

# РОБЕРТ СТИВЕНСОН

THE LETTERS OF  
ROBERT LOUIS  
STEVENSON — VOLUME  
1

**Robert Louis Stevenson**  
**The Letters of Robert Louis**  
**Stevenson — Volume 1**

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The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson — Volume 1:*

# Содержание

CHAPTER I — STUDENT DAYS AT EDINBURGH, TRAVELS AND EXCURSIONS, 1868-1873	4
CHAPTER II — STUDENT DAYS — ORDERED SOUTH, SEPTEMBER 1873-JULY 1875	39
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	97

# Robert Louis Stevenson

## The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson — Volume 1

### CHAPTER I — STUDENT DAYS AT EDINBURGH, TRAVELS AND EXCURSIONS, 1868-1873

Letter: SPRING GROVE SCHOOL, 12TH NOVEMBER  
1863.

MA CHERE MAMAN, — Jai recu votre lettre Aujourdhui et comme le jour prochaine est mon jour de naissance je vous ecrit ce lettre. Ma grande gatteaux est arrive il leve 12 livres et demi le prix etait 17 shillings. Sur la soiree de Monseigneur Faux il y etait quelques belles feux d'artifice. Mais les polissons entrent dans notre champ et nos feux d'artifice et handkerchiefs disappeared quickly, but we charged them out of the field. Je suis presque driven mad par une bruit terrible tous les garcons kik up comme grand un bruit qu'll est possible. I hope you will find your house at Mentone nice. I have been obliged to stop from writing by the want of a pen, but now I have one, so I will continue.

My dear papa, you told me to tell you whenever I was

miserable. I do not feel well, and I wish to get home.

Do take me with you.

*R. STEVENSON.*

Letter: 2 SULLYARDE TERRACE, TORQUAY,  
THURSDAY (APRIL 1866).

RESPECTED PATERNAL RELATIVE, — I write to make a request of the most moderate nature. Every year I have cost you an enormous — nay, elephantine — sum of money for drugs and physician's fees, and the most expensive time of the twelve months was March.

But this year the biting Oriental blasts, the howling tempests, and the general ailments of the human race have been successfully braved by yours truly.

Does not this deserve remuneration?

I appeal to your charity, I appeal to your generosity, I appeal to your justice, I appeal to your accounts, I appeal, in fine, to your purse.

My sense of generosity forbids the receipt of more — my sense of justice forbids the receipt of less — than half-a-crown. — Greeting from, Sir, your most affectionate and needy son,

*R. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

## WICK, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 1868

MY DEAR MOTHER, — .. Wick lies at the end or elbow of an open triangular bay, hemmed on either side by shores, either cliff or steep earth-bank, of no great height. The grey houses of Pulteney extend along the southerly shore almost to the cape; and it is about half-way down this shore — no, six-sevenths way down — that the new breakwater extends athwart the bay.

Certainly Wick in itself possesses no beauty: bare, grey shores, grim grey houses, grim grey sea; not even the gleam of red tiles; not even the greenness of a tree. The southerly heights, when I came here, were black with people, fishers waiting on wind and night. Now all the S.Y.S. (Stornoway boats) have beaten out of the bay, and the Wick men stay indoors or wrangle on the quays with dissatisfied fish-curers, knee-high in brine, mud, and herring refuse. The day when the boats put out to go home to the Hebrides, the girl here told me there was 'a black wind'; and on going out, I found the epithet as justifiable as it was picturesque. A cold, BLACK southerly wind, with occasional rising showers of rain; it was a fine sight to see the boats beat out a-teeth of it.

In Wick I have never heard any one greet his neighbour with the usual 'Fine day' or 'Good morning.' Both come shaking their heads, and both say, 'Breezy, breezy!' And such is the atrocious quality of the climate, that the remark is almost invariably

justified by the fact.

The streets are full of the Highland fishers, lubberly, stupid, inconceivably lazy and heavy to move. You bruise against them, tumble over them, elbow them against the wall — all to no purpose; they will not budge; and you are forced to leave the pavement every step.

To the south, however, is as fine a piece of coast scenery as I ever saw. Great black chasms, huge black cliffs, rugged and over- hung gullies, natural arches, and deep green pools below them, almost too deep to let you see the gleam of sand among the darker weed: there are deep caves too. In one of these lives a tribe of gipsies. The men are ALWAYS drunk, simply and truthfully always. From morning to evening the great villainous-looking fellows are either sleeping off the last debauch, or hulking about the cove 'in the horrors.' The cave is deep, high, and airy, and might be made comfortable enough. But they just live among heaped boulders, damp with continual droppings from above, with no more furniture than two or three tin pans, a truss of rotten straw, and a few ragged cloaks. In winter the surf bursts into the mouth and often forces them to abandon it.

An EMEUTE of disappointed fishers was feared, and two ships of war are in the bay to render assistance to the municipal authorities. This is the ides; and, to all intents and purposes, said ides are passed. Still there is a good deal of disturbance, many drunk men, and a double supply of police. I saw them sent for by some people and enter an inn, in a pretty good hurry: what it

was for I do not know.

You would see by papa's letter about the carpenter who fell off the staging: I don't think I was ever so much excited in my life. The man was back at his work, and I asked him how he was; but he was a Highlander, and — need I add it? — dickens a word could I understand of his answer. What is still worse, I find the people here-about — that is to say, the Highlanders, not the northmen — don't understand ME.

I have lost a shilling's worth of postage stamps, which has damped my ardour for buying big lots of 'em: I'll buy them one at a time as I want 'em for the future.

The Free Church minister and I got quite thick. He left last night about two in the morning, when I went to turn in. He gave me the enclosed. — I remain your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON  
WICK, September 5, 1868. MONDAY.

MY DEAR MAMMA, — This morning I got a delightful haul: your letter of the fourth (surely mis-dated); Papa's of same day; Virgil's BUCOLICS, very thankfully received; and Aikman's ANNALS, a precious and most acceptable donation, for which I tender my most ebullient thanksgivings. I almost forgot to drink my tea and eat mine egg.

It contains more detailed accounts than anything I ever saw, except Wodrow, without being so portentously tiresome and so desperately overborne with footnotes, proclamations, acts of

Parliament, and citations as that last history.

I have been reading a good deal of Herbert. He's a clever and a devout cove; but in places awfully twaddley (if I may use the word). Oughtn't this to rejoice Papa's heart -

'Carve or discourse; do not a famine fear.  
Who carves is kind to two, who talks to all.'

You understand? The 'fearing a famine' is applied to people gulping down solid viviers without a word, as if the ten lean kine began to-morrow.

Do you remember condemning something of mine for being too obtrusively didactic. Listen to Herbert -

'Is it not verse except enchanted groves  
And sudden arbours shadow coarse-spun lines?  
Must purling streams refresh a lover's loves?  
MUST ALL BE VEILED, WHILE HE THAT READS  
DIVINES  
CATCHING THE SENSE AT TWO REMOVES?'

You see, 'except' was used for 'unless' before 1630.

TUESDAY. — The riots were a hum. No more has been heard; and one of the war-steamers has deserted in disgust.

The MOONSTONE is frightfully interesting: isn't the detective prime? Don't say anything about the plot; for I have only read on to the end of Betteredge's narrative, so don't know

anything about it yet.

I thought to have gone on to Thurso to-night, but the coach was full; so I go to-morrow instead.

To-day I had a grouse: great glorification.

There is a drunken brute in the house who disturbed my rest last night. He's a very respectable man in general, but when on the 'spree' a most consummate fool. When he came in he stood on the top of the stairs and preached in the dark with great solemnity and no audience from 12 P.M. to half-past one. At last I opened my door. 'Are we to have no sleep at all for that DRUNKEN BRUTE?' I said. As I hoped, it had the desired effect. 'Drunken brute!' he howled, in much indignation; then after a pause, in a voice of some contrition, 'Well, if I am a drunken brute, it's only once in the twelvemonth!' And that was the end of him; the insult rankled in his mind; and he retired to rest. He is a fish-curer, a man over fifty, and pretty rich too. He's as bad again to-day; but I'll be shot if he keeps me awake, I'll douse him with water if he makes a row. — Ever your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**WICK, SEPTEMBER 1868. SATURDAY, 10 A.M**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — The last two days have been dreadfully hard, and I was so tired in the evenings that I could not

write. In fact, last night I went to sleep immediately after dinner, or very nearly so. My hours have been 10-2 and 3-7 out in the lighter or the small boat, in a long, heavy roll from the nor'-east. When the dog was taken out, he got awfully ill; one of the men, Geordie Grant by name and surname, followed SHOOT with considerable ECLAT; but, wonderful to relate! I kept well. My hands are all skinned, blistered, discoloured, and engrained with tar, some of which latter has established itself under my nails in a position of such natural strength that it defies all my efforts to dislodge it. The worst work I had was when David (MacDonald's eldest) and I took the charge ourselves. He remained in the lighter to tighten or slacken the guys as we raised the pole towards the perpendicular, with two men. I was with four men in the boat. We dropped an anchor out a good bit, then tied a cord to the pole, took a turn round the sternmost thwart with it, and pulled on the anchor line. As the great, big, wet hawser came in it soaked you to the skin: I was the sternest (used, by way of variety, for sternmost) of the lot, and had to coil it — a work which involved, from ITS being so stiff and YOUR being busy pulling with all your might, no little trouble and an extra ducking. We got it up; and, just as we were going to sing 'Victory!' one of the guys slipped in, the pole tottered — went over on its side again like a shot, and behold the end of our labour.

You see, I have been roughing it; and though some parts of the letter may be neither very comprehensible nor very interesting to YOU, I think that perhaps it might amuse Willie Traquair, who

delights in all such dirty jobs.

The first day, I forgot to mention, was like mid-winter for cold, and rained incessantly so hard that the livid white of our cold-pinched faces wore a sort of inflamed rash on the windward side.

I am not a bit the worse of it, except fore-mentioned state of hands, a slight crick in my neck from the rain running down, and general stiffness from pulling, hauling, and tugging for dear life.

We have got double weights at the guys, and hope to get it up like a shot.

What fun you three must be having! I hope the cold don't disagree with you. — I remain, my dear mother, your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**PULTENEY, WICK, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1868**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — Another storm: wind higher, rain thicker: the wind still rising as the night closes in and the sea slowly rising along with it; it looks like a three days' gale.

Last week has been a blank one: always too much sea.

I enjoyed myself very much last night at the R.'s. There was a little dancing, much singing and supper.

Are you not well that you do not write? I haven't heard from

you for more than a fortnight.

The wind fell yesterday and rose again to-day; it is a dreadful evening; but the wind is keeping the sea down as yet. Of course, nothing more has been done to the poles; and I can't tell when I shall be able to leave, not for a fortnight yet, I fear, at the earliest, for the winds are persistent. Where's Murra? Is Cummie struck dumb about the boots? I wish you would get somebody to write an interesting letter and say how you are, for you're on the broad of your back I see. There hath arrived an inroad of farmers to-night; and I go to avoid them to M- if he's disengaged, to the R.'s if not.

SUNDAY (LATER). — Storm without: wind and rain: a confused mass of wind-driven rain-squalls, wind-ragged mist, foam, spray, and great, grey waves. Of this hereafter; in the meantime let us follow the due course of historic narrative.

Seven P.M. found me at Breadalbane Terrace, clad in spotless blacks, white tie, shirt, et caetera, and finished off below with a pair of navvies' boots. How true that the devil is betrayed by his feet! A message to Cummy at last. Why, O treacherous woman! were my dress boots withheld?

Dramatis personae: pere R., amusing, long-winded, in many points like papa; mere R., nice, delicate, likes hymns, knew Aunt Margaret ('t'ould man knew Uncle Alan); fille R., nommee Sara (no h), rather nice, lights up well, good voice, INTERESTED face; Miss L., nice also, washed out a little, and, I think, a trifle sentimental; fils R., in a Leith office, smart, full of happy epithet,

amusing. They are very nice and very kind, asked me to come back — 'any night you feel dull; and any night doesn't mean no night: we'll be so glad to see you.' CEST LA MERE QUI PARLE.

I was back there again to-night. There was hymn-singing, and general religious controversy till eight, after which talk was secular. Mrs. S. was deeply distressed about the boot business. She consoled me by saying that many would be glad to have such feet whatever shoes they had on. Unfortunately, fishers and seafaring men are too facile to be compared with! This looks like enjoyment: better speck than Anster.

I have done with frivolity. This morning I was awakened by Mrs. S. at the door. 'There's a ship ashore at Shaltigoe!' As my senses slowly flooded, I heard the whistling and the roaring of wind, and the lashing of gust-blown and uncertain flaws of rain. I got up, dressed, and went out. The mizzled sky and rain blinded you.

C D + — — || + — — \ A \ \ B \

C D is the new pier.

A the schooner ashore. B the salmon house.

She was a Norwegian: coming in she saw our first gauge-pole, standing at point E. Norse skipper thought it was a sunk smack, and dropped his anchor in full drift of sea: chain broke: schooner came ashore. Insured laden with wood: skipper owner of vessel and cargo bottom out.

I was in a great fright at first lest we should be liable; but it

seems that's all right.

Some of the waves were twenty feet high. The spray rose eighty feet at the new pier. Some wood has come ashore, and the roadway seems carried away. There is something fishy at the far end where the cross wall is building; but till we are able to get along, all speculation is vain.

