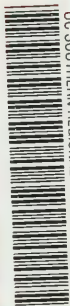


THE HOME AND
EARLY HAVNTS OF
R. L. STEVENSON BY
MARGARET ARMOUR

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EDINBURGH

THE HOME AND
EARLY HAUNTS OF
R. L. STEVENSON

1895

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON
AFTER THE ORIGINAL PAINTING
BY W. BROWN MACDOUGALL




ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BORN 1850

DIED 1894



THE HOME AND EARLY
HAUNTS OF ROBERT
LOUIS STEVENSON 

BY

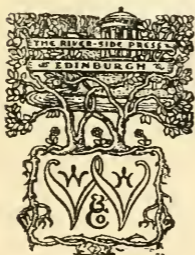
MARGARET ARMOUR

WITH TWELVE

ILLUSTRATIONS IN PHOTOGRAVURE
INCLUDING NEW PORTRAIT

BY

W. BROWN MACDOUGALL



Edinburgh Riverside Press
W. H. WHITE & CO.
1895



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To

C. S. A.

AND

M. B. McD.

853735

IN MEMORIAM
R. L. STEVENSON



In Memoriam

R. L. STEVENSON

*'The birds come and cry there, and
twitter in the chimney, But I go for
ever and come again no more.'*

MOURN for the dead, departed
With unreturning feet ;
The bright, the hero-hearted
No comrade more shall greet ;
Mourn him whom shadows cover,
Unstricken by the years ;
Mourn, Scotland, for thy lover,
Nor stint his meed of tears.

Waft, O winds ! our wailing
Beyond the twilight verge ;
In sorrow unavailing
Chant o'er his grave your dirge !
Alack ! the wand is broken,
And mute the magic tongue,
Ere half the words were spoken,
Or half the song was sung.

IN MEMORIAM

Oh, fair may be his pillow
 'Mid waters of the West,
And blue the shining billow
 Round the haven of his rest !
But ah ! the rugged mountains
 And the tempests of the north
Were dearer than the fountains
 Of the land that drew him forth.

How soft had been his sleeping
 Beneath his country's sod,
Within the quiet keeping
 Of the acre green of God,
With the daisied turf for cover
 Where the drowsy shadows lie,
And the throstle singing over,
 And the ash against the sky.

But though in vain his yearning
 For the land he shall not greet,
And though no Spring, returning,
 Shall tempt his tarrying feet,
Though few shall weep above him,
 Or wander by his shore,
Here, in the hearts that love him,
 His home is evermore.

MARGARET ARMOUR.

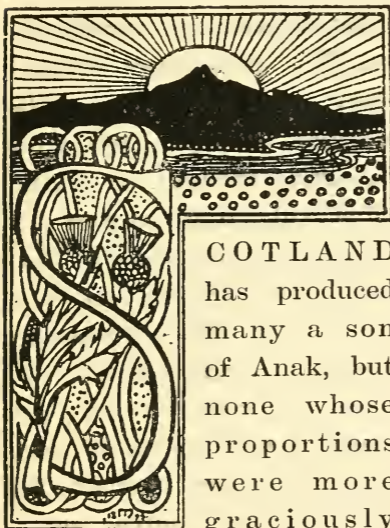
LIST OF THE
ILLUSTRATIONS



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THE HOME AND EARLY HAUNTS OF STEVENSON



COTLAND
has produced
many a son
of Anak, but
none whose
proportions
were more
graciously
noble than Stevenson's, or
whose loss has left her more
sorrowful.

THE HOME AND EARLY

We may be "dwindled sons of little men," yet one element of greatness remains in us. We can admire without envy those who revive the colossal tradition, and who, by taking thought and giving it art-utterance, restore by their cubit our ancient stature. When bidden shake our heads over their own emptiness, and resign ourselves to it as the common lot, it is cheering to think of one who found the wherewithal to fill his full from sources accessible to everybody; and when tempted despairingly to accept Emerson's abstract of

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

Thackeray's teaching — to "renounce ideals and accept London" — how encouraging is contact with a heart frankly aglow with romance and enthusiasm, and unerringly responsive to every sweet and deep appeal of life! To Stevenson the world is a "brave gymnasium, full of sea-bathing, horse-exercise, and bracing manly virtues." Into his outlook Cockneydom does not enter. Fortunate the man whose genius, like his, permits him to refuse the dusty paths, and strike for a worthy goal across the dewy tracks of fancy; who

THE HOME AND EARLY
goes exploring virgin forests
of adventure, fingering the
oaten pipe and discoursing
wisely by pastures green!
Keenly and widely cognisant
of life, Stevenson had, more-
over, that spiritual vision by
which alone the rareeshow
of Destiny can be viewed in
proper perspective. He was
more than a citizen of the
world; he had the freedom
of the universe. With head,
heart, and soul, he has served
his generation, and none are
so poor, let us hope, as not
to "do him reverence."

