



The Stevenson Myth

BY GEORGE S. HELLMAN

DRAWINGS BY PAUL ROCHE



THE zest of discovery and the enjoyment of research in the field of unknown writings of great authors are delights familiar to the lover and student of such papers. Let them imagine the thrill I experienced when, in looking over the Stevenson material offered a few years ago at auction sale in New York, there came the realization that score after score of the manuscripts therein included had never been printed. To acquire these without having the dealers recognize the astounding nature of many insufficiently described items led me, after having marked the catalogs, to refrain from attending the various sessions of the auction; adopting, instead, the policy of doing my buying the next morning. I would then make a round of the booksellers and offer a fifty per cent. advance over the prices fetched the preceding day, on the condition that I should be left alone with their Stevenson purchases to make my own selections. In this way, save for those items which were bought on order and which private collectors would not relinquish, almost all of the unpublished Stevenson material was corralled without having aroused competitive bidding by various dealers who knew my special predilections in the field of unpublished material. In this collection were family letters, unpublished essays, stories, portions of plays and

novels, and, most important of all, well over one hundred poems.

Professor W. P. Trent of Columbia University had been asked by that ardent Stevensonian, the late F. S. Peabody of Chicago, for his opinion concerning some unpublished material that formed a part of Mr. Peabody's notable Stevenson collection. Professor Trent and I were at that time associated on the publication committee of the Authors Club, and at one of our meetings there was occasion to mention the Stevenson papers that I had acquired. Professor Trent became greatly interested, and asked me whether I would study Mr. Peabody's manuscripts in connection with the others. The upshot of the entire matter was that at the invitation of the Bibliophile Society, whereof Professor Trent was vice-president, Mr. Peabody one of the most interested members, and H. H. Harper of Boston the directing spirit, the editing of all this unpublished material was undertaken by me. It led to the issue of two volumes of Stevenson's poetry in 1916, and later two more volumes of hitherto unknown Stevenson material were brought forth by the Bibliophile Society under the joint editorship of Professor Trent, Mr. Harper, and myself.

Thus these four Stevenson volumes came to make their appearance in print. But when the first two vol-

umes appeared, there was to come a surprise almost greater than that of their original discovery. The American publishers of Stevenson were Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, but as the Bibliophile Society issues its publications for its members alone, the executive council had, in accordance with its accustomed interpretation of the copyright law, acted on its own initiative without consulting any one outside of the society in publishing the Stevenson material. The heir or heirs of the Stevenson manuscripts had elected to get what they possibly considered full commercial results through the channels of the auction-room, and there was no suggestion that there was in their case or in the case of the American publishers any obstructive element in evidence. To few firms does the American public owe a greater debt of gratitude for the issuing of enjoyable and scholarly literature than to the house of Scribner, and when Mr. Charles Scribner asked to have a talk with me concerning the publication of the Stevenson poems, it was manifestly and solely to consider the rights of his firm and his clients.

After I had suggested to him that the technical side affecting copyright could be more advisably discussed with the publishers than with the editor, Mr. Scribner made a remark that startled me.

"I know, Mr. Hellman," he said, "where these manuscripts came from. They came from enemies of the Stevenson family in London."

"You are mistaken," I answered. "They came from the Stevenson family."

Great was the surprise of Mr. Scribner, and after I had explained to him

how these manuscripts, sold at the order of Stevenson's stepdaughter, Isobel Strong, later Mrs. Salisbury Field, had been gathered together, he asked:

"Are you willing to tell this to Lloyd Osbourne and show him the books and discuss the matter with him?"

"Gladly," I replied.

The next day Mr. Osbourne called at my office. After looking over the volumes, which he had not previously seen, it was with charming courtesy that he said:

"Before we discuss any other aspect, let me tell you that I am glad this work was done and that I hardly think it could have been done better."

Realization of various errors that crept into the work of editing was later to convince me that Mr. Osbourne's praise was too high and that Sir Sidney Colvin, for one, could have done the work much better; but the generous comment of Stevenson's stepson was gratifying.

