

Robert Louis Stevenson

**The Works of
Robert Louis Stevenson –
Swanston Edition. Volume...**



Robert Stevenson
The Works of Robert Louis
Stevenson – Swanston
Edition. Volume 24

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The Works of Robert Louis Stevenson – Swanston Edition, Vol. 24:*

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THE LETTERS OF ROBERT
LOUIS STEVENSON
1882-1890

VII

THE RIVIERA AGAIN – MARSEILLES AND HYÈRES

October 1882 — August 1884

In the two years and odd months since his return from California, Stevenson had made no solid gain of health. His winters, and especially his second winter, at Davos had seemed to do him much temporary good; but during the summers in Scotland he had lost as much as he had gained, or more. Loving the Mediterranean shores of France from of old, he now made up his mind to try them once again.

As the ways and restrictions of a settled invalid were repugnant to Stevenson's character and instincts, so were the life and society of a regular invalid station depressing and uncongenial to him. He determined, accordingly, to avoid settling in one of these, and hoped to find a suitable climate and habitation that should be near, though not in, some centre of the active and ordinary life of man, with accessible markets, libraries, and other resources. In September 1882 he started with his cousin Mr. R. A. M. Stevenson in search of a new home, and thought first of trying the

Languedoc coast, a region new to him. At Montpellier, he was laid up again with a bad bout of his lung troubles; and, the doctor not recommending him to stay, returned to Marseilles. Here he was rejoined by his wife, and after a few days' exploration in the neighbourhood they lighted on what seemed exactly the domicile they wanted. This was a roomy and attractive enough house and garden called the Campagne Defli, near the manufacturing suburb of St. Marcel, in a sheltered position in full view of the shapely coastward hills. By the third week in October they were installed, and in eager hopes of pleasant days to come and a return to working health. These hopes were not realised. Week after week went on, and the hemorrhages and fits of fever and exhaustion did not diminish. Work, except occasional verses, and a part of the story called *The Treasure of Franchard*, would not flow, and the time had to be whiled away with games of patience and other resources of the sick man. Nearly two months were thus passed; during the whole of one of them Stevenson had not been able to go beyond the garden; and by Christmas he had to face the fact that the air of the place was tainted. An epidemic of fever, due to some defect of drainage, broke out, and it became clear that this could be no home for Stevenson. Accordingly, at his wife's instance, though having scarce the strength to travel, he left suddenly for Nice, she staying behind to pack their chattels and wind up their affairs and responsibilities as well as might be. Various misadventures, miscarriages of telegrams, journeys taken at cross purposes and the like, making

existence uncomfortably dramatic at the moment, caused the couple to believe for a while that they had fairly lost each other. Mrs. Stevenson allows me to print a letter from herself to Mr. J. A. Symonds vividly relating these predicaments (see p. 11 foll.). At last, in the course of January, they came safely together at Marseilles, and next made a few weeks' stay at Nice, where Stevenson's health quickly mended. Thence they returned as far as Hyères. Staying here through the greater part of February, at the Hôtel des Îles d'Or, and finding the place to their liking, they cast about once more for a resting-place, and were this time successful.

The house chosen by the Stevensons at Hyères was not near the sea, but inland, on the road above the old town and beneath the ruins of the castle. The Chalet La Solitude it was called; a cramped but habitable cottage built in the Swiss manner, with a pleasant strip of garden, and a view and situation hardly to be bettered. Here he and his family lived for the next sixteen months (March 1883 to July 1884). To the first part of this period he often afterwards referred as the happiest time of his life. His malady remained quiescent enough to afford, at least to his own buoyant spirit, a strong hope of ultimate recovery. He delighted in his surroundings, and realised for the first time the joys of a true home of his own. The last shadow of a cloud between himself and his parents had long passed away; and towards his father, now in declining health, and often suffering from moods of constitutional depression, the son begins on his

part to assume, how touchingly and tenderly will be seen from the following letters, a quasi-paternal attitude of encouragement and monition. At the same time his work on the completion of the *Silverado Squatters*, on *Prince Otto*, the *Child's Garden of Verses* (for which his own name was *Penny Whistles*), on the *Black Arrow* (designated hereinafter, on account of its Old English dialect, as "tushery"), and other undertakings prospered well. In the autumn the publication of *Treasure Island* in book form brought with it the first breath of popular applause. The reader will see how modest a price Stevenson was content, nay, delighted, to receive for this classic. It was two or three years yet before he could earn enough to support himself and his family by literature: a thing he had always been earnestly bent on doing, regarding it as the only justification for his chosen way of life. In the meantime, it must be understood, whatever help he needed from his father was from the hour of his marriage always amply and ungrudgingly given.

In September of the same year, 1883, Stevenson had felt deeply the death of his old friend James Walter Ferrier (see the essay *Old Mortality* and the references in the following letters). But still his health held out fairly, until, in January 1884, on a visit to Nice, he was unexpectedly prostrated anew by an acute congestion of the internal organs, which for the time being brought him to death's door. Returning to his home, his recovery had been only partial when, after four months (May 1884), a recurrence of violent hemorrhages from the lung once more

prostrated him completely; soon after which he quitted Hyères, and the epidemic of cholera which broke out there the same summer prevented all thoughts of his return.

The Hyères time, both during the happy and hard-working months of March-December 1883, and the semi-convalescence of February-May 1884, was a prolific one in the way of correspondence; and there is perhaps no period of his life when his letters reflect so fully the variety of his moods and the eagerness of his occupations.

To the Editor of the New York Tribune

At Marseilles, while waiting to occupy the house which he had leased in the suburbs of that city, Stevenson learned that his old friend and kind adviser, Mr. James Payn, with whom he had been intimate as sub-editor of the Cornhill Magazine under Mr. Leslie Stephen in the '70's, had been inadvertently represented in the columns of the New York Tribune as a plagiarist of R. L. S. In order to put matters right, he at once sent the following letter both to the Tribune and to the London Athenæum: —

Terminus Hotel, Marseilles, October 16, 1882.

SIR, — It has come to my ears that you have lent the authority of your columns to an error.

More than half in pleasantry — and I now think the pleasantry ill-judged — I complained in a note to my *New Arabian Nights* that some one, who shall remain nameless for me, had borrowed the idea of a story from one of mine. As if I had not borrowed the ideas of the half of my own! As if any one who had written a story ill had a right to complain of any other who should have written it better! I am indeed thoroughly ashamed of the note, and of the principle which it implies.

But it is no mere abstract penitence which leads me to beg a corner of your paper — it is the desire to defend the honour of a man of letters equally known in America and England, of a man

who could afford to lend to me and yet be none the poorer; and who, if he would so far condescend, has my free permission to borrow from me all that he can find worth borrowing.

Indeed, sir, I am doubly surprised at your correspondent's error. That James Payn should have borrowed from me is already a strange conception. The author of *Lost Sir Massingberd* and *By Proxy* may be trusted to invent his own stories. The author of *A Grape from a Thorn* knows enough, in his own right, of the humorous and pathetic sides of human nature.

But what is far more monstrous – what argues total ignorance of the man in question – is the idea that James Payn could ever have transgressed the limits of professional propriety. I may tell his thousands of readers on your side of the Atlantic that there breathes no man of letters more inspired by kindness and generosity to his brethren of the profession, and, to put an end to any possibility of error, I may be allowed to add that I often have recourse, and that I had recourse once more but a few weeks ago, to the valuable practical help which he makes it his pleasure to extend to younger men.

I send a duplicate of this letter to a London weekly; for the mistake, first set forth in your columns, has already reached England, and my wanderings have made me perhaps last of the persons interested to hear a word of it. – I am, etc.,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To R. A. M. Stevenson

Terminus Hotel, Marseille, Saturday [October 1882].

MY DEAR BOB, – We have found a house! – at Saint Marcel, Banlieue de Marseille. In a lovely valley between hills part wooded, part white cliffs; a house of a dining-room, of a fine salon – one side lined with a long divan – three good bedrooms (two of them with dressing-rooms), three small rooms (chambers of *bonne* and *sich*), a large kitchen, a lumber room, many cupboards, a back court, a large olive yard, cultivated by a resident *paysan*, a well, a *berceau*, a good deal of rockery, a little pine shrubbery, a railway station in front, two lines of omnibus to Marseille.

£48 per annum

It is called Campagne Defli! query Campagne Debug? The Campagne Demosquito goes on here nightly, and is very deadly. Ere we can get installed, we shall be beggared to the door, I see.

I vote for separations; F.'s arrival here, after our separation, was better fun to me than being married was by far. A separation completed is a most valuable property; worth piles. – Ever your affectionate cousin,

R. L. S.

To Thomas Stevenson

Terminus Hotel, Marseille, le 17th October 1882.

MY DEAR FATHER, – We grow, every time we see it, more delighted with our house. It is five miles out of Marseilles, in a lovely spot, among lovely wooded and cliffy hills – most mountainous in line – far lovelier, to my eyes, than any Alps. To-day we have been out inventorying; and though a mistral blew, it was delightful in an open cab, and our house with the windows open was heavenly, soft, dry, sunny, southern. I fear there are fleas – it is called Campagne Defli – and I look forward to tons of insecticide being employed.

I have had to write a letter to the New York Tribune and the Athenæum. Payn was accused of stealing my stories! I think I have put things handsomely for him.

Just got a servant!!! – Ever affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

Our servant is a Muckle Hash of a Weedy!

To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

The next two months' letters had perforce to consist of little save bulletins of back-going health, and consequent disappointment and incapacity for work.

Campagne Defli, St. Marcel, Banlieue de Marseille, November 13, 1882.

MY DEAR MOTHER, – Your delightful letters duly arrived this morning. They were the only good feature of the day, which was not a success. Fanny was in bed – she begged I would not split upon her, she felt so guilty; but as I believe she is better this evening, and has a good chance to be right again in a day or two, I will disregard her orders. I do not go back, but do not go forward – or not much. It is, in one way, miserable – for I can do no work; a very little wood-cutting, the newspapers, and a note about every two days to write, completely exhausts my surplus energy; even Patience I have to cultivate with parsimony. I see, if I could only get to work, that we could live here with comfort, almost with luxury. Even as it is, we should be able to get through a considerable time of idleness. I like the place immensely, though I have seen so little of it – I have only been once outside the gate since I was here! It puts me in mind of a summer at Prestonpans and a sickly child you once told me of.

Thirty-two years now finished! My twenty-ninth was in San

Francisco, I remember – rather a bleak birthday. The twenty-eighth was not much better; but the rest have been usually pleasant days in pleasant circumstances.

Love to you and to my father and to Cummy.

From me and Fanny and Wogg.

R. L. S.

To Trevor Haddon

Campagne Defli, St. Marcel, Dec. 29th, 1882.

DEAR SIR, – I am glad you sent me your note, I had indeed lost your address, and was half thinking to try the Ringstown one; but far from being busy, I have been steadily ill. I was but three or four days in London, waiting till one of my friends was able to accompany me, and had neither time nor health to see anybody but some publisher people. Since then I have been worse and better, better and worse, but never able to do any work and for a large part of the time forbidden to write and even to play Patience, that last of civilised amusements. In brief, I have been “the sheer hulk” to a degree almost outside of my experience, and I desire all my friends to forgive me my sins of omission this while back. I only wish you were the only one to whom I owe a letter, or many letters.

But you see, at least, you had done nothing to offend me; and I dare say you will let me have a note from time to time, until we shall have another chance to meet. – Yours sincerely,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

An excellent new year to you, and many of them.

If you chance to see a paragraph in the papers describing my illness, and the “delicacies suitable to my invalid condition” cooked in copper, and the other ridiculous and revolting yarns,

pray regard it as a spectral illusion, and pass by.

[Mrs. R. L. Stevenson to John Addington Symonds

I intercalate here Mrs. Stevenson's extremely vivid and characteristic account of the weird misadventures that befell the pair during their retreat from St. Marcel in search of a healthier home.

[Campagne Defli, St. Marcel, January 1883.]

MY DEAR MR. SYMONDS, – What must you think of us? I hardly dare write to you. What do you do when people to whom you have been the dearest of friends requite you by acting like fiends? I do hope you heap coals of fire on their heads in the good old Christian sense.

Louis has been very ill again. I hasten to say that he is now better. But I thought at one time he would never be better again. He had continual hemorrhages and became so weak that he was twice insensible in one day, and was for a long time like one dead. At the worst fever broke out in this village, typhus, I think, and all day the death-bells rang, and we could hear the chanting whilst the wretched villagers carried about their dead lying bare to the sun on their coffin-lids, so spreading the contagion through the streets. The evening of the day when Louis was so long insensible the weather changed, becoming very clear and fine and greatly refreshing and reviving him. Then I said if it held good he should

start in the morning for Nice and try what a change might do. Just at that time there was not money enough for the two of us, so he had to start alone, though I expected soon to be able to follow him. During the night a peasant-man died in a house in our garden, and in the morning the corpse, hideously swollen in the stomach, was lying on its coffin-lid at our gates. Fortunately it was taken away just before Louis went, and he didn't see it nor hear anything about it until afterwards. I had been back and forth all the morning from the door to the gates, and from the gates to the door, in an agony lest Louis should have to pass it on his way out.

I was to have a despatch from Toulon where Louis was to pass the night, two hours from St. Marcel, and another from Nice, some few hours further, the next day. I waited one, two, three, four days, and no word came. Neither telegram nor letter. The evening of the fourth day I went to Marseilles and telegraphed to the Toulon and Nice stations and to the bureau of police. I had been pouring out letters to every place I could think of. The people at Marseilles were very kind and advised me to take no further steps to find my husband. He was certainly dead, they said. It was plain that he stopped at some little station on the road, speechless and dying, and it was now too late to do anything; I had much better return at once to my friends. "Eet ofen 'appens so," said the Secretary, and "Oh yes, all right, very well," added a Swiss in a sympathetic voice. I waited all night at Marseilles and got no answer, all the next day and got no answer; then I went

back to St. Marcel and there was nothing there. At eight I started on the train with Lloyd who had come for his holidays, but it only took us to Toulon where again I telegraphed. At last I got an answer the next day at noon. I waited at Toulon for the train I had reason to believe Louis travelled by, intending to stop at every station and inquire for him until I got to Nice. Imagine what those days were to me. I never received any of the letters Louis had written to me, and he was reading the first he had received from me when I knocked at his door. A week afterwards I had an answer from the police. Louis was much better: the change and the doctor, who seems very clever, have done wonderful things for him. It was during this first day of waiting that I received your letter. There was a vague comfort in it like a hand offered in the darkness, but I did not read it until long after.

We have had many other wild misadventures, Louis has twice (started) actually from Nice under a misapprehension. At this moment I believe him to be at Marseilles, stopping at the Hotel du Petit Louvre; I am supposed to be packing here at St. Marcel, afterwards we are to go somewhere, perhaps to the Lake of Geneva. My nerves were so shattered by the terrible suspense I endured that memorable week that I have not been fit to do much. When I was returning from Nice a dreadful old man with a fat wife and a weak granddaughter sat opposite me and plied me with the most extraordinary questions. He began by asking if Lloyd was any connection of mine, and ended I believe by asking my mother's maiden name. Another of the questions he

put to me was where Louis wished to be buried, and whether I could afford to have him embalmed when he died. When the train stopped the only other passenger, a quiet man in a corner who looked several times as if he wished to interfere and stop the old man but was too shy, came to me and said that he knew Sidney Colvin and he knew you, and that you were both friends of Louis; and that his name was Basil Hammond,¹ and he wished to stay on a day in Marseilles and help me work off my affairs. I accepted his offer with heartfelt thanks. I was extremely ill next day, but we two went about and arranged about giving up this house and what compensation, and did some things that I could not have managed alone. My French is useful only in domestic economy, and even that, I fear, is very curious and much of it patois. Wasn't that a good fellow, and a kind fellow? – I cannot tell you how grateful I am, words are such feeble things – at least for that purpose. For anger, justifiable wrath, they are all too forcible. It was very bad of me not to write to you, we talked of you so often and thought of you so much, and I always said – “now I will write” – and then somehow I could not...

