

And the high soul climbs the highway,  
And the low soul gropes the low,  
And in between the misty flats,  
The rest drift to and fro.  
To every man there openeth  
A highway and a low,

And every man decideth  
Which way his soul shall go."  
"Let not thy heart envy sinners, but be thou in the fear  
of the Lord all the day long, for surely there is a reward,  
and thine expectation shall not be cut off." He shall give  
thee the desire of thy heart.

## Literary Notes

(By Roderick Random)

### A NEW BIOGRAPHY OF "R.L.S."

I have just been reading the new biography of J. A. Steuart, "Robert Louis Stevenson, The Man and Writer," which has aroused a good deal of discussion in the press. When Graham Balfour wrote his "Life" Mrs. Stevenson was still alive and the biographer was necessarily much restricted in dealing with certain aspects of the novelist's career, especially of that part relating to his courtship and marriage. The unusual circumstances of the case made it a delicate matter to handle and Balfour's reticence is not to be wondered at. However, Mrs. Stevenson died in 1914 and since her death, her son, Lloyd Osborne has published a book of reminiscences of his stepfather in which he has dealt, with some freedom, of intimate matters in connection with the family's home circle. Moreover, recently a good deal of new material in regard to Stevenson has been made available through the efforts of Americans in Boston, and the new biographer has had access to this and has drawn upon it for the picture of Stevenson which he presents to us, a picture which is somewhat different in shading from those put forth by earlier biographers. For one thing, he has gone into the writer's pedigree in very careful detail and brings out the French ancestry to which he ascribes certain features of his work which many have found alien to a purely Anglo-Saxon or even Celtic genius.

Miss Masson, in her biography, sketched somewhat lightly the Bohemian tendencies which Stevenson showed as a youth in Edinburgh in his fondness for keeping company with folk who were outside the pale of Edinburgh respectability. Mr. Steuart has dwelt on this at some length and with complete frankness, in the course of which discussion the character of the old Stevenson becomes somewhat qualified and altered. Indeed, there is not much halo left when Steuart gets through with him. The biographer, also, condemns in no uncertain terms the son's heartlessness in his indifference to the sufferings which his conduct caused to his parents, especially to his father. If one had the time, it would be an interesting study to take the "Letters" and read them in connection with this biography and find out how far Steuart's strictures are justified in the light of what the novelist writes in confession to his intimate friends. He was one who unbosomed himself somewhat freely and, as human documents, these epistolary remains are more valuable than those of most famous men. Stevenson was an egoist in the extreme and it is this, partly, that makes him so interesting both in his essays and his letters.

If Steuart has dealt thus frankly with the novelist's early follies and peccadilloes, he is not slow to acknowledge the fine qualities that he developed in later life, not only the courage with which he fought against illness and kept bright and cheerful to those about him, while

despair was at his own heart, but the unselfish courage with which he championed the cause of the oppressed.

The description of the life in the South seas and in Samoa and his relations with the natives is given with a fulness and completeness lacking in any of the other biographies. The struggle to make money in order to support the rather ambitious menage which Stevenson had taken upon his shoulders is set forth. At one time, he reached an earning power by his writings of five thousand pounds a year. According to Steuart, he was far from happy. The estrangement from Henley, the cause for which, by the way, is fully explained earlier in the book, had been a sore trial. The exile from the familiar scenes and friends of his youth bore upon him very heavily. On the whole, it is not a very cheerful story that Steuart has to tell although it has many glints of brightness too. After reading it one recalls a paragraph in a letter written by Stevenson from Hyeres to his friend, Mr. Dick in Edinburgh. "I re-read the other day, that heartbreaking book, the Life of Scott. One should read such works now and then, but O, not often. As I live, I feel more and more that literature should be cheerful and brave-spirited, even if it cannot be made beautiful and pious and heroic. We wish it to be a green place; the Waverley Novels are better to re-read than the over-true life, fine as dear Sir Walter was."

One thing, I think the Edinburgh people will not be particularly pleased by this biography as the writer is inclined to cast up to them how with Stevenson they bore out the truth of the proverb that a prophet is not without honour save in his own country.

### THE U.S., THE BRITISH EMPIRE— LITERATURE AND FILMS

Recently a prominent citizen of the United States confessed in a speech at a public gathering in Toronto that the literature the people of his country were reading was by British authors. Then we have a member of the House of Lords in London complaining that American films were dominating in the theatres of the British Isles and proving a tremendous propaganda for American ideals which often tended to belittle British prestige. An animated discussion followed in which all were agreed as to the desirability of having films of home manufacture, scenes and peoples that would deal with the Empire.

Closer at hand in our sister city of Victoria, one of the aldermen, commenting on the matter, pleaded for the establishment of the film industry in British Columbia, where we have scenery that is second to none in the world.

Seeing that the educative power of the screen, for good or ill is so tremendous, it might be worth while considering whether it would not be advisable to provide a subsidy of some kind to foster such an enterprise. It is true that we have not the plenteousness of sunshine to be found in California, but

our summer climate should be suitable enough. Indeed, Californian companies have been coming for years to take advantage of our scenic beauties.

For a long time, thinking Canadian have been realizing the menace to our national life of having so much of our literature purveyed from the United States. Some of it is good and some bad, but in either case, the fact remains that it exploits, to a certain extent, alien institutions and has a tendency to distract and divert the eyes of our people, more especially the rising generation, from their own to a foreign flag, and all that it stands for.

If this is so in regard to books and periodicals, it is also so of the moving pictures, which, in the last twenty years, have become such a power and have achieved such popularity. The danger with these is perhaps more insidious, for besides hindering the growth of our own national pride and self-consciousness, they tend to vitiate and destroy the moral sense of our people on account of the sordid sensationalism of so many of them and their appeal to the baser passions.

What we need is a motion picture drama of our own, clean and virile and rational in its plot and making full use of the picturesqueness of background and wealth of atmosphere which our country so bountifully affords. This would foster in us the pride in our own land and the incentive to youth to seek to develop its own resources. It would advertise us to foreigners, especially to our kinsmen in the Old Land, and attract the settlers of which we have such pressing need to fill up and cultivate our great unpeopled spaces, valueless without settlement, but rich and wide enough to provide homes for millions.

Perhaps our biggest problem in Canada, as it has been and is in the United States, is the assimilation of these immigrants, of widely differing races as they are, and many of them with alien ideals and sympathies and unused to our form of government.

We cannot, as a rule, expect very great success with the first generation of these, the adults who come in here with their habits and modes of thought fixed. Our opportunity comes with the children. Now, the greatest factor to mould these into useful and patriotic citizens is, of course, the school system, both day and Sunday school. After this, one of the most potent influences might be the moving picture show, far more so than the spoken drama because of its much greater popularity and its capability of penetrating into small country towns and community centres, which the other can never reach. Statesmen, then, might do well to consider the possibilities of fostering a national screen drama that would be a propaganda for Canadian ideals and institutions among our own people.

The best of foreign art, whether on the stage or on the screen or between the covers of books, must always be welcome—for art transcends nationality—but we should seek to develop it at home.