



## Robert Louis Stevenson



IF there be a writer of our language, at the present moment, who has the effect of making us forget the extinction of the pleasant fashion of the literary portrait, it is certainly the bright particular genius

whose name is written at the head of these remarks. Mr. Stevenson fairly challenges portraiture, as we pass him on the highway of literature (if that be the road, rather than some wandering, sun-checked by-lane that he may be said to follow), just as the possible model, in local attire, challenges the painter who wanders through the streets of a foreign town looking for subjects. He gives us new ground to wonder why the effort to fix a face and figure, to seize a literary character and transfer it to the canvas of the critic, should have fallen into such discredit among us and have given way to the mere multiplication of little private judgment-seats, where the scales and the judicial wig, both of them considerably awry and not rendered more august by the company of a vicious-looking switch, have taken the place, as the symbols of office, of the kindly, disinterested palette and brush. It has become the fashion to be effective at the expense of the sitter, to make some little point, or inflict some little dig, with a heated party air, rather than to catch a talent in the fact, follow its line, and put a finger on its essence; so that the exquisite art of criticism, smothered in grossness, finds itself turned into a question of "sides." The critic industriously keeps his score, but it is seldom to be hoped that the author, criminal though he may be, will be apprehended by justice through the handbills given out in the case; for it is of the essence of a happy description that it shall have been preceded by a happy observation and a free curiosity; and desuetude, as we say, has overtaken these amiable, uninvincible faculties, which have not the advantage of organs and chairs.

I hasten to add that it is not the purpose of these few pages to restore their luster, or to bring back the more penetrating vision of which we lament the disappearance. No individual can bring it back, for the light that we look at things by is, after all, made by all of us. It is sufficient to note, in passing, that if Mr. Stevenson had presented himself in an age or in a country of portraiture, the paint-

ers would certainly each have had a turn at him. The easels and benches would have bristled, the circle would have been close, and quick, from the canvas to the sitter, the rising and falling of heads. It has happened to all of us to have gone into a studio, a studio of pupils, and seen the thick cluster of bent backs and the conscious model in the midst. It has happened to us to be struck, or not to be struck, with the beauty or the symmetry of this personage, and to have made some remark which, whether expressing admiration or disappointment, has elicited from one of the attentive workers the exclamation, "Character—character is what he has!" These words may be applied to Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson: in the language of that art which depends most on observation, character—character is what he has. He is essentially a model, in the sense of a sitter; I do not mean, of course, in the sense of a pattern or a guiding light. And if the figures who have a life in literature may also be divided into two great classes, we may add that he is conspicuously one of the draped; he would never, if I may be allowed the expression, pose for the nude. There are writers who present themselves before the critic with just the amount of drapery that is necessary for decency, but Mr. Stevenson is not one of these; he makes his appearance in an amplitude of costume. His costume is part of the character of which I just now spoke; it never occurs to us to ask how he would look without it. Before all things he is a writer with a style—a model with a complexity of curious and picturesque garments. It is by the cut and the color of this rich and becoming frippery—I use the term endearingly, as a painter might—that he arrests the eye and solicits the brush.

That is, frankly, half the charm he has for us, that he wears a dress and wears it with courage, with a certain cock of the hat and tinkle of the supererogatory sword; or, in other words, that he is curious of expression, and regards the literary form not simply as a code of signals, but as the keyboard of a piano and as so much plastic material. He has that vice deplored by Mr. Herbert Spencer, a manner—a manner for a manner's sake, it may sometimes doubtless be said. He is as different as possible from the sort of writer who regards words as numbers and a page as the mere addition of them; much more, to carry out our image,

the dictionary stands for him as a wardrobe, and a proposition as a button for his coat. Mr. William Archer, in an article\* so gracefully and ingeniously turned that the writer may almost be accused of imitating even while he deprecates, speaks of him as a votary of "lightness of touch" at any cost, and remarks that "he is not only philosophically content, but deliberately resolved, that his readers shall look first to his manner and only in the second place to his matter." I shall not attempt to gainsay this; I cite it rather, for the present, because it carries out my own sense. Mr. Stevenson delights in a style, and his own has nothing accidental or diffident; it is eminently conscious of its responsibilities and meets them with a kind of gallantry — as if language were a pretty woman and a person who proposes to handle it had, of necessity, to be something of a Don Juan. This element of the gallant is a noticeable part of his nature, and it is rather odd that, at the same time, a striking feature of that nature should be an absence of care for things feminine. His books are for the most part books without women, and it is not women who fall most in love with them. But Mr. Stevenson does not need, as we may say, a petticoat to inflame him; a happy collocation of words will serve the purpose, or a singular image, or the bright eye of a passing conceit, and he will carry off a pretty paradox without so much as a scuffle. The tone of letters is in him — the tone of letters as distinct from that of philosophy or of those industries whose uses are supposed to be immediate. Many readers, no doubt, consider that he carries it too far; they manifest an impatience for some glimpse of his moral message. They may be heard to ask what it is he proposes to deduce, to prove, to establish, with such a variety of paces and graces.

