

His Last days

Pathetic Details of the Closing Scenes in the Life of Robert Louis Stevenson, the Famous Novelist—How He Ended His Life in His Much-Loved Samoan Home.

Robert Louis Stevenson died on the third of December. The following extracts from a letter just received from his step-daughter, published in *Kate Field's Washington*, give details of such profound interest that it seems cruel to withhold them from the legions of his admirers. The writer of the letter, Isabella Strong, has for some years been the constant companion of her mother and Mr. Stevenson; she had charge of the household affairs, and has acted as Stevenson's amanuensis; an artist and writer, she has ever been an invaluable member of that exceptional household, a household whose history as it has come to me from time to time from the hand of this dear and faithful friend, has caused me to associate it forever with the fascinating pages of that delight of my youth, "The Swiss Family Robinson."

A book should some day be written giving the inner life of that domestic circle. What that life must have been the reader will perhaps conjecture from the excerpts which follow. Here endeth the lesson in grief past words:

"VAILIMA, Dec. 5, 1894.

"You will have read in the papers before this reaches you that Louis is dead—but you will not know how beautiful that death was. He had been very well for a long time, and every morning I hurried through my household work to write for him in 'Hermion.' The last day, Dec. 3—and we little thought it was to be his last—was a day of rest. He had been working steadily till nearly 12, and then walked up and down the room talking to me of his work, of future chapters, of bits of his past life that bore on what he had been writing—as only he could talk.

In the afternoon, as I was writing my letters, I heard him and little Austin on the veranda by his study making a great noise over Austin's French lesson. He was laughing and in the best of spirits, so that later—after 5, yes, nearer 6—when I heard my mother calling for hot water, I was not at all alarmed, and went down stairs quite calmly to see what was wrong.

Louis sat in his red chair in the great hall, lying back unconscious and breathing heavily. Talolo—a Samoan servant—was bringing hot water for his feet; his mother and my mother were chafing his hands, and I ran at once for Lloyd. He was coming over from his cottage, quite cheerfully surveying a wreath he had made for a present to the Consul-General. He at once ran off on our fastest horse for the doctor, and when I went back to the house Louis was still the same.

"It seems he had been looking on watching my mother make a salad, and was dropping the oil for her with a perfectly steady hand. He suddenly said: 'What's that?' or 'What a pain!' and put both hands to his head and reeled. Mamma and his favorite boy, Sosimo, caught him and helped him into the big room, and he was never conscious after. We saw that he was dying, though each said to the other, 'He is surely better—his pulse is stronger.' Talolo and Sosimo knelt before him, chafing his feet and putting them into hot water, and as the room darkened, one by one, all the Samoans on the place crept in silently and sat in a wide semi-circle about him; some fanned him; others waited, kneeling upon one knee, in readiness to receive a message; others still, ran down the road with lanterns to light the doctor on his approach.

"When the big lamps were lit the first doctor arrived; he was the surgeon of H. M. S. *Wallace*. Lloyd and I went to the Tivoli Hotel in Apia, jumped off his horse, and the doctor mounted and rode, as he said, as if the horse knew what it was for—and it was Louis' own 'Jack'.

"When we saw the doctor's face we knew there was no hope. He said we had done right to keep his feet hot and his head cool. All the windows were thrown open, and the soft night air came in. Then, others still, ran anxiously trying different remedies. I looked out and saw a twinkling of lanterns at the gate and knew that Lloyd and the other doctor had come—our old friend, Dr. Funk. He ordered in the little brass bedstead from the guest chamber, and it was placed in the middle of the great room. Four of our boys carefully carried him, and he was laid upon the bed; and then the minister, Mr. Clark, came, and we knelt at the bed while he prayed. Louis was still unconscious, and only breathed fainter and at longer intervals, until at last he died at 10 minutes past 8 o'clock.

