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*A Child's
Garden of Verses*
Robert Louis Stevenson

Illustrated



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Robert Louis Stevenson

*A Child's
Garden of Verses*

Robert Louis Stevenson was a man who loved children and who, despite the gleam in his eye, won their affection by taking them seriously. In fact, he spent much of his life writing books for their amusement.

Stevenson was born an invalid and most of his life was passed in ill health, but it was his long hours in semi-seclusion when he was young that drew him to the world of stories. While he was still too young to read, his nurse Alison Cunningham would entertain him with tales that would make the time slip by. It was to her, many years later, that he dedicated *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

In spite of the great popularity of his adventure novels, *A Child's Garden of Verses* is still one of Stevenson's most beloved works. In these short and simple poems, he has perfectly recaptured the feelings and fantasies of a small child—a thing that is not easy for a grownup to do.

The natives of Samoa, where Stevenson lived out the last years of his life, gave him the title of "Tusitala," the "teller of tales," but this book reveals that Stevenson also deserved great honor as the writer of poetry for children.

Complete and Unabridged



AN AIRMONT CLASSIC

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*A Child's
Garden of Verses*
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



AIRMONT

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

THE SPECIAL CONTENTS OF THIS EDITION

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ISBN: 0-8049-0195-3 A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES

TO ALISON CUNNINGHAM

FROM HER BOY

For the long nights you lay awake
And watched for my unworthy sake:
For your most comfortable hand
That led me through the uneven land:
For all the story-books you read:
For all the pains you comforted:

For all you pitied, all you bore,
In sad and happy days of yore:—
My second Mother, my first Wife,
The angel of my infant life—
From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, nurse, the little book you hold!

And grant it, Heaven, that all who read
May find as dear a nurse at need,
And every child who lists my rhyme,
In the bright, fireside, nursery clime,
May hear it in as kind a voice
As made my childish days rejoice!

R. L. S.



*A Child's
Garden
of Verses*

Robert
Louis
Stevenson



INTRODUCTION

Open this book and read aloud the poems that are on its pages. They are all simple, but the children who hear them as well as the adults who read them will immediately recognize that Robert Louis Stevenson knew a great deal about the way young people think and feel, for in them he has perfectly described the child's world of imagination. As we grow older we lose that precious ability that Stevenson recounts of living a life of adventure while still safe behind a chair in the living room, or sailing the seas while still snug in bed. But the very small can see much in what grown-

ups take at surface value: the wind howling around the house at night, the first birdcall in the morning, a leaf floating on a stream. Grownups are frequently alone, but children always have their unseen playmate, their own imagination, who can make even the most ordinary amusements or pastimes exciting and fun.

The Scottish poet, essayist and novelist who wrote this remarkable collection was born in Edinburgh on November 13, 1850. Although he was a weak child and had frequent bouts with ill health, his ambitious father, a civil engineer, wanted his only son and only child to study engineering, but this career did not have the slightest appeal to Robert who had early expressed a preference for books and writing. However, as a second suitable alternative, Stevenson's father convinced him to study law. But Stevenson never practiced the law even though he was admitted to the bar. His adult life was spent far differently from the life of the staid, middle class, the role his father had tried to urge upon him. While in school he set himself the task of imitating the prose style of writers he admired, and in this way he began to develop his own sturdy style.

While in France (for the rest of his life Steven-

son would travel trying to find the right climate to best preserve his health) Stevenson met an attractive American woman, Fanny Vandergrift Osbourne, and fell in love. Mrs. Osbourne was separated from her husband, but returned to her native California. The romantic Stevenson was, however, undaunted by the move and decided to pursue his love across the ocean, a course of action which was much disapproved by his parents. In 1879 Stevenson undertook a very difficult trip to America. But, fortunately for Stevenson, this story had a happy ending, for Fanny Osbourne obtained a divorce from her first husband and married Stevenson. At first they lived destitute and roughed it by camping in California, but the elder Stevensons finally gave their reluctant approval and the three, Robert, Fanny, and her small son Lloyd, returned to Europe.

