

**STEVENSONS
ATTITUDE TO LIFE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649314355

Stevensons Attitude to life by John Franklin Genung

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

JOHN FRANKLIN GENUNG

**STEVENSONS
ATTITUDE TO LIFE**



**TEVENSON'S ATTITUDE
TO LIFE : WITH READ-
INGS FROM HIS ESSAYS
AND LETTERS. BY JOHN
FRANKLIN GENUNG**

**THOMAS Y. CROWELL AND COMPANY
PUBLISHERS : NEW YORK : MDCCCCI**

Copyright, 1901, by T. Y. Crowell & Co.

D. B. Updike, The Merrymount Press, Boston

PREFATORY NOTE



THE marks of oral discourse, which this book still bears from its original form as a lecture, it has not been thought best to remove. What was first read aloud by the author he now gives, to those who care for the theme, opportunity to read for themselves. And if, beyond the sound of his voice, some fit audience may like to hear how the deep music of life reverberates from one of the sanest minds, one of the bravest hearts, of the century just past, the purpose of this little volume will be fulfilled.

For the readings, which have a very vital share in giving the volume whatever value it has, thankful acknowledgment is hereby made to Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, who have kindly given permission to quote from works of which they hold the copyright. The readings are taken from the Thistle Edition of Stevenson's works.

Amherst, Massachusetts, February 6, 1901.

STEVENSON'S ATTITUDE TO LIFE



STEVENSON'S attitude to life: this is what we now propose to consider; a natural enough subject of inquiry, it would seem; and yet the very proposal, as thus phrased, is a departure from the Stevensonian idiom. If

he had the framing of an ideal for us, his first counsel, I imagine, would be, Do not assume an attitude toward life at all, but just live; do not be a spectator and critic of the business of living, but throw yourself into the heart of it, and be all there, and say no more about it.

i



FROM this consideration radiates our whole subject. In Stevenson's implicit philosophy a formulated attitude would be too much like attitudinizing; too self-conscious and put on;

too much sicklied o'er with the uneasy introspectiveness of the tired century. Enough of posing and irresolution outside the arena of life; such, we may be sure, was his thought as he listened to the utterances that came surging up to him from the inner heart of his time. And so what he represents first and wholesomest of all, what most gives him power on his age, is the robust reaction against all this which breathes like an ozone through every page of his writings. Not that this reaction is overt, or that he takes it upon himself to set up a pro-

x

Stevenson's
Attitude to
Life

test. One great element of his power, on the contrary, is the entire absence of remonstrance, or of anything merely negative or repressive. He simply ignores that benumbing *arrière-pensée* which for full half a century has so beset the faith of the world, and dares to take life at its positive intrinsic value, without the disquiet of morbid analysis. That is all; his "attitude" is merely the free joyous erectness of the undismayed soul.

To approach life with fearless confidence that it means intensely and means good; to bear full weight upon it, never letting encroaching doubts or disillusionings chill the youthful spirit in which the soul first welcomes the world,— a hearty gospel this; introduced by him, too, just at a time when the spirit of the age might turn to it most gratefully, as to a sunshine out of fogs and discomfort. And not only Stevenson's words, but his life no less, ennobled that gospel; maintained as it was under such difficulties of physical weakness and enforced exile that just for this brave service we count him among the heroes and martyrs of literature; classing him as a worthy peer in the same rank with Walter Scott, breathing forth the rarest spirit of romance from under his burden of unrighteous debt, and Charles Lamb, adding to the world's joy by his immortal words written from the home where in lifelong renunciation of conjugal comfort he was caring for a mad sister. All these buried their hardships in silence away from the world, while they coined their life's best ore into a mintage of health and

cheer. Nor can we count the latest-born the least of these, when we recall how almost from earliest years he lived face to face with death, yet not in defiance but with unflagging buoyancy and courage wrought as he could snatch respite from disease to fulfil what we may truly call his message to the world. To work thus was his animating principle, his life-creed; and this very triumph of spirit was his greatest message.

Stevenson's
Attitude to
Life

You remember how bravely this trait of his comes to expression in his essay *Æs Triplex*, an essay not only full of his own life but singularly prophetic of his manner of leaving it. The whole essay ought to be quoted; I will read you merely the last page. "Who would find heart enough," he says, "to begin to live, if he dallied with the consideration of death? . . . It is better to lose health like a spendthrift than to waste it like a miser. It is better to live and be done with it, than to die daily in the sick-room. By all means begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished in a week. It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honour useful labour. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely ending. All who have meant good work with their whole hearts, have done good work, although they may die before they have the time to sign it. Every heart that has beat strong and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world, and bettered the