CHAPTER XVII

R. L. S.

"Who is it that says most? which can say more
Than this rich praise,—that you alone are you?"

For any who have read the foregoing pages it should be unnecessary here to dwell upon the sources of many qualities which distinguished Stevenson throughout his life, or the degree to which they were called forth in turn or affected by the many variations of his environment. A Scot born, we have seen how Edinburgh and Swanston set the seal upon his nationality, and how from father and mother he drew diverse elements of temperament and character. We have seen the effect of his schooling, such as it was, and the prolonged leisure of his boyhood; of the influence of his friends and his reading; the results of his training as an engineer and as an advocate; of his wanderings in France, his breakdown in America, and the happiness of his married life.

In several respects it must be owned that he was fortunate. His long preludes and painful apprenticeship would clearly have proved impossible had it been necessary for him to make money at an early age, and even the history of his maturity would have been materially changed if he had been compelled to rely solely upon his writing to meet the expenses of his household. His late beginning had, again, this advantage: tardy in some ways as he was, he had left behind him

the ignobler elements of youth before his voice was heard or recognised. The green-sickness of immaturity was over, at the worst only one or two touches of self-consciousness remained, and even in his earliest published essays there rings out the note of high spirit and cheerfulness which issued from the sick-room of later years, deceived for a time the most penetrating of critics, and was perhaps the best part of his message to a world that had fallen on weary days.

In regarding Stevenson both as man and writer we find that the most unusual fact about him was the coupling of the infinite variety of his character and intellect with the extraordinary degree in which he was moved by every thought and every feeling. Few men are acted upon by so wide a range of emotions and ideas; few men hold even two or three ideas or feel even a few emotions with nearly as much intensity as compelled him under all. When we have considered both number and degree, we shall find other gifts no less remarkable and even more characteristic—the unfailing spirit of chivalry and the combination of qualities that went to make up his peculiar and individual charm. Though it is inevitable thus to take him piecemeal and to dwell upon one side at a time to the exclusion of the others he so rapidly turned upon us, we must never allow this process to efface in our minds what is far more essential—the image of the living whole.

I have spoken of him at once as a man and a writer, for in his case there was no part of the writer which was not visibly present in the man. There are authors

whose work bears so little apparent relation to themselves, that we either wonder how they came to write so good a book, or else in our hearts we wish their books more worthy of the men. To neither of these classes does Stevenson belong. His works are "signed all over," and despite the chameleon-like nature of his style,[1] but few consecutive sentences on any page of his could have been written by any other person. Authorship provided him with a field for his energies and brought him the rewards of success, but did not otherwise change him from what he was, nor did it even exercise the whole of his faculties or exhaust the supply of his ideas.

I. If I have failed to produce a correct impression of his intense energy, I have quoted him and written to little purpose. The child with his "fury of play"; the boy walking by himself in the black night and exulting in the consciousness of the bull's-eye beneath his coat; the lad already possessed with the invincible resolve of learning to write, which for the time overcame the desire of all other action: these were but the father of the man. So vehement were his emotions, his own breast was too small to contain them. He paid a visit at nineteen to a place he had not seen since childhood. "As I felt myself on the road at last that I had been dreaming of for these many days before, a perfect intoxication of joy took hold upon me; and I was so pleased at my own happiness that I could let none past me till I had taken them into my confidence."[2]

It is useless to go on quoting: through life he did the

[1] Appendix G. [2] *Juvenilia*, p. 96.

thing he was doing as if it were the one thing in the world that was worth being done. I will give but one more example, premising that its essence lies in its very triviality: the smaller the matter at stake, the more surprising is the blaze of energy displayed. One day he was talking to a lady in his house at Bournemouth, at a time when he was recovering from hemorrhage, and visitors and conversation were both strictly forbidden. A book of Charles Reade's—*Griffith Gaunt,* I think—was mentioned, and nothing would serve Stevenson but that he should run to a cold room at the top of the house to get the volume. His visitor first tried to prevent it, then refused to wait for his return, and was only dissuaded from her resolve by being told (and she knew it to be true) that if he heard that she had left the house he would certainly run after her down the drive without waiting for either hat or coat.

