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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

By JOHN FREEMAN

ON December 3rd, 1894, Stevenson died at Samoa. Natives filed round the bed of "The Master" and kept a night-watch beside it, and the day after dug a grave and buried the body on the crest of a hill. A myth was born when Stevenson died, and spread with the news of his death through England and America. The loss of a friend is a sore burden, falling perhaps more lightly upon those near to him in space than upon those far off; for they are indeed the more unhappy whose affections and regrets wander over a vast world and return accusingly home again. Distance and silence are hostile to friendship, and men are but human; and because the old companionship had perforce declined into casual letters and remembrances, the warmest of Stevenson's friends charged themselves, maybe, with neglect. And thus, by the subtlest reaction of loyalty, a prompt effusion of homage began. Potent indeed must the personality have been that attracted Henry James and George Meredith, Sir Sidney Colvin and Mr. Edmund Gosse: never man had finer friends than Stevenson, and friend joined with friend in spontaneous praise, easing their regret in tributes that far exceeded those by which his own candid spirit had been at once delighted and embarrassed. The grace, the charm that his presence had shed over any company received immediate publicity, but not less eager was the recognition of his genius and its achievement during a brief twenty years. And so the myth took wing, and the Master in Samoa became equally the Master in England; and now, when there are few living that loved him and remember him in the flesh, and the swift-heeled younger generation presses hard, the myth still wonderfully endures. Those who knew him not but were among his contemporaries are still touched by that grace and charm, by his ardour and brightness and courage; and even if they no longer regard his genius as supreme among modern spirits, they yet preserve fresh and clear the image of an enchanting personality.

But how far does the myth endure for others? I call it a myth without suggesting that it was baseless, for these wide and generous apprehensions are never baseless; but I cannot banish the phantom of Stevenson himself, hovering now over Samoa and now over London and now over Edinburgh, and pondering with witty eyes the caprices of fame. Nor can I banish another phantom that rises obscure and gigantic over Stevenson's shoulder and wears the graver look of Edgar Allan Poe. Stevenson is amused, but Poe looks perplexed and then incredulous, and so draws or dims away, leaving me doubtful if it was indeed his apparition or a delusion. Had either phantom spoken I should have known, but they were silent, Stevenson seeming unconscious of his neighbour and Poe reserved.

I

A schoolboy then in his teens, who had strangely missed reading *Treasure Island*, may I hope be pardoned for his indifference to the warm stir that came up from the south when Stevenson died ; but who could remain for long untroubled by the influence of so vital a myth ? And yet that other phantom, that intruder, cannot be put by. I will not confront Stevenson's brilliant personality with the enigmatic and desperate character of Poe, but who shall escape reminders on reading some of the best and some of the worst of Stevenson's stories ? *Olalla* and *The Body Snatcher*, *Markheim* and *The Master of Ballantrae* have divers merits, but are they not all in debt to the American ? It is no discredit to borrow of Poe, but to weaken or blur what is borrowed, to make something worse and not something better of it—this, surely, would provoke Poe's æsthetic disdain. *Olalla* is the story of a high Spanish family depraved by inbreeding ; centuries that knew nothing of eugenics have dwindled in this family to a mother and son whose nature is brutal, and a lovely hapless daughter who refuses to love and transmit the taint. It is a tragic story, beautifully conceived, carefully planned ; but an essayist delighting in words has expressed *Olalla's* refusal, and the pleading against it, in this style :

Others, ages dead, have wooed other men with my eyes ; other men have heard the pleading of the same voice that now sounds in your ears. The hands of the dead are in my bosom ; they move me, they pluck me, they guide me ; I am a puppet at their command ; and I but reinform features and attributes that have long been laid aside from evil in the quiet of the grave. . . . Shall I bind another spirit, reluctant as my own, into this bewitched and tempest-broken tenement that I now suffer in ?

The Body Snatcher is a story showing, again, how completely Stevenson shared Poe's delight in the macabre, using familiar traditions for the creation of physical horror ; but it is still an essayist, a young man in love with the English dictionary, who writes the story, making it ineffective by his ingenuous evasion of common words such as body and corpse, and teasing the ear with the repetition of ensigns of mortality, unholy burden, unnatural burden, ghastly comrade, sad merchandise, and so on. . . . Yes, it is incredible ! and incredible, too, how poorly the conception has been used, for the story opens with one theme and ends upon another ; starts with sinister drama and ends with solemn farce. It was not from Poe that Stevenson learned how easy it was to spoil a story. And if you turn to *The Master of Ballantrae* you may see that he has but added a fault to an ambitious novel, in that scene of the burial of the Master and the attempted resuscitation ; a scene that suggests Poe as Poe never was—at his worst, although it is right to remember that for the episode itself there was an independent origin. Or passing on to *Markheim* and stories in the *New Arabian Nights*, even to part of the machinery of *Treasure Island*, you will observe how patiently, how fondly, how humbly Stevenson subjected himself to the innovating genius of Poe. An admirable master

