The Art of Robert Louis Stevenson.

by

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CHAPTER ONE.

BIOGRAPHY AND BIOGRAPHERS.

In approaching a study of the art of Robert Louis Stevenson we shall start from the hypothesis that in order to understand his art, it is necessary to understand the author. Therefore, the first part of the chapter will deal with mere biographical facts; we shall learn something of his ancestry, his early environment, the various vicissitudes of his life and his ultimate destiny. Then with that background we shall pass on to consider the quality of his personality as revealed by his friends and biographers.

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh November 13th, 1850. His father, Thomas Stevenson, an engineer, belonged to a famous family of lighthouse architects. Two well-known lighthouses, "Bell Rock" and "Skerryvore" stand as enduring monuments to the Stevenson skill. Particularly in the eyes of Stevenson himself were these a source of pride. In his book, A Family of Engineers, he reveals his admiration for the daring exploits and hardy lives of his paternal ancestors, practical men of trained scientific mind and shrewd common sense.

But Stevenson was no less proud of his maternal ancestry, the Balfours of Pilrig, landed gentry, famous throughout Lowland Scotland for their culture and piety. His mother was the daughter of the Reverend Louis Balfour

of Colinton. Stevenson's mind loved to dwell on the theme of his ancestors. He believed that "Our conscious years are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us." In writing of his grandfather he said, "I often wonder what I inherited from this old minister. I must suppose that he was fond of preaching sermons and so am I."1. There is no doubt it was from the Balfours that Stevenson inherited the love of preaching and the teaching of morality which is revealed in his work.

The gloom of Calvinism clung about Stevenson in his infancy. He himself said that he had a Covenanting childhood. His nurse, Alison Cunningham, steeped his receptive mind in all the doctrines of her faith. His parents were deeply religious and very orthodox, but to his mother's faith was added a gayness of spirit, a blithesomeness that counteracted the gloom of Calvinism. Although at an early age he formed opinions which to the Presbyterians of the old school seemed very dangerous, yet the vivid memory of his childhood's faith remained with him to the end and always made an irresistible appeal for reverence.

As a child Stevenson was very delicate. He was educated at private schools but his real education was acquired from early wanderings in search of health. These excursions made a deep impression on his childish mind and

1. Memories and Portraits. "The Manse" Ch. 6. P. 106. Scribner's New York 1926. From now on the Publisher's name for Memories and Portraits will be omitted.

later provided valuable material for his writings, as for example in The Lantern Bearers, and in one of the most imaginative chapters of David Balfour which has its weird setting on the Bass Rock, near where he spent his youthful vacations.

From childhood Stevenson showed literary tendencies. All through his boyhood and youth he was pointed out as the pattern of an idler and yet he was always busy on his own private ends which was to learn to write. He knew he was misjudged at this time and, later, in the following poem, tried to justify his actions.

> Say not of me that weakly I declined
> The labours of my sires, and fled the sea
> The towers we founded and the lamps we lit,
> To play at home with paper like a child.
> But rather say: In the afternoon of time
> A strenuous family dusted from its hands
> The sand of granite, and beholding far
> Along the sounding coast its pyramids
> And tall memorials catch the dying sun,
> Smiled well content, and to this childish task
> Around the fire addressed its evening hours.[1]

At the age of seventeen he entered Edinburgh University with a view to following his father's profession, but he soon realised that his interests were centred, not in engineering, but in literature. His father, averse to the adoption of literature as a profession, then suggested law. At first Stevenson complied with his father's request and in 1875 he was called to the Bar. According to the Scottish custom among briefless advocates he began pacing

1. Underwoods: "Say not of me." Tusitala Edition. V.22 P.95. William Heinemann Ltd. London. From now on the publisher's name will be omitted for the Tusitala edition.

Parliament House. In his account of Edinburgh he gives an amusing description of the "Salle des pas perdus" of the Scottish Bar "where idle youths by a ferocious custom parade, breathing dust and bombazine as they exhibit themselves in vain to potential patrons with briefs to bestow."[1]

But Stevenson was not interested in law except as it contributed to his knowledge of men and books. Finally he decided to follow his own bent - literature. He continued to pose as an idler with Bohemian ways, yet he was in reality practising the art of writing. While at college he had contributed to journals[2] but at that time his articles attracted little attention. Meanwhile he was enriching his life by friendship and travel. In London he became a member of the Savile Club, where he attracted the attention of men such as Leslie Stephen, Andrew Lang, Edmund Gosse and later George Meredith, while in Edinburgh he counted among his intimate friends, W. E. Henley, Fleeming, Jenkin, and Sir Sidney Colvin.

Between 1875 and 1878 he contributed to journals a series of essays later published as Virginibus Puerisque[3] and Familiar Studies of Men and Books[4] and such stories as

1. Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes. Ch.3. P.33. The Co-operative Publication Society, New York and London. This edition has been used throughout for Stevenson's novels and from now on the Publisher's name will be omitted.
2. The articles then written are now included in Memories and Portraits.
3. Published 1881.
4. Published 1882.

A Lodging for the Night and The Sire de Malétrait's Door.

For reasons of health and from a love of adventure he travelled in a canoe along the rivers of France and Belgium, and with a donkey, "The Immortal Modestine," in the mountains of Southern France. The fruits of such experiences were An Inland Voyage, published in 1878, and Travels with a Donkey, in the following year. While in France he met Mrs. Fanny Osbourne, with whom he fell in love. In the closing paragraph of An Inland Voyage there is the following indirect reference to their meeting:-

> 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.[1]

In 1879 Stevenson followed Mrs. Osbourne to California where a serious illness would have ended his life had it not been for her careful nursing. The following year they were married. Of her he writes -

> Trusty, dusky, vivid true,
> With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
> Steel-true and blade straight
> The great artificer
> Made my mate.[2]

On his way to California, Stevenson crossed the ocean as a steerage passenger and travelled across the

1. An Island Voyage - "Back to the World." Co-operative Edition. Vol.7. Page 148.
2. Songs of Travels - "My Wife." Tusitala Edition. No.25. P.147.

continent in an immigrant train. He made use of these experiences in his next publications, The Amateur Emigrant and Across the Plains, while the Silverado Squatters was written among the mountains near San Francisco where he spent his honeymoon.

After spending a year in America Stevenson returned to Scotland to begin once more a restless search for health, the pathetic mood of which is revealed in his essay Ordered South. There he says that -

> It is not in such numbness of spirit only that the life of the invalid resembles a premature old age. Those excursions that he had promised himself to furnish prove too long or too arduous for his feeble body; and the barrier hills are as impassable as ever.[1]

For a time Stevenson lived at Davos in the Swiss Alps where he completed the tale that first brought him fame - Treasure Island, published in 1882. From then on Stevenson successively sought health and continued writing, until at last in 1888 he departed from California on his last quest. He went on a leisurely voyage among the Islands of the Pacific and finally settled at Samoa. There he enjoyed a temporary return to health, but it was only temporary. At the time of his death he was engaged in writing Weir of Hermiston and St. Ives. The setting in both is Scottish. Despite a long absence of nine years he wrote of his native land and the scenes of his youth with a vividness that is startling. It is to Swanston and the Pentlands

1. Virginibus Puerisque: Ordered South. Tusitala Edition No. 25. Page 68.

that his thoughts, towards the end of his life, turned with tragic yearning. His longing is revealed in the following lines -

> Be it granted to me to behold you again in dying
> Hills of home! and to hear again the call;
> Hear above the graves of the martyrs the peewees crying
> And hear no more at all.[1]

His prayer remained unanswered save in dreams for he died at Samoa on December 3rd, 1894, at the age of forty-four. His philosophy of life and death revealed in Aes Triplex is strangely applicable to his own death. Of him too it might be said that -

> In the hot-fit of life, a tip-toe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual land.[2]

At his own request he was buried on Mount Vaea, overlooking the Pacific - a fitting resting place for the man who loved above all things, the freedom of the open air, the glory of the sea and sky, the wind among the trees and the silent companionship of the stars. And on his tomb is his Requiem:-

> Under the wide and stary sky
> Dig the grave and let me lie
> Glad did I live and gladly die
> And I laid me down with a will.

1. Songs of Travel "To S. R. Crockett". Tusitala Edition. Vol.22. P.168.

2. Virginibus Puerisque: Ordered South. Tusitala Edition. No.25. Page 68.

This be the verse you grave for me
Here he lies where he longed to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.[1]

But in order to have a clear conception of Stevenson's art we must go deeper than mere biographical facts. They throw much light on his art but not enough. We have still to reckon with the elusive quality of the man's personality. Scott-James tells us that

> Sainte-Beuve would have his critic set himself, not hurriedly, but as the final task following long study, to drag to the light of day that essential element in character, which may be clearly revealed or may lie hidden, but in any case determines the author in all his moods, in all his phases, in all aspects of his creative work.[2]

Stevenson's friends and biographers reveal him in many moods and phases so before proceeding to study his art we shall see what light they throw on his personality.

Stevenson's wide circle of friends, most of them men of letters, pay tribute to the charm of his personality. The tributes are set forth in I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson,[3] a collection of personal reminiscences. Even Saintsbury, the most conservative of critics, came under his spell. They were introduced at the Savile Club and arranged to dine together. "So he came," writes Saintsbury, "and we were friends ever after." Sir Sydney Colvin, who edited Stevenson's letters says,

1. Underwoods "Requiem" Tusitala Edition. Vol. 21. Page 83.
2. Scott-James: The Making Of Literature. Ch. 22. Page 255. Henry Holt and Company, New York.
3. I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson: Edited by Rosaline Masson. Page 186. W. & R. Chambers, Edinburgh 1922.

Those whom his writings charm or impress, but who never knew him, can but imagine how doubly they would have been charmed and impressed by his presence. Few men probably, certainly none that I have ever seen or read of, have had about them such a richness and variety of human nature;[1]

Andrew Lang pays an equally glowing tribute -

I have known no man in whom the pre-eminently manly virtues of kindness, courage, sympathy, helpfulness were more beautifully conspicuous than in Robert Louis Stevenson. He was as unique in character as in literary genius.[2]

To judge from the eulogies of his friends it seems hard for anyone who knew him to hold the scales of judgment quite even. Few writers have, during their lifetime, commanded so much admiration and regard from their fellow craftsmen. Henley alone of all his intimate friends became a bitter critic. During Stevenson's last years in Samoa he conducted family worship for his household and wrote his Vailima Prayers. It was this that aroused the bitter wrath of Henley and produced from him after Stevenson's death the often quoted taunt "The Seraph in Chocolate." Henley knew and loved the gay Bohemian of Edinburgh days, but the moralist of later years he neither loved nor appreciated. What Henley failed to understand was that the Covenanting strain in Stevenson was there by inheritance. He, himself, tells us "I am bound in and in with my forbears."[3] The moralist of Samoa was no poseur but a man in whom the fever of his troubled youth had burnt itself out and in whom the results of ancestry, early training, and

1. Sir Sydney Colvin. Introduction to Letters. Page 29. Methuen and Company. London 1900. Unless when otherwise stated this edition has been used throughout for Stevenson's letters, and in future the publisher's name will be omitted.
2. North American Review. Vol. 160. P. 186.
3. Letters. Volume 2. Page 230.

environment were working out a logical development. To Henley, however, we are indebted for one of the most realistic pictures of Stevenson.

> Thin-legged, thin chested, slight unspeakably,
> Neat-footed, and weak-fingered; in his face -
> Lean, large-boned, curved of beak, and touched with race,
> Bold-lipped, rich-tinted, mutable as the sea,
> The brown eyes radiant with vivacity -
> There shines a brilliant and romantic grace,
> Of passion and imprudence and energy.
> Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
> Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,
> Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist;
> A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
> Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,
> And something of the Shorter-Catechist.[1]

In passing to a study of Stevenson's biographers we find that they fall into three classes. First there are those who knew and loved him and could not help infusing some of this love into their critical judgments. The most notable of these is Stevenson's cousin, Graham Balfour, whose biography is very sympathetic and reveals much personal love and admiration, but as it was written while several members of the Stevenson family were still alive, it is lacking in independent judgment. A later critic writes of this biography.