I am so sleepy I am writing nonsense.

I stood a long while on the cope watching the sea below me; I hear its dull, monotonous roar at this moment below the shrieking of the wind; and there came ever recurring to my mind the verse I am so fond of: -

'But yet the Lord that is on high  
Is more of might by far  
Than noise of many waters is  
Or great sea-billows are.'

The thunder at the wall when it first struck — the rush along ever growing higher — the great jet of snow-white spray some forty feet above you — and the 'noise of many waters,' the roar, the hiss, the 'shrieking' among the shingle as it fell head over heels at your feet. I watched if it threw the big stones at the wall; but it never moved them.

MONDAY. — The end of the work displays gaps, cairns of ten ton blocks, stones torn from their places and turned right round. The damage above water is comparatively little: what there may be below, ON NE SAIT PAS ENCORE. The roadway

is torn away, cross heads, broken planks tossed here and there, planks gnawn and mumbled as if a starved bear had been trying to eat them, planks with spales lifted from them as if they had been dressed with a rugged plane, one pile swaying to and fro clear of the bottom, the rails in one place sunk a foot at least. This was not a great storm, the waves were light and short. Yet when we are standing at the office, I felt the ground beneath me QUAIL as a huge roller thundered on the work at the last year's cross wall.

How could NOSTER AMICUS Q. MAXIMUS appreciate a storm at Wick? It requires a little of the artistic temperament, of which Mr. T. S., C.E., possesses some, whatever he may say. I can't look at it practically however: that will come, I suppose, like grey hair or coffin nails.

Our pole is snapped: a fortnight's work and the loss of the Norse schooner all for nothing! — except experience and dirty clothes. — Your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. CHURCHILL BABINGTON

**[SWANSTON COTTAGE,  
LOTHIANBURN, SUMMER 1871.]**

MY DEAR MAUD, — If you have forgotten the hand-writing — as is like enough — you will find the name of a former

correspondent (don't know how to spell that word) at the end. I have begun to write to you before now, but always stuck somehow, and left it to drown in a drawerful of like fiascos. This time I am determined to carry through, though I have nothing specially to say.

We look fairly like summer this morning; the trees are blackening out of their spring greens; the warmer suns have melted the hoarfrost of daisies of the paddock; and the blackbird, I fear, already beginning to 'stint his pipe of mellower days' — which is very apposite (I can't spell anything to-day — ONE p or TWO?) and pretty. All the same, we have been having shocking weather — cold winds and grey skies.

I have been reading heaps of nice books; but I can't go back so far. I am reading Clarendon's HIST. REBELL. at present, with which I am more pleased than I expected, which is saying a good deal. It is a pet idea of mine that one gets more real truth out of one avowed partisan than out of a dozen of your sham impartialists — wolves in sheep's clothing — simpering honesty as they suppress documents. After all, what one wants to know is not what people did, but why they did it — or rather, why they THOUGHT they did it; and to learn that, you should go to the men themselves. Their very falsehood is often more than another man's truth.

I have possessed myself of Mrs. Hutchinson, which, of course, I admire, etc. But is there not an irritating deliberation and correctness about her and everybody connected with her? If she

would only write bad grammar, or forget to finish a sentence, or do something or other that looks fallible, it would be a relief. I sometimes wish the old Colonel had got drunk and beaten her, in the bitterness of my spirit. I know I felt a weight taken off my heart when I heard he was extravagant. It is quite possible to be too good for this evil world; and unquestionably, Mrs. Hutchinson was. The way in which she talks of herself makes one's blood run cold. There — I am glad to have got that out — but don't say it to anybody — seal of secrecy.

Please tell Mr. Babington that I have never forgotten one of his drawings — a Rubens, I think — a woman holding up a model ship. That woman had more life in her than ninety per cent. of the lame humans that you see crippling about this earth.

By the way, that is a feature in art which seems to have come in with the Italians. Your old Greek statues have scarce enough vitality in them to keep their monstrous bodies fresh withal. A shrewd country attorney, in a turned white neckcloth and rusty blacks, would just take one of these Agamemnons and Ajaxes quietly by his beautiful, strong arm, trot the unresisting statue down a little gallery of legal shams, and turn the poor fellow out at the other end, 'naked, as from the earth he came.' There is more latent life, more of the coiled spring in the sleeping dog, about a recumbent figure of Michael Angelo's than about the most excited of Greek statues. The very marble seems to wrinkle with a wild energy that we never feel except in dreams.

I think this letter has turned into a sermon, but I had nothing

interesting to talk about.

I do wish you and Mr. Babington would think better of it and come north this summer. We should be so glad to see you both. DO reconsider it. — Believe me, my dear Maud, ever your most affectionate cousin,

*LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO ALISON CUNNINGHAM

1871?

MY DEAR CUMMY, — I was greatly pleased by your letter in many ways. Of course, I was glad to hear from you; you know, you and I have so many old stories between us, that even if there was nothing else, even if there was not a very sincere respect and affection, we should always be glad to pass a nod. I say 'even if there was not.' But you know right well there is. Do not suppose that I shall ever forget those long, bitter nights, when I coughed and coughed and was so unhappy, and you were so patient and loving with a poor, sick child. Indeed, Cummy, I wish I might become a man worth talking of, if it were only that you should not have thrown away your pains.

Happily, it is not the result of our acts that makes them brave and noble, but the acts themselves and the unselfish love that moved us to do them. 'Inasmuch as you have done it unto one of the least of these.' My dear old nurse, and you know there is nothing a man can say nearer his heart except his mother or his wife — my dear old nurse, God will make good to you all the good that you have done, and mercifully forgive you all the

evil. And next time when the spring comes round, and everything is beginning once again, if you should happen to think that you might have had a child of your own, and that it was hard you should have spent so many years taking care of some one else's prodigal, just you think this — you have been for a great deal in my life; you have made much that there is in me, just as surely as if you had conceived me; and there are sons who are more ungrateful to their own mothers than I am to you. For I am not ungrateful, my dear Cummy, and it is with a very sincere emotion that I write myself your little boy,

Louis.

Letter: TO CHARLES BAXTER

**DUNBLANE, FRIDAY, 5TH MARCH 1872**

MY DEAR BAXTER, — By the date you may perhaps understand the purport of my letter without any words wasted about the matter. I cannot walk with you to-morrow, and you must not expect me. I came yesterday afternoon to Bridge of Allan, and have been very happy ever since, as every place is sanctified by the eighth sense, Memory. I walked up here this morning (three miles, TU-DIEU! a good stretch for me), and passed one of my favourite places in the world, and one that I very much affect in spirit when the body is tied down and brought immovably to anchor on a sickbed. It is a meadow and bank on a corner on the river, and is connected in my mind inseparably

with Virgil's ECLOGUES. HIC CORULIS MISTOS INTER  
CONSEDIMUS ULMOS, or something very like that, the  
passage begins (only I know my short-winded Latinity must  
have come to grief over even this much of quotation); and  
here, to a wish, is just such a cavern as Menalcas might shelter  
himself withal from the bright noon, and, with his lips curled  
backward, pipe himself blue in the face, while MESSIEURS  
LES ARCADIENS would roll out those cloying hexameters that  
sing themselves in one's mouth to such a curious lifting chant.

In such weather one has the bird's need to whistle; and I, who  
am specially incompetent in this art, must content myself by  
chattering away to you on this bit of paper. All the way along  
I was thanking God that he had made me and the birds and  
everything just as they are and not otherwise; for although there  
was no sun, the air was so thrilled with robins and blackbirds that  
it made the heart tremble with joy, and the leaves are far enough  
forward on the underwood to give a fine promise for the future.  
Even myself, as I say, I would not have had changed in one IOTA  
this forenoon, in spite of all my idleness and Guthrie's lost paper,  
which is ever present with me — a horrible phantom.

No one can be alone at home or in a quite new place. Memory  
and you must go hand in hand with (at least) decent weather if  
you wish to cook up a proper dish of solitude. It is in these little  
flights of mine that I get more pleasure than in anything else.  
Now, at present, I am supremely uneasy and restless — almost to  
the extent of pain; but O! how I enjoy it, and how I SHALL enjoy

it afterwards (please God), if I get years enough allotted to me for the thing to ripen in. When I am a very old and very respectable citizen with white hair and bland manners and a gold watch, I shall hear three crows cawing in my heart, as I heard them this morning: I vote for old age and eighty years of retrospect. Yet, after all, I dare say, a short shrift and a nice green grave are about as desirable.

Poor devil! how I am wearying you! Cheer up. Two pages more, and my letter reaches its term, for I have no more paper. What delightful things inns and waiters and bagmen are! If we didn't travel now and then, we should forget what the feeling of life is. The very cushion of a railway carriage — 'the things restorative to the touch.' I can't write, confound it! That's because I am so tired with my walk. Believe me, ever your affectionate friend,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO CHARLES BAXTER

**DUNBLANE, TUESDAY, 9TH APRIL 1872**

MY DEAR BAXTER, — I don't know what you mean. I know nothing about the Standing Committee of the Spec., did not know that such a body existed, and even if it doth exist, must sadly repudiate all association with such 'goodly fellowship.' I am a 'Rural Voluptuary' at present. THAT is what is the

matter with me. The Spec. may go whistle. As for 'C. Baxter, Esq.,' who is he? 'One Baxter, or Bagster, a secretary,' I say to mine acquaintance, 'is at present disquieting my leisure with certain illegal, uncharitable, unchristian, and unconstitutional documents called BUSINESS LETTERS: THE AFFAIR IS IN THE HANDS OF THE POLICE.' Do you hear THAT, you evildoer? Sending business letters is surely a far more hateful and slimy degree of wickedness than sending threatening letters; the man who throws grenades and torpedoes is less malicious; the Devil in red-hot hell rubs his hands with glee as he reckons up the number that go forth spreading pain and anxiety with each delivery of the post.

I have been walking to-day by a colonnade of beeches along the brawling Allan. My character for sanity is quite gone, seeing that I cheered my lonely way with the following, in a triumphant chant: 'Thank God for the grass, and the fir-trees, and the crows, and the sheep, and the sunshine, and the shadows of the fir-trees.' I hold that he is a poor mean devil who can walk alone, in such a place and in such weather, and doesn't set up his lungs and cry back to the birds and the river. Follow, follow, follow me. Come hither, come hither, come hither — here shall you see — no enemy — except a very slight remnant of winter and its rough weather. My bedroom, when I awoke this morning, was full of bird-songs, which is the greatest pleasure in life. Come hither, come hither, come hither, and when you come bring the third part of the EARTHLY PARADISE; you can get it for me in

Elliot's for two and tenpence (2s. 10d.) (BUSINESS HABITS).  
Also bring an ounce of honeydew from Wilson's.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**BRUSSELS, THURSDAY, 25TH JULY 1872**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — I am here at last, sitting in my room, without coat or waistcoat, and with both window and door open, and yet perspiring like a terra-cotta jug or a Gruyere cheese.

We had a very good passage, which we certainly deserved, in compensation for having to sleep on cabin floor, and finding absolutely nothing fit for human food in the whole filthy embarkation. We made up for lost time by sleeping on deck a good part of the forenoon. When I woke, Simpson was still sleeping the sleep of the just, on a coil of ropes and (as appeared afterwards) his own hat; so I got a bottle of Bass and a pipe and laid hold of an old Frenchman of somewhat filthy aspect (FIAT EXPERIMENTUM IN CORPORE VILI) to try my French upon. I made very heavy weather of it. The Frenchman had a very pretty young wife; but my French always deserted me entirely when I had to answer her, and so she soon drew away and left me to her lord, who talked of French politics, Africa, and domestic economy with great vivacity. From Ostend a smoking-

hot journey to Brussels. At Brussels we went off after dinner to the Parc. If any person wants to be happy, I should advise the Parc. You sit drinking iced drinks and smoking penny cigars under great old trees. The band place, covered walks, etc., are all lit up. And you can't fancy how beautiful was the contrast of the great masses of lamplit foliage and the dark sapphire night sky with just one blue star set overhead in the middle of the largest patch. In the dark walks, too, there are crowds of people whose faces you cannot see, and here and there a colossal white statue at the corner of an alley that gives the place a nice, ARTIFICIAL, eighteenth century sentiment. There was a good deal of summer lightning blinking overhead, and the black avenues and white statues leapt out every minute into short-lived distinctness.

I get up to add one thing more. There is in the hotel a boy in whom I take the deepest interest. I cannot tell you his age, but the very first time I saw him (when I was at dinner yesterday) I was very much struck with his appearance. There is something very leonine in his face, with a dash of the negro especially, if I remember aright, in the mouth. He has a great quantity of dark hair, curling in great rolls, not in little corkscrews, and a pair of large, dark, and very steady, bold, bright eyes. His manners are those of a prince. I felt like an overgrown ploughboy beside him. He speaks English perfectly, but with, I think, sufficient foreign accent to stamp him as a Russian, especially when his manners are taken into account. I don't think I ever saw any one who looked like a hero before. After breakfast this morning I

was talking to him in the court, when he mentioned casually that he had caught a snake in the Riesengebirge. 'I have it here,' he said; 'would you like to see it?' I said yes; and putting his hand into his breast-pocket, he drew forth not a dried serpent skin, but the head and neck of the reptile writhing and shooting out its horrible tongue in my face. You may conceive what a fright I got. I send off this single sheet just now in order to let you know I am safe across; but you must not expect letters often.

