDonald, whose professedly

real pictures of life are all informed of this phantasy, which spoils

them for what they profess to be, and yet to the discerning cannot

disguise what they really are--the attempts of a mystic poet and phantasy

writer and allegoristic moralist to walk in the ways of Anthony Trollope

or of Mrs Oliphant, and, like a stranger in a new land always looking

back (at least by a side-glance, an averted or half-averted face which

keeps him from seeing steadily and seeing whole the real world with which

now he is fain to deal), to the country from which he came.

Stevenson did largely free himself, that is his great achievement--had he

lived, we verily believe, so marked was his progress, he would have been

a great and true realist, a profound interpreter of human life and its

tragic laws and wondrous compensations--he would have shown how to make

the full retreat from fairyland without penalty of too early an escape

from it, as was the case with Thomas the Rymer of Ercildoune, and with

one other told of by him, and proved that to have been a dreamer need not

absolutely close the door to insight into the real world and to art. This

side of the subject, never even glanced at by Mr Henley or Mr Zangwill or

their \_confreres\_, yet demands, and will well reward the closest and most

careful attention and thought that can be given to it.

The parabolic element, with the whimsical humour and turn for paradoxical

inversion, comes out fully in such a work as \_Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde\_.

There his humour gives body to his fancy, and reality to the

half-whimsical forms in which he embodies the results of deep and earnest

speculations on human nature and motive. But even when he is professedly

concerned with incident and adventure merely, he manages to communicate

to his pages some touch of universality, as of unconscious parable or

allegory, so that the reader feels now and then as though some thought,

or motive, or aspiration, or weakness of his own were being there

cunningly unveiled or presented; and not seldom you feel he has also

unveiled and presented some of yours, secret and unacknowledged too.

Hence the interest which young and old alike have felt in \_Treasure

Island\_, \_Kidnapped\_, and \_The Wrecker\_--a something which suffices

decisively to mark off these books from the mass with which superficially

they might be classed.

CHAPTER XIX--EDMUND CLARENCE STEDMAN'S ESTIMATE

It should be clearly remembered that Stevenson died at a little over

forty--the age at which severity and simplicity and breadth in art but

begin to be attained. If Scott had died at the age when Stevenson was

taken from us, the world would have lacked the \_Waverley Novels\_; if a

like fate had overtaken Dickens, we should not have had \_A Tale of Two

Cities\_; and under a similar stroke, Goldsmith could not have written

\_Retaliation\_, or tasted the bitter-sweet first night of \_She Stoops to

Conquer\_. At the age of forty-four Mr Thomas Hardy had probably not

dreamt of \_Tess of the D'Urbervilles\_. But what a man has already done

at forty years is likely, I am afraid, to be a gauge as well as a promise

of what he will do in the future; and from Stevenson we were entitled to

expect perfect form and continued variety of subject, rather than a

measurable dynamic gain.

This is the point of view which my friend and correspondent of years ago,

Mr Edmund Clarence Stedman, of New York, set out by emphasising in his

address, as President of the meeting under the auspices of the Uncut

Leaves Society in New York, in the beginning of 1895, on the death of

Stevenson, and to honour the memory of the great romancer, as reported in

the \_New York Tribune\_:

"We are brought together by tidings, almost from the Antipodes, of the

death of a beloved writer in his early prime. The work of a romancer

and poet, of a man of insight and feeling, which may be said to have

begun but fifteen years ago, has ended, through fortune's sternest

cynicism, just as it seemed entering upon even more splendid

achievement. A star surely rising, as we thought, has suddenly gone

out. A radiant invention shines no more; the voice is hushed of a

creative mind, expressing its fine imagining in this, our peerless

English tongue. His expression was so original and fresh from

Nature's treasure-house, so prodigal and various, its too brief flow

so consummate through an inborn gift made perfect by unsparing toil,

that mastery of the art by which Robert Louis Stevenson conveyed those

imaginings to us so picturesque, yet wisely ordered, his own romantic

life--and now, at last, so pathetic a loss which renews

"'The Virgilian cry,

The sense of tears in mortal things,'

that this assemblage has gathered at the first summons, in tribute to

a beautiful genius, and to avow that with the putting out of that

bright intelligence the reading world experiences a more than wonted

grief.

"Judged by the sum of his interrupted work, Stevenson had his

limitations. But the work was adjusted to the scale of a possibly

long career. As it was, the good fairies brought all gifts, save that

of health, to his cradle, and the gift-spoiler wrapped them in a

shroud. Thinking of what his art seemed leading to--for things that

would be the crowning efforts of other men seemed prentice-work in his

case--it was not safe to bound his limitations. And now it is as if

Sir Walter, for example, had died at forty-four, with the \_Waverley

Novels\_ just begun! In originality, in the conception of action and

situation, which, however phantastic, are seemingly within reason,

once we breathe the air of his Fancyland; in the union of bracing and

heroic character and adventure; in all that belongs to tale-writing

pure and simple, his gift was exhaustless. No other such charmer, in

this wise, has appeared in his generation. We thought the stories,

the fairy tales, had all been told, but 'Once upon a time' meant for

him our own time, and the grave and gay magic of Prince Florizel in

dingy London or sunny France. All this is but one of his provinces,

however distinctive. Besides, how he buttressed his romance with

apparent truth! Since Defoe, none had a better right to say: 'There

was one thing I determined to do when I began this long story, and

that was to tell out everything as it befell.'

"I remember delighting in two fascinating stories of Paris in the time

of Francois Villon, anonymously reprinted by a New York paper from a

London magazine. They had all the quality, all the distinction, of

which I speak. Shortly afterward I met Mr Stevenson, then in his

twenty-ninth year, at a London club, where we chanced to be the only

loungers in an upper room. To my surprise he opened a

conversation--you know there could be nothing more unexpected than

that in London--and thereby I guessed that he was as much, if not as

far, away from home as I was. He asked many questions concerning 'the

States'; in fact, this was but a few months before he took his

steerage passage for our shores. I was drawn to the young Scotsman at

once. He seemed more like a New-Englander of Holmes's Brahmin caste,

who might have come from Harvard or Yale. But as he grew animated I

thought, as others have thought, and as one would suspect from his

name, that he must have Scandinavian blood in his veins--that he was

of the heroic, restless, strong and tender Viking strain, and

certainly from that day his works and wanderings have not belied the

surmise. He told me that he was the author of that charming book of

gipsying in the Cevennes which just then had gained for him some

attentions from the literary set. But if I had known that he had

written those two stories of sixteenth-century Paris--as I learned

afterwards when they reappeared in the \_New Arabian Nights\_--I would

not have bidden him good-bye as to an 'unfledged comrade,' but would

have wished indeed to 'grapple him to my soul with hooks of steel.'

"Another point is made clear as crystal by his life itself. He had

the instinct, and he had the courage, to make it the servant, and not

the master, of the faculty within him. I say he had the courage, but

so potent was his birth-spell that doubtless he could not otherwise.

Nothing commonplace sufficed him. A regulation stay-at-home life

would have been fatal to his art. The ancient mandate, 'Follow thy

Genius,' was well obeyed. Unshackled freedom of person and habit was

a prerequisite; as an imaginary artist he felt--nature keeps her poets

and story-tellers children to the last--he felt, if he ever reasoned

it out, that he must gang his own gait, whether it seemed promising,

or the reverse, to kith, kin, or alien. So his wanderings were not

only in the most natural but in the wisest consonance with his

creative dreams. Wherever he went, he found something essential for

his use, breathed upon it, and returned it fourfold in beauty and

worth. The longing of the Norseman for the tropic, of the pine for

the palm, took him to the South Seas. There, too, strange secrets

were at once revealed to him, and every island became an 'Isle of

Voices.' Yes, an additional proof of Stevenson's artistic mission lay

in his careless, careful, liberty of life; in that he was an artist no

less than in his work. He trusted to the impulse which possessed

him--that which so many of us have conscientiously disobeyed and too

late have found ourselves in reputable bondage to circumstances.

"But those whom you are waiting to hear will speak more fully of all

this--some of them with the interest of their personal

remembrance--with the strength of their affection for the man beloved

by young and old. In the strange and sudden intimacy with an author's

record which death makes sure, we realise how notable the list of

Stevenson's works produced since 1878; more than a score of books--not

fiction alone, but also essays, criticism, biography, drama, even

history, and, as I need not remind you, that spontaneous poetry which

comes only from a true poet. None can have failed to observe that,

having recreated the story of adventure, he seemed in his later

fiction to interfuse a subtler purpose--the search for character, the

analysis of mind and soul. Just here his summons came. Between the

sunrise of one day and the sunset of the next he exchanged the forest

study for the mountain grave. There, as he had sung his own wish, he

lies 'under the wide and starry sky.' If there was something of his

own romance, so exquisitely capricious, in the life of Robert Louis

Stevenson, so, also, the poetic conditions are satisfied in his death,

and in the choice of his burial-place upon the top of Pala. As for

the splendour of that maturity upon which we counted, now never to be

fulfilled on sea or land, I say--as once before, when the great New-

England romancer passed in the stillness of the night:

"'What though his work unfinished lies? Half bent

The rainbow's arch fades out in upper air,

The shining cataract half-way down the height

Breaks into mist; the haunting strain, that fell

On listeners unaware,

Ends incomplete, but through the starry night

The ear still waits for what it did not tell.'"

Dr Edward Eggleston finely sounded the personal note, and told of having

met Stevenson at a hotel in New York. Stevenson was ill when the

landlord came to Dr Eggleston and asked him if he should like to meet

him. Continuing, he said:

"He was flat on his back when I entered, but I think I never saw

anybody grow well in so short a time. It was a soul rather than a

body that lay there, ablaze with spiritual fire, good will shining

through everywhere. He did not pay me any compliment about my work,

and I didn't pay him any about his. We did not burn any of the

incense before each other which authors so often think it necessary to

do, but we were friends instantly. I am not given to speedy

intimacies, but I could not help my heart going out to him. It was a

wonderfully invested soul, no hedges or fences across his fields, no

concealment. He was a romanticist; I was--well, I don't know exactly

what. But he let me into the springs of his romanticism then and

there.

"'You go in your boat every day?' he asked. 'You sail? Oh! to write

a novel a man must take his life in his hands. He must not live in

the town.' And so he spoke, in his broad way, of course, according to

the enthusiasm of the moment.

"I can't sound any note of pathos here to-night. Some lives are so

brave and sweet and joyous and well-rounded, with such a completeness

about them that death does not leave imperfection. He never had the

air of sitting up with his own reputation. He let his books toss in

the waves of criticism and make their ports if they deserve to. He

had no claptrap, no great cause, none of the disease of pruriency

which came into fashion with Flaubert and Guy de Maupassant. He

simply told his story, with no condescension, taking the readers into

his heart and his confidence."

CHAPTER XX--EGOTISTIC ELEMENT AND ITS EFFECTS

From these sources now traced out by us--his youthfulness of spirit, his

mystical bias, and tendency to dream--symbolisms leading to disregard of

common feelings--flows too often the indeterminateness of Stevenson's

work, at the very points where for direct interest there should be

decision. In \_The Master of Ballantrae\_ this leads him to try to bring

the balances even as regards our interest in the two brothers, in so far

justifying from one point of view what Mr Zangwill said in the quotation

we have given, or, as Sir Leslie Stephen had it in his second series of

the \_Studies of a Biographer\_:

"The younger brother in \_The Master of Ballantrae\_, who is

black-mailed by the utterly reprobate master, ought surely to be

interesting instead of being simply sullen and dogged. In the later

adventures, we are invited to forgive him on the ground that his brain

has been affected: but the impression upon me is that he is sacrificed

throughout to the interests of the story [or more strictly for the

working out of the problem as originally conceived by the author]. The

curious exclusion of women is natural in the purely boyish stories,

since to a boy woman is simply an incumbrance upon reasonable modes of

life. When in \_Catriona\_ Stevenson introduces a love story, it is

still unsatisfactory, because David Balfour is so much the undeveloped

animal that his passion is clumsy, and his charm for the girl

unintelligible. I cannot feel, to say the truth, that in any of these

stories I am really among living human beings with whom, apart from

their adventures, I can feel any very lively affection or antipathy."

In the \_Ebb-Tide\_ it is, in this respect, yet worse: the three heroes

choke each other off all too literally.

In his excess of impartiality he tones down the points and lines that

would give the attraction of true individuality to his characters, and

instead, would fain have us contented with his liberal, and even over-

sympathetic views of them and allowances for them. But instead of thus

furthering his object, he sacrifices the whole--and his story becomes,

instead of a broad and faithful human record, really a curiosity of

autobiographic perversion, and of overweening, if not extravagant egotism

of the more refined, but yet over-obtrusive kind.

Mr Baildon thus hits the subjective tendency, out of which mainly this

defect--a serious defect in view of interest--arises.

"That we can none of us be sure to what crime we might not descend, if

only our temptation were sufficiently acute, lies at the root of his

fondness and toleration for wrong-doers (p. 74).

Thus he practically declines to do for us what we are unwilling or unable

to do for ourselves. Interest in two characters in fiction can never, in

this artificial way, and if they are real characters truly conceived, be

made equal, nor can one element of claim be balanced against another,

even at the beck of the greatest artist. The common sentiment, as we

have seen, resents it even as it resents lack of guidance elsewhere.

After all, the novelist is bound to give guidance: he is an authority in

his own world, where he is an autocrat indeed; and can work out issues as

he pleases, even as the Pope is an authority in the Roman Catholic world:

he abdicates his functions when he declines to lead: we depend on him

from the human point of view to guide us right, according to the heart,

if not according to any conventional notion or opinion. Stevenson's

pause in individual presentation in the desire now to raise our sympathy

for the one, and then for the other in \_The Master of Ballantrae\_, admits

us too far into Stevenson's secret or trick of affected self-withdrawal

in order to work his problem and to signify his theories, to the loss and

utter confusion of his aims from the point of common dramatic and human

interest. It is the same in \_Catriona\_ in much of the treatment of James

Mohr or More; it is still more so in not a little of the treatment of

\_Weir of Hermiston\_ and his son, though there, happily for him and for

us, there were the direct restrictions of known fact and history, and

clearly an attempt at a truer and broader human conception unburdened by

theory or egotistic conception.

Everywhere the problem due to the desire to be overjust, so to say,

emerges; and exactly in the measure it does so the source of true

dramatic directness and variety is lost. It is just as though

Shakespeare were to invent a chorus to cry out at intervals about Iago--"a

villain, bad lot, you see, still there's a great deal to be said for

him--victim of inheritance, this, that and the other; and considering

everything how could you really expect anything else now." Thackeray was

often weak from this same tendency--he meant Becky Sharp to be largely

excused by the reader on these grounds, as he tries to excuse several

others of his characters; but his endeavours in this way to gloss over

"wickedness" in a way, do not succeed--the reader does not carry clear in

mind as he goes along, the suggestions Thackeray has ineffectually set

out and the "healthy hatred of scoundrels" Carlyle talked about has its

full play in spite of Thackeray's suggested excuses and palliations, and

all in his own favour, too, as a story-wright.

Stevenson's constant habit of putting himself in the place of another,

and asking himself how would I have borne myself here or there, thus

limited his field of dramatic interest, where the subject should have

been made pre-eminently in aid of this effect. Even in Long John Silver

we see it, as in various others of his characters, though there, owing to

the demand for adventure, and action contributory to it, the defect is

not so emphasised. The sense as of a projection of certain features of

the writer into all and sundry of his important characters, thus imparts,

if not an air of egotism, then most certainly a somewhat constrained, if

not somewhat artificial, autobiographical air--in the very midst of

action, questions of ethical or casuistical character arise, all

contributing to submerging individual character and its dramatic

interests under a wave of but half-disguised autobiography. Let

Stevenson do his very best--let him adopt all the artificial disguises he

may, as writing narrative in the first person, etc., as in \_Kidnapped\_

and \_Catriona\_, nevertheless, the attentive reader's mind is constantly

called off to the man who is actually writing the story. It is as

though, after all, all the artistic or artificial disguises were a mere

mask, as more than once Thackeray represented himself, the mask partially

moved aside, just enough to show a chubby, childish kind of transformed

Thackeray face below. This belongs, after all, to the order of

self-revelation though under many disguises: it is creation only in its

manner of work, not in its essential being--the spirit does not so to us

go clean forth of itself, it stops at home, and, as if from a remote and

shadowy cave or recess, projects its own colour on all on which it looks.

