CHAPTER XI

BOURNEMOUTH—1884–87

"This is the study where a smiling God
Beholds each day my stage of labour trod,
And smiles and praises, and I hear him say:
'The day is brief; be diligent in play.'"

R. L. S.

THE next three years Stevenson was to spend in England—the only time he was ever resident in this country—and then Europe was to see him no more. At first sight the chronicle of this time would seem to be more full of interest than any other period of his life. *Treasure Island*, his "first book," had just been given to the world; the year after his return *A Child's Garden of Verses* and *Prince Otto* were published, and *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Kidnapped* appeared in the following year. To have written almost any one of these brilliant yet widely dissimilar books would be to challenge the attention of the most distinguished contemporary men of letters; and to meet Stevenson at this time was instantly to acknowledge the quality and charm of the man and the strong fascination of his talk. For the whole of the period he made his home at Bournemouth, within easy reach of London visitors; and in London itself Mr. Colvin (who had now become Keeper of Prints at the British Museum) not only had a house always open to him, but delighted to bring together those who by their own powers were best fitted to appreciate his society.

Yet the reality is disappointing. To produce brilliant writings it is not necessary at the time to live an exciting or even a very full life, and Stevenson's health deprived him more and more of the ordinary incidents which happen to most men in their daily course. Looking back on this period in after-days, he cries out: "Remember the pallid brute that lived in Skerryvore like a weevil in a biscuit." Nearly all the time which was not devoted to contending with illness was taken up with his work, and as he rarely left home without returning in a more or less disabled condition, he stayed in his own house and led the most retired of lives. Even there it was no uncommon experience for a visitor who had come to Bournemouth specially to see him to find himself put to the door, either on the ground of having a cold, to the contagion of which it was unsafe for Stevenson to be exposed, or because his host was already too ill to receive him.

But this is to anticipate matters. On his return from Royat he was unable to be present at the matinée on July 2nd, at the Prince's Theatre,[1] when the Deacon was played by Mr. Henley's brother. The play had been given at Bradford eighteen months before, and during the summer of 1883 had been acted by a travelling company some forty times in Scotland and the North of England without any marked success. It was in the gallery of one of the houses where it was played that the complaint was heard during the performance of another piece: "A dunna what 's coom to Thayter Royal. Thar 's been na good moorder there for last six months"; and the Deacon's fate may not have

[1] Now the Prince of Wales' Theatre.

been up to the usual standard. The play was now received in London with interest, and regarded as full of promise by critics who knew better what to expect of it, but the lack of stage experience told against it, and it has not been revived in this country.

Having passed a few days in a hotel at Richmond, Stevenson and his wife went down to Bournemouth, where Lloyd Osbourne had for some months past been at school. After staying at a hotel, and trying first one and then another set of lodgings on the West Cliff, at the end of October they migrated into a furnished house in Branksome Park. The doctors whom he consulted were equally divided in their opinions, two saying it would be safe for him to stay in this country, while two advised him to go abroad; and in the end he yielded only to the desire to be near his father, who, though still at work, was evidently failing fast.

Meanwhile the first two months at Bournemouth were spent chiefly in the company of Mr. Henley, and were devoted to collaboration over two new plays. The reception of *Deacon Brodie* had been sufficiently promising to serve as an incentive to write a piece which should be a complete success, and so to grasp some of the rewards which now seemed within reach of the authors. They had never affected to disregard the fact that in this country the prizes of the dramatist are out of all proportion to the payment of the man of letters, and already in 1883 Stevenson had written to his father: "The theatre is the gold-mine; and on that I must keep an eye." Now that they were again able to meet, and to be constantly together, the friends embarked upon some of the schemes they had projected

long ago, and no doubt had talked over at Nice at the beginning of the year. By October the drafts of *Beau Austin* and *Admiral Guinea*[1] were completed and set up in type; and in the following spring, at the suggestion of Mr. Beerbohm Tree, the two collaborators again set to work and produced their English version of *Macaire.*

These were to have been but the beginning of their labours, but more necessary work intervened, and the plays were never resumed.[2]

It may be convenient here to round off the history of Stevenson's dramatic writings: early in 1887 he helped his wife with a play, *The Hanging Judge,* which was not completed at the time and has never yet been printed. Except for an unfinished fragment, intended for home representation at Vailima, he never again turned his hand to any work for the stage. *Beau Austin* was produced at the Haymarket Theatre in 1890, *Admiral Guinea* and *Macaire* have since been performed, and all the plays written in partnership with Mr. Henley have thus been seen upon the stage, though

[1] *Letters,* ii. 362.