We sent every body away. Lloyd and his own Sosimo and I dressed him and laid him out. He didn't look ill. He really looked so quiet and peaceful that one could not cry to see him. We threw the English flag on his bed—the old flag he flew on the *Cassini*—and then the natives were allowed to return.

"It was so strangely silent and peaceful. He lay as though quietly sleeping, with his hands clasped on his breast; the only ring on his finger was a little old silver one my mother gave him years ago. Do you remember his beautiful hands? so slender and pointed. We sat there, dazed, stunned; it was as if we had been brought to stone. Above us the carved, antique wall above the bed of Hermes looked down upon us; and over the great iron safe the light fell on the marble bust of his grandfather and brought out in full relief the strong, plain, Scotch features.

"And then the swinging doors opened and the Chief of Tangamaron came in with his wife, the first of Louis' Samoan friends. They were barefooted and wore only the lava-lava—a waistcloth. He came forward to where Louis lay, bowed low to him, and said slowly, 'Alofa, Tustitola!'—Love to you, Teller of Tales—and he laid a fine mat on the foot of the bed; it is a funeral custom of these people and implies the deepest affection and respect. Then Tono came with his family and laid another mat upon the bed, and each said, 'Alofa, Tustitola,' and stepped back and crouched upon the floor; they sat there silently in a great semi-circle, his friends whom he had loved so much; they made no demonstrations of grief; they didn't wail like the Hawaiians, but sat bowed and reverent.

"Sosimo came and knelt by Lloyd and asked if his people might make 'Popo Church'—as he called it—you know five of our men and one of our girls are Catholics; then Sosimo in a beautiful deep voice that trembled with emotion read the prayers for the dead, and the other five chanted the responses. It is just what Louis would have loved!

"December 6. "It has been raining a heavy, tropical black rain almost ever since Louis died. The morning after his death more people came and many flowers were sent; only the flowers sent by Samoans were placed upon his bed. The flag that covered him hardly showed, for the five mats that were arranged one upon the other, showing an edge of each; the flowers were of many colors; and the wreath of his feet was woven

of the scarlet hibiscus and yellow trumpet flowers; at his head was a wreath of white gardenias. That was a cool, clear day; all the windows were open, and we laid the flowers upon the big dining table; there were wreaths that our girls had made; a cross of roses from the Catholic sisters; bouquets from friends, brown and white; and among them a tawdry glazed tin cross, trimmed with white artificial flowers and tied with big bows of cheap white satin ribbon—it was sent by the Samoan wife of a white trader on the beach.

"December 12. "I will send you a little book Lloyd and I have been writing, with the help of some of Louis' friends here. We found that it was impossible to write to all who would expect a letter, so we wrote a plain account of the death and burial, asked one friend to describe the Thanksgiving dinner, the last entertainment we gave in Vaillima, just a week before he died; another describes the feast he gave the chiefs and for love of him, built him a chair to Apia to these we have added the Samoan songs that are sung about him, and at the end is the 'Requiem' he wrote himself—and such a comforting one it is to us. Do you remember it? It is in Underwoods:

"Under the clear and starry sky
Dig my grave and let me lie.
The sky is clear and starry that now shines above him.

"The feast above mentioned was given by Stevenson to the chiefs and people who had just completed a road reaching from Vaillima to Apia; the road was a testimonial to Stevenson, who had befriended them in time of trouble. A board by the roadside bears this inscription, a legend which they themselves worded:

THE ROAD OF THE LOVING HEART.

"Remembering the great love of his highness, Tustitola,
And his loving care when we were in prison and sore distressed,
We have prepared him an enduring present,
This road which we have dug to last forever."

Then follow the names of all those who had a share in that labor of love.