This is essentially the character of the \_mystic\_; and hence the

justification for this word as applied expressly to Stevenson by Mr

Chesterton and others.

"The inner life like rings of light

Goes forth of us, transfiguring all we see."

The effect of these early days, with the peculiar tint due to the

questionings raised by religious stress and strain, persists with

Stevenson; he grows, but he never escapes from that peculiar something

which tells of childish influences--of boyish perversions and troubled

self-examinations due to Shorter Catechism--any one who would view

Stevenson without thought of this, would view him only from the

outside--see him merely in dress and outer oddities. Here I see definite

and clear heredity. Much as he differed from his worthy father in many

things, he was like him in this--the old man like the son, bore on him

the marks of early excesses of wistful self-questionings and painful

wrestlings with religious problems, that perpetuated themselves in a

quaint kind of self-revelation often masked by an assumed self-withdrawal

or indifference which to the keen eye only the more revealed the real

case. Stevenson never, any more than his father, ceased to be interested

in the religious questions for which Scotland has always had a

\_penchant\_--and so much is this the case that I could wish Professor

Sidney Colvin would even yet attempt to show the bearing of certain

things in that \_Address to the Scottish Clergy\_ written when Stevenson

was yet but a young man, on all that he afterwards said and did. It

starts in the \_Edinburgh Edition\_ without any note, comment, or

explanation whatever, but in that respect the \_Edinburgh Edition\_ is not

quite so complete as it might have been made. In view of the point now

before us, it is far more important than many of the other trifles there

given, and wants explanation and its relation to much in the novels

brought out and illustrated. Were this adequately done, only new ground

would be got for holding that Stevenson, instead of, as has been said,

"seeing only the visible world," was, in truth, a mystical moralist, once

and always, whose thoughts ran all too easily into parable and fable, and

who, indeed, never escaped wholly from that atmosphere, even when writing

of things and characters that seemed of themselves to be wholly outside

that sphere. This was the tendency, indeed, that militated against the

complete detachment in his case from moral problems and mystical thought,

so as to enable him to paint, as it were, with a free hand exactly as he

saw; and most certainly not that he saw only the visible world. The

mystical element is not directly favourable to creative art. You see in

Tolstoy how it arrests and perplexes--how it lays a disturbing check on

real presentation--hindering the action, and is not favourable to the

loving and faithful representation, which, as Goethe said, all true and

high art should be. To some extent you see exactly the same thing in

Nathaniel Hawthorne as in Tolstoy. Hawthorne's preoccupations in this

way militated against his character-power; his healthy characters who

would never have been influenced as he describes by morbid ones yet are

not only influenced according to him, but suffer sadly. Phoebe Pyncheon

in \_The House of the Seven Gables\_, gives sunshine to poor Hepzibah

Clifford, but is herself never merry again, though joyousness was her

natural element. So, doubtless, it would have been with Pansie in

\_Doctor Dolliver\_, as indeed it was with Zenobia and with the hero in the

\_Marble Faun\_. "We all go wrong," said Hawthorne, "by a too strenuous

resolution to go right." Lady Byron was to him an intolerably

irreproachable person, just as Stevenson felt a little of the same

towards Thoreau; notwithstanding that he was the "sunnily-ascetic," the

asceticism and its corollary, as he puts it: the passion for individual

self-improvement was alien in a way to Stevenson. This is the position

of the casuistic mystic moralist and not of the man who sees only the

visible world.

Mr Baildon says:

"Stevenson has many of the things that are wanting or defective in

Scott. He has his philosophy of life; he is beyond remedy a moralist,

even when his morality is of the kind which he happily calls 'tail

foremost,' or as we may say, inverted morality. Stevenson is, in

fact, much more of a thinker than Scott, and he is also much more of

the conscious artist, questionable advantage as that sometimes is. He

has also a much cleverer, acuter mind than Scott, also a questionable

advantage, as genius has no greater enemy than cleverness, and there

is really no greater descent than to fall from the style of genius to

that of cleverness. But Stevenson was too critical and alive to

misuse his cleverness, and it is generally employed with great effect

as in the diabolical ingenuities of a John Silver, or a Master of

Ballantrae. In one sense Stevenson does not even belong to the school

of Scott, but rather to that of Poe, Hawthorne, and the Brontes, in

that he aims more at concentration and intensity, than at the easy,

quiet breadth of Scott."

If, indeed, it should not here have been added that Stevenson's theory of

life and conduct was not seldom too insistent for free creativeness, for

dramatic freedom, breadth and reality.

Now here I humbly think Mr Baldion errs about the cleverness when he

criticises Stevenson for the \_faux pas\_ artistically of resorting to the

piratic filibustering and the treasure-seeking at the close of \_The

Master of Ballantrae\_, he only tells and tells plainly how cleverness

took the place of genius there; as indeed it did in not a few

cases--certainly in some points in the Dutch escapade in \_Catriona\_ and

in not a few in \_Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde\_. The fault of that last story is

simply that we seem to hear Stevenson chuckling to himself, "Ah, now,

won't they all say at last how clever I am." That too mars the \_Merry

Men\_, whoever wrote them or part wrote them, and \_Prince Otto\_ would have

been irretrievably spoiled by this self-conscious sense of cleverness had

it not been for style and artifice. In this incessant "see how clever I

am," we have another proof of the abounding youthfulness of R. L.

Stevenson. If, as Mr Baildon says (p. 30), he had true child's horror of

being put in fine clothes in which one must sit still and be good,

\_Prince Otto\_ remains attractive in spite of some things and because of

his fine clothes. Neither Poe nor Hawthorne could have fallen to the

piracy, and treasure-hunting of \_The Master of Ballantrae\_.

"Far behind Scott in the power of instinctive, irreflective, spontaneous

creation of character, Stevenson tells his story with more art and with a

firmer grip on his reader." And that is exactly what I, wishing to do

all I dutifully can for Stevenson, cannot see. His genius is in nearly

all cases pulled up or spoiled by his all too conscious cleverness, and

at last we say, "Oh Heavens! if he could and would but let himself go or

forget himself what he might achieve." But he doesn't--never does, and

therefore remains but a second-rate creator though more and more the

stylist and the artist. This is more especially the case at the very

points where writers like Scott would have risen and roused all the

readers' interest. When Stevenson reaches such points, he is always as

though saying "See now how cleverly I'll clear that old and stereotyped

style of thing and do something \_new\_." But there are things in life and

human nature, which though they are old are yet ever new, and the true

greatness of a writer can never come from evading or looking askance at

them or trying to make them out something else than what they really are.

No artistic aim or ambition can suffice to stand instead of them or to

refine them away. That way lies only cold artifice and frigid lacework,

and sometimes Stevenson did go a little too much on this line.

CHAPTER XXI--UNITY IN STEVENSON'S STORIES

The unity in Stevenson's stories is generally a unity of subjective

impression and reminiscence due, in the first place, to his quick, almost

abnormal boyish reverence for mere animal courage, audacity, and

doggedness, and, in the second place, to his theory of life, his

philosophy, his moral view. He produces an artificial atmosphere.

Everything then has to be worked up to this--kept really in accordance

with it, and he shows great art in the doing of this. Hence, though, a

quaint sense of sameness, of artificial atmosphere--at once really a lack

of spontaneity and of freedom. He is freest when he pretends to nothing

but adventure--when he aims professedly at nothing save to let his

characters develop themselves by action. In this respect the most

successful of his stories is yet \_Treasure Island\_, and the least

successful perhaps \_Catriona\_, when just as the ambitious aim compels him

to pause in incident, the first-person form creates a cold stiffness and

artificiality alien to the full impression he would produce upon the

reader. The two stories he left unfinished promised far greater things

in this respect than he ever accomplished. For it is an indisputable

fact, and indeed very remarkable, that the ordinary types of men and

women have little or no attraction for Stevenson, nor their commonplace

passions either. Yet precisely what his art wanted was due infusion of

this very interest. Nothing else will supply the place. The ordinary

passion of love to the end he \_shies\_, and must invent no end of

expedients to supply the want. The devotion of the ordinary type, as

Thomas Hardy has over and over exhibited it, is precisely what Stevenson

wants, to impart to his novels the full sense of reality. The secret of

morals, says Shelley, is a going out of self. Stevenson was only on the

way to secure this grand and all-sufficing motive. His characters, in a

way, are all already like himself, romantic, but the highest is when the

ordinary and commonplace is so apprehended that it becomes romantic, and

may even, through the artist's deeper perception and unconscious grasp

and vision, take the hand of tragedy, and lose nothing. The very

atmosphere Stevenson so loved to create was in itself alien to this; and,

so far as he went, his most successful revelations were but records of

his own limitations. It is something that he was to the end so much the

youth, with fine impulses, if sometimes with sympathies misdirected, and

that, too, in such a way as to render his work cold and artificial, else

he might have turned out more of the Swift than of the Sterne or

Fielding. Prince Otto and Seraphina are from this cause mainly complete

failures, alike from the point of view of nature and of art, and the

Countess von Rosen is not a complete failure, and would perhaps have been

a bit of a success, if only she had made Prince Otto come nearer to

losing his virtue. The most perfect in style, perhaps, of all

Stevenson's efforts it is yet most out of nature and truth,--a farce,

felt to be disguised only when read in a certain mood; and this all the

more for its perfections, just as Stevenson would have said it of a human

being too icily perfect whom he had met.

On this subject, Mr Baildon has some words so decisive, true, and final,

that I cannot refrain from here quoting them:

"From sheer incapacity to retain it, Prince Otto loses the regard,

affection, and esteem of his wife. He goes eavesdropping among the

peasantry, and has to sit silent while his wife's honour is coarsely

impugned. After that I hold it is impossible for Stevenson to

rehabilitate his hero, and, with all his brilliant effects, he fails.

. . . I cannot help feeling a regret that such fine work is thrown

away on what I must honestly hold to be an unworthy subject. The

music of the spheres is rather too sublime an accompaniment for this

genteel comedy Princess. A touch of Offenbach would seem more

appropriate. Then even in comedy the hero must not be the butt." And

it must reluctantly be confessed that in Prince Otto you see in excess

that to which there is a tendency in almost all the rest--it is to

make up for lack of hold on human nature itself, by resources of style

and mere external technical art.

CHAPTER XXII--PERSONAL CHEERFULNESS AND INVENTED GLOOM

Now, it is in its own way surely a very remarkable thing that Stevenson,

who, like a youth, was all for \_Heiterkeit\_, cheerfulness, taking and

giving of pleasure, for relief, change, variety, new impressions, new

sensations, should, at the time he did, have conceived and written a

story like \_The Master of Ballantrae\_--all in a grave, grey, sombre tone,

not aiming even generally at what at least indirectly all art is

conceived to aim at--the giving of pleasure: he himself decisively said

that it "lacked all pleasurableness, and hence was imperfect in essence."

A very strange utterance in face of the oft-repeated doctrine of the

essays that the one aim of art, as of true life, is to communicate

pleasure, to cheer and to elevate and improve, and in face of two of his

doctrines that life itself is a monitor to cheerfulness and mirth. This

is true: and it is only explainable on the ground that it is youth alone

which can exult in its power of accumulating shadows and dwelling on the

dark side--it is youth that revels in the possible as a set-off to its

brightness and irresponsibility: it is youth that can delight in its own

excess of shade, and can even dispense with sunshine--hugging to its

heart the memory of its own often self-created distresses and conjuring

up and, with self-satisfaction, brooding over the pain and imagined

horrors of a lifetime. Maturity and age kindly bring their own

relief--rendering this kind of ministry to itself no longer desirable,

even were it possible. \_The Master of Ballantrae\_ indeed marks the

crisis. It shows, and effectively shows, the other side of the adventure

passion--the desire of escape from its own sombre introspections, which

yet, in all its "go" and glow and glitter, tells by its very excess of

their tendency to pass into this other and apparently opposite. But

here, too, there is nothing single or separate. The device of piracy,

etc., at close of \_Ballantrae\_, is one of the poorest expedients for

relief in all fiction.

Will in \_Will o' the Mill\_ presents another. When at the last moment he

decides that it is not worth while to get married, the author's then

rather incontinent philosophy--which, by-the-bye, he did not himself act

on--spoils his story as it did so much else. Such an ending to such a

romance is worse even than any blundering such as the commonplace

inventor could be guilty of, for he would be in a low sense natural if he

were but commonplace. We need not therefore be surprised to find Mr

Gwynn thus writing:

"The love scenes in \_Weir of Hermiston\_ are almost unsurpassable; but

the central interest of the story lies elsewhere--in the relations

between father and son. Whatever the cause, the fact is clear that in

the last years of his life Stevenson recognised in himself an ability

to treat subjects which he had hitherto avoided, and was thus no

longer under the necessity of detaching fragments from life. Before

this, he had largely confined himself to the adventures of roving men

where women had made no entrance; or, if he treated of a settled

family group, the result was what we see in \_The Master of

Ballantrae\_."

In a word, between this work and \_Weir of Hermiston\_ we have the passage

from mere youth to manhood, with its wider, calmer views, and its

patience, inclusiveness, and mild, genial acceptance of types that before

did not come, and could not by any effort of will be brought, within

range or made to adhere consistently with what was already accepted and

workable. He was less the egotist now and more the realist. He was not

so prone to the high lights in which all seems overwrought, exaggerated;

concerned really with effects of a more subdued order, if still the theme

was a wee out of ordinary nature. Enough is left to prove that

Stevenson's life-long devotion to his art anyway was on the point of

being rewarded by such a success as he had always dreamt of: that in the

man's nature there was power to conceive scenes of a tragic beauty and

intensity unsurpassed in our prose literature, and to create characters

not unworthy of his greatest predecessors. The blind stroke of fate had

nothing to say to the lesson of his life, and though we deplore that he

never completed his masterpieces, we may at least be thankful that time

enough was given him to prove to his fellow-craftsmen, that such labour

for the sake of art is not without art's peculiar reward--the triumph of

successful execution.

CHAPTER XXIII--EDINBURGH REVIEWERS' DICTA INAPPLICABLE TO LATER WORK

From many different points of view discerning critics have celebrated the

autobiographic vein--the self-revealing turn, the self-portraiture, the

quaint, genial, yet really child-like egotistic and even dreamy element

that lies like an amalgam, behind all Stevenson's work. Some have even

said, that because of this, he will finally live by his essays and not by

his stories. That is extreme, and is not critically based or justified,

because, however true it may be up to a certain point, it is not true of

Stevenson's quite latest fictions where we see a decided breaking through

of the old limits, and an advance upon a new and a fresher and broader

sphere of interest and character altogether. But these ideas set down

truly enough at a certain date, or prior to a certain date, are wrong and

falsely directed in view of Stevenson's latest work and what it promised.

For instance, what a discerning and able writer in the \_Edinburgh Review\_

of July 1895 said truly then was in great part utterly inapplicable to

the whole of the work of the last years, for in it there was grasp, wide

and deep, of new possibilities--promise of clear insight, discrimination,

and contrast of character, as well as firm hold of new and great human

interest under which the egotistic or autobiographic vein was submerged

or weakened. The \_Edinburgh Reviewer\_ wrote:

"There was irresistible fascination in what it would be unfair to

characterise as egotism, for it came natural to him to talk frankly

and easily of himself. . . . He could never have dreamed, like Pepys,

of locking up his confidence in a diary. From first to last, in

inconsecutive essays, in the records of sentimental touring, in

fiction and in verse, he has embodied the outer and the inner

autobiography. He discourses--he prattles--he almost babbles about

himself. He seems to have taken minute and habitual introspection for

the chief study in his analysis of human nature, as a subject which

was immediately in his reach, and would most surely serve his purpose.

We suspect much of the success of his novels was due to the fact that

as he seized for a substructure on the scenery and situations which

had impressed him forcibly, so in the characters of the most different

types, there was always more or less of self-portraiture. The subtle

touch, eminently and unmistakably realistic, gave life to what might

otherwise have seemed a lay-figure. . . . He hesitated again and again

as to his destination; and under mistakes, advice of friends, doubted

his chances, as a story-writer, even after \_Treasure Island\_ had

enjoyed its special success. . . . We venture to think that, with his

love of intellectual self-indulgence, had he found novel-writing

really enjoyable, he would never have doubted at all. But there comes

in the difference between him and Scott, whom he condemns for the

slovenliness of hasty workmanship. Scott, in his best days, sat down

to his desk and let the swift pen take its course in inspiration that

seemed to come without an effort. Even when racked with pains, and

groaning in agony, the intellectual machinery was still driven at a

high pressure by something that resembled an irrepressible instinct.

