

CHAPTER IX

DAVOS AND THE HIGHLANDS — 1880—82

“A mountain valley, an Alpine winter, and an invalid's weakness make up among them a prison of the most effective kind.”

R. L. S., *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21st February, 1881.

By the middle of October the party again started, made a journey broken by frequent halts, and on the 4th of November reached Davos Platz, where they were to spend the winter. They took up their quarters in the Hotel Belvedere, the nucleus of the present large establishment, and there they stayed until the following April.

The great feature of the place for Stevenson was the presence of John Addington Symonds, who, having come there three years before on his way to Egypt, had taken up his abode in Davos, and was now building himself a house. To him the newcomer bore a letter of introduction from Mr. Gosse. On November 5th Louis wrote to his mother: “We got to Davos last evening; and I feel sure we shall like it greatly. I saw Symonds this morning, and already like him; it is such sport to have a literary man around. My father can understand me, when he thinks what it would be to come up here for a winter and find TAIT.¹ Symonds is like a Tait to me; eternal interest in the same topics, eternal cross-

¹ Professor P. G. Tait, the eminent man of science, Professor of Natural Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh, 1860-1900: a close friend of Thomas Stevenson.

causewaying of special knowledge. That makes hours to fly." And a little later he wrote: "Beyond its splendid climate, Davos has but one advantage—the neighbourhood of J. A. Symonds. I daresay you know his work, but the man is far more interesting."¹

This first winter Stevenson produced but little. He arrived full of eagerness to begin his Scottish history, but a little study and reflection, following upon his new-found enthusiasm for the parts of Scotland where he had been staying, had fixed his attention exclusively upon one section of his original subject, and for the time he limited his view to a history of the Highlands extending from 1715 to his own day. "I breathe after this Highland business," he wrote in December, "feeling a real, fresh, lively, and modern subject, full of romance and scientific interest, in front of me. It is likely it will turn into a long essay."

Even this, it seemed, was beyond his powers for the present. The doctor in a few weeks spoke hopefully of his case, but the climate, though beneficial in the long run, was not at first conducive to any deliberate effort. Of the sensations produced in himself, Stevenson has left an analysis that may be contrasted with the moods of the convalescent in "Ordered South."

" . . . In many ways it is a trying business to reside upon the Alps.² . . . But one thing is undeniable—that in the rare air, clear, cold, and blinding light of Alpine winters, a man takes a certain troubled delight in his existence, which can nowhere else be paralleled. He is perhaps no happier, but he is stingingly alive. It

¹ *Dictionary of National Biography*, sub "Symonds."

² *Pall Mall Gazette*, 5th March, 1881, "The Stimulation of the Alps."

does not, perhaps, come out of him in work or exercise, yet he feels an enthusiasm of the blood unknown in more temperate climates. It may not be health, but it is fun.

“There is nothing more difficult to communicate on paper than this baseless ardour, this stimulation of the brain, this sterile joyousness of spirits. You wake every morning, see the gold upon the snow-peaks, become filled with courage, and bless God for your prolonged existence. The valleys are but a stride to you; you cast your shoe over the hill-tops; your ears and your heart sing; in the words of an unverified quotation from the Scotch psalms, you feel yourself fit ‘on the wings of all the winds’ to ‘come flying all abroad.’ Europe and your mind are too narrow for that flood of energy. Yet it is notable that you are hard to root out of your bed; that you start forth singing, indeed, on your walk, yet are unusually ready to turn home again; that the best of you is volatile; and that although the restlessness remains till night, the strength is early at an end. With all these heady jollities, you are half conscious of an underlying languor in the body; you prove not to be so well as you had fancied; you weary before you have well begun; and though you mount at morning with the lark, that is not precisely a song-bird’s heart that you bring back with you when you return with aching limbs and peevish temper to your inn.

“It is hard to say wherein it lies, but this joy of Alpine winters is its own reward. Baseless, in a sense, it is more than worth more permanent improvements. The dream of health is perfect while it lasts; and if, in

trying to realise it, you speedily wear out the dear hallucination, still every day, and many times a day, you are conscious of a strength you scarce possess, and a delight in living as merry as it proves to be transient. The brightness — heaven and earth conspiring to be bright; the levity and quiet of the air; the odd, stirring silence — more stirring than a tumult; the snow, the frost, the enchanted landscape: all have their part in the effect on the memory, *tous vous tapent sur la tête*; and yet when you have enumerated all, you have gone no nearer to explain or even to qualify the delicate exhilaration that you feel — delicate, you may say, and yet excessive, greater than can be said in prose, almost greater than an invalid can bear. There is a certain wine of France, known in England in some gaseous disguise, but when drunk in the land of its nativity, still as a pool, clean as river water, and as heady as verse. It is more than probable that in its noble natural condition this was the very wine of Anjou so beloved by Athos in the *Musketeers*. Now if the reader has ever washed down a liberal second breakfast with the wine in question, and gone forth, on the back of these dilutions, into a sultry, sparkling noontide, he will have felt an influence almost as genial, although strangely grosser, than this fairy titillation of the nerves among the snow and sunshine of the Alps. That also is a mode, we need not say of intoxication, but of insobriety. Thus also a man walks in a strong sunshine of the mind, and follows smiling, insubstantial meditations. And, whether he be really so clever or so strong as he supposes, in either case he will enjoy his chimæra while it lasts.