The main thing that he establishes, to my own perception, is that it is a delight to read him and that he renews this delight by a constant variety of experiment. Of this anon, however; and meanwhile it may be noted as a curious characteristic of current fashions that the writer whose effort is perceptibly that of the artist is very apt to find himself thrown on the defensive. A work of literature is a form, but the author who betrays a consciousness of the responsibilities involved in this circumstance not rarely perceives himself to be regarded as an uncanny personage. The usual judgment is that he may be artistic, but that he must not be too much so; that way, apparently, lies something worse than madness. This queer superstition has so successfully imposed itself that the mere fact of having

\* "R. L. Stevenson: his Style and Thought." "The [London] Times," November, 1885.

been indifferent to such a danger constitutes in itself an originality. How few they are in number and how soon we could name them, the writers of English prose, at the present moment, the quality of whose prose is personal, expressive, renewed at each attempt! The state of things that would have been expected to be the rule has become the exception, and an exception for which, most of the time, an apology appears to be thought necessary. A mill that grinds with regularity and with a certain commercial fineness — that is the image suggested by the manner of a good many of the fraternity. They turn out an article for which there is a demand, they keep a shop for a specialty, and the business is carried on in accordance with a useful, well-tested prescription. It is just because he has no specialty that Mr. Stevenson is an individual, and because his curiosity is the only receipt by which he produces. Each of his books is an independent effort — a window opened to a different view. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is as dissimilar as possible from "Treasure Island"; "Virginibus Puerisque" has nothing in common with "The New Arabian Nights," and I should never have supposed "A Child's Garden of Verses" to be from the hand of the author of "Prince Otto."

Though Mr. Stevenson cares greatly for his phrase, as every writer should who respects himself and his art, it takes no very attentive reading of his volumes to show that it is not what he cares for most, and that he regards an expressive style only, after all, as a means. It seems to me the fault of Mr. Archer's interesting paper that it suggests too much that the author of these volumes considers the art of expression as an end — a game of words. He finds that Mr. Stevenson is not serious, that he neglects a whole side of life, that he has no perception, and no consciousness, of suffering; that he speaks as a happy but heartless pagan, living only in his senses (which the critic admits to be exquisitely fine), and that, in a world full of heaviness, he is not sufficiently aware of the philosophic limitations of mere technical skill. (In sketching these aberrations Mr. Archer himself, by the way, displays anything but ponderosity of hand.) He is not the first reader, and he will not be the last, who shall have been irritated by Mr. Stevenson's jauntiness. That jauntiness is an essential part of his genius; but, to my sense, it ceases to be irritating — it indeed becomes positively touching, and constitutes an appeal to sympathy and even to tenderness — when once one has perceived what lies beneath the dancing-tune to which he mostly moves. Much as he cares for his phrase he cares more for life, and for a certain transcendently lovable

part of it. He feels, as it seems to us, and that is not given to every one; this constitutes a philosophy which Mr. Archer fails to read between his lines—the respectable, desirable moral which many a reader doubtless finds that he neglects to point. He does not feel everything equally, by any manner of means; but his feelings are always his reasons; he regards them, whatever they may be, as sufficiently honorable, does not disguise them in other names or colors, and looks at whatever he meets in the brilliant candle-light that they shed. As in his extreme artistic vivacity he seems really disposed to try everything, he has tried once, by way of a change, to be inhuman, and there is a hard glitter about "Prince Otto" which seems to indicate that in this case, too, he has succeeded, as he has done in most of the feats that he has attempted. But "Prince Otto" is even less like his other productions than his other productions are like each other.

The part of life that he cares for most is youth, and the direct expression of the love of youth is the beginning and the end of his message. His appreciation of this delightful period amounts to a passion; and a passion, in the age in which we live, strikes us, on the whole, as a sufficient philosophy. It ought to satisfy Mr. Archer, and there are writers graver than Mr. Stevenson on whose behalf no such moral motive can be alleged. Mingled with his almost equal love of a literary surface it represents a real originality. This combination is the key-note of Mr. Stevenson's faculty and the explanation of his perversities. The feelings of one's teens, and even of an earlier period (for the delights of crawling, and almost of the rattle, are embodied in "A Child's Garden of Verses"), and the feeling for happy turns—these, in the last analysis (and his sense of a happy turn is of the subtlest), are the corresponding halves of his character. If "Prince Otto" and "Dr. Jekyll" left me a clearer field for the assertion, I should say that everything he has written is a direct apology for boyhood; or rather (for it must be confessed that Mr. Stevenson's tone is seldom apologetic) a direct rhapsody on the age of little jackets. Even members of the very numerous class who have held their breath over "Treasure Island" may shrug their shoulders at this account of the author's religion; but it is none the less a great pleasure—the highest reward of observation—to put one's hand on a rare illustration, and Mr. Stevenson is certainly rare. What makes him so is the singular maturity of the expression that he has given to young sentiments; he judges them, measures them, sees them from the outside, as well as entertains them. He describes credulity

with all the resources of experience, and represents a crude stage with infinite ripeness. In a word, he is an artist accomplished even to sophistication, whose constant theme is the unsophisticated. Sometimes, as in "Kidnapped," the art is so ripe that it lifts even the subject into the general air; the execution is so serious that the idea (the idea of a boy's romantic adventures) becomes a matter of universal relations. What he prizes most in the boy's ideal is the imaginative side of it, the capacity for successful make-believe. The general freshness in which this is a part of the gloss seems to him the divinest thing in life; considerably more divine, for instance, than the passion usually regarded as the supremely tender one. The idea of making believe appeals to him much more than the idea of making love. That delightful little book of rhymes, the "Child's Garden," commemorates, from beginning to end, the picturing, personifying, dramatizing faculty of infancy, the view of life from the level of the nursery-fender. The volume is a wonder, for the extraordinary vividness with which it reproduces early impressions; a child might have written it if a child could see childhood from the outside, for it would seem that only a child is really near enough to the nursery-floor. And what is peculiar to Mr. Stevenson is that it is his own childhood he appears to delight in, and not the personal presence of little darlings. Oddly enough, there is no strong implication that he is fond of babies; he does not speak as a parent, or an uncle, or an educator—he speaks as a contemporary absorbed in his own game. That game is almost always a vision of dangers and triumphs; and if emotion, with him, infallibly resolves itself into memory, so memory is an evocation of throbs and thrills and suspense. He has given to the world the romance of boyhood, as others have produced that of the peerage, the police, and the medical profession.

