

**ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON**



**THE MASTER OF  
BALLANTRAE**

**EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION**

# **The Master of Ballantrae**

## ***A Winter's Tale***

**Robert Louis Stevenson**

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*The Master of Ballantrae, R. L. Stevenson*  
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck  
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9  
Germany

ISBN: 9783849642525

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## **Robert Louis Stevenson - A Biographical Primer**

*By Sidney Colvin*

The Scottish novelist, essayist, poet, and traveller was born at 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, on 13 Nov. 1850. He was baptised Robert Louis Balfour, but from about his eighteenth year dropped the use of the third christian name

and changed the spelling of the second to Louis; signing thereafter Robert Louis in full, and being called always Louis by his family and intimate friends. On both sides of the house he was sprung from capable and cultivated stock. His father, Thomas Stevenson [q. v.], was a member of the distinguished Edinburgh firm of civil engineers [see under Stevenson, Robert; Stevenson, David; and Stevenson, Alan]. His mother was Margaret Isabella (d. 14 May 1897), youngest daughter of Lewis Balfour, for many years minister of the parish of Colinton in Midlothian, and grandson to James Balfour (1705–1795) [q. v.], professor at Edinburgh first of moral philosophy and afterwards of the law of nature and of nations. His mother's father was described by his grandson in the essay called 'The Manse.' Robert Louis was his parents' only child. His mother was subject in early and middle life to chest and nerve troubles, and her son may have inherited from her some of his constitutional weakness as well as of his intellectual vivacity and taste for letters. His health was infirm from the first. He suffered from frequent bronchial affections and acute nervous excitability, and in the autumn of 1858 was near dying of a gastric fever. In January 1853 his parents moved to No. 1 Inverleith Terrace, and in May 1857 to 17 Heriot Row, which continued to be their Edinburgh home until the father's death in 1887. Much of his time was also spent in the manse at Colinton on the water of Leith, the home of his maternal grandfather. If he suffered much as a child from the distresses, he also enjoyed to the full the pleasures, of imagination. He was eager in every kind of play, and made the most of all the amusements natural to an only child kept much indoors by ill-health. The child in him never died; and the zest with which in after life he would throw himself into the pursuits of children and young boys was on his own account as much as on theirs. This spirit is illustrated in the pieces which he wrote and published under the title 'A Child's Garden of Verses,' as

well as in a number of retrospective essays and fragments referring with peculiar insight and freshness of memory to that period of life ('Child's Play,' 'Notes of Childhood,' 'Rosa quo locorum,' and others unpublished).

Such a child was naturally a greedy reader, or rather listener to reading; for it was not until his eighth year that he learned to read easily or habitually to himself. He began early to take pleasure in attempts at composition: a 'History of Moses,' dictated in his sixth year, and an account of 'Travels in Perth,' in his ninth, are still extant. Ill-health prevented his getting much regular or continuous schooling. He attended first (1858-61) a preparatory school kept by a Mr. Henderson in India Street; and next (at intervals for some time after the autumn of 1861) the Edinburgh Academy. For a few months in the autumn of 1863 he was at a boarding-school kept by a Mr. Wyatt at Spring Grove, near London; from 1864 to 1867 his education was conducted chiefly at Mr. Thompson's private school in Frederick Street, Edinburgh, and by private tutors in various places to which he travelled for his own or his parents' health. Such travels included frequent visits to health resorts in Scotland; occasional excursions with his father on his nearer professional rounds, e.g. to the coasts and lighthouses of Fife in 1864; and also longer journeys—to Germany and Holland in 1862, to Italy in 1863, to the Riviera in the spring of 1864, and to Torquay in 1865 and 1866. From 1867 the family life became more settled between Edinburgh and Swanston cottage, a country home in the Pentlands which Thomas Stevenson first rented in that year, and the scenery and associations of which inspired not a little of his son's work in literature (see especially *A Pastoral* and *St. Ives*).

In November of the same year, 1867, Louis Stevenson was entered as a student at the Edinburgh University, and for

several winters attended classes there with such regularity as his health and inclinations permitted. According to his own account (essay on A College Magazine; Life of Fleeming Jenkin, &c.), he was alike at school and college an incorrigible idler and truant. But outside the field of school and college routine he showed eager curiosity and activity of mind. 'He was of a conversable temper,' so he says of himself, 'and insatiably curious in the aspects of life; and spent much of his time scraping acquaintance with all classes of man and woman kind.' At the same time he read precociously and omnivorously in the belles-lettres, including a very wide range of English poetry, fiction, and essays, and a fairly wide range of French; and was a genuine student of Scottish history, and to some extent of history in general. He had been intended as a matter of course to follow the family profession of engineering; and from 1868 his summer excursions took a professional turn. In that and the two following years he went to watch the works of the firm in progress at various points on the mainland and in the northern and western islands. He was a favourite, though a very irregular, pupil of the professor of engineering, Fleeming Jenkin [q. v.]; and must have shown some aptitude for the calling hereditary in his family, inasmuch as in 1871 he received the silver medal of the Edinburgh Society of Arts for a paper on a suggested improvement in lighthouse apparatus. The outdoor and seafaring parts of the profession were in fact wholly to his taste, as in spite of his frail health he had a passion for open-air exercise and adventure (though not for sports). Office work, on the other hand, was his aversion, and his physical powers were unequal to the workshop training necessary to the practical engineer. Accordingly in this year, 1871, it was agreed that he should give up the hereditary profession and read for the bar.