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

P.S. — The snake was about a yard long, but harmless, and now, he says, quite tame.

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**HOTEL LANDSBERG, FRANKFURT,  
MONDAY, 29TH JULY 1872**

... LAST night I met with rather an amusing adventuress. Seeing a church door open, I went in, and was led by most importunate finger-bills up a long stair to the top of the tower. The father smoking at the door, the mother and the three daughters received me as if I was a friend of the family and had come in for an evening visit. The youngest daughter (about thirteen, I suppose, and a pretty little girl) had been learning English at the school, and was anxious to play it off upon a real, veritable Englishman; so we had a long talk, and I was shown

photographs, etc., Marie and I talking, and the others looking on with evident delight at having such a linguist in the family. As all my remarks were duly translated and communicated to the rest, it was quite a good German lesson. There was only one contretemps during the whole interview — the arrival of another visitor, in the shape (surely) the last of God's creatures, a wood-worm of the most unnatural and hideous appearance, with one great striped horn sticking out of his nose like a boltsprit. If there are many wood-worms in Germany, I shall come home. The most courageous men in the world must be entomologists. I had rather be a lion-tamer.

To-day I got rather a curiosity — LIEDER UND BALLADEN VON ROBERT BURNS, translated by one Silbergleit, and not so ill done either. Armed with which, I had a swim in the Main, and then bread and cheese and Bavarian beer in a sort of cafe, or at least the German substitute for a cafe; but what a falling off after the heavenly forenoons in Brussels!

I have bought a meerschaum out of local sentiment, and am now very low and nervous about the bargain, having paid dearer than I should in England, and got a worse article, if I can form a judgment.

Do write some more, somebody. To-morrow I expect I shall go into lodgings, as this hotel work makes the money disappear like butter in a furnace. — Meanwhile believe me, ever your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**HOTEL LANDSBERG,  
THURSDAY, 1ST AUGUST 1872**

... YESTERDAY I walked to Eckenheim, a village a little way out of Frankfurt, and turned into the alehouse. In the room, which was just such as it would have been in Scotland, were the landlady, two neighbours, and an old peasant eating raw sausage at the far end. I soon got into conversation; and was astonished when the landlady, having asked whether I were an Englishman, and received an answer in the affirmative, proceeded to inquire further whether I were not also a Scotchman. It turned out that a Scotch doctor — a professor — a poet — who wrote books — GROSS WIE DAS — had come nearly every day out of Frankfurt to the ECKENHEIMER WIRTHSCHAFT, and had left behind him a most savoury memory in the hearts of all its customers. One man ran out to find his name for me, and returned with the news that it was COBIE (Scobie, I suspect); and during his absence the rest were pouring into my ears the fame and acquirements of my countryman. He was, in some undecipherable manner, connected with the Queen of England and one of the Princesses. He had been in Turkey, and had there married a wife of immense wealth. They could find apparently no measure adequate to express the size of his books. In one way or another, he had amassed a princely fortune, and had apparently

only one sorrow, his daughter to wit, who had absconded into a KLOSTER, with a considerable slice of the mother's GELD. I told them we had no klostern in Scotland, with a certain feeling of superiority. No more had they, I was told — 'HIER IST UNSER KLOSTER!' and the speaker motioned with both arms round the taproom. Although the first torrent was exhausted, yet the Doctor came up again in all sorts of ways, and with or without occasion, throughout the whole interview; as, for example, when one man, taking his pipe out of his mouth and shaking his head, remarked APROPOS of nothing and with almost defiant conviction, 'ER WAR EIN FEINER MANN, DER HERR DOCTOR,' and was answered by another with 'YAW, YAW, UND TRANK IMMER ROTHEN WEIN.'

Setting aside the Doctor, who had evidently turned the brains of the entire village, they were intelligent people. One thing in particular struck me, their honesty in admitting that here they spoke bad German, and advising me to go to Coburg or Leipsic for German. — 'SIE SPRECHEN DA REIN' (clean), said one; and they all nodded their heads together like as many mandarins, and repeated REIN, SO REIN in chorus.

Of course we got upon Scotland. The hostess said, 'DIE SCHOTTLANDER TRINKEN GERN SCHNAPPS,' which may be freely translated, 'Scotchmen are horrid fond of whisky.' It was impossible, of course, to combat such a truism; and so I proceeded to explain the construction of toddy, interrupted by a cry of horror when I mentioned the HOT water; and thence,

as I find is always the case, to the most ghastly romancing about Scottish scenery and manners, the Highland dress, and everything national or local that I could lay my hands upon. Now that I have got my German Burns, I lean a good deal upon him for opening a conversation, and read a few translations to every yawning audience that I can gather. I am grown most insufferably national, you see. I fancy it is a punishment for my want of it at ordinary times. Now, what do you think, there was a waiter in this very hotel, but, alas! he is now gone, who sang (from morning to night, as my informant said with a shrug at the recollection) what but 'S IST LANGE HER, the German version of Auld Lang Syne; so you see, madame, the finest lyric ever written will make its way out of whatsoever corner of patois it found its birth in.

**'MEITZ HERZ IST IM HOCHLAND, MEAN  
HERZ IST NICHT HIER, MEIN HERZ IST IM  
HOCHLAND IM GRUNEN REVIER. IM GRUNEN  
REVIERE ZU JAGEN DAS REH; MEIN HERZ  
IST IM HOCHLAND, WO IMMER ICH GEH.'**

I don't think I need translate that for you.

There is one thing that burthens me a good deal in my patriotic garrulage, and that is the black ignorance in which I grope about everything, as, for example, when I gave yesterday a full and, I fancy, a startlingly incorrect account of Scotch education to a

very stolid German on a garden bench: he sat and perspired under it, however with much composure. I am generally glad enough to fall back again, after these political interludes, upon Burns, toddy, and the Highlands.

I go every night to the theatre, except when there is no opera. I cannot stand a play yet; but I am already very much improved, and can understand a good deal of what goes on.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 2, 1872. — In the evening, at the theatre, I had a great laugh. Lord Allcash in FRA DIAVOLO, with his white hat, red guide-books, and bad German, was the PIECE-DE-RESISTANCE from a humorous point of view; and I had the satisfaction of knowing that in my own small way I could minister the same amusement whenever I chose to open my mouth.

I am just going off to do some German with Simpson. — Your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO THOMAS STEVENSON

**FRANKFURT, ROSENGASSE 13, AUGUST 4, 1872**

MY DEAR FATHER, — You will perceive by the head of this page that we have at last got into lodgings, and powerfully mean ones too. If I were to call the street anything but SHADY, I should be boasting. The people sit at their doors in shirt-sleeves, smoking as they do in Seven Dials of a Sunday.

Last night we went to bed about ten, for the first time **HOUSEHOLDERS** in Germany — real Teutons, with no deception, spring, or false bottom. About half-past one there began such a trumpeting, shouting, pealing of bells, and scurrying hither and thither of feet as woke every person in Frankfurt out of their first sleep with a vague sort of apprehension that the last day was at hand. The whole street was alive, and we could hear people talking in their rooms, or crying to passers-by from their windows, all around us. At last I made out what a man was saying in the next room. It was a fire in Sachsenhausen, he said (Sachsenhausen is the suburb on the other side of the Main), and he wound up with one of the most tremendous falsehoods on record, 'HIER ALLES RUHT — here all is still.' If it can be said to be still in an engine factory, or in the stomach of a volcano when it is meditating an eruption, he might have been justified in what he said, but not otherwise. The tumult continued unabated for near an hour; but as one grew used to it, it gradually resolved itself into three bells, answering each other at short intervals across the town, a man shouting, at ever shorter intervals and with superhuman energy, 'FEUER, — IM SACHSENHAUSEN, and the almost continuous winding of all manner of bugles and trumpets, sometimes in stirring flourishes, and sometimes in mere tuneless wails. Occasionally there was another rush of feet past the window, and once there was a mighty drumming, down between us and the river, as though the soldiery were turning out to keep the peace. This was all we had

of the fire, except a great cloud, all flushed red with the glare, above the roofs on the other side of the Gasse; but it was quite enough to put me entirely off my sleep and make me keenly alive to three or four gentlemen who were strolling leisurely about my person, and every here and there leaving me somewhat as a keepsake... However, everything has its compensation, and when day came at last, and the sparrows awoke with trills and CAROL-ETS, the dawn seemed to fall on me like a sleeping draught. I went to the window and saw the sparrows about the eaves, and a great troop of doves go strolling up the paven Gasse, seeking what they may devour. And so to sleep, despite fleas and fire-alarms and clocks chiming the hours out of neighbouring houses at all sorts of odd times and with the most charming want of unanimity.

We have got settled down in Frankfurt, and like the place very much. Simpson and I seem to get on very well together. We suit each other capitally; and it is an awful joke to be living (two would-be advocates, and one a baronet) in this supremely mean abode.

The abode is, however, a great improvement on the hotel, and I think we shall grow quite fond of it. — Ever your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

## 13 ROSENGASSE, FRANKFURT, TUESDAY MORNING, AUGUST 1872

.. Last night I was at the theatre and heard DIE JUDIN (LA JUIVE), and was thereby terribly excited. At last, in the middle of the fifth act, which was perfectly beastly, I had to slope. I could stand even seeing the cauldron with the sham fire beneath, and the two hateful executioners in red; but when at last the girl's courage breaks down, and, grasping her father's arm, she cries out — O so shudderfully! — I thought it high time to be out of that GALERE, and so I do not know yet whether it ends well or ill; but if I ever afterwards find that they do carry things to the extremity, I shall think more meanly of my species. It was raining and cold outside, so I went into a BIERHALLE, and sat and brooded over a SCHNITT (half-glass) for nearly an hour. An opera is far more REAL than real life to me. It seems as if stage illusion, and particularly this hardest to swallow and most conventional illusion of them all — an opera — would never stale upon me. I wish that life was an opera. I should like to LIVE in one; but I don't know in what quarter of the globe I shall find a society so constituted. Besides, it would soon pall: imagine asking for three-kreuzer cigars in recitative, or giving the washerwoman the inventory of your dirty clothes in a sustained and FLOURISHOUS aria.

I am in a right good mood this morning to sit here and write

to you; but not to give you news. There is a great stir of life, in a quiet, almost country fashion, all about us here. Some one is hammering a beef-steak in the REZ-DE-CHAUSSEE: there is a great clink of pitchers and noise of the pump-handle at the public well in the little square-kin round the corner. The children, all seemingly within a month, and certainly none above five, that always go halting and stumbling up and down the roadway, are ordinarily very quiet, and sit sedately puddling in the gutter, trying, I suppose, poor little devils! to understand their MUTTERSPRACHE; but they, too, make themselves heard from time to time in little incomprehensible antiphonies, about the drift that comes down to them by their rivers from the strange lands higher up the Gasse. Above all, there is here such a twittering of canaries (I can see twelve out of our window), and such continual visitation of grey doves and big-nosed sparrows, as make our little bye-street into a perfect aviary.

I look across the Gasse at our opposite neighbour, as he dandles his baby about, and occasionally takes a spoonful or two of some pale slimy nastiness that looks like DEAD PORRIDGE, if you can take the conception. These two are his only occupations. All day long you can hear him singing over the brat when he is not eating; or see him eating when he is not keeping baby. Besides which, there comes into his house a continual round of visitors that puts me in mind of the luncheon hour at home. As he has thus no ostensible avocation, we have named him 'the W.S.' to give a flavour of respectability to the

street.

Enough of the Gasse. The weather is here much colder. It rained a good deal yesterday; and though it is fair and sunshiny again to-day, and we can still sit, of course, with our windows open, yet there is no more excuse for the siesta; and the bathe in the river, except for cleanliness, is no longer a necessity of life. The Main is very swift. In one part of the baths it is next door to impossible to swim against it, and I suspect that, out in the open, it would be quite impossible. — Adieu, my dear mother, and believe me, ever your affectionate son,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON*  
(*RENTIER*).

Letter: TO CHARLES BAXTER

**17 HERIOT ROW, EDINBURGH,  
SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 1873**

MY DEAR BAXTER, — The thunderbolt has fallen with a vengeance now. On Friday night after leaving you, in the course of conversation, my father put me one or two questions as to beliefs, which I candidly answered. I really hate all lying so much now — a new found honesty that has somehow come out of my late illness — that I could not so much as hesitate at the time; but if I had foreseen the real hell of everything since, I think I should have lied, as I have done so often before. I so far thought of my

father, but I had forgotten my mother. And now! they are both ill, both silent, both as down in the mouth as if — I can find no simile. You may fancy how happy it is for me. If it were not too late, I think I could almost find it in my heart to retract, but it is too late; and again, am I to live my whole life as one falsehood? Of course, it is rougher than hell upon my father, but can I help it? They don't see either that my game is not the light-hearted scoffer; that I am not (as they call me) a careless infidel. I believe as much as they do, only generally in the inverse ratio: I am, I think, as honest as they can be in what I hold. I have not come hastily to my views. I reserve (as I told them) many points until I acquire fuller information, and do not think I am thus justly to be called 'horrible atheist.'

Now, what is to take place? What a curse I am to my parents! O Lord, what a pleasant thing it is to have just DAMNED the happiness of (probably) the only two people who care a damn about you in the world.