“The influence of this giddy air displays itself in many secondary ways. People utter their judgments with a cannonade of syllables; a big word is as good as a meal to them; and the turn of a phrase goes further than humour or wisdom. By the professional writer many sad vicissitudes have to be undergone. At first, he cannot write at all. The heart, it appears, is unequal to the pressure of business, and the brain, left without nourishment, goes into a mild decline. Next, some power of work returns to him, accompanied by jumping headaches. Last, the spring is opened, and there pours at once from his pen a world of blatant, hustling polysyllables. He writes them in good faith and with a sense of inspiration; it is only when he comes to read what he has written that surprise and disquiet seize upon his mind. What is he to do, poor man? All his little fishes talk like whales. This yeasty inflation, this stiff and strutting architecture of the sentence, have come upon him while he slept; and it is not he, it is the Alps who are to blame. He is not, perhaps, alone, which somewhat comforts him. Nor is the ill without a remedy. Some day, when the spring returns, he shall go down a little lower in this world, and remember quieter inflections and more modest language. . . .

“Is it a return of youth, or is it a congestion of the brain? It is a sort of congestion, perhaps, that leads the invalid, when all goes well, to face the new day with such a bubbling cheerfulness. It is certainly congestion that makes night hideous with visions; all the chambers of a many-storeyed caravanserai haunted with vociferous nightmares, and many wakeful people

come down late for breakfast in the morning. Upon that theory the cynic may explain the whole affair — exhilaration, nightmares, pomp of tongue, and all. But on the other hand, the peculiar blessedness of boyhood may itself be but a symptom of the same complaint, for the two effects are strangely similar; and the frame of mind of the invalid upon the Alps is a sort of intermittent youth, with periods of lassitude. The fountain of Juventus does not play steadily in these parts; but there it plays, and possibly nowhere else."

Apart from this exhilaration, there was much that he disliked in Davos, more especially the cut-and-dry walks alone possible to him, the monotonous river, the snow (in which he could see no colour), and the confinement to a single valley. "The mountains are about you like a trap," he wrote; "you cannot foot it up a hillside and behold the sea as a great plain, but live in holes and corners, and can change only one for the other."

The drawbacks of hotel life seem to have affected him but little; he had the company of his wife, and a constant interest in his stepson, who, having brought the toy-press given him the previous spring in California and used at Silverado, now devoted to printing all the time he could secure from lessons with his tutor.

A characteristic story which I have from Mrs. Stevenson belongs to this period. When they were leaving for Davos, her father-in-law, warned by the experiences of Louis in California, made her promise that she would let him know if at any time they were in want of money.

"The time came," she says, "when Louis had in-

fluenza and did need more, but he would not let me tell his father. I used every argument. At last I said, 'What do you think should be done with the money your father has so carefully laid by for the use of his family?' 'It should be given,' said Louis, 'to some young man of talent, who is in poor health and could not otherwise afford to get a necessary change of climate.' 'Oh, very well,' said I, 'I shall appeal to your father at once in the case of a young man named Stevenson, who is in just that position.' At this Louis could only laugh, and I wrote the story to his father, who was much amused by it, and of course sent the necessary supplies."

In these days, and indeed throughout his life, he was often unreasonable, but this very unreason seems always to have had a quality and a charm of its own, which only endeared Stevenson the more to those who suffered under its caprice, as two other anecdotes of Davos may serve to show. A young Church of England parson, who knew him but slightly, was roused one morning about six o'clock by a message that Stevenson wanted to see him immediately. Knowing how ill his friend was, he threw on his clothes and rushed to Stevenson's room, only to see a haggard face gazing from the bed-clothes, and to hear an agonised voice say, "For God's sake, ——, have you got a Horace?"

Another friend had received from Italy a present of some Christmas roses, to which particular associations gave a personal sentiment and value. Stevenson was seeking high and low for some flowers—the occasion, I think, was the birthday of a girl who could never live

to see another—he heard of the arrival of these. He came, he stated the paramount necessity of depriving his friend, and he bore the flowers away. The two stories might end here, and show Stevenson in rather an unamiable light: their point is that neither of his friends ever dreamed of resenting his conduct or regarding it with any other feeling but affectionate amusement.