For several ensuing years Stevenson attended law classes in the university, giving to the subject some serious although fitful attention, until he was called to the bar in 1875. But it was on another side that this 'pattern of an idler,' to use his own words, was gradually developing himself into a model of unsparing industry. From childhood he had never ceased to practise writing, and on all his truantries went pencil and copybook in hand. Family and school magazines in manuscript are extant of which, between his thirteenth and sixteenth years, he was editor, chief contributor, and illustrator. In his sixteenth year he wrote a serious essay on the 'Pentland Rising of 1666' (having already tried his hand at an historical romance on the same subject). This was printed as a pamphlet, and is now a rarity in request among collectors. For the following four or five years, though always writing both in prose and verse, he kept his efforts to himself, and generally destroyed the more ambitious of them. Among these were a romance on the life of Hackston of Rathillet, a poetical play of 'Semiramis' written in imitation of Webster, and 'Voces Fidelium,' a series of dramatic dialogues in verse. A few manuscript essays and notes of travel that have been preserved from 1868 to 1870, together with his letters to his mother of the same period, show almost as good a gift of observation and expression as his published work of five or six years later. Less promising and less personal are a series of six papers which he contributed in 1871 to the 'Edinburgh University Magazine,' a short-lived periodical started by him in conjunction with one or two college friends and fellow-members of the Speculative Society.

With high social spirits and a brilliant, somewhat fantastic, gaiety of bearing, Stevenson was no stranger to the storms and perplexities of youth. A restless and inquiring conscience, perhaps inherited from covenanting ancestors, kept him inwardly calling in question the grounds of

conduct and the accepted codes of society. At the same time his reading had shaken his belief in Christian dogma; the harsher forms of Scottish Calvinistic Christianity being indeed at all times repugnant to his nature. From the last circumstance arose for a time troubles with his father, the more trying while they lasted because of the deep attachment and pride in each other which always subsisted between father and son. He loved the aspects of his native city, but neither its physical nor its social atmosphere was congenial to him. Amid the biting winds and rigid social conventions of Edinburgh he craved for Bohemian freedom and the joy of life, and for a while seemed in danger of a fate like that of the boy-poet, Robert Fergusson [q. v.], with whom he always owned a strong sense of spiritual affinity.

But his innate sanity of mind and disposition prevailed. In the summer of 1873 he made new friends, who encouraged him strongly to the career of letters. His first contribution to regular periodical literature, a little paper on 'Roads,' appeared in the 'Portfolio' (edited by Philip Gilbert Hamerton) for December 1873. In the meantime his health had suffered a serious breakdown. In consequence of acute nervous exhaustion, combined with threatening lung symptoms, he was ordered to the Riviera, where he spent (chiefly at Mentone) the winter of 1873-4. Returning with a certain measure of recovered health in April 1874, he went to live with his parents at Edinburgh and Swanston, and resumed his reading for the bar. He attended classes for Scots law and conveyancing, and for constitutional law and history. He worked also for a time in the office of Messrs. Skene, Edwards, & Bilton, of which the antiquary and historian, William Forbes Skene [q. v.], was senior partner. On 14 July 1875 he passed his final examination with credit, and was called to the bar on the 16th, but never practised. Since abandoning the engineering profession he had resumed the habit of frequent miscellaneous



excursions in Scotland, England, or abroad. Now, in 1875, began the first of a series of visits to the artistic settlements in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau, where his cousin, Mr. R. A. M. Stevenson, was for the time established. He found the forest climate restorative to his health, and the life and company of Barbizon and the other student resorts congenial. In the winter of 1874-5 he made in Edinburgh the acquaintance of Mr. W. E. Henley, which quickly ripened into a close and stimulating literary friendship. In London he avoided all formal and dress-coated society; and at the Savile Club (his favourite haunt) and elsewhere his own Bohemian oddities of dress and appearance would sometimes repel at first sight persons to whom on acquaintance he soon became endeared by the charm of his conversation. Among his friends of these years may be especially mentioned Mr. Leslie Stephen, Mr. James Payn, Dr. Appleton (editor of the 'Academy'), Professor Clifford, Mr. Walter Pollock, Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse, Mr. Andrew Lang, and Mr. Edmund Gosse. In 1876 he went with Sir Walter Simpson on the canoe tour in Belgium and France described in the 'Inland Voyage.' In the spring of 1878 he made friends at Burford Bridge with a senior whom he had long honoured, Mr. George Meredith; and in the summer had a new experience in serving as secretary to Professor Fleeming Jenkin in his capacity of juror on the Paris Exhibition. In the autumn of the same year he spent a month at Monastier in Velay, whence he took the walk through the mountains to Florac narrated in the 'Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes.'

During these years, 1874-8, his health, though frail, was passable. With his vagrant way of life he combined a steady and growing literary industry. While reading for the bar in 1874-5, much of his work was merely experimental (poems, prose-poems, and tales not published). Much also was in preparation for proposed undertakings on Scottish history.

His studies in Highland history, which were diligent and exact, in the end only served to provide the historical background of his Scottish romances. Until the end of 1875 he had only published, in addition to essays in the magazines, an 'Appeal to the Church of Scotland,' written to please his father and published as a pamphlet in 1875. In 1876 he contributed as a journalist, but not frequently, to the 'Academy' and 'Vanity Fair,' and in 1877 more abundantly to 'London,' a weekly review newly founded under the editorship of Mr. Glasgow Brown, an acquaintance of Edinburgh Speculative days. In the former year, 1876, began the brilliant series of essays on life and literature in the 'Cornhill Magazine' which were afterwards collected with others in the volumes called severally 'Virginibus Puerisque' and 'Familiar Studies of Men and Books.' They were continued in 1877, and in greater number throughout 1878. His first published stories were: 'A Lodging for the Night' (Temple Bar, October 1877); 'The Sire de Malétroit's Door' (Temple Bar, January 1878); and 'Will o' the Mill' (Cornhill Magazine, January 1878).