[2] A list in Stevenson's writing shows some of their projects at the time, though it is certain that these had not been worked out, and we may doubt whether they would ever have been seriously considered. "Farmer George" was to have covered the whole reign of George the Third, ending with a scene in which the mad king recovered for a while his reason:—

Deacon Brodie: Drama in Four Acts and Ten Tableaux.
Beau Austin: Play in Four Acts.
Admiral Guinea: Melodrama in Four Acts.
Honour and Arms: Drama in Three Acts and Five Tableaux.
The King of Clubs: Drama in Four Acts.

none of them have kept it. The want of practical stage-craft may partly be to blame, and it must be remembered that Stevenson, at any rate, had not been inside a theatre since his return from America; but their chief interest lies in their literary quality, and it is to be feared that Mr. Archer was premature in his declaration that the production of *Beau Austin* showed triumphantly that "the aroma of literature can be brought over the footlights with stimulating and exhilarating effect." [1]

As soon as the two finished plays were laid aside, husband and wife began to put together the second series of *New Arabian Nights* from the stories which Mrs. Stevenson had made up to while away the hours of illness at Hyères. Stevenson wrote the passages relating to Prince Florizel and collaborated in the remainder; but the only complete story of his invention in the book was "The Explosive Bomb": by which he designed "to make dynamite ridiculous, if he could not make it horrible."

Meanwhile, on receiving an application from the pro-

Pepys' Diary: Comedy.
The Admirable Crichton: Romantic Comedy in Five Acts.
Ajax: Drama in Four Acts.
The Passing of Vanderdecken: (Legend!) in Four Acts.
Farmer George: Historical Play in Five Acts.
The Gunpowder Plot: Historical Play in
Marcus Aurelius: Historical Play
The Atheists: Comedy.
The Mother-in-Law: Drama.
Madam Fate: Drama in a Prologue and Four Acts.

prietor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* for a Christmas story, he attempted to produce a new tale for the occasion. It proved, however, what, in the slang of the studio, he called a "machine," and "Markheim," which was now ready, being too short, as a last resource he bethought himself of "The Body Snatcher," one of the "tales of horror" written at Pitlochry in 1881, and then "laid aside in a justifiable disgust." It was not one of his greater achievements, and would probably have excited little comment, had it not been for the gruesome and unauthorized methods of advertisement.

Soon afterwards he successfully concluded negotiations for a Life of the Duke of Wellington, which he was commissioned to write for the series of "English Worthies," edited by Mr. Andrew Lang. The military genius of the strategist had long dazzled Stevenson, who had also been deeply fascinated by the study of his character. I will not say that to him the man who wrote the Letters to Miss J. was as remarkable as the victor of Waterloo, but it is certain that the great soldier became twice as interesting on account of that marvellous correspondence. According to Mr. Gosse, special emphasis was to be given to the humour of Wellington, and certainly the biography was by no means to be restricted to his military career. Three years before, Stevenson had written to his father about a book on George the Fourth, perhaps the *Greville Memoirs:* "What a picture of Hell! Yet the punishment of the end seemed more, if possible, than he had deserved. Iron-handed Wellington crushing him in his fingers; contempt, insult, disease, terror—what a haunted, despicable scene!"

The book, however, although it was in Stevenson's mind for several years and was advertised as "in preparation," was never written, or, so far as I know, even begun. Not the least interesting part of the whole story is the picture of Stevenson sitting down to address a letter of inquiries to Mr. Gladstone, for whose political career he had always the most complete aversion, and finding himself, somewhat to his dismay, overcome with an involuntary reverence for the statesman who embodied so much of England's past.

Casting about for a new story, he turned in February to the highroad, that to him and to his father before him had for long been one of the richest fields of romance. When, to his delight, he had first found his powers of narrative in *Treasure Island*, and discovered what possibilities lay before him of writing for boys the kind of stories he liked himself, he announced with glee to Mr. Henley that his next book was to be "Jerry Abershaw: A Tale of Putney Heath."[1] He was also to write "The Squaw Men: or, The Wild West," and of this one chapter was actually drafted. The new venture was, however, called "The Great North Road," but, like *St. Ives* in later days, it rapidly increased in proportions and in difficulty of management. So at the end of the eighth chapter it was relinquished for *Kidnapped* and apparently dropped out of sight. Already in its beginnings it showed an increase of skill in dealing with Nance Holdaway, who foreshadowed other heroines yet to come.

By the end of January so successful had the winter

[1] *Letters*, i. 223. Cf. "A Gossip on Romance."

been that Thomas Stevenson bought a house at Bournemouth as a present for his daughter-in-law. Its name was forthwith changed to Skerryvore, in commemoration of the most beautiful and the most difficult to build of all the lighthouses erected by the family.[1] It was no great distance from where they were already living: a modern brick house, closely covered with ivy; and from the top windows it was possible to catch a glimpse of the sea. There was half an acre of ground, very charmingly arranged, running down from the lawn at the back, past a bank of heather, into a chine or small ravine full of rhododendrons, and at the bottom a tiny stream.

