

РОБЕРТ СТИВЕНСОН

RECORDS OF A
FAMILY OF
ENGINEERS

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Records of a Family of Engineers

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Records of a Family of Engineers:

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Robert Louis Stevenson Records of a Family of Engineers

INTRODUCTION: THE SURNAME OF STEVENSON

From the thirteenth century onwards, the name, under the various disguises of Stevinstoun, Stevensoun, Stevensonne, Stenesone, and Stewinsoune, spread across Scotland from the mouth of the Firth of Forth to the mouth of the Firth of Clyde. Four times at least it occurs as a place-name. There is a parish of Stevenston in Cunningham; a second place of the name in the Barony of Bothwell in Lanark; a third on Lyne, above Drochil Castle; the fourth on the Tyne, near Traprain Law. Stevenson of Stevenson (co. Lanark) swore fealty to Edward I in 1296, and the last of that family died after the Restoration. Stevensons of Hirdmanshiels, in Midlothian, rode in the Bishops' Raid of Aberlady, served as jurors, stood bail for neighbours – Hunter of Polwood, for instance – and became extinct about the same period, or possibly earlier. A Stevenson of Luthrie and another of Pitroddie make their bows, give their names, and vanish. And

by the year 1700 it does not appear that any acre of Scots land was vested in any Stevenson.¹

Here is, so far, a melancholy picture of backward progress, and a family posting towards extinction. But the law (however administered, and I am bound to aver that, in Scotland, ‘it couldna weel be waur’) acts as a kind of dredge, and with dispassionate impartiality brings up into the light of day, and shows us for a moment, in the jury-box or on the gallows, the creeping things of the past. By these broken glimpses we are able to trace the existence of many other and more inglorious Stevensons, picking a private way through the brawl that makes Scots history. They were members of Parliament for Peebles, Stirling, Pittenweem, Kilrenny, and Inverurie. We find them burgesses of Edinburgh; indwellers in Biggar, Perth, and Dalkeith. Thomas was the forester of Newbattle Park, Gavin was a baker, John a maltman, Francis a surgeon, and ‘Schir William’ a priest. In the feuds of Humes and Heatleys, Cunninghams, Montgomeries, Mures, Ogilvies, and Turnbells, we find them inconspicuously involved, and apparently getting rather better than they gave. Schir William (reverend gentleman) was cruellie slaughtered on the Links of Kincraig in 1582; James (‘in the mill-town of Roberton’), murdered in 1590; Archibald (‘in Gallowfarren’), killed with shots of pistols and hagbuts in 1608. Three violent deaths in about seventy years, against which

¹ An error: Stevensons owned at this date the barony of Dolphingston in Haddingtonshire, Montgrennan in Ayrshire, and several other lesser places.

we can only put the case of Thomas, servant to Hume of Cowden Knowes, who was arraigned with his two young masters for the death of the Bastard of Mellerstanes in 1569. John ('in Dalkeith') stood sentry without Holyrood while the banded lords were despatching Rizzio within. William, at the ringing of Perth bell, ran before Gowrie House 'with ane sword, and, entering to the yearde, saw George Craiggingilt with ane twa-handit sword and utheris nychtbouris; at quilk time James Boig cryit ower ane wynds, "Awa hame! ye will all be hangit"' – a piece of advice which William took, and immediately 'depairtit.' John got a maid with child to him in Biggar, and seemingly deserted her; she was hanged on the Castle Hill for infanticide, June 1614; and Martin, elder in Dalkeith, eternally disgraced the name by signing witness in a witch trial, 1661. These are two of our black sheep.² Under the Restoration, one Stevenson was a bailie in Edinburgh, and another the lessee of the Canonmills. There were at the same period two physicians of the name in Edinburgh, one of whom, Dr. Archibald, appears to have been a famous man in his day and generation. The Court had continual need of him; it was he who reported, for instance, on the state of Rumbold; and he was for some time in the enjoyment of a pension of a thousand pounds Scots (about eighty pounds sterling) at a time when five hundred pounds is described as 'an opulent future.' I do not know if I should be glad or sorry that he failed to keep favour; but on 6th January 1682 (rather a cheerless New Year's present) his pension

² Pitcairn's *Criminal Trials*, at large. – [R. L. S.]

was expunged.³ There need be no doubt, at least, of my exultation at the fact that he was knighted and recorded arms. Not quite so genteel, but still in public life, Hugh was Under-Clerk to the Privy Council, and liked being so extremely. I gather this from his conduct in September 1681, when, with all the lords and their servants, he took the woful and soul-destroying Test, swearing it ‘word by word upon his knees.’ And, behold! it was in vain, for Hugh was turned out of his small post in 1684.⁴ Sir Archibald and Hugh were both plainly inclined to be trimmers; but there was one witness of the name of Stevenson who held high the banner of the Covenant – John, ‘Land-Labourer,’⁵ in the parish of Daily, in Carrick,’ that ‘eminently pious man.’ He seems to have been a poor sickly soul, and shows himself disabled with scrofula, and prostrate and groaning aloud with fever; but the enthusiasm of the martyr burned high within him.

‘I was made to take joyfully the spoiling of my goods, and with pleasure for His name’s sake wandered in deserts and in mountains, in dens and caves of the earth. I lay four months in the coldest season of the year in a haystack in my father’s garden, and a whole February in the open fields not far from Camragen, and this I did without the least prejudice from the night air; one night, when lying in the fields near to the Carrick-Miln, I was all covered with snow in the morning. Many nights have I lain

³ Fountainhall’s *Decisions*, vol. i. pp. 56, 132, 186, 204, 368. – [R. L. S.]

⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 158, 299. – [R. L. S.]

⁵ Working farmer: Fr. *laboureur*.

with pleasure in the churchyard of Old Daily, and made a grave my pillow; frequently have I resorted to the old walls about the glen, near to Camragen, and there sweetly rested.' The visible band of God protected and directed him. Dragoons were turned aside from the bramble-bush where he lay hidden. Miracles were performed for his behoof. 'I got a horse and a woman to carry the child, and came to the same mountain, where I wandered by the mist before; it is commonly known by the name of Kellsrhins: when we came to go up the mountain, there came on a great rain, which we thought was the occasion of the child's weeping, and she wept so bitterly, that all we could do could not divert her from it, so that she was ready to burst. When we got to the top of the mountain, where the Lord had been formerly kind to my soul in prayer, I looked round me for a stone, and espying one, I went and brought it. When the woman with me saw me set down the stone, she smiled, and asked what I was going to do with it. I told her I was going to set it up as my Ebenezer, because hitherto, and in that place, the Lord had formerly helped, and I hoped would yet help. The rain still continuing, the child weeping bitterly, I went to prayer, and no sooner did I cry to God, but the child gave over weeping, and when we got up from prayer, the rain was pouring down on every side, but in the way where we were to go there fell not one drop; the place not rained on was as big as an ordinary avenue.' And so great a saint was the natural butt of Satan's persecutions. 'I retired to the fields for secret prayer about mid-night. When I went to pray I was much straitened, and

could not get one request, but “Lord pity,” “Lord help”; this I came over frequently; at length the terror of Satan fell on me in a high degree, and all I could say even then was – “Lord help.” I continued in the duty for some time, notwithstanding of this terror. At length I got up to my feet, and the terror still increased, then the enemy took me by the arm-pits, and seemed to lift me up by my arms. I saw a loch just before me, and I concluded he designed to throw me there by force; and had he got leave to do so, it might have brought a great reproach upon religion.⁶ But it was otherwise ordered, and the cause of piety escaped that danger.⁷

On the whole, the Stevensons may be described as decent, reputable folk, following honest trades – millers, maltsters, and doctors, playing the character parts in the Waverley Novels with propriety, if without distinction; and to an orphan looking about him in the world for a potential ancestry, offering a plain and quite unadorned refuge, equally free from shame and glory. John, the land-labourer, is the one living and memorable figure, and he, alas! cannot possibly be more near than a collateral. It was on August 12, 1678, that he heard Mr. John Welsh on the Craighdowhill, and ‘took the heavens, earth, and sun in the firmament that was shining on us, as also the ambassador who

⁶ This John Stevenson was not the only ‘witness’ of the name; other Stevensons were actually killed during the persecutions, in the Glen of Trool, on Pentland, etc.; and it is very possible that the author’s own ancestor was one of the mounted party embodied by Muir of Caldwell, only a day too late for Pentland.

⁷ Wodrow Society’s *Select Biographies*, vol. ii. – [R. L. S.]

made the offer, and *the clerk who raised the psalms*, to witness that I did give myself away to the Lord in a personal and perpetual covenant never to be forgotten'; and already, in 1675, the birth of my direct ascendant was registered in Glasgow. So that I have been pursuing ancestors too far down; and John the land-labourer is debarred me, and I must relinquish from the trophies of my house his *rare soul-strengthening and comforting cordial*. It is the same case with the Edinburgh bailie and the miller of the Canonmills, worthy man! and with that public character, Hugh the Under-Clerk, and, more than all, with Sir Archibald, the physician, who recorded arms. And I am reduced to a family of inconspicuous maltsters in what was then the clean and handsome little city on the Clyde.