The year 1878 was to Stevenson one of great productiveness. In May was issued his first book, 'The Inland Voyage,' containing the account of his canoe trip, and written in a pleasant fanciful vein of humour and reflection, but with the style a little over-mannered. Besides six or eight characteristic essays of the 'Virginibus Puerisque' series, there appeared in 'London' (edited by Mr. Henley) the set of fantastic modern tales called the 'New Arabian Nights,' conceived in a very spirited and entertaining vein of the realistic-unreal, as well as the story of 'Providence and the Guitar;' and in the 'Portfolio' the 'Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh,' republished at the end of the year in book form. During the autumn and winter of this year he wrote 'Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes,' and was much engaged in the planning of plays in

collaboration with Mr. Henley, of which one, 'Deacon Brodie,' was finished in the spring of 1879. This was also the date of the essay 'On some Aspects of Burns.' In the same spring he drafted in Edinburgh, but afterwards laid by, four chapters on ethics (a study to which he once referred as being always his 'veiled mistress') under the name of 'Lay Morals.' In few men have the faculties been so active on the artistic and the ethical sides at once, and this fragment is of especial interest in the study of its author's mind and character.

By his various published writings Stevenson had made little impression as yet on the general reader. But the critical had recognised in him a new artist of the first promise in English letters, who aimed at, and often achieved, those qualities of sustained precision, lucidity, and grace of style which are characteristic of the best French prose, but in English rare in the extreme. He had known how to stamp all he wrote with the impress of a vivid personal charm; had shown himself a master of the apt and animated phrase; and whether in tale or parable, essay or wayside musing, had touched on vital points of experience and feeling with the observation and insight of a true poet and humourist.

The year 1879 was a critical one in Stevenson's life. In France he had met an American lady, Mrs. Osbourne (née Van de Grift), whose domestic circumstances were not fortunate, and who was living with her daughter and young son in the art-student circles of Paris and Fontainebleau. At the beginning of 1879 she returned to California. In June Stevenson determined to follow. He travelled by emigrant ship and train, partly for economy, partly for the sake of the experience. The journey and its discomforts proved disastrous to his health, but did not interrupt his industry. Left entirely to his own resources, he stayed for eight

months partly at Monterey and partly at San Francisco. During a part of these months he was at death's door from a complication of pleurisy, malarial fever, and exhaustion of the system, but managed nevertheless to write the story of 'The Pavilion on the Links,' two or three essays for the 'Cornhill Magazine,' the greater part of a Californian story, 'A Vendetta in the West' (never published), a first draft of the romance of 'Prince Otto,' and the two parts of the 'Amateur Emigrant' (not published till some years later). He also tried to get work on the local press, and some contributions were printed in the 'Monterey Independent;' but on the whole his style was not thought up to Californian standards. In the spring of 1880 he was married to Mrs. Osbourne, who had obtained some months before a divorce from her husband. She nursed him through the worst of his illness, and in May they went for the sake of health to lodge at a deserted mining station above Calistoga, in the Californian coast range. The story of this sojourn is told in the 'Silverado Squatters.'

Later, Stevenson brought his wife home in August 1880. She was to him a perfect companion, taking part keenly and critically in his work, sharing all his gipsy tastes and love of primitive and natural modes of life, and being, in spite of her own precarious health, the most devoted and efficient of nurses in the anxious times which now ensued.

For the next seven or eight years Stevenson's life seemed to hang by a thread. Chronic lung disease had declared itself, and the slightest exposure or exertion was apt to bring on a prostrating attack of cough, hæmorrhage, and fever. The trial was manfully borne; and in every interval of respite he worked in unremitting pursuit of the standards he had set before himself.

Between 1880 and 1887 he lived the life of an invalid, vainly seeking relief by change of place. After spending six weeks (August and September 1880) with his parents at Blair Athol and Strathpeffer, he went in October, with his wife and stepson, to winter at Davos, where he made fast friends with John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) [q. v.] and his family. He wrote little, but prepared for press the collected essays 'Virginibus Puerisque,' in which he preaches with captivating vigour and grace his gospel of youth, courage, and a contempt for the timidities and petty respectabilities of life. For the rest, he amused himself with verses playful and other, and with supplying humorous text and cuts ('Moral Emblems,' 'Not I,' &c.) for a little private press worked by his young stepson. Returning to Scotland at the end of May with health somewhat improved, he spent four months with his parents at Pitlochry and Braemar. At Pitlochry he wrote 'Thrawn Janet' and the chief part of 'The Merry Men,' two of the strongest short tales in Scottish literature, the one of Satanic possession, the other of a conscience and imagination haunted, to the overthrow of reason, by the terrors of the sea. At Braemar he began 'Treasure Island,' his father helping with suggestions and reminiscences from his own seafaring experiences. At the suggestion of Mr. A. H. Japp, the story was offered to, and accepted by, the editor (Mr. Henderson) of a boys' periodical called 'Young Folks.' In the meantime (August 1881) Stevenson had been a candidate for the vacant chair of history and constitutional law at Edinburgh. In the light of such public reputation as he yet possessed, the candidature must have seemed paradoxical; but it was encouraged by competent advisers, including the retiring professor, Dr. Æneas Mackay. It failed. Had it succeeded, his health would almost certainly have proved unequal to the work. A cold and wet season at Braemar did him much harm; and in October he was ordered off to spend a second winter (1881-2) at Davos. He here finished the tale of

'Treasure Island,' began, on the suggestion of Mr. George Bentley, a life (never completed) of William Hazlitt, and prepared for press the collection of literary essays 'Familiar Studies of Men and Books.'