Mrs. Stevenson at once started off for Hyères, whence she returned with their books and other belongings. The new house, however, was not ready for their occupation until the end of April, and when the move was made, to no one did it bring greater satisfaction than to Stevenson.

Wanderer as he was, and still gave the impression of being, he entered into his new property with a keenness of delight that must have amused those of his friends who remembered his former disparagement of all household possessions.[2] "Our drawing-room is now a place so beautiful that it 's like eating to sit in it. No other room is so lovely in the world; there I sit like an old Irish beggarman's cast-off bauchle in a palace throne-room. Incongruity never went so far; I blush for the figure I cut in such a bower."

The large dovecot is commemorated in *Underwoods;* the garden was an endless pleasure to Mrs. Stevenson,

[1] Vol. i, p. 11. [2] Vol. i, p. 176.

and having long been the domain of "Boguey" in his lifetime, became at last his resting-place. Having been sent to hospital to recover from wounds received in battle, he broke loose, in his maimed state attacked another dog more powerful than himself, and so perished. His master and mistress were inconsolable, and never, even in Samoa, could bring themselves to allow any successor.

I have already referred to the easy access to Bournemouth, which was, of course, a prime consideration with his parents. But Stevenson's friends had seen little of him for several years past, so in this also there was a welcome change from Hyères. Nearly all the old and tried companions whom I have mentioned came to Skerryvore during these years: R. A. M. Stevenson and his wife, and his sister, Mrs. de Mattos, and her children; Miss Ferrier, Mr. Baxter, Professor Jenkin and Mrs. Jenkin, Mr. Colvin, and Mr. Henley all paid more or less frequent visits. Among the newcomers were Mr. Sargent, who twice came to paint his host's portrait; Mr. James Sully, an old friend at the Savile Club; Mr. William Archer, who owed his first coming to his severe but inspiring analysis of Stevenson, and remained as one of the most valued of his critics and appreciative of his friends; and last and most welcome of the admissions into the inmost circle, his very dear friend, Mr. Henry James.

One of the most frequent visitors was R. A. M. Stevenson, who had, after some time, decided to give up the thankless task of producing pictures for the public which were not those he wanted to paint, and to use his technical knowledge and matchless powers

of exposition in the criticism of art. That other art of writing, however, which Louis had spent his life in learning, could not be mastered in a day for the purposes of journalism even by so brilliant a talker as Bob, and it fell to Louis and Mr. Henley to give him many hints and put him through an apprenticeship in the technical part of the new profession in which he so rapidly made his mark.

Nor were the residents of Bournemouth to be overlooked, although (besides Dr. Scott, to whom *Underwoods* was chiefly dedicated, and Mrs. Boodle and her daughter, the "Gamekeeper" of the *Letters*) close friendship was confined to two families—Sir Henry Taylor and his wife and daughters, and Sir Percy and Lady Shelley. Sir Percy, the son of the poet, was devoted to yachting and the theatre (especially melodrama), and his genial, kindly nature, in which shrewdness and simplicity were most attractively blended, endeared him to his new as to all his old friends, while Lady Shelley, no less warm-hearted, took the greatest fancy to Louis, and discovering in him a close likeness to her renowned father-in-law, she forthwith claimed him as her son.

But it was the Taylors with whom he lived in more intimate relations in spite of the impression he seems here again to have produced of a being wholly transitory and detached, a bird of passage resting in his flight from some strange source to regions yet more unknown. Sir Henry indeed died almost before the friendship had commenced, but Lady Taylor and her daughters continued to live at Bournemouth until long after Skerryvore was transferred to other hands.

But before Sir Henry Taylor passed away, Stevenson had suffered a more unexpected and a heavier blow in the death of his friend Fleeming Jenkin on June 12th, 1885. Only once again in his life was he to lose one very near to him, and the subsequent task of writing his friend's life not only raised his great admiration, but even deepened the regret for his loss.

To some of his friends in these days, and chiefly to Miss Una Taylor, Mrs. Jenkin, Mr. Henley, and his cousin Bob, he owed the revival of his interest in music, which now laid greater hold upon him than ever before. He began to learn the piano, though he never reached even a moderate degree of skill; he flung himself with the greatest zeal into the mysteries of composition, wherein it is but honest to say that he failed to master the rudiments. "Books are of no use," he says; "they tell you how to write in four parts, and that cannot be done by man. Or do you know a book that really tells a fellow? I suppose people are expected to have ears. To my ear a fourth is delicious, and consecutive fifths the music of the spheres. As for hidden fifths, those who pretend to dislike 'em I can never acquit of affectation. Besides (this in your ear) there is nothing else in music; I know; I have tried to write four parts."