Fanny V. de G. Stevenson.]

¹ For many years fellow of and historical lecturer at Trinity College, Cambridge.

To Charles Baxter

After his Christmas flight to Marseilles and thence to Nice, Stevenson began to mend quickly. In this letter to Mr. Baxter he acknowledges the receipt of a specimen proof, set up for their private amusement, of *Brashiana*, the series of burlesque sonnets he had written at Davos in memory of the Edinburgh publican already mentioned. It should be explained that in their correspondence Stevenson and Mr. Baxter were accustomed to keep up an old play of their student days by merging their identities in those of two fictitious personages, Thomson and Johnson, imaginary types of Edinburgh character, and ex-elders of the Scottish Kirk.

Grand Hotel, Nice, 12th January '83.

DEAR CHARLES, – Thanks for your good letter. It is true, man, God's truth, what ye say about the body Stevison. The deil himsel, it's my belief, couldnae get the soul harled oot o' the creature's wame, or he had seen the hinder end o' they proofs. Ye crack o' Mæcenas, he's naebody by you! He gied the lad Horace a rax forrit by all accounts; but he never gied him proofs like yon. Horace may hae been a better hand at the clink than Stevison – mind, I'm no sayin' 't – but onyway he was never sae weel prentit. Damned, but it's bonny! Hoo mony pages will there be, think ye? Stevison maun hae sent ye the feck o' twenty sangs – fifteen

I'se warrant. Weel, that'll can make thretty pages, gin ye were to prent on ae side only, whilk wad be perhaps what a man o' your *great* idees would be ettlin' at, man Johnson. Then there wad be the Pre-face, an' prose ye ken prents oot langer than po'try at the hinder end, for ye hae to say things in't. An' then there'll be a title-page and a dedication and an index wi' the first lines like, and the deil an' a'. Man, it'll be grand. Nae copies to be given to the Liberys.

I am alane myself, in Nice, they ca't, but damned, I think they micht as well ca't Nesty. The Pile-on,² 's they ca't, 's about as big as the river Tay at Perth; and it's rainin' maist like Greenock. Dod, I've seen 's had mair o' what they ca' the I-talian at Muttonhole. I-talian! I haenae seen the sun for eicht and forty hours. Thomson's better, I believe. But the body's fair attenyated. He's doon to seeven stane eleeven, an' he sooks awa' at cod liver ile, till it's a fair disgrace. Ye see he tak's it on a drap brandy; and it's my belief, it's just an excuse for a dram. He an' Stevison gang about their lane, maistly; they're company to either, like, an' whiles they'll speak o' Johnson. But *he's* far awa', losh me! Stevison's last book 's in a third edeetion; an' it's bein' translated (like the psaulms of David, nae less) into French; and an eediot they ca' Asher – a kind o' rival of Tauchnitz – is bringin' him oot in a paper book for the Frenchies and the German folk in twa volumes. Sae he's in luck, ye see. – Yours,

² *Paillon.*

Thomson.

To Sidney Colvin

Stevenson here narrates in his own fashion by what generalship he at last got rid of the Campagne Defli without having to pay compensation as his wife expected.

Hotel du Petit Louvre, Marseille, 15 Feb. 1883.

DEAR SIR, – This is to intimate to you that Mr. and Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson were yesterday safely delivered

of a

Campagne

The parents are both doing much better than could be expected; particularly the dear papa.

There, Colvin, I did it this time. Huge success. The propriétaires were scattered like chaff. If it had not been the agent, may Israel now say, if it had not been the agent who was on our side! But I made the agent march! I threatened law; I was Immense – what do I say? – Immeasurable. The agent, however, behaved well and is a fairly honest little one-eared, white-eyed tom-cat of an opera-going gold-hunter. The propriétaire *non est inventa*; we countermarched her, got in valuator; and in place of

a hundred francs in her pocket, she got nothing, and I paid *one* silver biscuit! It *might* go further but I am convinced will not, and anyway, I fear not the consequences.

The weather is incredible; my heart sings; my health satisfies even my wife. I did jolly well right to come after all and she now admits it. For she broke down as I knew she would, and I from here, without passing a night at the Defli, though with a cruel effusion of coach-hires, took up the wondrous tale and steered the ship through. I now sit crowned with laurel and literally exulting in kudos. The affair has been better managed than our two last winterings, – I am yours,

Brabazon Drum.

To Alison Cunningham

The verses referred to in the following are those of the *Child's Garden*.

[Nice, February 1883.]

MY DEAR CUMMY, – You must think, and quite justly, that I am one of the meanest rogues in creation. But though I do not write (which is a thing I hate), it by no means follows that people are out of my mind. It is natural that I should always think more or less about you, and still more natural that I should think of you when I went back to Nice. But the real reason why you have been more in my mind than usual is because of some little verses that I have been writing, and that I mean to make a book of; and the real reason of this letter (although I ought to have written to you anyway) is that I have just seen that the book in question must be dedicated to the only person who will really understand it, I don't know when it may be ready, for it has to be illustrated, but I hope in the meantime you may like the idea of what is to be; and when the time comes, I shall try to make the dedication as pretty as I can make it. Of course, this is only a flourish, like taking off one's hat; but still, a person who has taken the trouble to write things does not dedicate them to any one without meaning it; and you must just try to take this dedication in place of a great many things that I might have said, and that I ought to have done,

to prove that I am not altogether unconscious of the great debt of gratitude I owe you. This little book, which is all about my childhood, should indeed go to no other person but you, who did so much to make that childhood happy.

Alison Cunningham,

Do you know, we came very near sending for you this winter. If we had not had news that you were ill too, I almost believe we should have done so, we were so much in trouble.

I am now very well; but my wife has had a very, very bad spell, through overwork and anxiety, when I was *lost!* I suppose you heard of that. She sends you her love, and hopes you will write to her, though she no more than I deserves it. She would add a word herself, but she is too played out. – I am, ever your old boy,

R. L. S.

To W. E. Henley

Stevenson was by this time beginning to send home some of the MS. of the *Child's Garden*, the title of which had not yet been settled. The pieces as first numbered are in a different order from that afterwards adopted, but the reader will easily identify the references.

[Nice, March 1883.]

MY DEAR LAD, – This is to announce to you the MS. of Nursery Verses, now numbering XLVIII. pieces or 599 verses, which, of course, one might augment *ad infinitum*.

But here is my notion to make all clear.

I do not want a big ugly quarto; my soul sickens at the look of a quarto. I want a refined octavo, not large – not *larger* than the Donkey book, at any price.

I think the full page might hold four verses of four lines, that is to say, counting their blanks at two, of twenty-two lines in height. The first page of each number would only hold two verses or ten lines, the title being low down. At this rate, we should have seventy-eight or eighty pages of letterpress.

The designs should not be in the text, but facing the poem; so that if the artist liked, he might give two pages of design to every poem that turned the leaf, *i. e.* longer than eight lines, *i. e.* to twenty-eight out of the forty-six. I should say he would not use

this privilege (?) above five times, and some he might scorn to illustrate at all, so we may say fifty drawings. I shall come to the drawings next.

But now you see my book of the thickness, since the drawings count two pages, of 180 pages; and since the paper will perhaps be thicker, of near two hundred by bulk. It is bound in a quiet green with the words in thin gilt. Its shape is a slender, tall octavo. And it sells for the publisher's fancy, and it will be a darling to look at; in short, it would be like one of the original Heine books in type and spacing.

Now for the pictures. I take another sheet and begin to jot notes for them when my imagination serves: I will run through the book, writing when I have an idea. There, I have jotted enough to give the artist a notion. Of course, I don't do more than contribute ideas, but I will be happy to help in any and every way. I may as well add another idea; when the artist finds nothing much to illustrate, a good drawing of any *object* mentioned in the text, were it only a loaf of bread or a candlestick, is a most delightful thing to a young child. I remember this keenly.

Of course, if the artist insists on a larger form, I must, I suppose, bow my head. But my idea I am convinced is the best, and would make the book truly, not fashionably pretty.

I forgot to mention that I shall have a dedication; I am going to dedicate 'em to Cummy; it will please her, and lighten a little my burthen of ingratitude. A low affair is the Muse business.

I will add no more to this lest you should want to communicate

with the artist; try another sheet. I wonder how many I'll keep wandering to.

O I forgot. As for the title, I think "Nursery Verses" the best. Poetry is not the strong point of the text, and I shrink from any title that might seem to claim that quality; otherwise we might have "Nursery Muses" or "New Songs of Innocence" (but that were a blasphemy), or "Rimes of Innocence": the last not bad, or – an idea – "The Jews' Harp," or – now I have it – "The Penny Whistle."

THE PENNY WHISTLE

NURSERY VERSES

BY

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

ILLUSTRATED BY —

And here we have an excellent frontispiece, of a party playing

on a P. W. to a little ring of dancing children.

THE PENNY WHISTLE

is the name for me

Fool! this is all wrong, here is the true name: —

PENNY WHISTLES

FOR SMALL WHISTLERS

The second title is queried, it is perhaps better, as simply
PENNY WHISTLES.

Nor you, O Penny Whistler, grudge
That I your instrument debase:
By worse performers still we judge,
And give that fife a second place!

Crossed penny whistles on the cover, or else a sheaf of 'em.

SUGGESTIONS

IV. The procession – the child running behind it. The procession tailing off through the gates of a cloudy city.

IX. *Foreign Lands.*— This will, I think, want two plates – the child climbing, his first glimpse over the garden wall, with what he sees – the tree shooting higher and higher like the beanstalk, and the view widening. The river slipping in. The road arriving in Fairyland.

X. *Windy Nights.*— The child in bed listening – the horseman galloping.

XII. The child helplessly watching his ship – then he gets smaller, and the doll joyfully comes alive – the pair landing on the island – the ship's deck with the doll steering and the child firing the penny cannon. Query two plates? The doll should never come properly alive.

XV. Building of the ship – storing her – Navigation – Tom's accident, the other child paying no attention.

XXXI. *The Wind.*— I sent you my notion of already.

XXXVII. *Foreign Children.*— The foreign types dancing in a jing-a-ring, with the English child pushing in the middle. The foreign children looking at and showing each other marvels. The English child at the leaside of a roast of beef. The English child sitting thinking with his picture-books all round him, and the jing-a-ring of the foreign children in miniature dancing over the

picture-books.

XXXIX. Dear artist, can you do me that?

XLII. The child being started off – the bed sailing, curtains and all, upon the sea – the child waking and finding himself at home; the corner of toilette might be worked in to look like the pier.

XLVII. The lighted part of the room, to be carefully distinguished from my child's dark hunting grounds. A shaded lamp.

R. L. S.

To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

Hôtel des Îles d'Or, Hyères, Var, March 2 [1883].

MY DEAR MOTHER, — It must be at least a fortnight since we have had a scratch of a pen from you; and if it had not been for Cummy's letter, I should have feared you were worse again: as it is, I hope we shall hear from you to-day or to-morrow at latest.

Health.— Our news is good: Fanny never got so bad as we feared, and we hope now that this attack may pass off in threatenings. I am greatly better, have gained flesh, strength, spirits; eat well, walk a good deal, and do some work without fatigue. I am off the sick list.

Lodging.— We have found a house up the hill, close to the town, an excellent place though very, very little. If I can get the landlord to agree to let us take it by the month just now, and let our month's rent count for the year in case we take it on, you may expect to hear we are again installed, and to receive a letter dated thus: —

La Solitude,
Hyères-les-Palmiers,
Var.

If the man won't agree to that, of course I must just give it up, as the house would be dear enough anyway at 2000 f. However, I hope we may get it, as it is healthy, cheerful, and

close to shops, and society, and civilisation. The garden, which is above, is lovely, and will be cool in summer. There are two rooms below with a kitchen, and four rooms above, all told. – Ever your affectionate son,

R. L. Stevenson.

To Thomas Stevenson

“Cassandra” was a nickname of the elder Mr. Stevenson for his daughter-in-law. The scheme of a play to be founded on *Great Expectations* was one of a hundred formed in these days and afterwards given up.

*Hôtel des Îles d'Or, but my address will be Chalet la Solitude,
Hyères-les-Palmiers, Var, France, March 17, 1883.*

Dear Sir, – Your undated favour from Eastbourne came to hand in course of post, and I now hasten to acknowledge its receipt. We must ask you in future, for the convenience of our business arrangements, to struggle with and tread below your feet this most unsatisfactory and uncommercial habit. Our Mr. Cassandra is better; our Mr. Wogg expresses himself dissatisfied with our new place of business; when left alone in the front shop, he bawled like a parrot; it is supposed the offices are haunted.

To turn to the matter of your letter, your remarks on *Great Expectations* are very good. We have both re-read it this winter, and I, in a manner, twice. The object being a play; the play, in its rough outline, I now see: and it is extraordinary how much of Dickens had to be discarded as unhuman, impossible, and ineffective: all that really remains is the loan of a file (but from a grown-up young man who knows what he was doing, and to a convict who, although he does not know it is his father – the

father knows it is his son), and the fact of the convict-father's return and disclosure of himself to the son whom he has made rich. Everything else has been thrown aside; and the position has had to be explained by a prologue which is pretty strong. I have great hopes of this piece, which is very amiable and, in places, very strong indeed: but it was curious how Dickens had to be rolled away; he had made his story turn on such improbabilities, such fantastic trifles, not on a good human basis, such as I recognised. You are right about the casts, they were a capital idea; a good description of them at first, and then afterwards, say second, for the lawyer to have illustrated points out of the history of the originals, dusting the particular bust – that was all the development the thing would bear. Dickens killed them. The only really well *executed* scenes are the riverside ones; the escape in particular is excellent; and I may add, the capture of the two convicts at the beginning. Miss Havisham is, probably, the worst thing in human fiction. But Wemmick I like; and I like Trabb's boy; and Mr. Wopsle as Hamlet is splendid.

The weather here is greatly improved, and I hope in three days to be in the chalet. That is, if I get some money to float me there.

I hope you are all right again, and will keep better. The month of March is past its mid career; it must soon begin to turn toward the lamb; here it has already begun to do so; and I hope milder weather will pick you up. Wogg has eaten a forget of rice and milk, his beard is streaming, his eyes wild. I am besieged by demands of work from America.

The £50 has just arrived; many thanks; I am now at ease. –
Ever your affectionate son, *pro* Cassandra, Wogg and Co.,

R. L. S.

To W. E. Henley

[*Chalet la Solitude, Hyères, April 1883.*]

My head is singing with *Otto*; for the first two weeks I wrote and revised and only finished IV chapters: last week, I have just drafted straight ahead, and I have just finished Chapter XI. It will want a heap of oversight and much will not stand, but the pace is good; about 28 Cornhill pp. drafted in seven days, and almost all of it dialogue – indeed I may say all, for I have dismissed the rest very summarily in the draft: one can always tickle at that. At the same rate, the draft should be finished in ten days more; and then I shall have the pleasure of beginning again at the beginning. Ah damned job! I have no idea whether or not *Otto* will be good. It is all pitched pretty high and stilted; almost like the Arabs, at that; but of course there is love-making in *Otto*, and indeed a good deal of it. I sometimes feel very weary; but the thing travels – and I like it when I am at it.

Remember me kindly to all. – Your ex-contributor,

R. L. S.

To Mrs. Sitwell

His correspondent had at his request been writing and despatching to him fair copies of the various sets of verses for the *Child's Garden* (as the collection was ultimately called), which he had been from time to time sending home.

Chalet la Solitude, Hyères [April 1883].

MY DEAR FRIEND, – I am one of the lowest of the – but that's understood. I received the copy, excellently written, with I think only one slip from first to last. I have struck out two, and added five or six; so they now number forty-five; when they are fifty, they shall out on the world. I have not written a letter for a cruel time; I have been, and am, so busy, drafting a long story (for me, I mean), about a hundred Cornhill pages, or say about as long as the Donkey book: *Prince Otto* it is called, and is, at the present hour, a sore burthen but a hopeful. If I had him all drafted, I should whistle and sing. But no: then I'll have to rewrite him; and then there will be the publishers, alas! But some time or other, I shall whistle and sing, I make no doubt.

