

SELECTIONS FROM
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

CANBY AND PIERCE



SELECTIONS FROM
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

EDITED BY

HENRY SEIDEL CANBY

AND

FREDERICK ERASTUS PIERCE

Assistant Professors of English in Yale University

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK CHICAGO BOSTON

**COPYRIGHT, 1911, BY
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS**

Printed in the United States of America

Published April, 1911

H

INTRODUCTION

I.—LIFE OF STEVENSON

THE life of Robert Louis Stevenson is almost coextensive with the last half of the nineteenth century. He was born in the middle of that century (Nov. 13, 1850), and died a little before its end (Dec. 3, 1894). His birthplace was Edinburgh; and in spite of many journeys hither and thither, this city may be considered his permanent home until he left Scotland for the Western Hemisphere.

Almost from the cradle he showed that tendency to physical weakness and insidious disease which pursued him all his life. As a result of delicate health his schooling was irregular, and his early education chiefly drawn from wide general reading at home. Furthermore, in that harsh northern climate he was forced to spend much of his time indoors. This restriction must have been a heavy disappointment to the boy; for his spirit was as ambitious as his body was frail, and more than one clever prank of his boyhood shows the love of adventure which later produced *Treasure Island*.

Stevenson's father, uncle, and grandfather before him had been civil engineers, famous for their work in building lighthouses. The love of this bold, out-of-door life with its great possibilities of accomplishment had become a family tradition; and, as a result, Stevenson himself was intended for the same career. But though he was full of enthusiasm for his father's work and wondered later in life if he had not made a mistake in substituting literature for it, he never showed any strong inclination to become an engineer. Unquestionably Stevenson had some of the scientific ability hereditary in the family as well as some of the family love for danger and

achievement and the mysterious fascination of the ocean; but his precarious health and inborn passion for writing drew him too powerfully another way. His attempt to become a lawyer was equally unsatisfactory. He was admitted to the Scottish Bar in 1875, but made almost no attempt to practice. His heart was elsewhere.

Fortunately, his family were in comfortable circumstances; and his father, though disappointed at the boy's attitude toward engineering, was loving and generous. Hence, Stevenson was not forced by want into a distasteful profession, but was allowed to mature at leisure his natural gift as an author. His first works were short essays, setting forth his own original views on the most widely differing topics, from the characteristics of a landscape to the dangers of falling in love. Although some of these essays have since won a high rank by their literary polish and vivid individuality, they attracted but little notice at the time. Then came a series of travel-sketches, in which the author's success was due to the very ill health that pursued him. His tendency to lung disease forced him frequently to flee out of the inclement air of Scotland to some warmer region, France, or Italy, or Belgium. These trips not only fulfilled his romantic longings to see men and countries, they also gave him a great fund of interesting material, which he worked up into such delightfully picturesque narratives as the *Inland Voyage* and *Travels with a Donkey*, his first published books. Gradually various essays and stories of his found places in different magazines; and, although they won little notice from the general public, they did make an impression on a few discerning critics, and thereby laid a foundation for Stevenson's future success. By degrees, also, he made the acquaintance of literary men older and more prominent than himself, who by their criticism aided him in his work and by their influence helped him to find publishers and readers. Among these was Sidney Colvin, recently elected Slade professor of Fine Arts at Cambridge University, who later became Stevenson's lifelong friend; the poet, W. E. Henley; and the well-known critics and authors, Edmund Gosse and Andrew Lang.

Before he was thirty, Stevenson began to drift away from essays and travel-sketches into the field of story-writing. No doubt this change was partly a step to meet the demands of the public; but partly also it was a response to the man's own nature. There was, as one American critic has put it, a troll in his blood, a restless, adventurous, romance-loving spirit, which was debarred from its natural development by the weakness of his body and found expression instead in the exciting creations of his mind. It must not be assumed that he abandoned his old field of work altogether; on the contrary some of his finest essays had still to be written; but from now on their number dwindles, and narrative forms more and more the bulk of the author's output.

In France, in 1876, Stevenson first met the woman who was to be his future wife. She was a Mrs. Osbourne, an American, who after an unhappy marriage had left her Californian home to live with her two children in a foreign country. Acquaintance soon deepened into friendship; but on account of financial and other reasons it was nearly four years before they were married. The marriage finally took place May 19, 1880, in California, whither Stevenson had gone to join his future wife. It was while sailing from Scotland to New York on this trip that the author encountered those experiences which he afterward embodied in *The Amateur Emigrant*.

