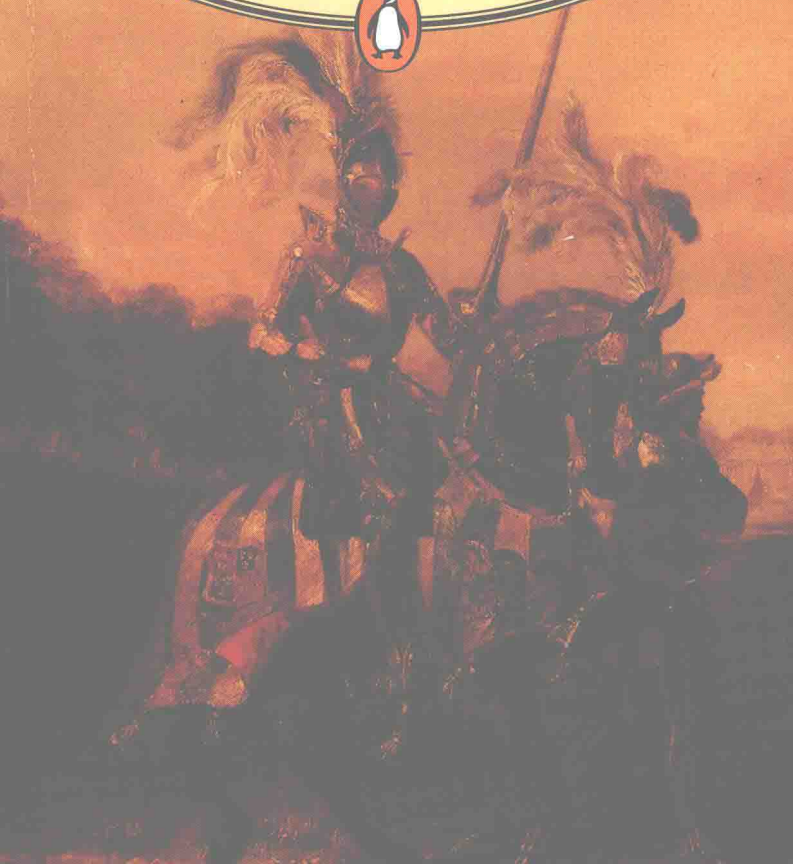


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THE BLACK ARROW

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON



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BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON (1850–94). As a novelist he is often noted for the powers of invention and depth of psychological insight found in his work; a skill defined by G. K. Chesterton as being able ‘to pick the right word up on the point of his pen’.

Born in Edinburgh in 1850, Robert Louis (originally Lewis) Balfour Stevenson was the son of a prosperous civil engineer. His father had plans for Stevenson to follow his profession, but his son’s ill health and weak disposition meant that an alternative career had to be decided upon. Choosing law as a compromise, Stevenson attended Edinburgh University to study for the bar, but his growing disillusion with the Presbyterian respectability of his parents’ class led to frequent clashes and he became distanced from them, preferring instead to lead a bohemian existence. His fascination for the city’s low life and the bizarre characters he came across proved rich material for his later stories. By the time Stevenson was admitted to the bar in 1875 he was already determined to become a professional writer. While still in his early twenties he began suffering from severe respiratory problems which the Scottish climate did nothing to alleviate. In an attempt to relieve his symptoms, he spent much of his life travelling to warmer countries, and it was while living in France in 1876 that he met his future wife, Mrs Fanny Osbourne, a woman ten years his senior. He followed her to California by emigrant ship in 1879, and they later married after her divorce was finalized. Stevenson’s early published works *An Inland Voyage* (1878) and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cervennes* (1879), based on his own adventures, were followed by a constant stream of articles and essays. However, it wasn’t until 1883 that his first full-length work of fiction, *Treasure Island*, appeared. A severe bout of illness followed by a period of rest at Bournemouth brought Stevenson into contact with Henry James, with whom he became close friends. The recognition Stevenson had received from *Treasure Island*

grew with the publication of *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Kidnapped* in 1886. In 1888 he took his family to the South Seas once more in search of a climate more conducive to his condition. Settling in Samoa he gained a reputation as a story-teller, especially among the natives. He died from a brain haemorrhage while working on his unfinished masterpiece, *Weir of Hermiston*, in 1894. Stevenson's Calvinistic upbringing and constant fight against ill-health led to a preoccupation with death and the darker side of human nature which is found in his work. Despite Stevenson's claim that 'fiction is to grown men what play is to the child', he had, by the end of his life, mastered an enormous range of fiction, from historical adventure stories and swashbuckling romances to gothic-style horror stories.

The Black Arrow is set in England during the Wars of the Roses, when York and Lancaster were each struggling arduously for the country's throne. Combining exciting adventure with a touching love story, *The Black Arrow* still has a wide appeal for today's reader.

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ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON



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DEDICATION

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 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.

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THE BLACK ARROW

A TALE OF THE TWO ROSES

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 country-folk 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 to-day. 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. Half-way 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 crossbow 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 Kettleby, 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 and 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 mien, armed with sword and spear, a steel salet on his head, a leather jack upon his body. He was a great man in these 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 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 farthing a shoot!"

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

"Draw a good bow!" cried Appleyard. "Yes! But who'll shoot me a good shoot? It's there the eye comes in, and the head between your shoulders. Now, what might you call a long shoot, Bennet Hatch?"