Stevenson can have had little or nothing of that inspiriting afflatus.

He did his painstaking work conscientiously, thoughtfully; he erased,

he revised, and he was hard to satisfy. In short, it was his

weird--and he could not resist it--to set style and form before fire

and spirit."

CHAPTER XXIV--MR HENLEY'S SPITEFUL PERVERSIONS

More unfortunate still, as disturbing and prejudicing a sane and true and

disinterested view of Stevenson's claims, was that article of his

erewhile "friend," Mr W. E. Henley, published on the appearance of the

\_Memoir\_ by Mr Graham Balfour, in the \_Pall Mall Magazine\_. It was well

that Mr Henley there acknowledged frankly that he wrote under a keen

sense of "grievance"--a most dangerous mood for the most soberly critical

and self-restrained of men to write in, and that most certainly Mr W. E.

Henley was not--and that he owned to having lost contact with, and

recognition of the R. L. Stevenson who went to America in 1887, as he

says, and never came back again. To do bare justice to Stevenson it is

clear that knowledge of that later Stevenson was essential--essential

whether it was calculated to deepen sympathy or the reverse. It goes

without saying that the Louis he knew and hobnobbed with, and nursed near

by the Old Bristo Port in Edinburgh could not be the same exactly as the

Louis of Samoa and later years--to suppose so, or to expect so, would

simply be to deny all room for growth and expansion. It is clear that

the W. E. Henley of those days was not the same as the W. E. Henley who

indited that article, and if growth and further insight are to be allowed

to Mr Henley and be pleaded as his justification \_cum\_ spite born of

sense of grievance for such an onslaught, then clearly some allowance in

the same direction must be made for Stevenson. One can hardly think that

in his case old affection and friendship had been so completely

submerged, under feelings of grievance and paltry pique, almost always

bred of grievances dwelt on and nursed, which it is especially bad for

men of genius to acknowledge, and to make a basis, as it were, for

clearer knowledge, insight, and judgment. In other cases the pleading

would simply amount to an immediate and complete arrest of judgment. Mr

Henley throughout writes as though whilst he had changed, and changed in

points most essential, his erewhile friend remained exactly where he was

as to literary position and product--the Louis who went away in 1887 and

never returned, had, as Mr W. E. Henley, most unfortunately for himself,

would imply, retained the mastery, and the Louis who never came back had

made no progress, had not added an inch, not to say a cubit, to his

statue, while Mr Henley remained \_in statu quo\_, and was so only to be

judged. It is an instance of the imperfect sympathy which Charles Lamb

finely celebrated--only here it is acknowledged, and the "imperfect

sympathy" pled as a ground for claiming the full insight which only

sympathy can secure. If Mr Henley was fair to the Louis he knew and

loved, it is clear that he was and could only be unjust to the Louis who

went away in 1887 and never came back.

"At bottom Stevenson was an excellent fellow. But he was of his

essence what the French call \_personnel\_. He was, that is,

incessantly and passionately interested in Stevenson. He could not be

in the same room with a mirror but he must invite its confidences

every time he passed it; to him there was nothing obvious in time and

eternity, and the smallest of his discoveries, his most trivial

apprehensions, were all by way of being revelations, and as

revelations must be thrust upon the world; he was never so much in

earnest, never so well pleased (this were he happy or wretched), never

so irresistible as when he wrote about himself. \_Withal\_, \_if he

wanted a thing\_, \_he went after it with an entire contempt of

consequences\_. \_For these\_, \_indeed\_, \_the Shorter Catechism was ever

prepared to answer\_; \_so that whether he did well or ill\_, \_he was

safe to come out unabashed and cheerful\_."

Notice here, how undiscerning the mentor becomes. The words put in

"italics," unqualified as they are, would fit and admirably cover the

character of the greatest criminal. They would do as they stand, for

Wainwright, for Dr Dodd, for Deeming, for Neil Cream, for Canham Read, or

for Dougal of Moat Farm fame. And then the touch that, in the Shorter

Catechism, Stevenson would have found a cover or justification for it

somehow! This comes of writing under a keen sense of grievance; and how

could this be truly said of one who was "at bottom an excellent fellow."

W. Henley's ethics are about as clear-obscure as is his reading of

character. Listen to him once again--more directly on the literary

point.

"To tell the truth, his books are none of mine; I mean that if I

wanted reading, I do not go for it to the \_Edinburgh Edition\_. I am

not interested in remarks about morals; in and out of letters. \_I

have lived a full and varied life\_, and my opinions are my own. \_So\_,

\_if I crave the enchantment of romance\_, \_I ask it of bigger men than

he\_, \_and of bigger books than his\_: of \_Esmond\_ (say) and \_Great

Expectations\_, of \_Redgauntlet\_ and \_Old Mortality\_, \_of La Reine

Margot\_ and \_Bragelonne\_, of \_David Copperfield\_ and \_A Tale of Two

Cities\_; while if good writing and some other things be in my

appetite, are there not always Hazlitt and Lamb--to say nothing of

that globe of miraculous continents; which is known to us as

Shakespeare? There is his style, you will say, and it is a fact that

it is rare, and \_in the last\_ times better, because much simpler than

in the first. But, after all, his style is so perfectly achieved that

the achievement gets obvious: and when achievement gets obvious, is it

not by way of becoming uninteresting? And is there not something to

be said for the person who wrote that Stevenson always reminded him of

a young man dressed the best he ever saw for the Burlington Arcade?

{10} Stevenson's work in letters does not now take me much, and I

decline to enter on the question of his immortality; since that,

despite what any can say, will get itself settled soon or late, for

all time. No--when I care to think of Stevenson it is not of R. L.

Stevenson--R. L. Stevenson, the renowned, the accomplished--executing

his difficult solo, but of the Lewis that I knew and loved, and

wrought for, and worked with for so long. The successful man of

letters does not greatly interest me. I read his careful prayers and

pass on, with the certainty that, well as they read, they were not

written for print. I learn of his nameless prodigalities, and recall

some instances of conduct in another vein. I remember, rather, the

unmarried and irresponsible Lewis; the friend, the comrade, the

\_charmeur\_. Truly, that last word, French as it is, is the only one

that is worthy of him. I shall ever remember him as that. The

impression of his writings disappears; the impression of himself and

his talk is ever a possession. . . . Forasmuch as he was primarily a

talker, his printed works, like these of others after his kind, are

but a sop for posterity. A last dying speech and confession (as it

were) to show that not for nothing were they held rare fellows in

their day."

Just a month or two before Mr Henley's self-revealing article appeared in

the \_Pall Mall Magazine\_, Mr Chesterton, in the \_Daily News\_, with almost

prophetic forecast, had said:

"Mr Henley might write an excellent study of Stevenson, but it would

only be of the Henleyish part of Stevenson, and it would show a

distinct divergence from the finished portrait of Stevenson, which

would be given by Professor Colvin."

And it were indeed hard to reconcile some things here with what Mr Henley

set down of individual works many times in the \_Scots and National

Observer\_, and elsewhere, and in literary judgments as in some other

things there should, at least, be general consistency, else the search

for an honest man in the late years would be yet harder than it was when

Diogenes looked out from his tub!

Mr James Douglas, in the \_Star\_, in his half-playful and suggestive way,

chose to put it as though he regarded the article in the \_Pall Mall

Magazine\_ as a hoax, perpetrated by some clever, unscrupulous writer,

intent on provoking both Mr Henley and his friends, and Stevenson's

friends and admirers. This called forth a letter from one signing

himself "A Lover of R. L. Stevenson," which is so good that we must give

it here.

A LITERARY HOAX.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE \_STAR\_.

SIR--I fear that, despite the charitable scepticism of Mr Douglas,

there is no doubt that Mr Henley is the perpetrator of the saddening

Depreciation of Stevenson which has been published over his name.

What openings there are for reprisals let Mr Henley's conscience tell

him; but permit me to remind him of two or three things which R. L.

Stevenson has written concerning W. E. Henley.

First this scene in the infirmary at Edinburgh:

"(Leslie) Stephen and I sat on a couple of chairs, and the poor fellow

(Henley) sat up in his bed with his hair and beard all tangled, and

talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a king's palace, or the

great King's palace of the blue air. He has taught himself two

languages since he has been lying there. \_I shall try to be of use to

him\_."

Secondly, this passage from Stevenson's dedication of \_Virginibus

Puerisque\_ to "My dear William Ernest Henley":

"These papers are like milestones on the wayside of my life; and as I

look back in memory, there is hardly a stage of that distance but I

see you present with advice, reproof, or praise. Meanwhile, many

things have changed, you and I among the rest; but I hope that our

sympathy, founded on the love of our art, and nourished by mutual

assistance, shall survive these little revolutions, undiminished, and,

with God's help, unite us to the end."

Thirdly, two scraps from letters from Stevenson to Henley, to show

that the latter was not always a depreciator of R. L. Stevenson's

work:

"1. I'm glad to think I owe you the review that pleased me best of all

the reviews I ever had. . . . To live reading such reviews and die

eating ortolans--sich is my aspiration.

"2. Dear lad,--If there was any more praise in what you wrote, I

think--(the editor who had pruned down Mr Henley's review of

Stevenson's \_Prince Otto\_) has done us both a service; some of it

stops my throat. . . . Whether (considering our intimate relations)

you would not do better to refrain from reviewing me, I will leave to

yourself."

And, lastly, this extract from the very last of Stevenson's letters to

Henley, published in the two volumes of \_Letters\_:

"It is impossible to let your new volume pass in silence. I have not

received the same thrill of poetry since G. M.'s \_Joy of Earth\_

volume, and \_Love in a Valley\_; and I do not know that even that was

so intimate and deep. . . . I thank you for the joy you have given me,

and remain your old friend and present huge admirer, R. L. S."

It is difficult to decide on which side in this literary friendship lies

the true modesty and magnanimity? I had rather be the author of the last

message of R. L. Stevenson to W. E. Henley, than of the last words of W.

E. Henley concerning R. L. Stevenson.

CHAPTER XXV--MR CHRISTIE MURRAY'S IMPRESSIONS

MR CHRISTIE MURRAY, writing as "Merlin" in our handbook in the \_Referee\_

at the time, thus disposed of some of the points just dealt with by us:

"Here is libel on a large scale, and I have purposely refrained from

approaching it until I could show my readers something of the spirit

in which the whole attack is conceived. 'If he wanted a thing he went

after it with an entire contempt for consequences. For these, indeed,

the Shorter Catechist was ever prepared to answer; so that whether he

did well or ill, he was safe to come out unabashed and cheerful.' Now

if Mr Henley does not mean that for the very express picture of a

rascal without a conscience he has been most strangely infelicitous in

his choice of terms, and he is one of those who make so strong a

profession of duty towards mere vocables that we are obliged to take

him \_au pied de la lettre\_. A man who goes after whatever he wants

with an entire contempt of consequences is a scoundrel, and the man

who emerges from such an enterprise unabashed and cheerful, whatever

his conduct may have been, and justifies himself on the principles of

the Shorter Catechism, is a hypocrite to boot. This is not the report

we have of Robert Louis Stevenson from most of those who knew him. It

is a most grave and dreadful accusation, and it is not minimised by Mr

Henley's acknowledgment that Stevenson was a good fellow. We all know

the air of false candour which lends a disputant so much advantage in

debate. In Victor Hugo's tremendous indictment of Napoleon le Petit

we remember the telling allowance for fine horsemanship. It spreads

an air of impartiality over the most mordant of Hugo's pages. It is

meant to do that. An insignificant praise is meant to show how a

whole Niagara of blame is poured on the victim of invective in all

sincerity, and even with a touch of reluctance.

"Mr Henley, despite his absurdities of ''Tis' and 'it were,' is a

fairly competent literary craftsman, and he is quite gifted enough to

make a plain man's plain meaning an evident thing if he chose to do

it. But if for the friend for whom 'first and last he did share' he

can only show us the figure of one 'who was at bottom an excellent

fellow,' and who had 'an entire contempt' for the consequences of his

own acts, he presents a picture which can only purposely be obscured.

. . .

"All I know of Robert Louis Stevenson I have learned from his books,

and from one unexpected impromptu letter which he wrote to me years

ago in friendly recognition of my own work. I add the testimonies of

friends who may have been of less actual service to him than Mr

Henley, but who surely loved him better and more lastingly. These do

not represent him as the victim of an overweening personal vanity, nor

as a person reckless of the consequences of his own acts, nor as a

Pecksniff who consoled himself for moral failure out of the Shorter

Catechism. The books and the friends amongst them show me an erratic

yet lovable personality, a man of devotion and courage, a loyal,

charming, and rather irresponsible person whose very slight faults

were counter-balanced many times over by very solid virtues. . . .

"To put the thing flatly, it is not a heroism to cling to mere

existence. The basest of us can do that. But it is a heroism to

maintain an equable and unbroken cheerfulness in the face of death.

For my own part, I never bowed at the literary shrine Mr Henley and

his friends were at so great pains to rear. I am not disposed to

think more loftily than I ever thought of their idol. But the Man--the

Man was made of enduring valour and childlike charm, and these will

keep him alive when his detractors are dead and buried."

As to the Christian name, it is notorious that he was christened Robert

Lewis--the Lewis being after his maternal grandfather--Dr Lewis Balfour.

Some attempt has been made to show that the Louis was adopted because so

many cousins and relatives had also been so christened; but the most

likely explanation I have ever heard was that his father changed the name

to Louis, that there might be no chance through it of any notion of

association with a very prominent noisy person of the name of Lewis, in

Edinburgh, towards whom Thomas Stevenson felt dislike, if not positive

animosity. Anyhow, it is clear from the entries in the register of

pupils at the Edinburgh Academy, in the two years when Stevenson was

there, that in early youth he was called Robert only; for in the school

list for 1862 the name appears as Robert Stevenson, without the Lewis,

while in the 1883 list it is given as Lewis Robert Stevenson. Clearly if

in earlier years Stevenson was, in his family and elsewhere, called

\_Robert\_, there could have then arisen no risk of confusion with any of

his relatives who bore the name of Lewis; and all this goes to support

the view which I have given above. Anyhow he ceased to be called Robert

at home, and ceased in 1863 to be Robert on the Edinburgh Academy list,

and became Lewis Robert. Whether my view is right or not, he was

thenceforward called Louis in his family, and the name uniformly spelt

Louis. What blame on Stevenson's part could be attached to this family

determination it is hard to see--people are absolutely free to spell

their names as they please, and the matter would not be worth a moment's

attention, or the waste of one drop of ink, had not Mr Henley chosen to

be very nasty about the name, and in the \_Pall Mall Magazine\_ article

persisted in printing it Lewis as though that were worthy of him and of

it. That was not quite the unkindest cut of all, but it was as unkind as

it was trumpery. Mr Christie Murray neatly set off the trumpery spite of

this in the following passage:

"Stevenson, it appears, according to his friend's judgment, was

'incessantly and passionately interested in Stevenson,' but most of us

are incessantly and passionately interested in ourselves. 'He could

not be in the same room with a mirror but he must invite its

confidences every time he passed it.' I remember that George Sala,

who was certainly under no illusion as to his own personal aspect,

made public confession of an identical foible. Mr Henley may not have

an equal affection for the looking-glass, but he is a very poor and

unimaginative reader who does not see him gloating over the god-like

proportions of the shadow he sends sprawling over his own page. I

make free to say that a more self-conscious person than Mr Henley does

not live. 'The best and most interesting part of Stevenson's life

will never get written--even by me,' says Mr Henley.

"There is one curious little mark of animus, or one equally curious

affectation--I do not profess to know which, and it is most probably a

compound of the two--in Mr Henley's guardedly spiteful essay which

asks for notice. The dead novelist signed his second name on his

title-pages and his private correspondence 'Louis.' Mr Henley spells

it 'Lewis.' Is this intended to say that Stevenson took an

ornamenting liberty with his own baptismal appellation? If so, why

not say the thing and have done with it? Or is it one of Mr Henley's

wilful ridiculosities? It seems to stand for some sort of meaning,

and to me, at least, it offers a jarring hint of small spitefulness

which might go for nothing if it were not so well borne out by the

general tone of Mr Henley's article. It is a small matter enough, God

knows, but it is precisely because it is so very small that it

irritates."

