

## CHAPTER VII

TRANSITION—1876-79

“ You may paddle all day long ; but it is when you come back at nightfall, and look in at the familiar room, that you find Love or Death awaiting you beside the stove ; and the most beautiful adventures are not those we go to seek.”

*The concluding words of “ An Inland Voyage.”*

THE next three years of Stevenson's life were so closely similar to the three preceding, that at first sight, but for his own selection of the age of five-and-twenty as the limit of youth, it might seem almost unnecessary to mark any division between them. He continued to spend his time between France, London, and Edinburgh, to lead a more or less independent life, and to give the best of his talents and industry to his now recognised profession. The year 1877 was marked by the acceptance of the first of his stories ever printed—*A Lodging for the Night*—and from that date his fiction began to take its place beside, and gradually to supersede, the essays with which his career had opened. The month of May, 1878, saw not only the appearance of his first book—*An Inland Voyage*—but also the beginning of his two first serial publications—the *New Arabian Nights* and the *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*; and they were followed at the end of the year by the *Edinburgh* in book form, and in June, 1879, by the *Travels with a Donkey*. All these, however, were but a measure of the author's growing reputation, and of the facility with which he could now find a publisher.

Original as these writings were, and unlike the work of his contemporaries, none of them constituted any new departure in his life or any alteration in his attitude to the world: and the change that now came arrived from another quarter. His friendships, as we have seen, counted for a great deal with Stevenson, and though the roll of them was not yet closed, and ended indeed only at his death, it was at the beginning of this period that he made the acquaintance which affected him more than any other—he now met for the first time the lady who was afterwards to be his wife.

Already it is becoming difficult to realise that there was a time not long distant when study for all the professions, including that of art, was hedged about with arbitrary restrictions for women. At the date of which I am speaking these limitations had been removed to some extent in Paris as far as the studios were concerned, but the natural consequences had not yet followed in country quarters, and women artists were as yet unknown in any of the colonies about Fontainebleau. Hitherto these societies had been nearly as free from the female element as were afterwards the early novels of Stevenson himself: the landlady, the chambermaid, the peasant girl passed across the stage, but the leading rôles were filled by men alone. But when Stevenson and Sir Walter Simpson, the "Arethusa" and the "Cigarette," returned from the Inland Voyage to their quarters at Grez, they found the colony in trepidation at the expected arrival of the invader.

The new-comers, however, were neither numerous nor formidable; being only an American lady and her two children—a young girl and a boy. Mrs. Osbourne

had seen her domestic happiness break up in California, and had come to France for the education of her family. She and her daughter had thrown themselves with ardour into the pursuit of painting, and thus became acquainted with some of the English and American artists in Paris. After profiting by the opportunities afforded them in the capital, they were in search of country lodgings, and accordingly, having taken counsel with their artist friends, they came to Grez.

So here for the first time Stevenson saw the woman whom Fate had brought half-way across the world to meet him. He straightway fell in love; he knew his own mind, and in spite of all dissuasions and difficulties, his choice never wavered. The difficulties were so great and hope so remote that nothing was said to his parents or to any but two or three of his closest friends. But in the meantime life took on a cheerful hue, and the autumn passed brightly for them all until the middle of October,<sup>1</sup> when Stevenson must return to Edinburgh, there to spend the winter.

In January, 1877, he came to London for a fortnight, and first met Mr. Gosse, who, being immediately added to the ranks of his intimate friends, has given us a most vivid and charming description of the effect produced on strangers at that time by Stevenson.

“It was in 1877,<sup>2</sup> or late in 1876, that I was presented to Stevenson, at the old Savile Club, by Mr. Sidney Colvin, who thereupon left us to our devices. We

<sup>1</sup> To the next year belongs the charcoal drawing made by Mrs. Osbourne of her future husband, which has been redrawn by Mr. T. Blake Wirgman, and stands at the beginning of this volume.

<sup>2</sup> *Critical Kitcats* (London, William Heinemann, 1896), p. 278.

went downstairs and lunched together, and then we adjourned to the smoking-room. As twilight came on I tore myself away, but Stevenson walked with me across Hyde Park, and nearly to my house. He had an engagement, and so had I, but I walked a mile or two back with him. The fountains of talk had been unsealed, and they drowned the conventions. I came home dazzled with my new friend, saying, as Constance does of Arthur, 'Was ever such a gracious creature born?'

