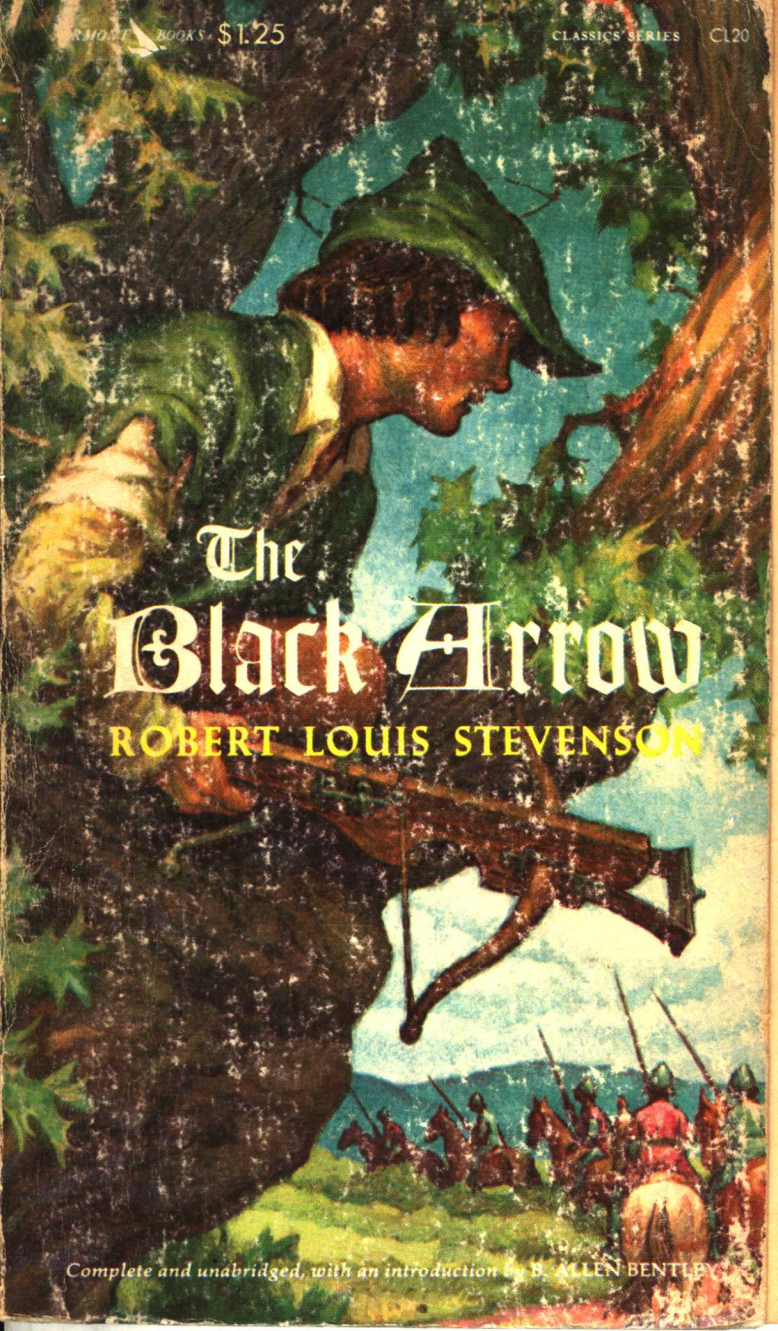
ARMOUR BOOKS · $1.25 CLASSICS SERIES CL20



The Black Arrow

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Complete and unabridged, with an introduction by B. ALLEN BENTLEY

The Black Arrow

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

AIRMONT BOOKS
22 EAST 60TH STREET • NEW YORK 22

An Airmont Classic
specially selected for the Airmont Library
from the immortal literature of the world

Black Arrow

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Introduction

The element underlying all of Robert Louis Stevenson's writing—that which is vividly seen in every word, action, and character in *The Black Arrow*—is his romantic imagination. Indeed, as the author tells us elsewhere, the principle organizing all his conscious thought and action was the intuition that his life was "a romance of destiny," that he was at the mercy of strange inner forces breaking out, sometimes, in the fiery structure of his prose and poetry, and sometimes in violent tubercular attacks which, throughout his life, marred the rare seasons of his good health.

This, more than any device of style or plot, accounts for the unusual sense of wonder and involvement which holds both young and older readers of the novels of Stevenson. He wrote his life and dreams into adventures which frail health (and hostile father) prevented him from attaining in reality.

The Black Arrow is a story in which Stevenson—as he had done earlier in *Treasure Island* and was to do again in *Kidnapped*—succeeds in transplanting himself into a youth-

ful hero whose succession of adventures carries him from north to south, from east to west in a troubled landscape of dark horror and shining glory. In this novel he is Richard Shelton, the son of a lord who, he gradually discovers, has been dispossessed and murdered by Sir Daniel Brackley in the shifts of power between the Houses of York and Lancaster during the Wars of the Roses.