And from him, as from
all the earth's great ones,

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

a wealth accrues indirectly. Everything ever connected with these receives an imaginative enhancement. Those who have lived with them, spoken with them, touched but the hem of their garment; the fields where they have walked; the house that has held them; the spots where they have sojourned—all receive an extrinsic value. The hero's way winds luminous through the comings and goings of lesser men, and he showers abroad the largess of enriched association.

True, there are our Shakespeares whose obliterated

THE HOME AND EARLY track continues to baffle our geographers of greatness. But with Stevenson it is not so. He, himself, has drawn the chart of his journeyings; a complete itinerary may be compiled from his books; nay, in his "Memories and Portraits," he turns back from the later highways expressly to strew with finger-posts the sequestered scenes of his youth. These lay, as everyone knows, in the Lothians of Scotland. Or if any are ignorant, it is not Stevenson's fault, for never were early haunts dwelt on with such loving insistence.

EDINBURGH
CASTLE





HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

Scotland is happy in her sons. They grow to be her lovers, and among them is rarely wanting some poet-voice to praise her. She glows with the reflected light of literature. With Burns, Scott, Stevenson to proclaim her sovereignty, what wonder she sits proudly in her mists, receiving the homage of the nations! Each of these sings her as a whole, but each has some chosen part on which he specially dwells. With Burns it is the banks and braes of Ayrshire; Scott's heart is divided between the Highlands and the Eildons

THE HOME AND EARLY
by Tweed. Edinburgh won
notes from both in passing;
but with Stevenson it is the
burden of the song.

He was born there at
8 Howard Place, in the year
1850. As the only child of
deep - hearted parents, and
surrounded by a sufficiency
of wealth, in spite of a fragile
physique, he may be said to
have started with a firm foot
on life. His roots were
struck into soil of heredity
unusually rich. "It is the
chief recommendation," he
says, "of long pedigrees that
we can follow backward the
careers of our homunculos

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

and be reminded of our anti-natal lives. Our conscious years are but a moment in the history of the elements that build us up." And so he whimsically saddles his homunculus with its share in his grandfather's doings as he "ran races under the green avenue at Pilrig; trudged up Leith Walk, which was still a country place, and sat on the High School benches, and was thrashed, perhaps, by Dr. Adam." He has excusable difficulty in joining himself on to the reverend doctor of his conscious knowledge, the Presbyterian patriarch

THE HOME AND EARLY

who stood "contented on the old ways," with a pulse suitably sobered to his calling.

But between his father and him the coupling irons are obvious. His father's talk, he tells us, "compounded of so much sterling sense and so much freakish humour, and clothed in language so apt, droll and emphatic, was a perpetual delight to all who knew him. . . . His own stories, that every night he put himself to sleep with, dealt perpetually with ships, roadside inns, robbers, old sailors, and commercial travellers before the use of

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON
steam." Surely the son is just
the father in print; in the
parent the material is lying
loose, which nature welds
into genius for the child.

Little is said explicitly
about nursery winters in
town, but the "Child's Gar-
den of Verses," in which they
are embalmed, breathes an
atmosphere of cosy kind-
ness. Alison Cunningham,
the heroine of that "bright,
fireside, nursery clime" will
live forever as the peerless
nurse—

" My second mother, my first wife,
The angel of my infant life."

Such praise from her boy

THE HOME AND EARLY
must ring sweetly, albeit
sadly, in the ears of the old
woman, still alive in Edin-
burgh, for whom the childish
prattle and the full voice of
manhood have now become
an equal silence.