"The formal man is the slave of words," he said; and as a consequence of his own fiery intensity, no man was ever less imposed upon by the formulas of other people. His railing against the burgess, for example, was no catchword, but the inmost and original feeling of his heart. Consequently, whenever he uttered a commonplace, it will be usually found that he had rediscovered the truth of it for himself, did not say it merely because he had heard it from somebody else, and generally invested it with some fresh quality of his own. Perhaps his most emphatic utterance in this respect, and that most resembling his conversation in certain moods, is the *Lay Morals,* all the more outspoken because it was never finished for press. It abounds in sayings such as these: "It is easy to be an ass and to

follow tne multitude like a blind, besotted bull in a stampede; and that, I am well aware, is what you and Mrs. Grundy mean by being honest." "It is to keep a man awake, to keep him alive to his own soul and its fixed design of righteousness, that the better part of moral and religious education is directed; not only that of words and doctors, but the sharp ferule of calamity under which we are all God's scholars till we die." "Respectability: the deadliest gag and wet blanket that can be laid on men." "I have only to read books, to think . . . the mass of people are merely speaking in their sleep."

So when he spoke, he spoke direct from his own reflection and experience, and when he prayed, he did not hesitate to pass beyond the decorous ring-fence supposed to include all permissible objects of prayer; he gave thanks for "the work, the food, and the bright skies that make our lives delightful," and honestly and reverently made his petition that he might be granted gaiety and laughter. These instances are on the surface, but in spiritual matters he had a rare power of leaving on one side the non-essential and going straight to the heart of the difficulty, that was hardly realised by the world at large. Taine's charge against Scott that "he pauses on the threshold of the soul" has been renewed against Stevenson. For one thing, in spite of his apparent frankness, he had a deep reserve on the things that touched him most profoundly, and never wore his heart upon his sleeve. So far as the criticism applies to his writings, it is little less untrue than that which called him "a faddling hedonist," and its injustice has been shown by Mr. Colvin;[1] so far as it ap-

[1] *Letters*, i. 18.

plies to himself, it must be met by a contradiction. He was a man who had walked in the darkest depths of the spirit, and had known the bitterness of humiliation. But in that valley—of which he never spoke—he too, like the friend whom he commemorates,[1] "had met with angels"; he too had "found the words of life."

To return to his plain speaking, in literature he was equally sincere. Sir Walter Scott was for him "out and away the king of the romantics." But if a discerning estimate of Scott's shortcomings, as well as his merits, is desired, it can hardly be found more justly expressed in few words than on the last page but one of "A Gossip on Romance."

In composition also no one who produced so much has probably ever been so little the victim of the stereotyped phrase as Stevenson. A few mannerisms he had, no doubt—"it was a beautiful clear night of stars"—but they were from his own mint, and it was oftenest he himself who first called attention to them.

For the most part the effect on his writing of the ardour of which I am speaking is to be seen in two ways—in his diligence and in the intellectual intensity of the work produced. If ever capacity for taking pains be accounted genius in literature, no one can deny the possession of the supreme gift to Stevenson. To Mr. Iles he wrote, in 1887: "I imagine nobody had ever such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it day in and day out; and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world." In 1876 he reckoned that his final copy involved ten times the

[1] *Memories and Portraits*, p. 121.

actual quantity of writing; in 1888 the articles for *Scribner's Magazine* were written seven or eight times; the year before his death he told Mr. Crockett that it had taken him three weeks to write four-and-twenty pages. His prose works, exclusive of his published letters, run to nearly eight thousand pages of the Edinburgh Edition—three hundred words to a page. Nine-tenths of this was written within less than twenty years; and there were, besides, more or less completely conceived, many novels, stories, essays, histories, biographies, and plays, which occupied no inconsiderable amount of his attention within that time.

Moreover, besides the matter there was the form, and this from first to last continually engaged him. In the early seventies there were not many writers in this country to whom style was a matter of life or death, or if it were so, their aspirations were mostly hidden and unrealised. But to Stevenson from the beginning the technical problem was always present; with less fire the work of art had been less completely welded into an expression of the whole nature of the man; with less diligence the file-marks would seldom have been so completely removed. His style matured in simplicity and breadth as the years of labour brought their reward: it varied, of course, with the subject in hand; but not the least excellence of the instrument thus evolved is that it never failed of adaptation to whatever new class of writing its creator essayed.