The central—and dual—plot of Richard's revenge on Sir Daniel and his romance and escape with Joanna Sedley (Sir Daniel's imprisoned ward) stands out in vivid relief against the background conflict of the warring royal houses. Throughout the epic sprawl of Richard's adventures—from his pursuit of the fleeing Joanna, through the dark forests where the righteous outlaws of the Black Arrow form a kind of protection for Richard against the injustices of Sir Daniel, to the siege of the castle where Joanna is imprisoned—the sound of a nation in agony reverberates, and reminds us that we are in the midst of an experience that goes beyond the personal drama of the hero, of Joanna, or even that of Stevenson's inspired portrait of the powerful, if hideous, figure of Richard Crookback himself, the future king.

Lending spice to the sonorous roll of these background forces, the black arrow sings and thuds into its victim four times—precisely as the warning parchment had predicted.

Apart from re-creating a complex and unpredictably changing period of history into a living drama, Stevenson has created characters in *The Black Arrow* who, if they do not attain the immense stature of creations like Long John Silver in *Treasure Island* or the grotesque horror of Mr. Hyde, are brilliantly sketched and are unforgettable. Lawless, the forest bandit, crashes his way drunkenly through dark woods and the dangerously quiet precincts of Sir Daniel's house with equal and open good-will. And who can fail to be moved by the subtle unfolding of Richard's love for Joanna; by her transition from a disguised boy to the bloom of womanhood? Richard Crookback comes closest to Hyde, perhaps, in the jagged lines of Stevenson's pen; and the miseries of the fate-dispossessed old sailor, Arbuckle, add a touch of pathos that would, were he omitted, be lacking in this flinty and rugged tale.

In addition to living history and character, individual scenes and panoramas are made brilliant by Stevenson's imagination. The quiet opening of the story upon a feudal farmyard is shattered by the confusion of a flock of birds rising sullenly above an area of forest. In a flash an arrow pierces Appleyard. He lives for minutes before anyone can pull out the missile. When it is removed, there is a gush of blood, and the old man dies in convulsions and the tale is underway. The sack of the town of Shoreby by Richard Crookback's troops is quick and ferocious; and yet, in the few pages it requires to outline it, gruesome detail is abundant. And finally, the chilling storm and shipwreck of the *Good Hope* are spectacles rivaling Conrad's most terrible encounters with the raging of the sea.

The saga of the Black Arrow, while it reflects the innocent robustness and impulsive romance of Stevenson's mind, so captivating to young people, also contains hints that his soul was constantly preoccupied with the internal moral struggle of mankind—the conflict of good and evil. In order to understand the root of this impulse in his "romance of destiny," it is necessary to examine briefly the course of the author's life.

Stevenson was born in Scotland in 1850, the only son of Thomas Stevenson, a well-to-do civil engineer, and his wife, Margaret Isabella Balfour. The natural forces at work in the family shaping the spirit of the child were dark to a degree that, today, might seem uncanny. The moral sternness of young Stevenson's father, nurtured by an uncompromising dedication to the most austere principles of Calvinist Presbyterianism, allowed the youth little freedom of religious interpretation—undoubtedly a sad truth in the face of the intense inner self-examination which Stevenson indulged in throughout his entire life, and in most of his writings. The censures of his father, allied to the tales of fire, damnation, and demonic lore that he heard from the fertile imagination of a superstitious—if devoted—nurse named Alison Cunningham, contributed to the tragic and horrifying tales of his later years: *The Body Snatchers, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* and *Markheim.* It may also be, then, that this part of Stevenson's early development is reflected in the dark

tones of death and sudden horror lurking in the forests of *The Black Arrow,* in the repelling aura which hangs about Richard Crookback like a shroud, and in the deep conflicts within Richard Shelton himself as he explores the avenues of his mysterious and contradictory relationship with Sir Daniel Brackley.

As though sinister instructions were not enough, Stevenson's own "romance of destiny" must inevitably include ill-health. Ill-health could not, however, impair the remarkable energies that poured forth in his writing. In four years, between 1883 and 1887, he wrote his four longest and greatest novels: *Treasure Island* (1883), *The Black Arrow* (1884), *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *Kidnapped* (1886). The first draft of Jekyll and Hyde was written in the space of three days! It is a wonder that a man so ill—and one whose voyages carried him into every area of the globe—lived even for forty years.

