

duty, and refusing to fulfil my appointed destiny, humble as you correctly point out that destiny to be.

I take a letter in my hand. In it I am assured that in time I might become even a reputable writer of fiction, if only I would consent to abjure love-making, landscape, and low society, and live cleanly in a land of pure romance.

The next I open implores me not to imperil a considerable future by inserting descriptions of killings and miscellaneous bloodsheds; but, on the contrary, to confine myself to the characterisation of the domestic affection between the sexes, and the influence of vegetarian tracts on the elevation of the masses.

I am obliged, touched—grateful even; but I cannot avoid being somewhat confused.

I am reminded of my old master in the Mathematics at Edinburgh, Professor Kelland (of whose "kindly spectacle" Mr. Stevenson has written so charmingly). When Kelland sat in the seat of judgment upon our examination papers he leaned ever to the side of mercy. To his fellow-examiner he would say, touching the paper gently with his fingers, as if he would feel the beating heart that waited anxiously outside for the verdict: "We'll let the laddie through this time; he's done his best. *It's true his best is not very good!*"

So with a like kindly charity, dear distant mentors, think of me. It is not given me always to write what you would—only what I can. To write that which is in one's heart at the moment is the only rule. And the seasons change with me, and my wayward likings with them. In summer I can write with anyone of lasses and lads, and the long courtships between the gloaming and the mirk; but as soon as winter bites snell and grim, I must needs buckle on steel-cap and leathern jack and ride forth a-foraying on the English border.

Be content, therefore, with lowlier things if the knightly quest prove too high for me. After all, if the matter like you not, there is no compulsion to read—not even if, as I hope, you have gone to them that sell, and bought my merry lads in Lincoln green.