The present point, however, is the energy and perseverance which prepared and secured the mastery, and in reviewing the amount of Stevenson's finished work, neither the quantity sacrificed in the process must be

forgotten, nor the extreme compression of the remainder. His was not the pen that covers page after page without an effort, unblotted and uncondensed, but the tool of the man who, in Mr. Kipling's phrase, "makes most delicate inlay-work in black and white, and files out to the fraction of a hair." In his own words, the only test of writing that he knew was this: "If there is anywhere a thing said in two sentences that could have been as clearly and as engagingly and as forcibly said in one, then it 's amateur work." And the main thing in which he thought his own stories failed was this: "I am always cutting the flesh off their bones."

Of such material he produced nearly four hundred pages a year for twenty years, and of the conditions under which most of it was done he wrote to Mr. George Meredith in 1893:—

"For fourteen years I have not had a day's real health; I have wakened sick and gone to bed weary; and I have done my work unflinchingly. I have written in bed, and written out of it, written in hemorrhages, written in sickness, written torn by coughing, written when my head swam for weakness; and for so long, it seems to me I have won my wager and recovered my glove. I am better now, have been, rightly speaking, since first I came to the Pacific; and still, few are the days when I am not in some physical distress. And the battle goes on—ill or well, is a trifle; so as it goes. I was made for a contest, and the Powers have so willed that my battlefield should be this dingy, inglorious one of the bed and the physic bottle."

But besides the energy spent on the work there is

also the intensity of his intelligence. He had no vast memory like Scott's, but he remembered to a most unusual extent his own emotions and sensations, and the events of his past life, and what remained in his mind preserved its freshness and a lifelike sharpness of outline.

If Stevenson's claim to genius is to be based upon any single gift, it is this quality that most deserves such recognition, nor can it well be refused, if Baudelaire's definition be regarded as adequate: *Le génie n'est que l'enfance retrouvée à volonté.* The paper on "Child's Play," the *Child's Garden of Verses*, and certain passages quoted in the earlier pages of this book display a power of returning to the ideas and feelings of childhood which has seldom if ever been shown in a higher degree, or has existed except along with intellectual powers of a very considerable calibre.

It related also to the ordinary sensations of maturity. We have all been active and all been tired, but who has given us such pictures of activity and of fatigue as Stevenson? Consider the account of his tobogganing, place beside it the calm of weariness following exercise described in "Walking Tours," or the drowsy labour of the end of the *Inland Voyage*, and then recall David Balfour. "By what I have read in books, I think few that have held a pen were ever really wearied, or they would write of it more strongly. I had no care of my life, neither past nor future, and I scarce remembered there was such a lad as David Balfour; I did not think of myself, but just of each fresh step, which I was sure would be my last, with despair, and of Alan, who was the cause of it, with hatred."[1]

[1] *Kidnapped*, chap. xxii.

It was not only, however, in the recalling of his past life that Stevenson showed this concentration of mind, for the effect of such works as *Jekyll and Hyde* is due to the intense realisation of the situations evoked, by which new life was breathed into worn-out themes.

As in books so in correspondence. Letters were at times to Stevenson an irksome duty, at others a welcome opportunity for the outpouring of himself to his friends, but in haste or in delight it was entirely without calculation that he dictated or wrote. It occurred suddenly to him one day that his letters to Mr. Colvin from Samoa "would make good pickings" after his death, "and a man could make some kind of a book out of it without much trouble."[1] So little have people understood his character and moods that after this point they have found in the *Vailima Letters* a self-conscious tone and a continual appeal to the gallery.

To see him was utterly to disbelieve in any regard of ulterior motives. He was his father's son, and with him, also, "his affections and emotions, passionate as these were, and liable to passionate ups and downs, found the most eloquent expression both in words and gestures. Love, anger, and indignation shone through him and broke forth in imagery, like what we read of Southern races." If he were talking, he was seldom for a moment still, but generally paced restlessly up and down the room, using his hands continually to emphasize what he was saying, but with gestures that seemed purely necessary and natural.