certainly, to follow, and therefore the last in the world to follow subserviently ; for nothing that Poe achieved is bettered by Stevenson, and all these reminders fall rather chillingly upon the reader, even while it is noted that he wrote far finer stories than these, things so good as *The Merry Men* and *The Pavilion on the Links*.

As if impatient of the success proper to his calling, Stevenson has diminished the value of many of his novels, not merely by reminders of Poe, but by the moral note which sounds in them, insistent as a drum. The pulpiteer in the writer, honest and unpretentious truly, was all too garrulous and constantly dulled the artist ; and thus even in the short stories Stevenson sometimes made his moral explicit and assertive, instead of silently alert and vivifying. *Olalla*, to revert to that beautiful hybrid, is a chief instance, certainly a better instance than *Markheim*, which is a mere tract, or *Will o' the Mill*, which, on the other hand, is a beautiful subdued allegory expressed in a living figure. In *Olalla* the moral emphasis is gained by repeating the farewell of the unhappy girl who has forsworn the joy of her being ; and the lightest reader will notice that the repetition spoils the incident, adding the moral only by destroying the truth and beauty. The same volume contains a welcome fantasy, *The Treasure of Franchard*, and once more the moral is crudely stitched on to the comedy—a red-flannel patch on a pleasant Fête Galante frippery.

II

The moralist and the artist in Stevenson maintained a petty war in his members, the moralist never in danger, the artist often wounded but happily never expelled. It was a simple warfare, a clash of hammer and tongs, for both moralist and artist were simple persons and so gained immensely in the general affection. Subtlety may be a sure bond between the artist and a few readers, but simplicity is the spell that draws the many to him. Simplicity shines in the large round moon of Stevenson's moral, simplicity speaks in the *obiter dicta* of his letters and, clearest of all, in the essays. Thus he debates—no, dismisses—the question of the right of the artist to use a gloomy theme, his right, in effect, to create *Jude the Obscure* and *Crime and Punishment*. “ My horror of the horrible ! ” he cries in one place, distinguishing himself thereby from the radiant and insatiable Shelley ; and elsewhere, “ One dank, dispirited word is harmful, a crime of *lèse-humanité*, a piece of acquired evil ; every gay, every bright word or picture, like every pleasant air of music, is a piece of pleasure set afloat.” His own view of life, he averred and showed, was the romantically-comic ; “ beauty touched with sex and laughter ; beauty with God's earth for the background,” was his search ; for tragedy, it seems, did not “ come off,” unless it was tragedy-in-a-good-humour. It is a courageous avowal, unshared by his fellow-artists, and seeming to us a little narrow and old-fashioned (so brutal is change !)—as odd, in fact, as the æsthetics of the 'nineties ; and his loyalty to this avowal was unbroken, except

perhaps in *The Master of Ballantrae*. He avoided certain things only partly because he was afraid of them ; life was such a solemn, agonistic experience that the highest office of literature was the stimulation of man's moral nature and the drugging of his speculation. Not to concur in this simple and urgent view seems a meanness ; and indeed, who that has not thought deeply and sorely would dare to place the spiritual, the imaginative above the conventionally moral, if precedence may be considered at all by mortal men ? But the dilemma has been faced by other writers of our time, and I hope we are not the poorer if it has been answered in another way than Stevenson's.

His preference was a wholly natural one, candidly declared, for instance, in *The Lantern Bearers*, and implicit almost everywhere ; and although it led him into the shallows rather than into the deep, it taught him sympathy and brightness. Superficial he was not, and his own experience had shown him much that he would fain teach others ; but his doctrine of the useful led him to disregard whatever did not seem immediately useful. The pursuit of art could not content him ; " had I been an engineer, and literature my amusement, it would have been better perhaps," he wrote a little before his death ; and his immersion in Samoan affairs, his zest and practical conscience, prove that fondness for action was as instinctive as aversion from speculation.