I am going to make a fortune, it has not yet begun, for I am not yet clear of debt; but as soon as I can, I begin upon the fortune. I shall begin it with a halfpenny, and it shall end with horses and yachts and all the fun of the fair. This is the first real grey hair in my character: rapacity has begun to show, the greed of the

protuberant guttler. Well, doubtless, when the hour strikes, we must all guttle and protube. But it comes hard on one who was always so willow-slender and as careless as the daisies.

Truly I am in excellent spirits. I have crushed through a financial crisis; Fanny is much better; I am in excellent health, and work from four to five hours a day – from one to two above my average, that is; and we all dwell together and make fortunes in the loveliest house you ever saw, with a garden like a fairy story, and a view like a classical landscape.

Little? Well, it is not large. And when you come to see us, you will probably have to bed at the hotel, which is hard by. But it is Eden, madam, Eden and Beulah and the Delectable Mountains and Eldorado and the Hesperidean Isles and Bimini.³

We both look forward, my dear friend, with the greatest eagerness to have you here. It seems it is not to be this season: but I appoint you with an appointment for next season. You cannot see us else: remember that. Till my health has grown solid like an oak-tree, till my fortune begins really to spread its boughs like the same monarch of the woods (and the acorn, ay de mi! is not yet planted), I expect to be a prisoner among the palms.

Yes, it is like old times to be writing you from the Riviera, and after all that has come and gone, who can predict anything? How fortune tumbles men about! Yet I have not found that they change their friends, thank God.

Both of our loves to your sister and yourself. As for me, if I

³ The name of the Delectable Land in one of Heine's *Lieder*.

am here and happy, I know to whom I owe it; I know who made
my way for me in life, if that were all, and I remain, with love,
your faithful friend,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Edmund Gosse

“Gilder” in the following is of course the late R. W. Gilder, for many years the admirable editor of the *Century Magazine*.

Chalet la Solitude, Hyères [April 1883].

MY DEAR GOSSE, – I am very guilty; I should have written to you long ago; and now, though it must be done, I am so stupid that I can only boldly recapitulate. A phrase of three members is the outside of my syntax.

First, I like the *Rover* better than any of your other verse. I believe you are right, and can make stories in verse. The last two stanzas and one or two in the beginning – but the two last above all – I thought excellent. I suggest a pursuit of the vein. If you want a good story to treat, get the *Memoirs of the Chevalier Johnstone*, and do his passage of the Tay; it would be excellent: the dinner in the field, the woman he has to follow, the dragoons, the timid boatmen, the brave lasses. It would go like a charm; look at it, and you will say you owe me one.

Second, Gilder asking me for fiction, I suddenly took a great resolve, and have packed off to him my new work, *The Silverado Squatters*. I do not for a moment suppose he will take it; but pray say all the good words you can for it. I should be awfully glad to get it taken. But if it does not mean dibbs at once, I shall be

ruined for life. Pray write soon and beg Gilder your prettiest for a poor gentleman in pecuniary sloughs.

Fourth, next time I am supposed to be at death's door write to me like a Christian, and let not your correspondence attend on business. – Yours ever,

R. L. S.

P.S.– I see I have led you to conceive the *Squatters* are fiction. They are not, alas!

To Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

Chalet la Solitude, May 5 [1883].

MY DEAREST PEOPLE, – I have had a great piece of news. There has been offered for *Treasure Island*– how much do you suppose? I believe it would be an excellent jest to keep the answer till my next letter. For two cents I would do so. Shall I? Anyway, I'll turn the page first. No – well – A hundred pounds, all alive, O! A hundred jingling, tingling, golden, minted quid. Is not this wonderful? Add that I have now finished, in draft, the fifteenth chapter of my novel, and have only five before me, and you will see what cause of gratitude I have.

The weather, to look at the per contra sheet, continues vomitable; and Fanny is quite out of sorts. But, really, with such cause of gladness, I have not the heart to be dispirited by anything. My child's verse book is finished, dedication and all, and out of my hands – you may tell Cummy; *Silverado* is done, too, and cast upon the waters; and this novel so near completion, it does look as if I should support myself without trouble in the future. If I have only health, I can, I thank God. It is dreadful to be a great, big man, and not be able to buy bread.

O that this may last!

I have to-day paid my rent for the half year, till the middle of September, and got my lease: why they have been so long, I

know not.

I wish you all sorts of good things.

When is our marriage day? – Your loving and ecstatic son,

Treasure Eilaan.

It has been for me a Treasure Island verily.

To Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

La Solitude, Hyères, May 8, 1883.

MY DEAR PEOPLE, – I was disgusted to hear my father was not so well. I have a most troubled existence of work and business. But the work goes well, which is the great affair. I meant to have written a most delightful letter; too tired, however, and must stop. Perhaps I'll find time to add to it ere post.

I have returned refreshed from eating, but have little time, as Lloyd will go soon with the letters on his way to his tutor, Louis Robert (!!!!), with whom he learns Latin in French, and French, I suppose, in Latin, which seems to me a capital education. He, Lloyd, is a great bicycler already, and has been long distances; he is most new-fangled over his instrument, and does not willingly converse on other subjects.

Our lovely garden is a prey to snails; I have gathered about a bushel, which, not having the heart to slay, I steal forth withal and deposit near my neighbour's garden wall. As a case of casuistry, this presents many points of interest. I loathe the snails, but from loathing to actual butchery, trucidation of multitudes, there is still a step that I hesitate to take. What, then, to do with them? My neighbour's vineyard, pardy! It is a rich, villa, pleasure-garden of course; if it were a peasant's patch, the snails, I suppose, would have to perish.

The weather these last three days has been much better, though it is still windy and unkind. I keep splendidly well, and am cruelly busy, with mighty little time even for a walk. And to write at all, under such pressure, must be held to lean to virtue's side.

My financial prospects are shining. O if the health will hold, I should easily support myself. – Your ever affectionate son,

R. L. S.

To Edmund Gosse

La Solitude, Hyères-les-Palmiers, Var [May 20, 1883].

MY DEAR GOSSE, – I enclose the receipt and the corrections. As for your letter and Gilder's, I must take an hour or so to think; the matter much importing – to me. The £40 was a heavenly thing.

I send the MS. by Henley, because he acts for me in all matters, and had the thing, like all my other books, in his detention. He is my unpaid agent – an admirable arrangement for me, and one that has rather more than doubled my income on the spot.

If I have been long silent, think how long you were so and blush, sir, blush.

I was rendered unwell by the arrival of your cheque, and, like Pepys, “my hand still shakes to write of it.” To this grateful emotion, and not to D.T., please attribute the raggedness of my hand.

This year I should be able to live and keep my family on my own earnings, and that in spite of eight months and more of perfect idleness at the end of last and beginning of this. It is a sweet thought.

This spot, our garden and our view, are sub-celestial. I sing daily with my Bunyan, that great bard,

“I dwell already the next door to Heaven!”

If you could see my roses, and my aloes, and my fig-marigolds, and my olives, and my view over a plain, and my view of certain mountains as graceful as Apollo, as severe as Zeus, you would not think the phrase exaggerated.

It is blowing to-day a *hot* mistral, which is the devil or a near connection of his.

This to catch the post. – Yours affectionately,

R. L. Stevenson.

To Edmund Gosse

La Solitude, Hyères-les-Palmiers, Var, France, May 21, 1883.

MY DEAR GOSSE, – The night giveth advice, generally bad advice; but I have taken it. And I have written direct to Gilder to tell him to keep the book⁴ back and go on with it in November at his leisure. I do not know if this will come in time; if it doesn't, of course things will go on in the way proposed. The £40, or, as I prefer to put it, the 1000 francs, has been such a piercing sun-ray as my whole grey life is gilt withal. On the back of it I can endure. If these good days of Longman and the Century only last, it will be a very green world, this that we dwell in and that philosophers miscall. I have no taste for that philosophy; give me large sums paid on the receipt of the MS. and copyright reserved, and what do I care about the non-bëent? Only I know it can't last. The devil always has an imp or two in every house, and my imps are getting lively. The good lady, the dear, kind lady, the sweet, excellent lady, Nemesis, whom alone I adore, has fixed her wooden eye upon me. I fall prone; spare me, Mother Nemesis! But catch her!

I must now go to bed; for I have had a whoreson influenza cold, and have to lie down all day, and get up only to meals and the delights, June delights, of business correspondence.

You said nothing about my subject for a poem. Don't you like

⁴ *Silverado Squatters.*

it? My own fishy eye has been fixed on it for prose, but I believe it could be thrown out finely in verse, and hence I resign and pass the hand. Twig the compliment? – Yours affectionately,

R. L. S.

To W. E. Henley

“Tushery” had been a name in use between Stevenson and Mr. Henley for romances of the *Ivanhoe* type. He now applies it to his own tale of the Wars of the Roses, *The Black Arrow*, written for Mr. Henderson’s Young Folks, of which the office was in Red Lion Court.

[Hyères, May 1883.]

... The influenza has busted me a good deal; I have no spring, and am headachy. So, as my good Red Lion Courier begged me for another Butcher’s Boy – I turned me to – what thinkest ’ou? – to Tushery, by the mass! Ay, friend, a whole tale of tushery. And every tusher tushes me so free, that may I be tushed if the whole thing is worth a tush. *The Black Arrow: A Tale of Tunstall Forest* is his name: tush! a poor thing!

Will *Treasure Island* proofs be coming soon, think you?

I will now make a confession. It was the sight of your maimed strength and masterfulness that begot John Silver in *Treasure Island*. Of course, he is not in any other quality or feature the least like you; but the idea of the maimed man, ruling and dreaded by the sound, was entirely taken from you.

Otto is, as you say, not a thing to extend my public on. It is queer and a little, little bit free; and some of the parties are immoral; and the whole thing is not a romance, nor yet a comedy;

nor yet a romantic comedy; but a kind of preparation of some of the elements of all three in a glass jar. I think it is not without merit, but I am not always on the level of my argument, and some parts are false, and much of the rest is thin; it is more a triumph for myself than anything else; for I see, beyond it, better stuff. I have nine chapters ready, or almost ready, for press. My feeling would be to get it placed anywhere for as much as could be got for it, and rather in the shadow, till one saw the look of it in print. – Ever yours,

Pretty Sick.

To W. E. Henley

La Solitude, Hyères-les-Palmiers, May 1883.

MY DEAR LAD, – The books came some time since, but I have not had the pluck to answer: a shower of small troubles having fallen in, or troubles that may be very large.

I have had to incur a huge vague debt for cleaning sewers; our house was (of course) riddled with hidden cesspools, but that was infallible. I have the fever, and feel the duty to work very heavy on me at times; yet go it must. I have had to leave *Fontainebleau*, when three hours would finish it, and go full-tilt at tushery for a while. But it will come soon.

I think I can give you a good article on Hokusai; but that is for afterwards; *Fontainebleau* is first in hand.

By the way, my view is to give the *Penny Whistles* to Crane or Greenaway. But Crane, I think, is likeliest; he is a fellow who, at least, always does his best.

Shall I ever have money enough to write a play?

O dire necessity!

A word in your ear: I don't like trying to support myself. I hate the strain and the anxiety; and when unexpected expenses are foisted on me, I feel the world is playing with false dice. – Now I must Tush, adieu.

An Aching, Fevered, Penny-Journalist.

A lytle Jape of TUSHERIE

By A. Tusher.

The pleasant river gushes
Among the meadows green;
At home the author tushes;
For him it flows unseen.

The Birds among the Būshes
May wanton on the spray;
But vain for him who tushes
The brightness of the day!

The frog among the rushes
Sits singing in the blue.
By'r la'kin! but these tushes
Are wearisome to do!

The task entirely crushes
The spirit of the bard:
God pity him who tushes —
His task is very hard.

The filthy gutter slushes,
The clouds are full of rain,
But doomed is he who tushes

To tush and tush again.

At morn with his hair-brushes,
Still “tush” he says, and weeps;
At night again he tushes,
And tushes till he sleeps.

And when at length he pŭshes
Beyond the river dark —
'Las, to the man who tushes,
“Tush,” shall be God's remark!

To Sidney Colvin

[*Chalet la Solitude, Hyères, May 1883.*]

COLVIN, – The attempt to correspond with you is vain. Well, well, then so be it. I will from time to time write you an insulting letter, brief but monstrous harsh. I regard you in the light of a genteel impostor. Your name figures in the papers but never to a piece of letter-paper: well, well.

News. I am well: Fanny been ill but better: *Otto* about three-quarters done; *Silverado* proofs a terrible job – it is a most unequal work – new wine in old bottles – large rats, small bottles:⁵ as usual, penniless – O but penniless: still, with four articles in hand (say £35) and the £100 for *Silverado* imminent, not hopeless.

Why am I so penniless, ever, ever penniless, ever, ever penny-penny-penniless and dry?

The birds upon the thorn,
The poppies in the corn,

They surely are more fortunate or prudenter than I!

⁵ The allusion is to a specimen I had been used to hear quoted of the Duke of Wellington's table-talk in his latter years. He had said that musk-rats were sometimes kept alive in bottles in India. Curate, or other meek dependent: "I presume, your Grace, they are small rats and large bottles." His Grace: "No, large rats, small bottles; large rats, small bottles; large rats, small bottles."

In Arabia, everybody is called the Father of something or other for convenience or insult's sake. Thus you are "the Father of Prints," or of "Bummkopferies," or "Father of Unanswered Correspondence." They would instantly dub Henley "the Father of Wooden Legs"; me they would denominate the "Father of Bones," and Matthew Arnold "the Father of Eyeglasses."

I have accepted most of the excisions. Proposed titles: —

The Innocent Muse.

A Child's Garden of Rhymes.

Songs of the Playroom.

Nursery Songs.

I like the first?

R. L. S.

To W. E. Henley

La Solitude, Hyères, May or June 1883.

DEAR LAD, – Snatches in return for yours; for this little once, I'm well to windward of you.

Seventeen chapters of *Otto* are now drafted, and finding I was working through my voice and getting screechy, I have turned back again to rewrite the earlier part. It has, I do believe, some merit: of what order, of course, I am the last to know; and, triumph of triumphs, my wife – my wife who hates and loathes and slates my women – admits a great part of my Countess to be on the spot.

Yes, I could borrow, but it is the joy of being before the public, for once. Really, £100 is a sight more than *Treasure Island* is worth.

The reason of my *dèche*? Well, if you begin one house, have to desert it, begin another, and are eight months without doing any work, you will be in a *dèche* too. I am not in a *dèche*, however; *distingue*– I would fain distinguish; I am rather a swell, but *not solvent*. At a touch the edifice, *ædificium*, might collapse. If my creditors began to babble around me, I would sink with a slow strain of music into the crimson west. The difficulty in my elegant villa is to find oil, *oleum*, for the dam axles. But I've paid my rent until September; and beyond the chemist, the grocer, the

baker, the doctor, the gardener, Lloyd's teacher, and the great chief creditor Death, I can snap my fingers at all men. Why will people spring bills on you? I try to make 'em charge me at the moment; they won't, the money goes, the debt remains. – The Required Play is in the *Merry Men*.

Q. E. F.

I thus render honour to your *flair*; it came on me of a clap; I do not see it yet beyond a kind of sunset glory. But it's there: passion, romance, the picturesque, involved: startling, simple, horrid: a sea-pink in sea-froth! *S'agit de la désenterrer*. "Help!" cries a buried masterpiece.

Once I see my way to the year's end, clear, I turn to plays; till then I grind at letters; finish *Otto*; write, say, a couple of my *Traveller's Tales*; and then, if all my ships come home, I will attack the drama in earnest. I cannot mix the skeins. Thus, though I'm morally sure there is a play in *Otto*, I dare not look for it: I shoot straight at the story.