It is very difficult to give the impression of his demeanour and the brilliancy of his talk without falling

[1] *Vailima Letters*, June, 1892.

into the contrary error, and suggesting a self-consciousness full of acting and exaggeration. Nothing could be further from the truth, and it is easily shown. His singleness of mind always, in later days at any rate, impressed friends and foes alike with his sincerity of purpose. He was no sportsman and no athlete—fragile and long-haired[1]—yet nobody ever hinted he was unmanly: he was given to preaching, and himself not beyond reproach, yet no one for an instant suspected him of hypocrisy. Whatever he did he did with his whole heart, and it was hard for any one to think otherwise. All the foibles of mysteriousness and secrecy which formed a part of his life in student days fell away from him before the end. The burden of responsibility had diminished, it may be, the gaiety of his temper; but his character shone out the more clearly as the years showed the man.

II. If Stevenson delivered himself over, heart and soul, as I have said, to the absorbing interest or the ruling passion of the moment, it was assuredly not for the want of other interests or other passions. Of the many-sidedness of his mind the variety of his works is surely sufficient evidence, and even these by no means exhausted the whole of his resources. He wrote novels —the novel of adventure, the novel of character, the novel of incident; he wrote short stories and essays of all kinds—their variety it is impossible even to characterise; he wrote history and biography, fables and moralities, and treatises on ethics; he wrote poems—blank verse, lyrics and ballads, songs and poetry for

[1] See, however, vol. ii. p. 190.

children; he wrote plays, ranging from melodrama to genteel comedy; books of travel reflective and descriptive; he composed prayers and lay sermons, and even ventured on political speculation.

All were not of equal merit—that is not now to the point—but it would not be difficult to pick out at least ten works differing widely from each other, but all definitely belonging to the highest class of their kind. Only one verdict is possible, and for that it is necessary to lay hands upon a commonplace, and appropriate it to the benefit of the man who has best right to the distinction. It is curious that the saying was first made for Goldsmith, the best loved among our authors of the eighteenth century, the one who, in Professor Raleigh's phrase, shares with Stevenson "the happy privilege of making lovers among his readers." But of Stevenson it is even more true to say with Dr. Johnson: *Nullum fere scribendi genus non tetigit, nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.*

For this diversity of power and achievement I have relied on the evidence of his published writings, because it would otherwise appear incredible. But account must also be taken of at least a part of his unfinished and unpublished work, differing again in kind; and to that in turn must be added the indications in his letters of other veins of character or reflection that were never worked at all. Over and above all there was the talk of the man himself, in which the alternations were even more rapid and more striking.[1] Wit, humour, and pathos; the romantic, the tragic, the picturesque;

[1] For the admirable description by Mr. Colvin and Mr. Henley, see *Letters*, vol. i. pp. xxxvii, xxxviii.

stern judgment, wise counsel, wild fooling, all fell into their natural places, followed each other in rapid and easy succession, and made a marvellous whole, not the least of the wonder being the congruity and spontaneity which gave to it the just effect of being a perfectly natural utterance.

The quality was, of course, not without its defects, the chief of which were an apparent detachment and a sort of fickleness, or want of persistence. It was probably the former of these which led several persons quite independently of each other to give Stevenson the name of "Sprite," a being exempt from the ordinary limitations of mankind, an Ariel free to wander through the realms of imagination, turning hither and thither as his fancies prompted him.

Of the abandonment of his inventions I have already spoken. "He was always full of schemes, and plans, and fancies," says Mr. Henley. "You left him hot on one, and the next time you saw him, you found to your distress (having gone all the way with him) that he had forgotten all about it."

Thus if he saw life on each of its many sides in turn with an intensity denied to a wider range of vision, he was liable at times to see it neither steadily nor whole. For the latter he was somewhat compensated by the fact that he saw so many aspects of it in rapid succession that he speedily corrected any narrowness of consideration, his nature further helping him in this—that he never saw it with any narrowness of temper.

Taken together with the kindliness of his nature it also, to a great extent, explains his extraordinary gift of sympathy. He seemed to divine from his own ex-

perience how other people felt, and how best they might be encouraged or consoled. I doubt if any one ever remained for long in his company either reticent or ill at ease. Mr. Gosse reminds us of Stevenson's talks at Sydney with a man formerly engaged in the "blackbirding" trade, who was with great difficulty induced to speak of his experiences. "He was very shy at first," said Stevenson, "and it was not till I told him of a good many of my escapades that I could get him to thaw, and then he poured it all out. I have always found *that* the best way of getting people to be confidential." We have seen with what success he approached the natives in this manner; in like fashion, no doubt, he inquired of Highlanders about the Appin murder.