Often in the evening he would turn into the billiard-room, and there his talk might be heard at its best. A fellow-visitor has given a spirited and sympathetic description of him in those days, and adds: "Once only do I remember seeing him play a game of billiards, and a truly remarkable performance it was. He played with all the fire and dramatic intensity that he was apt to put into things. The balls flew wildly about, on or off the table as the case might be, but seldom indeed ever threatened a pocket or got within a hand's-breadth of a cannon. 'What a fine thing a game of billiards is,' he remarked to the astonished onlookers, '—once a year or so!'"¹

When he was well, Stevenson had to be out of doors a good deal, and spent the time mostly in walks, often with his dog for a companion.

"*15th December, 1880.*—MY DEAR MOTHER, —I shall tell you about this morning. When I got out with Woggs about half-past seven, the sky was low and grey; the Tinzenhorn and the other high peaks were covered. It had snowed all night, a fine, soft snow; and all the ground had a gloss, almost a burnish, from the new coating. The woods were elaborately pow-

¹ Mr. Harold Vallings in *Temple Bar*, February, 1901, p. 25.

dered grey—not a needle but must have had a crystal. In the road immediately below me, a long train of sack-laden sledges was going by, drawn by four horses, with an indescribable smoothness of motion, and no sound save that of the bells. On the other road, across the river, four or five empty sledges were returning towards Platz, some of the drivers sitting down, some standing up in their vehicles; they glided forward without a jolt or a tremor, not like anything real, but like cardboard figures on a toy-theatre. I wonder if you can understand how odd this looked.”

Occasionally he joined in skating and more frequently in the tobogganing then newly introduced. The latter experiences, as in all sports in which he ever took part, were delightful to him chiefly for the surroundings, and quite apart from all rivalry or competition, since, as he says in the *Inland Voyage*, he “held all racing as a creature of the devil.” The following passage shows how he extracted the keenest pleasure both from the exercise itself and the romantic conditions with which he was able to invest it:—

“Perhaps the true way to toboggan is alone and at night. First comes the tedious climb, dragging your instrument behind you. Next a long breathing-space, alone with snow and pine woods, cold, silent, and solemn to the heart. Then you push off; the toboggan fetches way; she begins to feel the hill, to glide, to swim, to gallop. In a breath you are out from under the pine-trees, and a whole heaven full of stars reels and flashes overhead. Then comes a vicious effort; for by this time your wooden steed is speeding like the wind, and you are spinning round a corner, and the

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whole glittering valley and all the lights in all the great hotels lie for a moment at your feet; and the next you are racing once more in the shadow of the night, with close-shut teeth and beating heart. Yet a little while and you will be landed on the highroad by the door of your own hotel. This, in an atmosphere tingling with forty degrees of frost, in a night made luminous with stars and snow, and girt with strange white mountains, teaches the pulse an unaccustomed tune, and adds a new excitement to the life of man upon his planet." ¹

In the meanwhile he was allowed to work two hours in the morning, and one, if he wished, in the afternoon, and this time was not wholly without result. The first edition of *Virginibus Puerisque*—his earliest volume of collected papers—was prepared for the press, and the second essay in that book and the thrice-rejected article on Raeburn were there printed for the first time. The essay on Pepys was written, and a paper for the *Fortnightly*, but this was all the prose that he succeeded in finishing before his departure, except the four articles on Davos, which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The last were mere impressions, anonymous, unfinished, and unrevised: yet no one can doubt for a moment the authorship of the extracts I have given.

Chiefly for his own amusement during the winter, he wrote also a good deal of familiar verse, the best of which was in Scots dialect, and included the lines addressed to the author of *Rab and his Friends*. In a series of octosyllabic stanzas he denounced certain dishonest tradesmen

¹ "Alpine Diversions," *Pall Mall Gazette*, 26th February, 1881.

of Davos, and he also wrote a sequence of sonnets—almost his only use of this metrical form—their subject being one Peter Brash, a publican of Edinburgh, who had been the subject of his early jokes.

An outline of the Highland history may be found in the *Letters*,¹ but the book itself remained unwritten, and is never likely now to become what Stevenson could have made of it. But he spent some time in preparatory reading, and even began to learn Gaelic for the purpose, though he never got beyond the rudiments of the language.

A health-resort, from its very conditions, often casts upon a visitor shadows of death and bereavement, but this year the Stevensons were affected with the deepest sympathy for a loss that touched them nearly: their friend Mrs. Sitwell arrived unexpectedly with her son, who was already in the last stages of a swift consumption, and before the end came in April, there were but the alternations of despair and of hoping against hope until the blow fell.

