THE BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION

OF THE WORKS OF

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

THE MERRY MEN

AND OTHER TALES AND FABLES

STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE

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BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

WITH PREFACES BY MRS. STEVENSON

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PREFACE

TO

THE BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION

IN a vague quest for "a house . . . a burn within reach; heather and a fir or two," we came upon "Kinnaird Cottage," near Pitlochry, where Professor Blackie, a picturesque and well-known figure in Scotland, had been in the habit of spending his vacations. For some reason the cottage was vacant during the summer of 1881; we were very glad, indeed, to engage it, though our landlady and her daughter, who were to attend to our domestic affairs, made it plain to us that we were not to be considered in the same breath with the eccentric professor. Kinnaird Cottage possessed more advantages than my husband had demanded when he agreed to go to the Highlands with his people, for the house stood a few yards from "a little green glen with a burn, — a wonderful burn, gold and green and snow white, singing loud and low in different steps of its career, now pouring over miniature crags, now fretting itself to death in a maze of rocky stairs and pots;

never was so sweet a little river. Behind, great purple moorlands reaching to Ben Vrackie."

Although it was the seventh of June when we moved into the cottage, as yet we had had nothing but cold rains and penetrating winds; and in all innocence (this being my first season in this beautiful and inclement region) I asked when the spring would begin. "The spring!" said my mother-in-law; "why, *this* is the spring." "And the summer," I inquired anxiously, — "when will the summer be here?" "Well," returned my mother-in-law doubtfully, "we must wait for St. Swithin's day; it all depends on what kind of weather we have then." St. Swithin's day came and went in a storm of wind and rain. "I am afraid," confessed my mother-in-law, "that the summer is past, and we shall have no more good weather." And so it turned out. Between showers she and I wandered over the moor and along the banks of the burn, but always with umbrellas in our hands, and generally returning drenched.

My husband, who had come to the Highlands solely for the sunshine and bracing air, was condemned to spend the most of his time in our small, stuffy sitting-room, with no amusement or occupation other than that afforded by his writing materials. The only books we had with us were two large volumes of the life of Voltaire, which did not tend to raise our already depressed spirits. Even

these, removed from us by my husband's parents one dreary Sunday as not being proper "Sabba'-day reading," were annexed by the elder couple, each taking a volume. Thrown entirely on our own resources for amusement, we decided to write stories and read them to each other; naturally, these tales, coloured by our surroundings, were of a sombre cast.

As my husband was then writing only for our mutual entertainment, without thought of publication, he put his first tale, *Thrawn Janet,* in the vernacular of the country. "I doubt if this is good enough for my father to hear," he said, as he began reading it to me. But he took heart as he went on. That evening is as clear in my memory as though it were yesterday, — the dim light of our one candle, with the acrid smell of the wick we forgot to snuff, the shadows in the corners of the "lang, laigh, mirk chalmer, perishing cauld," the driving rain on the roof close above our heads, and the gusts of wind that shook our windows. The very sound of the names — Murdock Soulis, The Hangin' Shaw in the beild of the Black Hill, Balweary in the vale of Dule — sent a "cauld grue" along my bones. By the time the tale was finished my husband had fairly frightened himself, and we crept down the stairs clinging hand in hand like two scared children. My father-in-law's unexpected praise of *Thrawn Janet* caused my husband

to regard it with more favour; and after a few corrections he began to feel that he had really, as he said, "pulled it off."

For some time he had had it in his mind to weave a thread of a story round The Merry Men of Aros Roost. The summer having apparently slipped past us without stopping, and the rain hardly ceasing after St. Swithin's day (in my mother-in-law's diary I find recorded "weather wet," almost immediately after "have had bad weather," "still wet," "afraid to venture out," "pouring rain," and so on, almost without variation) my husband had nothing to distract his attention from the work in hand, and *The Merry Men* was soon under way. The story itself, overshadowed by its surroundings, did not come so easily as *Thrawn Janet,* and never quite satisfied its author, who believed that he had succeeded in giving the terror of the sea, but had failed to get a real grip on his story.