But even where he had some set purpose in view, his talk seemed to be a natural and purely spontaneous outpouring of himself. It never seemed to me to be vanity—if it were, it was the most genial that ever existed—but rather a reference to instances within his own knowledge to illustrate the point in hand. He never monopolised the conversation, however eager he might be, but was faithful to his preference for talk which is in its nature a debate, "the amicable counter-assertion of personality," and "the Protean quality which is in man" enabled him, without ceasing to be himself, to meet the temper of his company.

With this multiplicity one might expect to find room in his character for many contradictory qualities or the presence in excess and defect of the very same virtues, and this in truth was so. To reconcile opposites was a task he thought of but little importance, and a fa-

vourite phrase with him was Whitman's: "Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself." Consistency was a virtue for which it was easy to pay too high a price, and often it had to be surrendered for matters of greater import. Aspiration and humour, shrewdness and romance, profusion and self-denial, self-revelation and reserve, in him were curiously matched. On his frankness and his reticence I have already dwelt. He speaks of himself, as Professor Raleigh says,[1] "with no shadow of hypocrisy and no whiff or taint of indecent familiarity"; he tells you *everything*, as you think at first, and so simply and so frankly that it is only gradually you realise that he has not been revealing the things nearest his heart, that you learn no secrets of his home or his religion, nor of anything that was not for you to know. Self-denial, again, he showed in many ways; in his youth especially, when money was scarce with him, if any one had to go without, he was the first to surrender his claim and sacrifice himself. On the other hand, with "that virtue of frugality which is the armour of the artist" he was but ill-equipped.

Of his self-restraint in literature there can be no better instance than the very sparing use he makes of the pathetic. In the early essay on "Nurses" it is perhaps a trifle forced; there are hardly two more beautiful or dignified examples of it in English literature than in the essay on "Old Mortality," and the death of the fugitive French colonel in *St. Ives*. But it was only in conversation that one realised the extraordinary degree to

[1] *Robert Louis Stevenson*, by Walter Raleigh, p. 77. Edward Arnold, 1896.

which he possessed the power of moving the heart-strings. It was not that he made frequent or unmanly use of it, but being less upon his guard, the pathetic aspect of some person or incident would appeal to him, and in a moment he would have the least tender-hearted of his hearers hardly less deeply moved than himself. Ordinarily even in conversation he used it chiefly as a weapon of chivalry in defence of the neglected and the old; but as Swift "could write beautifully about a broomstick," so Stevenson one day described a chair, enlarging upon the hard lot of the legs that had to support the idle seat, until the boy to whom he was talking was almost in tears. On the other side must be set his description of "Home, Sweet Home" in *Across the Plains*, as "belonging to that class of art which may be best described as a brutal assault upon the feelings. Pathos must be redeemed by dignity of treatment. If you wallow naked in the pathetic, like the author of 'Home, Sweet Home,' you make your hearers weep in an unmanly fashion."

But the supreme instance of diverse elements in him was patience and its opposite. Never have I heard of any one in whom these contradictories were both shown in so high a degree. His endurance in illness and in work we have seen: no pain was too great to bear, no malady too long: he never murmured until it was over. No task was too irksome, no revision too exacting—laboriously, and like an eager apprentice, he went through with it to the end.

But on the other hand, when impatience came to the surface, it blazed up like the anger of a man who had never known a check. It was generally caused by

some breach of faith or act of dishonesty or unjustifiable delay. The only time I know of its being displayed in public was in a Paris restaurant, where Stevenson had ordered a change of wine, and the very bottle he had rejected was brought back to him with a different label. There was a sudden explosion of wrath; the bottle was hurled against the wall; in an instant the restaurant was emptied, and—so much for long-suffering—the proprietor and his staff were devoting the whole of their attention and art to appease and reconcile the angry man.