CHAPTER XXVI--HERO-VILLAINS

In truth, it must indeed be here repeated that Stevenson for the reason

he himself gave about \_Deacon Brodie\_ utterly fails in that healthy

hatred of "fools and scoundrels" on which Carlyle somewhat incontinently

dilated. Nor does he, as we have seen, draw the line between hero and

villain of the piece, as he ought to have done; and, even for his own

artistic purposes, has it too much all on one side, to express it simply.

Art demands relief from any one phase of human nature, more especially of

that phase, and even from what is morbid or exceptional. Admitting that

such natures, say as Huish, the cockney, in the \_Ebb-Tide\_ on the one

side, and Prince Otto on the other are possible, it is yet absolutely

demanded that they should not stand \_alone\_, but have their due

complement and balance present in the piece also to deter and finally to

tell on them in the action. If "a knave or villain," as George Eliot

aptly said, is but a fool with a circumbendibus, this not only wants to

be shown, but to have that definite human counterpart and corrective; and

this not in any indirect and perfunctory way, but in a direct and

effective sense. It is here that Stevenson fails--fails absolutely in

most of his work, save the very latest--fails, as has been shown, in \_The

Master of Ballantrae\_, as it were almost of perverse and set purpose, in

lack of what one might call ethical decision which causes him to waver or

seem to waver and wobble in his judgment of his characters or in his

sympathy with them or for them. Thus he fails to give his readers the

proper cue which was his duty both as man and artist to have given. The

highest art and the lowest are indeed here at one in demanding moral

poise, if we may call it so, that however crudely in the low, and however

artistically and refinedly in the high, vice should not only not be set

forth as absolutely triumphing, nor virtue as being absolutely,

outwardly, and inwardly defeated. It is here the same in the melodrama

of the transpontine theatre as in the tragedies of the Greek dramatists

and Shakespeare. "The evening brings a' 'hame'" and the end ought to

show something to satisfy the innate craving (for it is innate, thank

Heaven! and low and high alike in moments of \_elevated impression\_,

acknowledge it and bow to it) else there can scarce be true \_denouement\_

and the sense of any moral rectitude or law remain as felt or

acknowledged in human nature or in the Universe itself.

Stevenson's toleration and constant sermonising in the essays--his desire

to make us yield allowances all round is so far, it may be, there in

place; but it will not work out in story or play, and declares the need

for correction and limitation the moment that he essays artistic

presentation--from the point of view of art he lacks at once artistic

clearness and decision, and from the point of view of morality seems

utterly loose and confusing. His artistic quality here rests wholly in

his style--mere style, and he is, alas! a castaway as regards discernment

and reading of human nature in its deepest demands and laws. Herein lies

the false strain that has spoiled much of his earlier work, which renders

really superficial and confusing and undramatic his professedly dramatic

work--which never will and never can commend the hearty suffrages of a

mixed and various theatrical audience in violating the very first rule of

the theatre, and of dramatic creation.

From another point of view this is my answer to Mr Pinero in regard to

the failure of Stevenson to command theatrical success. He confuses and

so far misdirects the sympathies in issues which strictly are at once

moral and dramatic.

I am absolutely at one with Mr Baildon, though I reach my results from

somewhat different grounds from what he does, when he says this about

\_Beau Austin\_, and the reason of its failure--complete failure--on the

stage:

"I confess I should have liked immensely to have seen [? to see] this

piece on the boards; for only then could one be quite sure whether it

could be made convincing to an audience and carry their sympathies in

the way the author intended. Yet the fact that \_Beau Austin\_, in

spite of being 'put on' by so eminent an actor-manager as Mr Beerbohm

Tree, was no great success on the stage, is a fair proof that the

piece lacked some of the essentials, good or bad, of dramatic success.

Now a drama, like a picture or a musical composition, must have a

certain unity of key and tone. You can, indeed, mingle comedy with

tragedy as an interlude or relief from the strain and stress of the

serious interest of the piece. But you cannot reverse the process and

mingle tragedy with comedy. Once touch the fine spun-silk of the

pretty fire-balloon of comedy with the tragic dagger, and it falls to

earth a shrivelled nothing. And the reason that no melodrama can be

great art is just that it is a compromise between tragedy and comedy,

a mixture of tragedy with comedy and not comedy with tragedy. So in

drama, the middle course, proverbially the safest, is in reality the

most dangerous. Now I maintain that in \_Beau Austin\_ we have an

element of tragedy. The betrayal of a beautiful, pure and

noble-minded woman is surely at once the basest act a man can be

capable of, and a more tragic event than death itself to the woman.

Richardson, in \_Clarissa Harlowe\_, is well aware of this, and is

perfectly right in making his \_denouement\_ tragic. Stevenson, on the

other hand, patches up the matter into a rather tame comedy. It is

even much tamer than it would have been in the case of Lovelace and

Clarissa Harlowe; for Lovelace is a strong character, a man who could

have been put through some crucial atonement, and come out purged and

ennobled. But Beau Austin we feel is but a frip. He endures a few

minutes of sharp humiliation, it is true, but to the spectator this

cannot but seem a very insufficient expiation, not only of the wrong

he had done one woman, but of the indefinite number of wrongs he had

done others. He is at once the villain and the hero of the piece, and

in the narrow limits of a brief comedy this transformation cannot be

convincingly effected. Wrongly or rightly, a theatrical audience,

like the spectators of a trial, demand a definite verdict and

sentence, and no play can satisfy which does not reasonably meet this

demand. And this arises not from any merely Christian prudery or

Puritanism, for it is as true for Greek tragedy and other high forms

of dramatic art."

The transformation of villain into hero, if possible at all, could only

be convincingly effected in a piece of wide scope, where there was room

for working out the effect of some great shock, upheaval of the nature,

change due to deep and unprecedented experiences--religious conversion,

witnessing of sudden death, providential rescue from great peril of

death, or circumstance of that kind; but to be effective and convincing

it needs to be marked and \_fully justified\_ in some such way; and no

cleverness in the writer will absolve him from deference to this great

law in serious work for presentation on the stage; if mere farces or

little comedies may seem sometimes to contravene it, yet this--even

this--is only in appearance.

True, it is not the dramatists part \_of himself\_ to condemn, or to

approve, or praise: he has to present, and to present various characters

faithfully in their relation to each other, and their effect upon each

other. But the moral element cannot be expunged or set lightly aside

because it is closely involved in the very working out and presentation

of these relations, and the effect upon each other. Character is vital.

And character, if it tells in life, in influence and affection, must be

made to tell directly also in the drama. There is no escape from

this--none; the dramatist is lopsided if he tries to ignore it; he is a

monster if he is wholly blind to it--like the poet in \_In Memoriam\_,

"Without a conscience or an aim." Mr Henley, in his notorious, all too

confessional, and yet rather affected article on Stevenson in the \_Pall

Mall Magazine\_, has a remark which I confess astonished me--a remark I

could never forget as coming from him. He said that he "had lived a very

full and varied life, and had no interest in remarks about morals."

"Remarks about morals" are, nevertheless, in essence, the pith of all the

books to which he referred, as those to which he turned in preference to

the \_Edinburgh Edition\_ of R. L. Stevenson's works. The moral element is

implicit in the drama, and it is implicit there because it is implicit in

life itself, or so the great common-sense conceives it and demands it.

What we might call the asides proper of the drama, are "remarks about

morals," nothing else--the chorus in the Greek tragedy gathered up

"remarks about morals" as near as might be to the "remarks about morals"

in the streets of that day, only shaped to a certain artistic

consistency. Shakespeare is rich in "remarks about morals," often coming

near, indeed, to personal utterance, and this not only when Polonius

addresses his son before his going forth on his travels. Mr Henley here

only too plainly confessed, indeed, to lack of that conviction and

insight which, had he but possessed them, might have done a little to

relieve \_Beau Austin\_ and the other plays in which he collaborated with

R. L. Stevenson, from their besetting and fatal weakness. The two

youths, alas! thought they could be grandly original by despising, or

worse, contemning "remarks about morals" in the loftier as in the lower

sense. To "live a full and varied life," if the experience derived from

it is to have expression in the drama, is only to have the richer

resource in "remarks about morals." If this is perverted under any self-

conscious notion of doing something spick-and-span new in the way of

character and plot, alien to all the old conceptions, then we know our

writers set themselves boldly at loggerheads with certain old-fashioned

and yet older new-fashioned laws, which forbid the violation of certain

common demands of the ordinary nature and common-sense; and for the lack

of this, as said already, no cleverness, no resource, no style or graft,

will any way make up. So long as this is tried, with whatever

concentration of mind and purpose, failure is yet inevitable, and the

more inevitable the more concentration and less of humorous by-play,

because genius itself, if it despises the general moral sentiment and

instinct for moral proportion--an ethnic reward and punishment, so to

say--is all astray, working outside the line; and this, if Mr Pinero will

kindly excuse me, is the secret of the failure of these plays, and not

want of concentration, etc., in the sense he meant, or as he has put it.

Stevenson rather affected what he called "tail-foremost morality," a kind

of inversion in the field of morals, as De Quincey mixed it up with tail-

foremost humour in \_Murder as a Fine Art\_, etc., etc., but for all such

perversions as these the stage is a grand test and corrector, and such

perversions, and not "remarks about morals," are most strictly prohibited

there. Perverted subtleties of the sort Stevenson in earlier times

especially much affected are not only amiss but ruinous on the stage; and

what genius itself would maybe sanction, common-sense must reject and

rigidly cut away. Final success and triumph come largely by \_this\_ kind

of condensation and concentration, and the stern and severe lopping off

of the indulgence of the \_egotistical\_ genius, which is human discipline,

and the best exponent of the doctrine of unity also. This is the

straight and the narrow way along which genius, if it walk but

faithfully, sows as it goes in the dramatic pathway all the flowers of

human passion, hope, love, terror, and triumph.

I find it advisable, if not needful, here to reinforce my own

impressions, at some points, by another quotation from Mr Baildon, if he

will allow me, in which Stevenson's dependence in certain respects on the

dream-faculty is emphasised, and to it is traced a certain tendency to a

moral callousness or indifference which is one of the things in which the

waking Stevenson transparently suffered now and then invasions from the

dream-Stevenson--the result, a kind of spot, as we may call it, on the

eye of the moral sense; it is a small spot; but we know how a very small

object held close before the eye will wholly shut out the most lovely

natural prospects, interposing distressful phantasmagoria, due to the

strained and, for the time, morbid condition of the organ itself. So, it

must be confessed, it is to a great extent here.

But listen to Mr Baildon:

"In \_A Chapter on Dreams\_, Stevenson confesses his indebtedness to this

still mysterious agency. From a child he had been a great and vivid

dreamer, his dreams often taking such frightful shape that he used to

awake 'clinging in terror to the bedpost.' Later in life his dreams

continued to be frequent and vivid, but less terrifying in character and

more continuous and systematic. 'The Brownies,' as he picturesquely

names that 'sub-conscious imagination,' as the scientist would call it,

that works with such surprising freedom and ingenuity in our dreams,

became, as it were, \_collaborateurs\_ in his work of authorship. He

declares that they invented plots and even elaborated whole novels, and

that, not in a single night or single dream, but continuously, and from

one night to another, like a story in serial parts. Long before this

essay was written or published, I had been struck by this phantasmal

dream-like quality in some of Stevenson's works, which I was puzzled to

account for, until I read this extraordinary explanation, for explanation

it undoubtedly affords. Anything imagined in a dream would have a

tendency, when retold, to retain something of its dream-like character,

and I have on doubt one could trace in many instances and distinguish the

dreaming and the waking Stevenson, though in others they may be blended

beyond recognition. The trouble with the Brownies or the dream-Stevenson

\_was his or their want of moral sense\_, so that they sometimes presented

the waking author with plots which he could not make use of. Of this

Stevenson gives an instance in which a complete story of marked ingenuity

is vetoed through the moral impossibility of its presentment by a writer

so scrupulous (and in some directions he is extremely scrupulous) as

Stevenson was. But Stevenson admits that his most famous story, \_The

Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde\_, was not only suggested by a

dream, but that some of the most important and most criticised points,

such as the matter of the powder, were taken direct from the dream. It

had been extremely instructive and interesting had he gone more into

detail and mentioned some of the other stories into which the

dream-element entered largely and pointed out its influence, and would

have given us a better clue than we have or now ever can have.

"Even in \_The Suicide Club\_ and the \_Rajah's Diamond\_, I seem to feel

strongly the presence of the dream-Stevenson. . . . \_At certain points

one feels conscious of a certain moral callousness\_, \_such as marks the

dream state\_, \_as in the murder of Colonel Geraldine's brother\_, \_the

horror of which never seems to come fully home to us\_. But let no one

suppose these stories are lacking in vividness and in strangely realistic

detail; for this is of the very nature of dreaming at its height. . . .

While the \_dramatis personae\_ play their parts with the utmost spirit

while the story proceeds, they do not, as the past creations do, seem to

survive this first contact and live in our minds. This is particularly

true of the women. They are well drawn, and play the assigned parts well

enough, but they do not, as a rule, make a place for themselves either in

our hearts or memories. If there is an exception it is Elvira, in

\_Providence and the Guitar\_; but we remember her chiefly by the one

picture of her falling asleep, after the misadventures of the night, at

the supper-table, with her head on her husband's shoulder, and her hand

locked in his with instinctive, almost unconscious tenderness."

CHAPTER XXVII--MR G. MOORE, MR MARRIOTT WATSON AND OTHERS

From our point of view it will therefore be seen that we could not have

read Mr George Moore's wonderfully uncritical and misdirected diatribe

against Stevenson in \_The Daily Chronicle\_ of 24th April 1897, without

amusement, if not without laughter--indeed, we confess we may here quote

Shakespeare's words, we "laughed so consumedly" that, unless for Mr

Moore's high position and his assured self-confidence, we should not

trust ourselves to refer to it, not to speak of writing about it. It was

a review of \_The Secret Rose\_ by W. B. Yeats, but it passed after one

single touch to belittling abuse of Stevenson--an abuse that was

justified the more, in Mr Moore's idea, because Stevenson was dead. Had

he been alive he might have had something to say to it, in the way, at

least, of fable and moral. And when towards the close Mr Moore again

quotes from Mr Yeats, it is still "harping on my daughter" to undo

Stevenson, as though a rat was behind the arras, as in \_Hamlet\_.

"Stevenson," says he, "is the leader of these countless writers who

perceive nothing but the visible world," and these are antagonistic to

the great literature, of which Mr Yeats's \_Secret Rose\_ is a survival or

a renaissance, a literature whose watchword should be Mr Yeats's

significant phrase, "When one looks into the darkness there is always

something there." No doubt Mr Yeats's product all along the line ranks

with the great literature--unlike Homer, according to Mr Moore, he never

nods, though in the light of great literature, poor Stevenson is always

at his noddings, and more than that, in the words of Leland's Hans

Breitmann, he has "nodings on." He is poor, naked, miserable--a mere

pretender--and has no share in the makings of great literature. Mr Moore

has stripped him to the skin, and leaves him to the mercy of rain and

storm, like Lear, though Lear had a solid ground to go on in self-aid,

which Stevenson had not; he had daughters, and one of them was Cordelia,

after all. This comes of painting all boldly in black and white: Mr

Yeats is white, R. L. Stevenson is black, and I am sure neither one nor

other, because simply of their self-devotion to their art, could have

subscribed heartily to Mr Moore's black art and white art theory. Mr

Yeats is hardly the truest modern Celtic artist I take him for, if he can

fully subscribe to all this.

Mr Marriott Watson has a little unadvisedly, in my view, too like

ambition, fallen on 'tother side, and celebrated Stevenson as the master

of the horrifying. {11} He even finds the \_Ebb-Tide\_, and Huish, the

cockney, in it richly illustrative and grand. "There never was a more

magnificent cad in literature, and never a more foul-hearted little

ruffian. His picture glitters (!) with life, and when he curls up on the

island beach with the bullet in his body, amid the flames of the vitriol

he had intended for another, the reader's shudder conveys something also,

even (!) of regret."