This amounts to saying that what he is most curious of in life is heroism,—personal gallantry, if need be, with a manner, or a banner,—though he is also abundantly capable of enjoying it when it is artless. The delightful exploits of Jim Hawkins, in "Treasure Island," are unaffectedly performed; but none the less "the finest action is the better for a piece of purple," as the author remarks in the paper on "The English Admirals," in "Virginibus Puerisque"—a paper of which the moral is, largely, that "we learn to desire a grand air in our heroes; and such a knowledge of the human stage as shall make them put the dots on their own i's and leave us in no suspense as to when they mean to be heroic." The love of brave words as well as

brave deeds—which is simply Mr. Stevenson's essential love of style—is recorded in this little paper with a charming, slightly sophistical ingenuity. "They served their guns merrily, when it came to fighting, and they had the readiest ear for a bold, honorable sentiment of any class of men the world ever produced." The author goes on to say that most men of high destinies have even high-sounding names. Alan Breck, in "Kidnapped," is a wonderful picture of the union of courage and swagger; the little Jacobite adventurer, a figure worthy of Scott at his best, and representing the highest point that Mr. Stevenson's talent has reached, shows us that a marked taste for tawdry finery—tarnished and tattered, some of it, indeed, by ticklish occasions—is quite compatible with a perfectly high mettle. Alan Breck is, at bottom, a study of the love of glory, carried out with extreme psychological truth. When the love of glory is of an inferior order, the reputation is cultivated rather than the opportunity; but when it is a pure passion, the opportunity is cultivated for the sake of the reputation. Mr. Stevenson's kindness for adventurers extends even to the humblest of all, the mountebank and the strolling player, or even the peddler whom he declares that in his foreign travels he is habitually taken for, as we see in the whimsical apology for vagabonds which winds up "An Inland Voyage." The hungry conjurer, the gymnast whose *maillot* is loose, have something of the glamour of the hero, inasmuch as they, too, pay with their person.

To be even one of the outskirts of art leaves a fine stamp on a man's countenance. . . . That is the kind of thing that reconciles me to life; a ragged, tipping, incompetent old rogue, with the manners of a gentleman and the vanity of an artist, to keep up his self-respect!

What reconciles Mr. Stevenson to life is the idea that in the first place it offers the widest field that we know of for odd doings, and that in the second these odd doings are the best of pegs to hang a sketch in three lines or a paradox in three pages.

As it is not odd, but extremely usual, to marry, he deprecates that course in "Virginius Puerisque," the collection of short essays which is most a record of his opinions—that is, largely, of his likes and dislikes. It all comes back to his sympathy with the juvenile, and that feeling about life which leads him to regard women as so many superfluous girls in a boy's game. They are almost wholly absent from his pages (the main exception is "Prince Otto," though there is a Clara apiece in "The Rajah's Diamond" and "The Pavilion on the Links"), for they don't like ships and pistols and fights; they encumber the

decks and require separate apartments; and, almost worst of all, have not the highest literary standard. Why should a person marry, when he might be swinging a cutlass or looking for a buried treasure? Why should he go to the altar when he might be polishing his prose? It is one of those curious, and, to my sense, fascinating inconsistencies that we encounter in Mr. Stevenson's mind that, though he takes such an interest in the childish life, he takes no interest in the fireside. He has an indulgent glance for it in the verses of the "Garden," but to his view the normal child is the child who absents himself from the family-circle, in fact when he can, in imagination when he cannot, in the disguise of a buccaneer. Girls don't do this, and women are only grown-up girls, unless it be the delightful maiden, fit daughter of an imperial race, whom he commemorates in "An Inland Voyage."

A girl at school in France began to describe one of our regiments on parade to her French school-mates; and as she went on, she told me the recollection grew so vivid, she became so proud to be the countrywoman of such soldiers, and so sorry to be in another country, that her voice failed her, and she burst into tears. I have never forgotten that girl, and I think she very nearly deserves a statue. To call her a young lady, with all its niminy associations, would be to offer her an insult. She may rest assured of one thing, although she never should marry a heroic general, never see any great or immediate result of her life, she will not have lived in vain for her native land.

There is something of that in Mr. Stevenson. When he begins to describe a British regiment on parade (or something of that sort) he, too, almost breaks down for emotion, which is why I have been careful to traverse the insinuation that he is primarily a chiseler of prose. If things had gone differently with him (I must permit myself this allusion to his personal situation, and I shall venture to follow it with two or three others), he might have been an historian of famous campaigns—a great painter of battle-pieces. Of course, however, in this capacity it would not have done for him to break down for emotion.

Although he remarks that marriage "is a field of battle, and not a bed of roses," he points out repeatedly that it is a terrible renunciation, and somehow, in strictness, incompatible even with honor—the sort of roving, trumpeting honor that appeals most to his sympathy. After that step

there are no more by-path meadows where you may innocently linger, but the road lies long and straight and dusty to the grave. . . . You may think you had a conscience and believed in God; but what is a conscience to a wife? . . . To marry is to domesticate the Recording Angel. Once you are married, there is nothing left for you, not even suicide, but to be good. . . . How, then, in such an atmosphere of compromise, to keep honor bright and abstain from base capitulations? . . . The proper qualities of each sex are, in-

deed, eternally surprising to the other. Between the Latin and the Teuton races there are similar divergences, not to be bridged by the most liberal sympathy. . . . It is better to face the fact and know, when you marry, that you take into your life a creature of equal if unlike frailties; whose weak human heart beats no more tunefully than yours.

If there is a grimness in that, it is as near as Mr. Stevenson ever comes to being grim, and we have only to turn the page to find the corrective — something delicately genial, at least, if not very much less sad:

"The blind bow-boy" who smiles upon us from the end of terraces in old Dutch gardens laughingly hails his bird-bolts among a fleeting generation. But for as fast as ever he shoots, the game dissolves and disappears into eternity from under his falling arrows; this one is gone ere he is struck; the other has but time to make one gesture and give one passionate cry; and they are all the things of a moment.