As a story, a comedy, I think *Otto* very well constructed; the echoes are very good, all the sentiments change round, and the points of view are continually, and, I think (if you please), happily contrasted. None of it is exactly funny, but some of it is smiling.

R. L. S.

To W. E. Henley

The verses alluded to are some of those afterwards collected in *Underwoods*.

[*Chalet la Solitude, Hyères, May or June 1883.*]

DEAR HENLEY, – You may be surprised to hear that I am now a great writer of verses; that is, however, so. I have the mania now like my betters, and faith, if I live till I am forty, I shall have a book of rhymes like Pollock, Gosse, or whom you please. Really, I have begun to learn some of the rudiments of that trade, and have written three or four pretty enough pieces of octosyllabic nonsense, semi-serious, semi-smiling. A kind of prose Herrick, divested of the gift of verse, and you behold the Bard. But I like it.

R. L. S.

To Jules Simoneau

This friend was the keeper of the inn and restaurant where Stevenson had boarded at Monterey in the autumn of 1879. In writing French, as will be seen, Stevenson had always more grip of idiom than of grammar.

[La Solitude, Hyères, May or June 1883.]

MON CHER ET BON SIMONEAU, – J'ai commencé plusieurs fois de vous écrire; et voilà-t-il pas qu'un empêchement quelconque est arrivé toujours. La lettre ne part pas; et je vous laisse toujours dans le droit de soupçonner mon cœur. Mon bon ami, ne pensez pas que je vous ai oublié ou que je vous oublierai jamais. Il n'en est de rien. Votre bon souvenir me tient de bien près, et je le garderai jusqu'à la mort.

J'ai failli mourir de bien près; mais me voici bien rétabli, bien que toujours un peu chétif et malingre. J'habite, comme vous voyez, la France. Je travaille beaucoup, et je commence à ne pas être le dernier; déjà on me dispute ce que j'écris, et je n'ai pas à me plaindre de ce que l'on appelle les honoraires. Me voici alors très affairé, très heureux dans mon ménage, gâté par ma femme, habitant la plus petite maisonnette dans le plus beau jardin du monde, et voyant de mes fenêtrés la mer, les îles d'Hyères, et les belles collines, montagnes et forts de Toulon.

Et vous, mon très cher ami? Comment celà va-t-il? Comment

vous portez-vous? Comment va le commerce? Comment aimez vous le pays? et l'enfant? et la femme? Et enfin toutes les questions possibles. Écrivez-moi donc bien vite, cher Simoneau. Et quant à moi, je vous promets que vous entendrez bien vite parler de moi; je vous *récrirai* sous peu, et je vous enverrai un de mes livres. Ceci n'est qu'un serrement de main, *from the bottom of my heart, dear and kind old man.* – Your friend,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To W. E. Henley

The “new dictionary” means, of course, the first instalments of the great Oxford Dictionary of the English Language, edited by Dr. J. A. H. Murray.

La Solitude, Hyères [June 1883].

DEAR LAD, – I was delighted to hear the good news about – . Bravo, he goes uphill fast. Let him beware of vanity, and he will go higher; let him be still discontented, and let him (if it might be) see the merits and not the faults of his rivals, and he may swarm at last to the top-gallant. There is no other way. Admiration is the only road to excellence; and the critical spirit kills, but envy and injustice are putrefaction on its feet.

Thus far the moralist. The eager author now begs to know whether you may have got the other Whistles, and whether a fresh proof is to be taken; also whether in that case the dedication should not be printed therewith; *Bulk Delights Publishers* (original aphorism; to be said sixteen times in succession as a test of sobriety).

Your wild and ravening commands were received; but cannot be obeyed. And anyway, I do assure you I am getting better every day; and if the weather would but turn, I should soon be observed to walk in hornpipes. Truly I am on the mend. I am still very careful. I have the new dictionary; a joy, a thing of beauty, and –

bulk. I shall be raked i' the mools before it's finished; that is the only pity; but meanwhile I sing.

I beg to inform you that I, Robert Louis Stevenson, author of *Brashiana* and other works, am merely beginning to commence to prepare to make a first start at trying to understand my profession. O the height and depth of novelty and worth in any art! and O that I am privileged to swim and shoulder through such oceans! Could one get out of sight of land – all in the blue? Alas not, being anchored here in flesh, and the bonds of logic being still about us.

But what a great space and a great air there is in these small shallows where alone we venture! and how new each sight, squall, calm, or sunrise! An art is a fine fortune, a palace in a park, a band of music, health, and physical beauty; all but love – to any worthy practiser. I sleep upon my art for a pillow; I waken in my art; I am unready for death, because I hate to leave it. I love my wife, I do not know how much, nor can, nor shall, unless I lost her; but while I can conceive my being widowed, I refuse the offering of life without my art. I *am* not but in my art; it is me; I am the body of it merely.

And yet I produce nothing, am the author of *Brashiana* and other works: tiddy-iddity – as if the works one wrote were anything but 'prentice's experiments. Dear reader, I deceive you with husks, the real works and all the pleasure are still mine and incommunicable. After this break in my work, beginning to return to it, as from light sleep, I wax exclamatory, as you see.

Sursum Corda:
Heave ahead:
Here's luck.
Art and Blue Heaven,
April and God's Larks.
Green reeds and the sky-scattering river.
A stately music.
Enter God!

R. L. S.

Ay, but you know, until a man can write that "Enter God," he has made no art! None! Come, let us take counsel together and make some!

To Trevor Haddon

During the height of the Provençal summer, for July and part of August, Stevenson went with his wife to the Baths of Royat in Auvergne (travelling necessarily by way of Clermont-Ferrand). His parents joined them at Royat for part of their visit. This and possibly the next following letters were written during the trip. The news here referred to was that his correspondent had won a scholarship at the Slade School.

*La Solitude, Hyères. But just now writing from Clermont-Ferrand,
July 5, 1883.*

DEAR MR. HADDON, – Your note with its piece of excellent news duly reached me. I am delighted to hear of your success: selfishly so; for it is pleasant to see that one whom I suppose I may call an admirer is no fool. I wish you more and more prosperity, and to be devoted to your art. An art is the very gist of life; it grows with you; you will never weary of an art at which you fervently and superstitiously labour. Superstitiously: I mean, think more of it than it deserves; be blind to its faults, as with a wife or father; forget the world in a technical trifle. The world is very serious; art is the cure of that, and must be taken very lightly; but to take art lightly, you must first be stupidly owlshy in earnest over it. When I made Casimir say “Tiens” at the end, I made a blunder. I thought it was what Casimir would

have said and I put it down. As your question shows, it should have been left out. It was a “patch” of realism, and an anti-climax. Beware of realism; it is the devil; ’tis one of the means of art, and now they make it the end! And such is the farce of the age in which a man lives, that we all, even those of us who most detest it, sin by realism.

Notes for the student of any art.

1. Keep an intelligent eye upon *all* the others. It is only by doing so that you come to see what Art is: Art is the end common to them all, it is none of the points by which they differ.

2. In this age beware of realism.

3. In your own art, bow your head over technique. Think of technique when you rise and when you go to bed. Forget purposes in the meanwhile; get to love technical processes; to glory in technical successes; get to see the world entirely through technical spectacles, to see it entirely in terms of what you can do. Then when you have anything to say, the language will be apt and copious.

My health is better.

I have no photograph just now; but when I get one you shall have a copy. It will not be like me; sometimes I turn out a capital, fresh bank clerk; once I came out the image of Runjeet Singh; again the treacherous sun has fixed me in the character of a travelling evangelist. It’s quite a lottery; but whatever the next venture proves to be, soldier, sailor, tinker, tailor, you shall have a proof. Reciprocate. The truth is I have no appearance; a certain

air of disreputability is the one constant character that my face presents: the rest change like water. But still I am lean, and still disreputable.

Cling to your youth. It is an artistic stock in trade. Don't give in that you are ageing, and you won't age. I have exactly the same faults and qualities still; only a little duller, greedier and better tempered; a little less tolerant of pain and more tolerant of tedium. The last is a great thing for life but – query? – a bad endowment for art?

Another note for the art student.

4. See the good in other people's work; it will never be yours. See the bad in your own, and don't cry about it; it will be there always. Try to use your faults; at any rate use your knowledge of them, and don't run your head against stone walls. Art is not like theology; nothing is forced. You have not to represent the world. You have to represent only what you can represent with pleasure and effect, and the only way to find out what that is is by technical exercise. – Yours sincerely,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Jules Simoneau

[Hyères or Royat, Summer 1883.]

MY DEAR FRIEND SIMONEAU, – It would be difficult to tell how glad I was to get your letter with your good news and kind remembrances, it did my heart good to the bottom. I shall never forget the good time we had together, the many long talks, the games of chess, the flute on an occasion, and the excellent food. Now I am in clover, only my health a mere ruined temple; the ivy grows along its shattered front, otherwise, I have no wish that is not fulfilled: a beautiful large garden, a fine view of plain, sea and mountain; a wife that suits me down to the ground, and a barrel of good Beaujolais. To this I must add that my books grow steadily more popular, and if I could only avoid illness I should be well to do for money, as it is, I keep pretty near the wind. Have I other means? I doubt it. I saw François here; and it was in some respects sad to see him, pining in the ungenial life and not, I think, very well pleased with his relatives. The young men, it is true, adored him, but his niece tried to pump me about what money I had, with an effrontery I was glad to disappoint. How he spoke of you I need not tell you. He is your true friend, dear Simoneau, and your ears should have tingled when we met, for we talked of little but yourself.

The papers you speak about are past dates but I will send you a

paper from time to time, as soon as I am able to go out again. We were both well pleased to hear of your marriage, and both Mrs. Stevenson and myself beg to be remembered with the kindest wishes to Mrs. Simoneau. I am glad you have done this. All races are better away from their own country; but I think you French improve the most of all. At home, I like you well enough, but give me the Frenchman abroad! Had you stayed at home, you would probably have acted otherwise. Consult your consciousness, and you will think as I do. How about a law condemning the people of every country to be educated in another, to change sons in short? Should we not gain all around? Would not the Englishman unlearn hypocrisy? Would not the Frenchman learn to put some heart into his friendships? I name what strikes me as the two most obvious defects of the two nations. The French might also learn to be a little less rapacious to women and the English to be a little more honest.

Indeed their merits and defects make a balance.

The English.	The French.
hypocrites	free from hypocrisy
good, stout reliable friends	incapable of friendship
dishonest to the root	fairly honest
fairly decent to women.	rather indecent to women.

There is my table, not at all the usual one, but yes, I think you will agree with it. And by travel, each race can cure much

of its defects and acquire much of the others' virtues. Let us say that you and I are complete! You are anyway: I would not change a hair of you. The Americans hold the English faults: dishonest and hypocrites, perhaps not so strongly but still to the exclusion of others. It is strange that such mean defects should be so hard to eradicate, after a century of separation, and so great an admixture of other blood.

Your stay in Mexico must have been interesting indeed: and it is natural you should be so keen against the Church on this side, we have a painful exhibition of the other side: the *libre-penseur* a mere priest without the sacraments, the narrowest tyranny of intolerance popular, and in fact a repetition in the XIXth century of theological ill-feeling minus the sermons. We have speeches instead. I met the other day one of the new lay schoolmasters of France; a pleasant cultivated man, and for some time listened to his ravings. "In short," I said, "you are like Louis Quatorze, you wish to drive out of France all who do not agree with you." I thought he would protest; not he! – "Oui, Monsieur," was his answer. And that is the cause of liberty and free thought! But the race of man was born tyrannical; doubtless Adam beat Eve, and when all the rest are dead the last man will be found beating the last dog. In the land of Padre d. R. you see the old tyranny still active on its crutches; in this land, I begin to see the new, a fat fellow, out of leading-strings and already killing flies.

This letter drones along unprofitably enough. Let me put a period to my divagations. Write again soon, and let me hear good

news of you, and I will try to be more quick of answer.

And with the best wishes to yourself and all your family,
believe me, your sincere friend,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Alison Cunningham

The persons mentioned below in the third paragraph are cousins of the writer and playmates of his childhood; two of them, christened Lewis like himself after their Balfour grandfather, had been nicknamed after their birthplaces “Delhi” and “Cramond” to avoid confusion. Mount Chessie is a beautiful place near Lasswade: “Cummy” has described his delight when she cut whistles for him there out of a plane-tree.

[Hyères or Royat, Summer 1883.]

MY DEAR CUMMY, – Yes, I own I am a real bad correspondent, and am as bad as can be in most directions.

I have been adding some more poems to your book. I wish they would look sharp about it; but, you see, they are trying to find a good artist to make the illustrations, without which no child would give a kick for it. It will be quite a fine work, I hope. The dedication is a poem too, and has been quite a long while written, but I do not mean you to see it till you get the book; keep the jelly for the last, you know, as you would often recommend in former days, so now you can take your own medicine.

I am very sorry to hear you have been so poorly; I have been very well; it used to be quite the other way, used it not? Do you remember making the whistle at Mount Chessie? I do not think it *was* my knife; I believe it was yours; but rhyme is a very

great monarch, and goes before honesty, in these affairs at least. Do you remember, at Warriston, one autumn Sunday, when the beech nuts were on the ground, seeing heaven open? I would like to make a rhyme of that, but cannot.

Is it not strange to think of all the changes: Bob, Cramond, Delhi, Minnie, and Henrietta, all married, and fathers and mothers, and your humble servant just the one point better off? And such a little while ago all children together! The time goes swift and wonderfully even; and if we are no worse than we are, we should be grateful to the power that guides us. For more than a generation I have now been to the fore in this rough world, and been most tenderly helped, and done cruelly wrong, and yet escaped; and here I am still, the worse for wear, but with some fight in me still, and not unthankful – no, surely not unthankful, or I were then the worst of human things!

My little dog is a very much better child in every way, both more loving and more amiable; but he is not fond of strangers, and is, like most of his kind, a great, specious humbug.

Fanny has been ill, but is much better again; she now goes donkey rides with an old woman, who compliments her on her French. That old woman – seventy odd – is in a parlous spiritual state.

Pretty soon, in the new sixpenny illustrated magazine, Wogg's picture is to appear: this is a great honour! And the poor soul, whose vanity would just explode if he could understand it, will never be a bit the wiser! – With much love, in which Fanny joins,

believe me, your affectionate boy,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Edmund Gosse

The reference is to Mr. Gosse's volume called *Seventeenth Century Studies*.

[Hyères or Royat, Summer 1883.]

MY DEAR GOSSE, – I have now leisurely read your volume; pretty soon, by the way, you will receive one of mine.

It is a pleasant, instructive, and scholarly volume. The three best being, quite out of sight – Crashaw, Otway, and Etherege. They are excellent; I hesitate between them; but perhaps Crashaw is the most brilliant.

Your Webster is not my Webster; nor your Herrick my Herrick. On these matters we must fire a gun to leeward, show our colours, and go by. Argument is impossible. They are two of my favourite authors: Herrick above all: I suppose they are two of yours. Well, Janus-like, they do behold us two with diverse countenances, few features are common to these different avatars; and we can but agree to differ, but still with gratitude to our entertainers, like two guests at the same dinner, one of whom takes clear and one white soup. By my way of thinking, neither of us need be wrong.

The other papers are all interesting, adequate, clear, and with a pleasant spice of the romantic. It is a book you may be well pleased to have so finished, and will do you much good. The

Crashaw is capital: capital; I like the taste of it. Preface clean and dignified. The handling throughout workmanlike, with some four or five touches of preciousness, which I regret.

With my thanks for information, entertainment, and a pleasurable envy here and there. – Yours affectionately,

R. L. S.

To Miss Ferrier

Soon after he was settled again at Hyères, Stevenson had a great shock in the death of one of the oldest and most intimate of his friends of Edinburgh days, Mr. James Walter Ferrier (see the essay *Old Mortality* in *Memories and Portraits*). It is in accordance with the expressed wish of this gentleman's surviving sister that publicity is given to the following letters: —

La Solitude, Hyères [Sept. 1883].