And well it may! Individual taste and opinion are but individual taste

and opinion, but the \_Ebb-Tide\_ and the cockney I should be inclined to

cite as a specimen of Stevenson's all too facile make-believe, in which

there is too definite a machinery set agoing for horrors for the horrors

to be quite genuine. The process is often too forced with Stevenson, and

the incidents too much of the manufactured order, for the triumph of that

simplicity which is of inspiration and unassailable. Here Stevenson,

alas! all too often, \_pace\_ Mr Marriott Watson, treads on the skirts of

E. A. Poe, and that in his least composed and elevated artistic moments.

And though, it is true, that "genius will not follow rules laid down by

desultory critics," yet when it is averred that "this piece of work

fulfils Aristotle's definition of true tragedy, in accomplishing upon the

reader a certain purification of the emotions by means of terror and

pity," expectations will be raised in many of the new generation, doomed

in the cases of the more sensitive and discerning, at all events, not to

be gratified. There is a distinction, very bold and very essential,

between melodrama, however carefully worked and staged, and that tragedy

to which Aristotle was there referring. Stevenson's "horrifying," to my

mind, too often touches the trying borders of melodrama, and nowhere more

so than in the very forced and unequal \_Ebb-Tide\_, which, with its rather

doubtful moral and forced incident when it is good, seems merely to

borrow from what had gone before, if not a very little even from some of

what came after. No service is done to an author like Stevenson by

fatefully praising him for precisely the wrong thing.

"Romance attracted Stevenson, at least during the earlier part of his

life, as a lodestone attracts the magnet. To romance he brought the

highest gifts, and he has left us not only essays of delicate humour"

(should this not be "essays \_full of\_" \_or\_ "characterised by"?) "and

sensitive imagination, but stories also which thrill with the

realities of life, which are faithful pictures of the times and

tempers he dealt with, and which, I firmly believe, will live so"

(should it not be "as"?) "long as our noble English language."

Mr Marriott Watson sees very clearly in some things; but occasionally he

misses the point. The problem is here raised how two honest, far-seeing

critics could see so very differently on so simple a subject.

Mr Baildon says about the \_Ebb-Tide\_:

"I can compare his next book, the \_Ebb-Tide\_ (in collaboration with

Osbourne) to little better than a mud-bath, for we find ourselves, as

it were, unrelieved by dredging among the scum and dregs of humanity,

the 'white trash' of the Pacific. Here we have Stevenson's masterly

but utterly revolting incarnation of the lowest, vilest, vulgarest

villainy in the cockney, Huish. Stevenson's other villains shock us

by their cruel and wicked conduct; but there is a kind of fallen

satanic glory about them, some shining threads of possible virtue.

They might have been good, even great in goodness, but for the malady

of not wanting. But Huish is a creature hatched in slime, his soul

has no true humanity: it is squat and toad-like, and can only spit

venom. . . . He himself felt a sort of revulsive after-sickness for

the story, and calls it in one passage of his \_Vailima Letters\_ 'the

ever-to-be-execrated \_Ebb-Tide\_' (pp. 178 and 184). . . . He repented

of it like a debauch, and, as with some men after a debauch, felt

cleared and strengthened instead of wrecked. So, after what in one

sense was his lowest plunge, Stevenson rose to the greatest height.

That is the tribute to his virtue and strength indeed, but it does not

change the character of the \_Ebb-Tide\_ as 'the ever-to-be-execrated.'"

Mr Baildon truly says (p. 49):

"The curious point is that Stevenson's own great fault, that tendency

to what has been called the 'Twopence-coloured' style, is always at

its worst in books over which he collaborated."

"Verax," in one of his "Occasional Papers" in the \_Daily News\_ on "The

Average Reader" has this passage:

"We should not object to a writer who could repeat Barrie in \_A Window

in Thrums\_, nor to one who would paint a scene as Louis Stevenson

paints Attwater alone on his South Sea island, the approach of the

pirates to the harbour, and their subsequent reception and fate. All

these are surely specimens of brilliant writing, and they are

brilliant because, in the first place, they give truth. The events

described must, in the supposed circumstances, and with the given

characters, have happened in the way stated. Only in none of the

specimens have we a mere photograph of the outside of what took place.

We have great pictures by genius of the--to the prosaic eye--invisible

realities, as well as of the outward form of the actions. We behold

and are made to feel the solemnity, the wildness, the pathos, the

earnestness, the agony, the pity, the moral squalor, the grotesque

fun, the delicate and minute beauty, the natural loveliness and

loneliness, the quiet desperate bravery, or whatever else any of these

wonderful pictures disclose to our view. Had we been lookers-on, we,

the average readers, could not have seen these qualities for

ourselves. But they are there, and genius enables us to see them.

Genius makes truth shine.

"Is it not, therefore, probable that the brilliancy which we average

readers do not want, and only laugh at when we get it, is something

altogether different? I think I know what it is. It is an attempt to

describe with words without thoughts, an effort to make readers see

something the writer has never seen himself in his mind's eye. He has

no revelation, no vision, nothing to disclose, and to produce an

impression uses words, words, words, makes daub, daub, daub, without

any definite purpose, and certainly without any real, or artistic, or

definite effect. To describe, one must first of all see, and if we

see anything the description of it will, as far as it is in us, come

as effortless and natural as the leaves on trees, or as 'the tender

greening of April meadows.' I, therefore, more than suspect that the

brilliancy which the average reader laughs at is not brilliancy. A

pot of flaming red paint thrown at a canvas does not make a picture."

Now there is vision for outward picture or separate incident, which may

exist quite apart from what may be called moral, spiritual, or even

loftily imaginative conception, at once commanding unity and commanding

it. There can be no doubt of Stevenson's power in the former line--the

earliest as the latest of his works are witnesses to it. \_The Master of

Ballantrae\_ abounds in picture and incident and dramatic situations and

touches; but it lacks true unity, and the reason simply is given by

Stevenson himself--that the "ending shames, perhaps degrades, the

beginning," as it is in the \_Ebb-Tide\_, with the cockney Huish,

"execrable." "We have great pictures by genius of the--to the prosaic

eye--invisible realities, as well as the outward form of the action."

True, but the "invisible realities" form that from which true unity is

derived, else their partial presence but makes the whole the more

incomplete and lop-sided, if not indeed, top-heavy, from light weight

beneath; and it is in the unity derived from this higher pervading, yet

not too assertive "invisible reality," that Stevenson most often fails,

and is, in his own words, "execrable"; the ending shaming, if not

degrading, the beginning--"and without the true sense of pleasurableness;

and therefore really imperfect \_in essence\_." Ah, it is to be feared

that Stevenson, viewing it in retrospect, was a far truer critic of his

own work, than many or most of his all too effusive and admiring

critics--from Lord Rosebery to Mr Marriott Watson.

Amid the too extreme deliverances of detractors and especially of

erewhile friends, become detractors or panegyrists, who disturb judgment

by overzeal, which is often but half-blindness, it is pleasant to come on

one who bears the balances in his hand, and will report faithfully as he

has seen and felt, neither more nor less than what he holds is true. Mr

Andrew Lang wrote an article in the \_Morning Post\_ of 16th December 1901,

under the title "Literary Quarrels," in which, as I think, he fulfilled

his part in midst of the talk about Mr Henley's regrettable attack on

Stevenson.

"Without defending the character of a friend whom even now I almost

daily miss, as that character was displayed in circumstances unknown

to me, I think that I ought to speak of him as I found him. Perhaps

our sympathy was mainly intellectual. Constantly do those who knew

him desire to turn to him, to communicate with him, to share with him

the pleasure of some idea, some little discovery about men or things

in which he would have taken pleasure, increasing our own by the

gaiety of his enjoyment, the brilliance of his appreciation. We may

say, as Scott said at the grave of John Ballantyne, that he has taken

with him half the sunlight out of our lives. That he was sympathetic

and interested in the work of others (which I understand has been

denied) I have reason to know. His work and mine lay far apart: mine,

I think, we never discussed, I did not expect it to interest him. But

in a fragmentary manuscript of his after his death I found the

unlooked for and touching evidence of his kindness. Again, he once

wrote to me from Samoa about the work of a friend of mine whom he had

never met. His remarks were ideally judicious, a model of serviceable

criticism. I found him chivalrous as an honest boy; brave, with an

indomitable gaiety of courage; on the point of honour, a Sydney or a

Bayard (so he seemed to me); that he was open-handed I have reason to

believe; he took life 'with a frolic welcome.' That he was

self-conscious, and saw himself as it were, from without; that he was

fond of attitude (like his own brave admirals) he himself knew well,

and I doubt not that he would laugh at himself and his habit of

'playing at' things after the fashion of childhood. Genius is the

survival into maturity of the inspiration of childhood, and Stevenson

is not the only genius who has retained from childhood something more

than its inspiration. Other examples readily occur to the memory--in

one way Byron, in another Tennyson. None of us is perfect: I do not

want to erect an immaculate clay-cold image of a man, in marble or in

sugar-candy. But I will say that I do not remember ever to have heard

Mr Stevenson utter a word against any mortal, friend or foe. Even in

a case where he had, or believed himself to have, received some wrong,

his comment was merely humorous. Especially when very young, his

dislike of respectability and of the \_bourgeois\_ (a literary

tradition) led him to show a kind of contempt for virtues which,

though certainly respectable, are no less certainly virtuous. He was

then more or less seduced by the Bohemian legend, but he was

intolerant of the fudge about the rights and privileges of genius. A

man's first business, he thought, was 'keep his end up' by his work.

If, what he reckoned his inspired work would not serve, then by

something else. Of many virtues he was an ensample and an inspiring

force. One foible I admit: the tendency to inopportune benevolence.

Mr Graham Balfour says that if he fell into ill terms with a man he

would try to do him good by stealth. Though he had seen much of the

world and of men, this practice showed an invincible ignorance of

mankind. It is improbable, on the doctrine of chances, that he was

always in the wrong; and it is probable, as he was human, that he

always thought himself in the right. But as the other party to the

misunderstanding, being also human, would necessarily think himself in

the right, such secret benefits would be, as Sophocles says, 'the

gifts of foeman and unprofitable.' The secret would leak out, the

benefits would be rejected, the misunderstanding would be embittered.

This reminds me of an anecdote which is not given in Mr Graham

Balfour's biography. As a little delicate, lonely boy in Edinburgh,

Mr Stevenson read a book called \_Ministering Children\_. I have a

faint recollection of this work concerning a small Lord and Lady

Bountiful. Children, we know, like to 'play at' the events and

characters they have read about, and the boy wanted to play at being a

ministering child. He 'scanned his whole horizon' for somebody to

play with, and thought he had found his playmate. From the window he

observed street boys (in Scots 'keelies') enjoying themselves. But

one child was out of the sports, a little lame fellow, the son of a

baker. Here was a chance! After some misgivings Louis hardened his

heart, put on his cap, walked out--a refined little figure--approached

the object of his sympathy, and said, 'Will you let me play with you?'

'Go to hell!' said the democratic offspring of the baker. This lesson

against doing good by stealth to persons of unknown or hostile

disposition was, it seems, thrown away. Such endeavours are apt to be

misconstrued."

CHAPTER XXVIII--UNEXPECTED COMBINATIONS

The complete artist should not be mystical-moralist any more than the man

who "perceives only the visible world"--he should not engage himself with

problems in the direct sense any more than he should blind himself to

their effect upon others, whom he should study, and under certain

conditions represent, though he should not commit himself to any form of

zealot faith, yet should he not be, as Lord Tennyson puts it in the

Palace of Art:

"As God holding no form of creed,

But contemplating all,"

because his power lies in the broadness of his humanity touched to fine

issues whenever there is the seal at once of truth, reality, and passion,

and the tragedy bred of their contact and conflict.

All these things are to him real and clamant in the measure that they aid

appeal to heart and emotion--in the measure that they may, in his hands,

be made to tell for sympathy and general effect. He creates an

atmosphere in which each and all may be seen the more effectively, but

never seen alone or separate, but only in strict relation to each other

that they may heighten the sense of some supreme controlling power in the

destinies of men, which with the ancients was figured as Fate, and for

which the moderns have hardly yet found an enduring and exhaustive name.

Character revealed in reference to that, is the ideal and the aim of all

high creative art. Stevenson's narrowness, allied to a quaint and

occasionally just a wee pedantic finickiness, as we may call it--an over-

elaborate, almost tricky play with mere words and phrases, was in so far

alien to the very highest--he was too often like a man magnetised and

moving at the dictates of some outside influence rather than according to

his own freewill and as he would.

Action in creative literary art is a \_sine qua non\_; keeping all the

characters and parts in unison, that a true \_denouement\_, determined by

their own tendencies and temperaments, may appear; dialogue and all

asides, if we may call them so, being supererogatory and weak really

unless they aid this and are constantly contributory to it. Egotistical

predeterminations, however artfully intruded, are, alien to the full

result, the unity which is finally craved: Stevenson fails, when he does

fail, distinctly from excess of egotistic regards; he is, as Henley has

said, in the French sense, too \_personnel\_, and cannot escape from it.

And though these personal regards are exceedingly interesting and indeed

fascinating from the point of view of autobiographical study, they are,

and cannot but be, a drawback on fiction or the disinterested revelation

of life and reality. Instead, therefore, of "the visible world," as the

only thing seen, Stevenson's defect is, that between it and him lies a

cloud strictly self-projected, like breath on a mirror, which dims the

lines of reality and confuses the character marks, in fact melting them

into each other; and in his sympathetic regards, causing them all to

become too much alike. Scott had more of the power of healthy

self-withdrawal, creating more of a free atmosphere, in which his

characters could freely move--though in this, it must be confessed, he

failed far more with women than with men. The very defects poor Carlyle

found in Scott, and for which he dealt so severely with him, as sounding

no depth, are really the basis of his strength, precisely as the absence

of them were the defects of Goethe, who invariably ran his characters

finally into the mere moods of his own mind and the mould of his errant

philosophy, so that they became merely erratic symbols without hold in

the common sympathy. Whether \_Walverwandschaften\_, \_Wilhelm Meister\_, or

\_Faust\_, it is still the same--the company before all is done are

translated into misty shapes that he actually needs to label for our

identification and for his own. Even Mr G. H. Lewes saw this and could

not help declaring his own lack of interest in the latter parts of

Goethe's greatest efforts. Stevenson, too, tends to run his characters

into symbols--his moralist-fabulist determinations are too much for

him--he would translate them into a kind of chessmen, moved or moving on

a board. The essence of romance strictly is, that as the characters will

not submit themselves to the check of reality, the romancer may

consciously, if it suits him, touch them at any point with the magic wand

of symbol, and if he finds a consistency in mere fanciful invention it is

enough. Tieck's \_Phantasus\_ and George MacDonald's \_Phantastes\_ are

ready instances illustrative of this. But it is very different with the

story of real life, where there is a definite check in the common-sense

and knowledge of the reader, and where the highest victory always lies in

drawing from the reader the admission--"that is life--life exactly as I

have seen and known it. Though I could never have put it so, still it

only realises my own conception and observation. That is something

lovingly remembered and re-presented, and this master makes me lovingly

remember too, though 'twas his to represent and reproduce with such

vigor, vividness and truth that he carried me with him, exactly as though

I had been looking on real men and women playing their part or their game

in the great world."

Mr Zangwill, in his own style, wrote:

"He seeks to combine the novel of character with the novel of

adventure; to develop character through romantic action, and to bring

out your hero at the end of the episode, not the fixed character he

was at the beginning, as is the way of adventure books, but a modified

creature. . . . It is his essays and his personality, rather than his

novels, that will count with posterity. On the whole, a great

provincial writer. Whether he has that inherent grip which makes a

man's provinciality the very source of his strength . . . only the

centuries can show.

The romanticist to the end pursued Stevenson--he could not, wholly or at

once, shake off the bonds in which he had bound himself to his first

love, and it was the romanticist crossed by the casuist, and the

mystic--Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, Markheim and Will of the Mill, insisted on

his acknowledging them in his work up to the end. \_The modified

creature\_ at the end of Mr Zangwill was modified too directly by the

egotistic element as well as through the romantic action, and this point

missed the great defect was missed, and Mr Zangwill spoke only in

generals.