“ . . . Those who have written about him from later impressions than those of which I speak, seem to me to give insufficient prominence to the gaiety of Stevenson. It was his cardinal quality in those early days. A childlike mirth leaped and danced in him; he seemed to skip upon the hills of life. He was simply bubbling with quips and jests; his inherent earnestness or passion about abstract things was incessantly relieved by jocosity; and when he had built one of his intellectual castles in the sand, a wave of humour was certain to sweep in and destroy it. I cannot, for the life of me, recall any of his jokes; and written down in cold blood, they might not be funny if I did. They were not wit so much as humanity, the many-sided outlook upon life. I am anxious that his laughter-loving mood should not be forgotten, because later on it was partly, but I think never wholly, quenched by ill-health, responsibility, and the advance of years. He was often, in the old days, excessively and delightfully silly—silly with the silliness of an inspired schoolboy; and I am afraid that our laughter sometimes sounded ill in the ears of age. . . .

“ My experience of Stevenson during these first years was confined to London, upon which he would make sudden piratical descents, staying a few days or weeks, and melting into air again. He was much at my house; and it must be told that my wife and I, as young married people, had possessed ourselves of a house too large for our slender means immediately to furnish. The one person who thoroughly approved of our great, bare, absurd drawing-room was Louis, who very earnestly dealt with us on the immorality of chairs and tables, and desired us to sit always, as he delighted to sit, upon hassocks on the floor. Nevertheless, as arm-chairs and settees straggled into existence, he handsomely consented to use them, although never in the usual way, but with his legs thrown sideways over the arms of them, or the head of a sofa treated as a perch. In particular, a certain shelf, with cupboards below, attached to a bookcase, is worn with the person of Stevenson, who would spend half an evening while passionately discussing some great question of morality or literature, leaping sideways in a seated posture to the length of this shelf, and then back again. He was eminently peripatetic, too, and never better company than walking in the street, this exercise seeming to inflame his fancy.”

It was in these years especially that he gave the impression of something transitory and unreal, sometimes almost inhuman.

“ He was careful, as I have hardly known any other man to be, not to allow himself to be burdened by the weight of material things. It was quite a jest with us that he never acquired any possessions. In the midst of

those who produced books, pictures, prints, *bric-à-brac*, none of these things ever stuck to Stevenson. There are some deep-sea creatures, the early part of whose life is spent dancing through the waters; at length some sucker or tentacle touches a rock, adheres, pulls down more tentacles, until the creature is caught there, stationary for the remainder of its existence. So it happens to men, and Stevenson's friends caught the ground with a house, a fixed employment, a 'stake in life'; he alone kept dancing in the free element, unattached."<sup>1</sup>

These were the days when he most frequented the Savile Club, and the lightest and most vivacious part of him there came to the surface. He might spend the morning in work or business, and would then come to the club for luncheon. If he were so fortunate as to find any congenial companions disengaged, or to induce them to throw over their engagements, he would lead them off to the smoking-room, and there spend an afternoon in the highest spirits and the most brilliant and audacious talk.

His private thoughts and prospects must often have been of the gloomiest, but he seems to have borne his unhappiness with a courage as high as he ever afterwards displayed, and with a show of levity which imposed on his friends and often ended by carrying him out of himself.

The whim of independence to which Mr. Gosse refers was carried out to an extreme by the two Stevenson cousins, about this time, in one of their visits to Paris, an experience which Louis afterwards transferred to the pages of *The Wrecker*. "Stennis," it may be

<sup>1</sup> *Critical Kitcats* (London, William Heinemann, 1896), p. 300.

explained, was the nearest approach to their name possible to Barbizon, and accordingly it was as Stennis *aîné* and Stennis *frère* that the pair were always known.

“The two Stennises had come from London, it appeared, a week before with nothing but greatcoats and tooth-brushes. It was expensive, to be sure, for every time you had to comb your hair a barber must be paid, and every time you changed your linen one shirt must be bought and another thrown away; but anything was better, argued these young gentlemen, than to be the slaves of haversacks. ‘A fellow has to get rid gradually of all material attachments: that was manhood,’ said they; ‘and as long as you were bound down to anything—house, umbrella, or portmanteau—you were still tethered by the umbilical cord.’”<sup>1</sup>

When he broke through this rule, his inconsistency was equally original and unexpected.