His delight and eagerness were enhanced rather than decreased by difficulties, and in a period of his life when nearly all pleasures were taken away from him, he was able at least to sit at the piano and create for the ear of his imagination those heavenly joys it is the prerogative of music to bestow.

Besides enjoying the company of his friends, he made good use of his few other opportunities. Since at

Bournemouth his health hardly ever allowed him to pass beyond the gate of Skerryvore, the chance seldom presented itself to him of meeting men of any other class whose lives lay outside his own, but those who fell in his way received unusual attention at his hands, more especially if they possessed originality or any independence of character. Thus, the barber that came to cut his hair, the picture-framer, the "vet" who attended "Boguey," each in their different way were originals to a man whose life was so secluded; their coming was welcomed, they invariably stayed to meals, and, sooner or later, told the story of their lives.

Such was his own life, and such were his surroundings at this period; and yet to leave the picture without a word of warning would be wholly to misrepresent Stevenson. A popular novelist, toiling incessantly at his writing, and confined by ill-health almost entirely within the walls of a suburban villa at an English watering-place, is about as dreary a figure as could be formed from the facts. The details are as accurate as if they were in a realistic novel, and yet the essence is wholly untrue to life. It is necessary to insist again and again on the "spirit intense and rare," the courage, the vivacity, the restless intellect ever forming new schemes with unceasing profusion. There are people who might live a life of the wildest adventure, of the most picturesque diversity, and yet be dull. Stevenson could lie in a sick-room for weeks without speaking, and yet declare truly, as he asserted to Mr. Archer, "I never was bored in my life." When everything else failed, and he was entirely incapable of work, he would build card-houses, or lie in bed modelling small figures

of wax or clay, taking the keenest interest in either process. On being told that a friend of his "has fallen in love with stagnation," from his invalid chair he protests that the dream of his life is to be "the leader of a great horde of irregular cavalry," and his favourite attitude "turning in the saddle to look back at my whole command (some five thousand strong) following me at the hand-gallop up the road out of the burning valley by moonlight."[1] In him at least the romantic day-dream called out as completely the splendid virtues of courage and enterprise and resolution as he could ever have displayed them on the field of battle.

Illness and anxiety had, as he afterwards said, put an end to the happiness of Hyères, but he was maintaining the unequal fight with much of the spirit and gaiety that he always showed; his sufferings did not dull the kindliness and sympathy which largely formed the fascination of his character, unique, perhaps, in being at once so lovable and so brilliant.

In the meantime he was hard at work. His interest in all questions relating to the methods of literature was unfailing. A lecture from Sir Walter Besant and an answer by Mr. Henry James brought Stevenson in his turn into the pages of *Longman's Magazine* for December, 1884. In "A Humble Remonstrance" he urged the paramount claims of the "story" in fiction, and dwelt on the problems involved for the student of method. Several months later he followed this up by a most inspiring but more strictly professional disquisition on "The Technical Elements of Style," "the work of five days in bed," which appeared in the *Contemporary*

[1] *Letters*, i. 311.

Review for April. At the time it was ill received and generally misunderstood: it is, however, the result of long and close study, and is a singularly suggestive inquiry into a subject which has been considered too vague and difficult for analysis, at any rate since the days of the classical writers on rhetoric, whom Stevenson had never read. He continued to meditate and to develop his ideas, and during 1886 had even planned a course of lectures to be delivered in London to students of his art. So full of the subject was he that when this project was peremptorily forbidden by the doctors, he could not rest until he found in Miss Boodle a pupil to whom he could disburden himself of the ideas with which he was overflowing.

In March, 1885, *A Child's Garden of Verses* was published at last, after having been set up twice in proof. In April *Prince Otto* began to run in *Longman's Magazine*, coming out as a book in October, and by May *More New Arabian Nights* appeared. Soon after the issue of *Prince Otto*, Stevenson wrote to Mr. Henley: "I had yesterday a letter from George Meredith, which was one of the events of my life. He cottoned (for one thing), though with differences, to Otto; cottoned more than my rosiest visions had inspired me to hope; said things that (from him) I would blush to quote." Mr. Meredith's letter unfortunately has disappeared, but in another from the same source there occur these words: "I have read pieces of *Prince Otto*, admiring the royal manner of your cutting away of the novelist's lumber. Straight to matter is the secret. Also approvingly your article on style."