Sternness and tenderness in him were very equally matched, though the former was kept mainly for himself and those nearest to him, of whom he asked nearly as much as of himself: tenderness, on the other hand, was for the failings of others. For like many chivalrous people, he expected but little of what he gave with so much freedom. His tenderness had something feminine, yet without lacking the peculiar strength that distinguishes it in a man. The Roman quality of sternness he so much admired came to himself, no doubt, with his Scottish blood. It is a virtue that for the most part requires exclusive dominion over a character for its proper display, and in Stevenson it had many rivals. But that it was genuine his appreciation of Lord Braxfield and his rendering of it in Lord Hermiston place beyond all doubt.[1]

Sternness and pity it is quite possible to harmonise, and the secret in Stevenson's case is perhaps solved in the following letter: "I wish you to read Taine's *Origines de la France Contemporaine* . . . and to try and

[1] Cf. *Vailima Letters*, p. 220.

understand what I have in my mind (ay, and in my heart!) when I preach law and police to you in season and out of season. What else do we care for, what else is anything but secondary, in that embroiled, confounded ravelment of politics, but to protect the old, and the weak, and the quiet, from that bloody wild beast that slumbers in man?

"True to my character, I have to preach. But just read the book. It is not absolutely fair, for Taine does not feel, with a warm heart, the touching side of their poor soul's illusions; he does not feel the infinite pathos of the Federations, poor pantomime and orgie, that (to its actors) seemed upon the very margin of heaven; nor the unspeakable, almost unthinkable tragedy of such a poor, virtuous, wooden-headed lot as the methodistic Jacobins. But he tells, as no one else, the dreadful end of sentimental politics."

III. To deal with Stevenson's intellectual qualities alone is to approach his less fascinating side, and to miss far more than half the influence of his charm. I have referred to his chivalry, only to find that in reality I was thinking of every one of the whole group of attributes which are associated with that name. Loyalty, honesty, generosity, courage; courtesy, tenderness, and self-devotion; to impute no unworthy motives and to bear no grudge; to bear misfortune with cheerfulness and without a murmur; to strike hard for the right and take no mean advantage; to be gentle to women and kind to all that are weak; to be very rigorous with oneself and very lenient to others—these, and any other virtues ever implied in "chivalry," were the

traits that distinguished Stevenson. They do not make life easy, as he frequently found. One day, his stepson tells me, they were sitting on the deck of a schooner in the Pacific, and Stevenson was reading a copy of *Don Quixote*. Suddenly he looked up, and, with an air of realisation, said sadly, as if to himself, "That 's me."

In spite of his knowledge of the world and his humour, and a vein of cynicism most difficult to define, many were his quixotries and many the windmills at which he tilted, less often wholly in vain than we thought who watched his errantry. The example remains; and

> "Would to-day, when Courtesy grows chill,
> And life's fine loyalties are turned to jest,
> Some fire of thine might burn within us still!
> Ah, would but one might lay his lance in rest,
> And charge in earnest—were it but a mill!"[1]

Of some of the virtues I have cited it would be superfluous to say more. There is no need to repeat how he faced death in the Riviera or bore the weariness of exile. But I may be pardoned if I dwell upon a few of the more striking instances in which he displayed his open-mindedness, his generosity of temper, his hatred of cruelty, and his readiness to forgive offences.

Generosity is a word in sore danger of being limited to the giving of money, but to Stevenson the quality must be attributed not only in this, but also in the widest possible application. It is a virtue that from its nature is easily abused: this did but make Stevenson think the more highly of it, and it can have no more splendid motto than his own aphorism, of which one version

[1] *At the Sign of the Lyre*, by Austin Dobson, p. 93.

runs: "The mean man doubted, Greatheart was deceived. 'Very well,' said Greatheart."

Of Stevenson's own generous temper there is no better illustration than a letter written in early days when he had been called to task by Mr. Henley for some words of depreciation.

"I think the crier-up has a good trade; but I like less and less every year the berth of runner-down; and I hate to see my friends in it. What is ——'s fault? That he runs down. What is the easiest thing to do? To run down. What is it that a strong man should scorn to do? To run down. And all this comes steeply home to me; for I am horrified to gather that I begin myself to fall into this same business which I abhor in others."

No one ever more eagerly welcomed the success of younger writers, entirely unknown to himself; but of this point the published letters are quite sufficient proof.