> It is not Robert Louis Stevenson at all, but an imaginary figure of flawless, superhuman virtue, set up, draped and adorned for blind unquestioning worship.[2]

The celestial halo is much in evidence. It was this halo that disturbed the next generation, inclined to discount all contemporary eulogies of Stevenson's personality and work as highly excessive. The chief critic of this

1. Henley - An Apparition - Poetry of Victorian Period. Woods Page 784.
2. J. A. Steuart: <u>The Man and Writer</u>. Introduction Page 3. Sampson, Low and Marston & Co. Ltd. London 1924. Several references will be made to Steuart's biography but from now on the Publisher's name will be omitted.

reaction is Frank Swinnerton whose critical biography appeared in 1914. He describes Stevenson as a poseur who exploited his charm. "Well, if he were a poseur, he was a most ingenuous one and if he exploited his charm, he must have had it."[1] Swinnerton's book is marked by a curious dislike. He is obviously antagonistic to Stevenson and is venting his spleen on him for the idolization of contempory critics. From his biographical sketch it would appear that Stevenson's ill health was a luxury, part of the "man's irrepressible vanity."[2] Such a criticism is obviously unfair. Except in the single case of the essay Ordered South, Stevenson never in writing for the public adopted the invalid point of view, or invited any attention to his infirmities. Swinnerton prides himself on the candour of his criticism which in his case reveals a lack of understanding of Stevenson's background, early training and temperament.

In the third class we have the recent biographers, more balanced in judgment and not influenced by personal friendship. J. A. Steuart's biography Man and Writer was published in 1924. It is written with insight into the character and personality of Stevenson. Stevenson himself said that

> There are two duties incumbent upon any man who enters upon the business of writing: truth to the fact and a good spirit in the treatment."[3] and these injunctions his

biographer tried to obey. He accepts in its entirety The Stevenson Myth, an article published in the Century Magazine, December 1922, where George Hellman, the American scholar,

1. Cunliffe: English Literature During the Last Half Century. P.83
2. Swinnerton. Biographical Sketch. Page 29. Doran Co. New York.
3. Stevenson's Essays Literary and Critical. Tusitala Edition. Vol.28. P.55

reveals how two volumes of hitherto unpublished poems came into his hands. Some of the poems deal with Stevenson's Bohemian escapades while at college and around these Hellman weaves a romantic love story. These poems had been carefully suppressed by Mrs. Stevenson who had decided it would be unwise to give such matter to the public. Steuart thinks that

> Mrs. Stevenson's motives for concealing so much valuable biographical matter are not beyond conjecture. Mr. Hellman believes that she was engaged in "the gentle art of myth-making." In other words she was protecting and preserving a reputation. Those intimate and all-too-suggestive effusions might shock the good people who, with all the implicit faith of trusting innocence, had accepted the cherub ideal in all its beautiful and blameless integrity. Especially might it be offended by the evidence of amatory adventures, worthier surely of a Burns or a Byron in his hours of licence, than of the Covenanting Louis Stevenson.[1]

In Steuart's work the celestial halo of the earlier biographers has disappeared, the harsh judgments of Swinnerton have been tempered with sympathy and justice. Stevenson, the man, is portrayed, intensely alive, most fascinating, and often most pathetically human.

It is interesting to note that the other outstanding biographer of this period, Rosaline Masson, does not take Mr. Hellman's article so seriously. She thinks that he reads far too much into the romantic ebullitions of Stevenson's college days. "The romantic story told in Mr. Hellman's article is an altogether incorrect deduction from the fragments of manuscript material at his disposal."[2] Be that as it may, both biographers are agreed that Stevenson during his early manhood passed through a period of storm and stress which throws much light on his personality.

1. J. A. Steuart: Man and Writer, Ch. 5. Page 115.
2. Rosaline Masson: Life of Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.3 P.80. W. R. Chambers Ltd. Edinburgh 1924.

His parents, people of intellect, were trying to fit him into a wrong mould, and he could not make himself fit, not even to save them heartache. They were conventional. He was a free lance, a child of nature, a spirit that could not be fettered by convention or dogma, a strolling minstrel in a world for the most part alien to him. For at this time not only did he revolt from religion but he broke away from many accepted social standards. He affected to disdain society, and found his boon companions among the social outcasts. His picturesque attire - the velvet coat and long hair - revealed an unusual and Bohemian personality that puzzled and shocked conventional Edinburgh.

But whilst Calvinistic doctrines were first responsible for sending Louis to the opposite extremes in faith and conduct the Calvinism in which he had been born and nurtured made him take himself in deadly earnest and rock himself on the wheel of conscience. Louis Stevenson was already, in his twenty-fourth year, one of those who by nature are impelled to look beyond the limitations of human experience and knowledge, and strain their eyes to discover what lies beyond, to penetrate the inscrutable mystery that fascinates or baffles our finite minds.[1]

Through this penetration Stevenson created a religion of his own, revealing his adaptability to the Hellenic faith - the joyousness of life, which he wove into his various activities. But throughout his life he retained the indelible impression of that Calvinism of his early surroundings against which he had rebelled. As we study his art we shall see reflected a combination of the Bohemian and the Covenanter. Stevenson had all the graces of the one and the moral earnestness of the other, "A Hebrew conscience and a Greek imagination, a Scottish sense of sin and a French delight in beauty."[2]

1. Rosaline Masson: Life of R.L.S. Ch.3 Page 95.
2. Kelman: The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.12 P.230. Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier. Edinburgh and London.

CHAPTER TWO.

BASIC INFLUENCES OF STEVENSON'S ART.

The two dominant influences in Stevenson's art are his early environment and his love for France. We have seen how he revolted against Calvinism, yet its teachings remained with him to the end. From his Scottish ancestry he inherited an exacting conscience that would never excuse careless or slip-shod work. The Stevensons knew that something more than inspiration was needed to build lighthouses that would stand the storms of time; a solid foundation, the result of grim hard labour, must be laid to support the beacon light. So it was with Stevenson. The inspiration was there but long years of hard toil and earnest endeavour were given before the gleam of his genius attracted mankind. So that finally

> What he wrote was not written, as he said scornfully of some literary performances, in sand with a salt spoon; it was at least in the tradition of Scriptures, cut with steel into stone. This was among the many good things he got from the spiritual atmosphere of his ancestry.[1]

But luckily for Stevenson another factor permeated his Scottish home and balanced the stern Puritanism that dominated Edinburgh at that time. His grandfather tolerated in the nursery the wild and imaginative Arabian fables that he might well have denounced in the pulpit, so that as a child the world of fancy was very real to Stevenson. In one of his essays, A Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured, he describes a

1. C.K. Chesterton: Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.5 P.101. Dodd, Mead and Co., New York. 1928.

shop window near his childhood's home, where all the year there stood displayed a theatre in working order, and below and about, dearer far to him, lay budgets of romance "Skelt's Juvenile Drama." "That shop was a loadstone for all who bore the name of a boy."[1] Stevenson could not pass it by, nor having entered, leave it. C. K. Chesterton attaches great importance to this early influence as the start of Stevenson's special romantic style and spirit, in fact, in his book on Stevenson he devotes a whole chapter to the "Country of the Skelt." As a delicate child Stevenson lived in a world of fancy with his toy theatres and books of romantic tales and to Stevenson the man, the world was still a theatre with high lights, illuminating incidents of romance.

The influence which the Scottish Covenanters exercised over Stevenson is profound. There is hardly a book of his that does not bear some trace. He was literally steeped in the thought and sentiment of the Bible and this close acquaintance has much significance in moulding his language, giving it at times a very fine simplicity as in the following prayer -

> The day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties. Help us to play the man, help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces, let cheerfulness abound with industry. Give us to go blithely on our business all the day, bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonoured, and grant us in the end the gift of sleep.[2]

In the subject matter of his art the influence of his Scottish inheritance is clearly seen, in essays such as - The History of Moses, The Book of Joseph, The Pentland Rising,

1. Memories and Portraits. Ch. 13. Page 200 (Scribners)
2. Vailima Prayers: Tusitala Edition. Vol. 21. Page 7.

Bagster's Pilgrim's Progress, The Poets and Poetry of Scotland, Some Aspects of Robert Burns and most interesting of all, John Knox and His Relations to Women, while for local colour in his novels, he returns again and again to the scenes of his childhood,- Edinburgh, the Pentland Hills, Swanston and Colinton figure very largely. Of Colinton he wrote

> Out of my reminiscences of life in that dear place all the morbid and painful elements have disappeared. That was my golden age "Et ego in Acadia vixi."[1]

But that was years afterwards when the fires of youth had burned themselves out and the bitterness of revolt had been forgotten. But while the fires raged, it was in France that he found consolation for his rebellious spirit.

It is a curious fact that in spite of Stevenson's residence in Bournemouth, in the south of England, that no indelible impression of that country was left upon his mind. In his essay The Foreigner at Home he writes

> It is not only when we cross the seas that we go abroad, there are foreign ports in England and the race that has conquered so wide an Empire has not yet managed to assimilate the islands whence she sprang.[2]

How differently he writes of France ! "Happy ... I was happy once, that was at Hyères."[3] There the climate suited him, the beauty of the surroundings satisfied his soul, his health improved so much that he thought he was recovering, and besides, the Gallic temperament suited his particular mood at that time. France, not England was the adopted home of his spirit.

Stevenson's visits to France cover three periods of his life. During his youth he spent holidays with his mother at

1. Unpublished M.S. Copied from Balfour's Life of Stevenson. P.40 Methwen and Co. London.
2. Memories and Portraits. Ch.1. Page 3. Scribners.
3. Letters. Edited by Sir Sidney Colvin. Vol. 34. Page 89 Tusitala.

Mentone. Between the years 1875-1879 he divided his time between France and Scotland. During these years he spent most of his time in Paris, Fontainebleau and in the artist colony at Grez. His third period was after his marriage, from October 1882 to August 1884 when he spent his time chiefly in the neighbourhood of Marseilles and Hyères. Edmund Gosse points out that far too little has been written about this formative period in Stevenson's life. He writes

> I am inclined to dwell in some fullness on the year he spent at Hyères, because curiously enough, it was not so much as mentioned to my knowledge by any of the writers of obituary notices at Stevenson's death. It takes, nevertheless, a prominent place in his life's history, for his removal thither marked a sudden and brilliant, though only temporary revival in his health and spirits. Some of his best work too, was written at Hyères, and one might say that fame first found him in this warm corner of Southern France.[1]

French influence is particularly obvious in Stevenson's choice of subjects. In one of his novels, St. Ives, the hero is a young Frenchman, a prisoner of war in Edinburgh Castle where most of the action takes place; the two elements, French and Scottish, are delightfully intermingled. But it is in his essays more than in his other works that we realise from his choice of subjects, what a large part France played in moulding his art. He wrote studies on Beranger, Villon, Hugo, Jules Verne and Charles D'Orleans. Among his best descriptive essays are Memories of Fontainebleau, Forest Notes and while Ordered South is a personal essay, it contains flashes of beauty inspired by the lovely French countryside. In A Mountain Town in France we realise how thoroughly at home Stevenson was among the French people. One of his friends who visited him at this time wrote an article with the very appropriate title,

1. Edmund Gosse: Critical Kit-Kats. Page 293.
(William Heinemann, London 1913)

"Stevenson among the Philistines." The description given of him is very enlightening.

> His personality had a tinge of that picturesqueness and Bohemianism which seldom fail to impinge sharply upon the prejudices of a true born Briton.[1]

As a young man, Scottish conventions weighed heavily upon Stevenson; he learned to love France because there at a critical time in his life he found less restraint upon him both socially and intellectually, but with the passing years there came an adjustment in his attitude towards Scotland. At Vailima his Scottish characteristics in matters of religion and sentiment reasserted themselves. The bitterness of the past was wiped out in retrospect. Writing to Charles Baxter two years before his death he says,

> You are still in the venerable city which I must always think of as my home. And I have come so far; and the sights and thoughts of my youth pursue me; and I see like a vision the youth of my father, and of his father, and the whole stream of lives flowing down there far in the North, with the sound of laughter and tears, to cast me out in the end, as a sudden freshet, on these ultimate islands.[2]

We shall see in the next chapter how the technique of Stevenson's style was acquired from a study of the best French masters; but it was the moral conscience inherited from a long line of Scottish ancestry that enabled Stevenson to submit to the rigid discipline of his art. No man ever put more conscience into his work.

Thus France was the inspiration of his technique and for a time the adopted home of his spirit, but Scotland, the true home of his spirit, was the source of his best inspirations and as we shall see later, the theme of his last and grandest work, Weir of Hermiston.