Still, with all this production, and with praise from

so high a quarter, it must not be supposed that Stevenson's writing as yet brought in any very extravagant payment. His professional income for this year, in fact, was exactly the same as that which he had averaged for the three years preceding, and amounted to less than four hundred pounds. Nor were his receipts materially increased before he reached America.

A subject much in his thoughts at this time was the duality of man's nature and the alternation of good and evil; and he was for a long while casting about for a story to embody this central idea. Out of this frame of mind had come the sombre imagination of "Markheim," but that was not what he required. The true story still delayed, till suddenly one night he had a dream. He awoke, and found himself in possession of two, or rather three, of the scenes in the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.*

Its waking existence, however, was by no means without incident. He dreamed these scenes in considerable detail, including the circumstance of the transforming powders, and so vivid was the impression that he wrote the story off at a red heat, just as it had presented itself to him in his sleep.

"In the small hours of one morning," says Mrs. Stevenson, "I was awakened by cries of horror from Louis. Thinking he had a nightmare, I awakened him. He said angrily: 'Why did you wake me? I was dreaming a fine bogey tale.' I had awakened him at the first transformation scene."

Mr. Osbourne writes: "I don't believe that there was ever such a literary feat before as the writing of *Dr.*

Jekyll. I remember the first reading as though it were yesterday. Louis came downstairs in a fever; read nearly half the book aloud; and then, while we were still gasping, he was away again, and busy writing. I doubt if the first draft took so long as three days."

He had lately had a hemorrhage, and was strictly forbidden all discussion or excitement. No doubt the reading aloud was contrary to the doctor's orders; at any rate Mrs. Stevenson, according to the custom then in force, wrote her detailed criticism of the story as it then stood, pointing out her chief objection—that it was really an allegory, whereas he had treated it purely as if it were a story. In the first draft Jekyll's nature was bad all through, and the Hyde change was worked only for the sake of a disguise. She gave the paper to her husband and left the room. After a while his bell rang; on her return she found him sitting up in bed (the clinical thermometer in his mouth), pointing with a long denunciatory finger to a pile of ashes. He had burned the entire draft. Having realised that he had taken the wrong point of view, that the tale was an allegory and not another "Markheim," he at once destroyed his manuscript, acting not out of pique, but from a fear that he might be tempted to make too much use of it, and not rewrite the whole from a new standpoint.

It was written again in three days ("I drive on with Jekyll: bankruptcy at my heels"); but the fear of losing the story altogether prevented much further criticism. The powder was condemned as too material an agency, but this he could not eliminate, because in the dream it had made so strong an impression upon him.

"The mere physical feat," Mr. Osbourne continues,

"was tremendous; and instead of harming him, it roused and cheered him inexpressibly." Of course it must not be supposed that these three days represent all the time that Stevenson spent upon the story, for after this he was working hard for a month or six weeks in bringing it into its present form.

The manuscript was then offered to Messrs. Longmans for their magazine; and on their judgment the decision was taken not to break it up into monthly sections, but to issue it as a shilling book in paper covers. The chief drawbacks of this plan to the author were the loss of immediate payment and the risk of total failure, but these were generously met by an advance payment from the publishers on account of royalties. "The little book was printed," says Mr. Charles Longman, "but when it was ready the bookstalls were already full of Christmas numbers, etc., and the trade would not look at it. We therefore withdrew it till after Christmas. In January it was launched—not without difficulty. The trade did not feel inclined to take it up, till a review appeared in the *Times*[1] calling attention to the story. This gave it a start, and in the next six months close on forty thousand copies were sold in this country alone." Besides the authorised edition in America, the book was widely pirated, and probably not less than a quarter of a million copies in all have been sold in the United States.

Its success was probably due rather to the moral instincts of the public than to any conscious perception of the merits of its art. It was read by those who never read fiction, it was quoted in pulpits, and made the sub-

[1] The *Times*, January 25th, 1886.

ject of leading articles in religious newspapers. But the praise, though general, was not always according to knowledge, as, for example, in one panegyric, which lauded "a new writer, following in some detail, perhaps more of style than matter, the much regretted Hugh Conway." Yet even this criticism by no means represents the extreme range of its circulation.