There is no startling auto-
biography in the "Garden of
Verses"—only evidence of a
finely sensitised mental plate
for the receiving and storing
of impressions; excursions
into that land of phantasy
where there were, one day,
to be such great possessions;
fealty to familiar things;
lavish gratitude; and the
paramount need to love and

THE BIRTHPLACE OF
STEVENSON



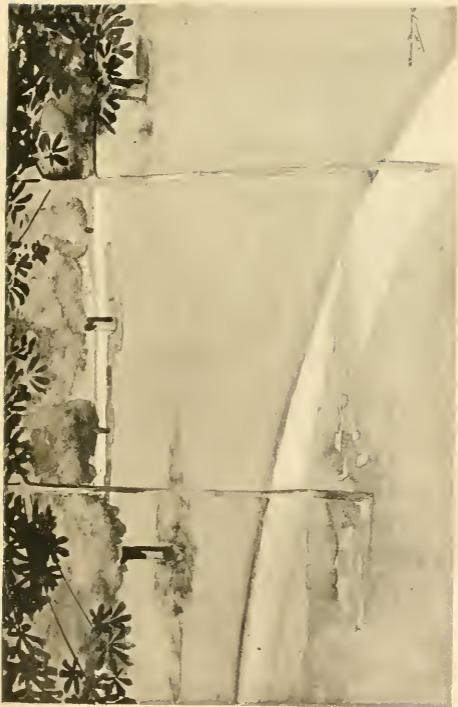
8 HOWARD PLACE



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IN THE GARDEN
HERIOT ROW





HAUNTS OF STEVENSON
worship. Stevenson was never without his hero. "Leerie," the lamplighter, founded the dynasty that had its *grand monarque* in Dumas. When he set himself to it, he could be acutely critical, as his *Familiar Studies of Men and Books* prove; but he was happier in enthusiasm, and, given a king worth throning, he favoured the theory of Divine right.

After his parents removed to Heriot Row, the common garden in front was his playground. It is well kept and bosky, but withal somewhat

THE HOME AND EARLY serious. The little poet's ingenuity must have been taxed to transfigure it to romantic uses, and fancy have been forced to make its bricks there with rather a scarcity of straw. But with his country haunts it was otherwise.

The chief of these, and the most tenderly recalled, is Colinton Manse, about three miles out of Edinburgh, in a deep green dell. His maternal grandfather, Dr. Balfour, held the charge there for thirty-seven years, during the last eight of which he was favoured by frequent

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON
visits from his little grand-
son.

The high-road, above, seems the usual distance from heaven when you are on it; but by the time you have plunged down the interminable flight of steps by the inn, that lead to the lower village, the upper level seems to neighbour the sky, and, with the high bank opposite, to form a lofty gallery round the secluded theatre where the Colinton folk play their unpretentious parts. A short climb and another plunge land you, past the church

THE HOME AND EARLY door, in the Manse garden. The depth is abysmal, but only the depth. The river has here an acre or so of flat margin, on which the roomy Manse and lawn lie large, as if miles were at their disposal. On one side towers a sheer, wooded bank, and, on the other, the gravestones rise in solemn terrace. This is the garden with its water-door where, behind the weir, the river "lies deep and darkling, and the sand slopes into brown obscurity with a glint of gold," looking as low as Styx under the enormous bank opposite. Within a

COLINTON MANSE





WHERE THE RIVER
LIES DEEP
AND DARKLING





HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

stone's throw is the mill, and, stretching up the hill, the miller's garden. Yonder are the plots behind the currant row where, "old and serious, brown and big," the gardener worked, who never seemed to want to play. This is the beloved valley, "brimmed like a cup with sunshine and the song of birds." Small wonder that the fairest blossoms in the "Garden of Verses" are culled from it. It was all enchanted ground, dear and delightful in itself, and enriched tenfold by merry, childish make-believe. Here Stevenson, in sailor suit,

THE HOME AND EARLY
frolicked with other little
folk, played Indian wars,
saw "valiant battles lost and
won," and was "all the thou-
sand things that children
are."

But the sunny picture
fades, and the sad lines come
to haunt us,

" All these are vanished clean away,
And the old manse is changed to-day ;
It wears an altered face
And shields a stranger race.
The river, on from mill to mill,
Flows past our childhood's garden still ;
But ah ! we children never more
Shall watch it from the water-door !
Below the yew—it still is there—
Our phantom voices haunt the air
As we were still at play.

.

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

The eternal dawn, beyond a doubt,
Shall break on hill and plain,
And put all stars and candles out,
Ere we be young again."

The flour mill and the weir
that served it are both gone;
the river brawls shallow over
stones, the miller's garden is
annexed to the graveyard,
no more to bloom in season
with the hollyhock and rose,
but to cherish indefinitely
another seed, of late and
doubtful-flower.

" And it is but a child of air
That lingers in the garden there."

Change has exceeded prophecy;
alas! it has falsified
it too.