1. Harold Vallings: Published in Temple Bar. 1901. Copied from Stevensoniana P.62 - Grant - Edinburgh. 1907.
2. Dedication to Catriona: Tusitala. Edition 7. Introduction.

CHAPTER THREE.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS ART.

"Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effort rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at last in these vain bouts I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction, and in co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Dafoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann."[1]

Such is Stevenson's own account of how he acquired a style. It would seem that he was born with a gift for words; their colour, tone and meaning inspired in him the idea of composition. He began to see that words were more than a mere medium of information.

They were histories and biographies; they embalmed the thoughts of dead generations and had also the secret of music and were capable of endless modulation and harmony under the touch of a deft hand and by the regulation of a quick ear. It is the lesson that every great stylist has to learn but few have gone about it with such systematic patience as Stevenson.[2]

With regard to his method Stevenson takes the world into his confidence; this confidence has been abused and he has himself to blame. He paraded his craftsmanship so openly before the public that his readers began to look only for

1. <u>Memories and Portraits</u>: <u>A College Magazine</u>. Biographical Edition. Page 57.

2. <u>Dawson</u>: <u>Makers of English Fiction</u>. P.244. Fleming H. Revell Co. London and Edinburgh.

echoes in style. The "sedulous ape" is the readiest criticism that comes to the lips of the superficial critics. They overlook the inspiration behind the method. He practised the "sedulous ape" in order to give an artistic form to his inspiration and in doing so there is no doubt that he at last succeeded in acquiring a style that was quite his own.

Stevenson devoted very attentive care to the art of writing. He knew the anxious quest of the exact word, the search for a cadence at the same time harmonious and not too markedly regular. His style is sufficiently nervous to bear such conscious filing and refining. It draws its strength from a very varied and supple vocabulary, in which the whole scale of learned shades meets with the most racy vein, popular, techincal or dialectal words."[1]

Cazamian touches on a point here overlooked by most critics, that is, Stevenson's use of dialect. His short story Thrawn Janet is a masterpiece in the use and exactness of the Scottish dialect. The characters speak in a mother tongue which is national, not parochial like that of the "Kailyard School." In the use of the Scottish dialect Stevenson has written with an ease and knowledge worthy of Burns or Scott.

In his essay On Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature Stevenson writes at length about the choice of words. In referring to the arts he states how literature alone is condemned to work in mosaic with finite and quite rigid words. He goes on to state that the first merit that attracts the reader in the pages of a good book is the apt choice and contrast of the words employed. Stevenson learned his lesson well. The richness and colour of words is one of the most

1. Legouis and Cazamian: History of English Literature. P.1306. J.M. Dent and Sons, New York.

striking qualities in his writing. His extensive and varied vocabulary enabled him to express the most delicate shades of meaning. But something more than the magic of words is needed to produce a stylist. "Style is the very essence of thinking."[1] Ideas must be added to words and phrases. Stevenson brings out this thought very clearly in the essay on style to which reference has already been made. After the choice of words comes the web, the rhythm of phrase, and the contents of the phrase; the business of the literary artist is to weave his meaning so that pattern and argument live in each other.

> And it is by the brevity, clearness, charm or emphasis of the second that we judge the strength and fitness of the first ... The web then, is the pattern; a web at once sensuous and logical, an elegant and pregnant texture; that is style, that is the foundation of the art of literature.[2]

Stevenson has been severely criticized for his ardent pursuit of correctness in form and expression, developed it is said, to hide meagreness of content. There might be some justification in this criticism if Stevenson had considered himself a first class novelist. He is entirely frank in admitting that he does not wield an easy pen. The productiveness of Scott staggered him. It is enlightening to compare Stevenson with a creative artist like Scott whose style is often slovenly but who, nevertheless, has a place among the great novelists. The reason for this is not far to seek. Scott ignored style in the intensity of his imagination; he forgot the demands of

1. Familiar Studies of Men and Books. "Walt Whitman". Calidonia Edition. Volume 2. Page 88.
2. Essays: Literary and Critical. Tusitala. Edition No. 28. P.36.

grammar because he was so occupied with his narrative. The pattern was secondary to him; to Stevenson it always came first. Scott did not consider the fine points of technique, Stevenson did: consequently he is never slip-shod; never guilty of using hackneyed expressions. His work is coloured by a felicity of phrase that reveals the power of his practised pen. If he lacked the strength and fertility possessed by Scott, he exhibited a technical skill undreamed of by his great predecessor. Stevenson is an artist in words, "A limner of landscape."[1]

In the Ebb Tide when the stolen ship Farralone is approaching the unknown island there is a fine description of the dawn. The stillness of the morning is broken by the sound of breakers.

> The sound was continuous, like the passing of a train: no rise or fall could be distinguished; minute by minute the ocean heaved with an equal potency against the invisible isle ... To the expert eye the isle itself was to be inferred from a certain string of blots along the starry heaven. There was little or no morning bank. A brightening came in the east; then a wash of some ineffable, faint, nameless hue between crimson and silver, and then coals of fire. These glimmered awhile on the sea-line, and seemed to brighten and darken, and spread out, and still the night and the stars remained undisturbed it was as though a spark should catch and glow and creep along the foot of some heavy and almost incombustible wall-hanging, and the room itself is scarce menaced. Yet a little after, and the whole east glowed with gold and scarlet, and the hollow of heaven was filled with daylight.[2]

The above pattern evolves with ease owing in no small measure to the simplicity of the syntax. Stevenson never used involved complex sentences. He had a fondness for short clauses in co-ordinate relation, separated by semi-colons and

1. L. Cope Cornford: Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.8 "Title. Dodd Mead and Company, New York 1900.
2. Ebb Tide: Biographical Edition. Ch VII Page 137. Charles Scribner's Sons. New York 1923.

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connected by "and" or "but". He was tireless in his experiments in diction and arrangement and the result is a style marked by ease, precision and purity.

Stevenson's art is at its best when describing nature. Here, the poet, sensitive to his surroundings, is revealed, and his power has full play. As a nature painter he excells in sky and atmosphere, in effects of night and early morning. The description of dawn in the previous paragraph has an incomparable touch, and no less beautiful is his description of night.

> Night is a dead monotonous period under a roof; but in the open world it passes lightly, with its stars and dews and perfumes, and the hours are marked by changes in the face of Nature. What seems a kind of temporal death to people choked between walls and curtains, is only a light and living slumber to the man who sleeps afield. All night long he can hear Nature breathing deeply and freely; even as she takes her rest, she turns and smiles; and there is one stirring hour unknown to those who dwell in houses, when a wakeful influence goes abroad over the sleeping hemisphere, and all the outdoor world are on their feet. It is then that the cock first crows, not this time to announce the dawn, but like a cheerful watchman speeding the course of night. Cattle awake on the meadows; sheep break their fast on dewy hillsides, and change to a new lair among the ferns; and houseless men, who have lain down with the fowls, open their dim eyes and behold the beauty of the night.[1]

But Stevenson's nature descriptions are not always condensed like the above. Often they run intermittently through his whole book giving it colour and atmosphere. Weir of Hermiston expresses perfectly the light and shade of the Scottish moorlands. The sweetness of the bogs is there; the wind blowing over the moors; the melancholy piping of the plover and curlew above the graves of the martyrs. All are

1. Travels With a Donkey: "A Night Among the Pines". Co-operative Publication. Volume 7. Page 222.

there, revealing a vividness of imagination and powers of description that give almost a physical sense of reality.

> "Gray recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places
> Standing stones on vacant wine-red moor,
> Hills of sheep and homes of the silent vanished races
> And winds austere and pure."[1]

But although Nature gives atmosphere to Stevenson's novels he does not depend on Nature for his characterization, that is, he does not use nature as a background for human emotions. C.K. Chesterton says

> There is no Celtic twilight about his Celts. Alan Breck Stewart had no yearning for any delicate vapour to veil his bright silver buttons or his bright blue French coat. There was hardly a cloud in the sky upon that day of doom, when Glenure dropped dead in the sunshine.[2]

For characterization Stevenson depends on the picked and pointed phrase, the use of the exact word.

> Even very good novelists have not this particular knack of putting a whole human figure together with a few unforgettable words. By the end of a novel by Mr. Arnold Bennett or Mr. E. F. Benson I have the sense that Lord Raingo or Lord Chesham is a real man, very rightly understood; but I never have at the beginning that feeling of magic; that a man has been brought to life by three words of an incantation. This was the genius of Stevenson.[3]

Stevenson chooses his style deliberately for the end he has in view. In his essays particularly, the pattern is always suitable to the theme. F0r example in Pulvis et Umbra his aim is to show how much insignificant man has accomplished in spite of the disparity between him and his

1. Poems: "To S. R. Crockett" Tusitala Edition Vol.22 P.168.
2. C. K. Chesterton: Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.2 P.31. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1928.
3. Ib. Ch.7 Page 121.

surroundings. Therefore he chooses intentionally a style which breathes pomp as in the following quotation:

"Meanwhile our rotatory island loaded with predatory life, and more drenched with blood, both animal and vegetable, than even mutinied ship, scuds through space with unimaginable speed, and turns alternate cheeks to the reverberation of a blazing world, ninety million miles away."[1]

But for the most part Stevenson's style is like his Scottish winds "austere and pure". He avoids the unnecessary word, the overloaded phrase. To Stevenson redundancy was the unpardonable sin in literature. In a letter to his cousin, R.A.M. Stevenson, he writes, "There is but one art - to omit! Oh, if I knew how to omit I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an Iliad of a daily paper."[2] This simplicity of diction is most effective, as for example in the following quotation from The Merry Men, a tale rich in descriptive passages of the Western Isles of Scotland.

"The great giant rocks that go down together in troops into the sea like cattle on a summer's day .... with the salt water sobbing instead of the quiet earth, and clots of sea pink blooming on their sides instead of heather .... I have often been out there in a dead calm at the slack of the tide."[3]

The simplicity of style in his novels shows a subtle power of restraint that detracts from his ability as a novelist. There is no doubt that in Stevenson's case

1. Stevenson's Essays: "Pulvis et Umbra." The Modern Student's Library. Page 316. Charles Scribner's Sons.
2. Letters: Sir Sydney Colvin. Book 1. Page 289.
3. The Merry Men: The Co-operative Publication Society, Chapter 1. Page 77.

his close adherence to form curbs the creative flight of his fancy. At times, as we shall see in the next chapter, the story Stevenson has to tell in his earlier novels is not quite convincing because the conscious artist intrudes upon the pages; the prose is too restrained for the theme in question. But in his later novels, what he loses in fertility of expression he gains in dramatic power. This very restraint has its advantages by giving vividness and strength to dramatic situations. "Here the dense sparingness of his best prose-moments in Weir of Hermiston for example - raises it to perfection. It then keeps as it were a classical quality in its eager but balanced romanticism."[1]

The sense of the dramatic in Stevenson's novels is heightened by the absence of interpolations. In his great artistic moments Stevenson, the individualist, does not intrude himself upon the pages. The story marches on, vivid yet restrained. Nowhere does his dramatic style reveal itself better than in The Master of Ballantrae. The whole story is intensely dramatic, from the first moment of the Master's appearance when he spins the guinea to see whether his brother or himself will join the Pretender, to the moment of his final disappearance, when dug from his grave in the wilderness his eyelids close in death. But the fine edge of Stevenson's dramatic style comes in the duel scene. Here the "dense sparingness" is at its best, assuming a classical purity and

1. Legouis and Cazamian: History of English Literature. P.1306
J.M. Dent & Sons, New York.

precision. Henry Durie, outraged and goaded by the persecution of his brother - the Master of Ballantrae, is at last roused to desperation by an insult to his wife. A fuel follows, fought by the light of candles, upon a frosty night, in the presence only of MacKellar, the steward. The Master falls, to all appearance, dead, but the body mysteriously disappears, and the night is shrouded in terror and mystery. No scene in Stevenson is more dramatic, more harrowing or more tragic.

The short story particularly suited the genius of Stevenson. Here detail is reduced to a minimum but each has a special significance; it cannot be spared. In a letter to Henry James, Stevenson bemoans the "besotting particularity" of fiction. His creed is that details should be reduced to a minimum in number but raised to a maximum in significance. He is most consistent in applying this to his short stories. When Markheim has killed the antiquarian and stands in the old curiosity shop musing on the eternity of a moment's deed, it is the striking of a clock, signifying the passing of time, that brings him back to action.

