

**THY ROD
AND THY STAFF**

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Thy rod and Thy staff by Arthur Christopher Benson

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ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON

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BY

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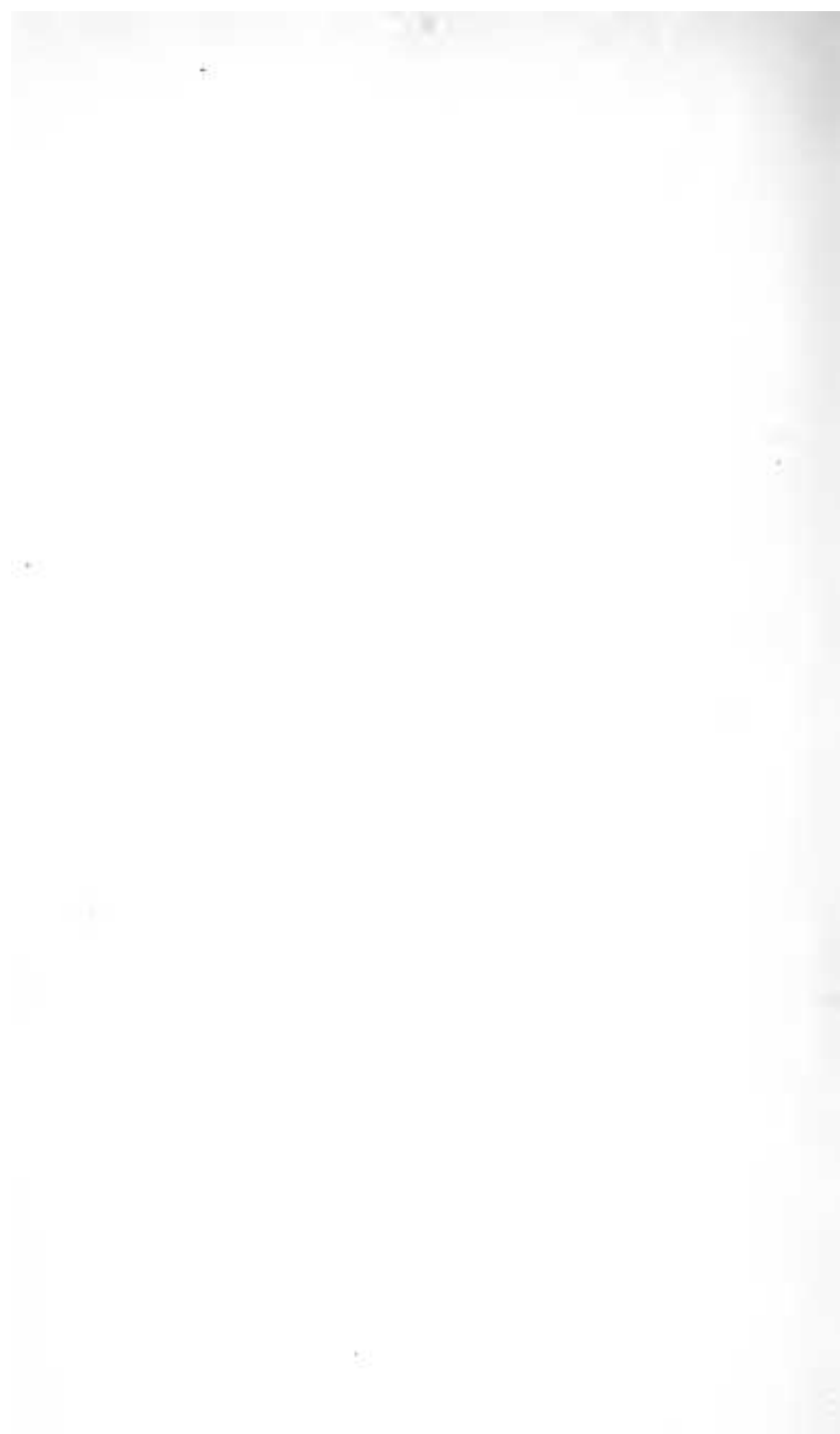
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TO
HENRY ROSS TODD
THIS BOOK
IS BY HIS FRIEND THE AUTHOR
AFFECTIONATELY AND GRATEFULLY
DEDICATED



PREFACE

I WROTE in the last of my books that dealt with personal experience, *The Silent Isle*, that I would some day tell, if I could, how it was that my pleasant design failed. I only wish I knew why it failed!

Well, this present book contains my sad and strange adventure, sad at first, and always strange, but afterwards so wonderfully blest in all its gifts and issues—the sense of life renewed, of old comfortable hopes and purposes destroyed, the glad prospects of the soul, the nearness and dear-ness of human relationship—that the failure has become for me not indeed a triumph, but a joy, in the hunted escape I made from a foolish and complacent Paradise into the real world—or so at least I think!

In any case it is all here humbly and plainly stated—the disappointment, the misery,

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the stumbling in the lonely mist—and then suddenly the beautiful outlook, as upon mountain-heads and falling streams and homelike valleys, that flashed upon my wondering eyes. Of course the danger of such a book is that it may all come to seem too dramatic, too heroic—a grouping of effects and contrasts around a central figure; but I can only say, quite frankly and simply, that anything less heroic and less dramatic than my handling of the adventure, cannot well be conceived. If I were in search of credit, I might well wish to suppress the ghastly inefficiency, the comatose listlessness, the shuddering cowardice with which I trod the dreary path. A noble nature, by hopeful endurance and tender considerateness, might have made something splendid out of the miserable episode. But I conducted myself like the abject figure in the *Winter's Tale* of the gentleman pursued by the bear; it was a dolorous and undignified flight, full of miserable indecision and helpless prostration. I showed no fight at all; I simply shuffled despairingly away from the monster

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which pursued me, murmuring apologies, and pleading for mercy.

It was that which made the end of it all so comforting and reviving—though in a sense so humiliating—that I had not earned my reward, except by bearing the blows of fate as a bolster might bear them, limply bulging back to my former shape. I do not wish there to be any mistake about this; for shocking as the experience was, I was very tenderly used, never tried beyond my strength, never absolutely at the end of my resources, helped patiently over many a stile. That was the one hopeful thing about it all. I was intended to suffer, and I did suffer; but I was not overwhelmed by suffering, and day by day I grew to feel that my miseries were being very delicately adjusted and apportioned to the exact end in view. My brain was never numbed, and I was always aware exactly what was happening to me. And thus I had the blessed sense that, though I was punished, I was also forgiven. It was remedial and not retributive.

I do not suppose that those who saw me