However, for me the main significance of these conversations with Mr. Osbourne and Mr. Scribner lay in their establishing the fact that neither of these gentlemen, Stevenson's publisher and Stevenson's stepson and collaborator, had in the twenty years since the famous author's death been aware of the existence of all this important unpublished material. As I pondered this curious state of affairs, and realized that Mrs. Stevenson, the owner and custodian of these documents, had thus, up to the time of her death in 1914, not divulged their contents to persons so directly interested and so well qualified to consider the importance of this lyric output, the consciousness was borne in upon me that the myth-making, which I had

hitherto somewhat vaguely suspected, was more than a matter of literary rumor, and that Mrs. Stevenson was disingenuously ingenious when, in the preface to a posthumous edition of her husband's poetry, she stated that verse had with Stevenson always been pre-eminently a pastime. It had, she surely must have known, been the channel for the expression of many of his most violent emotions, his deepest thoughts and feelings. But the good lady was more interested in the gentle and genteel art of myth-making.

The Stevenson myth is far and away the most remarkable thing of its kind in modern literature. Here was a writer whose works were avidly read by a world-wide contemporary public, and whose character and personality were familiar, through long acquaintance, to various men of letters among his friends; but after Stevenson died, it was not Sir Sidney Colvin by whom was completed the official biography, despite the fact that Stevenson himself had expressed the hope that this dearest of his friends would be his editor and biographer. Sir Sidney Colvin, Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang—how thoroughly well could any of these three have done this labor of love! But it was a member of the Stevenson family, Mr. Graham Balfour, who proved at the last to be Mrs. Stevenson's choice.

Was not this final decision dictated by her desire to continue and consolidate the Stevenson myth initiated ten years before Stevenson passed away at Samoa? To create and perpetuate a myth of this kind necessitates suppression of important facts, and we have no doubt that Sir Sidney Colvin and the others were averse to this procedure, and thus ineligible from Mrs.

Stevenson's point of view. Not that Mr. Balfour's "Life" is other than, within its limits, a painstaking and able biography. Its limitations, imposed from without, keep it from being the wholly genuine record which Stevenson himself would surely have preferred.

We had hoped that in his chapter on Stevenson in the latest, though, we hope, not the last of his books, Sir Sidney Colvin would have seen fit to be revelatory of the matter we have in mind. But he still adheres, for reasons one may well respect, to the silence that he has maintained ever since the no doubt disappointing time when he, the logical person above all others, found himself unable to undertake Stevenson's biography.

The author who for one brief moment came nearest to interfering seriously with the Stevenson myth was W. E. Henley. In the earliest years of their acquaintance a real sympathy had existed between these two greatly different men. But misunderstandings arose, and as the Stevenson myth developed, Henley, the unsuccessful, became more and more estranged from the popular R. L. S., who was now the far-famed and highly regarded leader in a large Samoan household. The review that Henley wrote of the Stevenson biography was thus tinged with the spirit of resentment, and coming shortly after the death of a man who had long been his friend, the paper justly incurred the criticism of being in bad taste. But all this does not do away with the fact that Henley bared some truths concerning Stevenson that no one else has since ventured to say with so authoritative a voice.

What is the Stevenson myth? Briefly, that Robert Louis Stevenson

*Twin streams late issued from the self-same mere
Thy fate and mine, with curious sight I trace.*

*I know, O heart of mine, O weary heart,
~~That thou art not unlearned in earthly grief~~
That in the fatal tenor of thy days
Much thou hast learned in many evil ways
Much strong restraint and patience under smart
Much learning in the many ways of art
To tell red kernel from vain displays,
And out of life's dishonour and dismays
~~Cunningly learned the road in some sure chart.~~
For thou art fain, O my heart, to probe
The secret issue of sad after years,
But willingly will lay aside I know
That sackcloth and uncomfortable robe
In which, the seat of pain and fruit of tears,
Our Lord did penance all his life below.*