That is an admission that though it is soon over, the great sentimental surrender is inevitable. And there is geniality too, still over the page (in regard to quite another matter), geniality, at least, for the profession of letters, in the declaration that there is

one thing you can never make Philistine natures understand; one thing which yet lies on the surface, remains as unseizable to their wits as a high flight of metaphysics — namely, that the business of life is mainly carried on by the difficult art of literature, and according to a man's proficiency in that art shall be the freedom and fullness of his intercourse with other men.

Yet it is difficult not to believe that the ideal in which our author's spirit might most gratefully have rested would have been the character of the paterfamilias, when the eye falls on such a charming piece of observation as these lines about children, in the admirable paper on "Child's Play":

If it were not for this perpetual imitation, we should be tempted to fancy they despised us outright, or only considered us in the light of creatures brutally strong and brutally silly, among whom they condescended to dwell in obedience, like a philosopher at a barbarous court.

## II.

WE know very little about a talent till we know where it grew up, and it would halt terribly at the start any account of the author of "Kidnapped" which should omit to insist promptly that he is a Scot of the Scots. Two facts, to my perception, go a great way to explain his composition, the first of which is that his boyhood was passed in the shadow of Edinburgh Castle, and the second, that he came of a family that had set up great lights on the coast. His grandfather, his uncle, were famous constructors of light-houses, and the name of the race is associated above all with the beautiful and beneficent tower of Skerryvore. We may exaggerate the way in which, in an im-

aginative youth, the sense of the "story" of things would feed upon the impressions of Edinburgh — though I suspect it would be difficult really to do so. The streets are so full of history and poetry, of picture and song, of associations springing from strong passions and strange characters, that for my own part I find myself thinking of an urchin going and coming there as I used to think — wonderingly, enviously — of the small boys who figured as supernumeraries, pages, or imps in showy scenes at the theater; the place seems the background, the complicated "set" of a drama, and the children the mysterious little beings who are made free of the magic world. How must it not have beckoned on the imagination to pass and repass, on the way to school, under the Castle rock, conscious acutely, yet familiarly, of the gray citadel on the summit, lighted up with the tartans and bagpipes of Highland regiments! Mr. Stevenson's mind, from an early age, was furnished with the concrete Highlander, who must have had much of the effect that we nowadays call decorative. I encountered somewhere a fanciful paper of our author's\* in which there is a reflection of half-holiday afternoons and, unless my own fancy plays me a trick, of lights red, in the winter dusk, in the high-placed windows of the Old Town — a delightful rhapsody on the penny sheets of figures for the puppet-shows of infancy, in life-like position, and awaiting the impatient yet careful scissors. "If landscapes were sold," he says in "Travels with a Donkey," "like the sheets of characters of my boyhood, one penny plain and twopence colored, I should go the length of twopence every day of my life."

Indeed, the color of Scotland has entered into him altogether, and though, oddly enough, he has written but little about his native country, his happiest work shows, I think, that she has the best of his ability. "Kidnapped" (whose inadequate title I may deplore in passing) breathes in every line the feeling of moor and loch, and is the finest of his longer stories; and "Thrawn Janet," a masterpiece in thirteen pages (lately republished in the volume of "The Merry Men"), is, among the shorter ones, the strongest in execution. The latter consists of a gruesome anecdote of the supernatural, related in the Scotch dialect; and the genuineness which this medium — at the sight of which, in general, the face of the reader grows long — wears in Mr. Stevenson's hands is a proof of how living the question of form always is to him, and what a variety of answers he has for it. It never would have occurred to us that the style of "Travels with a Donkey," or "Virginibus Puerisque," and the

\* Since reprinted in "Memories and Portraits."

idiom of the parish of Balweary could be a conception of the same mind. If it is a good fortune for a genius to have had such a country as Scotland for its primary stuff, this is doubly the case when there has been a certain process of detachment, of extreme secularization. Mr. Stevenson has been emancipated—he is, as we may say, a Scotchman of the world. None other, I think, could have drawn with such a mixture of sympathetic and ironical observation the character of the canny young Lowlander David Balfour, a good boy but an exasperating. “Treasure Island,” “The New Arabian Nights,” “Prince Otto,” “Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,” are not very directly founded on observation; but that quality comes in with extreme fineness as soon as the subject is Scotch.

I have been wondering whether there is something more than this that our author's pages would tell us about him, or whether that particular something is in the mind of an admirer, because he happens to have had other lights upon it. It has been possible for so acute a critic as Mr. William Archer to read pure high spirits and the gospel of the young man rejoicing in his strength and his matutinal cold bath between the lines of Mr. Stevenson's prose. And it is a fact that the note of a morbid sensibility is so absent from his pages, they contain so little reference to infirmity and suffering, that we feel a trick has really been played upon us on discovering by accident the actual state of the case with the writer who has indulged in the most enthusiastic allusion to the joy of existence. We must permit ourselves another mention of his personal situation, for it adds immensely to the interest of volumes through which there draws so strong a current of life to know that they are not only the work of an invalid, but have largely been written in bed, in dreary “health resorts,” in the intervals of sharp attacks. There is almost nothing in them to lead us to guess this; the direct evidence, indeed, is almost all contained in the limited compass of “The Silverado Squatters.” In such a case, however, it is the indirect that is the most eloquent, and I know not where to look for that, unless in the paper called “Ordered South” and its companion “Æs Triplex,” in “Virginibus Puerisque.” It is impossible to read “Ordered South” attentively without feeling that it is personal; the reflections it contains are from experience, not from fancy. The places and climates to which the invalid is carried to recover or to die are mainly beautiful, but

in his heart of hearts he has to confess that they are not beautiful for him. . . . He is like an enthusiast leading about with him a stolid, indifferent tourist. There is some one by who is out of sympathy with the

scene, and is not moved up to the measure of the occasion; and that some one is himself. . . . He seems to himself to touch things with muffled hands and to see through a veil. . . . Many a white town that sits far out on the promontory, many a comely fold of wood on the mountain-side, beckons and allures his imagination day after day, and is yet as inaccessible to his feet as the clefts and gorges of the clouds. The sense of distance grows upon him wonderfully; and after some feverish efforts and the fretful uneasiness of the first few days he falls contentedly in with the restrictions of his weakness. . . . He feels, if he is to be thus tenderly weaned from the passion of life, thus gradually inducted into the slumber of death, that when at last the end comes it will come quietly and fitly. . . . He will pray for Medea: when she comes, let her rejuvenate or slay.