But as literature also it was justly received with enthusiasm. Even Symonds, though he doubted "whether any one had the right so to scrutinise the abysmal depths of personality," admitted, "The art is burning and intense"; and the cry of horror and pain which he raised was in another sense a tribute to its success. "How had you the *ilia dura ferro et ære triplici durióra* to write *Dr. Jekyll?* I know now what was meant when you were called a sprite."[1]

In his "Chapter on Dreams," Stevenson has told his readers how the "brownies" suddenly became useful in providing him with stories for his books, but in spite of this statement it appears that besides *Jekyll and Hyde* there is only one other plot thus furnished which he ever actually completed. This was "Olalla," which appeared in the Christmas number of the *Court and Society Review;* in connection with it there arises an interesting point—an apparent plagiarism from the *Strange Story* by Lord Lytton. In either tale a squirrel is caught in the boughs of a tree by a semi-human youth and is shortly afterwards killed. It is true that Margrave slays the animal in revenge for a bite, whereas Stevenson's Felipe deliberately tortures the innocent creature, but the

[1] *John Addington Symonds: a Biography.* By Horatio F. Brown. London, Nimmo, 1895.

agility and the lack of humanity are the gist of both episodes. Beside the account in "Dreams" must be set Stevenson's own statement that his invention of Felipe was in part deliberate,[1] and it is impossible now to say whether (if the resemblance was more than accidental) the incident came back into the author's mind in his sleep or in his waking hours.

With the general result he was never well satisfied. To Lady Taylor he wrote: "The trouble with 'Olalla' is, that it somehow sounds false. . . . The odd problem is: What makes a story true? 'Markheim' is true; 'Olalla' false; and I don't know why, nor did I feel it while I worked at them; indeed I had more inspiration with 'Olalla,' as the style shows. I am glad you thought that young Spanish woman well dressed; I admire the style of it myself, more than is perhaps good for me; it is so solidly written. And that again brings back (almost with the voice of despair) my unanswerable: Why is it false?"

Kidnapped was begun in March, 1885, as another story for boys, and with as little premeditation as afterwards sufficed for its sequel. But when once the hero had been started upon his voyage, the tale was laid aside and not resumed until the following January, just after the publication of *Jekyll and Hyde*. No greater contrast can be imagined than the strong, healthy, open-air life of the new book and the dark fancies of the allegory which preceded it. Though the former was the product of his waking hours, it was no less spontaneous than a dream.

"In one of my books, and in one only, the characters

[1] *In the South Seas*, p. 353.

took the bit in their teeth; all at once, they became detached from the flat paper, they turned their backs on me and walked off bodily; and from that time my task was stenographic—it was they who spoke, it was they who wrote the remainder of the story." [1]

But within two months Stevenson began to flag, and not long after a visit for his father's sake to Matlock, where he had made small progress with the writing, he decided, at Mr. Colvin's suggestion, to break off with David's return to Edinburgh and leave the tale half told. Mr. Henderson gladly accepted the story for *Young Folks*, where it ran under Stevenson's own name from May to July, and was then published by Messrs. Cassell & Co.

It was dedicated to Mr. Baxter, whose permission was asked in a letter indicating its character and showing its author's capacity in dialect, if he had ever had a mind to let it run riot in his pages. "It 's Scōtch, sir: no strong, for the sake o' thae pock-puddens, but jist a kitchen o't, to leaven the wersh, sapless, fushionless, stotty, stytering South Scōtch they think sae muckle o'."

The whole took him, as he said, "probably five months' actual working; one of these months entirely over the last chapters, which had to be put together without interest or inspiration, almost word for word, for I was entirely worked out." But as a whole, the author thought it the best and most human work he had yet done, and its success was immediate with all readers. To mention two instances only:—Matthew Arnold, who apparently knew Stevenson's work little, if at all, before this, was at once filled with delight, and

[1] *Scribner's Magazine*, 1888, p. 764.

we are told that it was the last book Lord Iddesleigh was able to read with pleasure—"a volume," continues Mr. Lang, "containing more of the spirit of Scott than any other in English fiction."

The elder Stevenson had for several years, as we have seen, been declining in health and spirits, and the shadows began to close about his path. In 1885 he gradually reduced the amount of his work, though he still continued his practice, and could not altogether refuse the solicitations he received to appear as a scientific witness before Parliamentary Committees.

The tenderness of the relation between father and son now became pathetic in the extreme. As the old man's powers began to fail, he would speak to Louis as though he were still a child. When they went to the theatre together, and Louis stood up in his place, the father put his arm round him, saying: "Take care, my dearie, you might fall." At night, as he kissed his son, he would say reassuringly: "You 'll see me in the morning, dearie." "It was," says his daughter-in-law, "just like a mother with a young child."

It was chiefly in the summers and autumns that Louis left Bournemouth, but even then he rarely travelled any distance or was absent for any length of time. In 1885 he went to London in June, and then accompanied his wife on a last visit to Cambridge, to stay with Mr. Colvin, who was now resigning his professorship. In August he started for Dartmoor, but after meeting Mr. Thomas Hardy and his wife at Dorchester, was laid up with a violent hemorrhage at Exeter, in the hotel, and was compelled to remain there for several weeks before he was able to return home. In the following year he

went to town in June, and again in August, the latter time extending his journey to Paris in the company of his wife and Mr. Henley, to see their friends Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Low, then, after a long interval, revisiting France for the first time.