Only when we hold before our steadied eyes the things with which Stevenson has delighted us do we understand the cost of that delight—by what avoidances or suppressions it was maintained, how many doubts and questions were stunned and tossed into the fire at which our hands are warmed. A wholesome, hearty reactionary, indeed, does Stevenson seem, until you remember that it is unfair to reproach him with the changes of the past thirty years. Put it simply, then, that he was limited not by lack of experience but by a delusive doctrine of cheerfulness and the inability of men to endure truth. It is a limitation which is at least as conspicuous in the essays as in the stories ; wit, alert phrasing, gaiety of tone, good nature, and good humour are all subordinated to this practical and inadequate morality. Duty, duty—yes ! but is there no duty to the mind, no obedience demanded by one's own precarious, light-seeking thought ? The question pricks again and again :

A strange picture we make on our way to our chimæras, ceaselessly marching, grudging ourselves the time for rest ; indefatigable, adventurous pioneers. . . . O toiling hands of mortals ! O unwearied feet, travelling ye know not whither. Soon, soon, it seems to you, you must come forth on some conspicuous hilltop, and but a little way farther, against the setting sun, descry the spires of El Dorado. Little do ye know your own blessedness ; for to travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive, and the true success is to labour.

But if you transfer the application to the mind you have Stevenson no longer with you ; a term has been set to the journey. Some of the essays published in English and American magazines were written, as Sir Sidney Colvin says, in gloom and sickness. Less inspiring than your wont, is

Sir Sidney's comment in a letter to the author ; but I find them all but boisterous, wonderfully free from gloom and malady. Who is not the better, base as he may be, for hearing that he is "condemned to some nobility," with that implacable hunter, the desire of good, at his heels ? Who will not join with this moralist in denouncing the "canting moralists" that objected to seeing themselves, in Stevenson's vivid phrase, as ennobled lemurs, hair-crowned bubbles of dust ? He writes a Christmas sermon for his thousands of American readers, a wise and happy sermon ; gentleness and cheerfulness, the two perfect duties, are the matter of his praise ; and the very note of the sermon as we know it in England, as I hope it is known in America, is heard in these winning adjurations and easy simplicities.

Nevertheless, it is when he forgets his morality and writes pure fond reminiscence that he gives his best—say, *Fontainebleau*, with pleasant things enough but wise things also ; as, "To pity Millet is a piece of arrogance ; if life be hard for such resolute and pious spirits, it is harder still for us, had we the wit to understand it." As delightful in intimacy is the chapter called *Random Memories*, and with it come to mind those other random essays and the travel books which are but prolonged essays. Possessing a quick sense of his own individuality, he was able to enjoy *himself* as much, at least, as he enjoyed his friend ; hence the brightness of his egotism, securing or pleading for a welcome wherever young men are gathered together. His essays of travel and reminiscence show nothing so clearly as the travels of his own mind ; the sight was clear, the waters lucid, the voice the freshest, the most innocently candid. It is but the sedate reader that prefers *The Amateur Emigrant* to the more garrulous books. His purely literary essays please us now by a certain precocity of judgment, a sureness and a breadth that already marked him as a man of letters, even if he is hardly forgivable when he speaks of an earlier and more perfect man of letters, the author of *The Lives of the Poets* as "that stilted and accomplished stylist." He sees his subject so vividly as a picture—"Whitman like a large shaggy dog, just unchained, scouring the beaches of the world and baying at the moon"—that he is apt to love the picture for its brightness at least as much as for its truth, and makes his essays indeed familiar studies in a temperament. They are so good that you wish he had written others when time and experience had touched him more deeply.

III

Both in essay and short story Stevenson showed his limitations frankly enough, and perhaps saw them too indulgently ; but in looking at some of the longer stories his reader is promptly aware of large excellencies and but intermitted faults. *Kidnapped*, one of the best stories in the language ; *Treasure Island*, a little lower than the best, for the reason already indicated ; *Catriona*, an admirable yet inadequate sequel ; *Weir of*