The name has a certain air of being Norse. But the story of Scottish nomenclature is confounded by a continual process of translation and half-translation from the Gaelic which in olden days may have been sometimes reversed. Roy becomes Reid; Gow, Smith. A great Highland clan uses the name of Robertson; a sept in Appin that of Livingstone; Maclean in Glencoe answers to Johnstone at Lockerby. And we find such hybrids as Macalexander for Macallister. There is but one rule to be deduced: that however uncompromisingly Saxon a name may appear, you can never be sure it does not designate a Celt. My great-grandfather wrote the name *Stevenson* but pronounced it *Steenson*, after the fashion of the immortal minstrel in *Redgauntlet*; and this elision of a medial consonant appears a

Gaelic process; and, curiously enough, I have come across no less than two Gaelic forms: *John Macstophane cordinerius in Crossraguel*, 1573, and *William M'Steen* in Dunskeith (co. Ross), 1605. Stevenson, Steenson, Macstophane, M'Steen: which is the original? which the translation? Or were these separate creations of the patronymic, some English, some Gaelic? The curiously compact territory in which we find them seated – Ayr, Lanark, Peebles, Stirling, Perth, Fife, and the Lothians – would seem to forbid the supposition.⁸

‘Stevenson – or according to tradition of one of the proscribed of the clan MacGregor, who was born among the willows or in a hill-side sheep-pen – “Son of my love,” a heraldic bar sinister, but history reveals a reason for the birth among the willows far other than the sinister aspect of the name’: these are the dark words of Mr. Cosmo Innes; but history or tradition, being interrogated, tells a somewhat tangled tale. The heir of Macgregor of Glenorchy, murdered about 1858 by the Argyll Campbells, appears to have been the original ‘Son of my love’; and his more loyal clansmen took the name to fight under. It may be supposed the story of their resistance became popular, and the name in some sort identified with the idea of opposition to the Campbells. Twice afterwards, on some renewed aggression, in 1502 and 1552, we find the Macgregors again banding

⁸ Though the districts here named are those in which the name of Stevenson is most common, it is in point of fact far more wide-spread than the text indicates, and occurs from Dumfries and Berwickshire to Aberdeen and Orkney.

themselves into a sept of 'Sons of my love'; and when the great disaster fell on them in 1603, the whole original legend reappears, and we have the heir of Alaster of Glenstrae born 'among the willows' of a fugitive mother, and the more loyal clansmen again rallying under the name of Stevenson. A story would not be told so often unless it had some base in fact; nor (if there were no bond at all between the Red Macgregors and the Stevensons) would that extraneous and somewhat uncouth name be so much repeated in the legends of the Children of the Mist.

But I am enabled, by my very lively and obliging correspondent, Mr. George A. Macgregor Stevenson of New York, to give an actual instance. His grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, and great-great-great-grandfather, all used the names of Macgregor and Stevenson as occasion served; being perhaps Macgregor by night and Stevenson by day. The great-great-great-grandfather was a mighty man of his hands, marched with the clan in the 'Forty-five, and returned with *spolia opima* in the shape of a sword, which he had wrested from an officer in the retreat, and which is in the possession of my correspondent to this day. His great-grandson (the grandfather of my correspondent), being converted to Methodism by some wayside preacher, discarded in a moment his name, his old nature, and his political principles, and with the zeal of a proselyte sealed his adherence to the Protestant Succession by baptising his next son George. This George became the publisher and editor of the *Wesleyan Times*.

His children were brought up in ignorance of their Highland pedigree; and my correspondent was puzzled to overhear his father speak of him as a true Macgregor, and amazed to find, in rummaging about that peaceful and pious house, the sword of the Hanoverian officer. After he was grown up and was better informed of his descent, 'I frequently asked my father,' he writes, 'why he did not use the name of Macgregor; his replies were significant, and give a picture of the man: "It isn't a good *Methodist* name. You can use it, but it will do you no *good*."' Yet the old gentleman, by way of pleasantry, used to announce himself to friends as "Colonel Macgregor."

Here, then, are certain Macgregors habitually using the name of Stevenson, and at last, under the influence of Methodism, adopting it entirely. Doubtless a proscribed clan could not be particular; they took a name as a man takes an umbrella against a shower; as Rob Roy took Campbell, and his son took Drummond. But this case is different; Stevenson was not taken and left – it was consistently adhered to. It does not in the least follow that all Stevensons are of the clan Alpin; but it does follow that some may be. And I cannot conceal from myself the possibility that James Stevenson in Glasgow, my first authentic ancestor, may have had a Highland *alias* upon his conscience and a claymore in his back parlour.

To one more tradition I may allude, that we are somehow descended from a French barber-surgeon who came to St. Andrews in the service of one of the Cardinal Beaton. No details

were added. But the very name of France was so detested in my family for three generations, that I am tempted to suppose there may be something in it.⁹

⁹ Mr. J. H. Stevenson is satisfied that these speculations as to a possible Norse, Highland, or French origin are vain. All we know about the engineer family is that it was sprung from a stock of Westland Whigs settled in the latter part of the seventeenth century in the parish of Neilston, as mentioned at the beginning of the next chapter. It may be noted that the Ayrshire parish of Stevenston, the lands of which are said to have received the name in the twelfth century, lies within thirteen miles south-west of this place. The lands of Stevenson in Lanarkshire first mentioned in the next century, in the Ragman Roll, lie within twenty miles east.

CHAPTER I: DOMESTIC ANNALS

It is believed that in 1665, James Stevenson in Nether Carsewell, parish of Neilston, county of Renfrew, and presumably a tenant farmer, married one Jean Keir; and in 1675, without doubt, there was born to these two a son Robert, possibly a maltster in Glasgow. In 1710, Robert married, for a second time, Elizabeth Cumming, and there was born to them, in 1720, another Robert, certainly a maltster in Glasgow. In 1742, Robert the second married Margaret Fulton (Margret, she called herself), by whom he had ten children, among whom were Hugh, born February 1749, and Alan, born June 1752.

With these two brothers my story begins. Their deaths were simultaneous; their lives unusually brief and full. Tradition whispered me in childhood they were the owners of an islet near St. Kitts; and it is certain they had risen to be at the head of considerable interests in the West Indies, which Hugh managed abroad and Alan at home, at an age when others are still curveting a clerk's stool. My kinsman, Mr. Stevenson of Stirling, has heard his father mention that there had been 'something romantic' about Alan's marriage: and, alas! he has forgotten what. It was early at least. His wife was Jean, daughter of David Lillie, a builder in Glasgow, and several times 'Deacon of the Wrights': the date of the marriage has not reached me; but on 8th June 1772, when Robert, the only child of the union, was born, the

husband and father had scarce passed, or had not yet attained, his twentieth year. Here was a youth making haste to give hostages to fortune. But this early scene of prosperity in love and business was on the point of closing.

There hung in the house of this young family, and successively in those of my grandfather and father, an oil painting of a ship of many tons burthen. Doubtless the brothers had an interest in the vessel; I was told she had belonged to them outright; and the picture was preserved through years of hardship, and remains to this day in the possession of the family, the only memorial of my great-grandsire Alan. It was on this ship that he sailed on his last adventure, summoned to the West Indies by Hugh. An agent had proved unfaithful on a serious scale; and it used to be told me in my childhood how the brothers pursued him from one island to another in an open boat, were exposed to the pernicious dews of the tropics, and simultaneously struck down. The dates and places of their deaths (now before me) would seem to indicate a more scattered and prolonged pursuit: Hugh, on the 16th April 1774, in Tobago, within sight of Trinidad; Alan, so late as 26th May, and so far away as ‘Santt Kittes,’ in the Leeward Islands – both, says the family Bible, ‘of a fiver’(!). The death of Hugh was probably announced by Alan in a letter, to which we may refer the details of the open boat and the dew. Thus, at least, in something like the course of post, both were called away, the one twenty-five, the other twenty-two; their brief generation became extinct, their short-lived house fell

with them; and ‘in these lawless parts and lawless times’ – the words are my grandfather’s – their property was stolen or became involved. Many years later, I understand some small recovery to have been made; but at the moment almost the whole means of the family seem to have perished with the young merchants. On the 27th April, eleven days after Hugh Stevenson, twenty-nine before Alan, died David Lillie, the Deacon of the Wrights; so that mother and son were orphaned in one month. Thus, from a few scraps of paper bearing little beyond dates, we construct the outlines of the tragedy that shadowed the cradle of Robert Stevenson.

Jean Lillie was a young woman of strong sense, well fitted to contend with poverty, and of a pious disposition, which it is like that these misfortunes heated. Like so many other widowed Scots-women, she vowed her son should wag his head in a pulpit; but her means were inadequate to her ambition. A charity school, and some time under a Mr. M’Intyre, ‘a famous linguist,’ were all she could afford in the way of education to the would-be minister. He learned no Greek; in one place he mentions that the Orations of Cicero were his highest book in Latin; in another that he had ‘delighted’ in Virgil and Horace; but his delight could never have been scholarly. This appears to have been the whole of his training previous to an event which changed his own destiny and moulded that of his descendants – the second marriage of his mother.