The continual cold rains having seriously affected my husband's health, we finally left Kinnaird Cottage, and by the doctor's orders settled for a time in Braemar. The two stories were sent to the *Cornhill Magazine,* where *Thrawn Janet* was published in October, 1881, *The Merry Men* appearing serially from June, 1882.

F. V. DE G. S.

My Dear Lady Taylor:

To your name, if I wrote on brass, I could add nothing; it has been already written higher than I could dream to reach, by a strong and a dear hand; and if I now dedicate to you these tales, it is not as the writer who brings you his work, but as the friend who would remind you of his affection.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

Skerryvore,
Bournemouth.

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THE MERRY MEN

CHAPTER I

EILEAN AROS

IT was a beautiful morning in the late July when I set forth on foot for the last time for Aros. A boat had put me ashore the night before at Grisapol; I had such breakfast as the little inn afforded, and, leaving all my baggage till I had an occasion to come round for it by sea, struck right across the promontory with a cheerful heart.

I was far from being a native of these parts, springing, as I did, from an unmixed Lowland stock. But an uncle of mine, Gordon Darnaway, after a poor, rough youth, and some years at sea, had married a young wife in the islands; Mary Maclean she was called, the last of her family; and when she died in giving birth to a daughter, Aros, the sea-girt farm, had remained in his possession. It brought him in nothing but the means of life, as I was well aware; but he was a man whom ill-fortune had pursued; he feared, cumbered as he was with the young child, to make a fresh adventure upon life; and remained in Aros, biting his nails at destiny. Years passed over his

head in that isolation, and brought neither help nor contentment. Meantime our family was dying out in the Lowlands; there is little luck for any of that race; and perhaps my father was the luckiest of all, for not only was he one of the last to die, but he left a son to his name and a little money to support it. I was a student of Edinburgh University, living well enough at my own charges, but without kith or kin; when some news of me found its way to Uncle Gordon on the Ross of Grisapol; and he, as he was a man who held blood thicker than water, wrote to me the day he heard of my existence, and taught me to count Aros as my home. Thus it was that I came to spend my vacations in that part of the country, so far from all society and comfort, between the codfish and the moorcocks; and thus it was that now, when I had done with my classes, I was returning thither with so light a heart that July day.

The Ross, as we call it, is a promontory neither wide nor high, but as rough as God made it to this day; the deep sea on either hand of it, full of rugged isles and reefs most perilous to seamen — all overlooked from the eastward by some very high cliffs and the great peak of Ben Kyaw. *The Mountain of the Mist*, they say the words signify in the Gaelic tongue; and it is well named. For that hill-top, which is more than three thousand feet in height, catches all the clouds that come blowing from the seaward; and, indeed, I used often to think that it must make them for itself; since when all heaven was clear to the sea-level,

there would ever be a streamer on Ben Kyaw. It brought water, too, and was mossy[1] to the top in consequence. I have seen us sitting in broad sunshine on the Ross, and the rain falling black like crape upon the mountain. But the wetness of it made it often appear more beautiful to my eyes; for when the sun struck upon the hillsides, there were many wet rocks and watercourses that shone like jewels even as far as Aros, fifteen miles away.

The road that I followed was a cattle-track. It twisted so as nearly to double the length of my journey; it went over rough boulders so that a man had to leap from one to another, and through soft bottoms where the moss came nearly to the knee. There was no cultivation anywhere, and not one house in the ten miles from Grisapol to Aros. Houses of course there were — three at least; but they lay so far on the one side or the other that no stranger could have found them from the track. A large part of the Ross is covered with big granite rocks, some of them larger than a two-roomed house, one beside another, with fern and deep heather in between them where the vipers breed. Anyway the wind was, it was always sea-air, as salt as on a ship; the gulls were as free as moorfowl over all the Ross; and whenever the way rose a little, your eye would kindle with the brightness of the sea. From the very midst of the land, on a day of wind and a high spring, I have heard the Roost roaring like a battle where it runs by Aros, and

[1] Boggy.

the great and fearful voices of the breakers that we call the Merry Men.