Transcript of the facsimile of the Robert Louis Stevenson poem on the reverse page. The second canceled line was altered on another page of the notebook to read "reaped full experience from a perfect chart"

was the type of man possessing all those virtues which are generally held up for the emulation of youth. Of course this myth has not been accepted by the careful student of Stevenson's letters, where frequent side-lights, frankly thrown by the author, suggest a less doctored interpretation of his character. Of course, also, Stevenson himself, certainly prior to the last few years of his life, did not care to contribute, and never directly contributed of his own accord, to this picture of the virtues. He was far too aware of the weaknesses in his armor to pose as a perfect knight, too far aware that the idealism which made his life a fine one was not the idealism of the moralist. Stevenson's letters, finely revelatory as they are of the adult man and of the craftsman, do not wholly get away from that self-consciousness almost inevitably inherent in epistolary compositions meant for the eyes of others. It is different with poems. There, especially in the lyrics of tempestuous youth, the poet speaks to, as well as out of, his own heart. Of the unpublished poems carefully guarded by Mrs. Stevenson a few were the original drafts, but the great majority of these verses were second or later versions, or transcripts from the original versions, written by Stevenson in a number of copy-books. The author had obviously not only decided that these poems were worthy of preservation by him, but also left clear evidence of his desire to have them, or selections from them, published. Stevenson went so far as to compose the introductory poem for the volume he had in mind; and now, printed at last in the Bibliophile edition, it would seem to give to that publication the sanction of Stevenson himself.

Apart from "A Child's Garden of Verses," a little over one hundred poems—one hundred and five to be exact—are included in those which, previous to the Bibliophile edition, comprised the "Complete Edition" of Stevenson's poems. How then, we ask again, are we to regard the suppression of even a larger number,—one hundred and twenty in all,—which, if the present writer's hobby had not led him in the direction of Stevenson in the field of unpublished manuscripts, might have remained unavailable for future biographers? Let us grant that to a few poems, but only a few, applies the argument of comparative inferiority, and that others, addressed to Mrs. Stevenson, may have, through motive of delicate sentiment, been prevented from appearing during her lifetime, although we are not sure that there is much cause for the latter theory, as Mrs. Stevenson was willing, and justifiably willing, to see printed in 1895 the dedication to "Weir of Hermiston," and other verses where Stevenson praises his wife both as fine companion and helpful critic. Assuredly it is because so many of the poems have to do with the amatory experiences of Stevenson in his young unmarried days that his wife did not see to their publication.

Happily, Mrs. Stevenson did not go to the extent of destroying these illuminating poems. Just what selection Stevenson himself might have made, after having prepared his careful transcripts, one cannot say; one wonders to what poems he refers in his letter to Edmund Clarence Stedman of August 11, 1894, shortly before his death, where he writes of poems that are "under way," and adds, "I shall ask Sidney Colvin to let you have a sight of

the proofs as soon as they are ready." In any case, it is certain that Stevenson did not desire to have posterity kept ignorant forever of those verses which express the emotional and intellectual crises of his youth, or the many poems of later friendship and conjugal love which made their first appearance, more than a score of years after his death, in the Bibliophile volumes. Here, too, were included variations and unpublished portions of previously printed poems. Why, one must ask, was there omitted from that lovely poem, "The Canoe Speaks," the picture of the bathing maidens:

"And stepping free, each breathing lass,
From her discarded ring of clothes,
Into the crystal coolness goes."

And why was left out that entire portion of the same poem beginning:

"Now bare to the beholder's eye
Your late denuded bindings lie
Subsiding slowly where they fell,
A disinvested citadel."

Is there not in all this the conscious motive to minimize public recognition of that streak of sensuousness in Stevenson which was as much a part of his character as were his virtues, and which in these writings is artistically revealed? Only the motive of prudery, which we do not ascribe, or of practical or sentimental motives of myth-making, might, it seems, offer the explanation.

The Washington myth, concerning his inability to tell a lie, has been kept up for the supposed edification of American children, although the historian knows, for instance, that Washington, during the Revolutionary War, instructed General James Clinton to spread misleading information con-

cerning the size of the American forces, a perfectly justifiable strategic lie. The Washington Irving myth regarding the intensity of his life-long passion for the memory of Matilda Hoffman, who had died during the days of their engagement,—an intensity which, so the world was led to believe, prevented Irving from ever again falling in love with a woman,—is an instance of a myth made possible only by the deliberate act of a biographer. In this case Pierre M. Irving attempted to delete an entry in Washington Irving's journals which indicated the exact day whereon, many years after the sweet Matilda Hoffman's death, Irving had unsuccessfully proposed marriage to an English girl, Emily Foster, in Dresden. But how futile to confer on human beings abnormal or superhuman qualities! All of us, whether as individuals, or grouped as nations, have our vices and our virtues, our weak and our strong points. To emphasize the greater qualities that are characteristic of a man or a nation affords the value of fine example to contemporaries and successors; but to distort, or to suppress, involves, in the end, the destructive element which inheres in all insincerity. Especially in the case of Stevenson, the man's life offers universal sustaining elements whose force is vitiated by glossing over his weaknesses.