Shortly after their marriage Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson returned to Scotland. But it soon became evident that if Stevenson was to live long he could not remain permanently in that bleak and trying climate. Consequently, during the next seven years we find them experimenting with temporary homes in various parts of Europe. Two years were spent mainly at Davos in the Swiss Alps, two more in Southern France near Marseilles, neither residence proving wholly satisfactory, and finally three years at Bournemouth on the English coast. During all this time the strong affection between Stevenson and his parents brought the young people on frequent trips to the Stevenson home in Edinburgh. In the middle of this period (1883) appeared *Treasure Island*, the

first of its author's books which became really popular and brought in a substantial income. In 1886, shortly before leaving Bournemouth, he published the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, which gained a sale and a popularity far beyond that of anything that he had previously produced. From this time on Stevenson had an international reputation and a comfortable income from his writings. From this time on, also, his productions were no longer mainly essays, as they had been during his first period, or mainly short stories, as they had been more recently, but chiefly novels and tales of considerable length, like *The Wrecker* and *The Beach of Falesá*.

In 1885 appeared *A Child's Garden of Verse*, Stevenson's first published volume of poetry. Two other volumes of verse came out during his life, and one after his death. Each of these contained poems written within a period of several years. As a whole Stevenson's poetry does not rank as high as his prose; it seldom has the subtle melody or inexplicable charm of the great masters. But his songs for children have a sunny kindliness and his other poems a narrative swing which lift them far above mediocrity and reveal the same gifted story-teller and loving friend who delights us in his tales.

In 1887 his father, Thomas Stevenson, died. That death snapped one of the strongest links which bound the son to his birthplace; and in a few months he left Europe, planning, perhaps, to return, but destined never to do so. The demand of his invalid body for health and the craving of his adventurous spirit for new experience alike drew him to the Western Hemisphere. The rest of his life was a series of wanderings or short sojourns in America and the islands of the Pacific. His companions were his wife, his step-son, Lloyd Osbourne, to whom he was deeply attached, and part of the time his mother.

Stevenson entered America the second time, not obscurely, as he had come ten years before, but as an author whose reputation was assured. Several of his works had already been published by Scribner; now almost immediately he was en-

gaged by them to furnish twelve monthly articles for their magazine. From this time on he was in close relation with that well-known house. For the sake of the bracing climate, he spent the winter of 1887-88 at Saranac among the Adirondack Mountains of New York State. It is in this region that the tragic end of *The Master of Ballantrae* is pictured as occurring; and Stevenson tells us that he conceived that dramatic scene at this time, amid scenery as wild and on a night as cold as when Secundra dug up his buried master. But, although Saranac proved bracing for the invalid and convenient for the author it did not keep him long. Deep in his nature was the love of the ocean with its excitement and mystery, that ocean with which his ancestors had wrestled for generations; and he tells us that he would gladly have exchanged his fame as an author for a yacht and a voyage at sea. Consequently, the following summer the party crossed the continent, and, chartering the yacht *Casco* at San Francisco, sailed out into the romantic island world of the Pacific.

For nearly three years after this Stevenson and his companions voyaged to and fro between different groups of islands which lie hundreds of miles apart, now visiting the Hawaiian group far north of the equator, where he saw the dreary leper settlement at Molokai, now, as far south of the equator, to the Society Islands and New Caledonia. It was a changing panorama of differing surroundings and differing peoples, a life of variety and novel experience. It had its spice of danger, too; for more than once nothing but good luck and the utmost efforts of the crew prevented shipwreck. Finally, more by accident than design, the wanderers made themselves a permanent home at Apia in the Samoan group.

Almost four years, the last four of his life, Stevenson lived at Samoa. He built his home, called Vailima, or the Five Rivers, a little outside of the town of Apia, and not far from the mountain where he was afterward buried. He was never an indolent man, and his life here was one of surprising activity. Not only did he turn out an amount of literary work astonishing in a man of such frail physique, but he also took an

active and unselfish part in the politics of the island, fearlessly criticised the misgovernment of the European representatives there, and won the love and respect of the natives as few white men have done. A monument to the affection which he inspired in the Samoans is found in the road which their chiefs built to his house, built by their own toil and at their own expense, and which they significantly christened *Ala Loto Alofa*, The Road of the Loving Heart. Here at Vailima he died suddenly and almost painlessly, December 3, 1894. He had been working hard all day on the last (and what would have been the greatest) of his novels, *Weir of Hermiston*. At sunset he had come downstairs for rest and the company of his wife, when the blow fell. He lost consciousness almost immediately; and in an hour or two all was over. He was buried by his loving friends, Europeans and Samoans, on the summit of Mt. Vaea, a narrow ledge of rock, which from a height of thirteen hundred feet overlooks Samoa and the sea. On one of the panels of his tomb is engraved the *Requiem* which he himself composed years before:

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.