In the summer of 1882 he again tried Scotland (Stobo Manse in Upper Tweeddale, Lochearnhead, and Kingussie), and again with bad results for his health. As his wife was never well at Davos, they determined to winter in the south, and settled before Christmas in a cottage near Marseilles (Campagne Defli, St. Marcel). Thence being presently driven by a fever epidemic, they moved in January 1883 to a ch<sup>^</sup>alet in a pleasant garden on a hill behind Hy<sup>^</sup>eres (Ch<sup>^</sup>alet la Solitude). Here Stevenson enjoyed a respite of nearly a year from acute illness, as well as the first breath of popular success on the publication in book form of 'Treasure Island.' In this story the force of invention and vividness of narrative appealed to every reader, including those on whom its other qualities of style and character-drawing would in themselves have been thrown away; and it has taken its place in literature as a classic story of pirate and mutineer adventure. It has been translated into French, Spanish, and other languages. Partly at Marseilles and partly at Hy<sup>^</sup>eres he wrote the 'Treasure of Franchard,' a pleasant and ingenious tale of French provincial life; and early in 1883 completed for 'Young Folks' a second boys' tale, 'The Black Arrow.' This story of the wars of the Roses, written in a style founded on the 'Paston Letters,' was preferred to 'Treasure Island' by the audience to whom it was first addressed, but failed to please the critics when published in book form five years later, and was no favourite with its author. Stevenson's other work at Hy<sup>^</sup>eres consisted of verses for the 'Child's Garden;' essays for the 'Cornhill Magazine' and the 'Magazine of Art' (edited by Mr. Henley); the 'Silverado Squatters,' first drafted in 1880, and finally 'Prince Otto.' In

this tale, or fantasy, certain problems of character and conjugal relation which had occupied him ever since his boyish tragedy of 'Semiramis' are worked out with a lively play of intellect and humour, and (as some think) an excessive refinement and research of style, on a stage of German court life and with a delightful background of German forest scenery. The book, never very popular, is one of those most characteristic of his mind. It was translated into French in 1896 by Mr. Egerton Castle.

In September 1883 Stevenson suffered a great loss in the death of his old friend Mr. James Walter Ferrier (see the essay *Old Mortality*). In the beginning of 1884 his hopes and spirits were rudely dashed by two dangerous attacks of illness, the first occurring at Nice in January, the second at Hyères in May. Travelling slowly homewards by way of Royat, he arrived in England in July in an almost prostrate condition, and in September settled at Bournemouth. In the autumn and early winter his quarters were at Bonallie Tower, Branksome Park; in February 1885 his father bought and gave him the house at Westbourne which he called (after the famous lighthouse designed by his uncle Alan) Skerryvore. This was for the next two years and a half his home. His health, and on the whole his spirits, remained on a lower plane than before, and he was never free for many weeks together from fits of hæmorrhage and prostration. Nevertheless he was able to form new friendships and to do some of the best work of his life.

In 1885 he finished for publication two books which his illness had interrupted, the 'Child's Garden of Verses' and 'Prince Otto,' and began a highway romance called 'The Great North Road,' but relinquished it in order to write a second series of 'New Arabian Nights.' These new tales hinge about the Fenian dynamite conspiracies, of which the public mind was at this time full, and to the old elements of

fantastic realism add a new element of witty and scornful criminal psychology. The incidental stories of 'The Destroying Angel' and 'The Fair Cuban' were supplied by Mrs. Stevenson. During the same period he wrote several of the personal and literary essays afterwards collected in the volume 'Memories and Portraits;' a succession of Christmas stories, 'The Body Snatcher' in the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' 1884; 'Olalla' in the 'Court and Society Review,' and 'The Misadventures of John Nicholson' in 'Cassell's Christmas Annual,' both for 1885; and 'Markheim' in 'Unwin's Christmas Annual,' 1886; as well as several plays in collaboration with Mr. Henley, viz. 'Beau Austin,' 'Admiral Guinea,' and 'Robert Macaire.' Stevenson, like almost every other imaginative writer, had built hopes of gain upon dramatic work. His money needs, in spite of help from his father, were still somewhat pressing. Until 1886 he had never earned much more than 300l. a year by his pen. But in that year came two successes which greatly increased his reputation, and with it his power to earn. These were 'The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' and 'Kidnapped.' The former, founded partly on a dream, is a striking apologue of the double life of man. Published as a 'shilling shocker,' a form at that time in fashion, it became instantly popular; was quoted from a thousand pulpits; was translated into German, French, and Danish; and the names of its two chief characters have passed into the common stock of proverbial allusion. In 'Kidnapped'—a boys' highland story suggested by the historical incident of the Appin murder—the adventures are scarcely less exciting than those of 'Treasure Island,' the elements of character-drawing subtler and farther carried, while the romance of history and the sentiment of the soil are expressed as they had hardly been expressed since Scott. The success of these two tales, both with the critics and the public, established Stevenson's position at the head of the younger English writers of his day, among whom his



example encouraged an increased general attention to technical qualities of style and workmanship, as well as a reaction in favour of the novel of action and romance against the more analytic and less stimulating types of fiction then prevailing.