THE HOME AND EARLY

“ Years may go by and the wheel in the
river
Wheel as it wheels for us children to-
day,
Wheel, and keep roaring and foaming
forever,
Long after all of the boys are away.

You with the bean that I gave when
we quarrelled,
I with your marble of Saturday last,
Honoured and old and all gaily appar-
elled,
Here we shall meet and remember the
past.”

Exile had not yet thrown its
shadow.

Doubtless the old manse is
the scene still of worthy
labours, and its to-days full
of life and interest as the
yesterdays it recalls. But

THE COLLEGE
QUADRANGLE
EDINBURGH





HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

beautiful as it is, it looks like the burial place of dead joy. These "rhymes of old delight" have fixed our fancy forever to the vanished hours and their owners.

Stevenson's early school days do not bulk largely in the "Memories." In fact he was not much at school. His father had a terror of education (so called), and often plumed himself on having been the author of Louis' success in life, by keeping him as much as possible from pedagogic influence. That the paternal

THE HOME AND EARLY efforts met with filial support, Stevenson's own confession assures us. "All through my boyhood and youth," he writes, "I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler"; and this was highly probable, for his industry was by no means the sort to be recognised in scholastic high places. He was a day pupil first at Henderson's, Inverleith Row, and then, for a year, at the Edinburgh Academy. While at the latter he edited an MS. school magazine, called the "Sunbeam." A water-colour

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON
sketch by him in connection with this is still extant. It shows a small boy (the cousin who owns the picture) wrestling in the agonies of illicit composition for the "Sunbeam," in school hours, unconscious of the other agony that menaces from behind in the shape of uplifted "taws." The colour is delightful, and, in spite of doubtful ethics, the sketch uncommonly good. Had not writing been the only proficiency that attracted Stevenson, his budding draughtmanship might have blossomed, and art have

THE HOME AND EARLY

been added to his many conquered provinces.

Of boyish holiday haunts there were many. A cousin and early playmate recalls Craigleith Quarry, on the Queensferry Road, and "very sportive places" behind it; also the picturesque path that winds from Musselburgh up the Esk, where, he says, "the rounder, larger leaves gave the place a look of never seeing any one but us." Burns were followed to the sea, and links and copse allowed to tempt to many an hour of "idlesse." A favourite tramp of the more

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

bracing sort was round by Liberton and the Braids. Spots further afield, too, were visited. The Hawes Inn at Queensferry, that made such a call on Stevenson's fancy, and figured in *Kidnapped*, later, saw him often, and never failed, he tells us, to put him in a flutter, and "on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place." The lonely, blue bay of Gullane, with its amphitheatre of golden sand dunes, played an important part in *Katriona*. Cramond, North Berwick—the Forth,

THE HOME AND EARLY
up and down for many
miles, gave material for day-
dreams and adventure.

Sandwiched into those
years there are experiences
of travel. Two winters were
spent with his mother at
Mentone, where he attended
school. At the age of
thirteen, at Nice, he began
his acquaintance with
Dumas, through the study
of illustrated dessert plates.
Early journeys into England,
too, there were. We read of
the windmills the Scotch
child falls in love with, and
that keep turning in his
dreams; "the warm, habit-

THE CALTON
GRAVEYARD



"Where he went to be unhappy."



HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

able age of towns and hamlets; the green, settled ancient look of the country; the lush hedge-rows, stiles, and privy pathways in the fields; the sluggish brimming rivers, chalk, and smock-frocks; chimes of bells, and the rapid, pertly sounding English speech, . . . all set to English airs in the child's story that he tells himself at night." Each scene makes its own impression, not effacing but accentuating the one before, and all becoming mutually determinative. There was also half a year's experience of a boarding

THE HOME AND EARLY school near Isleworth, of whose fights and games and politics he talked much.

But, ere long, memory is busy again with the old haunts. Edinburgh University, in all innocence, inscribes a new classic on her roll. In the self-likeness he has left us of this period, he is a "lean, ugly, idle, unpopular student."