> Time, now that the deed was accomplished - time which had closed for the victim, had become instant and momentous for the slayer. The thought was yet in his mind, when, first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice - one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz - the clocks began to strike the hour of three in the afternoon."[1]

In Treasure Island Jim Hawkins discovers that the death notice of the pirates is written on a page of the Bible. His eye alights on the words "Without are dogs and murderers."

1. The Merry Men and Other Tales: "Markheim" Co-operative publication. Volume 1. Page 144.

The significance of this is obvious. Much of the charm of Stevenson's short stories is derived from the significance of important details that have some bearing on the story as a whole.

> Such details illustrate the classic conception of a work of art, in which every particular must be vitally connected with the general and the perfection of the smallest part depends upon its relation to the perfect whole.[1]

We have seen in the previous chapter that Stevenson was particularly attracted by French literature. Its sense of form, clarity, directness and precision made a strong appeal to him. Cazamian thinks that France stands for a large share in the development of his style

> The clear exact and smooth style which from an early age he selected for himself bears the stamp of our best masters.[2]

There are many evidences throughout his works, particularly in his essays, of his love for French literature. In The Ideal House he describes a little room for winter evenings where there would be three shelves full of eternal books that never weary, Molière, Montaigne, De Musset and Dumas have a prominent place. This appears among his early essays and with the passing years his loyalty to the French Masters did not lessen. In the British Weekly of May 13th, 1887, appeared an article by Stevenson, entitled "Books that have influenced me."[3] His dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is D'Artagnan, the elderly D'Artagnan of the Vicomte de Bragelonne. But the highest tribute of all he

1. Henry Van Dyke: "Adventurer in a Velvet Jacket." Scribner's Magazine. Vol.72 (1922) P.181.
2. Cazamian: History of English Literature. Page 1308.
3. Now included in Essays Literary and Critical. Tusitala Edition. Vol.28. Page 62.

pays to Montaigne.

> A book which has been very influential upon me fell early into my hands and so may stand first, though I think its influence was only sensible later on, and perhaps still keeps growing for it is a book not easily outlined; the Essais of Montaigne.[1]

It has been already noted that Stevenson's interest in style dated from his childhood. His sojourn among the artists at Fontainebleau fostered his inspiration. To learn the secrets of technique he cultivated the French masters and in his essays "On Some Technical Elements of Style" he acknowledges frankly that the French style is superior to that of the English.

With Stevenson, style was the resultant of several forces of which his own individual genius was the strongest. It has been pointed out in a previous chapter that his personality reveals the artist and the moralist; so does his style. To his individual genius was added the influence of French literature with its fine perception, but more influential even than the artistry of France was his Scottish inheritance. He himself says "My style is from the Covenanting writers." He had a conscience about small matters in art, revising his work again and yet again. The strong fibre in his Scottish temperament enabled him at last through sheer incredible labour and unexampled devotion to achieve a style which has called forth the admiration of the best critics. Saintsbury says that

> As the most brilliant and interesting by far, however, of those English writers whose life was comprised in the last half of the century he absolutely demands critical

1. Essays Literary and Critical. Tusitala Edition. Vol.28 Page 63.

treatment here, and it so happens that his method and results were extremely typical of the literary movement and character of our time. He has left somewhat minute accounts of his own apprenticeship, but they are almost unnecessary; no critic of the slightest competence could fail to divine the facts. Adopting to the full, and something more than the full, the modern doctrine of the all-importance of art, of manner, of style in literature, Mr. Stevenson early made the most elaborate studies in imitative composition. There is no doubt that he at last succeeded in acquiring a style which was quite his own.[1]

And as far back as 1894, the year of his death, the following tribute was paid to Stevenson's style:

For ease there has been nothing like it since Lamb, while for vivacity and vividness there is nothing like it elsewhere in English prose. The richer rhythms he perhaps lacks and his tone has possibly at times a touch of affectation. But no more subtle instrument of human thought has ever been wielded more gracefully outside the shores of France.[2]

1. Saintsbury. A History of Nineteenth Century Literature. Page 339. MacMillan and Co., New York & London.
2. Joseph Jacobs. Literary Studies 1894. Page 176. Copied from Library of Literary Criticism - Moulton. Vol. 8.

CHAPTER FOUR.

LIMITATIONS OF STEVENSON'S ART.

In dealing with the limitations of Stevenson's art it might be well to recall that Stevenson was an invalid - a wanderer in search of health. The year before his death he wrote to Meredith

> For fourteen years I have not had a day's real health; I havewakened 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.[1]

In the light of the above information is it any wonder that at times Stevenson's style should bear a certain nervousness that reveals the fevered mind? We shall learn in the next chapter how versatile is his art but in his very versatility we may observe a restlessness of mind arising from a lack of physical strength. Besides, as a novelist, he was handicapped by his long periods of seclusion in the sick room. The circumstances of his life prevented him from mixing freely in the ways of men. J. A. Steuart ascribes much of the new virility in Weir of Hermiston to Stevenson's widened horizon in Samoa where he entered into politics and learned "of the

1. Stevenson: Letters. Tusitala Edition. No. 35. Pages 75-6.

mixed anomalous, contradictory motives which actuate mankind."[1] Be that as it may, it is self evident that the sick room is not conducive to the development of a strong, virile novelist.

In 1880, the year of his sudden departure for San Francisco, Stevenson's fortunes were at a very low ebb. He was almost without means, for he had left home without telling his father of his approaching marriage. Two things he needed desperately - Health and money. Worn out by anxiety and haunted by a dread of failure he toiled unceasingly. The result of such supreme effort is his story, The Pavilion on the Links, "a piece of carpentry,"[2] into which he put every atom of his strength. And what is the result? - a story of needless rapidity of action and quick nervousness of style. One critic says:

> It furnishes an impressive example of Stevenson's intensity of will power, and his mastery of form even when writing at white heat. He was perfectly well aware that it lacked the sanity of health, that it was little more than a deft piece of mechanism, most adroitly done, that its glow is the glow of fever and must pass into the chill of an extinct volcano.[3]

His next work, The Silverado Squatters, was written under the same nervous strain while he was still in America; although much more subdued in tone and more natural than "The Pavilion on the Links, it bears at the beginning the same marks of a certain nervousness in style, and towards the end a "languor"[4] as if the author were tired. The Silverado Squatters

1. Steuart: Man and Writer. Book 2. Page 265.
2. Stevenson's Letters: "To Henley" Tusitala Edition. Vol.32. P.79
3. Steuart: Man and Writer. Book 1. Page 282
4. Stevenson's own criticism as quoted in letter which follows.

appeared first in the Century Magazine of October, 1883. It is interesting to note that this was Stevenson's first real introduction to the American public to whom he owed much for his early popularity. In spite of the eulogies of the American press at this time Stevenson had no illusions about his work. He knew that his efforts fell far short of his conceptions. In a letter to one of his friends he wrote

> Ill health is a great handicap in the race. I have never at command that press of spirits that are necessary to strike out a thing red-hot. Silverado is an example of stuff worried and pawed about, God knows how oten, in poor health, and you can see for yourself the result; good pages, an imperfect fusion, a certain languor of the whole, not, in short, art.[1]

There is no doubt that his limitations at this time were due, in no small measure, to the great nervous strain under which he laboured. His critical faculties must have been confused when in a state of nervous exhaustion, he revised many times The Silver Squatters. The above letter was written later from France where he partially regained his health; consequently his critical faculties were more alert. Then he became his own best critic and in spite of all eulogies from a favourable press, admitted frankly that his work at this time was not art.

But Stevenson was practising his art, writing, rewriting, imitating, shedding his old affectations and gaining much in naturalness and precision. The result is, that at times he learned his lesson not wisely, but too well. He simplified so much that his work suffers from an economy of detail. We have seen how effective this can be in dramatic situations but there are other situations which require amplifying, and in these Stevenson is deficient. There is no

1. Stevenson's Letters: Edited by Sidney Colvin. "To W.H. Low" Vol.1. Page 300.

doubt that much of the abundant detail of the Victorian novelists helped to give the characters reality whereas Stevenson's very economy of detail in certain situations is unsuitable. Stevenson tells us what is vital but nothing more. In many of his novels this proves his great strength, as for example in the dual scene in the Master of Ballantrae, but there are situations in novels as in life that require important detail, which, if omitted leaves the situation stark and unnatural. But his craftsmanship would not admit of abundant detail not even to illustrate the comfortable complexities of real life. Consequently he worked too narrowly and it is this that accounts for a certain "thinness" in his novels. The excellent qualities of precision and clarity, the distinguishing marks of his other works, when applied to his novels, reveal an incompleteness - a curbing of the creative imagination which makes certain situations lack reality and colour.

While at Hyères he wrote A Note on Realism which shows that he was much concerned with theories of art, too much it may be. Can we imagine Shakespeare theorising on how to write a play on Scott or how to tell a story? By this time Stevenson's place as an essayist and a writer of romantic tales was assured, but he was not satisfied. With the renewal of his health his literary horizon widened and he began to direct his energies towards his first long novel, Prince Otto. It was to be his crowning success. No effort was spared to make it so. Parts of it were written many times. Stevenson put his whole strength and skill into this novel and what is the result?

From a purely artistic standpoint it contains some of the finest descriptive passages he ever wrote; they reveal a man, sensitive to the beauty in nature, and gifted with a sense of the magic of words to reveal that beauty, but as a work of creative art Prince Otto is Stevenson's outstanding failure. We do not wonder that critics who have read only this novel of Stevenson pronouncing him lacking in creative power.

In Prince Otto, Stevenson enters into a new field for his setting and for a time leaves the world of pirates and shipwrecks. The scene is laid in a small German principality and the atmosphere is of court intrigue. The interest is supposed to lie in the development of the two leading characters, Prince Otto and his wife, the Princess Seraphina, but it is hard to take any real interest in them; they seem so far removed from real life. "Prince Otto is a sort of china shepherdess group, practising arcadian courtliness in an eighteenth century park."[1] The theme of the story is that court life is a breeding ground for scandal, choking a man's healthy tastes; therefore his device to get the Princess into the forest is too obvious. Through court intrigue a somewhat forced misunderstanding comes between Prince Otto and his wife. A revolution breaks out, and the Princess, deprived of her throne, flees into the forest where for the first time in her life she spends a night under the open heavens. The whole forest scene is vividly presented but the characters fade

1. Chesterton: Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.7 P.127.
Dodd, Mead and Co. 1928.

more and more into the background. In the following descriptive passage where the Princess watches the dawn, the style is slightly forced because the main interest of the story is detracted by the wealth of description lavished on the forest.

> Soon she had struggled to a certain hill-top, and saw far before her the silent unfolding of the day; the darkness trembled into light; and the stars were extinguished like the street lamps of a human city. The whiteness brightened into silver; the silver warmed into gold; the gold kindled into pure and living fire; and the face of the East was barred with elemental scarlet. The day drew its first long breath, steady and chill; and for leagues around the woods sighed and shivered. And then at one bound the sun leaped up; and her startled eyes received day's first arrow, and quailed under the buffet. The day was come plain and garish; and up the steep and solitary eastern heavens the sun, victorious over his competitors, continued slowly and royally to mount.[1]

Throughout the whole story which is finished with the greatest care in detail we feel that there is too much conscious effort. One of Stevenson's biographers tells us with regard to Prince Otto

> That at first all went well - in five and twenty days he had drafted fifteen chapters. But there was a stumbling-block in his path - he had yet to reckon with his women characters. When he came to the scenes where the intervention of the Countess von Rosen on behalf of the Prince and Princess is described, his resources were taxed to their utmost, and when the battle went against him, he renewed his attack again and again.[2]

When the final reconciliation comes between the Prince and Princess we find that their story has made no vital impression, because they themselves have never come to life. Consequently the weakness of the novel lies in its lack of virility and creative power. The style and form are there but the fire and spirit are lacking.

1. Prince Otto. The Co-operative Publication Society. P.192.
2. Graham Balfour. Life of Stevenson. Page 207. Methuen and Co., London 1908.

The passage quoted from Graham Balfour's biography suggests another limitation - Stevenson's inability to portray women. This criticism, justifiable in most cases is levelled against Stevenson by the same class of critics who continue to call him "a sedulous ape." But while he never acquired the perfection in portrayal of female characters that he did in his style yet he progressed from the unreal Princess Seraphina, to the mellow and delightful Kirsty Elliot in Weir of Hermiston, with whom we shall deal in our next chapter.