There was a Merchant-Burgess of Edinburgh of the name

of Thomas Smith. The Smith pedigree has been traced a little more particularly than the Stevensons', with a similar dearth of illustrious names. One character seems to have appeared, indeed, for a moment at the wings of history: a skipper of Dundee who smuggled over some Jacobite big-wig at the time of the 'Fifteen, and was afterwards drowned in Dundee harbour while going on board his ship. With this exception, the generations of the Smiths present no conceivable interest even to a descendant; and Thomas, of Edinburgh, was the first to issue from respectable obscurity. His father, a skipper out of Broughty Ferry, was drowned at sea while Thomas was still young. He seems to have owned a ship or two – whalers, I suppose, or coasters – and to have been a member of the Dundee Trinity House, whatever that implies. On his death the widow remained in Broughty, and the son came to push his future in Edinburgh. There is a story told of him in the family which I repeat here because I shall have to tell later on a similar, but more perfectly authenticated, experience of his stepson, Robert Stevenson. Word reached Thomas that his mother was unwell, and he prepared to leave for Broughty on the morrow. It was between two and three in the morning, and the early northern daylight was already clear, when he awoke and beheld the curtains at the bed-foot drawn aside and his mother appear in the interval, smile upon him for a moment, and then vanish. The sequel is stereo-type; he took the time by his watch, and arrived at Broughty to learn it was the very moment of her death. The incident is at least curious in having

happened to such a person – as the tale is being told of him. In all else, he appears as a man ardent, passionate, practical, designed for affairs and prospering in them far beyond the average. He founded a solid business in lamps and oils, and was the sole proprietor of a concern called the Greenside Company's Works – 'a multifarious concern it was,' writes my cousin, Professor Swan, 'of tinsmiths, coppersmiths, brass-founders, blacksmiths, and japanners.' He was also, it seems, a shipowner and underwriter. He built himself 'a land' – Nos. 1 and 2 Baxter's Place, then no such unfashionable neighbourhood – and died, leaving his only son in easy circumstances, and giving to his three surviving daughters portions of five thousand pounds and upwards. There is no standard of success in life; but in one of its meanings, this is to succeed.

In what we know of his opinions, he makes a figure highly characteristic of the time. A high Tory and patriot, a captain – so I find it in my notes – of Edinburgh Spearman, and on duty in the Castle during the Muir and Palmer troubles, he bequeathed to his descendants a bloodless sword and a somewhat violent tradition, both long preserved. The judge who sat on Muir and Palmer, the famous Braxfield, let fall from the bench the *obiter dictum* – 'I never liked the French all my days, but now I hate them.' If Thomas Smith, the Edinburgh Spearman, were in court, he must have been tempted to applaud. The people of that land were his abhorrence; he loathed Buonaparte like Antichrist. Towards the end he fell into a kind of dotage; his family must entertain him

with games of tin soldiers, which he took a childish pleasure to array and overset; but those who played with him must be upon their guard, for if his side, which was always that of the English against the French, should chance to be defeated, there would be trouble in Baxter's Place. For these opinions he may almost be said to have suffered. Baptised and brought up in the Church of Scotland, he had, upon some conscientious scruple, joined the communion of the Baptists. Like other Nonconformists, these were inclined to the Liberal side in politics, and, at least in the beginning, regarded Buonaparte as a deliverer. From the time of his joining the Spearmen, Thomas Smith became in consequence a bugbear to his brethren in the faith. 'They that take the sword shall perish with the sword,' they told him; they gave him 'no rest'; 'his position became intolerable'; it was plain he must choose between his political and his religious tenets; and in the last years of his life, about 1812, he returned to the Church of his fathers.

August 1786 was the date of his chief advancement, when, having designed a system of oil lights to take the place of the primitive coal fires before in use, he was dubbed engineer to the newly-formed Board of Northern Lighthouses. Not only were his fortunes bettered by the appointment, but he was introduced to a new and wider field for the exercise of his abilities, and a new way of life highly agreeable to his active constitution. He seems to have rejoiced in the long journeys, and to have combined them with the practice of field sports. 'A tall, stout man coming ashore with his gun over his arm' – so he was described to my father – the

only description that has come down to me by a light-keeper old in the service. Nor did this change come alone. On the 9th July of the same year, Thomas Smith had been left for the second time a widower. As he was still but thirty-three years old, prospering in his affairs, newly advanced in the world, and encumbered at the time with a family of children, five in number, it was natural that he should entertain the notion of another wife. Expeditious in business, he was no less so in his choice; and it was not later than June 1787 – for my grandfather is described as still in his fifteenth year – that he married the widow of Alan Stevenson.

The perilous experiment of bringing together two families for once succeeded. Mr. Smith's two eldest daughters, Jean and Janet, fervent in piety, unwearied in kind deeds, were well qualified both to appreciate and to attract the stepmother; and her son, on the other hand, seems to have found immediate favour in the eyes of Mr. Smith. It is, perhaps, easy to exaggerate the ready-made resemblances; the tired woman must have done much to fashion girls who were under ten; the man, lusty and opinionated, must have stamped a strong impression on the boy of fifteen. But the cleavage of the family was too marked, the identity of character and interest produced between the two men on the one hand, and the three women on the other, was too complete to have been the result of influence alone. Particular bonds of union must have pre-existed on each side. And there is no doubt that the man and the boy met with common ambitions, and a common bent, to the practice of that which had not so long before acquired

the name of civil engineering.

For the profession which is now so thronged, famous, and influential, was then a thing of yesterday. My grandfather had an anecdote of Smeaton, probably learned from John Clerk of Eldin, their common friend. Smeaton was asked by the Duke of Argyll to visit the West Highland coast for a professional purpose. He refused, appalled, it seems, by the rough travelling. 'You can recommend some other fit person?' asked the Duke. 'No,' said Smeaton, 'I'm sorry I can't.' 'What!' cried the Duke, 'a profession with only one man in it! Pray, who taught you?' 'Why,' said Smeaton, 'I believe I may say I was self-taught, an't please your grace.' Smeaton, at the date of Thomas Smith's third marriage, was yet living; and as the one had grown to the new profession from his place at the instrument-maker's, the other was beginning to enter it by the way of his trade. The engineer of to-day is confronted with a library of acquired results; tables and formulae to the value of folios full have been calculated and recorded; and the student finds everywhere in front of him the footprints of the pioneers. In the eighteenth century the field was largely unexplored; the engineer must read with his own eyes the face of nature; he arose a volunteer, from the workshop or the mill, to undertake works which were at once inventions and adventures. It was not a science then – it was a living art; and it visibly grew under the eyes and between the hands of its practitioners.

The charm of such an occupation was strongly felt by

stepfather and stepson. It chanced that Thomas Smith was a reformer; the superiority of his proposed lamp and reflectors over open fires of coal secured his appointment; and no sooner had he set his hand to the task than the interest of that employment mastered him. The vacant stage on which he was to act, and where all had yet to be created – the greatness of the difficulties, the smallness of the means intrusted him – would rouse a man of his disposition like a call to battle. The lad introduced by marriage under his roof was of a character to sympathise; the public usefulness of the service would appeal to his judgment, the perpetual need for fresh expedients stimulate his ingenuity. And there was another attraction which, in the younger man at least, appealed to, and perhaps first aroused, a profound and enduring sentiment of romance: I mean the attraction of the life. The seas into which his labours carried the new engineer were still scarce charted, the coasts still dark; his way on shore was often far beyond the convenience of any road; the isles in which he must sojourn were still partly savage. He must toss much in boats; he must often adventure on horseback by the dubious bridle-track through unfrequented wildernesses; he must sometimes plant his lighthouse in the very camp of wreckers; and he was continually enforced to the vicissitudes of outdoor life. The joy of my grandfather in this career was strong as the love of woman. It lasted him through youth and manhood, it burned strong in age, and at the approach of death his last yearning was to renew these loved experiences. What he

felt himself he continued to attribute to all around him. And to this supposed sentiment in others I find him continually, almost pathetically, appealing; often in vain.

Snared by these interests, the boy seems to have become almost at once the eager confidant and adviser of his new connection; the Church, if he had ever entertained the prospect very warmly, faded from his view; and at the age of nineteen I find him already in a post of some authority, superintending the construction of the lighthouse on the isle of Little Cumbrae, in the Firth of Clyde. The change of aim seems to have caused or been accompanied by a change of character. It sounds absurd to couple the name of my grandfather with the word indolence; but the lad who had been destined from the cradle to the Church, and who had attained the age of fifteen without acquiring more than a moderate knowledge of Latin, was at least no unusual student. And from the day of his charge at Little Cumbrae he steps before us what he remained until the end, a man of the most zealous industry, greedy of occupation, greedy of knowledge, a stern husband of time, a reader, a writer, unflagging in his task of self-improvement. Thenceforward his summers were spent directing works and ruling workmen, now in uninhabited, now in half-savage islands; his winters were set apart, first at the Andersonian Institution, then at the University of Edinburgh to improve himself in mathematics, chemistry, natural history, agriculture, moral philosophy, and logic; a bearded student – although no doubt scrupulously shaved. I find one reference to his

years in class which will have a meaning for all who have studied in Scottish Universities. He mentions a recommendation made by the professor of logic. 'The high-school men,' he writes, 'and *bearded men like myself*, were all attention.' If my grandfather were throughout life a thought too studious of the art of getting on, much must be forgiven to the bearded and belated student who looked across, with a sense of difference, at 'the high-school men.' Here was a gulf to be crossed; but already he could feel that he had made a beginning, and that must have been a proud hour when he devoted his earliest earnings to the repayment of the charitable foundation in which he had received the rudiments of knowledge.

In yet another way he followed the example of his father-in-law, and from 1794 to 1807, when the affairs of the Bell Rock made it necessary for him to resign, he served in different corps of volunteers. In the last of these he rose to a position of distinction, no less than captain of the Grenadier Company, and his colonel, in accepting his resignation, entreated he would do them 'the favour of continuing as an honorary member of a corps which has been so much indebted for your zeal and exertions.'