Hermiston, a bright hope—no more ; *The Wrecker*, a confused attempt at incident, and *The Ebb Tide*, a successful attempt—of all these it would be pleasant and superfluous to speak in tribute to their vivacities and virtues, just as it would be unpleasant and superfluous to speak in detail of certain others. They have all one root—Stevenson's fondness for dramatising his adventurous personality. He is John Silver and Pew, Alan Breck, Nares, Pinkerton, Attwater, Ballantrae, Durrisdeer, and even *Catriona* herself. An ideal of gallantry, figment of recurring and precious dream, held his mind ; and since the opportunity of gallant action might not come (and the evil of his ill characters is often but a perverted gallantry), his eager spirit wrapped itself around the persons of these stories and made them bright and warm. In them he satisfied all his famishing aspirations. Something of that warm glow may have been caught from Scott, but Stevenson's own blood animated his creatures and gave them almost all their attractive grace or force. And for this reason the longer novels are of a piece with the rest of his work, for gallantry, ardour, and simplicity breathe through essay, short story, poems and letters alike. His case is that of the inventive writer of all times : impossible piracies, long-desired journeys, adventures oft-dreamed and foregone—all these may be dramatically experienced and repeated for the pleasure of the dull and the dreamless. More than most romancers he rejoiced in the province of his invention. His genius was never so active as in giving unity of structure and tone to *Kidnapped*, and the complete success of that novel within its own well-defined range is due in part to this identification of himself with the whole story ; and thus it was he proved, as the shorter tales tempt one to doubt, that he could tell a story perfectly. The simplicity of his nature served him well in the portraiture of many characters, his attempts at the strange and unusual resulting, on the other hand, in a merely capricious Prince Otto and Seraphina, an unrealisable *Catriona*.

Excellent, then, in certain characters, Stevenson is yet better in incident, and infinitely resourceful in the artifices of delay, suspense, stimulation, deception, and surprise. He follows, in fact, and lifts to frequent perfection the novelist's common practice of displaying simple character through swift-succeeding incident, pricking our sense of the unusual, the wonderful, the splendid, without straining our recognition of never obscure personality. Great is the gain in contrast ! The contrast is wanting in *The Wrecker*, an extreme intricacy of incident defeating the simple characterisation and suggesting that Stevenson could not do what infinitely smaller writers so easily do. The failure here is the failure to keep in the key, a natural difficulty for collaborators. A poor sort of yarn, certainly well nourished with facts, was his own phrase for it ; yet scarcely well nourished, surely, since the facts are so plainly undigested. Any story, says Stevenson of another novel, " any story can be made *true* in its own key ; any story can be made *false* by the choice of a wrong key of detail or style : *Otto* is made to reel like a drunken—I was going to say man, but let us substitute cipher, by the variations of key." An admirable comment, to which it is

hard to add more than a word in saying that *Prince Otto* is Stevenson's chief, if not sole, essay in sentimentalism, and that neither character nor incident yields satisfaction in its pages.

I have referred in but a single phrase to the unfinished *Weir of Hermiston*, upon which so many wistful eyes have been cast. A lost masterpiece, cry some ; a bright hope, breathe others ; and all agree in lamentation. It is a clear and positive conception, with plain characters as ever and sinister incident and sombre shades spreading over the magnificent landscape. Does it not illustrate Stevenson's fondness for pairing his stories, or his inability to let a story stand alone, whether success or failure ? *The Master of Ballantrae* surely is to be matched by *Weir of Hermiston*, as *Kidnapped* certainly begot a weaker *Catriona* and the first *New Arabian Nights* a vain successor. Stevenson was trying once again the note of *The Master of Ballantrae*, and, although there is not another shabby Lucifer, there is more than a hint of poor Mr. Henry—sullenly true, stupidly still. . . . I grieve for the conclusion that might have been, even while doubting what it would have been. The great natural amphitheatre is set, tragic airs steal up, with shadowy powers and preparations, and the end might have revealed a better *Ballantrae* ; but death, harshly or kindly, stayed the conclusion.

IV

A reader will not reflect very long upon these novels of Stevenson's without noting another evidence of our author's simplicity, namely, his shy and uncertain attitude towards sex. The total exclusion of women from his finest novels has strangely contributed to their success. I cannot think what he would have made of a sequel to *Treasure Island*, but the sequel to *Kidnapped* shows the havoc that women played with his art ; for *Catriona* is no more than a partial success, the natural interest of the story being obscured by a kind of equivocation upon the ancient theme. Was it that the grace and gentleness in Stevenson, the exuberant, the scrupulous tenderness—the most prominent features of the letters—were features of a feminine development, cherished by his friends, admired by his readers, but not supremely valuable in his art ? And was his very genuine interest in violent and vivid action, such as abounds in many of the stories, at all incongruous with this development ? If women can best be presented by men and men by women in any imaginative art (greater boldness than mine is needed to press the argument), it is possible to explain Stevenson's difficulty with women. Always candid, he has given the clue in a letter, and writes rather self-consciously, " If I had to begin again . . . I believe I should try to honour Sex more religiously. The worst of our education is that Christianity does not recognise and hallow Sex." The sentiment may be admirable and recommend him to earnest and sensible people ; but it is perhaps less characteristic of the born artist than of the born moralist. It is found in a letter to his cousin,

and I wonder what vast smile would have wrinkled the face of Henry James, or Meredith, if by Fate's grotesquerie it had fallen into his hands instead ?