It is an obvious fact that Stevenson acquired fame without ability to portray women, for in the two romantic tales which first brought his name before the public - Treasure Island and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde there is no love-making at all. In Prince Otto there are love scenes revealing exquisite poetry but little reality of character. Olalla made its appearance in the same year as Prince Otto. It is intentionally meant for a love story having as its theme the sudden outburst of love between a dashing English trader and a Spanish girl. The whole tale lacks conviction and the heroine Olalla is as unreal as Princess Seraphina. Her tragic sorrows are meant to arouse the reader's sympathy but they fail to do so on account of her unreality. ~~The whole tale lacks conviction.~~ Stevenson realised this afterwards for he wrote

> The trouble with Olalla is that it somehow sounds false ... What makes a story true? Markheim is true: Olalla is false; and I don't know why, nor did I feel it while I worked at it, indeed I had more inspiration with Olalla as the style shows ... I admire the style myself more than perhaps is good for me; it is so solidly written. And that again brings

back (almost with a sense of despair) my unanswerable "Why is it false?"[1]

One of Stevenson's severest critics answers the question -

> It is false, not because it is insincere, but because Stevenson's knowledge had not the temper and the needle-like capacity to go ever deeper into the subtleties upon which he was engaged.... He became too intent upon his rendering of the idea; his literary sense took command when his knowledge failed.[2]

The most popular and elaborate of Stevenson's women characters is Catriona.[3] She has claims to reality that show distinct marks of progress but at times the portrayal of her character reveals conscious effort. She belongs to the conventional type of heroine, a maiden in distress with whom the gallant David Balfour falls in love at first sight. There seems to be imitation rather than reality in her pretty speeches and manners; and in spite of glimpses of real charm, she remains on the whole dim and shadowy, for the obvious reason that she was unreal to Stevenson himself. Besides she is overshadowed by the much more vital Barbara Grant, who befriends Catriona in her troubles. In the brief glimpses we get of her, there is revealed a quality of wit and a depth of feeling which show marks of further progress and foreshadow Kirsty Elliot in whom Stevenson reaches his highest mark in portraying female characters.

But on the whole his portrayal of women fails to give the arresting, compelling personality that corresponds to

1. Stevenson's Letters: Tusitala Edition. Vol. 33. Page 114.
2. Frank Swinnerton: Robert Louis Stevenson. Page 112. Doran Co. New York. 1914.
3. Text: Catriona: This book was published in America under the title of David Balfour. In England: Catriona

the best in literature. We get brilliant glimpses, as for example in Barbara Grant, but they are only glimpses. Stevenson does not seem able to maintain a steady level of excellence owing undoubtedly to his long struggle with physical weakness and ill health. Besides at this stage, he was still experimenting and had not that innate capacity for creative work by which he could forget words in the joy of creation. His female characters reveal a limitation to develop character through the complexities of thought, emotion, and motive, which underlie all human behaviour.

In chapter one we learned something of the charm of Stevenson's personality. It permeates all his writings and gives unquestioned attraction to his essays and letters, but in his novels, Stevenson, the self-conscious artists, is at times too evident, as per example, the forest scene in Prince Otto. In the novel of purely creative art the ideal is reached when the personality of the writer is concealed behind his creations. With Stevenson the personal element enters widely into his novels, revealing the intimacies of his soul. It needs no biographer to tell us that Stevenson is an artist and moralist; his own works are his best biography. In this respect he falls short of the great artists in literature whose work is impersonal, except where it is meant to be deliberately personal. We shall see in the next chapter how Stevenson in Weir of Hermiston comes within reach of the ideal. This novel, with its rich promise, reveals the author's marked progress, for

> Stevenson was not born with the supreme gift of being impersonal; and to say that is, in effect, to exclude

him from the first rank of novelists and perhaps even from a high place in the second. An ebullient, restless personality (and his was both) so attractive in essays, letters and occasional poems is, in the higher region of creative literature, a positive bar to supreme excellence. Scott was very nearly impersonal and his creations have a rare richness and variety: Shakespeare was completely impersonal and his creations are - human nature itself.[1]

1. Steuart: Man and Writer. Book 2. Page 263.

CHAPTER FIVE.

THE SCOPE OF HIS WORK.

John Franklin Genung [1] tells us that the literature of Stevenson's day was to a great extent pessimistic. George Eliot had brooded in a world of despair where happiness lay only in renunciation. Arnold had

> Wandered between two worlds - one dead
> The other powerless to be born.[2]

From such a mood, due in no small measure to scientific discoveries, a reaction was bound to come. Stevenson by his return to romance helped to stem the tide of pessimism that was sweeping over English literature; not that he was insensible to the claims of science, but he believed that a man's true life is his dream and desire in some cherished and fantastic pleasure. He makes his position clear in his essay Pan's Pipes where he says that

> There are moments when the mind refuses to be satisfied with evolution, and demands a ruddier presentation of the sum of man's experience. Sometimes the mood is brought about by laughter at the humorous side of life, as when, abstracting ourselves from earth, we imagine people plodding on foot, or seated in ships and speedy trains, with the planet all the while whirling in the opposite direction, so that, for all their hurry, they travel back-foremost through the universe of space. Sometimes it comes by the spirit of delight, and sometimes by the spirit of terror. At least there will always be hours when we refuse to be put off by the feint of explanation, nicknamed science; and demand instead some palpitating image of our estate, that shall represent the troubled and uncertain element in which we dwell. Science

1. John F. Genung: Stevenson's Attitude to Life. Thomas Y. Crowell and Company. New York 1901.
2. Arnold: "Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse." Verse 15.

writes of the world as if with the cold finger of a starfish; it is all true; but what is it when compared to the reality of which it discourses? where hearts beat high in April, and death strikes, and hills totter in the earthquake, and there is a glamour over all the objects of sight, and a thrill in the noises for the ear, and Romance itself has made her dwelling among men. [1]

Stevenson helped to bring romance back to a brooding world. In a previous chapter we saw how his love of romance was fostered in childhood by the literature of the nursery and the frequent excursions into the "Country of the Skelt." In his poem to Will H. Low, he writes

Youth now flees on feathered foot
Faint and fainter sounds the flute
Rarer songs of gods. [2]

But the experience expressed here does not apply to himself. Romance, which is the common possession of childhood, remained with him to the end. His novels abound in romantic incidents which reveal in the writer the eternal boy; but Stevenson's romances reveal a far deeper meaning than boyish fancy. What sharpened his memory for his childhood's romances was his growing need for some escape from a world that had grown cynical. Hence he took his stand on the side of romance, weaving his stories with a dream like reality and finding in the realms of romance his greatest satisfaction. He succeeds in identifying himself with his characters; Jim Hawkins, Alan Breck, and David Balfour, are Stevenson himself with his heart set for adventure. In A Gossip on Romance he explains the situation

Something happens as we desire to have it happen to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realized in the story with enticing and

1. Virginibus Puerisque: Tusitala Edition. Vol. 25. Page 128
2. Poems - Underwoods: Tusitala Edition. Vol. 22. Page 74

appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero aside; then we plunge into the tale in our own person and bathe in fresh experience; and then, and then only do we say that we have been reading a romance.[1]

In Stevenson's romances not only do we "bathe in fresh experiences," but these experiences have a convincing sense of reality, the unreal becomes the real. We are conscious of an appropriate local colour for events that satisfies the claims of reason. One thing in life calls for another. For example

Certain dark gardens cry aloud for a murder, certain old houses demand to be haunted, certain coasts are set apart for shipwrecks.[2]

He wove these ideas into his romances with the result that some situations are grim and terrible, but even in these, there is always the joy of battle, the intensity of the struggle calling forth from his characters the simple emotions that are not dependent on culture and civilization for their existence and strength. David Balfour, Alan Breck, Thrawn Janet, The Master of Ballantrae, are vital characters because they act from primitive passions. When depicting such characters Stevenson's art is at its best. In The Master of Ballantrae when Henry Durie strikes the Master, the latter is so enraged that he can only shout "A blow, I would not take a blow from God Almighty."[3] Here the character of the Master is revealed by action in the unusual situation which to Stevenson was the testing time of human worth.

1. Memories and Portraits. The Biographical Edition. Ch. 20. P. 248. (Scribners)
2. Ib. A Gossip on Romance. P. 234 Scribners.
3. The Master of Ballantrae: Co-operative Publication. Vol. 3. Page 116.

"It is not character but incident that woos us out of our reserve."[1]

The reader's interest in Stevenson's romances is kept alive by a succession of moving events. Stevenson carefully suppresses any individuality on the part of the characters beyond what is necessary to develop action. Treasure Island is a model of his constructive art, showing the author's power of narrative. Here character and setting are subordinate to the telling of the tale which is rounded to completion with a success that he does not always achieve. Besides the accurate construction there is revealed the rich power of the author's imagination creating situations of irresistible appeal. Saintsbury, a most reliable critic, says of this book

> It is the best boy's story since Marryat, and one of a literary excellence to which Marryat could make no pretentions.[2]

Treasure Island, spun out of the author's imagination is a pure romance where undismayed we sail unchartered seas in search of treasure, but in Kidnapped Stevenson limits his field to a definite historical romance. Here we have a masterly picture of the political and social condition of Scotland after the second Jacobite rebellion. As a novel the structure is weak showing wan incapacity to finish"[3] but the book has two outstanding merits, namely, the vivid pictures stamped by dint of clear and decisive drawing, and the character of Alan Breck. With regard to the first we have the parting of David

1. Memories and Portraits: Biographical Edition. Page 247.
2. Saintsbury. A History of Nineteenth Century Literature. P. 339.
3. Ib " " " " " P. 340.

Balfour; every single scene without exception has the same impressive mark and clear decisive line.

In chapter three - the development of Stevenson's art - we dealt with his ability to depict character with a few unerring touches. His crowning excellence in this respect is Alan Breck, in whom the virtues and failings of the Highlander are so admirably depicted. Through David Balfour's Lowland eyes we get a vivid picture of Alan Breck - a true Jacobite, with his love for lost causes and impossible loyalties. His ecstatic cry in the Round House "Am I no a bonny fighter?"[1] is an illuminating touch. In depicting Alan Breck we feel that Stevenson has been influenced by his own ideal character - the elderly D'Artagnan[2] of which he wrote "I know not a more human soul, nor, in his way, a finer."[3]

But Stevenson, the Romantic is revealed in a broader sense than mere association with his characters in a world of fancy. At times he seems to take a delight in the grim and ugly, going back in his style to the picaresque novel of the eighteenth century as for example in A Lodging for the Night. Here Villon appears in all the lustre of unredeemed villainy.

In Sire de Malétroit's Door, with its description of flying buttresses and gargoyles we have a pure mediaeval romance. For the first time the element of fear enters into Stevenson's novels - fear behind the closed door. Terror lay waiting in ambush for Denis de Beaulieu behind the Sire de

1. Kidnapped: Co-operative Publication. Vol. 5. Page 87.
2. See Ch. 3. Page 29.
3. Essays: Literary and Critical. Tusitala Edition. Vol. 28. P. 63.

Malétroit's door. <u>In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</u> it was the breaking down of the closed door that revealed the unspeakable horror of the dead Mr. Hyde. But the latter has a deeper significance than that of romance. It introduces the grave problem of moral issues - the momentous question of the higher and lower self. Stevenson the moralist is revealed. Years before he had wondered what was his inheritance from his maternal grandfather.[1] The question is answered in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. He bequeathed to him a love for preaching and a strong moral sense that kept him sane throughout his life. It balanced the strain of Bohemianism seen in his love for the romantic and picaresque, in his interest in rogues such as Villon, for whose failings he had a kindly eye.

