

**BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION.
MORE NEW ARABIAN
NIGHTS: THE DYNAMITER**

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Biographical Edition. More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter by Robert Louis Stevenson & Fanny van de Grift Stevenson

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON & FANNY VAN DE GRIFT STEVENSON

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THE DYNAMITER

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

AND

FANNY VAN DE GRIFT STEVENSON

WITH A PREFACE BY MRS. STEVENSON



NEW YORK
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PREFACE
TO
THE BIOGRAPHICAL EDITION

THE little chalet La Solitude, where my husband spent, as he has said, the happiest period of his life, was curiously out of keeping with its surroundings. A chalet was an incongruous object in Hyères, and it was made more conspicuous by its position, clinging to a low cliff almost at the entrance of the old town. From this cliff the ground rose with a gentle gradient until just outside our garden gate, where it became more rugged and steep, breaking out near the summit into rocky crags that were crowned with the ruins of an ancient Saracen castle.

Our tiny chalet was the result of a visit of the owner to the Paris Exposition of 1878. There, amidst Chinese pagodas, Turkish mosques, and the like in miniature, stood a model Swiss chalet that so fascinated our landlord that he bought it outright and had it removed to be again erected on his property in Hyères. It was like a doll's house,

with rooms so small that we could hardly turn round in them; but the view from the verandahs was extensive, the garden was large and wild, with winding paths and old grey olive trees where nightingales nested and sang. Looking in one direction we could see the Îles d'Or, and in another, the hills beyond Toulon. So quiet and secluded was our life here that we heard almost nothing of the outside world except through an occasional English correspondent. I remember, before we knew that cholera was raging in Toulon, only some three miles away, how we watched a cloud gathering over the town where it hung, heavy and lowering, day after day. We felt that it was somehow ominous, and were vaguely depressed. We were told afterwards that at that very time great fires were burning in the streets of Toulon by order of the mayor, and that the people gathered at night round these fires capering fantastically in a pagan dance, resurrected from the dark ages by no one knew whom or how.

But Toulon had another aspect than gloom. I shall never forget the day my husband and I drove there through lanes of roses from which the attar of commerce is made. On either side of us the rose hedges were in full bloom; the scent, mingled with the fragrance of innumerable violets, was truly intoxicating. When we alighted at a *place*

dappled with sunlight that filtered through the trees, and cooled by a spouting fountain where girls in coloured gowns laughed and chattered as they plied their trade of lace-making, we felt that our lines had indeed fallen in pleasant places.

We made almost no new acquaintances in Hyères, with the exception of Dr. Vidal, our physician, and a local English chemist, Mr. Powell. We were divided from the new town by a series of wooden stairs running precipitously to the street below. Near the foot of one of these stairways was Mr. Powell's pharmacy, very conveniently placed for us, as was afterwards proved. The chemist himself became fired with the desire to write. One story, at least, of his, a little tale of considerable merit, was published in the *Cornhill Magazine*. I believe my husband was more interested in the success of this venture of Mr. Powell's than in that of *Prince Otto*, which he was then engaged upon.

Our life in the chalet was of the utmost simplicity. With the help of one untrained maid I did the cooking myself. The kitchen was so narrow that I was in continual danger of being scorched by the range on one side, and at the same time impaled by the saucepan hooks on the other, and when we had a guest at dinner our maid had to pass in the dishes over our heads, as our chairs touched the walls of the dining-room, leaving her

no passage-way. The markets of Hyères were well supplied, and the wine both good and cheap, so we were able, for the first time, to live comfortably within our limited income.

My husband usually wrote from the very early morning until noon, while my household duties occupied the same time. In the afternoon the work of the morning was read aloud, and we talked it over, criticising and suggesting improvements. This finished, we walked in our garden, listened to the birds, and looked at our trees and flowers; or, accompanied by our Scotch terrier, wandered up the hill to the ruins of the castle. After dinner we talked or read aloud, and on rare occasions visited Mr. Powell or received a visit from him. The *châlet* was well named, as far as we were concerned, for it was almost a solitude *à deux*, but the days slipped by with amazing celerity.

One of the articles written by my husband at this time was entitled *Old Mortality*, and was afterwards printed with other papers in the book called *Memories and Portraits*. A friend of my husband's youth had died, and only his errors, which were many, were remembered, and the good in him forgotten. Injustice, and especially injustice to the helpless dead, always touched my husband very nearly. He wrote what was really a

defence of his old friend, and then, realizing its personal nature, hesitated to publish it. Finally, he sent the proof sheets to his friend's sister, leaving it to her to say whether it should see the light or not. She responded with an urgent request for its publication. It is the irony of fate that the man who wrote *Old Mortality* and *The Defence of Father Damien* — in both instances because the person misjudged lay "in his resting grave" — should have had his own memory attacked, not by an enemy, nor even by a stranger, but by one he had had every reason to believe his loyal friend.

It happened, about this time, that an editor of a notorious London journal, who published scandalous stories concerning private individuals, was prosecuted for libel, found guilty, and punished by imprisonment. When the news came to us, my husband said this was an occasion that must be celebrated. In the evening we placed a candle in each window to serve as an illumination, and lighted a bonfire we had previously prepared in the afternoon for the purpose. My husband, our maid, and I clasped hands and danced round the fire, shouting and laughing. Nemesis followed. We did not notice, in our excitement, that the mistral was blowing, until we were chilled to the bone.

The next day my husband lay in the pangs of

a new malady — sciatica — and on the following evening he had a terrible hemorrhage. Had not the pharmacy been so near and Mr. Powell so quickly reached, I doubt if recovery would have been possible. Sciatica and a hemorrhage seemed enough for the endurance of any mortal; but there was more to follow.

The old town, with its crooked, narrow, foul lanes, its sunless, age-worn houses, was no better than a hotbed of disease. Typhus, smallpox, cholera, heaven knows what not — lurked there in its damp shadows. In the early morning we could hear the fast rolling of wheels under our windows, an indication that patients from the old town were being carried to the pest-house. A few weeks before his illness, my husband had written to the mayor of Hyères, pointing out to him the unsanitary condition of the old town, and the consequent menace to the whole community. A gratifying answer came to the effect that the place should be cleaned out immediately and thoroughly. The mayor kept his word so far as the old town was concerned, but the accumulated *débris* of ages was only carried a short distance away to be dumped, a huge unsavoury pile, just in front of a pretty cottage called Rosemount, whose English owner was absent from home. This was unendurable, and more dangerous than before, as all paths led past