Any offence against himself he forgave readily, nor did he find it difficult to make excuses for almost any degree of misconduct on the part of others. There was only one action which I heard him say he could never pardon, and the exception was characteristic. The father of an acquaintance came to Edinburgh one day many years ago to render his son material assistance which he could ill afford. The pair met Stevenson, and the son, introducing his father, did not scruple to sneer at him behind his back. Stevenson's experience of life and of character was very wide; but he looked back on that gesture as the one really unpardonable offence he had ever known.

He could be angry enough and stern enough upon

occasion, but never was there any one so ready to melt at the least appeal to his compassion or mercy. In his political quarrels he found the greatest difficulty in keeping up an open breach with persons whom he liked in themselves, and for whom his sympathy was engaged, although he was convinced that they were ruining Samoa.[1] Truly he might say: "There was no man born with so little animosity as I."

But in fact the two kinds of generosity went frequently together. It is impossible for me to give the instances I know, but it is the fact that over and over again, no sooner had any one quarrelled with him, than Stevenson at once began to cast about for some means of doing his adversary a service, if only it could be done without divulging the source from whence it came.

In the narrower sense he was generous to a fault, but was ready to take any amount of personal trouble, and exercised judgment in his giving. When there was occasion he set no limit to his assistance. "Pray remember that if ever X—— should be in want of help, you are to strain my credit to breaking, and to mortgage all I possess or can expect, to help him." But in another case: "I hereby authorise you to pay when necessary £—— to Z——; if I gave him more, it would only lead to his starting a gig and a Pomeranian dog. I hope you won't think me hard about this. If you think the sum insufficient, you can communicate with me by return on the subject." Of course he received applications from all sorts of people on all manner of pretexts. There was one man who embarrassed him greatly by frequent letters. As far as could be

[1] *Vailima Letters*, p. 162.

gathered this person desired to abandon entirely the use of clothing, and coming to Samoa with "a woman I love," was there to gain his livelihood by whitewashing Stevenson's fences, which, by the way, consisted almost entirely of barbed wire. This individual even presented himself (but in the garb of civilisation) at Stevenson's hotel in Sydney; there, however, the line was drawn, and he was refused an interview.

But Stevenson's best service was often in the words with which he accompanied his gift. To his funeral only close personal friends were invited, but there appeared a tall gaunt stranger, whom nobody remembered to have seen before. He came up and apologised for his presence, and said he could not keep away, for Stevenson had saved him one day when he was at his lowest ebb. "I was wandering despondently along the road, and I met Mr. Stevenson, and I don't know whether it was my story, or that he saw I was a Scotchman, but he gave me twenty dollars and some good advice and encouragement. I took heart again, and I 'm getting on all right now, but if I had n't met Mr. Stevenson, and he had n't helped me, I should have killed myself that day." And the tears ran down his face.

Of Stevenson's open mind there could perhaps be no better proof than the passage in his last letter to R. A. M. Stevenson, written only two months before his death. If there was a class of men on this earth whom Louis loathed and placed beyond the pale of humanity, it was the dynamiters and anarchists; yet he could write of them in the following strain:—"There is a new something or other in the wind, which exercises

me hugely: anarchy,—I mean, anarchism. People who (for pity's sake) commit dastardly murders very basely, die like saints, and leave beautiful letters behind 'em (did you see Vaillant to his daughter? it was the New Testament over again); people whose conduct is inexplicable to me, and yet their spiritual life higher than that of most. This is just what the early Christians must have seemed to the Romans. . . . If they go on being martyred a few years more, the gross, dull, not unkindly bourgeois may get tired or ashamed or afraid of going on martyring; and the anarchists come out at the top just like the early Christians."

I have never met any one who hated cruelty of any kind with so lively a horror—I had almost said with so fanatical a detestation—from his earliest years.

"Do you remember telling me one day when I came in," wrote the Rev. Peter Rutherford, his tutor, to Mrs. Thomas Stevenson after her son's death, "how it was his eyes were so swollen: tear-swollen? You had found him in the study sobbing bitterly over a tale of cruelty he had been reading all alone." At the other end of his life I can remember his own impassioned account, given late one Sunday evening on his return from Apia, of how he had found a crowd of natives watching a dog-fight. He had plunged into their midst and stopped it, and turned to rebuke them. "But I found all my Samoan had clean gone out of my head, and all I could say to them was 'Pala'ai, Pala'ai!' ('Cowards, cowards!')." But the most characteristic of all his utterances was at Pitlochry in 1881, when he saw a dog being ill-treated. He at once interposed, and when the owner resented his interference and told him:

"It 's not your dog," he cried out: "It 's God's dog, and I 'm here to protect it."