About this time Stevenson was occupied with studies for a short book on Wellington (after Gordon his favourite hero), intended for a series edited by Mr. Andrew Lang. This was never written, and in the winter and spring 1886-7 his chief task was one of piety to a friend, viz. the writing of a life of Fleeming Jenkin from materials supplied by the widow. In the spring of 1887 he published, under the title 'Underwoods' (borrowed from Ben Jonson), a collection of verses, partly English and partly Scottish, selected from the chance production of a good many years. Stevenson's poetry, written chiefly when he was too tired to write anything else, expresses as a rule the charm and power of his nature with a more slippered grace, a far less studious and perfect art, than his prose. He also prepared for publication in 1887, under the title 'Memories and Portraits,' a collection of essays personal and other, including an effective exposition of his own theories of romance, which he had contributed to various periodicals during preceding years.

His father's death in May 1887 broke the strongest tie which bound him to this country. His own health showed no signs of improvement; and the doctors, as a last chance of recovery, recommended some complete change of climate and mode of life. His wife's connections pointing to the west, he thought of Colorado, persuaded his mother to join them, and with his whole household—mother, wife, and stepson—sailed for New York on 17 Aug. 1887. After a short stay under the hospitable care of friends at Newport, he was persuaded, instead of going farther west, to try the

climate of the Adirondack mountains for the winter. At the beginning of October the family moved accordingly to a house on Saranac Lake, and remained there until April 1888. Here he wrote for 'Scribner's Magazine' a series of twelve essays (published January-December 1888 and partly reprinted in 'Across the Plains'). Some of these ('Dreams,' 'Lantern Bearers,' 'Random Memories') contain his best work in the mixed vein of autobiography and criticism; others ('Pulvis et Umbra,' 'A Christmas Sermon') his strongest, if not his most buoyant or inspiring, in the ethical vein. For the same publishers he also wrote the ballad of 'Ticonderoga' and began the romance of 'The Master of Ballantrae,' of which the scene is partly laid in the country of his winter sojourn. This tragic story of fraternal hate is thought by many to take the first place among its author's romances, alike by vividness of presentment and by psychologic insight. In April Stevenson came to New York, but, soon wearying of the city, went for some weeks' boating to Manasquan on the New Jersey coast. At this time (March-May 1888), by way of 'a little judicious levity,' he revised and partly rewrote a farcical story drafted in the winter by his stepson, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, 'The Wrong Box,' which was published in the course of the year under their joint names. The fact that the farce turns on the misadventures of a corpse caused most readers to think the levity more apparent than the judgment; but the book cannot be read without laughter.

In the meantime the family had entertained the idea of a yachting excursion in the South Seas. The romance of the Pacific had attracted Stevenson from a boy. The enterprise held out hopes of relief to his health; an American publisher (Mr. S. S. McClure) provided the means of undertaking it by an offer of 2,000l. for letters in which its course should be narrated. The result was that on 26 June 1888 the whole family set out from San Francisco on board

the schooner yacht Casco (Captain Otis). They first sailed to the Marquesas, where they spent six weeks; thence to the Paumotus or Dangerous Archipelago; thence to the Tahitian group, where they again rested for several weeks, and whence they sailed northward for Hawaii. Arriving at Honolulu about the new year of 1889, they made a stay of nearly six months, during which Stevenson made several excursions, including one, which profoundly impressed him, to the leper settlement at Molokai. His journey so far having proved a source of infinite interest and enjoyment, as well as greatly improved health, Stevenson determined to prolong it. He and his party started afresh from Honolulu in June 1889 on a rough trading schooner, the Equator. Their destination was the Gilberts, a remote coral group in the western Pacific. At two of its petty capitals, Apemama and Butaritari, they made stays of about six weeks each, and at Christmas 1889 found their way again into semi-civilisation at Apia in the Samoan group. After a month or two's stay in Samoa, where the beauty of the scenery and the charm of the native population delighted them, the party went on to Sydney, where Stevenson immediately fell ill, the life of the city seeming to undo the good he had got at sea. This experience set him voyaging again, and determined him to make his home in the South Seas. In April 1890 a fresh start was made, this time on a trading steamer, the Janet Nicoll. Touching first at Samoa, where he had bought a property of about four hundred acres on the mountain above Apia, to which he gave the name Vailima (five rivers), he left instructions for clearing and building operations to be begun while he continued his voyage. The course of the Janet Nicoll took him during the summer to many remote islands, from Penhryn to the Marshalls, and landed him in September in New Caledonia. Returning the same month to Samoa, he found the small house already existing at Vailima to be roughly habitable, and installed himself there to superintend the further

operations of clearing, planting, and building. The family belongings from Bournemouth were sent out, and his mother, who had left him at Honolulu, rejoined him at Vailima in the spring of 1891.