Let us briefly consider the Stevenson of student days, and determine what the poems that have only lately come to light can add to that chapter of the official biography wherein this period, 1867-73, is treated. Mr. Balfour's only reference to Stevenson's problems or experiences in the field of sex is contained in the following lines: "He was 'young in youth,' and travel-

ling at the fiery pace of his age and temperament; his senses were impetuous; his intellect inquiring, and he must either find his own way, or, as he well might have done, lose it altogether." The biographer virtually dismisses a subject of intense importance in understanding the true Stevenson. Stevenson became of age in 1871, but before he had reached manhood he had entered upon one of the greatest experiences of his life: he had met his first love, and to her, and for her, beginning with the year 1870, he wrote some of his sincerest lyrics. We shall probably never know who this girl was. A marginal annotation by Stevenson, made many years later on the copy of one of his early lyrics to her, shows her name to have been Claire. She was of the lower class in life, and presumably one of the girls that Stevenson met when, owing to the small allowance made to him by his father in his student days, he frequented cheap taverns and went about with socially questionable people. He had a liaison with Claire, which reached its climax probably in 1870, and his devotion for her was so genuine and so manly that in his poem entitled "God Gave to Me a Child in Part" his regret that their child was never to be born is expressed in the poem whereof these are the first and last stanzas:

"God gave to me a child in part
Yet wholly gave the father's heart:—
Child of my soul, O whither now,
Unborn, unmothered, goest thou?

"Alas! alone he sits, who then
Immortal among mortal men,
Sat hand in hand with love, and all
day through
With your dear mother, wondered
over you."

Stevenson's attitude as here shown is decidedly high-minded. It would strongly seem to imply his desire to marry the girl, and other verses of the same period suggest that marriage was promised. But Stevenson was not of age and was entirely dependent upon his father. We can easily imagine how the elder Stevenson would have regarded a daughter-in-law of this type. He had opposed his son's romance with the intelligent and socially eligible divorcée, Mrs. Osbourne, relenting only after Stevenson had found himself on the verge of starvation in far-away San Francisco.

But Claire was not the only girl who engaged the affections of Robert Louis Stevenson during his student days, and though his passion for her was deeper and more lasting than that for any of the others, his poem entitled "I Dreamed of Forest Alleys Fair" shows him in close endearment with "Jenny." We find it not easy, therefore, to give full credence to Mr. Balfour's statement that "of all Stevenson's difficulties, those concerned with religion were the most important, if for no other reason than that they alone affected his relations with his father." Were the full story of Stevenson's youth to be written, his amorous experiences, especially those wherein Claire was involved, would assuredly seem to explain *at least* some part of the disturbances in the Stevenson household; and we are strongly inclined to surmise that his departure for the Continent was not wholly due to religious altercations with his father, or solely to questions of health.

The year 1873 marks the climax of those struggles that had made Stevenson's heart and mind a battleground for the previous three years.

It was then that he became fairly free from romantic youthful entanglements, and free, also, from the fear that he might be overborne by any narrow tenets of dogmatic religion.

The sex element that preponderates in the early poetry, and which no biographer has yet dwelt upon, is largely absent from the years 1873-76. All the early, lighter loves may be said to have ended with the poem of 1874, beginning, "Let Love go, if go she will"; and though the wrench was not without pain, as the interjected quotation, "Ah! God!", reveals on the margin of the manuscript, love in any potent way did not again enter Stevenson's life until he met Mrs. Osbourne at the little town of Grez, in France.

