

**THE LIFE OF ROBERT
LOUIS STEVENSON**

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The life of Robert Louis Stevenson by Graham Balfour

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GRAHAM BALFOUR

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LOUIS STEVENSON**

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON

BY

(SIR) GRAHAM BALFOUR

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CHAPTER I

HIS ANCESTORS

"The ascendant hand is what I feel most strongly; I am bound in and in with my forbears. . . . We are all nobly born; fortunate those who know it; blessed those who remember."—R. L. S., *Letters*, ii. 230.

"The sights and thoughts of my youth pursue me; and I see like a vision the youth of my father, and of his father, and the whole stream of lives flowing down there far in the north, with the sound of laughter and tears, to cast me out in the end, as by a sudden freshet, on these ultimate islands. And I admire and bow my head before the romance of destiny."—R. L. S., *Dedication of Catriona*,

"IT is the chief recommendation of long pedigrees," as Stevenson once wrote, "that we can follow back the careers of our component parts and be reminded of our ante-natal lives." But the threads are many and tangled, and it is hard to distinguish for more than a generation or two the transmission of the characteristics that are combined in any individual of our own day. When a man has been dead for a hundred years, it is seldom that anything is remembered of him but his name and his occupation; he has become no more than a link in a pedigree, and the personal disposition is forgotten which made him loved or feared, together with the powers that gained

him success, or the weaknesses that brought about his failure. Therefore it is no unusual circumstance that, while we can trace the line of Stevenson's ancestors on either side for two and four hundred years respectively, our knowledge of them, in any real sense of the word, begins only at the end of the eighteenth century. After that date we have four portraits, drawn in part by his own hand, together with the materials for another sketch; in these may be discerned some of the traits and faculties which went to make up a personality so unusual, so fascinating, and so deeply loved.

The record of his father's people opens in 1675 with the birth of a son, Robert, to James Stevenson, "presumably a tenant farmer" of Nether Carsewell in the parish of Neilston, some ten miles to the south-west of Glasgow. Robert's son, a maltster in Glasgow, had ten children, among whom were Hugh, born 1749, and Alan, born June, 1752.

"With these two brothers my story begins," their descendant wrote in *A Family of Engineers*. "Their deaths were simultaneous; their lives unusually brief and full. Tradition whispered me in childhood they were the owners of an islet near St. Kitts; and it is certain they had risen to be at the head of considerable interests in the West Indies, which Hugh managed abroad and Alan at home," almost before they had reached the years of manhood. In 1774 Alan was summoned to the West Indies by Hugh. "An agent had proved unfaithful on a serious scale; and it used to be told me in my childhood how the brothers pursued him from one island to another in an open boat, were exposed to the pernicious dews of the tropics, and simultaneously struck down. The dates and places of their deaths would seem to indicate a more scattered and prolonged pursuit." At all events, "in something like the course of post, both were called away, the one twenty-five, the other twenty-two."