



The Ploughboy

EDWARD L. CARPENTER.

THE bluebirds sing so sweetly in the morning;

They are building a nest yonder in the hedgerow, where I pass at sunrise; and I think their song is sweeter than that else at any time of day.

I take care not to disturb them: they work as hard as anybody for a living.

And I think they know me now, they are so bold.

But they do not follow in the furrow, like the wagtails and robins.

It is pleasant then, in the morning: the air is so sweet,

And the smell of the earth—and I like the warm smell of the horses.

Jeannie goes in the furrow, and Rob on the fallow; they go very steady;

And when the ground is soft-like, it's good enough going, but when it's stiff it stretches your arms a bit:

Lord! it does make you sweat!

From *Towards Democracy*.

"R. L. S."

"Tusitala," Twenty-five Years After.

RAYMOND KNISTER.

WHAT is the secret of this writer's charm? How can we define that *unseizable* quality of his character which gave him the power of winning the esteem and the affection, personal to a degree matched by only one or two writers of our literature, which followed him in his life to all the many corners of the earth which he successively pervaded, and which has continued with equal certainty to follow his personality as evinced in his work for the twenty-five years which have elapsed since his death? In one of his critical essays he remarks, in reference to writers in general, "It is not likely that posterity will fall in love with us, but not impossible that it may respect or sympathize; and so a man would rather leave behind him the portrait of his spirit than a portrait of his face, *figura animis magis quam corporis*. Of those who have thus survived themselves most completely, left a sort of personal seduction behind them in the world, and retained, after death, the art of making friends, Montaigne and Samuel Johnson certainly stand first." The fervent Stevensonian will at this point take exception to, or at least qualify his words: he is himself a third, and not least of the three, possessing this charm. For those with whom he met in life it almost universally exercised a potent attraction, even, in several cases, for those who were his public enemies. Certainly no other writer of the century won such practically unanimous regard from his fellow craftsmen, and from those, in his day emergent, whose fame flourishes in our own. The stream of magazine articles and books about, and editions of Stevenson has continued from the year in which *Treasure Island* was first published to the present, and nearly all breathe such combined affection for the man and admiration for the writer as are seldom conjoined, while of the dissenting few the majority confine themselves to attempts to pick to pieces his craftsmanship, without venturing to arraign the character of his personality. This can be well understood, for it is in his presentment of himself, if anywhere, that Stevenson's position is most inexpugnable: in the literature of personality his *letters* and the best of his essays stand alone. Thus we see the phenomenon of a writer who, were he living now, would not have been too old to write (and we can scarcely conceive of him as living and not writing), who might now, in less happy moments, have been, in his own words, "girded at by the clever lads in the reviews," occupying

the place of a writer of classics, both with the public and with critics.

But this anthem of eulogy, sincere as we can well believe it, has, at least as regards his temperament, done him wrong. With all his gaiety and irrepressible *joie de vivre* Stevenson was no unthinking Pollyanna; his was no gross, after-dinner optimism, the result of smoothly-operating gastronomic and financial machinery. He underwent a wholesome fit of the blues now and then, and was the stronger for it. "How the year slips by, Colvin,"—thus he writes to his friend—"and we walk in little cycles, and turn in little abortive spirals and come out again, hot and weary, to find the same view before us, the same hill barring the road. Only, bless God for it, we have still the same eye to see with, and if the scene be not altogether unsightly, we can enjoy it whether or no." In another letter: "You are quite right, our civilization is a hollow fraud. All the fun of life is lost by it; all it gains is that a larger number of persons can continue to be contemporaneously unhappy on the surface of the Globe. O, unhappy!—there is a big word and a false—continue to be not nearly—by about twenty per cent.—so happy as they might be: that would be nearer the mark." Yet I can remember but one expression of unrelieved pessimism in all his thirty odd volumes, though *The Master of Ballantrae* and *Markheim* among others, show that he gazed into the depths of life and saw more than his own reflection.