The poems that Stevenson addressed to the woman who was for many years his loyal wife form a series that establish the fine and ever ripening quality of his devotion to her, and he would be a churlish critic who would question Mrs. Stevenson's title to the love and gratitude of her husband. We are far more interested in considering how and why so loyal a companion, who was at the same time so intelligent a woman, undertook to create what we have called the Stevenson myth. The years 1876-79, covered by Mr. Balfour in the chapter entitled "Transition," give us no word of any moment concerning the inception of that passion which led Stevenson, in August, 1879, to reject the advice of friends, defy the parental wrath, and set forth, an emigrant, on his long journey to California, whither

Mrs. Osbourne had preceded him to obtain her divorce. So, too, in the succeeding chapter, wherein the marriage takes place, the approach is statistical, lacking color and warmth. We understand, of course, that Mrs. Stevenson herself was advising with the biographer, if, indeed, not supervising him. There may have been, or, let us say, there assuredly was, modesty in her self-elimination. But she was, after all, too much the *dea ex machina* in the epic of Stevenson's life forever to escape the full attention that is her due. She was a woman of force, will, self-confidence. The



Stevenson when
a law student

year that she took Stevenson as her husband marked physically and financially the nadir of his career. He had come to counting his pennies before he bought a cup of coffee and a roll of bread. It was to an almost starving man that there came a message from his father that he might henceforth count upon twelve hundred dollars or more a year. There is no indication, however, that at any time did Mrs. Osbourne regret that she was being wooed by a poor, sick, and little-known writer, and as soon as the marriage was practical, she became his wife.

Yet one must come to the conclusion that, however sturdy her qualities from the point of view of generous comradeship, domestic economy, and questions relating to Stevenson's health, she was not the perfect wife for such a man as Robert Louis Stevenson. Her traits of character and temperament soon made her a welcome daughter-in-law, especially to the stern and practical

father to whom, in many ways, she bore resemblance; but it is an open secret that she disturbed some of Stevenson's earlier friendships, and especially did her régime do much to alienate the affection of Henley. Of all this there is no mention in those pages of the official biography which follow the pilgrimage of Stevenson and his wife to Davos and the Highlands, and to the Riviera during the years 1880-84. Sir Sidney Colvin, in his latest essay on Stevenson, does indeed touch upon the disciplinarian quality in Mrs. Stevenson, but he gives no details, and unless he may still choose to verify or to lay at rest a rumor long credited in the inner Stevensonian circles, we shall probably never be able to know whether this strong-willed, self-confident woman did not push her prerogatives too far along the most regrettable channels that an author's wife can follow in a spirit of kindly meant autocracy. For the story goes that, during a period of special physical distress, when Stevenson was so weakened by hemorrhages that his conversations were conducted by means of a note-book and pencil, Mrs. Stevenson, over-riding the objections, of R. L. S., took it upon herself to throw into the fire the manuscript of a novel by her husband. The early eighties has been given as the date, Hyères the place, and the subject of the manuscript the life of a street-walker. We need not accept the statement that Stevenson considered this his masterpiece, although it well might have



Stevenson in later life

been, for his early experiences and his wide sympathies qualified him to approach the subject with rare humanity, while his studies in French literature, a phase of his literary development that has not been sufficiently studied, contributed to make him the one British writer of his time who might have handled the subject in an un-English way. Stevenson's treatment of the enforced victim of an elemental fact could easily have been a fine masterpiece of his style, and the even finer masterpiece of his philosophy toward life. Why, then, assuming its destruction,

did Mrs. Stevenson consign this work to the flames? We offer the following theories as explanations consonant with circumstances.

"An Inland Voyage," published in 1878, and "Travels with a Donkey," in 1879, had created a circle of admirers of Stevenson, but in both these volumes the author appears as the lover of wanderings, and not as a stable member of society. The serious side of Stevenson as an essayist whose writings might advisedly furnish instruction to youth was first appreciated on a wide scale with the appearance, in 1881, of "Virginibus Puerisque." The next year saw the publication of "Familiar Studies of Men and Books," a volume that further established Stevenson as a mentor of youth. Then, in 1883, came "Treasure Island," one of the finest and most exciting of romances, and appealing more strongly to the young reader than any other book of

its day from the pen of a notable stylist. Stevenson at last was financially successful as an author. He was, moreover, in the field of verse busy with the poems that were to be published, in 1885, under the title of "A Child's Garden of Verses." How would this public have been affected if the life-story of a harlot had then appeared? One can readily imagine the reaction of teachers and preachers and the consternation of the publishers. Art is all very well in its way, but royalties have to be considered. Or we may ascribe to Mrs. Stevenson a finer motive than the merely financial one, and consider, from her point of view, the pity of destroying by one too daring an act the position to which her husband had attained as an entertainer and instructor of youth. She saw him on a pedestal, and she made it her business to keep him there. This, we surmise, accounts for the obliteration of his reputed masterpiece, if, it seems again safer to add, this writing of his was, as we believe, destroyed.