Aros itself — Aros Jay, I have heard the natives call it, and they say it means *the House of God* — Aros itself was not properly a piece of the Ross, nor was it quite an islet. It formed the south-west corner of the land, fitted close to it, and was in one place only separated from the coast by a little gut of the sea, not forty feet across the narrowest. When the tide was full, this was clear and still, like a pool on a land river; only there was a difference in the weeds and fishes, and the water itself was green instead of brown; but when the tide went out, in the bottom of the ebb, there was a day or two in every month when you could pass dryshod from Aros to the mainland. There was some good pasture, where my uncle fed the sheep he lived on; perhaps the feed was better because the ground rose higher on the islet than the main level of the Ross, but this I am not skilled enough to settle. The house was a good one for that country, two storeys high. It looked westward over a bay, with a pier hard by for a boat, and from the door you could watch the vapours blowing on Ben Kyaw.

On all this part of the coast, and especially near Aros, these great granite rocks that I have spoken of go down together in troops into the sea, like cattle on a summer's day. There they stand, for all the world like their neighbours ashore; only the salt water sobbing between them instead of the quiet earth, and clots of sea-pink blooming on

their sides instead of heather; and the great sea-conger to wreathe about the base of them instead of the poisonous viper of the land. On calm days you can go wandering between them in a boat for hours, echoes following you about the labyrinth; but when the sea is up, Heaven help the man that hears that caldron boiling.

Off the south-west end of Aros these blocks are very many, and much greater in size. Indeed, they must grow monstrously bigger out to sea, for there must be ten sea-miles of open water sown with them as thick as a country place with houses, some standing thirty feet above the tides, some covered, but all perilous to ships; so that on a clear, westerly blowing day, I have counted, from the top of Aros, the great rollers breaking white and heavy over as many as six-and-forty buried reefs. But it is nearer in shore that the danger is worst; for the tide, here running like a mill-race, makes a long belt of broken water — a *Roost* we call it — at the tail of the land. I have often been out there in a dead calm at the slack of the tide; and a strange place it is, with the sea swirling and combing up and boiling like the caldrons of a linn, and now and again a little dancing mutter of sound as though the *Roost* were talking to itself. But when the tide begins to run again, and above all in heavy weather, there is no man could take a boat within half a mile of it, nor a ship afloat that could either steer or live in such a place. You can hear the roaring of it six miles away. At the seaward end there comes the

strongest of the bubble; and it 's here that these big breakers dance together — the dance of death, it may be called — that have got the name, in these parts, of the Merry Men. I have heard it said that they run fifty feet high; but that must be the green water only, for the spray runs twice as high as that. Whether they got the name from their movements, which are swift and antic, or from the shouting they make about the turn of the tide, so that all Aros shakes with it, is more than I can tell.

The truth is, that in a south-westerly wind, that part of our archipelago is no better than a trap. If a ship got through the reefs, and weathered the Merry Men, it would be to come ashore on the south coast of Aros, in Sandag Bay, where so many dismal things befell our family, as I propose to tell. The thought of all these dangers, in the place I knew so long, makes me particularly welcome the works now going forward to set lights upon the headlands and buoys along the channels of our iron-bound, inhospitable islands.

The country people had many a story about Aros, as I used to hear from my uncle's man, Rorie, an old servant of the Macleans, who had transferred his services without afterthought on the occasion of the marriage. There was some tale of an unlucky creature, a sea-kelpie, that dwelt and did business in some fearful manner of his own among the boiling breakers of the Roost. A mermaid had once met a piper on