What is my life to be at this rate? What, you rascal? Answer — I have a pistol at your throat. If all that I hold true and most desire to spread is to be such death, and a worse than death, in the eyes of my father and mother, what the DEVIL am I to do?

Here is a good heavy cross with a vengeance, and all rough with rusty nails that tear your fingers, only it is not I that have to carry it alone; I hold the light end, but the heavy burden falls on these two.

Don't — I don't know what I was going to say. I am an object

idiot, which, all things considered, is not remarkable. — Ever  
your affectionate and horrible atheist,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

# CHAPTER II — STUDENT DAYS — ORDERED SOUTH, SEPTEMBER 1873-JULY 1875

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**COCKFIELD RECTORY, SUDBURY,  
SUFFOLK, TUESDAY, JULY 28, 1873**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — I am too happy to be much of a correspondent. Yesterday we were away to Melford and Lavenham, both exceptionally placid, beautiful old English towns. Melford scattered all round a big green, with an Elizabethan Hall and Park, great screens of trees that seem twice as high as trees should seem, and everything else like what ought to be in a novel, and what one never expects to see in reality, made me cry out how good we were to live in Scotland, for the many hundredth time. I cannot get over my astonishment — indeed, it increases every day — at the hopeless gulf that there is between England and Scotland, and English and Scotch. Nothing is the same; and I feel as strange and outlandish here as I do in France or Germany. Everything by the wayside, in the houses, or about the people, strikes me with an unexpected unfamiliarity: I

walk among surprises, for just where you think you have them, something wrong turns up.

I got a little Law read yesterday, and some German this morning, but on the whole there are too many amusements going for much work; as for correspondence, I have neither heart nor time for it to-day.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**17 HERIOT ROW, EDINBURGH,  
SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 1873**

I HAVE been to-day a very long walk with my father through some of the most beautiful ways hereabouts; the day was cold with an iron, windy sky, and only glorified now and then with autumn sunlight. For it is fully autumn with us, with a blight already over the greens, and a keen wind in the morning that makes one rather timid of one's tub when it finds its way indoors.

I was out this evening to call on a friend, and, coming back through the wet, crowded, lamp-lit streets, was singing after my own fashion, DU HAST DIAMANTEN UND PERLEN, when I heard a poor cripple man in the gutter wailing over a pitiful Scotch air, his club-foot supported on the other knee, and his whole woebegone body propped sideways against a crutch. The nearest lamp threw a strong light on his worn, sordid face and the

three boxes of lucifer matches that he held for sale. My own false notes stuck in my chest. How well off I am! is the burthen of my songs all day long — DRUM IST SO WOHL MIR IN DER WELT! and the ugly reality of the cripple man was an intrusion on the beautiful world in which I was walking. He could no more sing than I could; and his voice was cracked and rusty, and altogether perished. To think that that wreck may have walked the streets some night years ago, as glad at heart as I was, and promising himself a future as golden and honourable!

SUNDAY, 11.20 A.M. — I wonder what you are doing now? — in church likely, at the TE DEUM. Everything here is utterly silent. I can hear men's footfalls streets away; the whole life of Edinburgh has been sucked into sundry pious edifices; the gardens below my windows are steeped in a diffused sunlight, and every tree seems standing on tiptoes, strained and silent, as though to get its head above its neighbour's and LISTEN. You know what I mean, don't you? How trees do seem silently to assert themselves on an occasion! I have been trying to write ROADS until I feel as if I were standing on my head; but I mean ROADS, and shall do something to them.

I wish I could make you feel the hush that is over everything, only made the more perfect by rare interruptions; and the rich, placid light, and the still, autumnal foliage. Houses, you know, stand all about our gardens: solid, steady blocks of houses; all look empty and asleep.

MONDAY NIGHT. — The drums and fifes up in the Castle

are sounding the guard-call through the dark, and there is a great rattle of carriages without. I have had (I must tell you) my bed taken out of this room, so that I am alone in it with my books and two tables, and two chairs, and a coal-skuttle (or SCUTTLE) (?) and a DEBRIS of broken pipes in a corner, and my old school play-box, so full of papers and books that the lid will not shut down, standing reproachfully in the midst. There is something in it that is still a little gaunt and vacant; it needs a little populous disorder over it to give it the feel of homeliness, and perhaps a bit more furniture, just to take the edge off the sense of illimitable space, eternity, and a future state, and the like, that is brought home to one, even in this small attic, by the wide, empty floor.

You would require to know, what only I can ever know, many grim and many maudlin passages out of my past life to feel how great a change has been made for me by this past summer. Let me be ever so poor and thread-paper a soul, I am going to try for the best.

These good booksellers of mine have at last got a WERTHER without illustrations. I want you to like Charlotte. Werther himself has every feebleness and vice that could tend to make his suicide a most virtuous and commendable action; and yet I like Werther too — I don't know why, except that he has written the most delightful letters in the world. Note, by the way, the passage under date June 21st not far from the beginning; it finds a voice for a great deal of dumb, uneasy, pleasurable longing that we have all had, times without number. I looked that up the other day for

ROADS, so I know the reference; but you will find it a garden of flowers from beginning to end. All through the passion keeps steadily rising, from the thunderstorm at the country-house — there was thunder in that story too — up to the last wild delirious interview; either Lotte was no good at all, or else Werther should have remained alive after that; either he knew his woman too well, or else he was precipitate. But an idiot like that is hopeless; and yet, he wasn't an idiot — I make reparation, and will offer eighteen pounds of best wax at his tomb. Poor devil! he was only the weakest — or, at least, a very weak strong man.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**17 HERIOT ROW, EDINBURGH,  
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 1873**

.. I WAS over last night, contrary to my own wish, in Leven, Fife; and this morning I had a conversation of which, I think, some account might interest you. I was up with a cousin who was fishing in a mill-lade, and a shower of rain drove me for shelter into a tumbledown steading attached to the mill. There I found a labourer cleaning a byre, with whom I fell into talk. The man was to all appearance as heavy, as HEBETE, as any English clodhopper; but I knew I was in Scotland, and launched out forthright into Education and Politics and the aims of one's

life. I told him how I had found the peasantry in Suffolk, and added that their state had made me feel quite pained and down-hearted. 'It but to do that,' he said, 'to onybody that thinks at a'!' Then, again, he said that he could not conceive how anything could daunt or cast down a man who had an aim in life. 'They that have had a guid schoolin' and do nae mair, whatever they do, they have done; but him that has aye something ayont need never be weary.' I have had to mutilate the dialect much, so that it might be comprehensible to you; but I think the sentiment will keep, even through a change of words, something of the heartsome ring of encouragement that it had for me: and that from a man cleaning a byre! You see what John Knox and his schools have done.

SATURDAY. — This has been a charming day for me from morning to now (5 P.M.). First, I found your letter, and went down and read it on a seat in those Public Gardens of which you have heard already. After lunch, my father and I went down to the coast and walked a little way along the shore between Granton and Cramond. This has always been with me a very favourite walk. The Firth closes gradually together before you, the coast runs in a series of the most beautifully moulded bays, hill after hill, wooded and softly outlined, trends away in front till the two shores join together. When the tide is out there are great, gleaming flats of wet sand, over which the gulls go flying and crying; and every cape runs down into them with its little spit of wall and trees. We lay together a long time on the beach; the sea just babbled among the stones; and at one time we heard

the hollow, sturdy beat of the paddles of an unseen steamer somewhere round the cape. I am glad to say that the peace of the day and scenery was not marred by any unpleasantness between us two.

I am, unhappily, off my style, and can do nothing well; indeed, I fear I have marred *ROADS* finally by patching at it when I was out of the humour. Only, I am beginning to see something great about John Knox and Queen Mary: I like them both so much, that I feel as if I could write the history fairly.

I have finished *ROADS* to-day, and send it off to you to see. The Lord knows whether it is worth anything! — some of it pleases me a good deal, but I fear it is quite unfit for any possible magazine. However, I wish you to see it, as you know the humour in which it was conceived, walking alone and very happily about the Suffolk highways and byeways on several splendid sunny afternoons. — Believe me, ever your faithful friend,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

MONDAY. — I have looked over *ROADS* again, and I am aghast at its feebleness. It is the trial of a very "prentice hand" indeed. Shall I ever learn to do anything well? However, it shall go to you, for the reasons given above.

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

## EDINBURGH, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1873

.. I MUST be very strong to have all this vexation and still to be well. I was weighed the other day, and the gross weight of my large person was eight stone six! Does it not seem surprising that I can keep the lamp alight, through all this gusty weather, in so frail a lantern? And yet it burns cheerily.

My mother is leaving for the country this morning, and my father and I will be alone for the best part of the week in this house. Then on Friday I go south to Dumfries till Monday. I must write small, or I shall have a tremendous budget by then.

7.20 P.M. — I must tell you a thing I saw to-day. I was going down to Portobello in the train, when there came into the next compartment (third class) an artisan, strongly marked with smallpox, and with sunken, heavy eyes — a face hard and unkind, and without anything lovely. There was a woman on the platform seeing him off. At first sight, with her one eye blind and the whole cast of her features strongly plebeian, and even vicious, she seemed as unpleasant as the man; but there was something beautifully soft, a sort of light of tenderness, as on some Dutch Madonna, that came over her face when she looked at the man. They talked for a while together through the window; the man seemed to have been asking money. 'Ye ken the last time,' she said, 'I gave ye two shillin's for your ludgin', and ye said —' it died off into whisper. Plainly Falstaff and Dame Quickly

over again. The man laughed unpleasantly, even cruelly, and said something; and the woman turned her back on the carriage and stood a long while so, and, do what I might, I could catch no glimpse of her expression, although I thought I saw the heave of a sob in her shoulders. At last, after the train was already in motion, she turned round and put two shillings into his hand. I saw her stand and look after us with a perfect heaven of love on her face — this poor one-eyed Madonna — until the train was out of sight; but the man, sordidly happy with his gains, did not put himself to the inconvenience of one glance to thank her for her ill-deserved kindness.

I have been up at the Spec. and looked out a reference I wanted. The whole town is drowned in white, wet vapour off the sea. Everything drips and soaks. The very statues seem wet to the skin. I cannot pretend to be very cheerful; I did not see one contented face in the streets; and the poor did look so helplessly chill and dripping, without a stitch to change, or so much as a fire to dry themselves at, or perhaps money to buy a meal, or perhaps even a bed. My heart shivers for them.

DUMFRIES, FRIDAY. — All my thirst for a little warmth, a little sun, a little corner of blue sky avails nothing. Without, the rain falls with a long drawn SWISH, and the night is as dark as a vault. There is no wind indeed, and that is a blessed change after the unruly, bedlamite gusts that have been charging against one round street corners and utterly abolishing and destroying all that is peaceful in life. Nothing sours my temper like these coarse

termagant winds. I hate practical joking; and your vulgarest practical joker is your flaw of wind.

I have tried to write some verses; but I find I have nothing to say that has not been already perfectly said and perfectly sung in ADELAIDE. I have so perfect an idea out of that song! The great Alps, a wonder in the starlight — the river, strong from the hills, and turbulent, and loudly audible at night — the country, a scented FRUHLINGSGARTEN of orchards and deep wood where the nightingales harbour — a sort of German flavour over all — and this love-drunken man, wandering on by sleeping village and silent town, pours out of his full heart, EINST, O WUNDER, EINST, etc. I wonder if I am wrong about this being the most beautiful and perfect thing in the world — the only marriage of really accordant words and music — both drunk with the same poignant, unutterable sentiment.

To-day in Glasgow my father went off on some business, and my mother and I wandered about for two hours. We had lunch together, and were very merry over what the people at the restaurant would think of us — mother and son they could not suppose us to be.

SATURDAY. — And to-day it came — warmth, sunlight, and a strong, hearty living wind among the trees. I found myself a new being. My father and I went off a long walk, through a country most beautifully wooded and various, under a range of hills. You should have seen one place where the wood suddenly fell away in front of us down a long, steep hill between a double

row of trees, with one small fair-haired child framed in shadow in the foreground; and when we got to the foot there was the little kirk and kirkyard of Irongray, among broken fields and woods by the side of the bright, rapid river. In the kirkyard there was a wonderful congregation of tombstones, upright and recumbent on four legs (after our Scotch fashion), and of flat-armed fir-trees. One gravestone was erected by Scott (at a cost, I learn, of 70 pounds) to the poor woman who served him as heroine in the HEART OF MIDLOTHIAN, and the inscription in its stiff, Jedediah Cleishbotham fashion is not without something touching. We went up the stream a little further to where two Covenanters lie buried in an oakwood; the tombstone (as the custom is) containing the details of their grim little tragedy in funnily bad rhyme, one verse of which sticks in my memory: -

'We died, their furious rage to stay,  
Near to the kirk of Iron-gray.'

We then fetched a long compass round about through Holywood Kirk and Lincluden ruins to Dumfries. But the walk came sadly to grief as a pleasure excursion before our return.