“*Paris, Jan., 1878.*—I have become a bird fancier. I carry six little creatures no bigger than my thumb about with me almost all the day long; they are so pretty; and it is so nice to waken in the morning and hear them sing.” Six or seven years later he again alludes to these or to other similar pets. “There is only one sort of bird that I can tolerate caged, though even then I think it hard, and that is what is called in France the *Bec-d’Argent*. I once had two of these pigmies in captivity; and in the quiet, bare house upon a silent street where I was then living, their song, which was not much louder than a bee’s, but airily musical, kept me in a perpetual good-humour. I put the cage upon my table when I worked, carried it with me when I went for

<sup>1</sup> *The Wrecker*, i. 73.

meals, and kept it by my head at night: the first thing in the morning, these *maestrini* would pipe up."

The following letter written from Paris has preserved a record of one of the thousand little kind and thoughtful acts which were so characteristic of Stevenson. Most of them are nameless and unremembered, but this—thanks to his perception of its humour—has been handed down to us.

"1st Feb., 1877, Paris.—MY DEAR MOTHER,—I have ordered a picture. There is magnificence for you. Poor — is, as usual, hard up, and I knew wanted to make me a present of a sketch; so I took the first word and offered him 50f. for one. You should have seen us. I was so embarrassed that I could not finish a single phrase, and kept beginning, 'You know,' and 'You understand,' and 'Look here, —,' and ending in pitiful intervals of silence. I was perspiring all over. Suddenly I saw — begin to break out all over in a silvery dew; and he just made a dive at me and took me in his arms—in a kind of champion comique style, you know, but with genuine feeling."

This letter is also an indirect confirmation of what has been said in the preceding chapter as to Stevenson's poverty. About this time, however, his father followed the precedent set in his own case, and paid to Louis as an instalment of his patrimony a considerable sum, amounting, I believe, to not less than a thousand pounds. The fact is certain, the date and exact details have been lost. In the end Stevenson derived small benefit himself. "The little money he had," as Mr. Colvin says, "was always absolutely at the disposal of his friends." In 1877 he had still £800, but, owing



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to misfortunes befalling his friends, in none of which was he under any obligation to intervene, within less than two years nothing of it remained. His income from writing was as yet extremely small, the payment for his essays amounting to a guinea a page, so that until 1878 he probably from all sources had never made £50 in any one year.

As to his work, the actual output of 1877 was no more than one contribution to *Temple Bar* and three *Cornhill* articles, of which the *Apology for Idlers* had been rejected for *Macmillan's* the year before. The *Temple Bar* story—*A Lodging for the Night*, already mentioned—was the outcome of his studies for the essay on Villon in the *Cornhill* for August, and the last result of his attention to French mediæval literature. But of his acumen and insight into Villon's character (on which recent discoveries have thrown fresh light), the specialists can hardly find enough to say.<sup>1</sup>

If this year had little to show, it was only because much of it was spent in preparing for the next year's harvest. 1878 was at once in quantity and in quality the richest year he had yet known. *An Inland Voyage* was published in May: the journey with the donkey was taken, and an elaborate diary of it kept: there were four essays and a story in *Cornhill*; three essays, a story, and the *New Arabian Nights* in *London*; a story in *Temple Bar*; while *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh* ran in the *Portfolio* from June till December, and then came out in book form.

<sup>1</sup> Letter of M. Marcel Schwob to Mr. Colvin, *Literature*, November 4th, 1899.

*London* was a weekly journal, founded by Robert Glasgow Brown, Stevenson's colleague on the *Edinburgh University Magazine*,<sup>1</sup> and after December, 1877, edited by Mr. Henley, who some time before had left Edinburgh.

It was in page and type not unlike the *World*, and to the omniscience necessary to an ordinary weekly paper it added a strong flavour of literature. Much of Mr. Henley's lighter verse appeared first in its columns, and among its less irregular contributors were Mr. Andrew Lang and the late Grant Allen and James Runciman. It was a staunch opponent of Mr. Gladstone and all his works, and won the favourable notice of Lord Beaconsfield. But the foundations of its finance were laid in sand, and it survived its originator little more than a year. It was the first paper edited by Mr. Henley, but though he never admitted to his columns work more brilliant of its kind, the *Arabian Nights* series was supposed by more than one of the proprietors sufficiently to account for the unpopularity of their journal.<sup>2</sup>

The conception of these stories is recorded in a letter to R. A. M. Stevenson. "The first idea of all was the hansom cabs, which I communicated to you in your mother's drawing-room in Chelsea. The same afternoon the Prince de Galles and the Suicide Club were invented, and several more now forgotten." The first half was actually written partly at Burford Bridge, partly at Swanston, while the *Rajab's Diamond* was

<sup>1</sup> *Memories and Portraits*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> L. Cope Cornford, *Robert Louis Stevenson*, p. 51. W. Blackwood & Sons, 1899.