The second of the short essays I have mentioned has a taste of mortality only because the purpose of it is to insist that the only sane behavior is to leave death and the accidents that lead to it out of our calculations. Life “is a honeymoon with us all through, and none of the longest. Small blame to us if we give our whole hearts to this glowing bride of ours”; the person who does so “makes a very different acquaintance with the world, keeps all his pulses going true and fast, and gathers impetus as he runs, until, if he be running towards anything better than wildfire, he may shoot up and become a constellation in the end.” Nothing can be more deplorable than to “forego all the issues of living in a parlor with a regulated temperature.” Mr. Stevenson adds that as for those whom the gods love dying young, a man dies too young at whatever age he parts with life. The testimony of “Æs Triplex” to the author's own disabilities is, after all, very indirect; it consists mainly in the general protest not so much against the fact of extinction as against the theory of it. The reader only asks himself why the hero of “Travels with a Donkey,” the historian of Alan Breck, should think of these things. His appreciation of the active side of life has such a note of its own that we are surprised to find that it proceeds in a considerable measure from an intimate acquaintance with the passive. It seems too anomalous that the writer who has most cherished the idea of a certain free exposure should also be the one who has been reduced most to looking for it within, and that the figures of adventurers who, at least in our literature of to-day, are the most vivid, should be the most vicarious. The truth is, of course, that, as the “Travels with a Donkey” and “An Inland Voyage” abundantly show, the author has a fund of reminiscences. He did not spend his younger years “in a parlor with a regulated temperature.” A reader who happens to be aware of how much it has been his later fate to do so may be excused for finding an added source of interest—something, indeed, deeply

and constantly touching—in this association of peculiarly restrictive conditions with the vision of high spirits and romantic accidents of a kind of honorably picturesque career. Mr. Stevenson is, however, distinctly, in spite of his occasional practice of the gruesome, a frank optimist, an observer who not only loves life, but does not shrink from the responsibility of recommending it. There is a systematic brightness in him which testifies to this and which is, after all, but one of the innumerable ingenuities of patience. What is remarkable in his case is that his productions should constitute an exquisite expression, a sort of whimsical gospel, of enjoyment. The only difference between "An Inland Voyage," or "Travels with a Donkey" and "The New Arabian Nights," or "Treasure Island," or "Kidnapped," is, that in the later books the enjoyment is reflective,—though it stimulates spontaneity with singular art,—whereas in the first two it is natural and, as it were, historical.

These little histories—the first volumes, if I mistake not, that introduced Mr. Stevenson to lovers of good writing—abound in charming illustrations of his disposition to look at the world as a not exactly refined, but glorified, pacified Bohemia. They narrate the quest of personal adventure—on one occasion in a canoe on the Sambre and the Oise, and on another at a donkey's tail over the hills and valleys of the Cévennes. I well remember that when I read them, in their novelty, upward of ten years ago, I seemed to see the author, unknown as yet to fame, jump before my eyes into a style. His steps in literature presumably had not been many; yet he had mastered his form—it had in these cases, perhaps, more substance than his matter—and a singular air of literary experience. It partly, though not completely, explains the phenomenon, that he had already been able to write the exquisite little story of "Will of the Mill," published previously to "An Inland Voyage," and now republished in the volume of "The Merry Men"; for in "Will of the Mill" there is something exceedingly rare, poetical, and unexpected, with that most fascinating quality a work of imagination can have, a dash of alternative mystery as to its meaning, an air—the air of life itself—of half inviting, half defying, you to interpret. This brief but finished composition stood in the same relation to the usual "magazine story" that a glass of Johannisberg occupies to a draught of table d'hôte *vin ordinaire*.

One evening, he asked the miller where the river went. . . . "It goes out into the lowlands, and waters the great corn country, and runs through a sight of fine cities (so they say) where kings live all alone in great palaces, with a sentry walking up and down before the door. And it goes under bridges with stone

men upon them, looking down and smiling so curious at the water, and living folks leaning their elbows on the wall and looking over too. And then it goes on and on, and down through marshes and sands, until at last it falls into the sea, where the ships are that bring parrots and tobacco from the Indies."

It is impossible not to open one's eyes at such a paragraph as that, especially if one has taken a common texture for granted. Will of the Mill spends his life in the valley through which the river runs, and through which, year after year, post-chaises and wagons, and pedestrians, and once an army, "horse and foot, cannon and timbrel, drum and standard," take their way, in spite of the dreams he has once had of seeing the mysterious world, and it is not till death comes that he goes on his travels. He ends by keeping an inn, where he converses with many more initiated spirits, and though he is an amiable man, he dies a bachelor, having broken off, with more plainness than he would have used had he been less untraveled,—of course he remains sadly provincial,—his engagement to the parson's daughter. The story is in the happiest key, and suggests all kinds of things, but what does it in particular represent? The advantage of waiting, perhaps—the valuable truth, that, one by one, we tide over our impatiences. There are sagacious people who hold that if one does not answer a letter it ends by answering itself. So the sub-title of Mr. Stevenson's tale might be "The Beauty of Procrastination." If you don't indulge your curiosities your slackness itself makes at last a kind of rich element, and it comes to very much the same thing in the end. When it came to the point, poor Will had not even the curiosity to marry; and the author leaves us in stimulating doubt as to whether he judges him too selfish or only too philosophic.

