

**LONGMANS' ENGLISH
CLASSICS. ROBERT LOUIS
STEVENSON'S TREASURE
ISLAND. [NEW YORK-1910]**

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON'S
TREASURE ISLAND

EDITED

WITH NOTES AND AN INTRODUCTION

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INTRODUCTION

THE AUTHOR

"HE was the spirit of boyhood tugging at the skirts of this old world of ours and compelling it to come back and play." These words, which Mr. J. M. Barrie has applied to the author of "Treasure Island," go far toward explaining why it is one of the best of all books for boys, both young and old. Eagerness in play, energy in action, delight in adventure were dominant characteristics of Robert Louis Stevenson throughout his life. That chronic infirmity of health which kept him constantly in search of a more propitious climate led him to live successively in many different quarters of the globe, until in the end he was lured forth to the ultimate islands of the South Pacific. His life was, therefore, one of great variety. And since, in spite of the hazard of his long struggle against death, he constantly maintained a brave and gallant disposition and wooed life as a lover, life gave him greater gifts of experience than fall to the lot of common men. Everywhere about the world he won delight, because he carried with him the faculty for being delighted in whatever came to pass. Because he enjoyed life as a tale that is told, his own life reads like a novel of adventure.

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh on November 13, 1850. He was the only child of Thomas Stevenson, who was eminent as a light-house engineer, as (in turn) his father, Robert Stevenson, had been before him, and of Margaret Isabella, daughter of the

Reverend Lewis Balfour, minister of Colinton in Midlothian. Louis was a playful, imaginative child; he was fond of being read to, and commenced to compose (by dictation) at the age of six. From the first his health was precarious; but he was tenderly and devotedly cared for by his mother and by his nurse, Alison Cunningham, for whom throughout his life he maintained a grateful affection. Because of his frequent illnesses, his schooling was irregular and unconservative; and even while attending school, he showed what seemed a somewhat truant disposition. He was less fond of studying than of taking long rambles through the city and the suburbs. On these roving expeditions, he always took along a copy-book, in which he tried to fit into words his impressions of people and places, imitating the rhythms of his favorite authors. In this way he was busy on his own private end, which was to learn to write. His father, however, wished him to follow the family profession; and with this in view, he entered Edinburgh University in 1867 and studied engineering. In this scientific work he showed very little interest; though in 1871 he won a silver medal for a paper "On a New Form of Intermittent Light for Lighthouses." The same year, much to his father's regret, he gave up engineering and (as a compromise) began to study law. He was admitted to the bar in 1875; but he at once forsook the legal profession also, and turned his attention entirely to letters.

Weakness of the lungs, accompanied by acute exhaustion of the nerves, forced him to spend the winter of 1873 at Mentone on the Riviera. In 1874 he joined the Savile Club in London, and soon made friends with many of the most prominent literary men of the day, including Sidney Colvin, William Ernest Henley, Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang, Walter

Pollock, Leslie Stephen, Sir Walter Simpson, and Professor Fleeming Jenkin. He was noted for the range and ardor and vivacity of his talk; and his social charm was irresistible. Henley's well-known sonnet, entitled "Apparition," gives a vivid description of his aspect at this period. In April, 1875, in company with his cousin, Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson, the painter and art critic, he made his first of many visits to the artist colony of Fontainebleau.

All this time he had practised writing constantly; and in his late twenties the fruits of his long labor began to be apparent. His first book, "An Inland Voyage," which was published in 1878, was an account of a canoe trip from Antwerp to Grez which he had taken in 1876 in company with Sir Walter Simpson. In the early autumn of 1878 he went alone upon the tramping trip through the Cévennes that resulted in "Travels with a Donkey," which was published in 1879. Though these little books of travel were written with more elaborate mannerism than he later showed in his maturer work, they stamped him already as a master of English prose style. Meanwhile, beginning in 1876, he contributed to the *Cornhill* and other magazines the critical essays which were later collected in "Familiar Studies of Men and Books," published in 1882, and the vigorous and brilliant papers on life and the living of it which, in 1881, were collected in the volume entitled "Virginibus Puerisque." As a critic he showed thorough study and sympathetic insight; and as a moralist he displayed a militant gaiety and bracing bravery of spirit.

