

**THE LIFE OF ROBERT
LOUIS STEVENSON
IN TWO VOLUMES, I**

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The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson in Two Volumes, I by Graham Balfour

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GRAHAM BALFOUR

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PREFACE

THIS book is intended to supplement the volumes of Stevenson's *Letters* already published. Originally it was to have been written by Mr. Colvin, and to have appeared simultaneously with the two volumes of correspondence, so admirably edited by him; but when health and opportunity unfortunately failed him, Mrs. Stevenson requested me to undertake the task. The reason for this selection was that, during the last two years and a half of my cousin's life, I had on his invitation made Vailima my home and the point of departure for my journeys, and, apart from the members of his own family, had been throughout that period the only one of his intimate friends in contact with every side of his life.

In Stevenson's case, if anywhere, the rule holds, that All Biography would be Autobiography if it could, and I have availed myself as far as possible of the writings in which he has referred to himself and his past experience. To bring together the passing allusions to himself scattered widely throughout his works was an obvious duty; at the same time my longer quotations, except in two or three manifest and necessary instances, have been taken almost entirely from the material which was hitherto either unpublished or issued only in the limited Edinburgh Edition. Whenever I found any pas-

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sage in his manuscripts or ephemeral work bearing upon his life or development, I employed it no less readily than I should have used a letter or a hasty note, and in exactly the same fashion, regarding it as a piece of direct evidence from the best possible source. Such use of documents, I need hardly point out, differs entirely from challenging admiration for the literary form of immature or unfinished compositions. Where so much taste and discretion have been shown in preparing the final edition of his works, I should be the last to transgress the bounds imposed upon publication.

Since autobiography is wont to deal at some length with the first memories of its author, there seemed no occasion unduly to restrain this tendency in the case of the singer and interpreter of childhood, whose account of his early years is not only interesting in itself, but also of additional value for its illustration of his poems and essays. Again, in the representation of his adolescence, it must be remembered that he never wholly ceased to be a boy, that much that belonged to him in early youth remained with him in after-life, and that enthusiasms and generous impulses would sweep in and carry him away till the end.

Much of course he did outgrow, and that almost entirely his worse part. I feel that I should have done him a very ill service if I had refrained from showing the faults of the immaturity from which the character and genius of his manhood emerged. He had many failings, but few or none that made his friends think worse of him or love him any the less. To be the writer that he was, amounted to a great exploit and service to humanity; to become the man that in the end he became,

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seems to me an achievement equally great, an example no less eloquent.

Many persons, both friends and strangers to me, have rendered my task far easier than I could have hoped. There is hardly one of Stevenson's intimate friends but has helped me in a greater or less degree, and if I were here to repeat my thanks to all to whom I am indebted for information, I should have to record more than sixty names. Those to whom we owe most are often those whom formally we thank the least; and to Mrs. Stevenson and Mr. Lloyd Osbourne I can never express my indebtedness for their suggestions and their knowledge, their confidence, their patience, and their encouragement. But, of course, for everything that is here printed I alone am responsible.

The references to Stevenson's writings are necessarily to the pages of the Edinburgh Edition, as being the most complete English collection of his works.

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