V

Admirable is the doctrine which Stevenson asserts in a *Letter to a Young Gentleman who Proposes to Embrace the Career of Art*—an essay which is a counterpart of sermons upon that other religion to which we referred a moment ago. In speaking of his own honoured vocation he says, "If a man love the labour of any trade, apart from any question of success or fame, the gods have called him. . . . He may have a taste for all the arts, and I think he often has ; but the mark of his calling is this laborious partiality for one." The test is far from perfect, but nothing could more exactly indicate Stevenson's calling. "Inextinguishable zest in its technical successes," is our author's dysphonious phrase when he proclaims an essential virtue in a writer ; and he displays this zest not simply in his work at large nor simply in his talk about it, but especially in one of the *Essays in the Art of Writing*. Readers and writers alike will easily recall the amused shock of hearing Stevenson declare that "the sister arts enjoy the use of a plastic and ductile material, like the modeller's clay ; literature alone is condemned to work in mosaic with finite and quite rigid words." Turning to other images he finds that the literary artists are weavers of webs and jugglers with oranges, and his repeated recourse to such figures suggests one of the reasons why his prose so soon fails to satisfy. It suggests, in fact, a mechanical regard of the material and motion of prose, which could not but produce an artificial style of writing ; and to this I must return in a moment, only observing now that the essay on *Some Technical Elements of Style in Literature*, at any rate, shows a real concern with technical elements, and the keenest desire of the author to distil the last drop of virtue from his own secret capacities. Style engrossed his mind and formed a problem which he approached in continually new ways. "Some artists, having formed a style, adhere to it through life ; but those of a higher order"—it is Stevenson himself that speaks—"cannot rest content. . . . Every fresh work on which they embark is a signal for a fresh engagement of the whole forces of their mind." It is not true of his own work : the whole forces of his mind were assuredly not engaged upon some of the books at which we have glanced ; but his argument is not spoilt by an exception. He is lucid and frank in his reference to the realistic method, and especially in his warning against the least appearance of irrelevant dexterity. In much that he says on questions of this sort you will note with admiration the resonant maturity of the voice of this confident young man of thirty-three.

How passionate was the technical preoccupation may be seen by looking at random among the letters. His zest burns brightly there, the happiest

expression of the egotism that endeared him to so many correspondents. He talks much of money (no writer more), of his steady advance from nothing to four thousand a year ; he talks no less freely of his own aims and accomplishment ; but nothing in these hundreds of letters is so much a part of his mind as the casual utterances—brimming over from constant meditation—upon the structure of stories, the use of language, the technical embarrassments and uncertainties which he confronted with so lively a spirit. The amount of his work was enormous, if you consider the shortness of his life, and were other evidence inadequate his letters would yield profuse witness that his best was achieved only with great pain and travail, even though much of the rest was scarcely “ achieved ” at all but fell fortuitously together. He is a lesson (he would rejoice to be a lesson !) to those that write, teaching them by his own diligence and ardour that it is only the finest elements in a writer that may survive in his book—may indeed survive his book itself as a memory, a tradition, a lingering fragrance. What he could not teach, nor learn, was the patience of the fields, the order of the seasons ; hence the strange fact that he could work almost concurrently at *The Master of Ballantrae* and *The Wrong Box*, at *Weir of Hermiston* and *St. Ives*, too hasty, or too restless, to distinguish between the memorable and the trivial. But this need not be pursued, with the letters before us crammed with autobiography. “ I care for nothing but the moral and the dramatic, not a jot for the picturesque or the beautiful, other than about people.” He was but thirty when he wrote this, and smarting under the unmerited rebuff to which *The Amateur Emigrant* had exposed him. To Henley, warning him that the critical spirit killed, he declared, “ I *am* not but in my art ; it is me ; I am the body of it merely.” To another, “ You have not to represent the world. You have to represent only what you can represent with pleasure and effect. . . . Try to use your faults.” A kind of ardour of the blood is, he thinks, the mother of immortal things in the art of letters ; but he does not add that it mothers also the puniest of perishing things. “ I am at bottom a psychologist, and ashamed of it,” he sighs astonishingly, in speaking of one of his ballads. More piercingly he writes, “ As we go on in life, we must part from prettinesses and the graces. We but attain qualities to lose them ; life is a series of farewells, even in art.” Slowly came this wisdom to Stevenson, and to no man can it come at all except with time and successive failures.