Shortly afterwards Stevenson and his wife set out for France, accompanied only by Woggs, for the boy had gone to England to school. They spent several weeks, first at Barbizon; then in Paris, whence they were driven by drains; and at St. Germain, where Stevenson for the first time in his life heard a nightingale sing, and, having proclaimed that no sounds in nature could equal his favourite blackbird, forthwith surrendered all prejudice and fell into an ecstasy. They found themselves in straits at St. Germain, owing to the failure of supplies and the general suspicious appearance of Stevenson's

¹ *Letters*, i. 187.

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wardrobe; being suddenly delivered from insults, they left their landlord, as Mrs. Stevenson alleged, in the belief that he had turned from his doors the eccentric son of a wealthy English nobleman.

They reached Edinburgh May 30th, 1881, and three days later started with his mother for Pitlochry, where they spent two months at Kinnaird Cottage; his father coming to them as often as business permitted. Louis had written to his parents that for country quarters his desiderata were these: "A house, not an inn, at least not an hotel; a burn within reach; heather and a fir or two. If these can be combined, I shall be pretty happy." These requisites he found, and indeed the man would be hard to satisfy who asked more of any stream—"a little green glen with a burn, a wonderful burn, gold and green and snow-white, singing loud and low in different steps of its career, now pouring over miniature crags, now fretting itself to death in a maze of rocky stairs and pots; never was so sweet a little river. Behind, great purple moorlands reaching to Ben Vrackie."¹

He had thus his heart's desire, and in return, if (as he was always urging) man is but a steward on parole, he did not fail to repay mankind for this season of delight. For in these two months he wrote "Thrawn Janet" and "The Merry Men." "The Body Snatcher" belongs to the same time, all three being intended for a volume of tales of the supernatural. For "Thrawn Janet" Stevenson afterwards claimed that if he had never written anything but this tale and the story of "Tod Lapraik" in *Catriona*, he would yet have been a writer.² It was

¹ *Letters*, i. 204.

² *Vailima Letters*, p. 241.

the outcome of a study of the Scotch literature of witchcraft, and is hardly open to any other criticism than that which its author himself found against it. " 'Thrawn Janet' has two defects; it is true only historically, true for a hill parish in Scotland in old days, not true for mankind and the world. Poor Mr. Soulis' faults we may eagerly recognise as virtues, and we feel that by his conversion he was merely worsened; and this, although the story carries me away every time I read it, leaves a painful impression on my mind." Even from the days of the *Edinburgh University Magazine* he had attached great importance to the names of his characters, and was never weary of improvising new lists for his amusement. "My own uncle," he wrote to Mr. Barrie, "has simply the finest name in the world, *Ramsay Traquair*. Beat that you cannot." But I can remember his saying to me one day with a tone of deep regret, "I have already used up the best name in all the world — Mr. Soulis."

"The Merry Men" was always one of his favourites, rather on account of the sentiment and the style than for the actual story. It was, as he put it, "a fantasia, or vision of the sea," and was designed to express the feeling of the west coast of Scotland as he conceived it in accordance with the memories of his engineering days, especially the weeks spent upon the island of Earraid.

He had now found his powers in dialect, in which hitherto he had written only a few verses and recorded but a few remembered phrases in his sketches or essays. But from this time much of the speech of his strongest novels was in Scotch, more or less broad, and the fame

of Stevenson as a novelist is inseparably connected with his mastery over the common tongue of his own country. It may, perhaps, be added that the work done at Pitlochry is the only published prose that he ever wrote in the vernacular in Scotland itself.¹

Over and above these stories he had in his mind at this time a scheme in connection with Jean Cavalier, the Protestant leader of the Cévennes in the eighteenth century, who had been a favourite hero with him since his travels with the donkey in that region. A copy of verses on Cavalier survives in one of his notebooks, but in spite of the inquiries he made of Mr. Gosse and others upon the subject, he seems never to have touched it again.