I find myself speaking of Mr. Stevenson's last volume (at the moment I write) before I have spoken, in any detail, of its predecessors, which I must let pass as a sign that I lack space for a full enumeration. I may mention two more of his productions as completing the list of those that have a personal reference. "The Silverado Squatters" describes a picnicking episode, undertaken on grounds of health, on a mountain-top in California; but this free sketch, which contains a hundred humorous touches, and in the figure of Irvine Lovelands one of Mr. Stevenson's most veracious portraits, is perhaps less vivid, as it is certainly less painful, than those other pages in which, some years ago, he commemorated the twelvemonth he spent in America—the history of a journey from New York to San Francisco in an emigrant-train, performed as the sequel to a voyage across the Atlantic in the same severe conditions. He has never



made his points better than in that half-humorous, half-tragical recital, nor given a more striking instance of his talent for reproducing the feeling of queer situations and contacts. It is much to be regretted that this little masterpiece has not been brought to light a second time, as also that he has not given the world — as I believe he came very near doing — his observations in the steerage of an Atlantic liner. If, as I say, our author has a taste for the impressions of Bohemia, he has been very consistent and has not shrunk from going far afield in search of them. And as I have already been indiscreet, I may add that if it has been his fate to be converted in fact from the sardonic view of matrimony, this occurred under an influence which should have the particular sympathy of American readers. He went to California for his wife; and Mrs. Stevenson, as appears moreover by the title-page of the work, has had a hand — evidently a light and practiced one — in “The Dynamiter,” the second series, characterized by a rich extravagance, of “The New Arabian Nights.” “The Silverado Squatters” is the history of a honeymoon — prosperous, it would seem, putting Irvine Lovelands aside, save for the death of dog Chuchu “in his teens, after a life so shadowed and troubled, continually shaken with alarms, and the tear of elegant sentiment permanently in his eye.”

Mr. Stevenson has a theory of composition in regard to the novel, on which he is to be congratulated, as any positive and genuine conviction of this kind is vivifying so long as it is not narrow. The breath of the novelist's being is his liberty; and the incomparable virtue of the form he uses is that it lends itself to views innumerable and diverse, to every variety of illustration. There is certainly no other mold of so large a capacity. The doctrine of M. Zola himself, so meager if literally taken, is fruitful, inasmuch as in practice he romantically departs from it. Mr. Stevenson does not need to depart, his individual taste being as much to pursue the romantic as his principle is to defend it. Fortunately, in England to-day, it is not much attacked. The triumphs that are to be won in the portrayal of the strange, the improbable, the heroic, especially as these things shine from afar in the credulous eye of youth, are his strongest, most constant incentive. On one happy occasion, in relating the history of “Doctor Jekyll,” he has seen them as they present themselves to a maturer vision. “Doctor Jekyll” is not a “boys' book,” nor yet is “Prince Otto”; the latter, however, is not, like the former, an experiment in mystification — it is, I think, more than anything else, an experiment in style, conceived one summer's day, when the author had

given the reins to his high appreciation of Mr. George Meredith. It is perhaps the most literary of his works, but it is not the most natural. It is one of those coquetries, as we may call them for want of a better word, which may be observed in Mr. Stevenson's activity — a kind of artful inconsequence. It is easy to believe that if his strength permitted him to be a more abundant writer he would still more frequently play this eminently literary trick — that of dodging off in a new direction — upon those who might have fancied they knew all about him. I made the reflection, in speaking of “Will of the Mill,” that there is a kind of anticipatory malice in the subject of that fine story; as if the writer had intended to say to his reader, “You will never guess, from the unctious with which I describe the life of a man who never stirred five miles from home, that I am destined to make my greatest hits in treating of the rovers of the deep.” Even here, however, the author's characteristic irony would have come in; for — the rare chances of life being what he most keeps his eye on — the uncommon belongs as much to the way the inquiring Will sticks to his door-sill as to the incident, say, of John Silver and his men, when they are dragging Jim Hawkins to his doom, hearing, in the still woods of Treasure Island, the strange hoot of the Maroon.

The novelist who leaves the extraordinary out of his account is liable to awkward confrontations, as we are compelled to reflect in this age of newspapers and of universal publicity. The next report of the next divorce case — to give an instance — shall offer us a picture of astounding combinations of circumstance and behavior, and the annals of any energetic race are rich in curious anecdote and startling example. That interesting compilation, “Vicissitudes of Families,” is but a superficial record of strange accidents; the family — taken, of course, in the long piece — is, as a general thing, a catalogue of odd specimens and strong situations, and we must remember that the most singular products are those which are not exhibited. Mr. Stevenson leaves so wide a margin for the wonderful — it impinges with easy assurance upon the text — that he escapes the danger of being brought up by cases he has not allowed for. When he allows for Mr. Hyde he allows for everything; and one feels, moreover, that even if he did not wave so gallantly the flag of the imaginary and contend that the improbable is what has most character, he would still insist that we ought to make believe. He would say we ought to make believe that the extraordinary is the best part of life, even if it were not, and to do so because the finest feelings — suspense, daring,

decision, passion, curiosity, gallantry, eloquence, friendship — are involved in it, and it is of infinite importance that the tradition of these precious things should not perish. He would prefer, in a word, any day in the week, Alexandre Dumas to Honoré de Balzac; and it is, indeed, my impression that he prefers the author of "The Three Musketeers" to any novelist except Mr. George Meredith. I should go so far as to suspect that his ideal of the delightful work of fiction would be the adventures of Monte Cristo related by the author of "Richard Feverel." There is some magnanimity in his esteem for Alexandre Dumas, inasmuch as in "Kidnapped" he has put into a fable worthy of that inventor a fineness of grain with which Dumas never had anything to do. He makes us say, Let the tradition live, by all means, since it was delightful; but at the same time he is the cause of our perceiving afresh that a tradition is kept alive only by something being added to it. In this particular case—in "Doctor Jekyll" and "Kidnapped"—Mr. Stevenson has added psychology.