In <u>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</u> we have Stevenson's treatment of the dual personality of man, the old Pauline doctrine of the carnal man warring against the spiritual. The Doctor, loved and respected, represents the higher nature, while Mr. Hyde, the villain represents the lower. Dr. Jekyll finds out how to separate the two personalities so that by day the respected Doctor can walk abroad, while at night, under cover of darkness, Mr. Hyde can steal forth and commit his dreadful crimes. For years the man is torn between his two natures, and the tragedy lies in Dr. Jekyll's knowledge that with each fresh indulgence, the evil is gaining ground. With this foreshadowing we are not surprised when the inevitable happens. Mr. Hyde has been liberated and the awful knowledge comes to him that he cannot be transformed back to

1. See Chapter 1. Page 3.

Dr. Jekyll. The scene ends with the lost soul of Mr. Hyde crying out in the agonies of death. This is Stevenson's darkest tale, issued with all the warning of a Calvinistic preacher. The lesson that the moralist teaches is obvious. His command is "Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life."[1]

But Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde has a psychological aspect as well as a moral. Stevenson tells us in A Chapter on Dreams[2] that he had long been trying to write a story on the subject of the dual personality and after racking his brains for a plot he dreamed the scene of Dr. Jekyll at the window and also the scene in which Mr. Hyde took the powder and underwent transformation in the presence of those pursuing him. All the rest he invented while awake. We have here an interesting revelation of the part that the subconscious plays in artistic production. The story has all the evidence of a dream from beginning to end. Who but an inveterate dreamer could have imagined Dr. Jekyll's horrible involuntary transition? The Doctor is speaking and he describes his sensations in the following manner

> I sat in the sun on a bench, the animal within me licking the chops of memory; the spiritual side a little drowsed, promising subsequent penitence, but not yet moved to begin. After all, I reflected I was like my neighbours, and then I smiled, comparing myself with other men, comparing my active good will with the lazy cruelty of their neglect. And at the very moment of that vain glorious thought a qualm came over me, a horrid nausea and the most deadly shuddering. These passed away and left me faint, and then, as in its turn the

1. Bible - Proverbs. Ch. 4. Verse 23.
2. First published in Scribner's Magazine, January 1888, Now collected in Across the Plains.

faintness subsided, I began to be aware of a change in the temper of my thought, a greater boldness, a contempt of danger, a solution of the bonds of obligation. I looked down; my clothes hung formlessly on my shrunken limbs; the hand that lay on my knee was corded and hairy. I was once more Edward Hyde.[1]

In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stevenson reveals a skilful use of the supernatural; the subject is precarious and a slip at any point would make the situation grotesque. Yet by means of carefully sustained horror the story retains its power unbroken to the end.

There is no doubt that the best of Stevenson's work is in the field of romance. Herein lies his most articulate message to mankind. He shows how a book can be crammed with thrilling adventures and yet reveal an accurate analysis of character. The suspense in his stories is well sustained and even in the most stirring moments the telling of the tale never loses its distinction.

When we come to Stevenson's novels we find as explained in a previous chapter that they have usually some limitations that deny to Stevenson a first place among novelists, but they have also distinctive virtues. Just as in his style there is a certain fine restraint, so is there in his characterization. He keeps his characters within bounds and so preserves a unity of effect. Even John Silver, the most wayward, has his prescribed area and beyond that he dare not wander. But not only is there restraint in characterization, there is also a note of high seriousness. Never in any mood does Stevenson give us the impression that

1. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Co-operative Publication. Vol. 6. Page 265.

life is a farce. He has a persistent sense of the spiritual forces that surround mankind. His blackest deeds seem to be written with eternity as a background. This is admirably illustrated in the Ebb-Tide, a sordid tale with passages of distinctive vividness. Three rogues, Captain Davis, Huish, and Herrick are seated on the verandah of Attwater's house. They have come to murder Attwater and he knows it. He is a mystic to whom the study of metaphysics is an interesting pastime. After wilfully probing the conscience of each man he strikes a bell and asks them to observe the effect. In Stevenson's own words this is what happened.

> The note rose clear and strong; it rang out far into the night, and over the deserted island; it died into the distance until there lingered in the porches of the ear a vibration that was sound no longer. "Empty houses, empty sea, solitary beaches." said Attwater, "And yet God hears the bell. And yet we sit on this verandah, on alighted stage with all heaven for spectators." The captain sat mesmerised. At length bursting with a sigh from the spell that bound him, he stammers out, "So you mean to tell me now that you sit here evenings, and ring up - well, ring up the angels - by yourself?" "As a matter of historic fact one does not," replied Attwater "Why ring a bell when there flows out from oneself and everything about one a far more momentous silence. The last beat of my heart, and the last thought in my mind echoing into Eternity forever, forever and forever?"[1]

We have commended Stevenson for his restraint but in his very strength at times lies his weakness. As we saw in chapter four his line is sometimes too sharply drawn. We know the vital things but nothing more, the wealth of detail that at times is necessary to give fire and spirit has been sacrificed for style and form. The tragedy of it is that in the unfinished Weir of Hermiston, all are there. It seems to be one of the calamities of literature that Stevenson's

1. Stevenson: The Ebb Tide. Ch. 9. Page 195
Biographical Edition; Charles Scribner's Sons
New York. 1923.

strength sank under the intense spiritual strain of this - his last and greatest work. Creative power came to him when his physical strength was ebbing away. Unlike Scott, Stevenson did not return to his native land to die. But in spirit he did return. Weir of Hermiston, a story of Edinburgh, is drenched in Scottish mists. Once more in the experiences of Archie Weir and his father, Stevenson passes through the "coiled perplexities of youth,"[1] and in doing so the past comes back with startling vividness. The spirit of the writer is woven into the web illuminating the style and form. Stevenson himself felt that this book with its new strength and vision would have permanence. In the introduction he writes

> To this day, on winter nights when the sleet is on the window, and the cattle are quiet in the byre, there will be told again amid the silence of the young and the additions and corrections of the old, the tale of the Justice Clerk, and of his son young Hermistion, that vanished from men's knowledge; of the two Kirsties and the four Black Brothers of the Cauldstaneslap; and of Frank Innes, the young fool advocate who came into these moorland parts to find his destiny.[2]

The central interest of the story lies in the unhappy relations between father and son through incompatability of temperament; surely a subject reminiscent of his own early experiences in days of storm and stress in Edinburgh. The character of the father, the stern coarse upright judge, with a sublime devotion to duty, is drawn with great vividness, not so much by actual presentation as by the subtle effect he produces on the other characters. He is the hanging judge, driving before him with a stern pitilessness the outcasts of

1. Songs of Travel: "To My Old Familiars." Tusitala Edition. Vol. 22. Page 154.
2. Weir of Hermiston: Co-operative Publication. Volume 8. Introduction.

society. In depicting the rugged strength of his elemental character Stevenson's art of character portrayal is at its best. In contrast to the judge is his wife with her softness of heart and unbalanced evangelical fervour, also Archie, his son, fastidious, well-bred and artistic. A quarrel between father and son is inevitable. When it takes place, Archie leaves home and becomes laird of Hermiston. One of the outstanding passages in the book is the scene by the Weaver's Stone where young Archie and Christina Elliot declare their love - a scene wrought with a beauty and delicacy to which Stevenson never before attained. It refutes the argument, justified in most cases, that Stevenson could not draw a woman, We feel that while Christina Elliot waits for Archie beside the Weaver's Stone the deepest secrets of the feminine heart have been revealed. But incomparably finer in character is the aunt - the elder Kirsty. She is without doubt the best of Stevenson's female characters. To safeguard her niece, Christina, she tells the story of her life to Archie Weir, pouring out the secrets of a heart that has not known how to grow old and yet has experienced life's bitterness. Cornford describes her as

> A monumental figure, eloquent of tragedy, a type of unexpugnable sorrow. Peculiar treasure passing unclaimed and unregarded, secret riches wasting all unused - here is a common fate, a destiny more cruel than Desdemona's and such a fate was Kirsty Elliot's."[1]

In His early stories Stevenson deals with the adventures of roving men where women, if introduced are ineffective, but in the last years of his life there are

1. <u>L. Cope Cornford</u>: Robert Louis Stevenson. Page 165
   Dodd. Mead & Co. New York.

distinct marks of growth, indicated by a greater power in drawing women. The great scenes in Weir of Hermiston do not depend on incident or melodramatic surroundings but are dependent on the secret springs of action of the human heart, as for example the nocturnal visit of the elder Kirsty to Archie Weir. The development of character is from within and the subjects treated are of universal appeal. We feel that he is attacking life as a whole, not in fragments as heretofore. The novel, even in its unfinished state, combines effective detail with a proportioned grasp of the main purpose and large design; and through it all Stevenson's spirit is reflected wandering among the moorlands and by the rushing streams of his native land, giving his work a new freedom. We shall confirm this statement by a quotation from J. A. Steuart. He thinks that in Weir of Hermiston Stevenson reveals new and unsuspected powers.

> It was as if the creative artist gathered all his energies for a last supreme effort and brought into action powers above and beyond himself. Weir of Hermiston stands out not merely as it's Author's masterpiece, but so incomparably his masterpiece that it almost seems the work of another and greater writer. The freedom, the strength, the originality of genuine creation are on every page. Here at last was the real novelist doing his real work, the creator who had put imitations and dilettantism behind him and was squarely facing the passing throbbing world of human nature.[1]

In chapter three we saw how in the development of his art the style of Stevenson was peculiarly suited to the construction of the short story with its demands for tenseness and swiftness. His short stories, reflecting quick flashes of inspiration, show his ability to see them as a whole; for this reason they are better than his novels

1. J. A. Steuart: Man and Writer. Book 2. Page 250. Simpson. Low & Marston. London.

where, he had difficulty in sustaining a long and complicated plot. The chief characteristics of his short stories are the compression which heightens and intensifies the effect, and their unquestionable unity. The French have been universally acclaimed as excellent short-story writers and in this field as in no other branch of Stevenson's work is French influence decidedly marked in both form and content. A Lodging for the Night, The Sire de Malétroit's Door and Providence and the Guitar are French both in character and setting.

The most unique but least interesting of Stevenson's short stories are his New Arabian Nights. As may be gleamed from the title they are fantastic, unreal, and depicting all the incongruities of a dream. The style is deliberately artificial so as to give pomp to the placid Prince Florizel of Bohemia, the central character in the story. He is living in London and is treated with vague diplomatic respect. The Prince himself seems to have palaces in every country but this point is so laboured that we begin to suspect his high position. The New Arabian Nights are evidently meant to be entertaining in the same fantastic way as the Old Arabian Nights and with just as little pretence of realism. C. K. Chesterton seems to be the only critic who appreciates these tales. In them he thinks that

> Stevenson created a form of art. He invented a "genre" which does not really exist outside his work..... The humour of Florizel's colossal condescension constitutes not only a new character but a new sort of character. He stands in a new relation;to reality and unreality; he is a sort of solid impossibility. Since that time many writers have written

such fanciful extravagances about the lights of London, but few of them have really struck those ironical semitones or made the same thing so completely a cockney conspiracy and an Arabian fairy-tale.[1]

Stevenson's remaining short stories can be grouped under two headings - moral and philosophical. We shall deal very briefly with the first group - the moral stories, as the subject has been already treated in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The most outstanding short story in this field is Markheim. Here the two elements - romance and morality - are very effectively combined. It is in this combination that Stevenson's art as a fabulist has its widest scope. First of all he presents vividly a murder; then when the imagination is stirred suddenly he confronts us with the real problem of the story - the moral issue. In Markheim this is brought about by a ghostly visitor to the murderer who proves to be his own soul. When Markheim's better nature prevails and he confesses his guilt "the features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change,"[2] and in the transformation the phantom disappears. The moral is obvious; it is the old story of the dual personality of man - the struggle between good and evil in the soul of man. Markheim, however, ends on a more hopeful note than Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. The smiling phantom would indicate that with confession the better nature has triumphed.

In passing to the philosphical type of short story we have chosen Will o' the Mill for two reasons, first because it is one of the most artistic and yet unfamiliar of Stevenson's short stories, and the other is, that here Stevenson is

1. Chesterton. Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch. 7. Page 136.
2. New Arabian Nights and other Fables: "Markheim" Co-operative Publication. Vol.1. Page 161

dealing with a philosophy of life with which he had no sympathy. The treatment is absolutely the distinguishing feature and the subject seems to be of comparatively little importance; at the same time it blends harmoniously with the style and treatment. The scenes pass before us with a quiet beauty - the mill beside the river in the mountain pass, the clear running water, the waving pine trees, the vision of the valley in the setting sun, Will's last journey - all are enfolded in an atmosphere, rich in haunting imagery.

With regard to the philosophy we realize that Will is an idealist who prefers his dreams to reality. His refusal to act and to suffer develops in him a cold wisdom, whereby introspection is substituted for life itself. One critic says that

> The mill is the apex of consistent idealism. It is a superb vantage point. The world is ever before it. It looks out over the world, understands the world, and yet is never of the world. That is its ideal position, its strong unpractical advantage. It sustains every hope but will risk no failures. Hence it is a place to grow worldly-wise without experience - an illuminating paradox, not an impossibility.[1]

It says much for the art of Stevenson that he was able to treat so successfully a philosophy which was antagonistic to his whole teaching.