The character of Stevenson is one which deservedly commands not only respect but love. The gentle kindliness of his nature was unalterable, except by occasional outbursts of righteous indignation at some act of cruelty. And these outbursts themselves came from the warmth of his heart. Yet, though tactful and sympathetic as a woman, he was essentially a masculine spirit, strong and courageous. The buoyant cheerfulness with which he laughed aside the disease that he never could conquer, and the determination with which he clung to his work when stronger men were idle is evidence

enough of this. Though chivalrous always and an affectionate son and husband, he usually cared less for the society of women than for that of men. His novels, too, appeal more to men than women. Much of the charm of his writing is due to a childlike freshness in his feeling, which he never lost. It was his rare good fortune to outgrow the immaturity of boyhood without losing its romance and its enthusiasm in the process. Genius, according to the definition of a French critic, is nothing but the power to live over our childhood at will; and it is this quality in Stevenson which has immortalised *Treasure Island*. Furthermore, as he appeals to our hearts by his boyishness and sympathy, so he appeals to our minds by his ingenious and versatile brain. True, he never saw into life as deeply as Shakespeare or Browning; but he saw life from many points of view, and hence all that he says has the fascination of variety and novelty. He said once that he was fifty-five per cent artist and forty-five per cent adventurer; and both artists and adventurers are interesting people. They may have a dash of the Bohemian in them, as Stevenson himself did; but their very eccentricities are refreshing. In one sense of the word, his genius was made rather than born, for it was only by long and patient effort that he made himself a better writer than those around him. But this fact merely increases our respect for him as a man, for it brings him into the list of that gallant army who are using all their efforts to make the world happier. While other writers have too often wasted the splendid gifts that nature gave them in dissipation or inaction, Stevenson can claim our affection and reverence because all his natural powers were used bravely and to the utmost for the good of humanity.

F. E. P.

II.—OUTLINE OF THE MAIN EVENTS IN STEVENSON'S LIFE

1850. Stevenson born.
1859-67. Attends various schools, mostly in Edinburgh.
1863. Trip to Italy with parents.

- 1865-66. Part of the time spent at Torquay in Devonshire, England.
- 1867-73. Studies at Edinburgh University.
1873. First published work (*Roads*) printed in *Portfolio* magazine.
- “ Goes to Southern France for health.
- 1874-79. Various trips to the continent of Europe.
1875. Called to the Scottish Bar.
1876. First meets his future wife in France.
1877. His first story (*A Lodging for the Night*) printed in *Temple Bar* magazine.
1878. His first book (*Inland Voyage*) published.
1879. First voyage to America.
1880. Married.
- “ Returns to Scotland.
- 1880-82. At Davos in the Swiss Alps.
- 1882-84. In Southern France.
1883. *Treasure Island* (Stevenson's first popular success) published.
- 1884-87. At Bournemouth.
1886. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* published, giving the author an international reputation.
1887. Stevenson's father dies.
- 1887-88. Second journey to America.
- 1883-91. Voyages in the Pacific.
- 1891-94. Life at Samoa.
1894. Stevenson's death.

III.—LIST OF STEVENSON'S PUBLICATIONS

This list includes all of Stevenson's more important publications, with the date of their first appearance in book form, and also a few less important works which help to give an idea of the author's versatility.

1878. *An Inland Voyage.*
1879. *Travels with a Donkey.*
1881. *Virginibus Puerisque.*
1882. *Familiar Studies of Men and Books.*
1882. *New Arabian Nights.*
1883. *The Silverado Squatters.*

- 1883. *Treasure Island.*
- 1885. *Prince Otto.*
- “ *A Child’s Garden of Verses.*
- “ *More New Arabian Nights. The Dynamiter.*
- 1886. *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*
- 1886. *Kidnapped.*
- 1887. *The Merry Men.*
- “ *Underwoods (verse).*
- “ *Memories and Portraits.*
- 1888. *The Black Arrow.*
- 1889. *The Master of Ballantrae.*
- “ *The Wrong Box.*
- 1890. *Father Damien.*
- 1891. *Ballads (verse).*
- 1892. *Across the Plains.*
- “ *The Wrecker.*
- “ *Three Plays (Deacon Brodie, Beau Austin, Admiral Guinea).*
- 1893. *Island Nights’ Entertainments.*
- “ *Catriona (in America entitled David Balfour).*
- 1894. *The Ebb Tide.*
- 1895. *Vailima Letters.*
- 1896. *Weir of Hermiston.*
- 1898. *St. Ives.*
- 1899. *Letters, Two Volumes.*
- 1911. *Letters, Four Volumes.*

IV.—BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following editions and biographical studies should be first consulted by those wishing to gain more knowledge of Stevenson than these Selections can give.