It is significant that Henley divides the life of Stevenson into two parts, and that the period immediately following his marriage marks the division-line. There was the younger Stevenson, brave, capricious, buoyant, vain, impatient of dogma, hating Mrs. Grundy, fascinating, and unconventional. This was the Stevenson whom Henley had loved despite his manifest faults. The second Stevenson was never quite comprehensible to Henley. The lighter posing of early days seemed now to have developed into a conscious pose before the world, not of the artist, but of the moralist. Here, I think, Henley was not quite fair to Stevenson, and though no doubt the author of "Virginibus Puerisque," and

of the many letters written sometimes in a rather fatherly spirit, enjoyed the unexpected position that he had won, Stevenson never fell into any vital insincerity or hypocrisy. The Covenant strain was his by inheritance, but his early conviction that one must not fear to pluck the rose on account of the thorn, and that life was much more than a matter of ethics, he never abandoned. The influence of his wife, the modifications that differentiate eager youth from respected middle age, played their parts in his attitude and in his writings.

Only in two instances, as far as I know, did Stevenson's courage not rise to the heights of his opportunity, and in both of these one surmises he would, if left to himself, have carried out his own intrepid ideas. I have in mind his protest on behalf of Boer independence embodied in the draft, written in 1881, found in a note-book among his unpublished papers, and printed for the first time by the Bibliophile Society forty years later. The proclamation of the South African Republic in December, 1880, with Kruger, Pretorius, and Joubert as its executive triumvirate, led in the following February to the battle of Majuba Hill, which culminated in the rout of the British. While this defeat enraged the greater part of England, there were many Englishmen who felt it folly to seek to deprive the freeborn Dutch of independence in their internal affairs. In March a truce was concluded, and a status involving internal self-government was arranged for, which lasted until the Second Boer War eighteen years later. It was during the weeks preceding the conclusion of the terms of peace that Stevenson drafted a letter wherein he wrote:

"We are in the wrong or all that we profess is false; blood has been lost, and, I fear, honour also. But if any honour yet remains, or any chivalry, that is certainly the only chivalrous or honourable course, for the strong to accept his buffet and do justice, already tardy, to the weak whom he has misused and who has so crushingly retorted. As if there were any prestige like the prestige of being just; or any generosity like that of owning and repairing injustice; as if in this troubled time, and with all our fair and plucky history, there were any course left to this nation but to hold back the sword of vengeance and bare the head to that state, possibly enough misguided, whom we have tried ineffectually to brutalize!"

Unless this letter has been lost in the files of some newspaper, we must regretfully resort to the conclusion that it was never sent, and we cannot free ourselves from the thought that Stevenson refrained on the practical advice of a wife who felt that political affairs were not her husband's *métier*, and that to accuse Englishmen of deficiency in chivalry and honor would eliminate a great body of the author's admirers. The point can indeed be well taken that a man who gives up his life to belles-lettres can be of widest value in sticking to his art; but the regret is still there that Stevenson's fearless words advocating the granting of independence to the Boers remained unspoken.

The second instance had to do with the Home Rule uprising in Ireland in 1886, when Stevenson evolved the scheme of going to live on a poor Irish farm and of braving in person the dangers exemplified by the imprisonment of the Curtin women. The de-

tails of his mental debate are outlined in his letter of April 15 to Mrs. Fleeming Jenkin. The crux of the matter was that "here was a wrong founded on crime; crime that the Government cannot prevent; crime that it occurs to no man to defy." But the crime is defied in Stevenson's mind, and his personal example can, he hopes, cause people to take more drastic notice of the terrible conditions then obtaining. He is willing to lose "friends, all comforts, and society." He is filled with the spirit of the Crusader. But though his wife does not refuse, "she hates the idea." We do not blame her in the least, and it is most doubtful that Stevenson could have accomplished much worth while for the cause of England in Ireland or for Home Rule by the Irish. At any rate, the plan went by the board, and Stevenson abandoned this opportunity to engage in an act of outstanding, even if quixotic, courage.