To very pious women the men of the house are apt to appear worldly. The wife, as she puts on her new bonnet before church, is apt to sigh over that assiduity which enabled her husband to pay the milliner's bill. And in the household of the Smiths and Stevensons the women were not only extremely pious, but the men were in reality a trifle worldly. Religious they both were;

conscious, like all Scots, of the fragility and unreality of that scene in which we play our uncomprehended parts; like all Scots, realising daily and hourly the sense of another will than ours and a perpetual direction in the affairs of life. But the current of their endeavours flowed in a more obvious channel. They had got on so far; to get on further was their next ambition – to gather wealth, to rise in society, to leave their descendants higher than themselves, to be (in some sense) among the founders of families. Scott was in the same town nourishing similar dreams. But in the eyes of the women these dreams would be foolish and idolatrous.

I have before me some volumes of old letters addressed to Mrs. Smith and the two girls, her favourites, which depict in a strong light their characters and the society in which they moved.

‘My very dear and much esteemed Friend,’ writes one correspondent, ‘this day being the anniversary of our acquaintance, I feel inclined to address you; but where shall I find words to express the feelings of a grateful *Heart*, first to the Lord who graciously inclined you on this day last year to notice an afflicted Stranger providentially cast in your way far from any Earthly friend?.. Methinks I shall hear him say unto you, “Inasmuch as ye shewed kindness to my afflicted handmaiden, ye did it unto me.”’

This is to Jean; but the same afflicted lady wrote indifferently to Jean, to Janet, and to Ms. Smith, whom she calls ‘my Edinburgh mother.’ It is plain the three were as one person, moving to acts of kindness, like the Graces, inarmed. Too much

stress must not be laid on the style of this correspondence; Clarinda survived, not far away, and may have met the ladies on the Calton Hill; and many of the writers appear, underneath the conventions of the period, to be genuinely moved. But what unpleasantly strikes a reader is, that these devout unfortunates found a revenue in their devotion. It is everywhere the same tale; on the side of the soft-hearted ladies, substantial acts of help; on the side of the correspondents, affection, italics, texts, ecstasies, and imperfect spelling. When a midwife is recommended, not at all for proficiency in her important art, but because she has ‘a sister whom I [the correspondent] esteem and respect, and [who] is a spiritual daughter of my Hond Father in the Gosple,’ the mask seems to be torn off, and the wages of godliness appear too openly. Capacity is a secondary matter in a midwife, temper in a servant, affection in a daughter, and the repetition of a shibboleth fulfils the law. Common decency is at times forgot in the same page with the most sanctified advice and aspiration. Thus I am introduced to a correspondent who appears to have been at the time the housekeeper at Invermay, and who writes to condole with my grandmother in a season of distress. For nearly half a sheet she keeps to the point with an excellent discretion in language then suddenly breaks out:

‘It was fully my intention to have left this at Martinmass, but the Lord fixes the bounds of our habitation. I have had more need of patience in my situation here than in any other, partly from the very violent, unsteady, deceitful temper of

the Mistress of the Family, and also from the state of the house. It was in a train of repair when I came here two years ago, and is still in Confusion. There is above six Thousand Pounds' worth of Furniture come from London to be put up when the rooms are completely finished; and then, woe be to the Person who is Housekeeper at Invermay!

And by the tail of the document, which is torn, I see she goes on to ask the bereaved family to seek her a new place. It is extraordinary that people should have been so deceived in so careless an impostor; that a few sprinkled 'God willings' should have blinded them to the essence of this venomous letter; and that they should have been at the pains to bind it in with others (many of them highly touching) in their memorial of harrowing days. But the good ladies were without guile and without suspicion; they were victims marked for the axe, and the religious impostors snuffed up the wind as they drew near.

I have referred above to my grandmother; it was no slip of the pen: for by an extraordinary arrangement, in which it is hard not to suspect the managing hand of a mother, Jean Smith became the wife of Robert Stevenson. Mrs. Smith had failed in her design to make her son a minister, and she saw him daily more immersed in business and worldly ambition. One thing remained that she might do: she might secure for him a godly wife, that great means of sanctification; and she had two under her hand, trained by herself, her dear friends and daughters both in law and love – Jean and Janet. Jean's complexion was extremely pale,

Janet's was florid; my grandmother's nose was straight, my great-aunt's aquiline; but by the sound of the voice, not even a son was able to distinguish one from other. The marriage of a man of twenty-seven and a girl of twenty who have lived for twelve years as brother and sister, is difficult to conceive. It took place, however, and thus in 1799 the family was still further cemented by the union of a representative of the male or worldly element with one of the female and devout.

This essential difference remained unbridged, yet never diminished the strength of their relation. My grandfather pursued his design of advancing in the world with some measure of success; rose to distinction in his calling, grew to be the familiar of members of Parliament, judges of the Court of Session, and 'landed gentlemen'; learned a ready address, had a flow of interesting conversation, and when he was referred to as 'a highly respectable *bourgeois*,' resented the description. My grandmother remained to the end devout and unambitious, occupied with her Bible, her children, and her house; easily shocked, and associating largely with a clique of godly parasites. I do not know if she called in the midwife already referred to; but the principle on which that lady was recommended, she accepted fully. The cook was a godly woman, the butcher a Christian man, and the table suffered. The scene has been often described to me of my grandfather sawing with darkened countenance at some indissoluble joint – 'Preserve me, my dear, what kind of a reedy, stringy beast is this?' – of the joint removed, the pudding

substituted and uncovered; and of my grandmother's anxious glance and hasty, deprecatory comment, 'Just mismanaged!' Yet with the invincible obstinacy of soft natures, she would adhere to the godly woman and the Christian man, or find others of the same kidney to replace them. One of her confidants had once a narrow escape; an unwieldy old woman, she had fallen from an outside stair in a close of the Old Town; and my grandmother rejoiced to communicate the providential circumstance that a baker had been passing underneath with his bread upon his head. 'I would like to know what kind of providence the baker thought it!' cried my grandfather.

But the sally must have been unique. In all else that I have heard or read of him, so far from criticising, he was doing his utmost to honour and even to emulate his wife's pronounced opinions. In the only letter which has come to my hand of Thomas Smith's, I find him informing his wife that he was 'in time for afternoon church'; similar assurances or cognate excuses abound in the correspondence of Robert Stevenson; and it is comical and pretty to see the two generations paying the same court to a female piety more highly strung: Thomas Smith to the mother of Robert Stevenson – Robert Stevenson to the daughter of Thomas Smith. And if for once my grandfather suffered himself to be hurried, by his sense of humour and justice, into that remark about the case of Providence and the Baker, I should be sorry for any of his children who should have stumbled into the same attitude of criticism. In the apocalyptic style of the

housekeeper of Invermay, woe be to that person! But there was no fear; husband and sons all entertained for the pious, tender soul the same chivalrous and moved affection. I have spoken with one who remembered her, and who had been the intimate and equal of her sons, and I found this witness had been struck, as I had been, with a sense of disproportion between the warmth of the adoration felt and the nature of the woman, whether as described or observed. She diligently read and marked her Bible; she was a tender nurse; she had a sense of humour under strong control; she talked and found some amusement at her (or rather at her husband's) dinner-parties. It is conceivable that even my grandmother was amenable to the seductions of dress; at least, I find her husband inquiring anxiously about 'the gowns from Glasgow,' and very careful to describe the toilet of the Princess Charlotte, whom he had seen in church 'in a Pelisse and Bonnet of the same colour of cloth as the Boys' Dress jackets, trimmed with blue satin ribbons; the hat or Bonnet, Mr. Spittal said, was a Parisian slouch, and had a plume of three white feathers.' But all this leaves a blank impression, and it is rather by reading backward in these old musty letters, which have moved me now to laughter and now to impatience, that I glean occasional glimpses of how she seemed to her contemporaries, and trace (at work in her queer world of godly and grateful parasites) a mobile and responsive nature. Fashion moulds us, and particularly women, deeper than we sometimes think; but a little while ago, and, in some circles, women stood or fell by the

degree of their appreciation of old pictures; in the early years of the century (and surely with more reason) a character like that of my grandmother warmed, charmed, and subdued, like a strain of music, the hearts of the men of her own household. And there is little doubt that Mrs. Smith, as she looked on at the domestic life of her son and her stepdaughter, and numbered the heads in their increasing nursery, must have breathed fervent thanks to her Creator.

Yet this was to be a family unusually tried; it was not for nothing that one of the godly women saluted Miss Janet Smith as ‘a veteran in affliction’; and they were all before middle life experienced in that form of service. By the 1st of January 1808, besides a pair of still-born twins, children had been born and still survived to the young couple. By the 11th two were gone; by the 28th a third had followed, and the two others were still in danger. In the letters of a former nurserymaid – I give her name, Jean Mitchell, *honoris causa*— we are enabled to feel, even at this distance of time, some of the bitterness of that month of bereavement.

‘I have this day received,’ she writes to Miss Janet, ‘the melancholy news of my dear babys’ deaths. My heart is like to break for my dear Mrs. Stevenson. O may she be supported on this trying occasion! I hope her other three babys will be spared to her. O, Miss Smith, did I think when I parted from my sweet babys that I never was to see them more?’ ‘I received,’ she begins her next, ‘the mournful news of my dear Jessie’s death. I also received the hair of my three

sweet babys, which I will preserve as dear to their memories and as a token of Mr. and Mrs. Stevenson's friendship and esteem. At my leisure hours, when the children are in bed, they occupy all my thoughts, I dream of them. About two weeks ago I dreamed that my sweet little Jessie came running to me in her usual way, and I took her in my arms. O my dear babys, were mortal eyes permitted to see them in heaven, we would not repine nor grieve for their loss.'

By the 29th of February, the Reverend John Campbell, a man of obvious sense and human value, but hateful to the present biographer, because he wrote so many letters and conveyed so little information, summed up this first period of affliction in a letter to Miss Smith: 'Your dear sister but a little while ago had a full nursery, and the dear blooming creatures sitting around her table filled her breast with hope that one day they should fill active stations in society and become an ornament in the Church below. But ah!'