Graham Balfour's summing up of the story is as follows

> 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 experiment in order to see what could be said in support of the opposite theory..... In the story, however, there were embodied so much wisdom, so much spirit, so much courage, so much of all that

1. Richard A. Rice: Stevenson, How to Know Him. Ch. 14. P. 375. The Bobbs-Merrill Co. Indianapolis.

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.[1]

In the choice of the final story we have been influenced by the statement made in chapter two, that French literature is one of the basic influences of Stevenson's art. Of all his short stories none is better written or more truly French than The Treasure of Franchard, a whimsical philosophic tale with bright flashes of humour.

The story opens dramatically with Doctor Desprez in attendance at the bedside of a mountebank. Here for the first time he meets the waif, Jean Marie, whose master is dying. Afterwards the doctor adopts Jean. The humour of the story lies in the conversations between the two. The doctor is an optimistic philosopher, struggling hard to expand the fine and enjoyable part of his true nature. He tries to let his philosophy permeate his life at all points. In contrast to him is the admirable imp Jean, who with his shrewd common sense, loves to prick, with commendable success, the doctor's inflations. The doctor finds a treasure - The Treasure of Franchard - and in his wild elation over it he loses his sense of values. Jean's wisdom is shown by his theft of this treasure which he knew at that time would ruin the doctor's immortal soul and endanger his happiness. The story progresses with perfect unity to the end where the appropriate restoration of the treasure to the doctor, now sobered and humbled, is at last of vital service.

But not only is there unity in this story, there is also character study of outstanding merit. The description of

1. Graham Balfour: Life of Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch.7. P.144. Methuen & Co., London 1908.

of the doctor's wife has hardly an equal in any of Stevenson's works. For this reason, in spite of its length, we shall quote the paragraph in full.

> She was exceedingly wholesome to look upon, a stout brune, with cool smooth cheeks, steady, dark eyes, and hands that neither art nor nature could improve. She was the sort of person over whom adversity passes like a summer cloud; she might, in the worst of conjunctions, knit her brows into one vertical furrow for a moment, but the next it would be gone. She had much of the placidity of a contented nun; with little of her piety, however; for Anastasie was of a very mundane nature, fond of oysters and old wine, and somewhat bold pleasantries, and devoted to her husband for her own sake rather than for his. She was imperturably good-natured, but had no idea of self-sacrifice. To live in that pleasant old house, with a green garden behind and bright flowers about the window, to eat and drink of the best, to gossip with a neighbor for a quarter of an hour, never to wear stays or a dress except when she went to Fontainebleau shopping, to be kept in a continual supply of racy novels, and to be married to Dr. Desprez and have no ground of jealousy, filled the cup of her nature to the brim.[1]

Stevenson shows equal skill with the other characters - the doctor and Jean Marie.

Another admirable feature of this story is the perfect harmony of the characters with their surroundings, showing on the part of the writer a complete understanding of the French people, and reflecting also the charm of France itself. The whole production, with its humour, whimsical philosophy, characterization, setting and perfect unity shows us Stevenson's art as a short story writer at its best.

In passing to Stevenson's essays we enter an entirely new realm of thought. It is here more than in his other works that the personality and charm of the writer is disclosed. He has succeeded in writing attractively about himself without

1. The Treasure of Franchard. Ch.3. 1st. Paragraph. Co-operative Publication. Vol.1

overstepping the bounds of good taste and reticence. There is a fine delicacy about his revelations. His moralizing is coloured by the sanity of the out of doors; his visions of truth are born of nights spent under the stars. Hence there is a healthy subjectivity about his essays - a sanity of mind that seems far removed from the grim moralizing of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In writing of Stevenson's subjectivity Dr. Kelman says,

> This personal presence, these passing notes of confession are wayside wells where we often find more refreshment than in all the glorious objective current of Scott's far broader stream.... It is this healthy subjectivity which accounts more than any other quality for the altogether unusual tribute of personal affection which he has gained from a public who knew him only in his essays.[1]

In dealing with the scope of Stevenson's essays we shall divide them into three groups - critical, personal, and philosophical.[2] The first group reveals the fact that Stevenson is not primarily a literary critic. He has flashes of keen insight into men and books rather than the sustained intellectual judgments of the true critic. His ill-health might possibly account for this, but the real explanation lies in his type of mind - inventive rather than constructive. Be that as it may his flashes of judgment reveal a shrewdness of perception that have been prophetic. For example he was one of the first in England to see literary merit in Whitman. At a time when the critics were very bitter he wrote

Yet I cannot help feeling that in this attempt

1. Kelman: The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch. 2. P. 30. Oliphant.Anderson and Ferrier. Edinburgh & London.
2. Texts: (a) Critical: 1.Familiar Studies of Men and Books.
   2. Essays - Literary and Critical.
   (b) Personal: Memories and Portraits.
   (c) Philosopphical and Personal. Virginibus Puerisque.

to trim my sails between an author whom I love and honour and a public too averse to recognise his merit. I have been led into a tone unbecoming from one of my stature to one of Whitman's. But the good and the great man will go on his way not vexed with my little shafts of merriment.... It will be enough to say here that Whitman's faults are few and unimportant when they are set beside his surprising merits.[1]

His subjects in criticism show a considerable range of understanding, as may be seen from the following list - Hugo, Burns, Whitman, Thoreau, Villon, Charles of Orleans, Pepys,and John Knox. The value of his work lies not so much in the actual criticisms of the subjects, as in the sympathetic treatment, with here and there flashes of clear insight. Stevenson's sincerity and lack of prejudice are revealed. He strives to critize his subjects on their own merits and hardly ever lets preconceived opinions influence his judgment; through all his critical work there runs a vein of human sympathy revealing a man of wide generosity. He tells us in the Preface, By Way of Criticism that he regrets he ever wrote on Villon, not merely because the essay strikes him as too picturesque but because he regarded Villon as a bad fellow, and yet in his criticism his treatment is fair..He finds in his death a story at once admirable and despicable. His treatment of John Knox whose stern Calvinistic doctrines were the cause of his early revolt, is equally fair and generous. At the close of the essay he pays a fine tribute to Knox' capacity for friendship with "a following of faithful women." In this tribute there is a note of unconscious humour when we think of Stevenson's own elusive heroines as

1. Familiar Studies of Men and Books. Preface Page 20.
Collins Edition.

depicted in chapter four.

In his essay on Thoreau, however, Stevenson does allow his prejudices to overrule his judgment. He tries to be fair by calling him "an Epicurean of the nobler sort," but it is obvious that he is condemning him for his cloistered virtue. We feel an undercurrent of dislike for any form of over-indulgent virtue; his own personal views on this matter seem to blind him to the sincere merits of the lonely philosopher of Walden Pond.

The real value of Stevenson's critical essays lies in the fact that they are interspersed with fine subtle appreciations, revealing and illuminating, but in the field of purely academic criticism they are not considered. However, in connection with criticism should be mentioned his three essays, published in 1882, 1883 and 1884,[1] in defense of romance as opposed to realism. The dates are significant, for at that time Realism was enthroned in English Literature. At the beginning of this chapter we stated that by his romance Stevenson helped to stem the tide of realism that was sweeping over English literature. In his essays he laid down the precepts of romance and the very fact that he was able to carry his theories into practice strengthened considerably his position as a reactionary against realism.

In the second series of essays, Memories and Portraits, we have Stevenson's reflections on the experiences

1. (a) A Gossip on Romance. 1882, Memories and Portraits.
2. (B) A Note on Realism. 1883, Essays-Literary and Critical.
3. (c) A Humble Remonstrance1884, Memories and Portraits.

and friendships of youth. The chief interest lies in the autobiographical element, which deals with college days and literary ambitions. Reference has already been made to these in the opening chapters, where rightly they belong. They prove but a stepping stone to the vantage ground of his best essay work, both personal and philosophical, contained in Virginibus Puerisque.

Although written when Stevenson was only twenty-five these essays remain unsurpassed by anything achieved in later life. In them are displayed his fluent and whimsical fancy, his free and delicate wit, and his buoyant and philosophic humour; they utter a gay call to the slumbering courage, eternal in the heart of man. By playing the "sedulous ape" to Lamb and Montaigne he learned the secret of the personal essay and "talked" from the printed page with a joy and delight that glorifies the commonplace.

Some of Stevenson's essays are out-door papers - impressions received on lonely walks, as for example, when he finds his first violet and wonders "by what alchemy the cold earth of the clods, and the vapid air and rain, can be transmuted into colour so rich and odour so touchingly sweet."[1]

Other essays are whimsical reflections on the comedy of life. On Falling in Love is written with a delicacy and humour that justifies Henley's opinion of Stevenson as "A streak of Puck." An Apology for Idlers is one of his most charming

1. Virginibus Puerisque: Ordered South. Tusitala Ed. Vol. 25. P. 65.

essays, written long before the problem of earning a living became for him a compelling need. He reveals his contempt for agitated purposeful people who are always bent on utility. He condemns extreme busyness in any form "Even books are good enough in their own way but they are a bloodless substitute for life"[1] And so he continues in his other essays, commenting on men and manners in a whimsical romantic way, but beneath his whimsicalities we can trace a distinct didactic note, artisically woven into the pattern giving it strength and virility. This can be illustrated from the essay El Dorado with its fine climax disclosing his sane philosophy of toil, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive and the true success is to labour."[2]

In passing to the third group we;find two purely philosophical essays - Aes Triplex and Pulvis et Umbra: the former, the best essay Stevenson ever wrote, reveals not only his courageous attitude towards life but his whole fearless philosophy of life and death. When the reaction came against Stevenson this essay received some bitter criticism. One critic writes,

> Such an essay as Aes Triplex seems by its air to hold all the wisdom of the ages, brought steadfastly to the contemplation of the end to which all must come. If it is read sentimentally, with the mind swooning, it may give the reader the feeling that he has looked upon the bright face of danger and seen death as not such a bad thing.[3]

The strongest argument against such criticism is that all his life Stevenson walked in the shadow of death

1. Virginibus Puerisque: "Apology for Idlers." Tusitala Ed.V.25.P.52.
2. Ib. "ElDorado" Tusital Ed. Vol. 25. Page 85.
3. Swinnerton: Robert Louis Stevenson. Page 71.

and showed no fear, so that his reflections in Aes Triplex are based on actual experience. He tells us that

> It is best to begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push, see what can be finished in a week..... All who have meant good work with their whole heart have done good work, although they may die before they have time to sign;it..... Life goes down with a better grace foaming in full tide over a precipice than miserably struggling to an end in sandy deserts.[1]

Stevenson philosophy of life is that it should be lived, not brooded over; its problems should be met with courage and gaiety, not with introspection and fear. For such doctrine Stevenson has been called a "faddling hedonist," but again the courage displayed in his own life contradicts the statement.

Critics object to the didactic element in Stevenson's essays on the grounds that the "Shorter Catechist," is too much in evidence, but it is just this bed-rock moral earnestness that strengthens his art, giving it a strain of spiritual idealism. In no other branch of his work do the artist and moralist so harmoniously blend as in his essays, and the result is that "Stevenson is the master essayist of the later nineteenth century by reason of his vivacity, vitality, his original reflections on life and his personal and fascinating style."[2]

If the artist and moralist blend harmoniously in Stevenson's essays, the Bohemian is very much in evidence in his letters. In them we find an exuberance, an unchastened

1. Virginibus Puerisque: Aes Triplex. Vol. 25. Page 81.
2. Andrew Lang: Introduction to Swanston Edition of Stevenson's work.

youthfulness that is found nowhere else in his writing; the vagabond temperament fully asserts itself and Stevenson, the careful artist disappears. We have seen how, in his other works, he strove to attain to the highest literary standards, but in his letters he wrote hurriedly; jumped from one subject to another as the whim moved him. The result is that his letters sparkle with significant comment on contemporary books and authors, that makes a valuable contribution to literature. They disclose also the charm of Stevenson's personality, his courage, his kindliness and his honesty. His letters are characterized by a sincere modesty for his own achievements and a total absence of professional jealousy. But with a few exceptions his letters as works of art may be discounted. Sir Sidney Colvin says with justification that

> In his letters - excepting a few written in youth, and having more or less the character of exercises, and a few in after years which were intended for the public eye - Stevenson, the deliberate artist, is scarcely forth coming at all. He does not care a fig for order, or logical sequence, or congruity, or for striking a key of expression and keeping it, but becomes simply the most spontaneous and unstudied of human beings. He will write with the most distinguished eloquence on one day, with simple good sense and good feeling on the second, with flat triviality on another, and with the most slashing, often ultra-colloquial, vehemence on a fourth, or will vary through all these moods, and more in one and the same letter. He has at his command the whole vocabularies of the English and Scottish languages, classical and slang, with good stories of the French, and tosses and tumbles them about irresponsibly to convey the impression or affection, the mood ar freak of the moment. [1]

One of the letters "with most distinguished eloquence" is written to Mrs. Sitwell.[2] It contains a very fine appreciation of the three Madonnas of the Elgin Marbles,

1. Sir Sydney Colvin: Letters. Vol. 1. Introduction. P. 28. (Methuen & Co. London. 1900)
2. Afterwards - Lady Sydney Colvin.