The philosophy of conduct which Stevenson exemplified in his life and illustrated in his writings was preponderantly a code based on the master words of simple courage and forbearance. Even if we consider the final period at Vailima, when he conducted the religious services, and when the family meal was preceded by a prayer composed by the head of the household, we need not regard Stevenson's attitude as colored by sanctimoniousness or the least insincerity. It is a far cry from the year 1873, when in "A Valentine Song" Stevenson attacked the "white neck-cloth'd bigot" with the cry:

"Back, minister of Christ and source
of fear,

We cherish freedom—back with thee
and thine!"

But as early as 1869, when Stevenson was yet a boy, in another mood he wrote a poem entitled "Prayer," ending with the stanza:

"O let my thoughts abide in Thee
Lest I should fall;
Show me Thyself in all I see,
Thou Lord of all."

Moreover, Stevenson of the Samoan days was, according to the custom of the South Sea Islands, "father" of a household in which children of the native chieftains were inmates, there to acquire such spiritual and intellectual education and other civilizing influences as, so runs the general supposition, the enlightened Occidental can confer. He was thus charged with responsibilities quite apart from the desire to give pleasure to his religiously inclined mother, then living with him, that made these prayers somewhat more, or, if you will, somewhat less, than the expression of individual inclination. Even so, the dominant note in these invocations is that of the weakness of human nature and of the value of kindness and courage.

Excerpts from these prayers, which were among Stevenson's unpublished manuscripts, are in consonance with what we believe was Stevenson's lifelong aversion to regarding himself as in any way an exemplar.

Despite the duality of his nature, the author of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," a work dramatically revealing the gleaming and the black sides of the spiritual shield, is deserving of the high admiration of his fellows for two basic reasons. As a man he fought despondency of mind, suffering of body, and other harassments along the road of life with consistent valor and with wide

generosity. In an entirely unpublished note-book belonging to the year 1872, when Stevenson was studying law at Edinburgh University, and when, through the medium of verse, and not, as some editors have thought, first through prose, he was preparing himself for his life career, we find on the initial page:

"O deeply fallen,
In glens of black despair I sit
And still forgotten of the crowd,
Wounded, alone,
At every pain I sing aloud
To hide a groan. . . .
I see and envy not. I hear
The song of general mankind."

And thereupon he goes on with verses that offer his solution of despair, the easing of "individual pain, in others' joy."

In maintaining this attitude and injecting its support into his writings, Stevenson made his permanent contribution to the general stock of courage on which mankind must draw whether or not the analyst of human actions finds in an inscrutable fate the predestinating agent negating the power of the individual will. Add to this that he was a devoted craftsman ever arduously and delightfully successfully engaged in the difficult field of stylistic achievement, and there need be no reluctance in seeing him step down from a pedestal of too elevated righteousness and take the place where he himself, we feel assured, would best like to have it, a man among other men—a man of many faults and weaknesses more than counterbalanced by his charm, by the tenacity of his courage, by the breadth of his generous vision.



A Gift from the East

A FABLE

BY LINCOLN STEFFENS

My very good friend, the traveler, who was coming slowly around the world, wrote to me from Japan that he had picked up a gift for me, a rare and curious gift. I tried to imagine what it might be. A vase? A print or a dainty painting? Some bit of sculptured beauty? I knew my friend, and I knew that he loved lovely things; but—

“No,” he said when he got home, “it is not a work of art. It’s a story, an idea, a truth, perhaps. I don’t know.”

And he gave it to me, as I give it to you for all it is worth.

“One quiet night in Tokio,” he began, “I passed the whole evening and the dark part of the morning with an elder statesman of Japan. And he talked; they do sometimes. And I listened, as I can, you know. So I heard things. I heard many things that shine like tiny lights for me now in the darkness of the East, stars in the