"Well," said Bennet, looking about him, "it would be a long shoot from here into the forest."

"Ay, it would be a longish shoot," said the old fellow, turning to look over his shoulder; and then he put up his hand over his eyes, and stood staring.

"Why, what are you looking at?" asked Bennet, with a chuckle. "Do you see Harry the Fift?"

The veteran continued looking up the hill in silence. The sun shone broadly over the shelving meadows; a few white sheep wandered browsing; all was still but the distant jangle of the bell.

"What is it, Appleyard?" asked Dick.

"Why, the birds," said Appleyard.

And, surely enough, over the top of the forest, where it ran down in a tongue among the meadows, and ended in a pair of goodly green elms, about a bow-shot from the field where they were standing, a flight of birds was skimming to and fro, in evident disorder.

"What of the birds?" said Bennet.

"Ay!" returned Appleyard, "y' are a wise man to go to war, Master Bennet. Birds are a good sentry; in forest places they be the first line of battle. Look you, now, if we lay here in camp, there might be archers skulking down to get the wind of us; and here would you be, none the wiser!"

"Why, old shrew," said Hatch, "there be no men nearer us than Sir Daniel's, at Kettley; y' are as safe as in London Tower; and ye raise scares upon a man for a few chaffinches and sparrows!"

"Hear him!" grinned Appleyard. "How many a rogue would give his two crop ears to have a shoot at either of us! Saint Michael, man! they hate us like two polecats!"

"Well, sooth it is, they hate Sir Daniel," answered Hatch, a little sobered.

"Ay, they hate Sir Daniel, and they hate every man that serves with him," said Appleyard; "and in the first order of hating, they hate Bennet Hatch and old Nicholas the Bowman. See ye here: if there was a stout fellow yonder in the wood-edge, and you and I stood fair for him—as, by Saint George, we stand!—which, think ye, would he choose?"

"You, for a good wager," answered Hatch.

"My surcoat to a leather belt, it would be you!" cried the old archer. "Ye burned Grimstone, Bennet—they'll ne'er forgive you that, my master. And as for me, I'll soon be in a good place, God grant, and out of bow-shoot—ay, and cannon-shoot—of all their malices. I am an old man, and draw fast to homeward, where the bed is ready. But for you, Bennet, y' are to remain behind here at your own peril, and if ye come to my years unhang'd, the old true-blue English spirit will be dead."

"Y' are the shrewishest old dolt in Tunstall Forest," returned Hatch, visibly ruffled by these threats. "Get ye to your arms before Sir Oliver come, and leave prating for one good while. An ye had talked so much with Harry the Fift, his ears would ha' been richer than his pocket."

An arrow sang in the air, like a huge hornet; it struck old Appleyard between the shoulder-blades, and pierced him clean through, and he fell forward on his face among the cabbages. Hatch, with a broken cry, leapt into the air; then, stooping double, he ran for the cover of the house. And in the meanwhile Dick Shelton had dropped behind a lilac, and had his cross-bow bent and shouldered, covering the point of the forest.

Not a leaf stirred. The sheep were patiently browsing; the birds had settled. But there lay the old man, with a clothyard arrow standing in his back; and there were Hatch holding to the gable, and Dick crouching and ready behind the lilac bush.

"D'ye see aught?" cried Hatch.

"Not a twig stirs," said Dick.

"I think shame to leave him lying," said Bennet, coming forward once more with hesitating steps and a very pale countenance. "Keep a good eye on the wood, Master Shelton—keep a clear eye on the wood. The saints assoil us! here was a good shoot!"

Bennet raised the old archer on his knee. He was

not yet dead ; his face worked, and his eyes shut and opened like machinery, and he had a most horrible, ugly look of one in pain.

"Can ye hear, old Nick ?" asked Hatch. "Have ye a last wish before ye wend, old brother ?"

"Pluck out the shaft, and let me pass, a' Mary's name !" gasped Appleyard. "I be done with Old England. Pluck it out !"

"Master Dick," said Bennet, "come hither, and pull me a good pull upon the arrow. He would fain pass, the poor sinner."

Dick laid down his crossbow, and, pulling hard upon the arrow, drew it forth. A gush of blood followed ; the old archer scrambled half upon his feet, called once upon the name of God, and then fell dead. Hatch, upon his knees among the cabbages, prayed fervently for the welfare of the passing spirit. But even as he prayed, it was plain that his mind was still divided, and he kept ever an eye upon the corner of the wood from which the shot had come. When he had done, he got to his feet again, drew off one of his mailed gauntlets, and wiped his pale face, which was all wet with terror.

"Ay," he said, "it'll be my turn next."

"Who hath done this, Bennet ?" Richard asked, still holding the arrow in his hand.

"Nay, the saints know," said Hatch. "Here are a good two score Christian souls that we have hunted out of house and holding, he and I. He has paid his shot, poor shrew, nor will it be long, mayhap, ere I pay mine. Sir Daniel driveth over-hard."

"This is a strange shaft," said the lad, looking at the arrow in his hand.

"Ay, by my faith !" cried Bennet. "Black, and black-feathered. Here is an ill-favoured shaft, by my sooth ! for black, they say, bodes burial. And here be words written. Wipe the blood away. What read ye ?"