M. Schwob, after having related how unreal a real sheep's heart looked

when introduced on the end of Giovanni's dagger in a French performance

of John Ford's \_Annabella and Giovanni\_, and how at the next performance

the audience was duly thrilled when Annabella's bleeding heart, made of a

bit of red flannel, was borne upon the stage, goes on to say

significantly:

"Il me semble que les personnages de Stevenson ont justement cette

espece de realisme irreal. La large figure luisante de Long John, la

couleur bleme du crane de Thevenin Pensete s'attachent a la memoire de

nos yeux en vertue de leur irrealite meme. Ce sont des fantomes de la

verite, hallucinants comme de vrais fantomes. Notez en passant que

les traits de John Silver hallucinent Jim Hawkins, et que Francois

Villon est hante par l'aspect de Thevenin Pensete."

Perhaps the most notable fact arising here, and one that well deserves

celebration, is this, that Stevenson's development towards a broader and

more natural creation was coincident with a definite return on the

religious views which had so powerfully prevailed with his father--a

circumstance which it is to be feared did not, any more than some other

changes in him, at all commend itself to Mr Henley, though he had

deliberately dubbed him even in the times of nursing nigh to the Old

Bristo Port in Edinburgh--something of "Shorter Catechist." Anyway Miss

Simpson deliberately wrote:

"Mr Henley takes exception to Stevenson's later phase in life--what he

calls his 'Shorter Catechism phase.' It should be remembered that Mr

Henley is not a Scotsman, and in some things has little sympathy with

Scotch characteristics. Stevenson, in his Samoan days, harked back to

the teaching of his youth; the tenets of the Shorter Catechism, which

his mother and nurse had dinned into his head, were not forgotten. Mr

Henley knew him best, as Stevenson says in the preface to \_Virginibus

Puerisque\_ dedicated to Henley, 'when he lived his life at

twenty-five.' In these days he had [in some degree] forgotten about

the Shorter Catechism, but the 'solemn pause' between Saturday and

Monday came back in full force to R. L. Stevenson in Samoa."

Now to me that is a most suggestive and significant fact. It will be the

business of future critics to show in how far such falling back would of

necessity modify what Mr Baildon has set down as his corner-stone of

morality, and how far it was bound to modify the atmosphere--the purely

egotistic, hedonistic, and artistic atmosphere, in which, in his earlier

life as a novelist, at all events, he had been, on the whole, for long

whiles content to work.

CHAPTER XXIX--LOVE OF VAGABONDS

What is very remarkable in Stevenson is that a man who was so much the

dreamer of dreams--the mystic moralist, the constant questioner and

speculator on human destiny and human perversity, and the riddles that

arise on the search for the threads of motive and incentives to human

action--moreover, a man, who constantly suffered from one of the most

trying and weakening forms of ill-health--should have been so

full-blooded, as it were, so keen for contact with all forms of human

life and character, what is called the rougher and coarser being by no

means excluded. Not only this: he was himself a rover--seeking daily

adventure and contact with men and women of alien habit and taste and

liking. His patience is supported by his humour. He was a bit of a

vagabond in the good sense of the word, and always going round in search

of "honest men," like Diogenes, and with no tub to retire into or the

desire for it. He thus on this side touches the Chaucers and their

kindred, as well as the Spensers and Dantes and their often illusive

\_confreres\_. His voyage as a steerage passenger across the Atlantic is

only one out of a whole chapter of such episodes, and is more significant

and characteristic even than the \_Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes\_

or the \_Inland Voyage\_. These might be ranked with the "Sentimental

Journeys" that have sometimes been the fashion--that was truly of a

prosaic and risky order. The appeal thus made to an element deep in the

English nature will do much to keep his memory green in the hearts that

could not rise to appreciation of his style and literary gifts at all. He

loves the roadways and the by-ways, and those to be met with there--like

him in this, though unlike him in most else. The love of the roadsides

and the greenwood--and the queer miscellany of life there unfolded and

ever changing--a kind of gipsy-like longing for the tent and familiar

contact with nature and rude human-nature in the open dates from beyond

Chaucer, and remains and will have gratification--the longing for novelty

and all the accidents, as it were, of pilgrimage and rude social travel.

You see it bubble up, like a true and new nature-spring, through all the

surface coatings of culture and artificiality, in Stevenson. He anew,

without pretence, enlivens it--makes it first a part of himself, and then

a part of literature once more. Listen to him, as he sincerely sings

this passion for the pilgrimage--or the modern phase of it--innocent

vagabond roving:

"Give to me the life I love,

Let the lave go by me;

Give the jolly heaven above,

And the by-way nigh me:

Bed in the bush, with stars to see;

Bread I dip in the river--

Here's the life for a man like me,

Here's the life for ever. . . .

"Let the blow fall soon or late;

Let what will be o'er me;

Give the face of earth around

And the road before me.

Health I ask not, hope nor love,

Nor a friend to know me:

All I ask the heaven above,

And the road below me."

True; this is put in the mouth of another, but Stevenson could not have

so voiced it, had he not been the born rover that he was, with longing

for the roadside, the high hills, and forests and newcomers and varied

miscellaneous company. Here he does more directly speak in his own

person and quite to the same effect:

"I will make you brooches and toys for your delight

Of bird song at morning, and star shine at night,

I will make a palace fit for you and me,

Of green days in forests and blue days at sea.

"I will make my kitchen, and you shall keep your room,

Where white flows the river, and bright blows the broom,

And you shall wash your linen and keep your body white,

In rainfall at morning and dew-fall at night.

"And this shall be for music when no one else is near,

The fine song for singing, the rare song to hear!

That only I remember, that only you admire,

Of the broad road that stretches, and the roadside fire."

Here Stevenson, though original in his vein and way, but follows a great

and gracious company in which Fielding and Sterne and so many others

stand as pleasant proctors. Scott and Dickens have each in their way

essayed it, and made much of it beyond what mere sentiment would have

reached. \_Pickwick\_ itself--and we must always regard Dickens as having

himself gone already over every bit of road, described every nook and

corner, and tried every resource--is a vagrant fellow, in a group of

erratic and most quaint wanderers or pilgrims. This is but a return

phase of it; Vincent Crummles and Mrs Crummles and the "Infant

Phenomenon," yet another. The whole interest lies in the roadways, and

the little inns, and the odd and unexpected \_rencontres\_ with

oddly-assorted fellows there experienced: glimpses of grim or grimy, or

forbidding, or happy, smiling smirking vagrants, and out-at-elbows fellow-

passengers and guests, with jests and quips and cranks, and hanky-panky

even. On high roads and in inns, and alehouses, with travelling players,

rogues and tramps, Dickens was quite at home; and what is yet more, he

made us all quite at home with them: and he did it as Chaucer did it by

thorough good spirits and "hail-fellow-well-met." And, with all his

faults, he has this merit as well as some others, that he went willingly

on pilgrimage always, and took others, promoting always love of comrades,

fun, and humorous by-play. The latest great romancer, too, took his

side: like Dickens, he was here full brother of Dan Chaucer, and followed

him. How characteristic it is when he tells Mr Trigg that he preferred

Samoa to Honolulu because it was more savage, and therefore yielded more

\_fun\_.

CHAPTER XXX--LORD ROSEBERY'S CASE

Immediately on reading Lord Rosebery's address as Chairman of the meeting

in Edinburgh to promote the erection of a monument to R. L. Stevenson, I

wrote to him politely asking him whether, since he quoted a passage from

a somewhat early essay by Stevenson naming the authors who had chiefly

influenced him in point of style, his Lordship should not, merely in

justice and for the sake of balance, have referred to Thoreau. I also

remarked that Stevenson's later style sometimes showed too much

self-conscious conflict of his various models in his mind while he was in

the act of writing, and that this now and then imparted too much an air

of artifice to his later compositions, and that those who knew most would

be most troubled by it. Of that letter, I much regret now that I did not

keep any copy; but I think I did incidentally refer to the friendship

with which Stevenson had for so many years honoured me. This is a copy

of the letter received in reply:

"38 BERKELEY SQUARE, W.,

17\_th\_ \_December\_ 1896.

"DEAR SIR,--I am much obliged for your letter, and can only state that

the name of Thoreau was not mentioned by Stevenson himself, and

therefore I could not cite it in my quotation.

"With regard to the style of Stevenson's later works, I am inclined to

agree with you.-Believe me, yours very faithfully,

ROSEBERY.

"Dr ALEXANDER H. JAPP."

This I at once replied to as follows:

"NATIONAL LIBERAL CLUB,

WHITEHALL PLACE, S.W.,

19\_th\_ \_December\_ 1896.

"MY LORD,--It is true R. L. Stevenson did not refer to Thoreau in the

passage to which you allude, for the good reason that he could not,

since he did not know Thoreau till after it was written; but if you

will oblige me and be so good as to turn to p. xix. of Preface, \_By

Way of Criticism\_, to \_Familiar Studies of Men and Books\_ you will

read:

"'Upon me this pure, narrow, sunnily-ascetic Thoreau had exercised a

wondrous charm. \_I have scarce written ten sentences since I was

introduced to him\_, \_but his influence might be somewhere detected by

a close observer\_.'

"It is very detectable in many passages of nature-description and of

reflection. I write, my Lord, merely that, in case opportunity should

arise, you might notice this fact. I am sure R. L. Stevenson would

have liked it recognised.--I remain, my Lord, always yours faithfully,

etc.,

ALEXANDER H. JAPP."

{Manuscript letter by R.L.S.: p262.jpg}

In reply to this Lord Rosebery sent me only the most formal

acknowledgment, not in the least encouraging me in any way to further aid

him in the matter with regard to suggestions of any kind; so that I was

helpless to press on his lordship the need for some corrections on other

points which I would most willingly have tendered to him had he shown

himself inclined or ready to receive them.

I might also have referred Lord Rosebery to the article in \_The British

Weekly\_ (\_1887\_), "Books that have Influenced Me," where, after having

spoken of Shakespeare, the \_Vicomte de Bragelonne\_, Bunyan, Montaigne,

Goethe, Martial, Marcus Aurelius's \_Meditations\_, and Wordsworth, he

proceeds:

"I suppose, when I am done, I shall find that I have forgotten much

that is influential, as I see already I have forgotten Thoreau."

I need but to add to what has been said already that, had Lord Rosebery

written and told me the result of his references and encouraged me to

such an exercise, I should by-and-by have been very pleased to point out

to him that he blundered, proving himself no master in Burns' literature,

precisely as Mr Henley blundered about Burns' ancestry, when he gives

confirmation to the idea that Burns came of a race of peasants on both

sides, and was himself nothing but a peasant.

When the opportunity came to correct such blunders, corrections which I

had even implored him to make, Lord Rosebery (who by several London

papers had been spoken of as "knowing more than all the experts about all

his themes"), that is, when his volume was being prepared for press, did

not act on my good advice given him "\_free\_, \_gratis\_, \_for nothing\_";

no; he contented himself with simply slicing out columns from the

\_Times\_, or allowing another man to do so for him, and reprinting them

\_literatim et verbatim\_, all imperfect and misleading, as they stood.

\_Scripta manet\_ alas! only too truly exemplified to his disadvantage. But

with that note of mine in his hand, protesting against an ominous and

fatal omission as regards the confessed influences that had operated on

Stevenson, he goes on, or allows Mr Geake to go on, quite as though he

had verified matters and found that I was wrong as regards the facts on

which I based my appeal to him for recognition of Thoreau as having

influenced Stevenson in style. Had he attended to correcting his serious

errors about Stevenson, and some at least of those about Burns, thus

adding, say, a dozen or twenty pages to his book wholly fresh and new and

accurate, then the \_Times\_ could not have got, even if it had sought, an

injunction against his publishers and him; and there would have been no

necessity that he should pad out other and later speeches by just a

little whining over what was entirely due to his own disregard of good

advice, his own neglect--his own fault--a neglect and a fault showing

determination not to revise where revision in justice to his subject's

own free and frank acknowledgments made it most essential and necessary.

Mr Justice North gave his decision against Lord Rosebery and his

publishers, while the Lords of Appeal went in his favour; but the House

of Lords reaffirmed the decision of Mr Justice North and granted a

perpetual injunction against this book. The copyright in his speech is

Lord Rosebery's, but the copyright in the \_Times\_' report is the

\_Times\_'. You see one of the ideas underlying the law is that no manner

of speech is quite perfect as the man speaks it, or is beyond revision,

improvement, or extension, and, if there is but one \_verbatim\_ report, as

was the case of some of these speeches and addresses, then it is

incumbent on the author, if he wishes to preserve his copyright, to

revise and correct his speeches and addresses, so as to make them at

least in details so far differ from the reported form. This thing ought

Lord Rosebery to have done, on ethical and literary \_grounds\_, not to

speak of legal and self-interested grounds; and I, for one, who from the

first held exactly the view the House of Lords has affirmed, do confess

that I have no sympathy for Lord Rosebery, since he had before him the

suggestion and the materials for as substantial alterations and additions

from my own hands, with as much more for other portions of his book, had

he informed me of his appreciation, as would have saved him and his book

from such a sadly ironical fate as has overtaken him and it.

From the whole business--since "free, gratis, for nothing," I offered him

as good advice as any lawyer in the three kingdoms could have done for

large payment, and since he never deemed it worth while, even to tell me

the results of his reference to \_Familiar Studies\_, I here and now say

deliberately that his conduct to me was scarcely so courteous and

grateful and graceful as it might have been. How different--very

different--the way in which the late R. L. Stevenson rewarded me for a

literary service no whit greater or more essentially valuable to him than

this service rendered to Lord Rosebery might have been to him.

This chapter would most probably not have been printed, had not Mr Coates

re-issued the inadequate and most misleading paragraph about Mr Stevenson

and style in his Lord Rosebery's \_Life and Speeches\_ exactly as it was

before, thus perpetuating at once the error and the wrong, in spite of

all my trouble, warnings, and protests. It is a tragicomedy, if not a

farce altogether, considering who are the principal actors in it. And

let those who have copies of the queer prohibited book cherish them and

thank me; for that I do by this give a new interest and value to it as a

curiosity, law-inhibited, if not as high and conscientious

literature--which it is not.

I remember very well about the time Lord Rosebery spoke on Burns, and

Stevenson, and London, that certain London papers spoke of his

deliverances as indicating more knowledge--fuller and exacter

knowledge--of all these subjects than the greatest professed experts

possessed. That is their extravagant and most reckless way, especially

if the person spoken about is a "great politician" or a man of rank. They

think they are safe with such superlatives applied to a brilliant and

clever peer (with large estates and many interests), and an ex-Prime

Minister! But literature is a republic, and it must here be said, though

all unwillingly, that Lord Rosebery is but an amateur--a superficial

though a clever amateur after all, and their extravagances do not change

the fact. I declare him an amateur in Burns' literature and study

because of what I have said elsewhere, and there are many points to add

to that if need were. I have proved above from his own words that he was

crassly and unpardonably ignorant of some of the most important points in

R. L. Stevenson's development when he delivered that address in Edinburgh

on Stevenson--a thing very, very pardonable--seeing that he is run after

to do "speakings" of this sort; but to go on, in face of such warning and

protest, printing his most misleading errors is not pardonable, and the

legal recorded result is my justification and his condemnation, the more

surely that even that would not awaken him so far as to cause him to

restrain Mr Coates from reproducing in his \_Life and Speeches\_, just as

it was originally, that peccant passage. I am fully ready to prove also

that, though Chairman of the London County Council for a period, and

though he made a very clever address at one of Sir W. Besant's lectures,

there is much yet--very much--he might learn from Sir W. Besant's

writings on London. It isn't so easy to outshine all the experts--even

for a clever peer who has been Prime Minister, though it is very, very

easy to flatter Lord Rosebery, with a purpose or purposes, as did at

least once also with rarest tact, at Glasgow, indicating so many other

things and possibilities, a certain very courtly ex-Moderator of the

Church of Scotland.

CHAPTER XXXI--MR GOSSE AND MS. OF \_TREASURE ISLAND\_

Mr Edmund Gosse has been so good as to set down, with rather an air of

too much authority, that both R. L. Stevenson and I deceived ourselves

completely in the matter of my little share in the \_Treasure Island\_

business, and that too much credit was sought by me or given to me, for

the little service I rendered to R. L. Stevenson, and to the world, say,

in helping to secure for it an element of pleasure through many

generations. I have not \_sought\_ any recognition from the world in this

matter, and even the mention of it became so intolerable to me that I

eschewed all writing about it, in the face of the most stupid and

misleading statements, till Mr Sidney Colvin wrote and asked me to set

down my account of the matter in my own words. This I did, as it would

have been really rude to refuse a request so graciously made, and the

reader has it in the \_Academy\_ of 10th March 1900. Nevertheless, Mr

Gosse's statements were revived and quoted, and the thing seemed ever to

revolve again in a round of controversy.