Near a hundred years ago these little creatures ceased to be, and for not much less a period the tears have been dried. And to this day, looking in these stitched sheaves of letters, we hear the sound of many soft-hearted women sobbing for the lost. Never was such a massacre of the innocents; teething and chincough and scarlet fever and smallpox ran the round; and little Lillies, and Smiths, and Stevensons fell like moths about a candle; and nearly all the sympathetic correspondents deplore and recall the little losses of their own. 'It is impossible to describe the Heavenly looks of the Dear Babe the three last days of his life,' writes Mrs.

Laurie to Mrs. Smith. 'Never – never, my dear aunt, could I wish to eface the remembrance of this Dear Child. Never, never, my dear aunt!' And so soon the memory of the dead and the dust of the survivors are buried in one grave.

There was another death in 1812; it passes almost unremarked; a single funeral seemed but a small event to these 'veterans in affliction'; and by 1816 the nursery was full again. Seven little hopefuls enlivened the house; some were growing up; to the elder girl my grandfather already wrote notes in current hand at the tail of his letters to his wife: and to the elder boys he had begun to print, with laborious care, sheets of childish gossip and pedantic applications. Here, for instance, under date of 26th May 1816, is part of a mythological account of London, with a moral for the three gentlemen, 'Messieurs Alan, Robert, and James Stevenson,' to whom the document is addressed:

'There are many prisons here like Bridewell, for, like other large towns, there are many bad men here as well as many good men. The natives of London are in general not so tall and strong as the people of Edinburgh, because they have not so much pure air, and instead of taking porridge they eat cakes made with sugar and plums. Here you have thousands of carts to draw timber, thousands of coaches to take you to all parts of the town, and thousands of boats to sail on the river Thames. But you must have money to pay, otherwise you can get nothing. Now the way to get money is, become clever men and men of education, by being good scholars.'

From the same absence, he writes to his wife on a Sunday:

‘It is now about eight o’clock with me, and I imagine you to be busy with the young folks, hearing the questions [*Anglicé*, catechism], and indulging the boys with a chapter from the large Bible, with their interrogations and your answers in the soundest doctrine. I hope James is getting his verse as usual, and that Mary is not forgetting her little *hymn*. While Jeannie will be reading Wotherspoon, or some other suitable and instructive book, I presume our friend, Aunt Mary, will have just arrived with the news of a *throng kirk* [a crowded church] and a great sermon. You may mention, with my compliments to my mother, that I was at St. Paul’s to-day, and attended a very excellent service with Mr. James Lawrie. The text was “Examine and see that ye be in the faith.”’

A twinkle of humour lights up this evocation of the distant scene – the humour of happy men and happy homes. Yet it is penned upon the threshold of fresh sorrow. James and Mary – he of the verse and she of the hymn – did not much more than survive to welcome their returning father. On the 25th, one of the godly women writes to Janet:

‘My dearest beloved madam, when I last parted from you, you was so affected with your affliction [you? or I?] could think of nothing else. But on Saturday, when I went to inquire after your health, how was I startled to hear that dear James was gone! Ah, what is this? My dear benefactors, doing so much good to many, to the Lord, suddenly to be

deprived of their most valued comforts! I was thrown into great perplexity, could do nothing but murmur, why these things were done to such a family. I could not rest, but at midnight, whether spoken [or not] it was presented to my mind – “Those whom ye deplore are walking with me in white.” I conclude from this the Lord saying to sweet Mrs. Stevenson: “I gave them to be brought up for me: well done, good and faithful! they are fully prepared, and now I must present them to my father and your father, to my God and your God.””

It would be hard to lay on flattery with a more sure and daring hand. I quote it as a model of a letter of condolence; be sure it would console. Very different, perhaps quite as welcome, is this from a lighthouse inspector to my grandfather:

‘In reading your letter the trickling tear ran down my cheeks in silent sorrow for your departed dear ones, my sweet little friends. Well do I remember, and you will call to mind, their little innocent and interesting stories. Often have they come round me and taken me by the hand, but alas! I am no more destined to behold them.’

The child who is taken becomes canonised, and the looks of the homeliest babe seem in the retrospect ‘heavenly the three last days of his life.’ But it appears that James and Mary had indeed been children more than usually engaging; a record was preserved a long while in the family of their remarks and ‘little innocent and interesting stories,’ and the blow and the blank were the more sensible.

Early the next month Robert Stevenson must proceed upon his voyage of inspection, part by land, part by sea. He left his wife plunged in low spirits; the thought of his loss, and still more of her concern, was continually present in his mind, and he draws in his letters home an interesting picture of his family relations:

'Windygates Inn, Monday (Postmark July 16th)

'My dearest Jeannie, – While the people of the inn are getting me a little bit of something to eat, I sit down to tell you that I had a most excellent passage across the water, and got to Wemyss at mid-day. I hope the children will be very good, and that Robert will take a course with you to learn his Latin lessons daily; he may, however, read English in company. Let them have strawberries on Saturdays.'

'Westhaven, 17th July.

'I have been occupied to-day at the harbour of Newport, opposite Dundee, and am this far on my way to Arbroath. You may tell the boys that I slept last night in Mr. Steadman's tent. I found my bed rather hard, but the lodgings were otherwise extremely comfortable. The encampment is on the Fife side of the Tay, immediately opposite to Dundee. From the door of the tent you command the most beautiful view of the Firth, both up and down, to a great extent. At night all was serene and still, the sky presented the most beautiful appearance of bright stars, and the morning was ushered in with the song of many little birds.'

'Aberdeen, July 19th.

'I hope, my dear, that you are going out of doors regularly and taking much exercise. I would have you to *make the markets daily*— and by all means to take a seat in the coach once or twice in the week and see what is going on in town. [The family were at the sea-side.] It will be good not to be too great a stranger to the house. It will be rather painful at first, but as it is to be done, I would have you not to be too strange to the house in town.

'Tell the boys that I fell in with a soldier — his name is Henderson — who was twelve years with Lord Wellington and other commanders. He returned very lately with only eightpence-halfpenny in his pocket, and found his father and mother both in life, though they had never heard from him, nor he from them. He carried my great-coat and umbrella a few miles.'

'Fraserburgh, July 20th.

'Fraserburgh is the same dull place which [Auntie] Mary and Jeannie found it. As I am travelling along the coast which they are acquainted with, you had better cause Robert bring down the map from Edinburgh; and it will be a good exercise in geography for the young folks to trace my course. I hope they have entered upon the writing. The library will afford abundance of excellent books, which I wish you would employ a little. I hope you are doing me the favour to go much out with the boys, which will do you much good and prevent them from getting so very much

overheated.’

[To the Boys – Printed.]

‘When I had last the pleasure of writing to you, your dear little brother James and your sweet little sister Mary were still with us. But it has pleased God to remove them to another and a better world, and we must submit to the will of Providence. I must, however, request of you to think sometimes upon them, and to be very careful not to do anything that will displease or vex your mother. It is therefore proper that you do not roamp [Scottish indeed] too much about, and that you learn your lessons.’

‘I went to Fraserburgh and visited Kinnaird Head Lighthouse, which I found in good order. All this time I travelled upon good roads, and paid many a toll-man by the way; but from Fraserburgh to Banff there is no toll-bars, and the road is so bad that I had to walk up and down many a hill, and for want of bridges the horses had to drag the chaise up to the middle of the wheels in water. At Banff I saw a large ship of 300 tons lying on the sands upon her beam-ends, and a wreck for want of a good harbour. Captain Wilson – to whom I beg my compliments – will show you a ship of 300 tons. At the towns of Macduff, Banff, and Portsoy, many of the houses are built of marble, and the rocks on this part of the coast or sea-side are marble. But, my dear Boys, unless marble be polished and dressed, it is a very coarse-looking stone, and has no more beauty than common rock.

As a proof of this, ask the favour of your mother to take you to Thomson's Marble Works in South Leith, and you will see marble in all its stages, and perhaps you may there find Portsoy marble! The use I wish to make of this is to tell you that, without education, a man is just like a block of rough, unpolished marble. Notice, in proof of this, how much Mr. Neill and Mr. M'Gregor [the tutor] know, and observe how little a man knows who is not a good scholar. On my way to Fochabers I passed through many thousand acres of Fir timber, and saw many deer running in these woods.'

[To Mrs. Stevenson.]

Inverness, July 21st.

'I propose going to church in the afternoon, and as I have breakfasted late, I shall afterwards take a walk, and dine about six o'clock. I do not know who is the clergyman here, but I shall think of you all. I travelled in the mail-coach [from Banff] almost alone. While it was daylight I kept the top, and the passing along a country I had never before seen was a considerable amusement. But, my dear, you are all much in my thoughts, and many are the objects which recall the recollection of our tender and engaging children we have so recently lost. We must not, however, repine. I could not for a moment wish any change of circumstances in their case; and in every comparative view of their state, I see the Lord's goodness in removing them from an evil world to an

abode of bliss; and I must earnestly hope that you may be enabled to take such a view of this affliction as to live in the happy prospect of our all meeting again to part no more – and that under such considerations you are getting up your spirits. I wish you would walk about, and by all means go to town, and do not sit much at home.’

Inverness, July 23rd.