Towards the end of June he heard that Professor Æneas Mackay was about to resign the chair of History and Constitutional Law in the University of Edinburgh. It was possible to discharge the duties of this professorship by lecturing only during the summer session; the election was in the hands of the Faculty of Advocates, and Stevenson resolved to stand. Of the history of Scotland he knew more at any rate than some who had formerly held the chair: his knowledge of Constitutional Law was probably limited to what he had learned during one session from an infrequent attendance at the lectures of the professor, which were confined to the subject of Constitutional History with special reference

¹ Here is a picture from one of his notebooks. Could any other language have produced just the same effect?—

“The gloaming had come lang syne; there was a wee red winter sun on the ae side, and on the ither a cauld, wameless moon; the snaw in the lang loan squeaked under my feet as I ran.”

to England; and to this topic I doubt whether Stevenson had ever given any serious attention whatever. He applied to his friends and got together a set of thirteen testimonials that are a tribute to the ingenuity of the human intellect, and were wholly disregarded by the electors. Grateful as Louis was to the loyalty of his supporters, he did not fail to see the humour of their conjunction: "It is an odd list of names. Church of England, Church of Scotland, Free Kirk, Pessimist, Radical, Tory: certainly I am not a party man." In the meantime he was so full of the idea, and so eager to try his powers, that he used to deliver specimen lectures to his stepson. The boy was seated on a chair, while the would-be professor declaimed for an hour upon Constitutional History, every now and then stopping to make sure that his class was following his meaning. The election took place in the winter, and Stevenson, although disappointed, was not surprised at the completeness of his failure.

On August 2nd the party left for Braemar; on the journey, Stevenson first conceived the family of Durrissdeer and the earlier part of *The Master of Ballantrae*, though both as yet were nameless, and it was six years and more before he began to set any word of it on paper.

At Braemar, having more accommodation, they were able to enjoy the society of some of their friends—Mr. Colvin, Mr. Baxter, and others. One of the first who arrived was Dr. Alexander Hay Japp, a new acquaintance, invited to discuss Thoreau, and to set Stevenson right upon one or two points in his history. Thoreau was duly discussed, but before the visitor left, he heard

the first eight or ten chapters of *Treasure Island*, then newly written, and carried off the fair copy of the manuscript, as far as it went, that he might offer it to a publisher. Stevenson himself has told the history of the book, his first book of which the public ever heard, in one of those articles of reminiscence condemned by his critics as premature, that now seem only too few and too short for all of us. Having first drawn the chart of an island (charts being to him "of all books the least wearisome to read and the richest in matter"), he then from the names, marked at random, constructed a story in order to please his schoolboy stepson (who had asked him to try and write "something interesting"); his father, another schoolboy in disguise, took fire at this and urged him on, helping him with lists and suggestions; unconscious memory came to his aid, and *Treasure Island* was half written.¹

Mr. Gosse immediately succeeded Dr. Japp as the family visitor, and under his congenial influence the story, which at first was called *The Sea Cook*, grew at the rate of a chapter a day; before Stevenson left Braemar, nineteen chapters had been written.² As soon as the idea of publication occurred, the book had been intended for Messrs. Routledge, but by Dr. Japp's good offices it was accepted for *Young Folks* by Mr. Henderson, the proprietor, when he saw the opening chapters and heard an outline of the story.

In this summer Stevenson first began to write the

¹ "My First Book," *Juvenilia*, p. 288.

² I am greatly obliged both to Mr. Gosse and to Dr. Japp for their recollections of this time. See also the *Academy*, lviii. pp. 189, 209, 237.

verses for children, which were afterwards published in the *Child's Garden*. His mother tells how she had Miss Kate Greenaway's *Birthday Book for Children*, with verses by Mrs. Sale Barker, then newly published, and how Louis took it up one day, and saying, "These are rather nice rhymes, and I don't think they would be difficult to do," proceeded to try his hand. About fourteen numbers seem to have been written in the Highlands, and apparently after three more had been added, they were then discontinued for a time.

But in the meanwhile the weather grew suddenly bad; Stevenson made a hurried flight (in a respirator) from Braemar on September 23rd, and after a few days in Edinburgh, passed on to London. Here he called on his new publisher; "a very amusing visit indeed; ordered away by the clerks, who refused loudly to believe I had any business; and at last received most kindly by Mr. Henderson."

From London they passed to Paris and so to Davos, which they reached on October 18th. This year they had taken for the winter a chalet belonging to the Hôtel Buol, where Symonds was still living; they hired a servant of their own, and only occasionally took meals in the hotel.

This winter differed considerably from the last. Stevenson was in better health, and being accustomed to the climate, and also less subject to interruption, produced a great deal more work, though, as before, a certain proportion of his labours was futile. Symonds was anxious that he should write an essay or essays on the Characters of Theophrastus, but *Treasure Island*

was already beginning its serial course, with the latter half of it yet unwritten. Fortunately the inspiration that had failed the author returned, the last fourteen chapters took but a fortnight, and at the second wave the book was finished as easily as it was begun.