"December 26. "Sosimo puts Louis' room in order every morning, dusting and sweeping it, and arranging his papers and blotting pad ready for him, as if he were going to use them as usual—arranging or rearranging where no one disarranges; and every day he places a bunch of white gardenias by the side of his master's bed. Sosimo was always devoted to Louis and jealous of any interference with his rights. He kept the corner of the room and is the sleekest one we have; he polished his spurs and kept his bridle shining; he was so used to Louis' papers that he never mixed them up; and now, as I turn the corner of the veranda, I often see him standing, shading his eyes with his hand, looking up to the summit of Vaea; what a subject for a picture—the boy's figure standing there would tell its own story of grief and love.

"Louis went so suddenly to the laundress coming out to Vaillima the day brought home his linen; I saw Sosimo with the bundle in his arms, holding it as if it were a baby and crying as his heart would break.

"We have had visits from many different groups of people; they came to sing a lament for Tustitola. They sit in a semi-circle on the veranda, the poet recites a part of them with a roll of manuscript in his hand; the song is finished the roll is handed to me for my mother. Some of these songs are very beautiful.

"The Tongans have come again, and we have all been up Vaea to decorate the grave; they adorned it in Tongan fashion; we drank aye, a solemn ceremonial, and they sang their songs. Sosimo, who was with us, planted Maile on the grave, with his cane-knife cut big crosses in the bark of the trees that line the path to the top of the mountain.

"Oh! I am so thankful to know that I loved him every minute he lived, and told him so. I do not have to regret now that I didn't show him in every way I could that I loved him dearly. I wrote for him day after day. I walked with him and listened always earnestly to his talk—but that was no virtue, as his talk was always animated and interesting, even when it soared beyond my intelligence."

These pages speak for themselves; comment would be impertinence. One of the two clergymen present at the interment on the summit of Vaea, repeated the following prayer which was written by Robert Louis Stevenson and read aloud to his family only the evening before his death:

"We beseech Thee, Lord, to behold us with favor, folk of many families and nations, gathered together in the peace of this roof; weak men and women, subsisting under the covert of thy patience. Be patient still; suffer us yet a while longer—with our broken purposes, good, with our idle endeavors against evil—suffer us a while longer to endure, and—if it may be—help us to do better. Bless to us our extraordinary mercies; if the day come when these mercies must be taken, have us play the man under affliction. Be with our friends; be with ourselves. Go with each of us to rest; hours of watching, and when the day returns to us, our sun and comforter, call us up with morning faces and with morning hearts—eager to labor—eager to be happy. If happiness shall be our portion—and if the day be marked with sorrow—strong to endure it."

"We thank Thee and praise Thee, and in the words of Him to whom this day is sacred, close our oblation."

Mr. Lloyd Osborne says: "No stranger's hand touched him. It was his body servant that interlocked his fingers and arranged his hands in the attitude of prayer. Those who loved him carried him to his last home; even the coffin was the work of an old friend. The grave was dug by his own men."

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THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

LESSON II, SECOND QUARTER, INTERNATIONAL SERIES, APRIL 14.

Text of the Lesson, I Cor. xv, 3-14 (An Easter Lesson)—Memory Verses, 12-14. Golden Text, I Cor. xv, 20—Commentary by the Rev. D. M. Stearns.

3. "For I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received—how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures." Various sections of this epistle are easily recognized by the words "now concerning" or "now as touching" (chapters vii, i, viii, i, xli, i, xvi, i). The section in which we find our lesson begins with xii, 1, and concerns the diversity of gifts which exist in the one body of Christ, the church, showing the supremacy of love and exhorting to be "always abounding in the work of the Lord" (xv, 58).

4. "And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures." The death and burial and resurrection of Christ, which constitute the consummation of His finished work and may be summarized by the phrase "His blood," were plainly foretold and may be readily seen by anointed eyes in Ps. xvi and xxiii, Isa. liii and elsewhere.

5. "And that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." On resurrection day He was seen on five different occasions—first by Mary Magdalene, then by the other women, after that by the two who walked to Emmaus, also by Peter, and in the evening by the twelve, as they were called, but that evening Thomas was not present, and Judas Iscariot had gone to his own place. See Luke xxiv, 33, 34; John xx, 24. That He should honor Peter with a special appearance, and also with a special message (Mark xvi, 7), should be a matter of special interest to any one who may have, through temptation, wandered away.