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written at Monastier, before the author set out with his *anese*. *The Sire de Malétroit's Door* (Door being substituted for the original "Mousetrap") was invented in France, first told over the fire one evening in Paris, and ultimately written at Penzance.

*Providence and the Guitar* was based upon a story told by a strolling French actor and his Bulgarian wife, who had stayed at Grez. The man had played inferior parts at a good theatre, and the woman also had been on the stage. They were quiet, innocent creatures, who spent all the daytime in fishing in the river. They had their meals on a bare table in the kitchen, and in the evening they sang in the dining-room and had a little "tombola" as in the story. They made the best of the most hideous poverty, but the worst of it was that they were forced to leave their only child with a peasant woman, while they were tramping from village to village. She had let the child fall, and it was in consequence a hunchback. Stevenson had much talk with them, taking great pleasure in their company and delight in hearing of their experiences. But there is no further foundation for the legend that he went strolling with them, or ever acted to a French audience.

When the story appeared he sent to the pair the money it brought him, and he received a most charming letter of thanks, which unfortunately has disappeared.

In 1877, Stevenson, having spent part of February and of June and July in France, returned there again from August to November. He did not carry out his original project of another canoe voyage by the Loing, the Loire, the Saone, and the Rhône to the Mediterranean,

but spent some time with Sir Walter Simpson either at Nemours or at Moret where the Loing joins the Seine. Their experience of the Oise had suggested the charms of the life on board a barge, their imagination was kindled, nothing would content them but to acquire such a vessel for themselves, well found in all things they could desire, picturesque and romantic as craft had never yet been; and in this fashion they should make a leisurely progress along the waterways of Europe.

“There should be no white fresher, and no green more emerald than ours, in all the navy of the canals. There should be books in the cabin, and tobacco jars, and some old Burgundy as red as a November sunset, and as fragrant as a violet in April.”

The *Eleven Thousand Virgins of Cologne* was “procured and christened,” but on that cruise and under that flag she never started. A financial difficulty arose, and both barge and canoes alike had to be sold. So Stevenson’s only other travelling this year was a trip with his parents to Cornwall, when he went as far as the Scilly Islands with his mother.

In 1878 he seems to have spent no more than a fortnight in Scotland until December, although he was in London four or five times. In April he stayed with his parents at the inn at Burford Bridge, under Box Hill, “with its arbours and green garden and silent, eddying river,” “known already as the place where Keats wrote some of his *Endymion*, and Nelson parted from his Emma,” and connected hereafter, it may be, with the *New Arabian Nights*, and the friendship between Stevenson and Mr. George Meredith, of which this

visit saw the beginning. All this summer he was acting as private secretary to Professor Fleeming Jenkin, who was a juror at the International Exhibition at Paris; the only post approaching any regular position or employment that Stevenson ever held.

This intimate association with his friend was a great delight to them both, and in no respect more than in the indulgence of their taste for the theatre.

“Another unalloyed dramatic pleasure, which Fleeming and I shared in the year of the Paris Exposition, was the *Marquis de Villemer*, that blameless play, performed by Madeleine Brohan, Delaunay, Worms, and Broisat — an actress, in such parts at least, to whom I have never seen full justice rendered. He had his fill of weeping on that occasion; and when the piece was at an end, in front of a café in the mild midnight air, we had our fill of talk about the art of acting.”<sup>1</sup>

Of an earlier experience in the same year, Stevenson writes:—

“I have been to see Salvini, and I now know more about him; no diminution of respect, rather an increase, from being able to compare him with the Français people, but a more critical vein. I notice, above all, the insufficiency, the scholastic key of his gestures, as compared with the incomparable freedom and inspiration of his intonations. As for Sarah Bernhardt, although her fame is only now beginning to reach England, and is now greater than ever in France, she is but the ghost of herself; and those who have not seen her before will never see her again — never see her at all, I mean.”