Meeting once more in their early haunts, the old friends revived many memories. One trivial reminiscence of this occasion is yet so characteristic of Stevenson, and so illustrates the working of his mind, that it may find a place here. The two friends, painter and writer, both possessing a fine palate for certain wines, had always laughed at one another's pretensions to such taste. In 1875 or 1876, soon after Mr. Low's marriage, he and his wife had gone to dine with Stevenson at the Musée de Cluny in the Boulevard St. Michel. Mr. Low hesitating for a moment in his choice of a wine, Stevenson turned to Mrs. Low, and on the spot made up and elaborately embellished a story of how her husband had once gone with him to dine at a restaurant, and had tasted and rejected every vintage the establishment was able to offer. At last—so the tale ran—the proprietor confessed that there was one bottle even finer in his cellar, which had lain there forty years, but that he was ready to give it up to such a master, although it was like surrendering a part of his life. A procession was formed, first the proprietor, then the cellarman, then the waiters of the establishment, and they all went down to the cellar to get the famous bottle. Back they came in the same order with the priceless treasure borne tenderly in the arms of the cellarman, a man with a long beard down to his waist, who had been so much in the cellar that the light made him blink. Slowly and rev-

erently they approached the table, and then they all sighed. The bottle was deliberately and ceremoniously uncorked, and the wine poured into small glasses, while the waiters looked on with breathless reverence. The two connoisseurs touched glasses and slowly carried them to their lips. There was absolute silence. All eyes were upon them, and when they drank deeply and expressed their satisfaction, the whole establishment heaved a sigh of relief.

Mrs. Low now reminded Stevenson of this story, and he, declaring it was no "story," but an historical account of what had actually happened, repeated it word for word as he had originally told it. When he came to the end, he added, "And the cellarman, overcome with emotion, dropped dead." As he said these words, he saw by his hearers' faces that this was a divergence from the original tale, and added quickly, "That about the cellarman is not *really* true!"

The quickness with which he caught the first sign of surprise at the only variation, and the readiness with which he recovered himself, were no less characteristic of Stevenson, as Mr. Low truly says, than the fact that the story of his invention took so concrete a form in his mind that, perhaps without its having recurred to his memory in all the interval, he was able to give the identical words and details as they had originally presented themselves to him.

An old project had this year been revived by Mr. Gilder of a boat-voyage down the Rhone to be written by Stevenson and illustrated by Mr. Low, but the former's health was now too precarious for even the most luxurious of such journeys. His visit to Paris,

however, was most successful, its chief event being a visit to Rodin the sculptor, to whom Mr. Henley introduced him. He came home in what was for him exceptionally good health; but returning in October to The Monument—his invariable name for Mr. Colvin's house at the British Museum—he did not escape so easily. The second holiday began delightfully, for it was on this occasion that he met some of the most distinguished of his elders in the world of letters and of art—especially, as Mr. Colvin records, Browning, Lowell, and Burne-Jones. But soon the visitor was taken ill, confined to bed, and unable to return home until the very end of November, when a succession of fogs made the danger of remaining in London greater than the risk of any journey.

This autumn there occurred a curious event in Stevenson's literary career, which is recorded in a letter to his mother. "*5th Sept., 1886.*— . . . I have just written a French (if you please !) story for a French magazine! Heaven knows what it 's like; but they asked me to do it, and I was only too pleased to try."

Although Stevenson had a wide and full vocabulary, and spoke French with a good accent and complete fluency, it seems certain that he had not the perfect knowledge of the language necessary for serious composition. At any rate the attempt came to nothing. "I was not brave enough to send it to the publishers," he said, "so I destroyed it, as one should all literary temptations of every class."[1]

[1] *Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific*, by Arthur Johnstone, p. 106.

By this time he had begun to write the *Memoir* of his friend Jenkin, the only biography which he ever actually carried to an end. A few months later Mrs. Jenkin came to Skerryvore to afford him what assistance he needed, and of his method of dealing with the work, she has given a description.

"I used to go to his room after tea, and tell him all I could remember of certain times and circumstances. He would listen intently, every now and then checking me while he made a short note, or asking me to repeat or amplify what I had said, if it had not been quite clear. Next morning I went to him again, and he read aloud to me what he had written—my two hours of talk compressed into a page, and yet, as it seemed to me, all there, all expressed. He would make me note what he had written word by word, asking me, 'Does this express quite exactly what you mean?' Sometimes he offered me alternative words, 'Does this express it more truly?' If I objected to any sentence as not conveying my meaning, he would alter it again and again—unwearied in taking pains."