During these Pacific voyages he had finished the 'Master of Ballantrae,' besides writing many occasional verses, and two long, not very effective, ballads on themes of Polynesian legend, the 'Song of Rahero' and the 'Feast of Famine.' He had also planned and begun at sea, in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, his one attempt at a long and sustained story of modern life, 'The Wrecker.' At Samoa he had written the first of his Pacific stories in prose, 'The Bottle Imp.' This little tale of morals and of magic appealed strongly to the native readers to whom (in a missionary translation) it was first addressed (published in English in 'Black and White,' 1891, and reprinted in 'Island Nights' Entertainments'). At Sydney he had written in a heat of indignation, and published in pamphlet form, the striking 'Letter to Dr. Hyde' in vindication of the memory of Father Damien. Lastly, on board the Janet Nicoll, 'under the most ungodly circumstances,' he had begun the work of composing the letters relating his travels, which were due under the original contract to the Messrs. McClure. This and 'The Wrecker' were the two tasks unfinished on his hands when he entered (November 1890) on the four years' residence at Vailima which forms the closing period of his life.

In his new Samoan home Stevenson soon began to exercise a hospitality and an influence which increased with every year. Among the natives he was known by the name of Tusitala (teller of tales), and was supposed to be master of an inexhaustible store of wealth, perhaps even to be the holder of the magic bottle of his own tale. He gathered about him a kind of feudal clan of servants and retainers,

whom he ruled in a spirit of affectionate kindness tempered with firm justice; and presently got drawn, as a man so forward in action and so impatient of injustice could not fail to do, into the entanglements of local politics and government. In health he seemed to have become a new man. Frail in comparison with the strong, he was yet able to ride and boat with little restriction, and to take part freely in local festivities, both white and native. The chief interruptions were an occasional trip to Sydney or Auckland, from which he generally came back the worse. From the middle of 1891 to the spring of 1893 his intromissions in politics embroiled him more or less seriously with most of the white officials in the island, especially the chief justice, Mr. Cedercrantz, and the president of the council, Baron Senfft von Pilsach. The proceedings of these gentlemen were exposed by him in a series of striking letters to the 'Times,' and the three treaty powers (Germany, Great Britain, and the United States) ultimately decided to dispense with their services. At one period of the struggle he believed himself threatened with deportation. Whether all his own steps on that petty but extremely complicated political scene were judicious is more than can be said; but impartial witnesses agree that he had a considerable moderating influence with the natives, and that his efforts were all in the direction of peace and concord.

His literary industry during these years was more strenuous than ever. His habit was to begin work at six in the morning or earlier, continue without interruption until the midday meal, and often to resume again until four or five in the afternoon. In addition to his literary labours he kept up an active correspondence both with old friends and new acquaintances, especially with writers of the younger generation in England, who had been drawn to him either by admiration for his work or by his ever ready and

generous recognition of their own. He had suffered for some time from scrivener's cramp, and in the last three years of his life was much helped by the affectionate services as amanuensis of his stepdaughter, Mrs. Strong, who had become a member of the household since 1889. In 1894 the plan devised by his business adviser and lifelong friend, Mr. Charles Baxter, of a limited édition de luxe of his collected works, under the title of the 'Edinburgh Edition,' afforded him much pleasure, together with a prospect of considerable gain. This experiment, without precedent during the lifetime of an author, proved a great success, but Stevenson did not live long enough to enjoy the opportunity of rest which its results were calculated to bring him.

Of his writings during the Samoan period, 'The Wrecker' was finished in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne in the winter 1890-1. Throughout 1891 he had a heavy task with the promised letters relating his Pacific voyages. Work undertaken to order seldom prospered with him, and these 'Letters,' having cost him more labour than anything he ever wrote, have less of his characteristic charm, despite the interest and strangeness of the matters of which they tell. They were published periodically in the New York 'Sun' and in 'Black and White,' and have been in part reprinted in the 'Edinburgh Edition.' A far more effective result of his South Sea experiences is the tale of the 'Beach of Falesà,' written in the same year and first published under the title 'Uma' in the 'Illustrated London News' (reprinted in 'Island Nights' Entertainments'). In 1892 he was much occupied with a task from which he could expect neither fame nor profit, but to which he was urged by a sense of duty and the hope of influencing the treaty powers in favour of what he thought a wiser policy in Samoa. This was the 'Footnote to History,' an account, composed with an intentional plainness of style, of the intricate local politics of the

preceding years, including a description of the famous hurricane of 1888. The same spring (1892) he took up again, after six years, the unfinished history of David Balfour at the point where ill-health had compelled him to break it off in 'Kidnapped.' This sequel (published first in 'Atalanta' under the title 'David Balfour,' and then in book form as 'Catriona') contains some of the author's best work, especially in the closing scenes at Leyden and Dunkerque. The comedy of boy and girl passion has been hardly anywhere more glowingly or more delicately expressed. In the same year (1892) was published 'Across the Plains,' a volume of collected essays, to which was prefixed the account of his emigrant journey from New York to San Francisco, much revised and compressed from the original draft of 1879; and in the spring of 1893 'Island Nights' Entertainments,' containing with 'The Beach of Falesà,' and 'The Bottle Imp,' a new tale of magic, 'The Isle of Voices,' first published in the 'National Observer.'

In the same year (1892) Stevenson made beginnings on a great variety of new work, some of it inspired by his Pacific experiences, and some by the memories and associations of Scotland, the power of which on his mind seemed only to be intensified by exile. To the former class belonged 'Sophia Scarlet,' a sentimental novel of planters' life in the South Seas, and 'The Ebb-Tide,' a darker story of South Sea crime and adventure, planned some time before under the title of the 'Pearl-Fisher' in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne. Of the latter class were 'Heathercat,' a tale of covenanting times and of the Darien adventure; 'The Young Chevalier,' an historical romance partly founded on facts supplied to him by Mr. Andrew Lang; 'Weir of Hermiston,' a tragic story of the Scottish border, in which the chief character was founded on that of the famous judge Lord Braxfield; and 'A Family of Engineers,' being an account of the lives and work of his grandfather, uncles, and father.