Again he started eagerly upon a new book, a *Life of Hazlitt*, he had long been wanting to write. There is a legend which is significant, although it cannot now be verified, that he had applied for a commission for this subject in some biographical series, but was refused on the ground that neither he nor his theme were of sufficient importance to justify their inclusion. Now he writes gleefully to his father: "I am in treaty with Bentley (Colvin again) for a Hazlitt! Is not that splendid? There will be piles of labour, but the book should be good. This will please you, will it not? Biography anyway, and a very interesting and sad one." He had long made a favourite study of the essays of his author, whose paper "On the Spirit of Obligations" had "been a turning-point" in his life. From no writer does he quote more freely, and he couples Hazlitt with Sterne and Heine as the best of companions on a walking tour. But a wider study of his writings produced a cooler feeling, and the *Liber Amoris* is said to have created a final distaste, which rendered any continued investigation or sympathetic treatment impossible.

Treasure Island, by "Captain George North," had been running an obscure career in the pages of its magazine from October to January, openly mocked at by more than one indignant reader. On its completion Stevenson announced to his father his intention of re-

writing "the whole latter part, lightening and *siccating* throughout." But it did not make its appearance as a book till nearly two years later.

The Scottish history had fallen into abeyance, or had come down to an article on "Burt, Boswell, Mrs. Grant, and Scott," and a paper on the Glenure murder, afterwards the central incident in *Kidnapped*, but neither of these were even begun. The volume of *Familiar Studies* was prepared for press, and the critical preface was written. The two papers on Knox the author now found dull, and he even hesitated about keeping them back as material for a new life of the great Scottish statesman and Reformer.

About this time also he had a good deal of correspondence with Mr. Gosse on a work he had proposed they should undertake in collaboration — "a retelling, in choice literary form, of the most picturesque murder cases of the last hundred years. We were to visit the scenes of these crimes," says Mr. Gosse, "and turn over the evidence. The great thing, Louis said, was not to begin to write until we were thoroughly alarmed. 'These things must be done, my boy, under the very shudder of the goose-flesh.' We were to begin with the 'Story of the Red Barn,' which is indeed a tale pre-eminently worthy to be retold by Stevenson. But the scheme never came off, and is another of the dead leaves in his Vallombrosa."¹

In January Stevenson gives an irresistible description of himself: "I dawdle on the balcony, read and write, and have fits of conscience and indigestion. The ingenious human mind, face to face with something it

¹ *Critical Kitcats*, p. 202.

downright ought to do, *does something else*. But the relief is temporary."

Temporary also was the idleness. *The Silverado Squatters*, the record of the circumstances of his honeymoon, was written, and no less than five magazine articles, including the first part of "Talk and Talkers" and the "Gossip on Romance." Still this did not satisfy him. He wrote to his mother: "I work, work away, and get nothing or but little done; it is slow, slow, slow; but I sit from four to five hours at it, and read all the rest of the time for Hazlitt." And to Charles Baxter, a little later, he wrote: "I am getting a slow, steady, sluggish stream of ink over paper, and shall do better this year than last." Before April he can say: "I have written something like thirty-five thousand words since I have been here, which shows at least I have been industrious."¹

To this time apparently belong the verses called "The Celestial Surgeon," which are as characteristic of Stevenson as anything he ever wrote. An eloquent modern preacher, treating of the deadly sin of accidie, "gloom and sloth and irritation," the opposite of "the vertue that is called *fortitude* or strength," quotes these "graceful, noble lines" at length, and says, "Surely no poet of the present day, and none, perhaps, since Dante, has so truly told of the inner character of accidie, or touched more skilfully the secret of its sinfulness."²

Whether in spite or in consequence of his harder

¹ Cf. *Letters*, i. 237.

² The Right Rev. Dr. Paget, Bishop of Oxford *The Spirit of Discipline*, Longmans, Green & Co., London, 1891.

work, his health continued to improve, notwithstanding great anxiety about his wife, who was affected by the high elevation. Early in December she was sent to Zürich and then to Berne, with indifferent results. Finally, Stevenson went down and brought her home on Christmas Day, the party travelling seven hours in an open sleigh in the snow, but fortunately nobody was the worse. Though frequently ailing, she managed with two short changes to stay out the necessary season, but was fit for little, and quite unable to take charge of the house. To cheer her depression, Symonds and her husband, and sometimes Mr. Horatio Brown, would forego their walk and spend the afternoon at her bedside. Stevenson would fling himself upon the bed with his feet to the pillow, and the hours passed in the most animated and varied discussion. Symonds, it will be remembered, was the Opalstein of "Talk and Talkers." On the first reading of that essay he affected indignation: "Louis Stevenson, what do you mean by describing me as a moonlight serenauder?" The sketch, however, gives, I believe, a real impression of the qualities of his talk, and it is only to be regretted that he has nowhere done the same for his companion.