If the pleasures of his work fell early and abundant for Stevenson, the disillusion was late but perhaps hardly less keen, though its expression was naturally less frequent. Two months before his death he wrote to Sir Sidney Colvin almost the last of those many confidences which honoured writer and reader equally : “ I am pretty nearly useless at literature. . . . I am a fictitious article and have long known it.” If piety and affection protest, he has yet another touch for acceptance. “ It was a very little dose of inspiration, and a pretty little trick of style, long lost, improved by the most heroic industry. . . . I cannot take myself seriously as an

artist ; the limitations are so obvious." Rare is this insight, rare this candour, among those that wrestle with the subtlest of creative tasks. Dying at a far younger age, Keats wrote, " I think I shall be among the English poets " ; and I know not which utterance is the more tragic, Keats's confidence or Stevenson's misgiving.

VI

Yes, it is only in part from his own work that the bright myth has sprung ; its true life is lived in the memory of those that knew him in the flesh or in the spirit. Sir Sidney Colvin's recent book gives the purest evidence you could wish of the myth-begetting personality which has manifested for thirty years so independent a vigour ; it contains but the latest of innumerable tributes, and I deplore that I cannot now quote from any of them. For those who knew not Stevenson in the flesh, or were boys when he died or long after, the myth is a perplexity. Seeking its origin in his books, in his novels and short stories and essays, they are obscurely baffled. They turn to his verse, sometimes simple and ingenious, sometimes amusing and lively ; and they find its faint radiance dimmed by the far brighter and deeper glow that burns in the heart of another children's poet of our own day. Sometimes a wild beauty may fleck the page with an alien wing :

Blows the wind to-day, and the sun and the rain are flying,
Blows the wind on the moors to-day and now,
Where about the graves of the martyrs the whaups are crying,
My heart remembers how !

Wild or prim, beauty is seldom heard in the verse. And, turning back to the prose, they find its appeal faint and accidental, wholly a thing of mood and occasion. A page in *The Wrecker* may delight because it prefigures Mr. Conrad, and passages in other books shed a momentary pleasure ; but an attentive ear is persuaded that it is a spectacular prose, written for the eye and not for the ear, without continuous rhythm or native music. Stevenson's instinct for prose was restlessly imperfect ; he pursued irreconcilables, and there is no one style which you can declare wholly his own ; certainly not a good style. Perhaps the best specimen is found in those few pages in which he is provoked to anger against the Reverend Dr. Hyde. Hyde had written a private letter concerning Damien ; it was wantonly printed in a newspaper, and roused fury in Stevenson because it vilified a man whose memory he adored. No one had a more generous mind than Stevenson ; he kindled at an insult or injustice to another as swiftly as he responded to kindness ; and of all the grounds for admiring Stevenson none is more solid than this. His open letter to Hyde was an attack, a fierce taunt : " with you, at last, I rejoice to feel the button off the foil and to plunge home." Yet even in this attack his style prevailed over him, and there is the strangest contrast between the angry sincerity

of what he says and his delicately curious way of saying it. " Style " had enthralled and straitened his mind for so many years that it subdued to its fantasies even his most passionate moments. In *Fontainebleau* he wrote of the excited amateur who has to die in a man before the artist can be born. Wasted precocity ! He was the finest of amateurs, always experimenting, always wanting yet seeming never to know what he wanted, and, of many excellences, wishing for all. He laboured sometimes too little, but more often too much. He did not know himself and was always trying to discover himself. He tried by wearing an Indian smoking-cap of tarnished gold, black shirt, linen trousers and leathern gaiters, when he carried a knapsack in France ; he tried at other times by wearing the guise of a literary scene-painter, of a portrait-painter, of an autobiographer ; he tried by writing simple verses for children, the finest boyish improvisations, the most gallant conceptions of historical adventure. All these were more than dramatic inventions, and into each he poured much of himself, glowingly profuse. In the finest of ways he would fain be all things to all men and first a moralist.

. . . Less from his books than from the affections of his friends, from the memory of his eager personal grace, was the myth created. Is it a small thing ? Surely not. It is not a small thing that a mere three letters distinguish him at once. W. S. and J. M. are not so lucid in their clue, and A. M., W. W., and R. B. are exposed to confusion ; even H. B. is unhappily ambiguous ; but who among millions will not recognise an admired and familiar shade when he reads R. L. S. ?