MY DEAR MISS FERRIER, — They say Walter is gone. You, who know how I have neglected him, will conceive my remorse. I had another letter written; when I heard he was worse, I promised myself to wake up for the last time. Alas, too late!

My dear Walter, set apart that terrible disease, was, in his right mind, the best and gentlest gentleman. God knows he would never intentionally hurt a soul.

Well, he is done with his troubles and out of his long sickness, and I dare say is glad to be at peace and out of the body, which in him seemed the enemy of the fine and kind spirit. He is the first friend I have ever lost, and I find it difficult to say anything and fear to intrude upon your grief. But I had to try to tell you how much I shared it.

Could you get any one to tell me particulars? Do not write yourself of course — I do not mean that; but some one else.

R. L. S.

To W. E. Henley

La Solitude, Hyères, September 19, 1883.

DEAR BOY, – Our letters vigorously cross: you will ere this have received a note to Coggie: God knows what was in it.

It is strange, a little before the first word you sent me – so late – kindly late, I know and feel – I was thinking in my bed, when I knew you I had six friends – Bob I had by nature; then came the good James Walter – with all his failings – the *gentleman* of the lot, alas to sink so low, alas to do so little, but now, thank God, in his quiet rest; next I found Baxter – well do I remember telling Walter I had unearthed “a W.S. that I thought would do” – it was in the Academy Lane, and he questioned me as to the Signet’s qualifications; fourth came Simpson; somewhere about the same time, I began to get intimate with Jenkin; last came Colvin. Then, one black winter afternoon, long Leslie Stephen, in his velvet jacket, met me in the Spec. by appointment, took me over to the infirmary, and in the crackling, blighting gas-light showed me that old head whose excellent representation I see before me in the photograph. Now when a man has six friends, to introduce a seventh is usually hopeless. Yet when you were presented, you took to them and they to you upon the nail. You must have been a fine fellow; but what a singular fortune I must have had in my six friends that you should take to all. I don’t know

if it is good Latin, most probably not: but this is enscrolled before my eyes for Walter: *Tandem e nubibus in apricum properat*. Rest, I suppose, I know, was all that remained; but O to look back, to remember all the mirth, all the kindness, all the humorous limitations and loved defects of that character; to think that he was young with me, sharing that weather-beaten, Fergussonian youth, looking forward through the clouds to the sunburst; and now clean gone from my path, silent – well, well. This has been a strange awakening. Last night, when I was alone in the house, with the window open on the lovely still night, I could have sworn he was in the room with me; I could show you the spot; and, what was very curious, I heard his rich laughter, a thing I had not called to mind for I know not how long.

I see his coral waistcoat studs that he wore the first time he dined in my house; I see his attitude, leaning back a little, already with something of a portly air, and laughing internally. How I admired him! And now in the West Kirk.

I am trying to write out this haunting bodily sense of absence; besides, what else should I write of?

Yes, looking back, I think of him as one who was good, though sometimes clouded. He was the only gentle one of all my friends, save perhaps the other Walter. And he was certainly the only modest man among the lot. He never gave himself away; he kept back his secret; there was always a gentle problem behind all. Dear, dear, what a wreck; and yet how pleasant is the retrospect! God doeth all things well, though by what strange, solemn, and

murderous contrivances!

It is strange: he was the only man I ever loved who did not habitually interrupt. The fact draws my own portrait. And it is one of the many reasons why I count myself honoured by his friendship. A man like you *had* to like me; you could not help yourself; but Ferrier was above me, we were not equals; his true self humoured and smiled paternally upon my failings, even as I humoured and sorrowed over his.

Well, first his mother, then himself, they are gone: “in their resting graves.”

When I come to think of it, I do not know what I said to his sister, and I fear to try again. Could you send her this? There is too much both about yourself and me in it; but that, if you do not mind, is but a mark of sincerity. It would let her know how entirely, in the mind of (I suppose) his oldest friend, the good, true Ferrier obliterates the memory of the other, who was only his “lunatic brother.”

Judge of this for me, and do as you please; anyway, I will try to write to her again; my last was some kind of scrawl that I could not see for crying. This came upon me, remember, with terrible suddenness; I was surprised by this death; and it is fifteen or sixteen years since first I saw the handsome face in the Spec. I made sure, besides, to have died first. Love to you, your wife, and her sisters. – Ever yours, dear boy,

R. L. S.

I never knew any man so superior to himself as poor James

Walter. The best of him only came as a vision, like Corsica from the Corniche. He never gave his measure either morally or intellectually. The curse was on him. Even his friends did not know him but by fits. I have passed hours with him when he was so wise, good, and sweet, that I never knew the like of it in any other. And for a beautiful good humour he had no match. I remember breaking in upon him once with a whole red-hot story (in my worst manner), pouring words upon him by the hour about some truck not worth an egg that had befallen me; and suddenly, some half hour after, finding that the sweet fellow had some concern of his own of infinitely greater import, that he was patiently and smilingly waiting to consult me on. It sounds nothing; but the courtesy and the unselfishness were perfect. It makes me rage to think how few knew him, and how many had the chance to sneer at their better.

Well, he was not wasted, that we know; though if anything looked liker irony than this fitting of a man out with these rich qualities and faculties to be wrecked and aborted from the very stocks, I do not know the name of it. Yet we see that he has left an influence; the memory of his patient courtesy has often checked me in rudeness; has it not you?

You can form no idea of how handsome Walter was. At twenty he was splendid to see; then, too, he had the sense of power in him, and great hopes; he looked forward, ever jesting of course, but he looked to see himself where he had the right to expect. He believed in himself profoundly; but *he never disbelieved in*

others. To the roughest Highland student he always had his fine, kind, open dignity of manner; and a good word behind his back.

The last time that I saw him before leaving for America – it was a sad blow to both of us. When he heard I was leaving, and that might be the last time we might meet – it almost was so – he was terribly upset, and came round at once. We sat late, in Baxter's empty house, where I was sleeping. My dear friend Walter Ferrier: O if I had only written to him more! if only one of us in these last days had been well! But I ever cherished the honour of his friendship, and now when he is gone, I know what I have lost still better. We live on, meaning to meet; but when the hope is gone, the pang comes.

R. L. S.

To Edmund Gosse

La Solitude, Hyères, 26th September 1883.

MY DEAR GOSSE, – It appears a bolt from Transatlantica is necessary to produce four lines from you. It is not flattering; but as I was always a bad correspondent, 'tis a vice to which I am lenient. I give you to know, however, that I have already twice (this makes three times) sent you what I please to call a letter, and received from you in return a subterfuge – or nothing...

My present purpose, however, which must not be postponed, is to ask you to telegraph to the Americans.

After a summer of good health of a very radiant order, toothache and the death of a very old friend, which came upon me like a thunderclap, have rather shelved my powers. I stare upon the paper, not write. I wish I could write like your Sculptors; yet I am well aware that I should not try in that direction. A certain warmth (tepid enough) and a certain dash of the picturesque are my poor essential qualities; and if I went fooling after the too classical, I might lose even these. But I envied you that page.

I am, of course, deep in schemes; I was so ever. Execution alone somewhat halts. How much do you make per annum, I wonder? This year, for the first time, I shall pass £300; I may even get halfway to the next milestone. This seems but a faint

remuneration; and the devil of it is, that I manage, with sickness, and moves, and education, and the like, to keep steadily in front of my income. However, I console myself with this, that if I were anything else under God's Heaven, and had the same crank health, I should make an even zero. If I had, with my present knowledge, twelve months of my old health, I would, could, and should do something neat. As it is, I have to tinker at my things in little sittings; and the rent, or the butcher, or something, is always calling me off to rattle up a pot-boiler. And then comes a back-set of my health, and I have to twiddle my fingers and play patience.

Well, I do not complain, but I do envy strong health where it is squandered. Treasure your strength, and may you never learn by experience the profound *ennui* and irritation of the shelved artist. For then, what is life? All that one has done to make one's life effective then doubles the itch of inefficiency.

I trust also you may be long without finding out the devil that there is in a bereavement. After love it is the one great surprise that life preserves for us. Now I don't think I can be astonished any more. – Yours affectionately,

R. L. S.

To Miss Ferrier

La Solitude, Hyères, 30th Sept. 1883.

MY DEAR MISS FERRIER, – I am very much obliged to you for your letter and was interested by all you told me. Yes, I know it is better for him to be gone, and what you say helps me to realise that it is so – I did not know how much he had suffered; it is so that we are cured of life. I am a little afraid to write or think much of Walter just yet; as I have not quite recovered the news and I have my work and my wife to think of.

Some day soon when the sharpness passes off (if it does) I must try to write some more of what he was: he was so little understood. I don't suppose any one knew him better than I did. But just now it is difficult to think of him. For you I do mourn indeed, and admire your courage: the loss is terrible. I have no portrait of him. Is there one? If so please let me have it: if it has to be copied please let it be.

Henley seems to have been as good to dear Walter as he is to all. That introduction was a good turn I did to both. It seems so strange for a friendship to begin all these years ago with so much mirth and now to end with this sorrow. Our little lives are moments in the wake of the eternal silence: but how crowded while they last. His has gone down in peace.

I was not certainly the best companion for Walter, but I do

believe I was the best he had. In these early days he was not fortunate in friends – looking back I see most clearly how much we both wanted a man of riper wisdom. We had no religion between the pair of us – that was the flaw. How very different was our last intimacy in Gladstone Terrace. But youth must learn – looking back over these wasted opportunities, I must try rather to remember what I did right, than to bewail the much that I left undone and knew not how to do. I see that even you have allowed yourself to have regrets. Dear Miss Ferrier, sure you were his angel. We all had something to be glad of, in so far as we had understood and loved and perhaps a little helped the gentle spirit; but you may certainly be proud. He always loved you; and I remember in his worst days spoke of you with great affection; a thing unusual with him; for he was walking very wild and blind and had no true idea whether of himself or life. The lifting afterwards was beautiful and touching. Dear Miss Ferrier I have given your kind messages to my wife who feels for you and reciprocates the hope to meet. When it may come off I know not. I feel almost ashamed to say that I keep better, I feel as if like Mrs. Leslie “you must hate me for it” – still I can very easily throw back whether by fatigue or want of care, and I do not like to build plans for my return to my own land. Is there no chance of your coming hereabouts? Though we cannot in our small and disorderly house offer a lady a room, one can be got close by and we can offer possible board and a most lovely little garden for a lounge. Please remember me kindly to your brother John and

Sir A. and Lady Grant and believe me with hearty sympathy –
Yours most sincerely,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

I was rejoiced to hear he never doubted of my love, but I must
cure my hate of correspondence. This has been a sharp lesson.

To W. E. Henley

It will be remembered that “Whistles” or “Penny Whistles” was his own name for the verses of the *Child’s Garden*. The proposal referred to at the end of this letter was one which had reached him from Messrs. Lippincott, the American publishers, for a sailing trip to be taken among the Greek islands and made the subject of a book.

La Solitude, Hyères [October 1883].

My dear excellent, admired, volcanic angel of a lad, trusty as a dog, eruptive as Vesuvius, in all things great, in all the soul of loyalty: greeting.

That you are better spirits me up good. I have had no colour of a Mag. of Art. From here, here in Highairs the Palm-trees, I have heard your conversation. It came here in the form of a Mistral, and I said to myself, Damme, there is some Henley at the foot of this!

I shall try to do the Whistle as suggested; but I can usually do whistles only by giving my whole mind to it: to produce even such limping verse demanding the whole forces of my untuneful soul. I have other two anyway: better or worse. I am now deep, deep, ocean deep in *Otto*: a letter is a curst distraction. About 100 pp. are near fit for publication; I am either making a spoon or spoiling the horn of a Caledonian bull, with that airy potentate.

God help me, I bury a lot of labour in that principality; and if I am not greatly a gainer, I am a great loser and a great fool. However, *sursum corda*; faint heart never writ romance.

Your Dumas I think exquisite; it might even have been stronglier said: the brave old godly pagan, I adore his big footprints on the earth.

Have you read Meredith's *Love in the Valley*? It got me, I wept; I remembered that poetry existed.

**“When her mother tends her
before the laughing mirror.”**

I propose if they (Lippincotts) will let me wait till next Autumn, and go when it is safest, to accept £450 with £100 down; but it is now too late to go this year. November and December are the months when it is safest; and the back of the season is broken. I shall gain much knowledge by the trip; this I look upon as one of the main inducements.

R. L. S.

To Sidney Colvin

The following is in answer to a letter containing remarks on the proofs of the *Child's Garden*, then going round among some of his friends, and on the instalments of *Silverado Squatters* and the *Black Arrow*, which were appearing in the *Century Magazine* and *Young Folks* respectively. The remarks on Professor Seeley's literary manner are *à propos* of the *Expansion of England*, which I had lately sent him.

La Solitude, Hyères [October 1883].

COLVIN, COLVIN, COLVIN, – Yours received; also interesting copy of *P. Whistles*. “In the multitude of councillors the Bible declares there is wisdom,” said my great-uncle, “but I have always found in them distraction.” It is extraordinary how tastes vary: these proofs have been handed about, it appears, and I have had several letters; and – distraction. Æsop: the Miller and the Ass.

Notes on details: —

1. I love the occasional trochaic line; and so did many excellent writers before me.
2. If you don't like *A Good Boy*, I do.
3. In *Escape at Bedtime*, I found two suggestions. “Shove” for “above” is a correction of the press; it was so written. “Twinkled” is just the error; to the child the stars appear to be there; any word

that suggests illusion is a horror.

4. I don't care; I take a different view of the vocative.

5. Bewildering and childering are good enough for me. These are rhymes, jingles; I don't go for eternity and the three unities.

I will delete some of those condemned, but not all. I don't care for the name Penny Whistles; I sent a sheaf to Henley when I sent 'em. But I've forgot the others. I would just as soon call 'em "Rimes for Children" as anything else. I am not proud nor particular.

Your remarks on the *Black Arrow* are to the point. I am pleased you liked Crookback; he is a fellow whose hellish energy has always fixed my attention. I wish Shakespeare had written the play after he had learned some of the rudiments of literature and art rather than before. Some day, I will re-tickle the Sable Missile, and shoot it, *moyennant finances*, once more into the air; I can lighten it of much, and devote some more attention to Dick o' Gloucester. It's great sport to write tushery.

By this I reckon you will have heard of my proposed excursiolorum to the Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece, and kindred sites. If the excursiolorum goes on, that is if *moyennant finances* comes off, I shall write to beg you to collect introductiolorums for me.

Distinguo: 1. *Silverado* was not written in America, but in Switzerland's icy mountains. 2. What you read is the bleeding and disembowelled remains of what I wrote. 3. The good stuff is all to come – so I think. "The Sea Fogs," "The Hunter's Family,"

“Toils and Pleasures” —*belles pages*. — Yours ever,

Ramnugger.

O! — Seeley is too clever to live, and the book a gem. But why has he read too much Arnold? Why will he avoid — obviously avoid — fine writing up to which he has led? This is a winking, curled-and-oiled, ultra-cultured, Oxford-don sort of an affectation that infuriates my honest soul. “You see” — they say — “how unbombastic *we* are; we come right up to eloquence, and, when it’s hanging on the pen, dammy, we scorn it!” It is literary Deronda-ism. If you don’t want the woman, the image, or the phrase, mortify your vanity and avoid the appearance of wanting them.

To W.E. Henley

The first paragraph of the following refers to contributions of R. L. S. to the Magazine of Art under Mr. Henley's editorship: —

La Solitude, Hyères [Autumn 1883].

DEAR LAD, — Glad you like *Fontainebleau*. I am going to be the means, under heaven, of aërating or literating your pages. The idea that because a thing is a picture-book all the writing should be on the wrong tack is *triste* but widespread. Thus *Hokusai* will be really a gossip on convention, or in great part. And the Skelt will be as like a Charles Lamb as I can get it. The writer should write, and not illustrate pictures: else it's bosh...