Now, with regard to the reliability in this matter of Mr Edmund Gosse,

let me copy here a little note made at request some time ago, dealing

with two points. The first is this:

1. \_Most assuredly\_ I carried away from Braemar in my portmanteau, as R.

L. Stevenson says in \_Idler's\_ article and in chapter of \_My First Book\_

reprinted in \_Edinburgh Edition\_, several chapters of \_Treasure Island\_.

On that point R. L. Stevenson, myself, and Mr James Henderson, to whom I

took these, could not all be wrong and co-operating to mislead the

public. These chapters, at least vii. or viii., as Mr Henderson

remembers, would include the \_first three\_, that is, \_finally revised

versions for press\_. Mr Gosse could not then \_have heard R. L. Stevenson

read from these final versions but from first draughts\_ ONLY, and I am

positively certain that with some of the later chapters R. L. Stevenson

wrote them off-hand, and with great ease, and did not revise them to the

extent of at all needing to re-write them, as I remember he was proud to

tell me, being then fully in the vein, as he put it, and pleased to

credit me with a share in this good result, and saying "my enthusiasm

over it had set him up steep." There was then, in my idea, a necessity

that Stevenson should fill up a gap by verbal summary to Mr Gosse (which

Mr Gosse has forgotten), bringing the incident up to a further point than

Mr Gosse now thinks. I am certain of my facts under this head; and as Mr

Gosse clearly fancies he heard R. L. Stevenson read all from final

versions and is mistaken--\_completely\_ mistaken there--he may be just as

wrong and the victim of error or bad memory elsewhere after the lapse of

more than twenty years.

2. I gave the pencilled outline of incident and plot to Mr Henderson--a

fact he distinctly remembers. This fact completely meets and disposes of

Mr Robert Leighton's quite imaginative \_Billy Bo'sun\_ notion, and is

absolute as to R. L. Stevenson before he left Braemar on the 21st

September 1881, or even before I left it on 26th August 1881, having

clear in his mind the whole scheme of the work, though we know very well

that the absolute re-writing out finally for press of the concluding part

of the book was done at Davos. Mr Henderson has always made it the

strictest rule in his editorship that the complete outline of the plot

and incident of the latter part of a story must be supplied to him, if

the whole story is not submitted to him in MS.; and the agreement, if I

am not much mistaken, was entered into days before R. L. Stevenson left

Braemar, and when he came up to London some short time after to go to

Weybridge, the only arrangement then needed to be made was about the

forwarding of proofs to him.

The publication of \_Treasure Island\_ in \_Young Folks\_ began on the 1st

October 1881, No. 565 and ran on in the following order:

\_October\_ 1, 1881.

THE PROLOGUE

No. 565.

I. The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow.

II. Black Dog Appears and Disappears.

No. 566.

Dated \_October\_ 8, 1881.

III. The Black Spot.

No. 567.

Dated \_October\_ 15, 1881.

IV. The Sea Chart.

V. The Last of the Blind Man.

VI. The Captain's Papers.

No. 568.

Dated \_October\_ 22, 1881.

THE STORY

I. I go to Bristol.

II. The Sea-Cook.

Ill. Powder and Arms.

Now, as the numbers of \_Young Folks\_ were printed about a fortnight in

advance of the date they bear under the title, it is clear that not only

must the contract have been executed days before the middle of September,

but that a large proportion of the \_copy\_ must have been in Mr

Henderson's hands at that date too, as he must have been entirely

satisfied that the story would go on and be finished in a definite time.

On no other terms would he have begun the publication of it. He was not

in the least likely to have accepted a story from a man who, though known

as an essayist, had not yet published anything in the way of a long

story, on the ground merely of three chapters of prologue. Mr Gosse left

Braemar on 5th September, when he says nine chapters were written, and Mr

Henderson had offered terms for the story before the last of these could

have reached him. That is on seeing, say six chapters of prologue. But

when Mr Gosse speaks about three chapters only written, does he mean

three of the prologue or three of the story, in addition to prologue, or

what does he mean? The facts are clear. I took away in my portmanteau a

large portion of the MS., together with a very full outline of the rest

of the story, so that Mr Stevenson was, despite Mr Gosse's cavillings,

\_substantially\_ right when he wrote in \_My First Book\_ in the \_Idler\_,

etc., that "when he (Dr Japp) left us he carried away the manuscript in

his portmanteau." There was nothing of the nature of an abandonment of

the story at any point, nor any difficulty whatever arose in this respect

in regard to it.

CHAPTER XXXII--STEVENSON PORTRAITS

Of the portraits of Stevenson a word or two may be said. There is a very

good early photograph of him, taken not very long before the date of my

visit to him at Braemar in 1881, and is an admirable

likeness--characteristic not only in expression, but in pose and

attitude, for it fixes him in a favourite position of his; and is, at the

same time, very easy and natural. The velvet jacket, as I have remarked,

was then his habitual wear, and the thin fingers holding the constant

cigarette an inseparable associate and accompaniment.

He acknowledged himself that he was a difficult subject to paint--not at

all a good sitter--impatient and apt to rebel at posing and time spent in

arrangement of details--a fact he has himself, as we shall see, set on

record in his funny verses to Count Nerli, who painted as successful a

portrait as any. The little miniature, full-length, by Mr J. S. Sarjent,

A.R.A., which was painted at Bournemouth in 1885, is confessedly a mere

sketch and much of a caricature: it is in America. Sir W. B. Richmond

has an unfinished portrait, painted in 1885 or 1886--it has never passed

out of the hands of the artist,--a photogravure from it is our

frontispiece.

There is a medallion done by St Gauden's, representing Stevenson in bed

propped up by pillows. It is thought to be a pretty good likeness, and

it is now in Mr Sidney Colvin's possession. Others, drawings, etc., are

not of much account.

And now we come to the Nerli portrait, of which so much has been written.

Stevenson himself regarded it as the best portrait of him ever painted,

and certainly it also is characteristic and effective, and though not

what may be called a pleasant likeness, is probably a good representation

of him in the later years of his life. Count Nerli actually undertook a

voyage to Samoa in 1892, mainly with the idea of painting this portrait.

He and Stevenson became great friends, as Stevenson naively tells in the

verses we have already referred to, but even this did not quite overcome

Stevenson's restlessness. He avenged himself by composing these verses

as he sat:

Did ever mortal man hear tell o' sic a ticklin' ferlie

As the comin' on to Apia here o' the painter Mr Nerli?

He cam'; and, O, for o' human freen's o' a' he was the pearlie--

The pearl o' a' the painter folk was surely Mr Nerli.

He took a thraw to paint mysel'; he painted late and early;

O wow! the many a yawn I've yawned i' the beard o' Mr Nerli.

Whiles I wad sleep and whiles wad wake, an' whiles was mair than

surly;

I wondered sair as I sat there fornent the eyes o' Nerli.

O will he paint me the way I want, as bonnie as a girlie?

O will he paint me an ugly tyke?--and be d-d to Mr Nerli.

But still an' on whichever it be, he is a canty kerlie,

The Lord protect the back an' neck o' honest Mr Nerli.

Mr Hammerton gives this account of the Nerli portrait:

"The history of the Nerli portrait is peculiar. After being exhibited

for some time in New Zealand it was bought, in the course of this

year, by a lady who was travelling there, for a hundred guineas. She

then offered it for that sum to the Scottish National Portrait

Gallery; but the Trustees of the Board of Manufactures--that oddly

named body to which is entrusted the fostering care of Art in

Scotland, and, in consequence, the superintendence of the National

Portrait Gallery--did not see their way to accept the offer. Some

surprise has been expressed at the action of the Trustees in thus

declining to avail themselves of the opportunity of obtaining the

portrait of one of the most distinguished Scotsmen of recent times. It

can hardly have been for want of money, for though the funds at their

disposal for the purchase of ordinary works of art are but limited, no

longer ago than last year they were the recipients of a very handsome

legacy from the late Mr J. M. Gray, the accomplished and much lamented

Curator of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery--a legacy left them

for the express purpose of acquiring portraits of distinguished

Scotsmen, and the income of which was amply sufficient to have enabled

them to purchase this portrait. One is therefore almost shut up to

the conclusion that the Trustees were influenced in their decision by

one of the two following reasons:

"1. That they did not consider Stevenson worthy of a place in the

gallery. This is a position so incomprehensible and so utterly

opposed to public sentiment that one can hardly credit it having been

the cause of this refusal. Whatever may be the place which Stevenson

may ultimately take as an author, and however opinions may differ as

to the merits of his work, no one can deny that he was one of the most

popular writers of his day, and that as a mere master of style, if for

nothing else, his works will be read so long as there are students of

English Literature. Surely the portrait of one for whom such a claim

may legitimately be made cannot be considered altogether unworthy of a

place in the National Collection, as one of Scotland's most

distinguished sons.

"2. The only other reason which can be suggested as having weighed

with the Trustees in their decision is one which in some cases might

be held to be worthy of consideration. It is conceivable that in the

case of some men the Trustees might be of opinion that there was

plenty of time to consider the matter, and that in the meantime there

was always the chance of some generous donor presenting them with a

portrait. But, as has been shown above, the portraits of Stevenson

are practically confined to two: one of these is in America, and there

is not the least chance of its ever coming here; and the other they

have refused. And, as it is understood that the Trustees have a rule

that they do not accept any portrait which has not been painted from

the life, they preclude themselves from acquiring a copy of any

existing picture or even a portrait done from memory.

"It is rumoured that the Nerli portrait may ultimately find a resting-

place in the National Collection of Portraits in London. If this

should prove to be the case, what a commentary on the old saying: 'A

prophet is not without honour save in his own country.'"

CHAPTER XXXIII--LAPSES AND ERRORS IN CRITICISM

Nothing could perhaps be more wearisome than to travel o'er the wide

sandy area of Stevenson criticism and commentary, and expose the many and

sad and grotesque errors that meet one there. Mr Baildon's slip is

innocent, compared with many when he says (p. 106) \_Treasure Island\_

appeared in \_Young Folks\_ as \_The Sea-Cook\_. It did nothing of the kind;

it is on plain record in print, even in the pages of the \_Edinburgh

Edition\_, that Mr James Henderson would not have the title \_The

Sea-Cook\_, as he did not like it, and insisted on its being \_Treasure

Island\_. To him, therefore, the vastly better title is due. Mr Henley

was in doubt if Mr Henderson was still alive when he wrote the brilliant

and elevated article on "Some Novels" in the \_North American\_, and as a

certain dark bird killed Cock Robin, so he killed off Dr Japp, and not to

be outdone, got in an ideal "Colonel" \_Jack\_; so Mr Baildon there follows

Henley, unaware that Mr Henderson did not like \_The Sea-Cook\_, and was

still alive, and that a certain Jack in the fatal \_North American\_ has

Japp's credit.

Mr Baildon's words are:

"This was the famous book of adventure, \_Treasure Island\_, appearing

first as \_The Sea-Cook\_ in a boy's paper, where it made no great stir.

But, on its publication in volume form, with the vastly better title,

the book at once 'boomed,' as the phrase goes, to an extent then, in

1882, almost unprecedented. The secret of its immense success may

almost be expressed in a phrase by saying that it is a book like

\_Gulliver's Travels\_, \_The Pilgrim's Progress\_, and \_Robinson Crusoe\_

itself for all ages--boys, men, and women."

Which just shows how far lapse as to a fact may lead to critical

misreadings also.

Mr Hammerton sometimes lets good folks say in his pages, without

correction, what is certainly not correct. Thus at one place we are told

that Stevenson was only known as Louis in print, whereas that was the

only name by which he was known in his own family. Then Mr Gosse, at p.

34, is allowed to write:

"Professor Blackie was among them on the steamer from the Hebrides, a

famous figure that calls for no description, and a voluble shaggy man,

clad in homespun, with spectacles forward upon his nose, who it was

whispered to us, was Mr Sam Bough, the Scottish Academician, \_a water-

colour painter of some repute\_, who was to die in 1878."

Mr Sam Bough \_was\_ "a water-colour painter of some repute," but a painter

in oils of yet greater repute--a man of rare strength, resource, and

facility--never, perhaps, wholly escaping from some traces of his early

experiences in scene-painting, but a true genius in his art. Ah, well I

remember him, though an older man, yet youthful in the band of young

Scotch artists among whom as a youngster I was privileged to move in

Edinburgh--Pettie, Chalmers, M'Whirter, Peter Graham, MacTaggart,

MacDonald, John Burr, and Bough. Bough could be voluble on art; and many

a talk I had with him as with the others named, especially with John

Burr. Bough and he both could talk as well as paint, and talk right

well. Bough had a slight cast in the eye; when he got a \_wee\_ excited on

his subject he would come close to you with head shaking, and spectacles

displaced, and forelock wagging, and the cast would seem to die away. Was

this a fact, or was it an illusion on my part? I have often asked myself

that question, and now I ask it of others. Can any of my good friends in

Edinburgh say; can Mr Caw help me here, either to confirm or to correct

me? I venture to insert here an anecdote, with which my friend of old

days, Mr Wm. MacTaggart, R.S.A., in a letter kindly favours me:

"Sam Bough was a very sociable man; and, when on a sketching tour,

liked to have a young artist or two with him. Jack Nisbett played the

violin, and Sam the 'cello, etc. Jack was fond of telling that Sam

used to let them all choose the best views, and then he would take

what was left; and Jack, with mild astonishment, would say, that 'it

generally turned out to be the best--on the canvas!'"

In Mr Hammerton's copy of the verses in reply to Mr Crockett's dedication

of \_The Stickit Minister\_ to Stevenson, in which occurred the fine phrase

"The grey Galloway lands, where about the graves of the martyrs the

whaups are crying, his heart remembers how":

"Blows the wind to-day and the sun and the rain are flying:

Blows the wind on the moors to-day and now,

Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,

My heart remembers how.

"Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places,

Standing stones on the vacant wine-red moor,

Hills of sheep, and the \_homes\_ of the silent vanished races,

And winds austere and pure.

"Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,

Hills of home! and to hear again the call--

Hear about the graves of the martyrs the pee-weet crying,

And hear no more at all."

Mr Hammerton prints \_howes\_ instead of \_homes\_, which I have italicised

above. And I may note, though it does not affect the poetry, if it does

a little affect the natural history, that the \_pee-weets\_ and the whaups

are not the same--the one is the curlew, and the other is the lapwing--the

one most frequenting wild, heathery or peaty moorland, and the other

pasture or even ploughed land--so that it is a great pity for unity and

simplicity alike that Stevenson did not repeat the "whaup," but wrote

rather as though pee-weet or pee-weets were the same as whaups--the

common call of the one is \_Ker-lee\_, \_ker-lee\_, and of the other \_pee-

weet\_, \_pee-weet\_, hence its common name.

It is a pity, too, that Mr Hammerton has no records of some portions of

the life at Davos Platz. Not only was Stevenson ill there in April 1892,

but his wife collapsed, and the tender concern for her made havoc with

some details of his literary work. It is good to know this. Such errata

or omissions throw a finer light on his character than controlling

perfection would do. Ah, I remember how my old friend W. B. Rands

("Matthew Browne" and "Henry Holbeach") was wont to declare that were men

perfect they would be isolated, if not idiotic, that we are united to

each other by our defects--that even physical beauty would be dead like

later Greek statues, were these not departures from the perfect lines.

The letter given by me at p. 28 transfigures in its light, some of his

work at that time.

And then what an opportunity, we deeply regret to say, Mr Hammerton

wholly missed, when he passed over without due explanation or commentary

that most significant pamphlet--the \_Address to the Scottish Clergy\_. If

Mr Hammerton had but duly and closely studied that and its bearings and

suggestions in many directions, then he would have written such a chapter

for true enlightenment and for interest as exactly his book--attractive

though it is in much--yet specially lacks. It is to be hoped that Mr

Sidney Colvin will not once more miss the chance which is thus still left

open to him to perfect his \_Life of Stevenson\_, and make it more

interpretive than anything yet published. If he does this, then, a

dreadful \_lacuna\_ in the \_Edinburgh Edition\_ will also be supplied.