6. "After that He was seen of above 500 brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep." This must have been the largest number to which He appeared at one time and may have been in Galilee or on the mount of the ascension, probably the former. If two or three witnesses could establish a matter, such a company ought to make it very sure. We have no record of His ever appearing after the resurrection and before the ascension to any but brethren—that is, believers—and when He comes again, as believers only saw Him ascend, so only believers will meet Him on His way (I Thess. iv, 16, 17).

7. "After that He was seen of James, then of all the apostles." We would not have known of this special appearance to James if Paul had not told us, and it may be that both Peter and James talked with Paul of these special appearances when he saw them during his visit to Jerusalem (Gal. i, 18, 19). There were at least 10 or 11 appearances, including the one at the ascension; then after the ascension He was seen by Stephen and Paul and John. That He rose from the dead and is now at the right hand of the Father is a fact well established.

8. "And, last of all, He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." This was the last appearance up to Paul's time, for the appearance to John in Patmos was full 90 years later. I wonder why Paul did not mention the appearance to Stephen. Perhaps it was too sore a recollection. Paul speaks of his conversion when the Lord appeared to him as a birth before the time, and also a pattern of those who should hereafter believe (I Tim. i, 16), for the conversion of the nation of Israel will be when they look upon Him at His coming in glory. We are now saved by looking to Him, not upon Him. Compare Isa. xlv, 22, and Zech. xii, 10.

9. "For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Paul's growth in his own estimation was true growth in grace. It was very lowly, at least of the apostles. "I to myself am less than the least of all saints" (Eph. iii, 8), but it is lowest of all, at a still later period, to call himself "the chief of sinners" (I Tim. i, 15). This is the work of the Spirit to magnify the Lord in all His loveliness and to increasingly expose the hideousness of the natural man. May we all grow thus.

10. "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain, but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me." Paul was forever magnifying the grace of God, by which we are saved, in which we stand, which is yet to be more fully revealed, and which Paul felt was in his case exceeding abundantly (Eph. ii, 8; Rom. v, 2; I Pet. i, 13; I Tim. i, 14). This abundant grace constrained him to abundant labors, but he wholly renounces all thought of his doing anything, and, as in Gal. ii, 20, emphasizes his "not I, but Christ," "not I, but the grace of God."

11. "Therefore, whether it be I or they, we preach, and so ye believe." Whether it was Paul or Apollus or Cephas, they were only ministers by whom the Lord wrought (I Cor. iii, 5-7), so that the members cannot and must not glory, only in the Lord, for no flesh shall glory in His presence. Let us glory only in the Lord.

12. "Now, if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" The Sadducees did not believe in any resurrection (Luke xx, 27). Some gentiles mocked at the idea (Acts xvii, 32); but, worse still, some professing Christians of our time say that at death we get our resurrection body, and they have no further use for the body that is laid in the grave. Yet it is plainly written that all that are in their graves shall come forth. They shall sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, and when Jesus rose from the dead many bodies of the saints which slept arose and came out of the graves and went into the holy city and appeared unto many (John v, 28, 29; Dan. xii, 2; Math. xxvii, 52, 53).

13. "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen." This verse, I think, gives the key to verse 29, which perplexes many. The question which Paul is arguing is, Has Christ risen? Now, all believers were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, but if He is a dead Christ, and not risen, why baptize for the dead? Why baptize any one in the name of a dead Christ?

14. "And if Christ be not risen then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." He goes on to add that if Christ be not risen all preachers are false witnesses, and all living believers are still in their sins, and all dead believers have perished. The great fact of the resurrection of Christ is not a truth merely for Easter, but for every Lord's day. His life and death would be of no avail to us had He not risen again, but He is risen (verse 20), and thus, power declared to be the Son of God (Rom. i, 4).

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