

Robert Louis Stevenson.

upon the people, to declare that we were at a crisis of our national existence, to point out that the salvation of Canada depended supremely on economy, rigid honesty and purity of administration, and to stake all upon that great issue was a task too great for him. Had he done so, he might merely have been laughed at for his simplicity. But, none the less, he would have done an unspeakable service to Canada. It is doubtful, however, if such a course ever presented itself to his mind. He was, by constitution, a party man; and though the purity of his own nature and life and his judicial experience made him ashamed of condoning crime, public or private, ashamed, indeed, of any mockery of justice, there were almost no lengths to which he would not have consented rather than shipwreck the party, once he had accepted the responsibility of leadership. He continued, therefore, to yoke his strong intellect to drag the heavily laden chariot along. Though he kept steadily at the work, it did not take long to kill him. He lost, too, once and again, his old impassive and impressive dignity of speech and manner. Taunts, which formerly would only have moved him to silent laughter, stung him now to the quick; and he gave way to a concentrated violence of passion which showed the tempests raging beneath the calm exterior, and which also betrayed a consciousness that fidelity to his party had forced him to be untrue, not so much to himself as to the traditions which he had once considered principles.

This analysis of his character may help to explain why he left the church of his birth and early manhood. The step was taken not, as it has been insinuated or even declared from public platforms, because of unworthy motives, but entirely because of convictions as deep as his nature could appreciate. His mind was not creative, either in statesmanship or in religion. He never moved in the world of ideas. The spiritual had to become institutional to him, in order to be real. Christianity, therefore, had to actualize itself in order to be credible; and the spectacle of the Roman church, based upon apostolic tradition and almost co-extensive with the civilized world, impressed him profoundly, as it had previously impressed John Henry Newman, Manning and others of the same school. Had he lived in the second century, he would have taken his stand with a lawyer like Pliny or an Emperor like Trajan, and approved the putting down of the poor silly fanatics, whose system threatened the life of Imperial Rome. Living in the nineteenth century, he naturally joined himself to the august organization which alone seemed to him capable of contending with new forces which he neither understood nor liked. It is to the credit of Canada that this great change did not make him a political impossibility. That it did not is enough to show that Protestants are beginning to understand their own principles, and to see the tribute paid to these principles in the honest desertion of a Protestant for the Roman church, as well as in the honest action of a Gavazzi, Chiniquy or a Papineau.

It is a disgrace for a man to die rich, someone has said. It certainly is for a public man. Sir John Thompson served Canada with all his strength and died poor. His friends are charging themselves with the care of his wife and children, and the country, if called on, will not fail to sanction what they are doing.

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A correspondent of *The Lady* is responsible for the statement that when supplying the particulars for opening a Post Office deposit account she described herself as a "journalist." The clerk immediately informed her that she ought to have written married instead. "That is not my occupation," the lady scribbler ventured to retort. "It is for a woman," was the clerkly reply.

DEATH has been very busy these last few years among our great men; and of that band of mighty ones born during the first two decades of our century, only one or two remain. One by one they have gone from us, and the losses have been sad enough; though our sorrow has been softened by the thought that their work was done, and they were ripe for the harvest. But our grief to-day is of another temper. Though with a body broken and harassed by disease, and a disposition kindly, tolerant and mellow as that of an aged saint, Robert Louis Stevenson never seemed to us anything but young. Many and various are the proofs of his genius that he has left us, and yet with regard to him we have always been in an attitude of expectation, as if the best were yet to come. And now as we realize that the fountain of delight is dried up, and that no more can ever come; here, indeed, is poignancy of grief.

Rarely has a literary man given promise in so many directions. In novels of sentiment and of adventure, in essays on men and books and human life, in the poetry of child life, of national character, and of primitive legend, and in the literature of travel and even of controversy, he made experiments, and in every case the experiment was of value. Whatever of truth there may be in the suggestion that if he had confined himself to a more limited range of expression he might have produced something more profoundly great, we are bound to marvel at his versatility as a thing wonderful even in itself; and there is little doubt but that if he had lived long enough to follow out that line on which he was more and more concentrating his efforts, he would have achieved results which would have made these earlier excursions into many fields seem but the necessary preliminary reconnoitring of the ground.

It is fairly evident that it was to the writing of romance that Mr. Stevenson had determined to devote himself chiefly in the future; and it is in this department that he has left the work which is most considerable in bulk, in popularity, and, above all, in influence. We can only guess what led him to this choice, but if the power of an author to affect the literature of his time is any index of his strength, it is clear that he chose that branch in which he was strongest. For it is to Mr. Stevenson most of all that we are indebted for the chief impulse which has caused and characterized that revival of the novel of incident and adventure, which has made the complaint no longer possible, that no romance is written in these days. That revival, no doubt, has its roots deeper than the influence of any one man, and is to be accounted for chiefly as the natural reaction from the supremacy of the novel of psychological analysis; but Robert Louis Stevenson has done much to make that reaction a distinct advance, instead of a profitless swing of the pendulum to the other extreme. "Kidnapped" is not a mere return to Marryatt and Fenimore Cooper, not even to Scott; it is a return to the picturesqueness and dramatic action of these earlier romance writers with the addition of a power of subtle characterisation of which they knew little or nothing. Scott's confession with reference to Miss Austen is well-known: "The big 'bow-wow' strain I can do myself, like any now going, but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting from the truth of the description and the sentiment is denied to me." The ideal which Stevenson seems to strive towards consists in a union of these two qualities, characteristic of Scott and Miss Austen, respectively, and it is clear that such a union was to be expected as the next development in English fiction. Scott succeeded magnificently with the characters that could be treated in the "bow-wow fashion," but with the commonplace he notoriously failed. The character of Rob Roy, on the one hand, and that of Edward Waverley on the other, will serve as examples. Jane Austen, and in our own time writers of the school of Mr. W. D. Howells and Mr. Henry James have succeeded in making the commonplace interesting; but, as is often said, in their books "nothing ever happens." It remained for some one to write books in which something does happen, and yet in which the ordinary non-heroic people are interesting, and this Mr. Stevenson has done. For proof of this we have only for a moment to consider how much of the interest of the David Balfour stories depends upon the delicate blending of innocent simplicity with shrewd sense and honest uprightness in the character of that "wise youth,"