

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES

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A Child's Garden of Verses by Robert Louis Stevenson

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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OF VERSES**

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BY
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY ANDREW LANG

Docket Edition

NEW IMPRESSION



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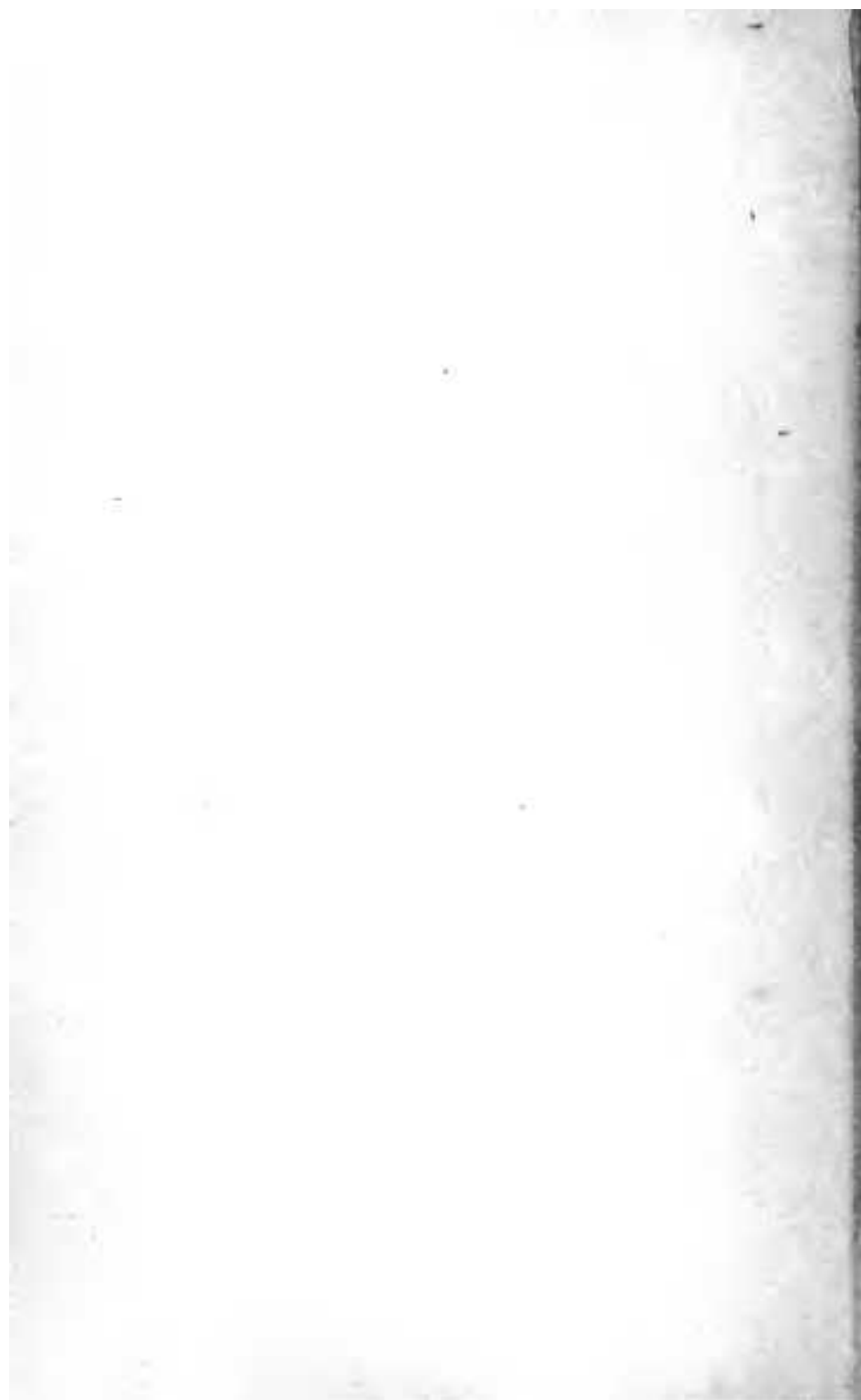
TO ALISON CUNNINGHAM

FROM HER BOY

*FOR the long nights you lay awake
And watched for my unworthy sake :
For your most comfortable hand
That led me through the uneven land :
For all the story-books you read :
For all the pains you comforted :
For all you pitied, all you bore,
In sad and happy days of yore :—
My second Mother, my first Wife,
The angel of my infant life—
From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, nurse, the little book you hold !*

*And grant it, Heaven, that all who read
May find as dear a nurse at need,
And every child who lists my rhyme,
In the bright, fireside, nursery clime,
May hear it in as kind a voice
As made my childish days rejoice !*

R. L.



INTRODUCTION

THIS little volume leads the memory back, far across 'the gulf whose waves are year by year.' In 1885, when 'A Child's Garden of Verses' was published, the author was still, I think, the youngest of a little group of friends who were fond of books and of lunching together at a certain club. It was yet more pleasant, though wickedly selfish, to induce Mr. Stevenson to lunch at another club, where you had him all to yourself. In those days he had for ten years at least been the bright particular star of the group: there was no one like him, whether as essayist, or as author of the rarely fantastic 'New Arabian Nights,' that *mélange* of stately banter, horror, burlesque, and vivid

invention. He had shown, too, his power as a narrator by his romance for boys, 'Treasure Island,' so cunning in style, so fertile in fancy, so masterly in the creation of Silver, that crutched buccaneer, and of the terrible blind Pew whose staff tapped with a terrifying sound, as (to quote the author of his being) 'He beckled, beckled all the way.' Finally Mr. Stevenson had won a path into the good graces of pulpit orators by the gruesome moral allegory of 'The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.'

The moral allegory I never could applaud: Mr. Hyde was not a good man, not one whom you could propose as a member of any club, with hope of his success, but Dr. Jekyll also was not a good man, and was less like a gentleman than his co-walker.

The peculiarity of Mr. Stevenson, among the set with whom he lived most when in London, was that he had never published verses. Most of the others had begun by attempting the strait and narrow way of verse, however obscurely, and however contemptuous, by 1885, may have been their own

opinion of what Keats calls their 'early blights.'

Mr. Stevenson, so far as his path was open to the sun and the eye of observers, had never even signed a copy of verses in a magazine. Then, unexpectedly, he blossomed on a new bough, and gave us 'A Child's Garden of Verses.' 'Shall I confess it or shall I conceal it?' as people say in Homer. The secret is that I could never read the book without 'a great inclination to cry.' The poems bring back so vividly, to some students, 'Another child, far, far away'—another child, absorbed in story books, lost in Shakespeare or Scott, perhaps seated under the table while the elders talk beside the fire or someone sings. Not all of us have been bookish children, but we who were bookish acted the scenes of which they read, and I remember, as a Roman engineer, taking part in the siege of Jerusalem, with a battering ram which, to the eyes of adults, bore the aspect of a long hard round cushion. The least bookish child, or grown-up who was once a child, and remembers the