<sup>1</sup> *Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin*, p. 145.

Meanwhile he was working hard, in spite of a touch of illness for which the doctor nearly ordered him to leave Paris for the South of France. *An Inland Voyage* had been accepted by Messrs. Kegan Paul, Trench & Co. at the beginning of the year; and on the 17th February we find the author writing from Paris: "I have now been four days writing a — preface, a weary preface." But it was that which stands before the *Inland Voyage*, and his readers have little reason to regret the amount of time so employed.

A week later he says: "I am getting a lot of work ready in my mind, and as soon as I am able to square my elbows, I shall put it through my hands rapidly. What a blessing work is! I don't think I could face life without it; and how glad I am I took to literature! It helps me so much."

In the whirl of Paris, during the same month, he wrote this letter to his father, sitting at a café in the Quartier Latin:—

*"Café de la Source, Bd. St. Michel, Paris,  
15th Feb., 1878.*

"A thought has come into my head which I think would interest you. Christianity is, among other things, a very wise, noble, and strange doctrine of life. Nothing so difficult to specify as the position it occupies with regard to asceticism. It is not ascetic. Christ was of all doctors (if you will let me use the word) one of the least ascetic. And yet there is a theory of living in the gospels which is curiously indefinable, and leans towards asceticism on one side, although it leans away from it on the other. In fact, asceticism is used

therein as a means, not as an end. The wisdom of this world consists in making oneself very little in order to avoid many knocks; in preferring others, in order that, even when we lose, we shall find some pleasure in the event; in putting our desires outside of ourselves, in another ship, so to speak, so that, when the worst happens, there will be something left. You see, I speak of it as a doctrine of life, and as a wisdom for this world. People must be themselves, I suppose. I feel every day as if religion had a greater interest for me; but that interest is still centred on the little rough-and-tumble world in which our fortunes are cast for the moment. I cannot transfer my interests, not even my religious interests, to any different sphere. . . . I have had some sharp lessons and some very acute sufferings in these last seven-and-twenty years—more even than you would guess. I begin to grow an old man; a little sharp, I fear, and a little close and unfriendly; but still I have a good heart, and believe in myself and my fellow-men and the God who made us all. . . . There are not many sadder people in the world, perhaps, than I. I have my eye on a sick-bed;<sup>1</sup> I have written letters to-day that it hurt me to write, and I fear it will hurt others to receive; I am lonely and sick and out of heart. Well, I still hope; I still believe; I still see the good in the inch, and cling to it. It is not much, perhaps, but it is always something.

“I find I have wandered a thousand miles from what I meant. It was this: of all passages bearing on Christianity in that form of a worldly wisdom, the most Christian, and, so to speak, the key of the whole posi-

<sup>1</sup> R. Glasgow Brown lay dying in the Riviera.

tion, is the Christian doctrine of revenge. And it appears that this came into the world through Paul! There is a fact for you. It was to speak of this that I began this letter; but I have got into deep seas and must go on.

“There is a fine text in the Bible, I don’t know where, to the effect that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord. . . . Strange as it may seem to you, everything has been, in one way or the other, bringing me a little nearer to what I think you would like me to be. ’T is a strange world, indeed, but there is a manifest God for those who care to look for him.

“This is a very solemn letter for my surroundings in this busy café; but I had it on my heart to write it; and, indeed, I was out of the humour for anything lighter.—Ever your affectionate son,

“ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

“P.S.—While I am writing gravely, let me say one word more. I have taken a step towards more intimate relations with you. But don’t expect too much of me. . . . Try to take me as I am. This is a rare moment, and I have profited by it; but take it as a rare moment. Usually I hate to speak of what I really feel, to that extent that when I find myself *cornered*, I have a tendency to say the reverse. R. L. S.”

This graver tone was beginning to grow upon him, for all his spirits and light-heartedness. It seemed, indeed, as if happiness had shown him her face only that he might be filled with inextinguishable longing and regret. Mrs. Osbourne had hitherto remained in France, but this year she returned to California. All



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was dark before them. She was not free to follow her inclination, and though the step of seeking a divorce was open to her, yet the interests and feelings of others had to be considered, and for the present all idea of a union was impossible. Stevenson, on his side, was still far from earning his own livelihood, and could not expect his parents to give their assistance or even their consent to the marriage. So there came the pain of parting without prospect of return, and he who was afterwards so long an exile from his friends now suffered separation from his dearest by the breadth of a continent and an ocean.