Some progress had been made with all of these when a fit of influenza in January 1893 diverted him to a lighter task, that of dictating (partly, when forbidden to speak, in the deaf-and-dumb alphabet) a tale of manners and the road called 'St. Ives,' dealing with the escape from Edinburgh Castle and subsequent adventures of a French prisoner of war in 1814. Of these various writings, the 'Ebb-Tide' was alone completed; it was published in 'To-day,' November 1893 to January 1894, and in book form in September 1894. The family history was carried as far as the construction of the Bell Rock lighthouse. 'Sophia Scarlet,' 'Heathercat,' and the 'Young Chevalier' never got beyond a chapter or two each. 'St. Ives' had been brought to within a little of completion when the author, feeling himself getting out of vein with it, turned again to 'Weir of Hermiston.' This, so far as it goes, is his strongest work. The few chapters which he lived to complete, taken as separate blocks of narrative and character presentment, are of the highest imaginative and emotional power.

Despite the habitual gaiety which Stevenson had continued to show before his family and friends, and his expressed confidence in his own improved health, there had not been wanting in his later correspondence from Vailima signs of inward despondency and distress. At moments, even, it is evident that he himself had presentiments that the end was near. It came in such a manner as he would himself have wished. On the afternoon of 3 Dec. 1894, he was talking gaily with his wife, when the sudden rupture of a blood-vessel in the brain laid him at her feet, and within two hours all was over. The next day he was buried on a romantic site of his own selection, whither it took the zealous toil of sixty natives to cut a path and carry him, on a peak of the forest-clad Mount Vaea.



The romance of Stevenson's life and the attraction of his character procured for him a degree of fame and affection disproportionate to the numerical circulation of his works. In this point he was much outstripped by several of his contemporaries. But few writers have during their lifetime commanded so much admiration and regard from their fellow-craftsmen. To attain the mastery of an elastic and harmonious English prose, in which trite and inanimate elements should have no place, and which should be supple to all uses and alive in all its joints and members, was an aim which he pursued with ungrudging, even with heroic, toil. Not always, especially not at the beginning, but in by far the greater part of his mature work, the effect of labour and fastidious selection is lost in the felicity of the result. Energy of vision goes hand in hand with magic of presentment, and both words and things acquire new meaning and a new vitality under his touch. Next to finish and brilliancy of execution, the most remarkable quality of his work is its variety. Without being the inventor of any new form or mode of literary art (unless, indeed, the verses of the 'Child's Garden' are to be accounted such), he handled with success and freshness nearly all the old forms—the moral, critical, and personal essay, travels sentimental and other, romances and short tales both historical and modern, parables and tales of mystery, boys' stories of adventure, drama, memoir, lyrical and meditative verse both English and Scottish. To some of these forms he gave quite new life: through all alike he expressed vividly his own extremely personal way of seeing and being, his peculiar sense of nature and of romance.

In personal appearance Stevenson was of good stature (about 5 ft. 10 in.) and activity, but very slender, his leanness of body and limb (not of face) having been throughout life abnormal. The head was small; the eyes dark hazel, very wide-set, intent, and beaming; the face of a

long oval shape; the expression rich and animated. He had a free and picturesque play of gesture and a voice of full and manly fibre, in which his pulmonary weakness was not at all betrayed. The features are familiar from many photographs and cuts. Of two small full-length portraits by Mr. John S. Sargent one belongs to the family, the other to Mr. Fairchild of Newport, U.S.A.; an oil sketch, done in one sitting, by Sir W. B. Richmond, in the National Portrait Gallery; a drawing from life, by an American artist, Mr. Alexander; a large medallion portrait in bronze, in some respects excellent, by A. St. Gaudens of New York; and a portrait painted in 1893 at Samoa by Signor Nerli, in private possession in Scotland.

His published writings, in book and pamphlet form, are as follows: 1. 'The Pentland Rising, a Page of History, 1666' (pamphlet), 1866. 2. 'An Appeal to the Church of Scotland' (pamphlet), 1875. 3. 'An Inland Voyage,' 1878. 4. 'Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh,' 1879. 5. 'Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes,' 1879. 6. 'Virginibus Puerisque,' 1881. 7. 'Familiar Studies of Men and Books,' 1882. 8. 'Treasure Island,' 1882. 9. 'New Arabian Nights,' 1882. 10. 'The Silverado Squatters,' 1883. 11. 'Prince Otto,' 1885. 12. 'The Child's Garden of Verses,' 1885. 13. 'More New Arabian Nights: the Dynamiter,' 1885. 14. 'The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,' 1886. 15. 'Kidnapped,' 1886. 16. 'The Merry Men and other Tales,' 1886. 17. 'Underwoods,' 1887. 18. 'Memories and Portraits,' 1887. 19. 'Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin' (prefixed to 'Papers of Fleeming Jenkin,' 2 vols.), 1887. 20. 'The Black Arrow,' 1888. 21. 'The Wrong Box' (in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne), 1888. 22. 'The Master of Ballantrae,' 1889. 23. 'Ballads,' 1890. 24. 'Father Damien: an Open Letter' (pamphlet) 1890. 25. 'The Wrecker' (in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne), 1892. 26. 'Across the Plains,' 1892. 27. 'A Footnote to History,' 1893. 28. 'Island Nights'