London. Surely it is a curious paradox that Stevenson reserves the depths of his admiration for the marble figures of a far-off day, when, as we have seen in chapter four his own heroines lack life and vitality. The letter is written with a deeply passionate note, one of the few examples where Stevenson's art is dominated by his emotions. In referring to the Marble Madonnas he says,

> And think if one could love a woman like that once.....would it not be a small thing to die? Not that there is not a passion of a quite other sort, much less epic, far more dramatic and intimate, that comes out of the very frailty of perishable women; out of the lines of suffering that we see written about their eyes, and that we may wipe out if it were but for a moment; out of the thin hands, wrought and tempered in agony to a fineness of perception, that the indifferent or the merely happy cannot know; out of the tragedy that lies about such a love, and the pathetic incompleteness.[1]

The other remarkable letter is written to Dr. Hyde[2] the missionary who cast grave aspersions on the moral character of Father Damien whose value and worth Stevenson happened to know. In this letter, written at white-heat of passion there is not a trace of the self-conscious artist; to the clearness and precision of style is added a new element - an edge of bitter sarcasm that has in it an echo of Dr. Johnson's famous letter to Lord Chesterfield.[3]

No chapter on the scope of Stevenson's work would be complete without some reference to A Child's Garden of Verses, a classic of childhood which reproduces the joys and sorrows of the child with a fidelity that is unique in

1. Letters. Edited by Sydney Colvin. Vol. 1. Page 91
2. Vailima Papers: Tusitala Edition. Vol. 21. Page 27.
3. Letter from Dr. Johnson to the Earl of Chesterfield. Feb. 7th. 1755.

literature. Stevenson retained the liveliest conception of his own thoughts and fancies when a child; consequently the verses are to a great extent autobiographical. In his other volumes, Underwoods, Ballads, and Songs of Travel[1] there are fine poetic touches but not enough to warrant the promise of great poetry. Nevertheless Stevenson is a born poet, to whom as we have seen, the world was full of romance and beauty only waiting to take shape in the form of art, and for him the most distinctive form was not poetry but prose.

We have seen in this chapter that Stevenson made contributions to the following branches of literature - romances, novels, short stories, essays, letters and poems. Therefore it is obvious that one of his most conspicuous qualities is his versatility. Handicapped as he was by ill-health he could not excel in all branches, even had his gifts been more lavish than they were. In the next chapter we shall try to sum up the real value of his work and the place that his art has attained in English literature.

1. Poems: Published in two volumes. Tusitala Edition. Volumes 22 and 23.

CHAPTER SIX.

AN ESTIMATE OF HIS ART.

In estimating the peculiar qualities of Stevenson's art it might be well to recall that he is his own best critic. Even after success came to him he had moments of deep despair with regard to his ability as a writer. It is enlightening to compare his criticism of Olalla written in 1884[1] with the criticism of his work in general which appears in a letter he wrote to Sydney Colvin in 1894 just a few weeks before his death. In this letter he says,

> But the fact is that I am pretty nearly useless in literature and I shall not ask you to spare St Ives when it goes to you..... No toil has been spared over the ungrateful canvas, and it will not come together..... I do not think it is possible to have fewer illusions than I..... But I cannot take myself seriously as an artist, the limitations are so obvious.[2]

Although these two criticisms are separated in time by nearly ten years, yet the note is the same. All his life Stevenson was only too well aware of how his best efforts fell short of his conceptions but he continued to the end to struggle towards the ideal he had in his mind of literature as a fine art. "Oh when shall I find the story of my dreams" he once wrote in deep despair, "a story that shall never halt nor wander nor step aside?"[3] In Weir of Hermiston it seemed

1. See Chapter 4. Pages 38. 39.
2. Letters. Edited by Sydney Colvin. Vol. 5. Page 172.
3. Ibid. Vol. 1. Page 175,

as if his dreams might be realised but in its unfinished state, it remains only a bright promise which increases infinitely the pathos of his early death.

Amid all the diversity of his work there is disclosed the "one increasing purpose" of his life, namely his desire to achieve the art of writing. We have seen how his style was the result of his continuous self-education. By living with words and practising the "sedulous ape" to the great masters, by tolerating no short-cuts or hackneyed expressions, he succeeded in acquiring a style that has given him an undisputed place in literature. Rosaline Masson in her tribute to Stevenson's style shows how it sounded a new note in English literature. She points out how the German influence had dominated the earlier nineteenth century writers who were influenced by the German metaphysical school of thought and style. She says that "This German influence had never touched Stevenson; it was alien to his nature and his earliest work showed at once the result of his early French studies. Stevenson's style was the reed music of Pan, thin and fine and emotional."[1]

In estimating Stevenson's work we are justified in calling him a literary artist. When his work is judged in the light of Pater's academic standards of criticism how fully he meets the demands!

The literary artist will be one who has winnowed and searched through his vocabulary making for himself an

1. Rosaline Masson: Life of Robert Louis Stevenson. Ch. 4. P. 171 Chalmers. Edinburgh. 1924.

instrument that can faithfully express his spirit, seeking to restore to words in general their fine edge, dreading all "surplusage," shunning the facile, the otiose the purely ornamental.... He will be a lover of words.... opposing the constant degradation of language by those who use it carefully.[1]

In the opening chapter we studied Stevenson's biography in order to understand his art. We found that he was a combination of the artist and moralist and that this dual personality is disclosed in his works. In estimating his style we realise that it is indeed the instrument by which he expresses his spirit, for as we study his works we are conscious that behind his style, inspiring and infusing it, lies the strong and charming personality of the man. By this we mean "the element of personality which communicates itself to language not by taking thought, but by attracting it into the peculiar spirit of which the writer is made."[2] Therefore, while Stevenson was the "sedulous ape" in the mechanics of his style, the style itself as an expression of spirit is entirely his own. His very choice of models is significant, We have already seen that the revival of the romantic novel found in him a leader, and next to his style, this is his greatest contribution. The best of his romantic tales are Treasure Island and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. These tales have already been dealt with in Chapter five but in summing up Stevenson's literary merits it is interesting to note how widely divergent are his two best stories. Treasure Island is open and

1. Scott James: The Making of Literature "Walter Pater."Ch.25.P.308
2. Ibid. P.309

straightforward, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, weird and mysterious. In the former Stevenson struck afresh an old note in English fiction. We have seen how the world of his day had grown weary of introspection and Stevenson appeared at the psychological time to take men out to the open and interest them in a life of adventure. One of the outstanding merits of Stevenson's literary art is disclosed in Treasure Island where he fuses with cunning skill character and incident.

In Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stevenson's Calvinistic training, hard but clear and definite, imparts great power. From an artistic point of view it is one of his best creations; every word is effective[1] and from a moral standpoint, with its fearless facing of the facts of life, it is considered one of the best allegories in English literature. W. T. Stead says that

> Marvellous is the skill with which he tells his gruesome narrative and it is little wonder that it has been read from the pulpit as the most impressive of all sermons on the consequence of sin; but apart from the note of the moralist there is the other suggestion of the division of personality.... Under the mask of the apparently virtuous Jekyll our subtler other self may be building up an edifice of Hell, and in like manner under the outward seeming of an unregenerate reprobate, the suppressed other self may be building up, little by little, its higher and purer nature, which will only be seen in its reality when the moral scaffolding of the flesh falls into the tomb."[2]

There is no doubt that Stevenson brought to Romance his richest gifts. We have seen how he differed from the other great romancers in his adherence to style. This sense of style gives Stevenson's best romantic work an unique distinction, an artistic appeal that is, for example, entirely

1. See Chapter 5. Page 48. Selection from Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
2. W. T. Stead. Man of Dreams. from "Borderland." Vol.2. 1895. Notes taken from copy in Carnegie Library. Edinburgh.

lacking in Scott. On the other hand, as we saw in chapter three, he never achieved the spacious ease and spontaneity of the "Wizard of the North."

We have already pointed out how certain of Stevenson's novels are affected by a sense of effort that reveals the self-conscious artist, but in his essays with their fine style and whimsical fancy he finds his happiest medium. Stevenson's style appeals to the intellect, his best romances satisfy the imagination, but it is Stevenson, the essayist, that appeals to the heart. The chief spiritual idea he has left to mankind is his joyous acceptance of life, a life to be lived abundantly here and now, not in some distant hereafter. We first meet his joyous philosophy of life in An Inland Voyage and Travels with a Donkey where he moralises on the varying characteristics of mankind, at one time praising gaiety, at another time, courtesy, but always, courage. All of Stevenson's philosophic qualities converge in Virginibus Puerisque. Here we have deep and whimsical thought expressed with a light artistic touch. The most amazing fact in connection with these essays is that we have an invalid writing as though with the incarnate spirit of youth into whose calculations death does not enter. No doubt it was his very ill-health that led Stevenson to dwell so much in his essays on the active life out of doors. This love of the open air, fostered in a life lived close to nature, has given his philosophy a sanity, clean and pure. From Montaigne he may have inherited the artistic technique of the essay, from Lamb his whimsical humour, from Hazlitt the lore of the wanderer,[1]

1. See Chapter 3. page 20.

but his essays more than his other works disclose the individual flavour of his own attractive personality, which is the very centre of his art.

Thus we have seen that Stevenson by his style, his best romances and his essays has made his greatest contributions to literature. All of these have a common factor which discloses the poet in Stevenson's art. This common factor was his keen sensibility to landscape, seen at its best in his Scottish stories. No other writer, not even Scott, has given us such realistic pictures of Scottish scenery. Kidnapped reflects the autumn moorlands with their purple beauty; The Merry Men portrays the wild Atlantic storms that dash against the rugged rocks of the Western Isles, while in Weir of Hermiston we have the quiet beauty of a border parish "where above the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying."[1]

Stevenson was a born artist witty and sensitive; to this part of his nature the fine artistic perception of France made a strong appeal. But he was also a moralist with a conscience that would never tolerate careless work. It was the latter that enabled him to develop his artistic powers to their utmost, so that in no small way his genius was helped "by an infinite capacity for taking pains." But with all his brilliant achievements in style, romance and essay, the creative power of the great artists was denied him. We have seen how skilfully be could work on a small canvas as for example in the Treasure of Franchard; where with quick flashes of inspiration he could see the short story as a whole and

1. Poems. To "S. R. Crockett" Tusitala Edition. Vol.22. Page 168

thus preserve unity, but as a novelist he is limited in both scope and characterization. His novels on the whole, show little unity and are for the most part episodic in character, as for example Kidnapped. In characterization too he is limited. He depends almost entirely on action for the development of character and only in Weir of Hermiston does he touch on the subtler complexities of thought, emotion and motive which underlie all human behaviour. Thus we see that while nature was lavish to Stevenson in many qualities, it denied to him the supreme gift of great creative power. No one was more conscious of the omission than Stevenson himself. We have seen how clear sighted he was concerning his own work. He knew his limitations, but never once, even when fame came to him did he rest content with them. Throughout his life, in spite of ill-health, he displayed an unflinching courage and consecrated devotion to the art of literature - his own "El Dorado" where he believed that true success was to labour.

> When Robert Louis Stevenson is summed up, when his qualities, mental and moral, have been analysed and tabulated, it will be found that a superb courage crowns all. And from that master-quality flow, almost as a matter of caurse, other virtues in which he was conspicuous - generosity, love of justice, an eager humanity, a passion for the happiness of the race. Criticism may deny him the title "great"; it cannot deny that he was brave. And it is his valour, tried as by fire at many a turn, more than aught else that enchants, inspires, and endears him to the peoples of two hemispheres.[1]

1. Steuart. Man and Writer. Book 2. Page 271.

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