It was in Switzerland that Stevenson began, for the amusement of Lloyd, a series of parlor readings that culminated in one of his most widely read adventure stories, *Treasure Island*. *A Child's Garden of Verses* was also composed with Lloyd in mind. Stevenson had been living in Scotland, and there wrote two of his most famous short stories, "Thrawn Janet" and "The Merry Men,"

but the Scottish weather proved to be too much for his lungs and he moved on to France. In France he began *A Child's Garden of Verses* and finished it when he returned to England. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* emerged from Stevenson's pen at this time and insured Stevenson's fame.

Still in search of a beneficial climate Stevenson returned to America and lived in the Adirondacks. Finally, he began a voyage in hope of permanent relief from his chronic tuberculosis. With his wife he sailed from San Francisco. It was his last journey for he spent the rest of his life in the South Seas and died in Samoa in 1894.

Although some of his fiction reflected the pain and suffering that Stevenson endured throughout his life, *A Child's Garden of Verses* is writing of sunshine and innocence and expresses the two lines of his short and often quoted poem from the *Garden*:

The world is so full of a number of things
That I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

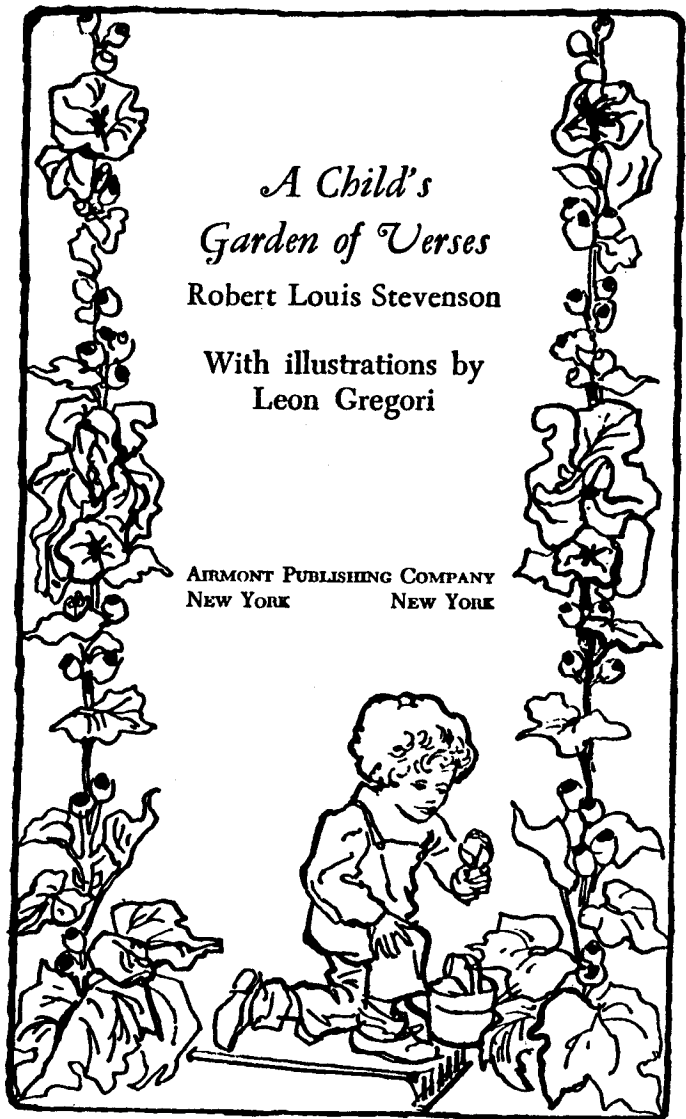
This is the world that is the child's birthright.

*A Child's
Garden of Verses*

Robert Louis Stevenson

With illustrations by
Leon Gregori

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