‘I am duly favoured with your much-valued letter, and I am happy to find that you are so much with my mother, because that sort of variety has a tendency to occupy the mind, and to keep it from brooding too much upon one subject. Sensibility and tenderness are certainly two of the most interesting and pleasing qualities of the mind. These qualities are also none of the least of the many endearments of the female character. But if that kind of sympathy and pleasing melancholy, which is familiar to us under distress, be much indulged, it becomes habitual, and takes such a hold of the mind as to absorb all the other affections, and unfit us for the duties and proper enjoyments of life. Resignation sinks into a kind of peevish discontent. I am far, however, from thinking there is the least danger of this in your case, my dear; for you have been on all occasions enabled to look upon the fortunes of this life as under the direction of a higher power, and have always preserved that propriety and consistency of conduct in all circumstances which endears your example to your family in particular, and to your friends. I am therefore, my dear, for you to go out much, and to go to the house up-stairs [he means

to go up-stairs in the house, to visit the place of the dead children], and to put yourself in the way of the visits of your friends. I wish you would call on the Miss Grays, and it would be a good thing upon a Saturday to dine with my mother, and take Meggy and all the family with you, and let them have their strawberries in town. The tickets of one of the *old-fashioned coaches* would take you all up, and if the evening were good, they could all walk down, excepting Meggy and little David.'

Inverness, July 25th, 11 p. m.

'Captain Wemyss, of Wemyss, has come to Inverness to go the voyage with me, and as we are sleeping in a double-bedded room, I must no longer transgress. You must remember me the best way you can to the children.'

'On board of the Lighthouse Yacht, July 29th.

'I got to Cromarty yesterday about mid-day, and went to church. It happened to be the sacrament there, and I heard a Mr. Smith at that place conclude the service with a very suitable exhortation. There seemed a great concourse of people, but they had rather an unfortunate day for them at the tent, as it rained a good deal. After drinking tea at the inn, Captain Wemyss accompanied me on board, and we sailed about eight last night. The wind at present being rather a beating one, I think I shall have an opportunity of standing into the bay of Wick, and leaving this letter to let you know my progress and that I am well.'

Lighthouse Yacht, Stornoway, August 4th.

‘To-day we had prayers on deck as usual when at sea. I read the 14th chapter, I think, of Job. Captain Wemyss has been in the habit of doing this on board his own ship, agreeably to the Articles of War. Our passage round the Cape [Cape Wrath] was rather a cross one, and as the wind was northerly, we had a pretty heavy sea, but upon the whole have made a good passage, leaving many vessels behind us in Orkney. I am quite well, my dear; and Captain Wemyss, who has much spirit, and who is much given to observation, and a perfect enthusiast in his profession, enlivens the voyage greatly. Let me entreat you to move about much, and take a walk with the boys to Leith. I think they have still many places to see there, and I wish you would indulge them in this respect. Mr. Scales is the best person I know for showing them the sailcloth-weaving, etc., and he would have great pleasure in undertaking this. My dear, I trust soon to be with you, and that through the goodness of God we shall meet all well.’

‘There are two vessels lying here with emigrants for America, each with eighty people on board, at all ages, from a few days to upwards of sixty! Their prospects must be very forlorn to go with a slender purse for distant and unknown countries.’

Lighthouse Yacht, off Greenock, Aug. 18th.

‘It was after *church-time* before we got here, but we had prayers upon deck on the way up the Clyde. This has, upon

the whole, been a very good voyage, and Captain Wemyss, who enjoys it much, has been an excellent companion; we met with pleasure, and shall part with regret.'

Strange that, after his long experience, my grandfather should have learned so little of the attitude and even the dialect of the spiritually-minded; that after forty-four years in a most religious circle, he could drop without sense of incongruity from a period of accepted phrases to 'trust his wife was *getting up her spirits*,' or think to reassure her as to the character of Captain Wemyss by mentioning that he had read prayers on the deck of his frigate '*agreeably to the Articles of War*'! Yet there is no doubt – and it is one of the most agreeable features of the kindly series – that he was doing his best to please, and there is little doubt that he succeeded. Almost all my grandfather's private letters have been destroyed. This correspondence has not only been preserved entire, but stitched up in the same covers with the works of the godly women, the Reverend John Campbell, and the painful Mrs. Ogle. I did not think to mention the good dame, but she comes in usefully as an example. Amongst the treasures of the ladies of my family, her letters have been honoured with a volume to themselves. I read about a half of them myself; then handed over the task to one of stauncher resolution, with orders to communicate any fact that should be found to illuminate these pages. Not one was found; it was her only art to communicate by post second-rate sermons at second-hand; and such, I take it, was the correspondence in which my grandmother delighted. If I

am right, that of Robert Stevenson, with his quaint smack of the contemporary 'Sandford and Merton,' his interest in the whole page of experience, his perpetual quest, and fine scent of all that seems romantic to a boy, his needless pomp of language, his excellent good sense, his unfeigned, unstained, unwearied human kindliness, would seem to her, in a comparison, dry and trivial and worldly. And if these letters were by an exception cherished and preserved, it would be for one or both of two reasons – because they dealt with and were bitter-sweet reminders of a time of sorrow; or because she was pleased, perhaps touched, by the writer's guileless efforts to seem spiritually-minded.

After this date there were two more births and two more deaths, so that the number of the family remained unchanged; in all five children survived to reach maturity and to outlive their parents.

CHAPTER II: THE SERVICE OF THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

I

It were hard to imagine a contrast more sharply defined than that between the lives of the men and women of this family: the one so chambered, so centred in the affections and the sensibilities; the other so active, healthy, and expeditious. From May to November, Thomas Smith and Robert Stevenson were on the mail, in the saddle, or at sea; and my grandfather, in particular, seems to have been possessed with a demon of activity in travel. In 1802, by direction of the Northern Lighthouse Board, he had visited the coast of England from St. Bees, in Cumberland, and round by the Scilly Islands to some place undecipherable by me; in all a distance of 2500 miles. In 1806 I find him starting 'on a tour round the south coast of England, from the Humber to the Severn.' Peace was not long declared ere he found means to visit Holland, where he was in time to see, in the navy-yard at Helvoetsluys, 'about twenty of Bonaparte's *English flotilla* lying in a state of decay, the object of curiosity to Englishmen.' By 1834 he seems to have been acquainted with the coast of France from Dieppe to Bordeaux; and a main part

of his duty as Engineer to the Board of Northern Lights was one round of dangerous and laborious travel.

In 1786, when Thomas Smith first received the appointment, the extended and formidable coast of Scotland was lighted at a single point – the Isle of May, in the jaws of the Firth of Forth, where, on a tower already a hundred and fifty years old, an open coal-fire blazed in an iron chauffer. The whole archipelago, thus nightly plunged in darkness, was shunned by sea-going vessels, and the favourite courses were north about Shetland and west about St. Kilda. When the Board met, four new lights formed the extent of their intentions – Kinnaird Head, in Aberdeenshire, at the eastern elbow of the coast; North Ronaldsay, in Orkney, to keep the north and guide ships passing to the south'ard of Shetland; Island Glass, on Harris, to mark the inner shore of the Hebrides and illuminate the navigation of the Minch; and the Mull of Kintyre. These works were to be attempted against obstacles, material and financial, that might have staggered the most bold. Smith had no ship at his command till 1791; the roads in those outlandish quarters where his business lay were scarce passable when they existed, and the tower on the Mull of Kintyre stood eleven months unlighted while the apparatus toiled and foundered by the way among rocks and mosses. Not only had towers to be built and apparatus transplanted; the supply of oil must be maintained, and the men fed, in the same inaccessible and distant scenes; a whole service, with its routine and hierarchy, had to be called out of nothing; and a new

trade (that of lightkeeper) to be taught, recruited, and organised. The funds of the Board were at the first laughably inadequate. They embarked on their career on a loan of twelve hundred pounds, and their income in 1789, after relief by a fresh Act of Parliament, amounted to less than three hundred. It must be supposed that the thoughts of Thomas Smith, in these early years, were sometimes coloured with despair; and since he built and lighted one tower after another, and created and bequeathed to his successors the elements of an excellent administration, it may be conceded that he was not after all an unfortunate choice for a first engineer.

War added fresh complications. In 1794 Smith came 'very near to be taken' by a French squadron. In 1813 Robert Stevenson was cruising about the neighbourhood of Cape Wrath in the immediate fear of Commodore Rogers. The men, and especially the sailors, of the lighthouse service must be protected by a medal and ticket from the brutal activity of the press-gang. And the zeal of volunteer patriots was at times embarrassing.

'I set off on foot,' writes my grandfather, 'for Marazion, a town at the head of Mount's Bay, where I was in hopes of getting a boat to freight. I had just got that length, and was making the necessary inquiry, when a young man, accompanied by several idle-looking fellows, came up to me, and in a hasty tone said, "Sir, in the king's name I seize your person and papers." To which I replied that I should be glad to see his authority, and know the reason of an address so abrupt. He told me the want of time prevented his

taking regular steps, but that it would be necessary for me to return to Penzance, as I was suspected of being a French spy. I proposed to submit my papers to the nearest Justice of Peace, who was immediately applied to, and came to the inn where I was. He seemed to be greatly agitated, and quite at a loss how to proceed. The complaint preferred against me was “that I had examined the Longships Lighthouse with the most minute attention, and was no less particular in my inquiries at the keepers of the lighthouse regarding the sunk rocks lying off the Land’s End, with the sets of the currents and tides along the coast: that I seemed particularly to regret the situation of the rocks called the Seven Stones, and the loss of a beacon which the Trinity Board had caused to be fixed on the Wolf Rock; that I had taken notes of the bearings of several sunk rocks, and a drawing of the lighthouse, and of Cape Cornwall. Further, that I had refused the honour of Lord Edgecombe’s invitation to dinner, offering as an apology that I had some particular business on hand.”