Your remarks about the ugly are my eye. Ugliness is only the prose of horror. It is when you are not able to write *Macbeth* that you write *Thérèse Raquin*. Fashions are external: the essence of art only varies in so far as fashion widens the field of its application; art is a mill whose thirlage, in different ages, widens and contracts; but, in any case and under any fashion, the great man produces beauty, terror, and mirth, and the little man produces cleverness (personalities, psychology) instead of beauty, ugliness instead of terror, and jokes instead of mirth. As it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be ever, world without end. Amen!

And even as you read, you say, “Of course, *quelle rengaine!*”

R. L. S.

To W. H. Low

Manhattan mentioned below is the name of a short-lived New York magazine, the editor of which had asked through Mr. Low for a contribution from R. L. S.

La Solitude, Hyères, October [1883].

MY DEAR LOW, – ... Some day or other, in Cassell's Magazine of Art, you will see a paper which will interest you, and where your name appears. It is called *Fontainebleau: Village Communities of Artists*, and the signature of R. L. Stevenson will be found annexed.

Please tell the editor of Manhattan the following secrets for me: *1st*, That I am a beast; *2nd*, that I owe him a letter; *3rd*, that I have lost his, and cannot recall either his name or address; *4th*, that I am very deep in engagements, which my absurd health makes it hard for me to overtake; but *5th*, that I will bear him in mind; *6th* and last, that I am a brute.

My address is still the same, and I live in a most sweet corner of the universe, sea and fine hills before me, and a rich variegated plain; and at my back a craggy hill, loaded with vast feudal ruins. I am very quiet; a person passing by my door half startles me; but I enjoy the most aromatic airs, and at night the most wonderful view into a moonlit garden. By day this garden fades into nothing, overpowered by its surroundings and the luminous distance; but

at night and when the moon is out, that garden, the arbour, the flight of stairs that mount the artificial hillock, the plumed blue gum-trees that hang trembling, become the very skirts of Paradise. Angels I know frequent it; and it thrills all night with the flutes of silence. Damn that garden; – and by day it is gone.

Continue to testify boldly against realism. Down with Dagon, the fish god! All art swings down towards imitation, in these days, fatally. But the man who loves art with wisdom sees the joke; it is the lustful that tremble and respect her ladyship; but the honest and romantic lovers of the Muse can see a joke and sit down to laugh with Apollo.

The prospect of your return to Europe is very agreeable; and I was pleased by what you said about your parents. One of my oldest friends died recently, and this has given me new thoughts of death. Up to now I had rather thought of him as a mere personal enemy of my own; but now that I see him hunting after my friends, he looks altogether darker. My own father is not well; and Henley, of whom you must have heard me speak, is in a questionable state of health. These things are very solemn, and take some of the colour out of life. It is a great thing, after all, to be a man of reasonable honour and kindness. Do you remember once consulting me in Paris whether you had not better sacrifice honesty to art; and how, after much confabulation, we agreed that your art would suffer if you did? We decided better than we knew. In this strange welter where we live, all hangs together by a million filaments; and to do reasonably well by others, is the

first pre-requisite of art. Art is a virtue; and if I were the man I should be, my art would rise in the proportion of my life.

If you were privileged to give some happiness to your parents, I know your art will gain by it. *By God it will! —Sic subscribitur,*

R. L. S.

To R. A. M. Stevenson

La Solitude, Hyères [October 1883].

MY DEAR BOB, – Yes, I got both your letters at Lyons, but have been since then decaying in several steps. Toothache; fever; Ferrier's death; lung. Now it is decided I am to leave to-morrow, penniless, for Nice to see Dr. Williams.

I was much struck by your last. I have written a breathless note on Realism for Henley; a fifth part of the subject hurriedly touched, which will show you how my thoughts are driving. You are now at last beginning to think upon the problems of executive, plastic art, for you are now for the first time attacking them. Hitherto you have spoken and thought of two things – technique and the *ars artium*, or common background of all arts. Studio work is the real touch. That is the genial error of the present French teaching. Realism I regard as a mere question of method. The “brown foreground,” “old mastery,” and the like, ranking with villanelles, as technical sports and pastimes. Real art, whether ideal or realistic, addresses precisely the same feeling, and seeks the same qualities – significance or charm. And the same – very same – inspiration is only methodically differentiated according as the artist is an arrant realist or an arrant idealist. Each, by his own method, seeks to save and perpetuate the same significance or charm; the one by

suppressing, the other by forcing, detail. All other idealism is the brown foreground over again, and hence only art in the sense of a game, like cup and ball. All other realism is not art at all – but not at all. It is, then, an insincere and showy handicraft.

Were you to re-read some Balzac, as I have been doing, it would greatly help to clear your eyes. He was a man who never found his method. An inarticulate Shakespeare, smothered under forcible-feeble detail. It is astounding to the riper mind how bad he is, how feeble, how untrue, how tedious; and, of course, when he surrendered to his temperament, how good and powerful. And yet never plain nor clear. He could not consent to be dull, and thus became so. He would leave nothing undeveloped, and thus drowned out of sight of land amid the multitude of crying and incongruous details. There is but one art – to omit! O if I knew how to omit, I would ask no other knowledge. A man who knew how to omit would make an *Iliad* of a daily paper.

Your definition of seeing is quite right. It is the first part of omission to be partly blind. Artistic sight is judicious blindness. Sam Bough must have been a jolly blind old boy. He would turn a corner, look for one-half or quarter minute, and then say, “This’ll do, lad.” Down he sat, there and then, with whole artistic plan, scheme of colour, and the like, and begin by laying a foundation of powerful and seemingly incongruous colour on the block. He saw, not the scene, but the water-colour sketch. Every artist by sixty should so behold nature. Where does he learn that? In the studio, I swear. He goes to nature for facts, relations, values –

material; as a man, before writing a historical novel, reads up memoirs. But it is not by reading memoirs that he has learned the selective criterion. He has learned that in the practice of his art; and he will never learn it well, but when disengaged from the ardent struggle of immediate representation, of realistic and *ex facto* art. He learns it in the crystallisation of day-dreams; in changing, not in copying, fact; in the pursuit of the ideal, not in the study of nature. These temples of art are, as you say, inaccessible to the realistic climber. It is not by looking at the sea that you get

“The multitudinous seas incarnadine,”

nor by looking at Mont Blanc that you find

“And visited all night by troops of stars.”

A kind of ardour of the blood is the mother of all this; and according as this ardour is swayed by knowledge and seconded by craft, the art expression flows clear, and significance and charm, like a moon rising, are born above the barren juggle of mere symbols.

The painter must study more from nature than the man of words. By why? Because literature deals with men's business and passions which, in the game of life, we are irresistibly obliged

to study; but painting with relations of light, and colour, and significances, and form, which, from the immemorial habit of the race, we pass over with an unregardful eye. Hence this crouching upon camp-stools, and these crusts.⁶ But neither one nor other is a part of art, only preliminary studies.

I want you to help me to get people to understand that realism is a method, and only methodic in its consequences; when the realist is an artist, that is, and supposing the idealist with whom you compare him to be anything but a *farceur* and a *dilettante*. The two schools of working do, and should, lead to the choice of different subjects. But that is a consequence, not a cause. See my chaotic note, which will appear, I fancy, in November in Henley's sheet.

Poor Ferrier, it bust me horrid. He was, after you, the oldest of my friends.

I am now very tired, and will go to bed having prelected freely. Fanny will finish.

R. L. S.

⁶ *Croûtes*: crude studies from nature.

To Thomas Stevenson

Some pages of MS. exist in which the writer at this time attempted to re-cast and expand a portion of the *Lay Morals* of 1879. A letter written some days earlier to his father, and partly quoted in Mr. Graham Balfour's *Life* (ed. 1906, p. 209), explains his purpose.

La Solitude, Hyères, 12th October 1883.

MY DEAR FATHER, – I have just lunched; the day is exquisite, the air comes through the open window rich with odour, and I am by no means spiritually minded. Your letter, however, was very much valued, and has been read oftener than once. What you say about yourself I was glad to hear; a little decent resignation is not only becoming a Christian, but is likely to be excellent for the health of a Stevenson. To fret and fume is undignified, suicidally foolish, and theologically unpardonable; we are here not to make, but to tread predestined, pathways; we are the foam of a wave, and to preserve a proper equanimity is not merely the first part of submission to God, but the chief of possible kindnesses to those about us. I am lecturing myself, but you also. To do our best is one part, but to wash our hands smilingly of the consequence is the next part, of any sensible virtue.

I have come, for the moment, to a pause in my moral works;

for I have many irons in the fire, and I wish to finish something to bring coin before I can afford to go on with what I think doubtfully to be a duty. It is a most difficult work; a touch of the parson will drive off those I hope to influence; a touch of overstrained laxity, besides disgusting, like a grimace, may do harm. Nothing that I have ever seen yet speaks directly and efficaciously to young men; and I do hope I may find the art and wisdom to fill up a gap. The great point, as I see it, is to ask as little as possible, and meet, if it may be, every view or absence of view; and it should be, must be, easy. Honesty is the one desideratum; but think how hard a one to meet. I think all the time of Ferrier and myself; these are the pair that I address. Poor Ferrier, so much a better man than I, and such a temporal wreck. But the thing of which we must divest our minds is to look partially upon others; all is to be viewed; and the creature judged, as he must be by his Creator, not dissected through a prism of morals, but in the unrefracted ray. So seen, and in relation to the almost omnipotent surroundings, who is to distinguish between F. and such a man as Dr. Candlish, or between such a man as David Hume and such an one as Robert Burns? To compare my poor and good Walter with myself is to make me startle; he, upon all grounds above the merely expedient, was the nobler being. Yet wrecked utterly ere the full age of manhood; and the last skirmishes so well fought, so humanly useless, so pathetically brave, only the leaps of an expiring lamp. All this is a very pointed instance. It shuts the mouth. I have learned more, in some

ways, from him than from any other soul I ever met; and he, strange to think, was the best gentleman, in all kinder senses, that I ever knew. – Ever your affectionate son,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To W. H. Low

The paper referred to at the beginning of the second paragraph is one on R. L. S. in the Century Magazine, the first seriously critical notice, says Mr. Low, which appeared of him in the States.

[*La Solitude, Hyères, Oct. 23, 1883.*]

MY DEAR LOW, —*C'est d'un bon camarade*; and I am much obliged to you for your two letters and the inclosure. Times are a litle changed with all of us since the ever memorable days of Lavenue: hallowed be his name! hallowed his old Fleury! — of which you did not see — I think — as I did — the glorious apotheosis: advanced on a Tuesday to three francs, on the Thursday to six, and on Friday swept off, holus bolus, for the proprietor's private consumption. Well, we had the start of that proprietor. Many a good bottle came our way, and was, I think, worthily made welcome.

I am pleased that Mr. Gilder should like my literature; and I ask you particularly to thank Mr. Bunner (have I the name right?) for his notice, which was of that friendly, headlong sort that really pleases an author like what the French call a "shake-hands." It pleased me the more coming from the States, where I have met not much recognition, save from the buccaneers, and above all from pirates who misspell my name. I saw my book advertised

in a number of the Critic as the work of one R. L. Stephenson; and, I own, I boiled. It is so easy to know the name of the man whose book you have stolen; for there it is, at full length, on the title-page of your booty. But no, damn him, not he! He calls me Stephenson. These woes I only refer to by the way, as they set a higher value on the Century notice.

I am now a person with an established ill-health – a wife – a dog possessed with an evil, a Gadarene spirit – a chalet on a hill, looking out over the Mediterranean – a certain reputation – and very obscure finances. Otherwise, very much the same, I guess; and were a bottle of Fleury a thing to be obtained, capable of developing theories along with a fit spirit even as of yore. Yet I now draw near to the Middle Ages; nearly three years ago, that fatal Thirty struck; and yet the great work is not yet done – not yet even conceived. But so, as one goes on, the wood seems to thicken, the footpath to narrow, and the House Beautiful on the hill's summit to draw further and further away. We learn, indeed, to use our means; but only to learn, along with it, the paralysing knowledge that these means are only applicable to two or three poor commonplace motives. Eight years ago, if I could have slung ink as I can now, I should have thought myself well on the road after Shakespeare; and now – I find I have only got a pair of walking-shoes and not yet begun to travel. And art is still away there on the mountain summit. But I need not continue; for, of course, this is your story just as much as it is mine; and, strange to think, it was Shakespeare's too, and Beethoven's, and Phidias's.

It is a blessed thing that, in this forest of art, we can pursue our woodlice and sparrows, *and not catch them*, with almost the same fervour of exhilaration as that with which Sophocles hunted and brought down the Mastodon.

Tell me something of your work, and your wife. – My dear fellow, I am yours ever,

R. L. Stevenson.

My wife begs to be remembered to both of you; I cannot say as much for my dog, who has never seen you, but he would like, on general principles, to bite you.

To W. E. Henley

By this time *Treasure Island* was out in book form, and the following is in reply to some reflections on its seamanship which had been conveyed to him through Mr. Henley: —

[*La Solitude, Hyères, November 1883.*]

MY DEAR LAD, — ... Of course, my seamanship is jimmy: did I not beseech you I know not how often to find me an ancient mariner — and you, whose own wife's own brother is one of the ancientest, did nothing for me? As for my seamen, did Runciman ever know eighteenth century Buccaneers? No? Well, no more did I. But I have known and sailed with seamen too, and lived and eaten with them; and I made my put-up shot in no great ignorance, but as a put-up thing has to be made, *i. e.* to be coherent and picturesque, and damn the expense. Are they fairly lively on the wires? Then, favour me with your tongues. Are they wooden, and dim, and no sport? Then it is I that am silent, otherwise not. The work, strange as it may sound in the ear, is not a work of realism. The next thing I shall hear is that the etiquette is wrong in Otto's Court! With a warrant, and I mean it to be so, and the whole matter never cost me half a thought. I make these paper people to please myself, and Skelt, and God Almighty, and with no ulterior purpose. Yet am I mortal myself; for, as I remind

you, I begged for a supervising mariner. However, my heart is in the right place. I have been to sea, but I never crossed the threshold of a court; and the courts shall be the way I want 'em.

I'm glad to think I owe you the review that pleased me best of all the reviews I ever had; the one I liked best before that was – 's on the *Arabians*. These two are the flowers of the collection, according to me. To live reading such reviews and die eating ortolans – sich is my aspiration.

Whenever you come you will be equally welcome. I am trying to finish *Otto* ere you shall arrive, so as to take and be able to enjoy a well-earned – O yes, a well-earned – holiday. Longman fetched by *Otto*: is it a spoon or a spoilt horn? Momentous, if the latter; if the former, a spoon to dip much praise and pudding, and to give, I do think, much pleasure. The last part, now in hand, much smiles upon me. – Ever yours,

R. L. S.

To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

La Solitude, Hyères [November 1883].

MY DEAR MOTHER, – You must not blame me too much for my silence; I am over head and ears in work, and do not know what to do first. I have been hard at *Otto*, hard at *Silverado* proofs, which I have worked over again to a tremendous extent; cutting, adding, rewriting, until some of the worst chapters of the original are now, to my mind, as good as any. I was the more bound to make it good, as I had such liberal terms; it's not for want of trying if I have failed.

I got your letter on my birthday; indeed, that was how I found it out about three in the afternoon, when postie comes. Thank you for all you said. As for my wife, that was the best investment ever made by man; but “in our branch of the family” we seem to marry well. I, considering my piles of work, am wonderfully well; I have not been so busy for I know not how long. I hope you will send me the money I asked however, as I am not only penniless, but shall remain so in all human probability for some considerable time. I have got in the mass of my expectations; and the £100 which is to float us on the new year cannot come due till *Silverado* is all ready; I am delaying it myself for the moment; then will follow the binders and the travellers and an infinity of other nuisances; and only at the last, the jingling-tingling.