There was in his nature a fund of generous anger which leaped into blaze at the sight of any unnecessary pain or injustice of whatever sort; even, a friend remarks, a touch of Scotch "thrawnness." His own nickname for himself was "the Old Man Virulent," in allusion, it is explained, "to fits of uncontrollable anger to which he was often subject in youth: fits occasioned sometimes by instances of official stolidity or impertinence, or what he took for such, more often by acts savoring of cruelty, meanness, or injustice." On one occasion (it was during his life at Vailima) two of his workmen were found to have shirked a piece of work assigned to them, and his reproof is thus described in his own words: "I administered my redoubtable tongue—it is really redoubtable—to these skulkers. I am a real employer of labor now, and have much of the ship captain when aroused." But he betrays his prevailing character a few sentences farther on by remarking that the men seemed not to have expected it. "There seems to be something in my appearance which suggests endless, bovine long-suffering." Again, writing this time to Henry James in reference to a dedication which he had made to a writer whose work had strongly attracted him, he says, "I thought Bourget was a friend of yours! And I thought the French were a polite race! He has received my dedication with a stately silence that has surprised me into apoplexy. Did I go and dedicate my book to the nasty alien, and the 'horrid Frenchman, and the Bloody Furriner? Well, I wouldn't do it again, and unless his case is susceptible of explanation you might perhaps tell him so over the walnuts and the wine, by way of speeding the gay hours. Sincerely, I thought my dedication worth a letter. . . . Do you know the story of the man who found a button in his hash and called the waiter? 'What do you call that?' says he. 'Well,' said the waiter, 'what d'you expect? Expect to find a gold watch and chain?' Heavenly apoplexy, is it not?" This turning aside from the wrathful thought is characteristic. It has yet to be learned that Stevenson was capable of retaining malice, unjustifiably, or at all; he was as wise as his own words in "Virginibus Puerisque": "Is it still the same between us?" Why, how can it be? It is eternally different, and yet you are

still the friend of my heart." In another place he writes: "Rightly looked upon, it is ourselves that we cannot forgive when we refuse forgiveness to our friend."

The quality of his spirit shows itself best in his attitude to his health, to use what is perhaps a pretentious term in his case. In the books published during his life-time there is one sole reference to this, the essay "Ordered South." "To me," he writes, "the medicine bottles on my chimney and the blood on my handkerchief are accidents; they do not color my view of life: and I should think myself a trifler and in bad taste if I introduced the world to these unimportant privacies." And we find one of his critics adjudging him, with his books as the basis, a "rosy-gilled athletic-aesthete," and remarking that his philosophy would not do for "those who are shut out from the exercise of any manly virtue save renunciation." The *letters*, naturally, tell a different tale. Here is an extract from one to George Meredith: "For fourteen years I have not had a day's real health. I have awakened 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." Yet in the face of these facts and of this realization, we find him referring to hemorrhage from the lungs as "his old friend Bluidy Jock," and in a letter dated from Hyeres, April 24, 1884, writing: "If you are in love with repose, here is your occasion: change with me. I am too blind to read, hence no reading; I am too weak to walk, hence no walking. I am not allowed to speak, hence no talking; but the great simplification has yet to be named; for if this goes on, I shall soon have nothing to eat—and hence, O Hallelujah! hence no eating." It is pleasant to remember that he lived to retain, as a result of his last despairing recourse, a trip to the South Seas, to attain to a measure of health undreamed of before, and to look back, rather smilingly than otherwise, on "the pallid brute that lived in Skerryvore like a weevil in a biscuit."

The most compelling and pervading mood of Stevenson was one of zest, the enjoyment of life in whatever form he found it. He was always a connoisseur of life, and never disenchanted from it, always giving sight and ear to "the beauty and terror . . . the winning music of the world." "God help us, it is a funny world! To see people skipping all round us, with their eyes sealed up with indifference, knowing nothing of the earth or man or woman, going automatically to offices and saying they are happy or unhappy from a sense of duty, I suppose, surely at least from no sense of happiness or unhappiness, unless perhaps they have a tooth that twinges. Is it not like a bad dream? Why don't they stamp their foot upon the ground and awake? There is the moon rising in the east, and there is a person with his heart broken and still glad and conscious of the world's glory up to the point of pain, and behold they know nothing of all this!" This feeling is expressed frequently, with greater finish, no less trenchantly, if less petulantly, in his books. The reader will at once call to mind passages in the essays, and the lines, not then, of course, calculated to convey irony, in *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

"The world is so full of a number of things
I am sure we should all be as happy as
kings."