"The New Arabian Nights" offers us, as the title indicates, the wonderful in the frankest, most delectable form. Partly extravagant, and partly very specious, they are the result of a very happy idea, that of placing a series of adventures which are pure adventures in the setting of contemporary English life, and relating them in the placidly ingenious tone of Scheherezade. This device is carried to perfection in "The Dynamiter," where the manner takes on more of a kind of high-flown serenity in proportion as the incidents are more "steep." In this line "The Suicide Club" is Mr. Stevenson's greatest success; and the first two pages of it, not to mention others, live in the memory. For reasons which I am conscious of not being able to represent as sufficient, I find something ineffaceably impressive—something really haunting—in the incident of Prince Florizel and Colonel Geraldine, who, one evening in March, are "driven by a sharp fall of sleet into an Oyster Bar in the immediate neighborhood of Leicester Square," and there have occasion to observe the entrance of a young man followed by a couple of commissionaires, each of whom carries a large dish of cream-tarts under a cover—a young man who "pressed these confections on every one's acceptance with exaggerated courtesy." There is no effort at a picture here, but the imagination makes one of the lighted interior, the London sleet outside, the company that we guess, given the locality, and the strange politeness of the young man, leading on to circumstances stranger still. This is what may be called putting one in the mood for a story.

But Mr. Stevenson's most brilliant stroke of that kind is the opening episode of "Treasure Island"—the arrival of the brown old seaman, with the saber-cut, at the "Admiral Benbow," and the advent, not long after, of the blind sailor, with a green shade over his eyes, who comes tapping down the road, in quest of him, with his stick. "Treasure Island" is a "boy's book," in the sense that it embodies a boy's vision of the extraordinary; but it is unique in this, and calculated to fascinate the weary mind of experience, that what we see in it is not only the ideal fable, but, as part and parcel of that, as it were, the young reader himself and his state of mind: we seem to read it over his shoulder, with an arm around his neck. It is all as perfect as a well-played boy's game, and nothing can exceed the spirit and skill, the humor and the open-air feeling, with which the whole thing is kept at the critical pitch. It is not only a record of queer chances, but a study of young feelings; there is a moral side in it, and the figures are not puppets with vague faces. If Jim Hawkins illustrates successful daring, he does so with a delightful, rosy good-boyishness, and a conscious, modest liability to error. His luck is tremendous, but it does not make him proud; and his manner is refreshingly provincial and human. So is that, even more, of the admirable John Silver, one of the most picturesque, and, indeed, in every way, most genially presented, villains in the whole literature of romance. He has a singularly distinct and expressive countenance, which, of course, turns out to be a grimacing mask. Never was a mask more knowingly, vividly painted. "Treasure Island" will surely become—it must already have become, and will remain—in its way a classic; thanks to this indescribable mixture of the prodigious and the human, of surprising coincidences and familiar feelings. The language in which Mr. Stevenson has chosen to tell his story is an admirable vehicle for these feelings; with its humorous braveries and quaintnesses, its echoes of old ballads and yarns, it touches all kinds of sympathetic chords.

Is "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" a work of high philosophic intention, or simply the most ingenious and irresponsible of fictions? It has the stamp of a really imaginative production, that we may take it in different ways, but I suppose it would be called the most serious of the author's tales. It deals with the relation of the baser parts of man to his nobler—of the capacity for evil that exists in the most generous natures, and it expresses these things in a fable which is a wonderfully happy invention. The subject is endlessly interesting, and rich in all sorts of provocation, and Mr.

Stevenson is to be congratulated on having touched the core of it. I may do him injustice, but it is, however, here, not the profundity of the idea which strikes me so much as the art of the presentation—the extremely successful form. There is a genuine feeling for the perpetual moral question, a fresh sense of the difficulty of being good and the brutishness of being bad, but what there is above all is a singular ability in holding the interest. I confess that that, to my sense, is the most edifying thing in the short, rapid, concentrated story, which is really a masterpiece of concision. There is something almost impertinent in the way, as I have noticed, in which Mr. Stevenson achieves his best effects without the aid of the ladies, and “Dr. Jekyll” is a capital example of his heartless independence. It is usually supposed that a truly poignant impression cannot be made without them, but in the drama of Mr. Hyde’s fatal ascendancy they remain altogether in the wing. It is very obvious—I do not say it cynically—that they must have played an important part in his development. The gruesome tone of the tale is, no doubt, deepened by their absence; it is like the late afternoon light of a foggy winter Sunday, when even inanimate objects have a kind of wicked look. I remember few situations in the pages of mystifying fiction more to the purpose than the episode of Mr. Utterson’s going to Dr. Jekyll’s to confer with the butler, when the doctor is locked up in his laboratory and the old servant, whose sagacity has hitherto encountered successfully the problems of the sideboard and the pantry, confesses that this time he is utterly baffled. The way the two men, at the door of the laboratory, discuss the identity of the mysterious personage inside, who has revealed himself in two or three inhuman glimpses to Poole, has those touches of which irresistible shudders are made. The butler’s theory is that his master has been murdered, and that the murderer is in the room, personating him with a sort of clumsy diabolism. “Well, when that masked thing like a monkey jumped from among the chemicals and whipped into the cabinet, it went down my spine like ice.” That is the effect upon the reader of most of the story. I say of most rather than all, because the ice rather melts in the sequel, and I have some difficulty in accepting the business of the powders, which seems to me too explicit and explanatory. The powders constitute the machinery of the transformation, and it will probably have struck many readers that this uncanny process would be more conceivable (so far as one may speak of the conceivable in such a case), if the author had not made it so definite.