Housekeeping was a burden and a doubtful economy, but the *châlet* in other respects was a great success. For one thing, it got the sun an hour sooner, and kept it an hour later than the hotels; for another, it provided its master with a spot where he was at liberty to create and develop for himself the amusement which pleased him best of all—the game of war. His childish enthusiasm about the army in the Crimea will be

remembered, though it was but the common feeling of the children of this country at the time. Deeds of arms would always raise a thrill in his breast, but so far as I know there was no outward sign of this interest in warfare or strategy during his youth or early manhood. In December, 1878, he wrote from the Savile Club: "I am in such glee about Peiwar.¹ I declared yesterday I was going to add the name to mine, and be Mr. Peiwar Stevenson for the future." In October, 1880, an old general who was a friend of the family came to see him in London, and brought as a present Sir Edward Hamley's *Operations of War*. R. A. M. Stevenson was there at the time, and both cousins were transported with enthusiasm. "I am drowned in it a thousand fathom deep," wrote Louis, "and 'O that I had been a soldier' is still my cry." He had never made any affectation of abandoning a pursuit he was supposed to have outgrown. He clung to the colouring of prints and to childish paintings long after most boys of his age have given up the diversions of the nursery. A large part of the winter of 1877 he spent in building with toy-bricks in his room at Heriot Row, and regretted that he had not been an architect. As Bishop Earle said of a child, "We laugh at his foolish sports, but his game is our earnest": it often is not wisdom, but dullness, that keeps men from joining in the livelier fancies of children. Stevenson, deterred by no false shame, extracted from toys much of the zest of reality, and raised their employment almost to the intensity of active life. And now, beginning to help his schoolboy with games, he became absorbed in the

¹ Lord Roberts's brilliant victory over the Afghans

pursuit, and developed a *kriegspiel* of his own, adapted to the conditions under which, of necessity, he played. While it was impossible for him to secure the services of an umpire, this very independence allowed the operations to be protracted for any length of time needed for the completion of an entire campaign. But his enthusiasm and the thoroughness and ingenuity he exhibited are best described in the account given by his adversary, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne:—

“The abiding spirit of the child in him was seldom shown in more lively fashion than during those days of exile at Davos, where he brought a boy’s eagerness, a man’s intellect, a novelist’s imagination, into the varied business of my holiday hours; the printing-press, the toy-theatre, the tin soldiers, all engaged his attention. Of these, however, the tin soldiers most took his fancy; and the war game was constantly improved and elaborated, until, from a few hours, a ‘war’ took weeks to play, and the critical operations in the attic monopolised half our thoughts. This attic was a most chilly and dismal spot, reached by a crazy ladder, and unlit save for a single frosted window; so low at the eaves and so dark that we could seldom stand upright, nor see without a candle. Upon the attic floor a map was roughly drawn in chalks of different colours, with mountains, rivers, towns, bridges, and roads of two classes. Here we would play by the hour, with tingling fingers and stiffening knees, and an intentness, zest, and excitement that I shall never forget. The mimic battalions marched and counter-marched, changed by measured evolutions from column formation into line, with cavalry screens in front and massed

supports behind, in the most approved military fashion of to-day. It was war in miniature, even to the making and destruction of bridges, the intrenching of camps; good and bad weather, with corresponding influence on the roads; siege and horse artillery, proportionately slow, as compared to the speed of unimpeded foot, and proportionately expensive in the upkeep; and an exacting commissariat added the last touch of verisimilitude. Four men formed the regiment, or unit, and our shots were in proportion to our units and amount of our ammunition. The troops carried carts of printers' 'ems'—twenty 'ems' to each cart—and for every shot taken an 'em' had to be paid into the base, from which fresh supplies could be slowly drawn in empty carts returned for the purpose."¹

The strength of the enemy in any given spot could only be ascertained according to strictly defined regulations, and an attempt was even made to mark certain districts as unhealthy and to settle by the hazard of the dice-box the losses incurred by all troops passing through them.

During one war Stevenson chronicled the operations in a series of extracts from the *Glendatule Times* and the *Yallobally Record*, until the editor of the latter sheet was hanged by order of General Osbourne and its place supplied by the less offensive *Herald*.

Year after year he reverted to the game, and even in Samoa there was a campaign room with the map coloured on the floor, although the painful realities of actual warfare, either present or imminent, occupied all our thoughts for the closing period of Stevenson's life.

¹ *Scribner's Magazine*, December, 1898, p. 709.

But busy as he was this winter, he had time not only for this game, but also, turning aside to help young Osbourne with his printing, he first wrote verses for the toy-press, and then, getting hold of a bit of rough wood, began to design and cut illustrations for his text, or in some cases to create pictures which a text must elucidate.