At first he continued to lead his life as if nothing had happened. After his Exhibition work was over, he went to Monastier, a mountain town near the sources of the Loire, and there occupied himself with a strenuous effort in completing both the *New Arabian Nights* and the *Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh*, both at this time in their serial career. There seems an irony in the fact that, having lived most of his life in Edinburgh, more or less against his will, he should retire to France only to write about it. But, as if by way of protest against realism, he never drew his native country or his countrymen better than when he was absent from Scotland.

At Monastier he spent some three weeks and completed his work, finding time also for some pencil sketches of the country and of the people, and obtaining, as always, a pleasant footing among the inhabitants, most of whom probably had never seen an Englishman (or Scotchman) in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Studio*, Winter Number, 1896-97; *Juvenilia*, p. 216.

On September 23rd he set out with his donkey on his eleven days' journey through the Cévennes, but here too his thoughts pursued him.

"I heard the voice of a woman singing some sad, old, endless ballad not far off. It seemed to be about love and a *bel amoureux*, her handsome sweetheart; and I wished I could have taken up the strain and answered her, as I went on upon my invisible woodland way, weaving, like Pippa in the poem, my own thoughts with hers. What could I have told her? Little enough; and yet all the heart requires. How the world gives and takes away, and brings sweethearts near only to separate them again into distant and strange lands; but to love is the great amulet which makes the world a garden; and 'hope, which comes to all,' outwears the accidents of life, and reaches with tremulous hand beyond the grave and death. Easy to say: yea, but also, by God's mercy, both easy and grateful to believe!"<sup>1</sup>

The *Inland Voyage* had been published in May, 1878, producing no more sensation than a small book, written for the sake of style by an unknown author, was likely to produce among the public, although the reviews showed uniform favour and occasional discernment. The author wrote to his mother: "I was more surprised at the tone of the critics than I suppose any one else. And the effect it has produced on me is one of shame. If they liked that so much, I ought to have given them something better, that's all. And I shall try to do so. Still it strikes me as odd; and I don't understand the vogue." And later in the year he has been reading it through again and finds it "not

<sup>1</sup> *Travels with a Donkey*, p. 310.

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badly written, thin, mildly cheery and strained." His final verdict, given in Samoa in the last year of his life, was that though this book and the *Travels with a Donkey* contained nothing but fresh air and a certain style, they were good of their kind, and possessed a simplicity of treatment which afterwards he thought had passed out of his reach.

The first draft of the *Voyage* was made some time in 1877 in Edinburgh, much of it being taken without alteration from his log-book. There are in this draft numerous variations from the text as finally printed, although many consecutive pages have no word altered, but the chief difference between them lies in the fact that most of the longer passages of general reflections are not to be found in the draft. Thus in the opening chapter the second and third and most of the last paragraph are as yet wanting.

Of the work of the year, *Will o' the Mill* shows perhaps the greatest advance. It was the first of his tales taken by the *Cornhill*, and in spite of the obvious influence of Hawthorne and a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the uneven development of the allegory, more than any of his shorter pieces, it produced the impression that a new writer had arisen, original in his conceptions, and already a master of style. The setting was composed, he told Mr. Iles, from a combination of the Murgthal in Baden and the Brenner Pass in Tyrol, over which he went on his Grand Tour at the age of twelve.

Apart from its manner, the interest of the story lies for us in its divergence from Stevenson's scheme and conduct of life. It was written, he told me, as an ex-

periment, in order to see what could be said in support of the opposite theory: much as he used to present to his cousin Bob any puzzling piece of action in order to find out what could be urged in its defence.<sup>1</sup> One of his ruling maxims was that "Acts may be forgiven: not even God can forgive the hanger-back"; yet here he depicted the delight of fruition indefinitely deferred, the prudence of giving no hostages to fortune, the superiority of the man who suffices to himself. In the story, however, there were embodied so much wisdom, so much spirit, so much courage, so much of all that was best in the writer, that it imposed on others long after it had ceased to satisfy himself. And as a work of art it may well outlast far more correct philosophy. It has this also: although in later days he ventured on a more elaborate treatment of his heroines, it seems to me—if any man may venture so far—that it is impossible to maintain that he was still ignorant of the heart of woman who now drew with so delicate and so firm a touch the outlines of "the parson's Marjory."