My grandfather produced in answer his credentials and letter of credit; but the justice, after perusing them, ‘very gravely observed that they were “musty bits of paper,”’ and proposed to maintain the arrest. Some more enlightened magistrates at Penzance relieved him of suspicion and left him at liberty to pursue his journey, – ‘which I did with so much eagerness,’ he adds, ‘that I gave the two coal lights on the Lizard only a very transient look.’

Lighthouse operations in Scotland differed essentially in

character from those in England. The English coast is in comparison a habitable, homely place, well supplied with towns; the Scottish presents hundreds of miles of savage islands and desolate moors. The Parliamentary committee of 1834, profoundly ignorant of this distinction, insisted with my grandfather that the work at the various stations should be let out on contract 'in the neighbourhood,' where sheep and deer, and gulls and cormorants, and a few ragged gillies, perhaps crouching in a bee-hive house, made up the only neighbours. In such situations repairs and improvements could only be overtaken by collecting (as my grandfather expressed it) a few 'lads,' placing them under charge of a foreman, and despatching them about the coast as occasion served. The particular danger of these seas increased the difficulty. The course of the lighthouse tender lies amid iron-bound coasts, among tide-races, the whirlpools of the Pentland Firth, flocks of islands, flocks of reefs, many of them uncharted. The aid of steam was not yet. At first in random coasting sloop, and afterwards in the cutter belonging to the service, the engineer must ply and run amongst these multiplied dangers, and sometimes late into the stormy autumn. For pages together my grandfather's diary preserves a record of these rude experiences; of hard winds and rough seas; and of 'the try-sail and storm-jib, those old friends which I never like to see.' They do not tempt to quotation, but it was the man's element, in which he lived, and delighted to live, and some specimen must be presented. On Friday, September 10th, 1830, the *Regent* lying

in Lerwick Bay, we have this entry: 'The gale increases, with continued rain.' On the morrow, Saturday, 11th, the weather appeared to moderate, and they put to sea, only to be driven by evening into Levenswick. There they lay, 'rolling much,' with both anchors ahead and the square yard on deck, till the morning of Saturday, 18th. Saturday and Sunday they were plying to the southward with a 'strong breeze and a heavy sea,' and on Sunday evening anchored in Otterswick. 'Monday, 20th, it blows so fresh that we have no communication with the shore. We see Mr. Rome on the beach, but we cannot communicate with him. It blows "mere fire," as the sailors express it.' And for three days more the diary goes on with tales of davits unshipped, high seas, strong gales from the southward, and the ship driven to refuge in Kirkwall or Deer Sound. I have many a passage before me to transcribe, in which my grandfather draws himself as a man of minute and anxious exactitude about details. It must not be forgotten that these voyages in the tender were the particular pleasure and reward of his existence; that he had in him a reserve of romance which carried him delightedly over these hardships and perils; that to him it was 'great gain' to be eight nights and seven days in the savage bay of Levenswick – to read a book in the much agitated cabin – to go on deck and hear the gale scream in his ears, and see the landscape dark with rain and the ship plunge at her two anchors – and to turn in at night and wake again at morning, in his narrow berth, to the glamorous and continued voices of the gale.

His perils and escapes were beyond counting. I shall only refer to two: the first, because of the impression made upon himself; the second, from the incidental picture it presents of the north islanders. On the 9th October 1794 he took passage from Orkney in the sloop *Elizabeth* of Stromness. She made a fair passage till within view of Kinnaird Head, where, as she was becalmed some three miles in the offing, and wind seemed to threaten from the south-east, the captain landed him, to continue his journey more expeditiously ashore. A gale immediately followed, and the *Elizabeth* was driven back to Orkney and lost with all hands. The second escape I have been in the habit of hearing related by an eye-witness, my own father, from the earliest days of childhood. On a September night, the *Regent* lay in the Pentland Firth in a fog and a violent and windless swell. It was still dark, when they were alarmed by the sound of breakers, and an anchor was immediately let go. The peep of dawn discovered them swinging in desperate proximity to the Isle of Swona¹⁰ and the surf bursting close under their stern. There was in this place a hamlet of the inhabitants, fisher-folk and wreckers; their huts stood close about the head of the beach. All slept; the doors were closed, and there was no smoke, and the anxious watchers on board ship seemed to contemplate a village of the dead. It was thought possible to launch a boat and tow the *Regent* from her place of danger; and with this view a signal of distress was made and a gun fired

¹⁰ This is only a probable hypothesis; I have tried to identify my father's anecdote in my grandfather's diary, and may very well have been deceived. — [R. L. S.]

with a red-hot poker from the galley. Its detonation awoke the sleepers. Door after door was opened, and in the grey light of the morning fisher after fisher was seen to come forth, yawning and stretching himself, nightcap on head. Fisher after fisher, I wrote, and my pen tripped; for it should rather stand wrecker after wrecker. There was no emotion, no animation, it scarce seemed any interest; not a hand was raised; but all callously awaited the harvest of the sea, and their children stood by their side and waited also. To the end of his life, my father remembered that amphitheatre of placid spectators on the beach; and with a special and natural animosity, the boys of his own age. But presently a light air sprang up, and filled the sails, and fainted, and filled them again; and little by little the *Regent* fetched way against the swell, and clawed off shore into the turbulent firth.

The purpose of these voyages was to effect a landing on open beaches or among shelving rocks, not for persons only, but for coals and food, and the fragile furniture of light-rooms. It was often impossible. In 1831 I find my grandfather 'hovering for a week' about the Pentland Skerries for a chance to land; and it was almost always difficult. Much knack and enterprise were early developed among the seamen of the service; their management of boats is to this day a matter of admiration; and I find my grandfather in his diary depicting the nature of their excellence in one happily descriptive phrase, when he remarks that Captain Soutar had landed 'the small stores and nine casks of oil *with all the activity of a smuggler.*' And it was one thing to land,

another to get on board again. I have here a passage from the diary, where it seems to have been touch-and-go. 'I landed at Tarbetness, on the eastern side of the point, in a *mere gale or blast of wind* from west-south-west, at 2 p.m. It blew so fresh that the captain, in a kind of despair, went off to the ship, leaving myself and the steward ashore. While I was in the light-room, I felt it shaking and waving, not with the tremor of the Bell Rock, but with the *waving of a tree*! This the light-keepers seemed to be quite familiar to, the principal keeper remarking that "it was very pleasant," perhaps meaning interesting or curious. The captain worked the vessel into smooth water with admirable dexterity, and I got on board again about 6 p.m. from the other side of the point.' But not even the dexterity of Soutar could prevail always; and my grandfather must at times have been left in strange berths and with but rude provision. I may instance the case of my father, who was storm-bound three days upon an islet, sleeping in the uncemented and unchimneyed houses of the islanders, and subsisting on a diet of nettle-soup and lobsters.

The name of Soutar has twice escaped my pen, and I feel I owe him a vignette. Soutar first attracted notice as mate of a praam at the Bell Rock, and rose gradually to be captain of the *Regent*. He was active, admirably skilled in his trade, and a man incapable of fear. Once, in London, he fell among a gang of confidence-men, naturally deceived by his rusticity and his prodigious accent. They plied him with drink – a hopeless enterprise, for Soutar could not be made drunk; they proposed cards, and Soutar

would not play. At last, one of them, regarding him with a formidable countenance, inquired if he were not frightened? 'I'm no' very easy fleyed,' replied the captain. And the rooks withdrew after some easier pigeon. So many perils shared, and the partial familiarity of so many voyages, had given this man a stronghold in my grandfather's estimation; and there is no doubt but he had the art to court and please him with much hypocritical skill. He usually dined on Sundays in the cabin. He used to come down daily after dinner for a glass of port or whisky, often in his full rig of sou'-wester, oilskins, and long boots; and I have often heard it described how insinuatingly he carried himself on these appearances, artfully combining the extreme of deference with a blunt and seamanlike demeanour. My father and uncles, with the devilish penetration of the boy, were far from being deceived; and my father, indeed, was favoured with an object-lesson not to be mistaken. He had crept one rainy night into an apple-barrel on deck, and from this place of ambush overheard Soutar and a comrade conversing in their oilskins. The smooth sycophant of the cabin had wholly disappeared, and the boy listened with wonder to a vulgar and truculent ruffian. Of Soutar, I may say *tantum vidi*, having met him in the Leith docks now more than thirty years ago, when he abounded in the praises of my grandfather, encouraged me (in the most admirable manner) to pursue his footprints, and left impressed for ever on my memory the image of his own Bardolphian nose. He died not long after.