I have left Mr. Stevenson’s best book to the last, as it is also the last he has given, at the present speaking,\* to the public—the tales comprising “The Merry Men” having already appeared; but I find that, on the way, I have anticipated some of the remarks that I had intended to make about it. That which is most to the point is that there are parts of it so fine as to suggest that the author’s talent has taken a fresh start, various as have been the impulses in which it had already indulged, and serious the impediments among which it is condemned to exert itself. There would have been a kind of perverse humility in his keeping up the fiction that a production so literary as “Kidnapped” is addressed to immature minds; and though it was originally given to the world, I believe, in a “boy’s paper,” the story embraces every occasion that it meets to satisfy the higher criticism. It has two weak spots, which need simply to be mentioned. The cruel and miserly uncle, in the first chapters, is rather in the tone of superseded tradition, and the tricks he plays upon his ingenuous nephew are a little like those of country conjurers; in these pages we feel that Mr. Stevenson is thinking too much of what a “boy’s paper” is expected to contain. Then the history stops without ending, as it were; but I think I may add that this accident speaks for itself. Mr. Stevenson has often to lay down his pen for reasons that have nothing to do with the failure of inspiration, and the last page of David Balfour’s adventures is an honorable plea for indulgence. The remaining five-sixths of the book deserve to stand by “Henry Esmond,” as a fictive autobiography in archaic form. The author’s sense of the English idiom of the last century, and still more of the Scotch, have enabled him to give a gallant companion to Thackeray’s *tour de force*. The life, the humor, the color of the central portions of “Kidnapped” have a singular pictorial virtue; these passages read like a series of inspired foot-notes on some historic page. The charm of the most romantic episode in the world—though perhaps it would be hard to say why it is the most romantic, when it was intermingled with so much stupidity—is over the whole business, and the forlorn hope of the Stuarts is revived for us without evoking satiety. There could be no better instance of the author’s talent for seeing the actual in the marvelous, and reducing the extravagant to plausible detail, than the description of Alan Breck’s defense in the cabin of the ship, and the really magnificent chapters of “The Flight in the Heather.” Mr. Stevenson has, in a high degree (and doubtless for

\* Since the above was written, “Underwoods,” as well as “Memories and Portraits,” has been published.

good reasons of his own), what may be called the imagination of physical states, and this has enabled him to arrive at a wonderfully exact notation of the miseries of his panting Lowland hero, dragged for days and nights over hill and dale, through bog and thicket, without meat or drink or rest, at the tail of an Homeric Highlander. The great superiority of the book resides, to my mind, however, in the fact that it puts two characters on their feet in an admirably upright way. I have paid my tribute to Alan Breck, and I can only repeat that he is a masterpiece. It is interesting to observe that, though the man is extravagant, the author's touch exaggerates nothing; it is, throughout, of the most truthful, genial, ironical kind, full of penetration, but with none of the grossness of moralizing satire. The figure is a genuine study, and nothing can be more charming than the way Mr. Stevenson both sees through it and admires it. Shall I say that he sees through David Balfour? This would be, perhaps, to underestimate the density of that medium. Beautiful, at any rate, is the expression which this unfortunate though circumspect youth gives to those qualities which combine to excite our respect and our

objurgations in the Scottish character. Such a scene as the episode of the quarrel of the two men on the mountain-side is a real stroke of genius, and has the very logic and rhythm of life—a quarrel which we feel to be inevitable, though it is about nothing, or almost nothing, and which springs from exasperated nerves and the simple shock of temperaments. The author's vision of it has a profundity which goes deeper, I think, than "Dr. Jekyll." I know of few better examples of the way genius has ever a surprise in its pocket—keeps an ace, as it were, up its sleeve. And in this case it endears itself to us by making us reflect that such a passage as the one I speak of is in fact a signal proof of what the novel can do at its best and what nothing else can do so well. In the presence of this sort of success we perceive its immense value. It is capable of a rare transparency—it can illustrate human affairs in cases so delicate and complicated that any other vehicle would be clumsy. To those who love the art that Mr. Stevenson practices he will appear, in pointing this incidental moral, not only to have won a particular triumph, but to have given a delightful pledge.

*Henry James.*

## SURPRISES.

O EARTH, that had so long in darkness lain,  
 Waiting and listening for the Voice that cried,  
 "Let there be light!"—on thy first eventide  
 What woe, what fear, wrung thy dumb soul with pain!  
 In darkling space down dropt the red sun, slain,  
 With all his banners drooping. Far and wide  
 Spread desolation's vast and blackening tide.  
 How couldst thou know that day would dawn again?  
 But the long hours wore on, till lo! pale gleams  
 Of faint, far glory lit the eastern skies,  
 Broadening and reddening till the sun's full beams  
 Broke in clear, golden splendor on thine eyes.  
 Darkness and brooding anguish were but dreams,  
 Lost in a trembling wonder of surprise!

Even so, O Life, all tremulous with woe,  
 Thou too didst cower when, without sound or jar,  
 From the high zenith sinking fast and far,  
 Thy sun went out of heaven! How couldst thou know  
 In that dark hour, that never tide could flow  
 So ebon-black, nor ever mountain-bar  
 Breast night so deep, without or moon or star,  
 But that the morning yet again must glow?  
 God never leaves thee in relentless dark.  
 Slowly the dawn on unbelieving eyes  
 Breaketh at last. Day brightens,—and, oh hark!  
 A flood of birdsong from the tender skies!  
 From storm and darkness thou hast found an ark,  
 Shut in with this great marvel of surprise!

*Julia C. R. Dorr.*