Entertainments,' 1893. 29. 'Catriona' (being the sequel to 'Kidnapped'), 1893. 30. 'The Ebb-Tide' (in collaboration with Mr. Lloyd Osbourne), 1894. The above were published during his lifetime; subsequently there appeared: 31. 'Vailima Letters,' 1895. 32. 'Fables' (appended to a new edition of 'Jekyll and Hyde'), 1896. 33. 'Weir of Hermiston,' 1896. 34. 'Songs of Travel,' 1896. 35. 'St. Ives,' with the final chapters supplied by Mr. A. T. Quiller Couch, 1897. 36. 'Letters to his Family and Friends,' ed. Sidney Colvin, 1899. All save the last were reprinted in the limited 'Edinburgh Edition,' which also contains the 'Amateur Emigrant,' entire for the first time (the title-paper of No. 26, 'Across the Plains,' was the second part of this); the unfinished 'Family of Engineers,' which has not been printed elsewhere; the 'Story of a Lie,' the 'Misadventures of John Nicholson;' and the fragmentary romance, 'The Great North Road'—all here reprinted from periodicals for the first time; the 'South Sea Letters,' not elsewhere reprinted; as well as 'The Pentland Rising,' 'A Letter to the Church of Scotland,' the 'Edinburgh University Magazine Essays,' 'Lay Morals,' 'Prayers written for Family Use at Vailima,' and a number of other papers and fragments, early and late, which have not been collected elsewhere. The edition is in twenty-seven volumes, of which the first series of twenty appeared 15 Nov. 1894-15 June 1896, and the supplementary series of seven December 1896-February 1898.

## **The Master of Ballantrae**

**To Sir Percy Florence and Lady Shelley**

Here is a tale which extends over many years and travels into many countries. By a peculiar fitness of circumstance the writer began, continued it, and concluded it among distant and diverse scenes. Above all, he was much upon the sea. The character and fortune of the fraternal enemies, the hall and shrubbery of Durrisdeer, the problem of Mackellar's homespun and how to shape it for superior flights; these were his company on deck in many star-reflecting harbours, ran often in his mind at sea to the tune of slatting canvas, and were dismissed (something of the suddenest) on the approach of squalls. It is my hope that these surroundings of its manufacture may to some degree find favour for my story with seafarers and sea-lovers like yourselves.

And at least here is a dedication from a great way off: written by the loud shores of a subtropical island near upon ten thousand miles from Boscombe Chine and Manor: scenes which rise before me as I write, along with the faces and voices of my friends.

Well, I am for the sea once more; no doubt Sir Percy also. Let us make the signal B. R. D.!

R. L. S.

Waikiki, *May* 17, 1889

## **Preface**

Although an old, consistent exile, the editor of the following pages revisits now and again the city of which he exults to be a native; and there are few things more strange, more painful, or more salutary, than such revisitations. Outside, in foreign spots, he comes by surprise and awakens more

attention than he had expected; in his own city, the relation is reversed, and he stands amazed to be so little recollected. Elsewhere he is refreshed to see attractive faces, to remark possible friends; there he scouts the long streets, with a pang at heart, for the faces and friends that are no more. Elsewhere he is delighted with the presence of what is new, there tormented by the absence of what is old. Elsewhere he is content to be his present self; there he is smitten with an equal regret for what he once was and for what he once hoped to be.

He was feeling all this dimly, as he drove from the station, on his last visit; he was feeling it still as he alighted at the door of his friend Mr. Johnstone Thomson, W.S., with whom he was to stay. A hearty welcome, a face not altogether changed, a few words that sounded of old days, a laugh provoked and shared, a glimpse in passing of the snowy cloth and bright decanters and the Piranesis on the dining-room wall, brought him to his bed-room with a somewhat lightened cheer, and when he and Mr. Thomson sat down a few minutes later, cheek by jowl, and pledged the past in a preliminary bumper, he was already almost consoled, he had already almost forgiven himself his two unpardonable errors, that he should ever have left his native city, or ever returned to it.

“I have something quite in your way,” said Mr. Thomson. “I wished to do honour to your arrival; because, my dear fellow, it is my own youth that comes back along with you; in a very tattered and withered state, to be sure, but—well!—all that’s left of it.”

“A great deal better than nothing,” said the editor. “But what is this which is quite in my way?”

“I was coming to that,” said Mr. Thomson: “Fate has put it in my power to honour your arrival with something really original by way of dessert. A mystery.”

“A mystery?” I repeated.

“Yes,” said his friend, “a mystery. It may prove to be nothing, and it may prove to be a great deal. But in the meanwhile it is truly mysterious, no eye having looked on it for near a hundred years; it is highly genteel, for it treats of a titled family; and it ought to be melodramatic, for (according to the superscription) it is concerned with death.”

“I think I rarely heard a more obscure or a more promising annunciation,” the other remarked. “But what is It?”

“You remember my predecessor’s, old Peter M’Brair’s business?”

“I remember him acutely; he could not look at me without a pang of reprobation, and he could not feel the pang without betraying it. He was to me a man of a great historical interest, but the interest was not returned.”

“Ah well, we go beyond him,” said Mr. Thomson. “I daresay old Peter knew as little about this as I do. You see, I succeeded to a prodigious accumulation of old law-papers and old tin boxes, some of them of Peter’s hoarding, some of his father’s, John, first of the dynasty, a great man in his day. Among other collections, were all the papers of the Durrisdeers.”

“The Durrisdeers!” cried I. “My dear fellow, these may be of the greatest interest. One of them was out in the ’45; one had some strange passages with the devil—you will