The engineer was not only exposed to the hazards of the

sea; he must often ford his way by land to remote and scarce accessible places, beyond reach of the mail or the post-chaise, beyond even the tracery of the bridle-path, and guided by natives across bog and heather. Up to 1807 my grand-father seems to have travelled much on horseback; but he then gave up the idea – ‘such,’ he writes with characteristic emphasis and capital letters, ‘is the Plague of Baiting.’ He was a good pedestrian; at the age of fifty-eight I find him covering seventeen miles over the moors of the Mackay country in less than seven hours, and that is not bad travelling for a scramble. The piece of country traversed was already a familiar track, being that between Loch Eriboll and Cape Wrath; and I think I can scarce do better than reproduce from the diary some traits of his first visit. The tender lay in Loch Eriboll; by five in the morning they sat down to breakfast on board; by six they were ashore – my grandfather, Mr. Slight an assistant, and Soutar of the jolly nose, and had been taken in charge by two young gentlemen of the neighbourhood and a pair of gillies. About noon they reached the Kyle of Durness and passed the ferry. By half-past three they were at Cape Wrath – not yet known by the emphatic abbreviation of ‘The Cape’ – and beheld upon all sides of them unfrequented shores, an expanse of desert moor, and the high-piled Western Ocean. The site of the tower was chosen. Perhaps it is by inheritance of blood, but I know few things more inspiring than this location of a lighthouse in a designated space of heather and air, through which the sea-birds are still flying. By 9 p.m. the return journey

had brought them again to the shores of the Kyle. The night was dirty, and as the sea was high and the ferry-boat small, Soutar and Mr. Stevenson were left on the far side, while the rest of the party embarked and were received into the darkness. They made, in fact, a safe though an alarming passage; but the ferryman refused to repeat the adventure; and my grand-father and the captain long paced the beach, impatient for their turn to pass, and tormented with rising anxiety as to the fate of their companions. At length they sought the shelter of a shepherd's house. 'We had miserable up-putting,' the diary continues, 'and on both sides of the ferry much anxiety of mind. Our beds were clean straw, and but for the circumstance of the boat, I should have slept as soundly as ever I did after a walk through moss and mire of sixteen hours.'

To go round the lights, even to-day, is to visit past centuries. The tide of tourists that flows yearly in Scotland, vulgarising all where it approaches, is still defined by certain barriers. It will be long ere there is a hotel at Sumburgh or a hydropathic at Cape Wrath; it will be long ere any *char-à-banc*, laden with tourists, shall drive up to Barra Head or Monach, the Island of the Monks. They are farther from London than St. Petersburg, and except for the towers, sounding and shining all night with fog-bells and the radiance of the light-room, glittering by day with the trivial brightness of white paint, these island and moorland stations seem inaccessible to the civilisation of to-day, and even to the end of my grandfather's career the isolation was far greater. There ran no post at all in the Long Island; from the light-house

on Barra Head a boat must be sent for letters as far as Tobermory, between sixty and seventy miles of open sea; and the posts of Shetland, which had surprised Sir Walter Scott in 1814, were still unimproved in 1833, when my grandfather reported on the subject. The group contained at the time a population of 30,000 souls, and enjoyed a trade which had increased in twenty years seven-fold, to between three and four thousand tons. Yet the mails were despatched and received by chance coasting vessels at the rate of a penny a letter; six and eight weeks often elapsed between opportunities, and when a mail was to be made up, sometimes at a moment's notice, the bellman was sent hastily through the streets of Lerwick. Between Shetland and Orkney, only seventy miles apart, there was 'no trade communication whatever.'

Such was the state of affairs, only sixty years ago, with the three largest clusters of the Scottish Archipelago; and forty-seven years earlier, when Thomas Smith began his rounds, or forty-two, when Robert Stevenson became conjoined with him in these excursions, the barbarism was deep, the people sunk in superstition, the circumstances of their life perhaps unique in history. Lerwick and Kirkwall, like Guam or the Bay of Islands, were but barbarous ports where whalers called to take up and to return experienced seamen. On the outlying islands the clergy lived isolated, thinking other thoughts, dwelling in a different country from their parishioners, like missionaries in the South Seas. My grandfather's unrivalled treasury of anecdote was never

written down; it embellished his talk while he yet was, and died with him when he died; and such as have been preserved relate principally to the islands of Ronaldsay and Sanday, two of the Orkney group. These bordered on one of the water-highways of civilisation; a great fleet passed annually in their view, and of the shipwrecks of the world they were the scene and cause of a proportion wholly incommensurable to their size. In one year, 1798, my grandfather found the remains of no fewer than five vessels on the isle of Sanday, which is scarcely twelve miles long.

‘Hardly a year passed,’ he writes, ‘without instances of this kind; for, owing to the projecting points of this strangely formed island, the lowness and whiteness of its eastern shores, and the wonderful manner in which the scanty patches of land are intersected with lakes and pools of water, it becomes, even in daylight, a deception, and has often been fatally mistaken for an open sea. It had even become proverbial with some of the inhabitants to observe that “if wrecks were to happen, they might as well be sent to the poor isle of Sanday as anywhere else.” On this and the neighbouring islands the inhabitants had certainly had their share of wrecked goods, for the eye is presented with these melancholy remains in almost every form. For example, although quarries are to be met with generally in these islands, and the stones are very suitable for building dykes (*Anglicé*, walls), yet instances occur of the land being enclosed, even to a considerable extent, with ship-timbers. The author has actually seen a park (*Anglicé*, meadow) paled round chiefly with cedar-wood

and mahogany from the wreck of a Honduras-built ship; and in one island, after the wreck of a ship laden with wine, the inhabitants have been known to take claret to their barley-meal porridge. On complaining to one of the pilots of the badness of his boat's sails, he replied to the author with some degree of pleasantry, "Had it been His will that you came na' here wi' your lights, we might 'a' had better sails to our boats, and more o' other things." It may further be mentioned that when some of Lord Dundas's farms are to be let in these islands a competition takes place for the lease, and it is *bona fide* understood that a much higher rent is paid than the lands would otherwise give were it not for the chance of making considerably by the agency and advantages attending shipwrecks on the shores of the respective farms.'

The people of North Ronaldsay still spoke Norse, or, rather, mixed it with their English. The walls of their huts were built to a great thickness of rounded stones from the sea-beach; the roof flagged, loaded with earth, and perforated by a single hole for the escape of smoke. The grass grew beautifully green on the flat house-top, where the family would assemble with their dogs and cats, as on a pastoral lawn; there were no windows, and in my grandfather's expression, 'there was really no demonstration of a house unless it were the diminutive door.' He once landed on Ronaldsay with two friends. The inhabitants crowded and pressed so much upon the strangers that the bailiff, or resident factor of the island, blew with his ox-horn, calling out to the

natives to stand off and let the gentlemen come forward to the laird; upon which one of the islanders, as spokesman, called out, "God ha'e us, man! thou needsna mak' sic a noise. It's no' every day we ha'e *three hatted men* on our isle.'" When the Surveyor of Taxes came (for the first time, perhaps) to Sanday, and began in the King's name to complain of the unconscionable swarms of dogs, and to menace the inhabitants with taxation, it chanced that my grandfather and his friend, Dr. Patrick Neill, were received by an old lady in a Ronaldsay hut. Her hut, which was similar to the model described, stood on a Ness, or point of land jutting into the sea. They were made welcome in the firelit cellar, placed 'in *casey* or straw-worked chairs, after the Norwegian fashion, with arms, and a canopy overhead,' and given milk in a wooden dish. These hospitalities attended to, the old lady turned at once to Dr. Neill, whom she took for the Surveyor of Taxes. 'Sir,' said she, 'gin ye'll tell the King that I canna keep the Ness free o' the Bangers (sheep) without twa hun's, and twa guid hun's too, he'll pass me threa the tax on dugs.'

This familiar confidence, these traits of engaging simplicity, are characters of a secluded people. Mankind – and, above all, islanders – come very swiftly to a bearing, and find very readily, upon one convention or another, a tolerable corporate life. The danger is to those from without, who have not grown up from childhood in the islands, but appear suddenly in that narrow horizon, life-sized apparitions. For these no bond of humanity exists, no feeling of kinship is awakened by their peril; they will

assist at a shipwreck, like the fisher-folk of Lunga, as spectators, and when the fatal scene is over, and the beach strewn with dead bodies, they will fence their fields with mahogany, and, after a decent grace, sup claret to their porridge. It is not wickedness: it is scarce evil; it is only, in its highest power, the sense of isolation and the wise disinterestedness of feeble and poor races. Think how many viking ships had sailed by these islands in the past, how many vikings had landed, and raised turmoil, and broken up the barrows of the dead, and carried off the wines of the living; and blame them, if you are able, for that belief (which may be called one of the parables of the devil's gospel) that a man rescued from the sea will prove the bane of his deliverer. It might be thought that my grandfather, coming there unknown, and upon an employment so hateful to the inhabitants, must have run the hazard of his life. But this were to misunderstand. He came franked by the laird and the clergyman; he was the King's officer; the work was 'opened with prayer by the Rev. Walter Trail, minister of the parish'; God and the King had decided it, and the people of these pious islands bowed their heads. There landed, indeed, in North Ronaldsay, during the last decade of the eighteenth century, a traveller whose life seems really to have been imperilled. A very little man of a swarthy complexion, he came ashore, exhausted and unshaved, from a long boat passage, and lay down to sleep in the home of the parish schoolmaster. But he had been seen landing. The inhabitants had identified him for a Pict, as, by some singular confusion

of name, they called the dark and dwarfish aboriginal people of the land. Immediately the obscure ferment of a race-hatred, grown into a superstition, began to work in their bosoms, and they crowded about the house and the room-door with fearful whisperings. For some time the schoolmaster held them at bay, and at last despatched a messenger to call my grand-father. He came: he found the islanders beside themselves at this unwelcome resurrection of the dead and the detested; he was shown, as adminicular of testimony, the traveller's uncouth and thick-soled boots; he argued, and finding argument unavailing, consented to enter the room and examine with his own eyes the sleeping Pict. One glance was sufficient: the man was now a missionary, but he had been before that an Edinburgh shopkeeper with whom my grandfather had dealt. He came forth again with this report, and the folk of the island, wholly relieved, dispersed to their own houses. They were timid as sheep and ignorant as limpets; that was all. But the Lord deliver us from the tender mercies of a frightened flock!

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