EDITIONS

The Thistle Edition, 26 vols. A complete collection of Stevenson’s writings.

The Biographical Edition, 32 vols. These volumes are of especial interest because of the introductions by Mrs. Stevenson.

The Scribner Popular Edition, 10 vols.

BIOGRAPHICAL

Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, 2 vols. By Graham Balfour. Published in the Thistle Edition but sold separately.

The Vailima Letters, 2 vols. Edited by Sidney Colvin, published separately and in the Thistle Edition.

The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, 4 vols. Edited by Sidney Colvin.

A Chronicle of Friendships, by Will H. Low. Especially valuable for its account of Stevenson's life in Paris and Fontainebleau.

V.—STEVENSON THE WRITER

Sargent's well-known portrait of the slender Stevenson, in his velveteen jacket, with cigarette in hand, while a whimsical look softens the glow of his cavernous eyes, emphasises too strongly perhaps the Bohemian in Stevenson's nature, and yet suggests unforgettably his most characteristic traits. The air of one who seeks the romantic in life breathes from the figure; the serious eyes and the glance belong to a humourist who loves a world which both pains and amuses him; and "artist" is as indelibly imprinted upon the whole as if it had been written in upon the picture. Romanticist, humourist, artist,—these, in truth, were the attributes of Robert Louis Stevenson.

First, last, and always he was a romanticist in the good, broad sense of the word; that is, he was a lover of all that stirs the imagination. Romantic ages such as the fifteenth century in France; romantic men like the Stuart Pretenders; romantic moments like the terrible hours after a great crime, or a momentous resolution;—all these interested him and found their way into his books. Love, which makes the most romantic romance of them all, did not, strangely enough, appeal so strongly, perhaps because, as with many men who lack physical strength, it was the masculine in life which stirred his fancy. But he fed his mind upon everything else that was strange, or splendid, and his acts and works were

often moulded by romantic desires. He loved the sea better than the land; the mountains more than the plains; when he set out upon his exile it was to the uttermost islands of the Pacific; even when most discouraged he would not let life seem trivial, or otherwise than full of the possibilities of charm and wonder. Few men have been so sure of the eternal value of whatsoever frees the imagination from the commonplace, and so convinced that nothing pushes back the horizons, nothing stirs the heart like romance.

Next to romance humour was the quality which Stevenson best understood, and this is not surprising, for the great romanticists have all been humourists. Humour is not the same as wit. Humour is a power which comes to kindly people who can grasp the truth about human nature, yet still retain their love for it. They see the inconsistencies, the incongruities, the weaknesses of mankind, and since they love their fellow-men can make these follies a cause of mirth, a reason for comprehension and sympathy. Without humour a writer of romances loses touch with human nature, and we, his readers, feel ill at ease in his world, where there is little humanity and only stage-laughs.

This saving grace of humour was Stevenson's, but it did more than sweeten his romance; it made him a preacher. All great humourists are preachers. They cannot avoid preaching except by silence, for they have only to describe the world as they see it to give the liveliest perceptions of its errors and mistakes. And they are often the best of preachers because they are content to make clear the absurdity of error, leaving the remedy to time who takes care of proved absurdities. Indeed, as one reads certain essays in this volume, for example the throbbing *Aes Triplex*, where the writer wars upon all cowardly fear of death, Stevenson's preaching is so serious that one may easily overlook the humour underlying it. But *Aes Triplex*, like nearly all the rest, is fundamentally humorous. It was the work of a thinker who saw the man-flock scurrying hither and thither in trivial terror, though the grass was tender, the water sweet, and little time at best to enjoy them; a thinker who saw man, like a blind horse in a cider-

press, plodding on and on, unconscious that he never left his appointed rut. These sights filled him with mingled pity and mirth. He spoke out, and such fine preaching as is to be found in the essays of this volume resulted. But very rarely, and only when the tragic entered his stories, or when, as in his more sombre essays, his native cheerfulness fought for its right to exist, did Stevenson cease to be essentially humorous in his attitude toward the world.