In February, 1882, he sent to his parents "two wood-cuts of my own cutting; they are moral emblems; one represents 'anger,' the other 'pride scorning poverty.' They will appear among others, accompanied by verses, in my new work published by S. L. Osbourne. If my father does not enjoy these, he is no true man." And to his mother: "Wood-engraving has suddenly drave between me and the sun. I dote on wood-engraving. I'm a made man for life. I've an amusement at last."

Of these blocks about two dozen in all were cut, most of them by Stevenson's own hands, though the elephant, at any rate, was due to his wife, and "the sacred ibis in the distance" was merely the result of an accident turned to advantage. He had in his boyhood received a few lessons in drawing as a polite accomplishment: later he found great difficulty in the mechanical work of his original profession, in which of course he had been specially trained. Thus, in 1868, he wrote to his mother, "It is awful how slowly I draw and how ill." Barbizon seemed to rouse in him no tendency to express himself in line or colour, and it was not till he was alone at Monastier in 1878 that he made for his own pleasure such sketches as any grown man with no technical education might attempt.

Art criticism is for the expert; I will only say that to

me these sketches seem to show an excellent eye for the configuration of the country. But after this Stevenson seems to have drawn no more landscape until, his camera being lost, he tried his hand at representing some of the coast scenery in the Marquesas, and his sketch, redrawn by Mr. Charles Wyllie, gives me a very vivid impression of the scenery of an island I have never visited.

It would be very easy to overrate not merely the importance but even the interest of these blocks. Stevenson soon obtained some pear-wood, and then, after he returned to Scotland, he procured box; on this latter material the illustrations of *The Graver and the Pen* were cut, but their merits are impaired rather than heightened by the improved technique.

That Stevenson had an eye for country, as I have said, for clouds, for water, and for the action of the human figure, the cuts are a clear proof. The most ridiculous of his puppets are full of life, from the "industrious pirate" with his spyglass, to Robin "who has that Abbot stuck as the red hunter spears the buck." One and all, they show in their rough state a touch full of spirit and original quality, that teaching might have refined away.¹

In April again the family quitted the Alps, but this year with welcome news. "We now leave Davos for good, I trust, Dr. Ruedi giving me leave to live in France, fifteen miles as the crow flies from the sea, and if possible near a fir wood. This is a great blessing: I hope I am grateful."

¹ *The Studio*, Winter Number, 1896-97. Robert Louis Stevenson, Illustrator. By Joseph Pennell. With twelve illustrations.

They crossed the Channel with little delay; Louis stayed first at Weybridge, and then at Burford Bridge, where he renewed his friendship with Mr. George Meredith. By May 20th he was in Edinburgh, and there spent most of June, though he made a week's expedition with his father to Lochearnhead, hard by the Braes of Balquhider. Here he made inquiries about the Appin murder, perpetrated only forty miles away, and was successful in finding some local traditions about the murderer still extant.¹

The flow of work at the beginning of the year was followed by a long period of unproductiveness after he returned to this country. He had an article in each number of the *Cornhill* from April to August, but except the second part of "Talk and Talkers" these had been written at Davos. After this his connection with the magazine came to an end. During the past seven years its readers had grown accustomed to look eagerly every month in hope of finding an article by R. L. S., and all its rivals have, by comparison, ever since seemed conventional and dull. Mr. Leslie Stephen resigned the editorship in 1883 to the late James Payn, who was no less a friend of Stevenson and an admirer of his work, but the price of the magazine was reduced and its character somewhat modified. In August the *New Arabian Nights*, long withheld by the advice of an experienced publisher, were issued in two volumes by Messrs. Chatto & Windus, and reached a second edition before the end of the year.

On June 26th the family went to the manse of Stobo in Peeblesshire for the summer. But the weather was

¹ Introduction to *Kidnapped*.

bad, the house shut in by trees, and the result most unbeneficial. In a fortnight Louis was ordered away, went to London to consult Dr. Andrew Clark, and in accordance with his advice started on July 22nd for Speyside in the company of Mr. Colvin. The rest of the family soon joined him at Kingussie, and here again by a burn — “the golden burn that pours and sulks”¹ — he spent the last entire month he ever passed in Scotland. Having gone to France to write about Edinburgh, in the Highlands he turned again to France, and now wrote most of *The Treasure of Franchard*. The weather again did its worst; he had an invitation to meet Cluny Macpherson, and was eagerly looking forward to a talk about the Highlands. But a hemorrhage intervened, Stevenson had to leave in haste, and by September 9th he was in London, again asking the advice of Dr. Clark. The opinion was so far favourable that there was no need to return to Davos, which disagreed with Mrs. Stevenson, and of which they were both heartily tired. They were thus at liberty to seek a home in some more congenial spot.

¹ *Memories and Portraits*, p. 145.