He takes care here, too, that his education shall not be interfered with, by acting upon "an extensive and highly rational system of truancy." In the intervals, however, of his

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

serious work—scribbling in penny version books, noting down features and scenes, and commemorating halting stanzas—his professors get some of his attention. But even then it is more as men than teachers. He could have written much better papers on themselves than on their subjects. Indeed, he has done so. Kelland he has immortalised. “No man’s education is complete or truly liberal who knew not Kelland. There were unutterable lessons in the mere sight of that frail, old clerical gentleman, lively as a boy,

THE HOME AND EARLY
kind like a fairy godfather.”
The best of these lessons
Stevenson no doubt mastered.
He may have failed to square
the circle, but he learned to
measure a gracious nature.
If getting at the human juicy
fibre of things, rather than
the dead skeleton had meant
medals, he would have been
hung with them. As it was,
his main achievement was
to escape from the stage
of studentship “not openly
shamed.”

One of the many exploits
on By-path Meadow during
this term of desultory study,
was the penny version-books’

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON
transformation into the printed pages of a college magazine. The magazine, though it failed, cannot altogether be accounted a *fiasco*, since *An Old Scotch Gardener* is recast from its pages. Other of his by-path doings were his strolls in the Calton Churchyard. As a child at Colinton he had hobnobbed with gravestones, and in the grim town cemetery he renewed the sombre fellowship. Thither he "went to be unhappy" and to moralise the spectacle into a thousand similes.

But all this time there

THE HOME AND EARLY
were the legitimate roving-
grounds, the holiday excur-
sions, and the long summers
in the Pentlands. Among
his loafing-gear, you may be
sure, the straight-jacket of
convention did not figure.
Even in town, that hung
mostly in his wardrobe; in-
deed, it had a brand new
look to the end. These were
his days of velveteen coat,
long hair, and straw hat.
Stretched on the warm grass
or heather, he continued to
eschew with devoutness the
busyness which he con-
sidered an indication of
defective vitality. He cul-

SWANSTON
COTTAGE





THE GARDEN
SWANSTON





W. Brown
95

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

tivated the leasures of the mind.

A summer house was rented by his family at Swanston. This curiously secluded village lies behind a farmhouse at the base of the northern spur of the Pentlands, which rise gravely green from the plains, and, with many a peak and scaur and loch, file in solemn line to the sunset. The house is built for happiness. You reach it by a shady sidewalk. Its walls are washed with warm ochre. It is modest in size and well-shaped, like a miniature

THE HOME AND EARLY mansion-house, and free from all taint of villadom. The back ground is a steep bit of brae, stopping short about the level of the roof. To the side is a gloom of pines, from which drop the "rocks overgrown with clematis." The trim garden falls down a southern slope, that begins to curve up at its bottom to the gigantic parallel ridges of Caerketton. In summer these tower for a thousand feet, in winter they are met half-way by the mist, whence fancy can follow them at will to the very gates of heaven.

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

There Stevenson watched the ways of man and beast, and the kindly doings of Nature, weaving romances and working with words. There, on some high knoll, the "sea-beholding city in the distance, and the world spread out like a piece of travel" below, he would sit "like Jupiter on Olympus, and look down on Men's life."

Two of his best character studies hail from here. Every one knows John Todd, the Swanston shepherd, and Robert Young, the old Scotch gardener. The latter has a

THE HOME AND EARLY summer setting. With his spare form and old straw hat, in the garden in the lap of the hill, among his sun-flowers, dahlias, wall-flowers, and roses, descanting in antique Scripture idiom on the great situations he has filled, till he "shrank the very place he cultivated," he moves as deathless as the sunshine.

John Todd looks out at us from the grimmer frame of the wintry hills. To describe him would be to quote what all have read, or to attempt a weak paraphrase. One can imagine the tingling delight

SWANSTON
VILLAGE





NIGHT SCENE ON
HALKERSIDE





HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

of those brave trappings in his company, over Halkerside during the solitary winter spent at Swans-ton. The early darkening, and the weird stretch of snow-landscape beneath it; the excitement of the sheep review; the racy talk of the wrathful, kindly man, enthralling with tales of the old droving days, and with dog stories that would have shamed any sporting paper. Then, the bracing ordeal over, there is the night in the lamp-lit snugger, the croon of the wind along the moors, mingling with the

THE HOME AND EARLY
musketry of Dumas. En-
viable the life that could fill
itself at such simple sources,
and turn all water into
wine!

Alas! here, too, the old
house

“wears an altered face
And shields a stranger race.”

Here, too, phantom voices
haunt the air. While I write
the sky is bleak. Nature's
shutters are up. White hills
and plains lie sheeted like
a dwelling closed in the ab-
sence of its master. The
west wind will blow again
and air them, and the
sun season them with its

HAUNTS OF STEVENSON

fires, but one tenant has departed to "come again no more."

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