Such humourist's preaching differs, of course, in a very important fashion from the usual pulpit variety. It is tolerant, it is never dogmatic. Stevenson could not be intolerant of other men's opinions for he saw but too clearly how fallible are all opinions; he could not be dogmatic for he knew that all programmes of conduct might lead somewhere or somehow to error. He pitied, or smiled at, the follies of the world instead of abusing them. One sees this in *An Apology for Idlers*, where he holds up for mirth the sordid individual who thinks that his own business is the only thing that matters, or in *Aes Triplex*, where he pictures Death creeping upon a life so shaken by fear of him as to be scarcely worth ending. One sees it also in work where he was not preaching; somewhat grimly, for example, in his story, *The Merry Men*, where the conscience-stricken uncle is haunted by his fears; more lightly in *Will o' the Mill*, when the sluggish youth who gives to that story its title decides that it is better to be comfortable than in love. His travel-sketches, too, are full of this humorous spirit; his charming letters are alight with the keenest, but the most sympathetic perceptions of mortal folly, mortal weakness (his own as much as anybody's), and mortal shame. There have been far greater humourists than Stevenson, men, who, better than he, saw deeply, felt truly, and gave us human nature with the lovable and unlovable qualities of the flesh. But no writer in English of our period has done all these things so well for the readers of this generation.

And, finally, R. L. S., as he liked to sign himself, was to the finger-tips an artist. The true artist, whether painter, musician, or writer of literature, is content only when his work is as true as he can make it to the conceptions shaped by

his imagination. He labours incessantly at what he calls his technique. Stevenson was a true artist, who never willingly and knowingly did less than his best. He wrote for money, as all artists should, since the need of making one's work desirable is the best preventive of morbid, unnatural, useless art; but he wrote, as he says in one of his letters, first of all for himself. The results are to be seen in the dignity, depth, and sincerity of his books, but most of all in his style. Stevenson's style, which, at its finest, is of remarkable force and beauty, was the product of a determination to express his ideas in the best possible manner. It is like the glaze which the potter bakes upon his already modelled clay, or the colour and final form which the painter gives to his sketch for a picture. Stevenson's carefully chosen words, his delicately modulated sentences, the melodious rhythm of his paragraphs serve to express to perfection the nicety, or the profundity, or the beauty of his thought. His style, therefore, is the best result as well as the best evidence of a lifelong devotion to the highest ideals of art.

Stevenson is so much a part of our own generation that we cannot, even if it were desirable, label him, and place him upon his proper shelf in literary history. Nevertheless, it is already evident that he was a leader in some very definite tendencies of his times.

The first of these was the swing toward romance. In the seventies and eighties, when R. L. S. began to write, science, much more than now, was affecting men's imaginations. Discoveries in physics, in chemistry, and in mechanics, most of all the then new theories of man's evolution from lower forms of life were emphasising the importance of *facts*. Fiction speedily responded to this scientific movement. In France, Zola was writing his careful studies of the ills of humanity; in England, Hardy was pessimistically narrating the truth, as he saw it, of country life, and (for all realistic fiction is not either squalid or pessimistic) Trollope was pouring out matter-of-fact stories of amusing but very commonplace people. Romance is a reaction against this realistic attitude. It is a pro-

test that the soul needs to dream as well as to understand. Romance does not deny the ugly and the commonplace, it temporarily ignores them. Stevenson was unfamiliar neither with science nor with misery and pain, but in such books as *Kidnapped*, *Treasure Island*, and *The Master of Ballantrae*, such stories as *The Sire de Malétoit's Door* and *A Lodging for the Night* he led away from them into regions where a man could be a boy again, could let loose his fancy, and give his heart a chance to beat. In these narratives Stevenson headed the romantic reaction, which has given us a series of tales of adventure or strange situation to place beside the novels of scientific realism that have also been produced throughout our period. But Stevenson's followers have none of them equalled the master. Indeed, no writer, since the great romanticists of an earlier generation, has flung himself with Stevenson's ardour into the pursuit of romance. "You just indulge the pleasure of your heart," he said of writing *Treasure Island*, "just drive along as the words come and the pen will scratch!"

Treasure Island is pure romance, like *Ivanhoe*, or *As You Like It*, but elsewhere Stevenson did more than revive romance, he linked it to the scientific spirit of the time. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, for example, is conducted like an experiment in the new science of psychology; *The Merry Men* is first of all a romantic picture of the landsman's terror of the sea, but it is also a psychological study of a guilty imagination. And in such essays as *Pulvis et Umbra* those problems with which scientists were wrestling are fearlessly handled by a romanticist, with admirable results.

Stevenson reacts against opposing tendencies not only in his romance but also in his humour. He came from Scotland, where Puritanical dogmatism kept the tightest of grips upon belief and conscience. In his youth he broke away in agony from the dogma of his father's church, suffering and giving pain in order to be free. And in his manhood he not less decisively broke away from the writers who still dominated English literature. The great preacher-essayists, Carlyle, Arnold, Ruskin, had made laws for conduct, for culture, for art. Stev-