There were, by contrast, the "sunlit uplands" of Stevenson's life which produced the "I'm-sure-we-should-all-be-as-happy-as-kings" philosophy. These were probably formed by the devotion of his mother, who saw to it that, in spite of his unyielding father, Stevenson had funds in those troubled years when he could not live on the proceeds of his writings. She was near him all his life and accompanied him even into the primitive wildernesses of the Pacific islands. Too, his philosophy was shaped by his wife, Fanny Osbourne, who patiently bred in him the antidote to his frail health and unpredictable moods of depression. That they were very close to each other is indisputable. Stevenson had gone to her in America in 1880, traveling across the ocean in steerage conditions (he tells us about them in *An Amateur Emigrant*), and after his marriage, with open acknowledgment of their embarrassed fortunes, he lived with her in an abandoned miner's shack near a quarry in California. The experience was one which demonstrated Fanny's power to dispel the very adversities which preyed upon her husband and to implant within him a sunny optimism.

It was for her, and for her children, especially the imaginative boy, Lloyd Osbourne, that Stevenson wrote *A Child's*

Garden of Verses (1885) and his thundering adventure sagas.

The latter years of Stevenson's life were his happiest. But always the disease was corroding his energies. In 1894, in the midst of his Samoan friends whose cause for freedom and education he had espoused as Byron had the Greeks', occupied by his unfinished writing, he collapsed and died.

There were two sides to the life of Robert Louis Stevenson: the dark and the light in the "romance of destiny." The fusion of these aspects of his soul is the source of the extraordinary range of his literary style and skill, and of the depth and power of his adventure novels which have never ceased to move the hearts of the world.

—B. ALLEN BENTLEY, B.A.

Contents

PROLOGUE

BOOK ONE
THE TWO LADS

BOOK TWO
THE MOAT HOUSE

BOOK THREE
MY LORD FOXHAM

Critic on the Hearth

NO one but myself knows what I have suffered, nor what my books have gained, by your unsleeping watchfulness and admirable pertinacity. And now here is a volume that goes into the world and lacks your *imprimatur:* a strange thing in our joint lives; and the reason of it is stranger still! I have watched with interest, with pain, and at length with amusement, your unavailing attempts to peruse *The Black Arrow*; and I think I should lack humour indeed, if I let the occasion slip and did not place your name in the fly-leaf of the only book of mine that you have never read—and never will read.

That others may display more constancy is still my hope. The tale was written years ago for a particular audience and (I may say) in rivalry with a particular author; I think I should do well to name him, Mr. Alfred R. Phillips. It was not without its reward at the time. I could not, indeed, displace Mr. Phillips from his well-won priority; but in the eyes of readers who thought less than nothing of *Treasure Island, The Black Arrow* was supposed to mark a clear advance. Those who read volumes and those who read story papers belong to different worlds. The verdict on *Treasure Island* was reversed in the other court; I wonder, will it be the same with its successor?

R. L. S.

Saranac Lake, April 8, 1888

PROLOGUE

John Amend-All

ON a certain afternoon, in the late springtime the bell upon Tunstall Moat House was heard ringing at an unaccustomed hour. Far and near, in the forest and in the fields along the river, people began to desert their labours and hurry towards the sound; and in Tunstall hamlet a group of poor countryfolk stood wondering at the summons.

Tunstall hamlet at that period, in the reign of old King Henry VI., wore much the same appearance as it wears today. A score or so of houses, heavily framed with oak, stood scattered in a long green valley ascending from the river. At the foot, the road crossed a bridge, and mounting on the other side, disappeared into the fringes of the forest on its way to the Moat House, and further forth to Holywood Abbey. Halfway up the village, the church stood among yews. On every side the slopes were crowned and the view bounded by the green elms and greening oak-trees of the forest.

Hard by the bridge, there was a stone cross upon a knoll, and here the group had collected—half-a-dozen women and one tall fellow in a russet smock—discussing what the bell betided. An express had gone through the hamlet half an hour before and drunk a pot of ale in the saddle, not daring to dismount for the hurry of his errand; but he had been ignorant himself of what was forward, and only bore sealed letters from Sir Daniel Brackley to Sir Oliver Oates, the parson, who kept the Moat House in the master's absence.

But now there was the noise of a horse; and soon, out of the edge of the wood and over the echoing bridge, there rode up young Master Richard Shelton, Sir Daniel's ward. He, at the least, would know, and they hailed him and begged him to explain. He drew bridle willingly enough—a young fellow not yet eighteen, sun-browned and grey-eyed, in a jacket of deer's leather, with a black velvet collar, a green hood upon his head, and a steel cross-bow at his back. The express, it appeared, had

brought great news. A battle was impending. Sir Daniel had sent for every man that could draw a bow or carry a bill to go post-haste to Kettley, under pain of his severe displeasure; but for whom they were to fight, or of where the battle was expected, Dick knew nothing. Sir Oliver would come shortly himself, and Bennet Hatch was arming at that moment, for he it was who should lead the party.

"It is the ruin of this kind land," a woman said. "If the barons live at war, ploughfolk must eat roots."