Carefully reading over again Mr Arthur Symons' \_Studies in Two

Literatures\_--published some years ago--I have come across instances of

apparent contradiction which, so far as I can see, he does not critically

altogether reconcile, despite his ingenuity and great charm of style. One

relates to Thoreau, who, while still "sturdy" as Emerson says, "and like

an elm tree," as his sister Sophia says, showed exactly the same love of

nature and power of interpreting her as he did after in his later

comparatively short period of "invalidity," while Mr Symons says his view

of Nature absolutely was that of the invalid, classing him unqualifiedly

with Jefferies and Stevenson, as invalid. Thoreau's mark even in the

short later period of "invalidity" was complete and robust independence

and triumph over it--a thing which I have no doubt wholly captivated

Stevenson, as scarce anything else would have done, as a victory in the

exact \_role\_ he himself was most ambitious to fill. For did not he too

wrestle well with the "wolverine" he carried on his back--in this like

Addington Symonds and Alexander Pope? Surely I cannot be wrong here to

reinforce my statement by a passage from a letter written by Sophia

Thoreau to her good friend Daniel Ricketson, after her brother's death,

the more that R. L. Stevenson would have greatly exulted too in its

cheery and invincible stoicism:

"Profound joy mingles with my grief. I feel as if something very

beautiful had happened--not death; although Henry is with us no

longer, yet the memory of his sweet and virtuous soul must ever cheer

and comfort me. My heart is filled with praise to God for the gift of

such a brother, and may I never distrust the love and wisdom of Him

who made him and who has now called him to labour in more glorious

fields than earth affords. You ask for some particulars relating to

Henry's illness. I feel like saying that Henry was never affected,

never reached by it. I never before saw such a manifestation of the

power of spirit over matter. Very often I heard him tell his visitors

that he enjoyed existence as well as ever. The thought of death, he

said, did not trouble him. His thoughts had entertained him all his

life and did still. . . . He considered occupation as necessary for

the sick as for those in health, and accomplished a vast amount of

labour in those last few months."

A rare "invalidity" this--a little confusing easy classifications. I

think Stevenson would have felt and said that brother and sister were

well worthy of each other; and that the sister was almost as grand and

cheery a stoic, with no literary profession of it, as was the brother.

The other thing relates to Stevenson's \_human soul\_. I find Mr Symons

says, at p. 243, that Stevenson "had something a trifle elfish and

uncanny about him, as of a bewitched being who was not actually human--had

not actually a human soul"--in which there may be a glimmer of truth

viewed from his revelation of artistic curiosities in some aspects, but

is hardly true of him otherwise; and this Mr Symons himself seems to have

felt, when, at p. 246, he writes: "He is one of those writers who speak

\_to us on easy terms\_, with whom we \_may exchange affections\_." How

"affections" could be exchanged on easy terms between the normal human

being and an elfish creature actually \_without a human soul\_ (seeing that

affections are, as Mr Matthew Arnold might have said, at least, three-

fourths of soul) is more, I confess, than I can quite see at present; but

in this rather \_maladroit\_ contradiction Mr Symons does point at one

phase of the problem of Stevenson--this, namely that to all the ordinary

happy or pleasure-endings he opposes, as it were of set purpose, gloom,

as though to certain things he was quite indifferent, and though, as we

have seen, his actual life and practice were quite opposed to this.

I am sorry I \_cannot\_ find the link in Mr Symons' essay, which would

quite make these two statements consistently coincide critically. As an

enthusiastic, though I hope still a discriminating, Stevensonian, I do

wish Mr Symons would help us to it somehow hereafter. It would be well

worth his doing, in my opinion.

CHAPTER XXXIV--LETTERS AND POEMS IN TESTIMONY

Among many letters received by me in acknowledgment of, or in commentary

on, my little tributes to R. L. Stevenson, in various journals and

magazines, I find the following, which I give here for reasons purely

personal, and because my readers may with me, join in admiration of the

fancy, grace and beauty of the poems. I must preface the first poem by a

letter, which explains the genesis of the poem, and relates a striking

and very touching incident:

"37 ST DONATT'S ROAD,

LEWISHAM HIGH ROAD, S.E.,

1\_st\_ \_March\_ 1895.

"DEAR SIR,--As you have written so much about your friend, the late

Robert Louis Stevenson, and quoted many tributes to his genius from

contemporary writers, I take the liberty of sending you herewith some

verses of mine which appeared in \_The Weekly Sun\_ of November last. I

sent a copy of these verses to Samoa, but unfortunately the great

novelist died before they reached it. I have, however, this week,

received a little note from Mrs Strong, which runs as follows:

"'Your poem of "Greeting" came too late. I can only thank you by

sending a little moss that I plucked from a tree overhanging his grave

on Vaea Mountain.'

"I trust you will appreciate my motive in sending you the poem. I do

not wish to obtrude my claims as a verse-writer upon your notice, but

I thought the incident I have recited would be interesting to one who

is so devoted a collector of Stevensoniana.--Respectfully yours,

F. J. COX."

GREETING

(TO ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, IN SAMOA)

We, pent in cities, prisoned in the mart,

Can know you only as a man apart,

But ever-present through your matchless art.

You have exchanged the old, familiar ways

For isles, where, through the range of splendid days,

Her treasure Nature lavishly displays.

There, by the gracious sweep of ampler seas,

That swell responsive to the odorous breeze.

You have the wine of Life, and we the lees!

You mark, perchance, within your island bowers,

The slow departure of the languorous hours,

And breathe the sweetness of the strange wild-flowers.

And everything your soul and sense delights--

But in the solemn wonder of your nights,

When Peace her message on the landscape writes;

When Ocean scarcely flecks her marge with foam--

Your thoughts must sometimes from your island roam,

To centre on the sober face of Home.

Though many a league of water rolls between

The simple beauty of an English scene,

From all these wilder charms your love may wean.

Some kindly sprite may bring you as a boon

Sweets from the rose that crowns imperial June,

Or reminiscence of the throstle's tune;

Yea, gladly grant you, with a generous hand,

Far glimpses of the winding, wind-swept strand,

The glens and mountains of your native land,

Until you hear the pipes upon the breeze--

But wake unto the wild realities

The tangled forests and the boundless seas!

For lo! the moonless night has passed away,

A sudden dawn dispels the shadows grey,

The glad sea moves and hails the quickening day.

New life within the arbours of your fief

Awakes the blossom, quivers in the leaf,

And splendour flames upon the coral reef.

If such a prospect stimulate your art,

More than our meadows where the shadows dart,

More than the life which throbs in London's heart,

Then stay, encircled by your Southern bowers,

And weave, amid the incense of the flowers,

The skein of fair romance--the gain is ours!

F. J. COX.

\_Weekly Sun\_, 11\_th\_ November 1904.

R. L. S., IN MEMORIAM.

An elfin wight as e'er from faeryland

Came to us straight with favour in his eyes,

Of wondrous seed that led him to the prize

Of fancy, with the magic rod in hand.

Ah, there in faeryland we saw him stand,

As for a while he walked with smiles and sighs,

Amongst us, finding still the gem that buys

Delight and joy at genius's command.

And now thy place is empty: fare thee well;

Thou livest still in hearts that owe thee more

Than gold can reckon; for thy richer store

Is of the good that with us aye most dwell.

Farewell; sleep sound on Vaea's windy shrine,

While round the songsters join their song to thine.

A. C. R.

APPENDIX

The following appeared some time ago in one of the London evening papers,

and I make bold, because of its truth and vigour, to insert it here:

THE LAND OF STEVENSON,

\_ON AN AFTERNOON'S WALK\_

Will there be a "Land of Stevenson," as there is already a "Land of

Burns," or a "Land of Scott," known to the tourist, bescribbled by the

guide-book maker? This the future must tell. Yet will it be easy to

mark out the bounds of "Robert Louis Stevenson's Country"; and, taking

his native and well-loved city for a starting-point, a stout walker may

visit all its principal sites in an afternoon. The house where he was

born is within a bowshot of the Water of Leith; some five miles to the

south are Caerketton and Allermuir, and other crests of the Pentlands,

and below them Swanston Farm, where year after year, in his father's

time, he spent the summer days basking on the hill slopes; two or three

miles to the westward of Swanston is Colinton, where his mother's father,

Dr Balfour, was minister; and here again you are back to the Water of

Leith, which you can follow down to the New Town. In this triangular

space Stevenson's memories and affections were firmly rooted; the fibres

could not be withdrawn from the soil, and "the voice of the blood" and

the longing for this little piece of earth make themselves plaintively

heard in his last notes. By Lothian Road, after which Stevenson quaintly

thought of naming the new edition of his works, and past Boroughmuirhead

and the "Bore Stane," where James FitzJames set up his standard before

Flodden, wends your southward way to the hills. The builder of suburban

villas has pushed his handiwork far into the fields since Stevenson was

wont to tramp between the city and the Pentlands; and you may look in

vain for the flat stone whereon, as the marvelling child was told, there

once rose a "crow-haunted gibbet." Three-quarters of an hour of easy

walking, after you have cleared the last of the houses will bring you to

Swanston; and half an hour more will take the stiff climber, a little

breathless, to

THE TOP OF CAERKETTON CRAGS.

You may follow the high road--indeed there is a choice of two, drawn at

different levels--athwart the western skirts of the Braid Hills, now

tenanted, crown and sides of them, by golf; then to the crossroads of

Fairmilehead, whence the road dips down, to rise again and circumvent the

most easterly wing of the Pentlands. You would like to pursue this

route, were it only to look down on Bow Bridge and recall how the last-

century gauger used to put together his flute and play "Over the hills

and far away" as a signal to his friend in the distillery below, now

converted into a dairy farm, to stow away his barrels. Better it is,

however, to climb the stile just past the poor-house gate, and follow the

footpath along the smoothly scooped banks of the Braid Burn to

"Cockmylane" and to Comiston. The wind has been busy all the morning

spreading the snow over a glittering world. The drifts are piled

shoulder-high in the lane as it approaches Comiston, and each old tree

grouped around the historic mansion is outlined in snow so virgin pure

that were the Ghost--"a lady in white, with the most beautiful clear

shoes on her feet"--to step out through the back gate, she would be

invisible, unless, indeed, she were between you and the ivy-draped

dovecot wall. Near by, at the corner of the Dreghorn Woods, is the

Hunters' Tryst, on the roof of which, when it was still a wayside inn,

the Devil was wont to dance on windy nights. In the field through which

you trudge knee-deep in drift rises the "Kay Stane," looking to-day like

a tall monolith of whitest marble. Stevenson was mistaken when he said

that it was from its top a neighbouring laird, on pain of losing his

lands, had to "wind a blast of bugle horn" each time the King

VISITED HIS FOREST OF PENTLAND.

That honour belongs to another on the adjacent farm of Buckstane. The

ancient monument carries you further back, and there are Celtic

authorities that translate its name the "Stone of Victory." The

"Pechtland Hills"--their elder name--were once a refuge for the Picts;

and Caerketton--probably Caer-etin, the giant's strong-hold--is one of

them. Darkly its cliffs frown down upon you, while all else is flashing

white in the winter sunlight. For once, in this last buttress thrown out

into the plain of Lothian towards the royal city, the outer folds of the

Pentlands loses its boldly-rounded curves, and drops an almost sheer

descent of black rock to the little glen below. In a wrinkle of the

foothills Swanston farm and hamlet are snugly tucked away. The spirit

that breathes about it in summer time is gently pastoral. It is

sheltered from the rougher blasts; it is set about with trees and green

hills. It was with this aspect of the place that Stevenson, coming

hither on holiday, was best acquainted. The village green, whereon the

windows of the neat white cottages turn a kindly gaze under low brows of

thatch, is then a perfect place in which to rest, and, watching the smoke

rising and listening to "the leaves ruffling in the breeze," to muse on

men and things; especially on Sabbath mornings, when the ploughman or

shepherd, "perplext wi' leisure," it is time to set forth on the three-

mile walk along the hill-skirts to Colinton kirk. But Swanston in winter

time must also

HAVE BEEN FAMILIAR TO STEVENSON.

Snow-wreathed Pentlands, the ribbed and furrowed front of Caerketton, the

low sun striking athwart the sloping fields of white, the shadows

creeping out from the hills, and the frosty yellow fog drawing in from

the Firth--must often have flashed back on the thoughts of the exile of

Samoa. Against this wintry background the white farmhouse, old and crow-

stepped, looks dingy enough; the garden is heaped with the fantastic

treasures of the snow; and when you toil heavily up the waterside to the

clump of pines and beeches you find yourself in a fairy forest. One need

not search to-day for the pool where the lynx-eyed John Todd, "the oldest

herd on the Pentlands," watched from behind the low scrag of wood the

stranger collie come furtively to wash away the tell-tale stains of

lamb's blood. The effacing hand of the snow has smothered it over.

Higher you mount, mid leg-deep in drift, up the steep and slippery hill-

face, to the summit. Edinburgh has been creeping nearer since

Stevenson's musing fancy began to draw on the memories of the climbs up

"steep Caerketton." But this light gives it a mystic distance; and it is

all glitter and shadow. Arthur Seat is like some great sea monster

stranded near a city of dreams; from the fog-swathed Firth gleams the

white walls of Inchkeith lighthouse, a mark never missed by Stevenson's

father's son; above Fife rise the twin breasts of the Lomonds. Or turn

round and look across the Esk valley to the Moorfoots; or more westerly,

where the back range of the Pentlands--Caernethy, the Scald, and the

knife-edged Kips--draw a sharp silhouette of Arctic peaks against the

sky. In the cloven hollow between is Glencarse Loch, an ancient chapel

and burying ground hidden under its waters; on the slope above it, not a

couple miles away, is Rullion Green, where, as Stevenson told in \_The

Pentland Rising\_ (his first printed work)

THE WESTLAND WHIGS WERE SCATTERED

as chaff on the hills. Were "topmost Allermuir," that rises close beside

you, removed from his place, we might see the gap in the range through

which Tom Dalyell and his troopers spurred from Currie to the fray. The

air on these heights is invigorating as wine; but it is also keen as a

razor. Without delaying long yon plunge down to the "Windy Door Nick";

follow the "nameless trickle that springs from the green bosom of

Allermuir," past the rock and pool, where, on summer evenings, the poet

"loved to sit and make bad verses"; and cross Halkerside and the

Shearers' Knowe, those "adjacent cantons on a single shoulder of a hill,"

sometimes floundering to the neck in the loose snow of a drain, sometimes

scaring the sheep huddling in the wreaths, or putting up a covey of

moorfowl that circle back without a cry to cover in the ling. In an hour

you are at Colinton, whose dell has on one side the manse garden, where a

bright-eyed boy, who was to become famous, spent so much of his time when

he came thither on visits to his stern Presbyterian grandfather; on the

other the old churchyard. The snow has drawn its cloak of ermine over

the sleepers, it has run its fingers over the worn lettering; and records

almost effaced start out from the stone. In vain these "voices of

generations dead" summon their wandering child, though you might deem

that his spirit would rest more quietly where the cold breeze from

Pentland shakes the ghostly trees in Colinton Dell than "under the

flailing fans and shadows of the palm."

Footnotes:

{1} Professor Charles Warren Stoddard, Professor of English Literature

at the Catholic University of Washington, in \_Kate Field's Washington\_.

{2} In his portrait-sketch of his father, Stevenson speaks of him as a

"man of somewhat antique strain, and with a blended sternness and

softness that was wholly Scottish, and at first sight somewhat

bewildering," as melancholy, and with a keen sense of his unworthiness,

yet humorous in company; shrewd and childish; a capital adviser.

{3} \_Inferno\_, Canto XV.

{4} Alas, I never was told that remark--when I saw my friend afterwards

there was always too much to talk of else, and I forgot to ask.

{5} Quoted by Hammerton, pp. 2 and 3.

{6} Tusitala, as the reader must know, is the Samoan for Teller of

Tales.

{7} \_Wisdom of Goethe\_, p. 38.

{8} \_The Foreigner at Home\_, in \_Memories and Portraits\_.

{9} A great deal has been made of the "John Bull element" in De Quincey

since his \_Memoir\_ was written by me (see \_Masson's Condensation\_, p.

95); so now perhaps a little more may be made of the rather conceited

Calvinistic Scot element in R. L. Stevenson!

{10} It was Mr George Moore who said this.

{11} \_Fortnightly Review\_, October, 1903.

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