SUNDAY. — Another beautiful day. My father and I walked into Dumfries to church. When the service was done I noted the two halberts laid against the pillar of the churchyard gate; and as I had not seen the little weekly pomp of civic dignitaries in our Scotch country towns for some years, I made my father wait. You

should have seen the provost and three bailies going stately away down the sunlit street, and the two town servants strutting in front of them, in red coats and cocked hats, and with the halberts most conspicuously shouldered. We saw Burns's house — a place that made me deeply sad — and spent the afternoon down the banks of the Nith. I had not spent a day by a river since we lunched in the meadows near Sudbury. The air was as pure and clear and sparkling as spring water; beautiful, graceful outlines of hill and wood shut us in on every side; and the swift, brown river fled smoothly away from before our eyes, rippled over with oily eddies and dimples. White gulls had come up from the sea to fish, and hovered and flew hither and thither among the loops of the stream. By good fortune, too, it was a dead calm between my father and me.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**[EDINBURGH], SATURDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1873**

IT is a little sharp to-day; but bright and sunny with a sparkle in the air, which is delightful after four days of unintermitting rain. In the streets I saw two men meet after a long separation, it was plain. They came forward with a little run and LEAPED at each other's hands. You never saw such bright eyes as they both had. It put one in a good humour to see it.

8 P.M. — I made a little more out of my work than I have made for a long while back; though even now I cannot make things fall into sentences — they only sprawl over the paper in bald orphan clauses. Then I was about in the afternoon with Baxter; and we had a good deal of fun, first rhyming on the names of all the shops we passed, and afterwards buying needles and quack drugs from open-air vendors, and taking much pleasure in their inexhaustible eloquence. Every now and then as we went, Arthur's Seat showed its head at the end of a street. Now, to-day the blue sky and the sunshine were both entirely wintry; and there was about the hill, in these glimpses, a sort of thin, unreal, crystalline distinctness that I have not often seen excelled. As the sun began to go down over the valley between the new town and the old, the evening grew resplendent; all the gardens and low-lying buildings sank back and became almost invisible in a mist of wonderful sun, and the Castle stood up against the sky, as thin and sharp in outline as a castle cut out of paper. Baxter made a good remark about Princes Street, that it was the most elastic street for length that he knew; sometimes it looks, as it looked to-night, interminable, a way leading right into the heart of the red sundown; sometimes, again, it shrinks together, as if for warmth, on one of the withering, clear east-windy days, until it seems to lie underneath your feet.

I want to let you see these verses from an ODE TO THE CUCKOO, written by one of the ministers of Leith in the middle of last century — the palmy days of Edinburgh —

who was a friend of Hume and Adam Smith and the whole constellation. The authorship of these beautiful verses has been most truculently fought about; but whoever wrote them (and it seems as if this Logan had) they are lovely -

'What time the pea puts on the bloom,  
Thou fliest the vocal vale,  
An annual guest, in other lands  
Another spring to hail.

Sweet bird! thy bower is ever green,  
Thy sky is ever clear;  
Thou hast no sorrow in thy song,  
No winter in thy year.

O could I fly, I'd fly with thee!  
We'd make on joyful wing  
Our annual visit o'er the globe,  
Companions of the spring.'

SUNDAY. — I have been at church with my mother, where we heard 'Arise, shine,' sung excellently well, and my mother was so much upset with it that she nearly had to leave church. This was the antidote, however, to fifty minutes of solid sermon, varra heavy. I have been sticking in to Walt Whitman; nor do I think I have ever laboured so hard to attain so small a success. Still, the

thing is taking shape, I think; I know a little better what I want to say all through; and in process of time, possibly I shall manage to say it. I must say I am a very bad workman, MAIS J'AI DU COURAGE; I am indefatigable at rewriting and bettering, and surely that humble quality should get me on a little.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 6. — It is a magnificent glimmering moonlight night, with a wild, great west wind abroad, flapping above one like an immense banner, and every now and again swooping furiously against my windows. The wind is too strong perhaps, and the trees are certainly too leafless for much of that wide rustle that we both remember; there is only a sharp, angry, sibilant hiss, like breath drawn with the strength of the elements through shut teeth, that one hears between the gusts only. I am in excellent humour with myself, for I have worked hard and not altogether fruitlessly; and I wished before I turned in just to tell you that things were so. My dear friend, I feel so happy when I think that you remember me kindly. I have been up to-night lecturing to a friend on life and duties and what a man could do; a coal off the altar had been laid on my lips, and I talked quite above my average, and hope I spread, what you would wish to see spread, into one person's heart; and with a new light upon it.

I shall tell you a story. Last Friday I went down to Portobello, in the heavy rain, with an uneasy wind blowing PAR RAFALES off the sea (or 'EN RAFALES' should it be? or what?). As I got down near the beach a poor woman, oldish, and seemingly, lately at least, respectable, followed me and made signs. She was

drenched to the skin, and looked wretched below wretchedness. You know, I did not like to look back at her; it seemed as if she might misunderstand and be terribly hurt and slighted; so I stood at the end of the street — there was no one else within sight in the wet — and lifted up my hand very high with some money in it. I heard her steps draw heavily near behind me, and, when she was near enough to see, I let the money fall in the mud and went off at my best walk without ever turning round. There is nothing in the story; and yet you will understand how much there is, if one chose to set it forth. You see, she was so ugly; and you know there is something terribly, miserably pathetic in a certain smile, a certain sodden aspect of invitation on such faces. It is so terrible, that it is in a way sacred; it means the outside of degradation and (what is worst of all in life) false position. I hope you understand me rightly. — Ever your faithful friend,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**[EDINBURGH], TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 1873**

MY father has returned in better health, and I am more delighted than I can well tell you. The one trouble that I can see no way through is that his health, or my mother's, should give way. To- night, as I was walking along Princes Street, I heard the bugles sound the recall. I do not think I had ever remarked it

before; there is something of unspeakable appeal in the cadence. I felt as if something yearningly cried to me out of the darkness overhead to come thither and find rest; one felt as if there must be warm hearts and bright fires waiting for one up there, where the buglers stood on the damp pavement and sounded their friendly invitation forth into the night.

WEDNESDAY. — I may as well tell you exactly about my health. I am not at all ill; have quite recovered; only I am what MM. LES MEDECINS call below par; which, in plain English, is that I am weak. With tonics, decent weather, and a little cheerfulness, that will go away in its turn, and I shall be all right again.

I am glad to hear what you say about the Exam.; until quite lately I have treated that pretty cavalierly, for I say honestly that I do not mind being plucked; I shall just have to go up again. We travelled with the Lord Advocate the other day, and he strongly advised me in my father's hearing to go to the English Bar; and the Lord Advocate's advice goes a long way in Scotland. It is a sort of special legal revelation. Don't misunderstand me. I don't, of course, want to be plucked; but so far as my style of knowledge suits them, I cannot make much betterment on it in a month. If they wish scholarship more exact, I must take a new lease altogether.

THURSDAY. — My head and eyes both gave in this morning, and I had to take a day of complete idleness. I was in the open air all day, and did no thought that I could avoid, and I think I

have got my head between my shoulders again; however, I am not going to do much. I don't want you to run away with any fancy about my being ill. Given a person weak and in some trouble, and working longer hours than he is used to, and you have the matter in a nutshell. You should have seen the sunshine on the hill to-day; it has lost now that crystalline clearness, as if the medium were spring-water (you see, I am stupid!); but it retains that wonderful thinness of outline that makes the delicate shape and hue savour better in one's mouth, like fine wine out of a finely-blown glass. The birds are all silent now but the crows. I sat a long time on the stairs that lead down to Duddingston Loch — a place as busy as a great town during frost, but now solitary and silent; and when I shut my eyes I heard nothing but the wind in the trees; and you know all that went through me, I dare say, without my saying it.

II. — I am now all right. I do not expect any tic to-night, and shall be at work again to-morrow. I have had a day of open air, only a little modified by *LE CAPITAINE FRACASSE* before the dining-room fire. I must write no more, for I am sleepy after two nights, and to quote my book, '*SINON BLANCHES, DU MOINS GRISES*'; and so I must go to bed and faithfully, hoggishly slumber. — Your faithful

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

## MENTONE, NOVEMBER 13, 1873

MY DEAR MOTHER, — The PLACE is not where I thought; it is about where the old Post Office was. The Hotel de Londres is no more an hotel. I have found a charming room in the Hotel du Pavillon, just across the road from the Prince's Villa; it has one window to the south and one to the east, with a superb view of Mentone and the hills, to which I move this afternoon. In the old great PLACE there is a kiosque for the sale of newspapers; a string of omnibuses (perhaps thirty) go up and down under the plane-trees of the Turin Road on the occasion of each train; the Promenade has crossed both streams, and bids fair to reach the Cap St. Martin. The old chapel near Freeman's house at the entrance to the Gorbio valley is now entirely submerged under a shining new villa, with Pavilion annexed; over which, in all the pride of oak and chestnut and divers coloured marbles, I was shown this morning by the obliging proprietor. The Prince's Palace itself is rehabilitated, and shines afar with white window-curtains from the midst of a garden, all trim borders and greenhouses and carefully kept walks. On the other side, the villas are more thronged together, and they have arranged themselves, shelf after shelf, behind each other. I see the glimmer of new buildings, too, as far eastward as Grimaldi; and a viaduct carries (I suppose) the railway past the mouth of the bone caves. F. Bacon (Lord Chancellor) made the remark that

'Time was the greatest innovator'; it is perhaps as meaningless a remark as was ever made; but as Bacon made it, I suppose it is better than any that I could make. Does it not seem as if things were fluid? They are displaced and altered in ten years so that one has difficulty, even with a memory so very vivid and retentive for that sort of thing as mine, in identifying places where one lived a long while in the past, and which one has kept piously in mind during all the interval. Nevertheless, the hills, I am glad to say, are unaltered; though I dare say the torrents have given them many a shrewd scar, and the rains and thaws dislodged many a boulder from their heights, if one were only keen enough to perceive it. The sea makes the same noise in the shingle; and the lemon and orange gardens still discharge in the still air their fresh perfume; and the people have still brown comely faces; and the Pharmacie Gros still dispenses English medicines; and the invalids (ehou!) still sit on the promenade and trifle with their fingers in the fringes of shawls and wrappers; and the shop of Pascal Amarante still, in its present bright consummate flower of aggrandisement and new paint, offers everything that it has entered into people's hearts to wish for in the idleness of a sanatorium; and the 'Chateau des Morts' is still at the top of the town; and the fort and the jetty are still at the foot, only there are now two jetties; and — I am out of breath. (To be continued in our next.)

For myself, I have come famously through the journey; and as I have written this letter (for the first time for ever so long)

with ease and even pleasure, I think my head must be better. I am still no good at coming down hills or stairs; and my feet are more consistently cold than is quite comfortable. But, these apart, I feel well; and in good spirits all round.

I have written to Nice for letters, and hope to get them to-night.

Continue to address Poste Restante. Take care of yourselves. This is my birthday, by the way — O, I said that before. Adieu.

Ever your affectionate son,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

## **MENTONE, SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 1873**

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I sat a long while up among the olive yards to-day at a favourite corner, where one has a fair view down the valley and on to the blue floor of the sea. I had a Horace with me, and read a little; but Horace, when you try to read him fairly under the open heaven, sounds urban, and you find something of the escaped townsman in his descriptions of the country, just as somebody said that Morris's sea-pieces were all taken from the coast. I tried for long to hit upon some language that might catch ever so faintly the indefinable shifting colour of olive leaves; and, above all, the changes and little silverings that pass over them,

like blushes over a face, when the wind tosses great branches to and fro; but the Muse was not favourable. A few birds scattered here and there at wide intervals on either side of the valley sang the little broken songs of late autumn and there was a great stir of insect life in the grass at my feet. The path up to this coign of vantage, where I think I shall make it a habit to ensconce myself a while of a morning, is for a little while common to the peasant and a little clear brooklet. It is pleasant, in the tempered grey daylight of the olive shadows, to see the people picking their way among the stones and the water and the brambles; the women especially, with the weights poised on their heads and walking all from the hips with a certain graceful deliberation.

TUESDAY. — I have been to Nice to-day to see Dr. Bennet; he agrees with Clark that there is no disease; but I finished up my day with a lamentable exhibition of weakness. I could not remember French, or at least I was afraid to go into any place lest I should not be able to remember it, and so could not tell when the train went. At last I crawled up to the station and sat down on the steps, and just steeped myself there in the sunshine until the evening began to fall and the air to grow chilly. This long rest put me all right; and I came home here triumphantly and ate dinner well. There is the full, true, and particular account of the worst day I have had since I left London. I shall not go to Nice again for some time to come.

THURSDAY. — I am to-day quite recovered, and got into Mentone to-day for a book, which is quite a creditable walk.

As an intellectual being I have not yet begun to re-exist; my immortal soul is still very nearly extinct; but we must hope the best. Now, do take warning by me. I am set up by a beneficent providence at the corner of the road, to warn you to flee from the hebetude that is to follow. Being sent to the South is not much good unless you take your soul with you, you see; and my soul is rarely with me here. I don't see much beauty. I have lost the key; I can only be placid and inert, and see the bright days go past uselessly one after another; therefore don't talk foolishly with your mouth any more about getting liberty by being ill and going south VIA the sickbed. It is not the old free-born bird that gets thus to freedom; but I know not what manacled and hide-bound spirit, incapable of pleasure, the clay of a man. Go south! Why, I saw more beauty with my eyes healthfully alert to see in two wet windy February afternoons in Scotland than I can see in my beautiful olive gardens and grey hills in a whole week in my low and lost estate, as the Shorter Catechism puts it somewhere. It is a pitiable blindness, this blindness of the soul; I hope it may not be long with me. So remember to keep well; and remember rather anything than not to keep well; and again I say, ANYTHING rather than not to keep well.