Do you know that *Treasure Island* has appeared? In the November number of Henley's Magazine, a capital number anyway, there is a funny publisher's puff of it for your book; also a bad article by me. Lang dotes on *Treasure Island*: "Except *Tom Sawyer* and the *Odyssey*," he writes, "I never liked any romance so much." I will inclose the letter though. The Bogue is angelic, although very dirty. It has rained – at last! It was jolly cold when the rain came.

I was overjoyed to hear such good news of my father. Let him go on at that! – Ever your affectionate,

R. L. S.

To Sidney Colvin

Of the “small ships” here mentioned, *Fontainebleau* and *The Character of Dogs* are well known: *A Misadventure in France* is probably a draft of the *Epilogue to an Inland Voyage*, not published till five years later. The *Travelling Companion* (of which I remember little except that its scene was partly laid in North Italy and that a publisher to whom it was shown declared it a work of genius but indecent) was abandoned some two years later, as set forth on p. 193 of this volume.

La Solitude, Hyères [November 1883].

£10,000 Pounds Reward!

Whereas Sidney Colvin, more generally known as the Guardian Angel, has vanished from the gaze of Mr. R. L. Stevenson, the above reward is offered as a means to discover the whereabouts of the misguided gentleman. He was known as a man of irregular habits, and his rowdy exterior would readily attract attention in a crowd. He was never known to resist a drink; whisky was his favourite dish. If any one will bring him to Mr. Stevenson's back area door, dead or alive, the greatest rejoicing will be felt by a bereaved and uneasy family.

Also, wherefore not a word, dear Colvin? My news is: splendid health; great success of the *Black Arrow*; another tale demanded, readers this time (the Lord lighten them!) pleased; a great variety of small ships launched or still upon the stocks – (also, why not send the annotated proof of *Fontainebleau*? ce n'est pas d'un bon camarade); a paper on dogs for Carr;⁷ a paper called *Old Mortality*, a paper called *A Misadventure in France*, a tale entitled *The Travelling Companion*; *Otto* arrested one foot in air; and last and not least, a great demand for news of Sidney Colvin and others. Herewith I pause, for why should I cast pearls before swine?

A word, Guardian Angel. You are much loved in this house, not by me only, but by the wife. The Wogg himself is anxious. – Ever yours affectionately,

R. L. S.

⁷ Mr. J. Comyns Carr, at this time editing the English Illustrated Magazine.

To Sidney Colvin

La Solitude, Hyères [November 1883].

MY DEAR COLVIN, – I have been bad, but as you were worse, I feel no shame. I raise a blooming countenance, not the evidence of a self-righteous spirit.

I continue my uphill fight with the twin spirits of bankruptcy and indigestion. Duns rage about my portal, at least to fancy's ear.

I suppose you heard of Ferrier's death: my oldest friend, except Bob. It has much upset me. I did not fancy how much. I am strangely concerned about it.

My house is the loveliest spot in the universe; the moonlight nights we have are incredible; love, poetry and music, and the Arabian Nights, inhabit just my corner of the world – nest there like mavis.

Here lies

The carcass of

Robert Louis Stevenson,

An active, austere, and not inelegant

writer,

who,

at the termination of a long career,

wealthy, wise, benevolent, and honoured by

been interred, below this frugal stone, in the garden which he honoured for so long with his poetic presence.)

I must write more solemn letters. Adieu. Write.

R. L. S.

To Mrs. Milne

This is to a cousin who had been one of his favourite playmates in childhood, and had recognised some allusions in the proof slips of the *Child's Garden* (the piece called *A Pirate Story*).

La Solitude, Hyères [November 1883].

MY DEAR HENRIETTA, – Certainly; who else would they be? More by token, on that particular occasion, you were sailing under the title of Princess Royal; I, after a furious contest, under that of Prince Alfred; and Willie, still a little sulky, as the Prince of Wales. We were all in a buck basket about half-way between the swing and the gate; and I can still see the Pirate Squadron heave in sight upon the weather bow.

I wrote a piece besides on Giant Bunker; but I was not happily inspired, and it is condemned. Perhaps I'll try again; he was a horrid fellow, Giant Bunker! and some of my happiest hours were passed in pursuit of him. You were a capital fellow to play: how few there were who could! None better than yourself. I shall never forget some of the days at Bridge of Allan; they were one golden dream. See "A Good Boy" in the *Penny Whistles*, much of the sentiment of which is taken direct from one evening at B. of A. when we had had a great play with the little Glasgow girl. Hallowed be that fat book of fairy tales! Do you remember

acting the Fair One with Golden Locks? What a romantic drama! Generally speaking, whenever I think of play, it is pretty certain that you will come into my head. I wrote a paper called *Child's Play* once, where, I believe, you or Willie would recognise things...

Surely Willie is just the man to marry; and if his wife wasn't a happy woman, I think I could tell her who was to blame. Is there no word of it? Well, these things are beyond arrangement; and the wind bloweth where it listeth – which, I observe, is generally towards the west in Scotland. Here it prefers a south-easterly course, and is called the Mistral – usually with an adjective in front. But if you will remember my yesterday's toothache and this morning's crick, you will be in a position to choose an adjective for yourself. Not that the wind is unhealthy; only when it comes strong, it is both very high and very cold, which makes it the devil. But as I am writing to a lady, I had better avoid this topic; winds requiring a great scope of language.

Please remember me to all at home; give Ramsay a pennyworth of acidulated drops for his good taste. – And believe me, your affectionate cousin,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Miss Ferrier

La Solitude, Hyères [November 22, 1883].

DEAR MISS FERRIER, – Many thanks for the photograph. It is – well, it is like most photographs. The sun is an artist of too much renown; and, at any rate, we who knew Walter “in the brave days of old” will be difficult to please.

I was inexpressibly touched to get a letter from some lawyers as to some money. I have never had any account with my friends; some have gained and some lost; and I should feel there was something dishonest in a partial liquidation even if I could recollect the facts, *which I cannot*. But the fact of his having put aside this memorandum touched me greatly.

The mystery of his life is great. Our chemist in this place, who had been at Malvern, recognised the picture. You may remember Walter had a romantic affection for all pharmacies? and the bottles in the window were for him a poem? He said once that he knew no pleasure like driving through a lamplit city, waiting for the chemists to go by.

All these things return now.

He had a pretty full translation of Schiller’s *Æsthetic Letters*, which we read together, as well as the second part of *Faust*, in Gladstone Terrace, he helping me with the German. There is no keepsake I should more value than the MS. of that translation.

They were the best days I ever had with him, little dreaming all would so soon be over. It needs a blow like this to convict a man of mortality and its burthen. I always thought I should go by myself; not to survive. But now I feel as if the earth were undermined, and all my friends have lost one thickness of reality since that one passed. Those are happy who can take it otherwise; with that I found things all beginning to dislimn. Here we have no abiding city, and one felt as though he had – and O too much acted.

But if you tell me, he did not feel my silence. However, he must have done so; and my guilt is irreparable now. I thank God at least heartily that he did not resent it.

Please remember me to Sir Alexander and Lady Grant, to whose care I will address this. When next I am in Edinburgh I will take flowers, alas! to the West Kirk. Many a long hour we passed in graveyards, the man who has gone and I – or rather not that man – but the beautiful, genial, witty youth who so betrayed him. – Dear Miss Ferrier, I am yours most sincerely,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To W. E. Henley

This refers to some dispute which had arisen with an editor (I forget whom) concerning the refusal of an article on Salvini. The nickname "Fastidious Brisk," from Ben Jonson's *Every Man out of his Humour*, was applied by Mr. Henley to Stevenson – very inappropriately as I always thought.

La Solitude, Hyères, Autumn 1883.

MY DEAR LAD, – You know your own business best; but I wish your honesty were not so warfaring. These conflicts pain Lucretian sitters on the shore; and one wonders – one wonders – wonders and whimpers. I do not say my attitude is noble; but is yours conciliatory? I revere Salvini, but I shall never see him – nor anybody – play again. That is all a matter of history, heroic history, to me. Were I in London, I should be the liker Tantalus – no more. But as for these quarrels: in not many years shall we not all be clay-cold and safe below ground, you with your loud-mouthed integrity, I with my fastidious briskness – and – with all their faults and merits, swallowed in silence. It seems to me, in ignorance of cause, that when the dustman has gone by, these quarrellings will prick the conscience. Am I wrong? I am a great sinner; so, my brave friend, are you; the others also. Let us a little imitate the divine patience and the divine sense of humour,

and smilingly tolerate those faults and virtues that have so brief a period and so intertwined a being.

I fear I was born a parson; but I live very near upon the margin (though, by your leave, I may outlive you all!), and too much rigour in these daily things sounds to me like clatter on the kitchen dishes. If it might be – could it not be smoothed? This very day my father writes me he has gone to see, upon his deathbed, an old friend to whom for years he has not spoken or written. On his deathbed; no picking up of the lost stitches; merely to say: my little fury, my spotted uprightness, after having split our lives, have not a word of quarrel to say more. And the same post brings me the news of another – War! Things in this troubled medium are not so clear, dear Henley; there are faults upon all hands; and the end comes, and Ferrier's grave gapes for us all.

The Prosy Preacher

(But written in deep dejection, my dear man).

Suppose they *are* wrong? Well, am I not tolerated, are you not tolerated? – we and *our* faults?

To W. H. Low

La Solitude, Hyères, Var, 13th December 1883.

MY DEAR LOW, – ... I was much pleased with what you said about my work. Ill-health is a great handicapper in the race. I have never at command that press of spirits that are necessary to strike out a thing red-hot. *Silverado* is an example of stuff worried and pawed about, God knows how often, in poor health, and you can see for yourself the result: good pages, an imperfect fusion, a certain languor of the whole. Not, in short, art. I have told Roberts to send you a copy of the book when it appears, where there are some fair passages that will be new to you. My brief romance, *Prince Otto*—far my most difficult adventure up to now – is near an end. I have still one chapter to write *de fond en comble*, and three or four to strengthen or recast. The rest is done. I do not know if I have made a spoon, or only spoiled a horn; but I am tempted to hope the first. If the present bargain hold, it will not see the light of day for some thirteen months. Then I shall be glad to know how it strikes you. There is a good deal of stuff in it, both dramatic and, I think, poetic; and the story is not like these purposeless fables of to-day, but is, at least, intended to stand firm upon a base of philosophy – or morals – as you please. It has been long gestated, and is wrought with care. *Enfin, nous verrons*. My labours have this year for the first time been rewarded with

upwards of £350; that of itself, so base we are! encourages me; and the better tenor of my health yet more. – Remember me to Mrs. Low, and believe me, yours most sincerely,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Thomas Stevenson

La Solitude, December 20, 1883.

MY DEAR FATHER, – I do not know which of us is to blame; I suspect it is you this time. The last accounts of you were pretty good, I was pleased to see; I am, on the whole, very well – suffering a little still from my fever and liver complications, but better.

I have just finished re-reading a book, which I counsel you above all things *not* to read, as it has made me very ill, and would make you worse – Lockhart's *Scott*. It is worth reading, as all things are from time to time that keep us nose to nose with fact; though I think such reading may be abused, and that a great deal of life is better spent in reading of a light and yet chivalrous strain. Thus, no Waverley novel approaches in power, blackness, bitterness, and moral elevation to the diary and Lockhart's narrative of the end; and yet the Waverley novels are better reading for every day than the *Life*. You may take a tonic daily, but not phlebotomy.

The great double danger of taking life too easily, and taking it too hard, how difficult it is to balance that! But we are all too little inclined to faith; we are all, in our serious moments, too much inclined to forget that all are sinners, and fall justly by their faults, and therefore that we have no more to do with that than with the

thundercloud; only to trust, and do our best, and wear as smiling a face as may be for others and ourselves. But there is no royal road among this complicated business. Hegel the German got the best word of all philosophy with his antinomies: the contrary of everything is its postulate. That is, of course, grossly expressed, but gives a hint of the idea, which contains a great deal of the mysteries of religion, and a vast amount of the practical wisdom of life. For your part, there is no doubt as to your duty – to take things easy and be as happy as you can, for your sake, and my mother's, and that of many besides. Excuse this sermon. – Ever your loving son,

R. L. S.

To Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

La Solitude, December 25, 1883.

MY DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER, – This it is supposed will reach you about Christmas, and I believe I should include Lloyd in the greeting. But I want to lecture my father; he is not grateful enough; he is like Fanny; his resignation is not the “true blue.” A man who has gained a stone; whose son is better, and, after so many fears to the contrary, I dare to say, a credit to him; whose business is arranged; whose marriage is a picture – what I should call resignation in such a case as his would be to “take down his fiddle and play as loud as ever he could.” That and nought else. And now, you dear old pious ingrate, on this Christmas morning, think what your mercies have been; and do not walk too far before your breakfast – as far as to the top of India Street, then to the top of Dundas Street, and then to your ain stair heid; and do not forget that even as *laborare*, so *joculari, est orare*; and to be happy the first step to being pious.

I have as good as finished my novel, and a hard job it has been – but now practically over, *laus deo!* My financial prospects better than ever before; my excellent wife a touch dolorous, like Mr. Tommy; my Bogue quite converted, and myself in good spirits. O, send Curry Powder per Baxter.

R. L. S.

To Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

[La Solitude, Hyères] last Sunday of '83.

MY DEAR MOTHER, – I give my father up. I give him a parable: that the Waverley novels are better reading for every day than the tragic Life. And he takes it backside foremost, and shakes his head, and is gloomier than ever. Tell him that I give him up. I don't want no such a parent. This is not the man for my money. I do not call that by the name of religion which fills a man with bile. I write him a whole letter, bidding him beware of extremes, and telling him that his gloom is gallows-worthy; and I get back an answer – Perish the thought of it.

Here am I on the threshold of another year, when, according to all human foresight, I should long ago have been resolved into my elements; here am I, who you were persuaded was born to disgrace you – and, I will do you the justice to add, on no such insufficient grounds – no very burning discredit when all is done; here am I married, and the marriage recognised to be a blessing of the first order, A1 at Lloyd's. There is he, at his not first youth, able to take more exercise than I at thirty-three, and gaining a stone's weight, a thing of which I am incapable. There are you; has the man no gratitude? There is Smeoroch⁸: is he blind? Tell him from me that all this is

⁸ A favourite Skye terrier. Mr. Stevenson was a great lover of dogs.

NOT THE TRUE BLUE!

I will think more of his prayers when I see in him a spirit of *praise*. Piety is a more childlike and happy attitude than he admits. Martha, Martha, do you hear the knocking at the door? But Mary was happy. Even the Shorter Catechism, not the merriest epitome of religion, and a work exactly as pious although not quite so true as the multiplication table – even that dry-as-dust epitome begins with a heroic note. What is man's chief end? Let him study that; and ask himself if to refuse to enjoy God's kindest gifts is in the spirit indicated. Up, Dullard! It is better service to enjoy a novel than to mump.

I have been most unjust to the Shorter Catechism, I perceive. I wish to say that I keenly admire its merits as a performance; and that all that was in my mind was its peculiarly unreligious and unmoral texture; from which defect it can never, of course, exercise the least influence on the minds of children. But they learn fine style and some austere thinking unconsciously. – Ever your loving son,

R. L. S.

To Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

La Solitude, Hyères-les-Palmiers, Var, January 1 (1884).

MY DEAR PEOPLE, – A Good New Year to you. The year closes, leaving me with £50 in the bank, owing no man nothing, £100 more due to me in a week or so, and £150 more in the course of the month; and I can look back on a total receipt of £465, 0s. 6d. for the last twelve months!

And yet I am not happy!

Yet I beg! Here is my beggary: —

1. Sellar's Trial.
2. George Borrow's Book about Wales.
3. My Grandfather's Trip to Holland.
4. And (but this is, I fear, impossible) the Bell Rock Book.