"Nay," said Dick, "every man that follows shall have sixpence a day, and archers twelve."

"If they live," returned the woman, "that may very well be; but how if they die, my master?"

"They cannot better die than for their natural lord," said Dick.

"No natural lord of mine," said the man in the smock. "I followed the Walsinghams; so we all did down Brierly way, till two years ago, come Candlemas. And now I must side with Brackley! It was the law that did it; call ye that natural? But now, what with Sir Daniel and what with Sir Oliver—that knows more of law than honesty—I have no natural lord but poor King Harry the Sixt, God bless him!—the poor innocent that cannot tell his right hand from his left."

"Ye speak with an ill tongue, friend," answered Dick, "to miscall your good master my lord the king in the same libel. But King Harry—praised be the saints!—has come again into his right mind, and will have all things peaceably ordained. And as for Sir Daniel, y' are very brave behind his back. But I will be no tale-bearer; and let that suffice."

"I say no harm of you, Master Richard," returned the peasant. "Y' are a lad; but when ye come to a man's inches, ye will find ye have an empty pocket. I say no more: the saints help Sir Daniel's neighbours, and the Blessed Maid protect his wards!"

"Clipsby," said Richard, "you speak what I cannot hear with honour. Sir Daniel is my good master, and my guardian."

"Come, now, will ye read me a riddle?" returned

Clipsby. "On whose side is Sir Daniel?"

"I know not," said Dick, colouring a little; for his guardian had changed sides continually in the troubles of that period, and every change had brought him some increase of fortune.

"Ay," returned Clipsby, "you, nor no man. For, indeed, he is one that goes to bed Lancaster and gets up York."

Just then the bridge rang under horse-shoe iron, and the party turned and saw Bennet Hatch come galloping —a brown-faced, grizzled fellow, heavy of hand and grim of mein, armed with sword and spear, a steel salet on his head, a leather jack upon his body. He was a great man in the parts; Sir Daniel's right hand in peace and war, and at that time, by his master's interest, bailiff of the hundred.

"Clipsby," he shouted, "off to the Moat House, and send all other laggards the same gate. Bowyer will give you jack and salet. We must ride before curfew. Look to it: he that is last at the lych-gate Sir Daniel shall reward. Look to it right well! I know you for a man of naught. Nance," he added, to one of the women, "is old Appleyard up town?"

"I'll warrant you," replied the woman. "In his field, for sure."

So the group dispersed, and while Clipsby walked leisurely over the bridge, Bennet and young Shelton rode up the road together, through the village and past the church.

"Ye will see the old shrew," said Bennet. "He will waste more time grumbling and prating of Harry the Fift than would serve a man to shoe a horse. And all because he has been to the French wars!"

The house to which they were bound was the last in the village, standing alone among lilacs; and beyond it, on the three sides, there was open meadow rising towards the borders of the wood.

Hatch dismounted, threw his rein over the fence, and walked down the field, Dick keeping close at his elbow, to where the old soldier was digging, knee-deep in his cabbages, and now and again, in a cracked voice, singing

a snatch of song. He was all dressed in leather, only his hood and tippet were of black frieze, and tied with scarlet; his face was like a walnut-shell, both for colour and wrinkles; but his old grey eye was still clear enough, and his sight unabated. Perhaps he was deaf; perhaps he thought it unworthy of an old archer of Agincourt to pay any heed to such disturbances; but neither the surly notes of the alarm bell nor the near approach of Bennet and the lad, appeared at all to move him; and he continued obstinately digging, and piped up, very thin and shaky:

"Now, dear lady, if thy will be,
I pray you that you will rue on me."

"Nick Appleyard," said Hatch, "Sir Oliver commends him to you, and bids that ye shall come within this hour to the Moat House, there to take command."

The old fellow looked up.

"Save you, my masters!" he said, grinning. "And where goeth Master Hatch?"

"Master Hatch is off to Kettley, with every man that we can horse," returned Bennet. "There is a fight toward, it seems, and my lord stays a reinforcement."

"Ay, verily," returned Appleyard. "And what will ye leave me to garrison withal?"

"I leave you six good men, and Sir Oliver to boot," answered Hatch.

"It'll not hold the place," said Appleyard; "the number sufficeth not. It would take two-score to make it good."

"Why, it's for that we came to you, old shrew!" replied the other. "Who else is there but you that could do aught in such a house with such a garrison?"

"Ay! when the pinch comes, ye remember the old shoe," returned Nick. "There is not a man of you can back a horse or hold a bill; and as for archery—St. Michael! if old Harry the Fift were back again, he would stand and let ye shoot at him for a farthen a shoot!"

"Nay, Nick, there's some can draw a good bow yet," said Bennet.

"Draw a good bow!" cried Appleyard. "Yes! But