Not that I am unhappy, mind you. I have found the words already — placid and inert, that is what I am. I sit in the sun and enjoy the tingle all over me, and I am cheerfully ready to concur with any one who says that this is a beautiful place, and I have a sneaking partiality for the newspapers, which would be all very

well, if one had not fallen from heaven and were not troubled with some reminiscence of the INEFFABLE AURORE.

To sit by the sea and to be conscious of nothing but the sound of the waves, and the sunshine over all your body, is not unpleasant; but I was an Archangel once.

FRIDAY. — If you knew how old I felt! I am sure this is what age brings with it — this carelessness, this disenchantment, this continual bodily weariness. I am a man of seventy: O Medea, kill me, or make me young again!

To-day has been cloudy and mild; and I have lain a great while on a bench outside the garden wall (my usual place now) and looked at the dove-coloured sea and the broken roof of cloud, but there was no seeing in my eye. Let us hope to-morrow will be more profitable.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**HOTEL MIRABEAU, MENTONE,  
SUNDAY, JANUARY 4, 1874**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — We have here fallen on the very pink of hotels. I do not say that it is more pleasantly conducted than the Pavillon, for that were impossible; but the rooms are so cheery and bright and new, and then the food! I never, I think, so fully appreciated the phrase 'the fat of the land' as I have done

since I have been here installed. There was a dish of eggs at DEJEUNER the other day, over the memory of which I lick my lips in the silent watches.

Now that the cold has gone again, I continue to keep well in body, and already I begin to walk a little more. My head is still a very feeble implement, and easily set a-spinning; and I can do nothing in the way of work beyond reading books that may, I hope, be of some use to me afterwards.

I was very glad to see that M'Laren was sat upon, and principally for the reason why. Deploring as I do much of the action of the Trades Unions, these conspiracy clauses and the whole partiality of the Master and Servant Act are a disgrace to our equal laws. Equal laws become a byword when what is legal for one class becomes a criminal offence for another. It did my heart good to hear that man tell M'Laren how, as he had talked much of getting the franchise for working men, he must now be content to see them use it now they had got it. This is a smooth stone well planted in the foreheads of certain dilettanti radicals, after M'Laren's fashion, who are willing to give the working men words and wind, and votes and the like, and yet think to keep all the advantages, just or unjust, of the wealthier classes without abatement. I do hope wise men will not attempt to fight the working men on the head of this notorious injustice. Any such step will only precipitate the action of the newly enfranchised classes, and irritate them into acting hastily; when what we ought to desire should be that they should act warily and little for many

years to come, until education and habit may make them the more fit.

All this (intended for my father) is much after the fashion of his own correspondence. I confess it has left my own head exhausted; I hope it may not produce the same effect on yours. But I want him to look really into this question (both sides of it, and not the representations of rabid middle-class newspapers, sworn to support all the little tyrannies of wealth), and I know he will be convinced that this is a case of unjust law; and that, however desirable the end may seem to him, he will not be Jesuit enough to think that any end will justify an unjust law.

Here ends the political sermon of your affectionate (and somewhat dogmatical) son,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**MENTONE, JANUARY 7, 1874**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — I received yesterday two most charming letters — the nicest I have had since I left — December 26th and January 1st: this morning I got January 3rd.

Into the bargain with Marie, the American girl, who is grace itself, and comes leaping and dancing simply like a wave — like nothing else, and who yesterday was Queen out of the Epiphany cake and chose Robinet (the French Painter) as her

FAVORI with the most pretty confusion possible — into the bargain with Marie, we have two little Russian girls, with the youngest of whom, a little polyglot button of a three-year old, I had the most laughable little scene at lunch to-day. I was watching her being fed with great amusement, her face being as broad as it is long, and her mouth capable of unlimited extension; when suddenly, her eye catching mine, the fashion of her countenance was changed, and regarding me with a really admirable appearance of offended dignity, she said something in Italian which made everybody laugh much. It was explained to me that she had said I was very POLISSON to stare at her. After this she was somewhat taken up with me, and after some examination she announced emphatically to the whole table, in German, that I was a MADCHEN; which word she repeated with shrill emphasis, as though fearing that her proposition would be called in question — MADCHEN, MADCHEN, MADCHEN, MADCHEN. This hasty conclusion as to my sex she was led afterwards to revise, I am informed; but her new opinion (which seems to have been something nearer the truth) was announced in a third language quite unknown to me, and probably Russian. To complete the scroll of her accomplishments, she was brought round the table after the meal was over, and said good-bye to me in very commendable English.

The weather I shall say nothing about, as I am incapable of explaining my sentiments upon that subject before a lady. But my health is really greatly improved: I begin to recognise myself

occasionally now and again, not without satisfaction.

Please remember me very kindly to Professor Swan; I wish I had a story to send him; but story, Lord bless you, I have none to tell, sir, unless it is the foregoing adventure with the little polyglot. The best of that depends on the significance of POLISSON, which is beautifully out of place.

SATURDAY, 10TH JANUARY. — The little Russian kid is only two and a half: she speaks six languages. She and her sister (aet. 8) and May Johnstone (aet. 8) are the delight of my life. Last night I saw them all dancing — O it was jolly; kids are what is the matter with me. After the dancing, we all — that is the two Russian ladies, Robinet the French painter, Mr. and Mrs. Johnstone, two governesses, and fitful kids joining us at intervals — played a game of the stool of repentance in the Gallic idiom.

O — I have not told you that Colvin is gone; however, he is coming back again; he has left clothes in pawn to me. — Ever your affectionate son,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**MENTONE, TUESDAY, 13TH JANUARY 1874**

.. I LOST a Philipine to little Mary Johnstone last night; so to-day I sent her a rubbishing doll's toilet, and a little note with it, with some verses telling how happy children made every one near

them happy also, and advising her to keep the lines, and some day, when she was 'grown a stately demoiselle,' it would make her 'glad to know she gave pleasure long ago,' all in a very lame fashion, with just a note of prose at the end, telling her to mind her doll and the dog, and not trouble her little head just now to understand the bad verses; for some time when she was ill, as I am now, they would be plain to her and make her happy. She has just been here to thank me, and has left me very happy. Children are certainly too good to be true.

Yesterday I walked too far, and spent all the afternoon on the outside of my bed; went finally to rest at nine, and slept nearly twelve hours on the stretch. Bennet (the doctor), when told of it this morning, augured well for my recovery; he said youth must be putting in strong; of course I ought not to have slept at all. As it was, I dreamed HORRIDLY; but not my usual dreams of social miseries and misunderstandings and all sorts of crucifixions of the spirit; but of good, cheery, physical things — of long successions of vaulted, dimly lit cellars full of black water, in which I went swimming among toads and unutterable, cold, blind fishes. Now and then these cellars opened up into sort of domed music-hall places, where one could land for a little on the slope of the orchestra, but a sort of horror prevented one from staying long, and made one plunge back again into the dead waters. Then my dream changed, and I was a sort of Siamese pirate, on a very high deck with several others. The ship was almost captured, and we were fighting desperately. The hideous

engines we used and the perfectly incredible carnage that we effected by means of them kept me cheery, as you may imagine; especially as I felt all the time my sympathy with the boarders, and knew that I was only a prisoner with these horrid Malays. Then I saw a signal being given, and knew they were going to blow up the ship. I leaped right off, and heard my captors splash in the water after me as thick as pebbles when a bit of river bank has given way beneath the foot. I never heard the ship blow up; but I spent the rest of the night swimming about some piles with the whole sea full of Malays, searching for me with knives in their mouths. They could swim any distance under water, and every now and again, just as I was beginning to reckon myself safe, a cold hand would be laid on my ankle — ugh!

However, my long sleep, troubled as it was, put me all right again, and I was able to work acceptably this morning and be very jolly all day. This evening I have had a great deal of talk with both the Russian ladies; they talked very nicely, and are bright, likable women both. They come from Georgia.

WEDNESDAY, 10.30. — We have all been to tea to-night at the Russians' villa. Tea was made out of a samovar, which is something like a small steam engine, and whose principal advantage is that it burns the fingers of all who lay their profane touch upon it. After tea Madame Z. played Russian airs, very plaintive and pretty; so the evening was Muscovite from beginning to end. Madame G.'s daughter danced a tarantella, which was very pretty.

Whenever Nelitchka cries — and she never cries except from pain — all that one has to do is to start 'Malbrook s'en va-t-en guerre.' She cannot resist the attraction; she is drawn through her sobs into the air; and in a moment there is Nelly singing, with the glad look that comes into her face always when she sings, and all the tears and pain forgotten.

It is wonderful, before I shut this up, how that child remains ever interesting to me. Nothing can stale her infinite variety; and yet it is not very various. You see her thinking what she is to do or to say next, with a funny grave air of reserve, and then the face breaks up into a smile, and it is probably 'Berecchino!' said with that sudden little jump of the voice that one knows in children, as the escape of a jack-in-the-box, and, somehow, I am quite happy after that!

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**[MENTONE, JANUARY 1874.]**

.. LAST night I had a quarrel with the American on politics. It is odd how it irritates you to hear certain political statements made. He was excited, and he began suddenly to abuse our conduct to America. I, of course, admitted right and left that we had behaved disgracefully (as we had); until somehow I got tired of turning alternate cheeks and getting duly buffeted; and when

he said that the Alabama money had not wiped out the injury, I suggested, in language (I remember) of admirable directness and force, that it was a pity they had taken the money in that case. He lost his temper at once, and cried out that his dearest wish was a war with England; whereupon I also lost my temper, and, thundering at the pitch of my voice, I left him and went away by myself to another part of the garden. A very tender reconciliation took place, and I think there will come no more harm out of it. We are both of us nervous people, and he had had a very long walk and a good deal of beer at dinner: that explains the scene a little. But I regret having employed so much of the voice with which I have been endowed, as I fear every person in the hotel was taken into confidence as to my sentiments, just at the very juncture when neither the sentiments nor (perhaps) the language had been sufficiently considered.

FRIDAY. — You have not yet heard of my book? — **FOUR GREAT SCOTSMEN** — John Knox, David Hume, Robert Burns, Walter Scott. These, their lives, their work, the social media in which they lived and worked, with, if I can so make it, the strong current of the race making itself felt underneath and throughout — this is my idea. You must tell me what you think of it. The Knox will really be new matter, as his life hitherto has been disgracefully written, and the events are romantic and rapid; the character very strong, salient, and worthy; much interest as to the future of Scotland, and as to that part of him which was truly modern under his Hebrew disguise. Hume, of course, the

urbane, cheerful, gentlemanly, letter-writing eighteenth century, full of attraction, and much that I don't yet know as to his work. Burns, the sentimental side that there is in most Scotsmen, his poor troubled existence, how far his poems were his personally, and how far national, the question of the framework of society in Scotland, and its fatal effect upon the finest natures. Scott again, the ever delightful man, sane, courageous, admirable; the birth of Romance, in a dawn that was a sunset; snobbery, conservatism, the wrong thread in History, and notably in that of his own land. VOILA, MADAME, LE MENU. COMMENT LE TROUVEZ-VOUS? IL Y A DE LA BONNE VIANDO, SI ON PARVIENT A LA CUIRE CONVENABLEMENT.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. THOMAS STEVENSON

**[MENTONE, MARCH 28, 1874.]**

MY DEAR MOTHER, — Beautiful weather, perfect weather; sun, pleasant cooling winds; health very good; only incapacity to write.

The only new cloud on my horizon (I mean this in no menacing sense) is the Prince. I have philosophical and artistic discussions with the Prince. He is capable of talking for two hours upon end, developing his theory of everything under Heaven from his first position, which is that there is no straight line. Doesn't that sound

like a game of my father's — I beg your pardon, you haven't read it — I don't mean MY father, I mean Tristram Shandy's. He is very clever, and it is an immense joke to hear him unrolling all the problems of life — philosophy, science, what you will — in this charmingly cut-and-dry, here-we-are-again kind of manner. He is better to listen to than to argue withal. When you differ from him, he lifts up his voice and thunders; and you know that the thunder of an excited foreigner often miscarries. One stands aghast, marvelling how such a colossus of a man, in such a great commotion of spirit, can open his mouth so much and emit such a still small voice at the hinder end of it all. All this while he walks about the room, smokes cigarettes, occupies divers chairs for divers brief spaces, and casts his huge arms to the four winds like the sails of a mill. He is a most sportive Prince.

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**[SWANSTON], MAY 1874, MONDAY**

WE are now at Swanston Cottage, Lothianburn, Edinburgh. The garden is but little clothed yet, for, you know, here we are six hundred feet above the sea. It is very cold, and has sleeted this morning. Everything wintry. I am very jolly, however, having finished Victor Hugo, and just looking round to see what I should next take up. I have been reading Roman Law and Calvin this

morning.