It will be noticed that Stevenson began his career as a critic and a moralist and a writer of descriptive prose. In his early works he remained an author for the discerning few; and it was not until he turned

to fiction that his writing became generally popular. His first stories to be published were "A Lodging for the Night," in October, 1877, "The Sire de Malétoit's Door," in January, 1878, and "Will o' the Mill," in the same month, January, 1878. The latter is one of the most perfect of all his short stories. His first volume of fiction was "New Arabian Nights," which appeared serially from June to October, 1878, and was published as a book in 1882. These early tales demonstrated at once his romantic love for the poetry of circumstance and his mastery of rapid and brilliant narrative.

Soon after the inland voyage of 1876, Stevenson met in France an American lady, Mrs. Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne, for whom he conceived a devotion that changed the entire course of his life. Her domestic circumstances had been unhappy, and on her return home in 1878, she took steps to obtain a divorce from her husband. Learning her determination, Stevenson resolved to follow her, and started suddenly for California in August, 1879. He undertook the journey against the remonstrances of his family and friends. He was very short of funds; and therefore crossed the ocean in what was practically the steerage and traversed the continent in an emigrant train. He afterward narrated the experiences of this double journey in "The Amateur Emigrant" and "Across the Plains." On board ship he wrote "The Story of a Lie," under stress of immediate need for money. Though he endured with genial interest the hardships of his great adventure, they resulted in a general breakdown of his health. From September to December, 1879, he lived at Monterey, the old Pacific capital, and worked incessantly. This was the first time in his life that he had been forced to earn his living entirely by his pen, and he found the struggle difficult.

In December, 1879, he moved to San Francisco, where for three months he lived in a workman's lodging, and was reduced almost to the point of death by enforced frugality and excessive labor. Mrs. Osbourne nursed him back to life. She was now free from her former husband; and Stevenson married her on May 19, 1880. Immediately afterward, in order to insure his recovery, the couple moved to a deserted mining camp in the California Coast Range. An account of their experiences in this regaling setting is given in "The Silverado Squatters." In August, 1880, Stevenson brought his wife to England, where she was enthusiastically welcomed by his parents and friends.

During the next two years he spent his summers in Scotland and his winters, on account of his hazardous health, at Davos Platz, in Switzerland, where he enjoyed the companionship of John Addington Symonds. It was at this period that he conceived and wrote that stirring narrative of buccaneers and buried treasure which was to mark the turning point in his career. "Treasure Island" was begun at Braemar and completed at Davos. It was undertaken to please his step-son, Lloyd Osbourne, then a lad of thirteen, who had asked him to try and write "something interesting." It ran serially in *Young Folks*, from October 1, 1881, to January 28, 1882, under the signature of "Captain George North," to give the impression that the author was a seafaring man. For this serial publication Stevenson received only £2 10s. (or approximately \$12.50) per page of 4,500 words; but he retained ownership of the book rights. The story was printed, without illustrations, in an unprominent part of the magazine, and attracted hardly any notice. In 1883 Cassell & Co. offered Stevenson £100 (or approximately \$500) as advance payment for the book rights to the story; and this

sum he was delighted to receive. On May 5, 1883, he wrote to his parents:

MY DEAREST PEOPLE,—

I have had a great piece of news. There has been offered for "Treasure Island"—how much do you suppose? I believe it would be an excellent jest to keep the answer till my next letter. For two cents I would do so. Shall I? Anyway, I'll turn the page first. No—well—A hundred pounds, all alive, O! A hundred jingling, tingling, golden, minted quid. Is not this wonderful? . . . It does look as if I should support myself without trouble in the future. If I have only health, I can, I thank God. It is dreadful to be a great, big man, and not be able to buy bread.

O that this may last!

Your loving and ecstatic son,
TREASURE ISLAND.

It has been for me a Treasure Island verily.

And in a letter written, about the same time, to his friend, William Ernest Henley, he said, "Really, £100 is a sight more than 'Treasure Island' is worth." The book was published, under the author's own name, toward the end of November, 1883. It was immediately successful, and made Stevenson suddenly famous as an artist in romance. Of its reception, his biographer, Mr. Graham Balfour, says: "Statesmen and judges and all sorts of staid and sober men became boys once more, sitting up long after bed-time to read their new book. The story goes that Mr. Gladstone got a glimpse of it at a colleague's house, and spent the next day hunting over London for a second-hand copy. The editor of the *Saturday Review*, the superior, cynical *Saturday* of old days, wrote excitedly to say that he thought 'Treasure Island' was the best book that had appeared since 'Robinson Crusoe;' and James Payn, who, if not a great novelist himself, yet held an undisputed position among novelists and critics,