Few persons seem to have enjoyed such a faculty for happiness, and in spite of circumstances which a world almost ap-

pear to embody a negation of the very existence of happiness, to have found so much of it. Perhaps the cause of this lies in his unwearied search for romance. "I have been after an adventure all my life, a pure dispassionate adventure, such as befel early and heroic voyagers." We find him, alone in the Cevennes, delighting to observe that, "to wash in one of God's rivers in the open air seems to me a sort of cheerful solemnity or semi-pagan act of worship. To dabble among dishes in a bedroom may make clean the body, but the imagination takes no share in such a cleansing. I went on with a light and peaceful heart, and sang songs to the spiritual ear as I advanced." Love of the sea and love of his art were his two great talismans to felicity. In much that he wrote, especially during his later years, the throb of the sea is an abidingly present overtone; no one had up to that time interpreted and described so well its moodiness "constant to change." "I will never leave the sea," he says; "it is only there that a true Briton lives; my poor grandfather, it is from him that I inherit the taste, I fancy, and he was round many islands in his day; but I, please God, shall beat him at that before the recall is sounded." In another letter is found the following: "This climate, these voyagings; these landfalls at dawn; new islands peeking from the morning bank; new forested harbors; new passing alarms of squalls and surf; new interests of gentle natives—the whole tale of my life is better to me than any poem."

Of the joy he found in his work expressions abound throughout the four volumes of his correspondence, and though I have already quoted so much, I cannot refrain from culling extracts from the letter announcing the beginning of *Treasure Island*, that tale of the joyous improbable, told in a limpid style. He had been writing "crawlers," his name for stories of a wierd tendency, such as *Thrawn Janet* and *The Body Snatcher* and others which he failed to complete, but he interrupts this work for new books.

"If this don't fetch the kids, why they've gone rotten since my day. Will you be surprised to learn that it is about Buccaneers, that it begins in the 'Admiral Benbow' public house on the Devon coast, that it's all about a map and a treasure and a mutiny, and a derelict ship, and a current, and a fine old Squire Trelawney (the real Tre, purged of literature and sin to suit the infant mind) and a doctor, and another doctor, and a sea cook with one leg, and a sea-song with the chorus 'Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum' (at the third ho you heave at the capstan bars) which is a real buccaneer's song only known to the crew of the late Captain Flint (died of rum at Key West, much regretted, friends will please accept this intimation); and lastly, would you be surprised to hear, in this connection, the name of *Routledge*? That's the kind of a man I am, blast your eyes. Two chapters have been written and tried on Lloyd with great success; the trouble is to work it off without oaths. Buccaneers without oaths—bricks without straw. But youth and the fond parent have to be consulted. . . . A chapter a day I mean to do; they are short; and perhaps in a month *The Sea Cook* may be to Routledge go, yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum! . . . It's awful fun boy's stories; you just indulge the pleasure of your heart, that's all; no trouble, no strain. O sweet, O generous, O human toils. You would like my blind beggar in chapter III I believe; no writing, just drive along as the words come and the pen will scratch

R. L. S.,
Author of Boys' Stories."

But despite this effervescence of high spirits, and the charm of manner which made itself felt even, to the effect of joyful service, by South-Sea Islanders,

so that it was a Samoan run, was a strain of himself at times in his actions pressed in my of the following may be forgiven the man who fallen asleep in to be good in be, and fail, when we get a and when we get so; well hit! young man to now I am col and in excellen So too I meant keep mounting I have been rep sea-level, and as I started, I am enterprise. O is not to succee in good spirits."

This sense of and in art ha finding clear e most wonderful *Triplex*, and *P* is always a n looking men, ar small planet, in and not enduri of years, we ar hopes are inacc term of hoping i of life." In res out clearly, tho form you that I author of *Br* am merely be prepare to make understand my and depth of no and O that I a shoulder throug early letter cont outburst: "O, v of my dreams, nor wander, no before its face, a until the pit rec essay on Thore: "To hear a str beautiful woma or a starry nig despair of his Lil This sentence i such a passage own words, "Th the despairer." to capturing an incommunicable unheard melodic the heard. He ward "inaccessi he, more than a mitted to attain to me that on depression duri due to a sense work, which ac submerged hims ters of *Wier of* of attainment c unattainable.

As for Steven been written ab best service we speak for them has been spill in a tone of d style, than abou his writing, and in late years, a d not to be wonder is one so diffic style of the fir natural and grow what. Joseph mysterious, alm producing strikin possible of dete word of the high effect by but irremediable, the individual shoul and that time s if not the sour criterion. Truly and fleetness, th pears one of the world. Those w cause he confes apprentice, layi of his workshop, his style a direct art for artifice, those who hold