EVENING. — I went up the hill a little this afternoon. The air was invigorating, but it was so cold that my scalp was sore. With this high wintry wind, and the grey sky, and faint northern daylight, it was quite wonderful to hear such a clamour of blackbirds coming up to me out of the woods, and the bleating of sheep being shorn in a field near the garden, and to see golden patches of blossom already on the furze, and delicate green shoots upright and beginning to frond out, among last year's russet bracken. Flights of crows were passing continually between the wintry leaden sky and the wintry cold-looking hills. It was the oddest conflict of seasons. A wee rabbit — this year's making, beyond question — ran out from under my feet, and was in a pretty perturbation, until he hit upon a lucky juniper and blotted himself there promptly. Evidently this gentleman had not had much experience of life.

I have made an arrangement with my people: I am to have 84 pounds a year — I only asked for 80 pounds on mature reflection — and as I should soon make a good bit by my pen, I shall be very comfortable. We are all as jolly as can be together, so that is a great thing gained.

WEDNESDAY. — Yesterday I received a letter that gave me much pleasure from a poor fellow-student of mine, who has been all winter very ill, and seems to be but little better even now. He seems very much pleased with ORDERED SOUTH. 'A month ago,' he says, 'I could scarcely have ventured to read it; to-day I

felt on reading it as I did on the first day that I was able to sun myself a little in the open air.' And much more to the like effect. It is very gratifying. — Ever your faithful friend,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

## **SWANSTON, WEDNESDAY, MAY 1874**

STRUGGLING away at FABLES IN SONG. I am much afraid I am going to make a real failure; the time is so short, and I am so out of the humour. Otherwise very calm and jolly: cold still IMPOSSIBLE.

THURSDAY. — I feel happier about the FABLES, and it is warmer a bit; but my body is most decrepit, and I can just manage to be cheery and tread down hypochondria under foot by work. I lead such a funny life, utterly without interest or pleasure outside of my work: nothing, indeed, but work all day long, except a short walk alone on the cold hills, and meals, and a couple of pipes with my father in the evening. It is surprising how it suits me, and how happy I keep.

SATURDAY. — I have received such a nice long letter (four sides) from Leslie Stephen to-day about my Victor Hugo. It is accepted. This ought to have made me gay, but it hasn't. I am not likely to be much of a tonic to-night. I have been very cynical over myself to-day, partly, perhaps, because I have just finished

some of the deedest rubbish about Lord Lytton's fables that an intelligent editor ever shot into his wastepaper basket. If Morley prints it I shall be glad, but my respect for him will be shaken.

TUESDAY. — Another cold day; yet I have been along the hillside, wondering much at idiotic sheep, and raising partridges at every second step. One little plover is the object of my firm adherence. I pass his nest every day, and if you saw how he files by me, and almost into my face, crying and flapping his wings, to direct my attention from his little treasure, you would have as kind a heart to him as I. To-day I saw him not, although I took my usual way; and I am afraid that some person has abused his simple wiliness and harried (as we say in Scotland) the nest. I feel much righteous indignation against such imaginary aggressor. However, one must not be too chary of the lower forms. To-day I sat down on a tree-stump at the skirt of a little strip of planting, and thoughtlessly began to dig out the touchwood with an end of twig. I found I had carried ruin, death, and universal consternation into a little community of ants; and this set me a-thinking of how close we are environed with frail lives, so that we can do nothing without spreading havoc over all manner of perishable homes and interests and affections; and so on to my favourite mood of an holy terror for all action and all inaction equally — a sort of shuddering revulsion from the necessary responsibilities of life. We must not be too scrupulous of others, or we shall die. Conscientiousness is a sort of moral opium; an excitant in small doses, perhaps, but at bottom a strong narcotic.

SATURDAY. — I have been two days in Edinburgh, and so had not the occasion to write to you. Morley has accepted the FABLES, and I have seen it in proof, and think less of it than ever. However, of course, I shall send you a copy of the MAGAZINE without fail, and you can be as disappointed as you like, or the reverse if you can. I would willingly recall it if I could.

Try, by way of change, Byron's MAZEPPA; you will be astonished. It is grand and no mistake, and one sees through it a fire, and a passion, and a rapid intuition of genius, that makes one rather sorry for one's own generation of better writers, and — I don't know what to say; I was going to say 'smaller men'; but that's not right; read it, and you will feel what I cannot express. Don't be put out by the beginning; persevere, and you will find yourself thrilled before you are at an end with it. — Ever your faithful friend,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

## **TRAIN BETWEEN EDINBURGH AND CHESTER, AUGUST 8, 1874**

MY father and mother reading. I think I shall talk to you for a moment or two. This morning at Swanston, the birds, poor creatures, had the most troubled hour or two; evidently there was a hawk in the neighbourhood; not one sang; and the whole garden

thrilled with little notes of warning and terror. I did not know before that the voice of birds could be so tragically expressive. I had always heard them before express their trivial satisfaction with the blue sky and the return of daylight. Really, they almost frightened me; I could hear mothers and wives in terror for those who were dear to them; it was easy to translate, I wish it were as easy to write; but it is very hard in this flying train, or I would write you more.

CHESTER. — I like this place much; but somehow I feel glad when I get among the quiet eighteenth century buildings, in cosy places with some elbow room about them, after the older architecture. This other is bedevilled and furtive; it seems to stoop; I am afraid of trap-doors, and could not go pleasantly into such houses. I don't know how much of this is legitimately the effect of the architecture; little enough possibly; possibly far the most part of it comes from bad historical novels and the disquieting statuary that garnishes some facades.

On the way, to-day, I passed through my dear Cumberland country. Nowhere to as great a degree can one find the combination of lowland and highland beauties; the outline of the blue hills is broken by the outline of many tumultuous tree-clumps; and the broad spaces of moorland are balanced by a network of deep hedgerows that might rival Suffolk, in the foreground. — How a railway journey shakes and discomposes one, mind and body! I grow blacker and blacker in humour as the day goes on; and when at last I am let out, and have the fresh air

about me, it is as though I were born again, and the sick fancies flee away from my mind like swans in spring.

I want to come back on what I have said about eighteenth century and middle-age houses: I do not know if I have yet explained to you the sort of loyalty, of urbanity, that there is about the one to my mind; the spirit of a country orderly and prosperous, a flavour of the presence of magistrates and well-to-do merchants in bag-wigs, the clink of glasses at night in fire-lit parlours, something certain and civic and domestic, is all about these quiet, staid, shapely houses, with no character but their exceeding shapeliness, and the comely external utterance that they make of their internal comfort. Now the others are, as I have said, both furtive and bedevilled; they are sly and grotesque; they combine their sort of feverish grandeur with their sort of secretive baseness, after the manner of a Charles the Ninth. They are peopled for me with persons of the same fashion. Dwarfs and sinister people in cloaks are about them; and I seem to divine crypts, and, as I said, trap-doors. O God be praised that we live in this good daylight and this good peace.

BARMOUTH, AUGUST 9TH. — To-day we saw the cathedral at Chester; and, far more delightful, saw and heard a certain inimitable verger who took us round. He was full of a certain recondite, far-away humour that did not quite make you laugh at the time, but was somehow laughable to recollect. Moreover, he had so far a just imagination, and could put one in the right humour for seeing an old place, very much as, according

to my favourite text, Scott's novels and poems do for one. His account of the monks in the Scriptorium, with their cowls over their heads, in a certain sheltered angle of the cloister where the big Cathedral building kept the sun off the parchments, was all that could be wished; and so too was what he added of the others pacing solemnly behind them and dropping, ever and again, on their knees before a little shrine there is in the wall, 'to keep 'em in the frame of mind.' You will begin to think me unduly biassed in this verger's favour if I go on to tell you his opinion of me. We got into a little side chapel, whence we could hear the choir children at practice, and I stopped a moment listening to them, with, I dare say, a very bright face, for the sound was delightful to me. 'Ah,' says he, 'you're VERY fond of music.' I said I was. 'Yes, I could tell that by your head,' he answered. 'There's a deal in that head.' And he shook his own solemnly. I said it might be so, but I found it hard, at least, to get it out. Then my father cut in brutally, said anyway I had no ear, and left the verger so distressed and shaken in the foundations of his creed that, I hear, he got my father aside afterwards and said he was sure there was something in my face, and wanted to know what it was, if not music. He was relieved when he heard that I occupied myself with litterature (which word, note here, I do not spell correctly). Good-night, and here's the verger's health!

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

## SWANSTON, WEDNESDAY, [AUTUMN] 1874

I HAVE been hard at work all yesterday, and besides had to write a long letter to Bob, so I found no time until quite late, and then was sleepy. Last night it blew a fearful gale; I was kept awake about a couple of hours, and could not get to sleep for the horror of the wind's noise; the whole house shook; and, mind you, our house IS a house, a great castle of jointed stone that would weigh up a street of English houses; so that when it quakes, as it did last night, it means something. But the quaking was not what put me about; it was the horrible howl of the wind round the corner; the audible haunting of an incarnate anger about the house; the evil spirit that was abroad; and, above all, the shuddering silent pauses when the storm's heart stands dreadfully still for a moment. O how I hate a storm at night! They have been a great influence in my life, I am sure; for I can remember them so far back — long before I was six at least, for we left the house in which I remember listening to them times without number when I was six. And in those days the storm had for me a perfect impersonation, as durable and unvarying as any heathen deity. I always heard it, as a horseman riding past with his cloak about his head, and somehow always carried away, and riding past again, and being baffled yet once more, AD INFINITUM, all night long. I think I wanted him to get past, but I am not sure; I know only that I had some interest either for or against in the matter; and I used to lie and hold my

breath, not quite frightened, but in a state of miserable exaltation.

My first John Knox is in proof, and my second is on the anvil. It is very good of me so to do; for I want so much to get to my real tour and my sham tour, the real tour first: it is always working in my head, and if I can only turn on the right sort of style at the right moment, I am not much afraid of it. One thing bothers me; what with hammering at this J. K., and writing necessary letters, and taking necessary exercise (that even not enough, the weather is so repulsive to me, cold and windy), I find I have no time for reading except times of fatigue, when I wish merely to relax myself. O — and I read over again for this purpose Flaubert's *TENTATION DE ST. ANTOINE*; it struck me a good deal at first, but this second time it has fetched me immensely. I am but just done with it, so you will know the large proportion of salt to take with my present statement, that it's the finest thing I ever read! Of course, it isn't that, it's full of *LONGUEURS*, and is not quite 'redd up,' as we say in Scotland, not quite articulated; but there are splendid things in it.

I say, *DO* take your macaroni with oil: *DO*, *PLEASE*. It's *BEASTLY* with butter. — Ever your faithful friend,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

## [EDINBURGH], DECEMBER 23, 1874

MONDAY. — I have come from a concert, and the concert was rather a disappointment. Not so my afternoon skating — Duddingston, our big loch, is bearing; and I wish you could have seen it this afternoon, covered with people, in thin driving snow flurries, the big hill grim and white and alpine overhead in the thick air, and the road up the gorge, as it were into the heart of it, dotted black with traffic. Moreover, I CAN skate a little bit; and what one can do is always pleasant to do.

TUESDAY. — I got your letter to-day, and was so glad thereof. It was of good omen to me also. I worked from ten to one (my classes are suspended now for Xmas holidays), and wrote four or five Portfolio pages of my Buckinghamshire affair. Then I went to Duddingston and skated all afternoon. If you had seen the moon rising, a perfect sphere of smoky gold, in the dark air above the trees, and the white loch thick with skaters, and the great hill, snow-sprinkled, overhead! It was a sight for a king.

WEDNESDAY. — I stayed on Duddingston to-day till after nightfall. The little booths that hucksters set up round the edge were marked each one by its little lamp. There were some fires too; and the light, and the shadows of the people who stood round them to warm themselves, made a strange pattern all round on the snow-covered ice. A few people with torches began to travel up and down the ice, a lit circle travelling along with them over the

snow. A gigantic moon rose, meanwhile, over the trees and the kirk on the promontory, among perturbed and vacillating clouds.

The walk home was very solemn and strange. Once, through a broken gorge, we had a glimpse of a little space of mackerel sky, moon-litten, on the other side of the hill; the broken ridges standing grey and spectral between; and the hilltop over all, snow-white, and strangely magnified in size.

This must go to you to-morrow, so that you may read it on Christmas Day for company. I hope it may be good company to you.

THURSDAY. — Outside, it snows thick and steadily. The gardens before our house are now a wonderful fairy forest. And O, this whiteness of things, how I love it, how it sends the blood about my body! Maurice de Guerin hated snow; what a fool he must have been! Somebody tried to put me out of conceit with it by saying that people were lost in it. As if people don't get lost in love, too, and die of devotion to art; as if everything worth were not an occasion to some people's end.

What a wintry letter this is! Only I think it is winter seen from the inside of a warm greatcoat. And there is, at least, a warm heart about it somewhere. Do you know, what they say in Xmas stories is true? I think one loves their friends more dearly at this season. — Ever your faithful friend,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO SIDNEY COLVIN

**17 HERIOT ROAD,  
EDINBURGH [JANUARY 1875]**

MY DEAR COLVIN, — I have worked too hard; I have given myself one day of rest, and that was not enough; I am giving myself another. I shall go to bed again likewise so soon as this is done, and slumber most potently.

9 P.M., slept all afternoon like a lamb.

About my coming south, I think the still small unanswerable voice of coins will make it impossible until the session is over (end of March); but for all that, I think I shall hold out jolly. I do not want you to come and bother yourself; indeed, it is still not quite certain whether my father will be quite fit for you, although I have now no fear of that really. Now don't take up this wrongly; I wish you could come; and I do not know anything that would make me happier, but I see that it is wrong to expect it, and so I resign myself: some time after. I offered Appleton a series of papers on the modern French school — the Parnassiens, I think they call them — de Banville, Coppee, Soulyard, and Sully Prudhomme. But he has not deigned to answer my letter.