The *Travels with a Donkey* were written in the winter and published in June. In the spring Louis wrote to R. A. M. Stevenson: "My book is through the press. It has good passages. I can say no more. A chapter called 'The Monks,' another 'A Camp in the Dark,' a third 'A Night among the Pines.' Each of these has, I think, some stuff in it in the way of writing. But lots of it is mere protestations to F., most of which I think you will understand. That is to me the main thread of interest. Whether the damned public — But that 's all one."

<sup>1</sup> *Memories and Portraits*, p. 187.

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He returned to London and began to collaborate with Mr. Henley in a play based on the latest of his drafts of *Deacon Brodie*, which he had not touched since he was nineteen. In the meantime he started on another walk, this time down the valley of the Stour, which separates the counties of Essex and Suffolk; but a sore heel soon brought him back to London, not unwillingly, as he found it "dull, cold, and not singularly pretty on the road." In December he wrote to his mother: "I don't wish the play spoken of at all; for of course, as a first attempt, it will most likely come to nothing. It is, however, pretty good in parts. I work three hours every morning here in the club on the *brouillons*; and then three in the afternoon on the fair copy. In bed by ten; here again in the morning, to the consternation of the servants, as soon as the club is open."

It was probably at this time that he made the social experiment recorded in *The Amateur Emigrant* of practising upon the public by "going abroad through a suburban part of London simply attired in a sleeve-waistcoat."

"The result was curious. I then learned for the first time, and by the exhaustive process, how much attention ladies are accustomed to bestow on all male creatures of their own station; for, in my humble rig, each one who went by me caused a certain shock of surprise and a sense of something wanting. In my normal circumstances, it appeared, every young lady must have paid me some passing tribute of a glance; and though I had often been unconscious of it when given, I was well aware of its absence when it was withheld. My height seemed to decrease with every woman who

passed me, for she passed me like a dog. This is one of my grounds for supposing that what are called the upper classes may sometimes produce a disagreeable impression in what are called the lower; and I wish some one would continue my experiment, and find out exactly at what stage of toilette a man becomes invisible to the well-regulated female eye." <sup>1</sup>

But life was not to be lived upon the old terms. His heart was elsewhere, and the news which reached him was disquieting. For some time it was fairly good; then Mrs. Osbourne fell seriously ill. There had been, there could be, no restoration of her home life; but it appeared that she would be able to obtain a divorce without causing any unnecessary distress to her family, and in this conjunction Stevenson could not see clearly what his course of action ought to be. He was first at Swanston with Mr. Henley, finishing *Deacon Brodie*; then in London; at Swanston again, this time alone, writing his chapters on *Lay Morals*; then at the Gareloch with his parents. In May he went to London, and, after staying with Mr. George Meredith, crossed over to France. Had he found a companion, he would perhaps have gone to the Pyrenees, but he spent most of his time at Cernay la Ville, and returned to London in the end of June. He there saw Mr. Macdonald of the *Times*, in reference to some negotiations for his employment; he expressed himself as unwilling to accept "leaders," but apparently asked for some more general commission, which, however, he did not receive.

The *Travels with a Donkey* had been published in June, and obtained the same unsubstantial success as

<sup>1</sup> *The Amateur Emigrant*, p. 83.

the *Inland Voyage*, although, contrary to its author's own judgment of the two books, it afterwards had slightly the better sale.

On 14th July he returned to Edinburgh, and by the 30th his mind was made up — to California he must go. From Edinburgh he came back to London, presumably to make arrangements for his start; and wherever he went, he found his friends unanimous in their opinion that he ought to stay at home. Under these circumstances it seemed to him so hopeless to expect any other judgment on the part of his parents, that he did not even go through the form of consulting them on the matter, and with open eyes went away, knowing that he need look for no further countenance from home. He had long felt it to be a duty that every man on reaching manhood should cease to be a burden to his father; he had now learned his craft, and every circumstance seemed to him to point out that the time was come for him to seek his own livelihood and justify his independence. These considerations were very present to his mind, and perhaps he hardly realised the distress which he would inevitably cause his parents by leaving them without a word and in almost total ignorance of the hopes and motives which inspired him.