His life in England led him to take both in home and in foreign politics a closer interest than he had felt before. He was deeply moved during these years by two events, though neither in the end led to any action on his part, nor even an open declaration of his views. These were the death of Gordon and a case of boycotting women in Ireland.

In 1884 he had felt acutely the withdrawal of the garrisons from the Soudan. "When I read at Nice that

Graham was recalled from Suakim after all that butchery, I died to politics. I saw that they did not regard what I regarded, and regarded what I despised; and I closed my account. If ever I could do anything, I suppose I ought to do it; but till that hour comes, I will not vex my soul."

This was no passing wave of sentiment; Gordon's fate was laid even more deeply to heart, and one of the motives which induced Stevenson to begin his letters to the *Times* upon Samoan affairs was the memory that in 1884 he had stood by in silence while a brave man was being deserted and a population dependent for help on the government of this country was handed over to the mercies of barbarism. So when he finally came to the point of writing the letter to Mr. Gladstone about the Iron Duke,[1] he could think of no other signature open to him than "Your fellow-criminal in the eyes of God," and forbore.

But although the passionate indignation and "that chastity of honour which felt a stain like a wound" were highly characteristic of Stevenson, at the most they could have led to nothing more than a series of letters to the papers. They might have stirred the public conscience, but though Stevenson would have been dealing with matters less remote from the knowledge of his readers, yet his part in any agitation or protest would not have differed greatly from his efforts in the cause of Samoa. The other project, on the contrary, would, if he had been able to carry it out, have led to a definite and entire change of the whole course of his life. On November 13th, 1885, Mr. John Curtin had

[1] See vol. ii. p. 7.

been murdered by a party of moonlighters in his house, Castle Farm, at Castle Island, County Kerry. His grown-up sons and daughters had shown the greatest courage, and one of the murderers had been shot. For this the family were cut off as far as possible from all the necessaries of life, and in April, 1887, the boycott still continued. Stevenson, while admitting the wrongs of Ireland, had always the most profound regard for the paramount claims of the law, and had long been shocked both by the disregard of it in Ireland and by the callous indifference of the English to the needs of those engaged in its support. He now pitched upon the case of the Curtin family as a concrete instance in which it behoved England to do her duty, and since no one else was forthcoming for the task, he prepared to offer himself as an agent, and, if need were, a martyr in the cause. As a man of letters he was not tied down to any one place to do his work, so he proposed to take the Curtins' farm and there live with his wife and his stepson. His wife added her protests to those of all his friends who heard of the project, but in vain, and so without sharing his illusions she cheerfully prepared to accompany him.

It is impossible to conceive a more quixotic design. Many of the objections to it Stevenson realised himself, or was told by his friends.[1] But perhaps he never suspected how little he understood the Irish, or how utterly futile his action would have proved. As a matter of fact he hardly ever came into contact with Irishmen at any time during his life, was probably misled by false inferences from the Highlanders as to Celtic peculiari-

[1] *Letters*, ii. 27. This letter belongs, however, to 1887.

ties, and in the principal Irishman whom he drew—Colonel Burke in *The Master of Ballantrae*—he has not carried conviction.[1] But these considerations, even if they had been brought home to him, would equally have failed to move him, and it was nothing but his father's illness which kept him for the time in this country. He abandoned the design with reluctance, and, as Mr. Colvin says, "to the last he was never well satisfied that he had done right in giving way."

It was driven from his mind, however, by events which touched him more nearly. In the autumn his parents had taken a house in Bournemouth for the winter, that Mr. Stevenson might have the companionship of his son. For some time after they came Louis was laid up in London, and even when he returned he was too ill to see much of his father or to have any cheering influence upon him. In February Thomas Stevenson was taken by his wife to Torquay, but came back to Bournemouth on the 1st of April. By the 21st he was so ill that it was thought better to bring him home, and he returned to Edinburgh. The accounts of him grew so alarming that Louis followed on the 6th of May, but was too late for his coming to be of any use, and on the 8th all was over.

Of the son's affection and of his appreciation for his father enough has been said to show how great the sense of his loss must have been. The shock of having found his father no longer able to recognise him preyed upon his mind, and for some time to come he was haunted day and night with "ugly images of sickness,

[1] Mac, the Ulsterman in *The Wrecker*, is better, but would not have helped his creator much in Kerry.

decline, and impaired reason," which increased yet further his sadness and the physical depression that weighed him down.

In the meantime he took cold, was not allowed to attend the funeral, and never left the house until, at the end of May, he was able to return to Bournemouth, and quitted Scotland for the last time.