I shall have another Portfolio paper so soon as I am done with this story, that has played me out; the story is to be called **WHEN THE DEVIL WAS WELL**: scene, Italy, Renaissance; colour, purely imaginary of course, my own unregenerate idea of what Italy then was. O, when shall I find the story of my dreams, that

shall never halt nor wander nor step aside, but go ever before its face, and ever swifter and louder, until the pit receives it, roaring? The Portfolio paper will be about Scotland and England. — Ever yours,

*R. L. STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**EDINBURGH, TUESDAY [FEBRUARY 1875]**

I GOT your nice long gossiping letter to-day — I mean by that that there was more news in it than usual — and so, of course, I am pretty jolly. I am in the house, however, with such a beastly cold in the head. Our east winds begin already to be very cold.

O, I have such a longing for children of my own; and yet I do not think I could bear it if I had one. I fancy I must feel more like a woman than like a man about that. I sometimes hate the children I see on the street — you know what I mean by hate — wish they were somewhere else, and not there to mock me; and sometimes, again, I don't know how to go by them for the love of them, especially the very wee ones.

THURSDAY. — I have been still in the house since I wrote, and I HAVE worked. I finished the Italian story; not well, but as well as I can just now; I must go all over it again, some time soon, when I feel in the humour to better and perfect it. And now I have taken up an old story, begun years ago; and I have now re-

written all I had written of it then, and mean to finish it. What I have lost and gained is odd. As far as regards simple writing, of course, I am in another world now; but in some things, though more clumsy, I seem to have been freer and more plucky: this is a lesson I have taken to heart. I have got a jolly new name for my old story. I am going to call it **A COUNTRY DANCE**; the two heroes keep changing places, you know; and the chapter where the most of this changing goes on is to be called 'Up the middle, down the middle.' It will be in six, or (perhaps) seven chapters. I have never worked harder in my life than these last four days. If I can only keep it up.

**SATURDAY.** — Yesterday, Leslie Stephen, who was down here to lecture, called on me and took me up to see a poor fellow, a poet who writes for him, and who has been eighteen months in our infirmary, and may be, for all I know, eighteen months more. It was very sad to see him there, in a little room with two beds, and a couple of sick children in the other bed; a girl came in to visit the children, and played dominoes on the counterpane with them; the gas flared and crackled, the fire burned in a dull economical way; Stephen and I sat on a couple of chairs, and the poor fellow sat up in his bed with his hair and beard all tangled, and talked as cheerfully as if he had been in a King's palace, or the great King's palace of the blue air. He has taught himself two languages since he has been lying there. I shall try to be of use to him.

We have had two beautiful spring days, mild as milk, windy

withal, and the sun hot. I dreamed last night I was walking by moonlight round the place where the scene of my story is laid; it was all so quiet and sweet, and the blackbirds were singing as if it was day; it made my heart very cool and happy. — Ever yours,

*ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.*

Letter: TO SIDNEY COLVIN

**FEBRUARY 8, 1875**

MY DEAR COLVIN, — Forgive my bothering you. Here is the proof of my second KNOX. Glance it over, like a good fellow, and if there's anything very flagrant send it to me marked. I have no confidence in myself; I feel such an ass. What have I been doing? As near as I can calculate, nothing. And yet I have worked all this month from three to five hours a day, that is to say, from one to three hours more than my doctor allows me; positively no result.

No, I can write no article just now; I am PIOCHING, like a madman, at my stories, and can make nothing of them; my simplicity is tame and dull — my passion tinsel, boyish, hysterical. Never mind — ten years hence, if I live, I shall have learned, so help me God. I know one must work, in the meantime (so says Balzac) **COMME LE MINEUR ENFOUI SOUS UN EBOULEMENT.**

**J'Y PARVIENDRAI, NOM DE NOM DE NOM!** But it's a

long look forward.

— Ever yours,

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**[BARBIZON, APRIL 1875.]**

MY DEAR FRIEND, — This is just a line to say I am well and happy. I am here in my dear forest all day in the open air. It is very be — no, not beautiful exactly, just now, but very bright and living. There are one or two song birds and a cuckoo; all the fruit-trees are in flower, and the beeches make sunshine in a shady place, I begin to go all right; you need not be vexed about my health; I really was ill at first, as bad as I have been for nearly a year; but the forest begins to work, and the air, and the sun, and the smell of the pines. If I could stay a month here, I should be as right as possible. Thanks for your letter. — Your faithful

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**17 HERIOT ROW, EDINBURGH,  
SUNDAY [APRIL 1875]**

HERE is my long story: yesterday night, after having supped,

I grew so restless that I was obliged to go out in search of some excitement. There was a half-moon lying over on its back, and incredibly bright in the midst of a faint grey sky set with faint stars: a very inartistic moon, that would have damned a picture.

At the most populous place of the city I found a little boy, three years old perhaps, half frantic with terror, and crying to every one for his 'Mammy.' This was about eleven, mark you. People stopped and spoke to him, and then went on, leaving him more frightened than before. But I and a good-humoured mechanic came up together; and I instantly developed a latent faculty for setting the hearts of children at rest. Master Tommy Murphy (such was his name) soon stopped crying, and allowed me to take him up and carry him; and the mechanic and I trudged away along Princes Street to find his parents. I was soon so tired that I had to ask the mechanic to carry the bairn; and you should have seen the puzzled contempt with which he looked at me, for knocking in so soon. He was a good fellow, however, although very impracticable and sentimental; and he soon bethought him that Master Murphy might catch cold after his excitement, so we wrapped him up in my greatcoat. 'Tobauga (Tobago) Street' was the address he gave us; and we deposited him in a little grocer's shop and went through all the houses in the street without being able to find any one of the name of Murphy. Then I set off to the head police office, leaving my greatcoat in pawn about Master Murphy's person. As I went down one of the lowest streets in the town, I saw a little bit of life that struck me. It was now half-past

twelve, a little shop stood still half-open, and a boy of four or five years old was walking up and down before it imitating cockcrow. He was the only living creature within sight.

At the police offices no word of Master Murphy's parents; so I went back empty-handed. The good groceress, who had kept her shop open all this time, could keep the child no longer; her father, bad with bronchitis, said he must forth. So I got a large scone with currants in it, wrapped my coat about Tommy, got him up on my arm, and away to the police office with him: not very easy in my mind, for the poor child, young as he was — he could scarce speak — was full of terror for the 'office,' as he called it. He was now very grave and quiet and communicative with me; told me how his father thrashed him, and divers household matters. Whenever he saw a woman on our way he looked after her over my shoulder and then gave his judgment: 'That's no HER,' adding sometimes, 'She has a wean wi' her.' Meantime I was telling him how I was going to take him to a gentleman who would find out his mother for him quicker than ever I could, and how he must not be afraid of him, but be brave, as he had been with me. We had just arrived at our destination — we were just under the lamp — when he looked me in the face and said appealingly, 'He'll no put — me in the office?' And I had to assure him that he would not, even as I pushed open the door and took him in.

The serjeant was very nice, and I got Tommy comfortably seated on a bench, and spirited him up with good words and the scone with the currants in it; and then, telling him I was just going

out to look for Mammy, I got my greatcoat and slipped away.

Poor little boy! he was not called for, I learn, until ten this morning. This is very ill written, and I've missed half that was picturesque in it; but to say truth, I am very tired and sleepy: it was two before I got to bed. However, you see, I had my excitement.

MONDAY. — I have written nothing all morning; I cannot settle to it. Yes — I WILL though.

10.45. — And I did. I want to say something more to you about the three women. I wonder so much why they should have been WOMEN, and halt between two opinions in the matter. Sometimes I think it is because they were made by a man for men; sometimes, again, I think there is an abstract reason for it, and there is something more substantive about a woman than ever there can be about a man. I can conceive a great mythical woman, living alone among inaccessible mountain-tops or in some lost island in the pagan seas, and ask no more. Whereas if I hear of a Hercules, I ask after Iole or Dejanira. I cannot think him a man without women. But I can think of these three deep-breasted women, living out all their days on remote hilltops, seeing the white dawn and the purple even, and the world outspread before them for ever, and no more to them for ever than a sight of the eyes, a hearing of the ears, a far-away interest of the inflexible heart, not pausing, not pitying, but austere with a holy austerity, rigid with a calm and passionless rigidity; and I find them none the less women to the end.

And think, if one could love a woman like that once, see her once grow pale with passion, and once wring your lips out upon hers, would it not be a small thing to die? Not that there is not a passion of a quite other sort, much less epic, far more dramatic and intimate, that comes out of the very frailty of perishable women; out of the lines of suffering that we see written about their eyes, and that we may wipe out if it were but for a moment; out of the thin hands, wrought and tempered in agony to a fineness of perception, that the indifferent or the merely happy cannot know; out of the tragedy that lies about such a love, and the pathetic incompleteness. This is another thing, and perhaps it is a higher. I look over my shoulder at the three great headless Madonnas, and they look back at me and do not move; see me, and through and over me, the foul life of the city dying to its embers already as the night draws on; and over miles and miles of silent country, set here and there with lit towns, thundered through here and there with night expresses scattering fire and smoke; and away to the ends of the earth, and the furthest star, and the blank regions of nothing; and they are not moved. My quiet, great-kneed, deep-breasted, well-draped ladies of Necessity, I give my heart to you!

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

[SWANSTON, TUESDAY, APRIL 1875.]

MY DEAR FRIEND, — I have been so busy, away to Bridge Of Allan with my father first, and then with Simpson and Baxter out here from Saturday till Monday. I had no time to write, and, as it is, am strangely incapable. Thanks for your letter. I have been reading such lots of law, and it seems to take away the power of writing from me. From morning to night, so often as I have a spare moment, I am in the embrace of a law book — barren embraces. I am in good spirits; and my heart smites me as usual, when I am in good spirits, about my parents. If I get a bit dull, I am away to London without a scruple; but so long as my heart keeps up, I am all for my parents.

What do you think of Henley's hospital verses? They were to have been dedicated to me, but Stephen wouldn't allow it — said it would be pretentious.

WEDNESDAY. — I meant to have made this quite a decent letter this morning, but listen. I had pain all last night, and did not sleep well, and now am cold and sickish, and strung up ever and again with another flash of pain. Will you remember me to everybody? My principal characteristics are cold, poverty, and Scots Law — three very bad things. Oo, how the rain falls! The mist is quite low on the hill. The birds are twittering to each other about the indifferent season. O, here's a gem for you. An old godly woman predicted the end of the world, because the seasons

were becoming indistinguishable; my cousin Dora objected that last winter had been pretty well marked. 'Yes, my dear,' replied the soothsayeress; 'but I think you'll find the summer will be rather complicated.' — Ever your faithful

*R. L. S.*

Letter: TO MRS. SITWELL

**[EDINBURGH, SATURDAY, APRIL 1875.]**

I AM getting on with my rehearsals, but I find the part very hard. I rehearsed yesterday from a quarter to seven, and to-day from four (with interval for dinner) to eleven. You see the sad strait I am in for ink. — A DEMAIN.

SUNDAY. — This is the third ink-bottle I have tried, and still it's nothing to boast of. My journey went off all right, and I have kept ever in good spirits. Last night, indeed, I did think my little bit of gaiety was going away down the wind like a whiff of tobacco smoke, but to-day it has come back to me a little. The influence of this place is assuredly all that can be worst against one; MAIL IL FAUT LUTTER. I was haunted last night when I was in bed by the most cold, desolate recollections of my past life here; I was glad to try and think of the forest, and warm my hands at the thought of it. O the quiet, grey thickets, and the yellow butterflies, and the woodpeckers, and the outlook over the plain as it were over a sea! O for the good, fleshly stupidity

of the woods, the body conscious of itself all over and the mind forgotten, the clean air nestling next your skin as though your clothes were gossamer, the eye filled and content, the whole MAN HAPPY! Whereas here it takes a pull to hold yourself together; it needs both hands, and a book of stoical maxims, and a sort of bitterness at the heart by way of armour. — Ever your faithful

*R. L. S.*

WEDNESDAY. — I am so played out with a cold in my eye that I cannot see to write or read without difficulty. It is swollen HORRIBLE; so how I shall look as Orsino, God knows! I have my fine clothes tho'. Henley's sonnets have been taken for the CORNHILL. He is out of hospital now, and dressed, but still not too much to brag of in health, poor fellow, I am afraid.

SUNDAY. — So. I have still rather bad eyes, and a nasty sore throat. I play Orsino every day, in all the pomp of Solomon, splendid Francis the First clothes, heavy with gold and stage jewellery. I play it ill enough, I believe; but me and the clothes, and the wedding wherewith the clothes and me are reconciled, produce every night a thrill of admiration. Our cook told my mother (there is a servants' night, you know) that she and the housemaid were 'just prood to be able to say it was oor young gentleman.' To sup afterwards with these clothes on, and a wonderful lot of gaiety and Shakespearean jokes about the table, is something to live for. It is so nice to feel you have been dead three hundred years, and the sound of your laughter is faint and

far off in the centuries. — Ever your faithful

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