At the same time it must be laid to the credit of his reason and the firm balance of his judgment that although vivisection was a subject he could not endure even to hear mentioned, yet, with all his imagination and sensibility, he never ranged himself among the opponents of this method of inquiry, provided, of course, it was limited, as in England, with the utmost rigour possible.

It is curious now to remember that an early critic of the *Travels with a Donkey* censured him severely for the treatment of Modestine as described by Stevenson himself. Yet woe betide either friend or stranger who appeared at Vailima on a horse with the sore back too common in the tropics: it was well for him if he did not have to return home on foot.

Irksome as ill-health was to Stevenson, it was yet the possible effect on his own character that he most dreaded, for he suspected that "being an invalid was a fatal objection to a human being," and his horror of valetudinarianism was due to its being "the worst training upon earth." He felt it hard that he should be judged by the same standard as men to whom the world was still "full of sea-bathing, and horse exercise, and bracing, manly virtues." Moreover, although he always reckoned his life "as a thing to be dashingly used and cheerfully hazarded," he could not be altogether unconscious of the insecurity of his tenure. On one of those fragments of paper preserved by chance, on which he used to write down his remarks during the many periods when he was forbidden to speak,

these words occur: "You know the remarks of no doctor mean anything in my case. My case is a sport. I may die to-night or live till sixty." I can remember his saying to me in Samoa, "I have n't had a fair chance, I 've had to spend nearly all my life in expectation of death." The chief result with him perhaps was that he sat looser to life, and had grown altogether familiar with the idea of leaving it;[1] for in the words of Sir Thomas Browne: "He that so often surviveth his expectation lives many lives, and will hardly complain of the shortness of his days."

The question of Stevenson's ill-health brings one to the consideration which troubled him now and again in his later days: whether he had not after all made a mistake in adopting literature as his profession. With him, as with Scott, "to have done things worthy to be written was a dignity to which no man made any approach who had only written things worthy to be read." At times he thought with a passing regret of the life of action he had forsaken, and was struck by the irony that his father, who had opposed his choice of the profession of literature, had come to approve of it before he died, while he, whom nothing but that change of life would satisfy, had himself lived to doubt its wisdom.[2] But in these comparisons it was an ideal life that he contemplated, where he should be always well and always strong, doing his work in the open air. With such health and such conditions, his character and his powers might have attained to other heights; we should then have known a different man, less human and less endeared to us by the frailties of

[1] *Letters*, ii. 353. [2] *Ibid.*, 321.

our common nature. But the field on which he fought with sickness and depression was one in which most of us are at times engaged, and where many sufferers carry on a lifelong struggle. Anywhere his example would have been splendid; it could hardly have been more widely seen, or have better helped his fellowmen.

There was this about him, that he was the only man I have ever known who possessed charm in a high degree, whose character did not suffer from the possession. The gift comes naturally to women, and they are at their best in its exercise. But a man requires to be of a very sound fibre before he can be entirely himself and keep his heart single, if he carries about with him a talisman to obtain from all men and all women the object of his heart's desire. Both gifts Stevenson possessed, not only the magic but also the strength of character to which it was safely intrusted.

But who shall bring back that charm? Who shall unfold its secret? He was all that I have said: he was inexhaustible, he was brilliant, he was romantic, he was fiery, he was tender, he was brave, he was kind. With all this there went something more. He always liked the people he was with, and found the best and brightest that was in them; he entered into all the thoughts and moods of his companions, and led them along pleasant ways, or raised them to a courage and a gaiety like his own. If criticism or reminiscence has yielded any further elucidation of his spell, I do not know: it defies my analysis, nor have I ever heard it explained.

There linger on the lips of men a few names that

bring to us, as it were, a breeze blowing off the shores of youth. Most of those who have borne them were taken from the world before early promise could be fulfilled, and so they rank in our regard by virtue of their possibilities alone. Stevenson is among the fewer still who bear the award both of promise and of achievement, and is happier yet in this: besides admiration and hope, he has raised within the hearts of his readers a personal feeling towards himself which is nothing less deep than love.