When I think of how last year began, after four months of sickness and idleness, all my plans gone to water, myself starting alone, a kind of spectre, for Nice – should I not be grateful? Come, let us sing unto the Lord!

Nor should I forget the expected visit, but I will not believe in that till it befall; I am no cultivator of disappointments, 'tis a herb that does not grow in my garden; but I get some good crops both of remorse and gratitude. The last I can recommend to all gardeners; it grows best in shiny weather, but once well grown,

is very hardy; it does not require much labour; only that the husbandman should smoke his pipe about the flower-plots and admire God's pleasant wonders. Winter green (otherwise known as Resignation, or the "false gratitude plant") springs in much the same soil; is little hardier, if at all; and requires to be so dug about and dunged, that there is little margin left for profit. The variety known as the Black Winter green (H. V. *Stevensoniana*) is rather for ornament than profit.

"John, do you see that bed of resignation?" – "It's doin' bravely, sir." – "John, I will not have it in my garden; it flatters not the eye and comforts not the stomach; root it out." – "Sir, I ha'e seen o' them that rase as high as nettles; gran' plants!" – "What then? Were they as tall as alps, if still unsavoury and bleak, what matters it? Out with it, then; and in its place put Laughter and a Good Conceit (that capital home evergreen), and a bush of Flowering Piety – but see it be the flowering sort – the other species is no ornament to any gentleman's Back Garden."

Jno. Bunyan.

To W. E. Henley

Early in January, Stevenson, after a week's visit at Hyères from his friends Charles Baxter and W. E. Henley, accompanied them as far as Nice, and there suddenly went down with an attack of acute congestion, first of the lungs and then of the kidneys. At one moment there seemed no hope, but he recovered slowly and returned to Hyères. His friends had not written during his illness, fearing him to be too far gone to care for letters. As he got better he began to chafe at their silence.

[Hyères, February or March 1884].

TANDEM DESINO*

I cannot read, work, sleep, lie still, walk, or even play patience.
These plagues will overtake all damned silencists; among whom,
from this day out, number
Eructavit cor Timonis.**

* Originally printed upside-down.

** Originally printed sideways.

the fiery indignator

Roland Little Stevenson

I counted miseries by the heap,
But now have had my fill,
I cannot see, I do not sleep,
But shortly I shall kill.

Of many letters, here is a
Full End.

The last will and testament of
a demitting correspondent.

My indefatigable pen
I here lay down forever. Men
Have used, and left me, and forgot;
Men are entirely off the spot;
Men are a *blague* and an abuse;
And I commit them to the deuce!

Roderick Lamond Stevenson.

I had companions, I had friends,

I had of whisky various blends.
The whisky was all drunk; and lo!
The friends were gone for evermo!

The loquacious man at peace.*

And when I marked the ingratitude,
I to my maker turned, and spewed.

Randolph Lovel Stevenson.

* Originally printed upside-down.

Here endeth the
Familiar Correspondence of

R. L. S.**

Explicuerunt Epistolae

Stevensonianae

Omnes.**

A pen broken, a subverted ink-pot.
All men are rot; but there are two —
Sidney, the oblivious Slade, and you —
Who from that rabble stand confest

** Originally printed sideways.

** Originally printed sideways.

Ten million times the rottenest.

R. L. S.

When I was sick and safe in gaol
I thought my friends would never fail.
One wrote me nothing; t'other bard
Sent me an insolent post-card.

R. L. S.

Terminus: Silentia.**

FINIS Finaliter finium.**

IF NOBODY WRITES TO ME I SHALL DIE

I now write no more.

*Richard Lefanu Stevenson,
Duke of Indignation*

Mark Tacebo,	Isaac Blood	}witnesses
Secretary	John Blind	
	Vain-hope Go-to-bed	
	Israel Sciatica	

** Originally printed sideways.

** Originally printed sideways.

The finger on the mouth.

To Sidney Colvin

The allusions in the second paragraph are to the commanders in the Nile campaigns of those years.

La Solitude, Hyères, 9th March 1884.

MY DEAR S. C., – You will already have received a not very sane note from me; so your patience was rewarded – may I say, your patient silence? However, now comes a letter, which on receipt, I thus acknowledge.

I have already expressed myself as to the political aspect. About Grahame, I feel happier; it does seem to have been really a good, neat, honest piece of work. We do not seem to be so badly off for commanders: Wolseley and Roberts, and this pile of Woods, Stewarts, Alisons, Grahames, and the like. Had we but ONE statesman on any side of the house!

Two chapters of *Otto* do remain: one to rewrite, one to create; and I am not yet able to tackle them. For me it is my chief o' works; hence probably not so for others, since it only means that I have here attacked the greatest difficulties. But some chapters towards the end: three in particular – I do think come off. I find them stirring, dramatic, and not unpoetical. We shall see, however; as like as not, the effort will be more obvious than the success. For, of course, I strung myself hard to carry it out. The next will come easier, and possibly be more popular. I believe

in the covering of much paper, each time with a definite and not too difficult artistic purpose; and then, from time to time, drawing oneself up and trying, in a superior effort, to combine the facilities thus acquired or improved. Thus one progresses. But, mind, it is very likely that the big effort, instead of being the masterpiece, may be the blotted copy, the gymnastic exercise. This no man can tell; only the brutal and licentious public, snouting in Mudie's wash-trough, can return a dubious answer.

I am to-day, thanks to a pure heaven and a beneficent, loud-talking, antiseptic mistral, on the high places as to health and spirits. Money holds out wonderfully. Fanny has gone for a drive to certain meadows which are now one sheet of jonquils: sea-bound meadows, the thought of which may freshen you in Bloomsbury. "Ye have been fresh and fair, Ye have been filled with flowers" – I fear I misquote. Why do people babble? Surely Herrick, in his true vein, is superior to Martial himself, though Martial is a very pretty poet.

Did you ever read St. Augustine? The first chapters of the *Confessions* are marked by a commanding genius: Shakespearian in depth. I was struck dumb, but, alas! when you begin to wander into controversy, the poet drops out. His description of infancy is most seizing. And how is this: "Sed majorum nugae negotia vocantur; puerorum autem talia cum sint puniuntur a majoribus." Which is quite after the heart of R. L. S. See also his splendid passage about the "luminosus limes amicitiae" and the "nebulae de limosa concupiscentia carnis"; going on "*Utrumque*

in confuso aestuabat et rapiebat imbecillam aetatem per abrupta cupiditatum.” That “Utrumque” is a real contribution to life’s science. Lust *alone* is but a pigmy; but it never, or rarely, attacks us single-handed.

Do you ever read (to go miles off, indeed) the incredible Barbey d’Aurévilly? A psychological Poe – to be for a moment Henley. I own with pleasure I prefer him with all his folly, rot, sentiment, and mixed metaphors, to the whole modern school in France. It makes me laugh when it’s nonsense; and when he gets an effect (though it’s still nonsense and mere Poëry, not poesy) it wakens me. *Ce qui ne meurt pas* nearly killed me with laughing, and left me – well, it left me very nearly admiring the old ass. At least, it’s the kind of thing one feels one couldn’t do. The dreadful moonlight, when they all three sit silent in the room – by George, sir, it’s imagined – and the brief scene between the husband and wife is all there. *Quant au fond*, the whole thing, of course, is a fever dream, and worthy of eternal laughter. Had the young man broken stones, and the two women been hard-working honest prostitutes, there had been an end of the whole immoral and baseless business: you could at least have respected them in that case.

I also read *Petronius Arbiter*, which is a rum work, not so immoral as most modern works, but singularly silly. I tackled some Tacitus too. I got them with a dreadful French crib on the same page with the text, which helps me along and drives me mad. The French do not even try to translate. They try to be

much more classical than the classics, with astounding results of barrenness and tedium. Tacitus, I fear, was too solid for me. I liked the war part; but the dreary intriguing at Rome was too much.

R. L. S.

To Mr. Dick

This correspondent was for many years head clerk and confidential assistant in the family firm at Edinburgh.

La Solitude, Hyères, 12th March 1884.

MY DEAR MR. DICK, – I have been a great while owing you a letter; but I am not without excuses, as you have heard. I overworked to get a piece of work finished before I had my holiday, thinking to enjoy it more; and instead of that, the machinery near hand came sundry in my hands! like Murdie's uniform. However, I am now, I think, in a fair way of recovery; I think I was made, what there is of me, of whipcord and thorn-switches; surely I am tough! But I fancy I shall not overdrive again, or not so long. It is my theory that work is highly beneficial, but that it should, if possible, and certainly for such partially broken-down instruments as the thing I call my body, be taken in batches, with a clear break and breathing space between. I always do vary my work, laying one thing aside to take up another, not merely because I believe it rests the brain, but because I have found it most beneficial to the result. Reading, Bacon says, makes a full man, but what makes me full on any subject is to banish it for a time from all my thoughts. However, what I now propose is, out of every quarter to work two months, and rest the third. I believe I shall get more done, as I generally

manage, on my present scheme, to have four months' impotent illness and two of imperfect health – one before, one after, I break down. This, at least, is not an economical division of the year.

I re-read the other day that heartbreaking book, the *Life of Scott*. One should read such works now and then, but O, not often. As I live, I feel more and more that literature should be cheerful and brave-spirited, even if it cannot be made beautiful and pious and heroic. We wish it to be a green place; the *Waverley Novels* are better to re-read than the over-true *Life*, fine as dear Sir Walter was. The Bible, in most parts, is a cheerful book; it is our little piping theologies, tracts, and sermons that are dull and dowie; and even the *Shorter Catechism*, which is scarcely a work of consolation, opens with the best and shortest and completest sermon ever written – upon Man's chief end. – Believe me, my dear Mr. Dick, very sincerely yours,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

P.S.– You see I have changed my hand. I was threatened apparently with scrivener's cramp, and at any rate had got to write so small, that the revisal of my MS. tried my eyes, hence my signature alone remains upon the old model; for it appears that if I changed that, I should be cut off from my "vivers."

R. L. S.

To Cosmo Monkhouse

This amiable and excellent public servant, art-critic, and versifier was a friend of old Savile Club days; the drift of his letter can easily be guessed from this reply. The reference to Lamb is to the essay on the Restoration dramatists.

La Solitude, Hyères, March 16, 1884.

MY DEAR MONKHOUSE, – You see with what promptitude I plunge into correspondence; but the truth is, I am condemned to a complete inaction, stagnate dismally, and love a letter. Yours, which would have been welcome at any time, was thus doubly precious.

Dover sounds somewhat shiveringly in my ears. You should see the weather *I* have – cloudless, clear as crystal, with just a punkah-draft of the most aromatic air, all pine and gum tree. You would be ashamed of Dover; you would scruple to refer, sir, to a spot so paltry. To be idle at Dover is a strange pretension; pray, how do you warm yourself? If I were there I should grind knives or write blank verse, or – But at least you do not bathe? It is idle to deny it: I have – I may say I nourish – a growing jealousy of the robust, large-legged, healthy Britain-dwellers, patient of grog, scornors of the timid umbrella, innocuously breathing fog: all which I once was, and I am ashamed to say liked it. How ignorant is youth! grossly rolling among unselected pleasures; and how

nobler, purer, sweeter, and lighter, to sip the choice tonic, to recline in the luxurious invalid chair, and to tread, well-shawled, the little round of the constitutional. Seriously, do you like to repose? Ye gods, I hate it. I never rest with any acceptance; I do not know what people mean who say they like sleep and that damned bedtime which, since long ere I was breeched, has rung a knell to all my day's doings and beings. And when a man, seemingly sane, tells me he has "fallen in love with stagnation," I can only say to him, "You will never be a Pirate!" This may not cause any regret to Mrs. Monkhouse; but in your own soul it will clang hollow – think of it! Never! After all boyhood's aspirations and youth's immoral day-dreams, you are condemned to sit down, grossly draw in your chair to the fat board, and be a beastly Burgess till you die. Can it be? Is there not some escape, some furlough from the Moral Law, some holiday jaunt contrivable into a Better Land? Shall we never shed blood? This prospect is too grey.

Here lies a man who never did
Anything but what he was bid;
Who lived his life in paltry ease,
And died of commonplace disease.

To confess plainly, I had intended to spend my life (or any leisure I might have from Piracy upon the high seas) as the leader of a great horde of irregular cavalry, devastating whole valleys. I can still, looking back, see myself in many favourite

attitudes; signalling for a boat from my pirate ship with a pocket-handkerchief, I at the jetty end, and one or two of my bold blades keeping the crowd at bay; or else turning in the saddle to look back at my whole command (some five thousand strong) following me at the hand-gallop up the road out of the burning valley: this last by moonlight.

Et point du tout. I am a poor scribe, and have scarce broken a commandment to mention, and have recently dined upon cold veal! As for you (who probably had some ambitions), I hear of you living at Dover, in lodgings, like the beasts of the field. But in heaven, when we get there, we shall have a good time, and see some real carnage. For heaven is – must be – that great Kingdom of Antinomia, which Lamb saw dimly adumbrated in the *Country Wife*, where the worm which never dies (the conscience) peacefully expires, and the sinner lies down beside the Ten Commandments. Till then, here a sheer hulk lies poor Tom Bowling, with neither health nor vice for anything more spirited than procrastination, which I may well call the Consolation Stakes of Wickedness; and by whose diligent practice, without the least amusement to ourselves, we can rob the orphan and bring down grey hairs with sorrow to the dust.

This astonishing gush of nonsense I now hasten to close, envelope, and expedite to Shakespeare's Cliff. Remember me to Shakespeare, and believe me, yours very sincerely,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Edmund Gosse

Mr. Gosse had written describing the office which he then occupied, a picturesque old-fashioned chamber in the upper stories of the Board of Trade.

La Solitude, Hyères, March 17, 1884.

MY DEAR GOSSE, – Your office – office is profanely said – your bower upon the leads is divine. Have you, like Pepys, “the right to fiddle” there? I see you mount the companion, barbiton in hand, and, fluttered about by city sparrows, pour forth your spirit in a voluntary. Now when the spring begins, you must lay in your flowers: how do you say about a potted hawthorn? Would it bloom? Wallflower is a choice pot-herb; lily-of-the-valley, too, and carnation, and Indian cress trailed about the window, is not only beautiful by colour, but the leaves are good to eat. I recommend thyme and rosemary for the aroma, which should not be left upon one side; they are good quiet growths.

On one of your tables keep a great map spread out; a chart is still better – it takes one further – the havens with their little anchors, the rocks, banks, and soundings, are adorably marine; and such furniture will suit your ship-shape habitation. I wish I could see those cabins; they smile upon me with the most intimate charm. From your leads, do you behold St. Paul’s? I always like to see the Foolscap; it is London *per se* and no spot

from which it is visible is without romance. Then it is good company for the man of letters, whose veritable nursing Pater-Noster is so near at hand.

I am all at a standstill; as idle as a painted ship, but not so pretty. My romance, which has so nearly butchered me in the writing, not even finished; though so near, thank God, that a few days of tolerable strength will see the roof upon that structure. I have worked very hard at it, and so do not expect any great public favour. *In moments of effort, one learns to do the easy things that people like.* There is the golden maxim; thus one should strain and then play, strain again and play again. The strain is for us, it educates; the play is for the reader, and pleases. Do you not feel so? We are ever threatened by two contrary faults: both deadly. To sink into what my forefathers would have called "rank conformity," and to pour forth cheap replicas, upon the one hand; upon the other, and still more insidiously present, to forget that art is a diversion and a decoration, that no triumph or effort is of value, nor anything worth reaching except charm. – Yours affectionately,

R. L. S.

To Miss Ferrier

Soon after the date of the following letter Miss Ferrier went out to her friends and stayed with them through the trying weeks which followed.

La Solitude, Hyères [March 22, 1884].

MY DEAR MISS FERRIER, – Are you really going to fail us? This seems a dreadful thing. My poor wife, who is not well off for friends on this bare coast, has been promising herself, and I have been promising her, a rare acquisition. And now Miss Burn has failed, and you utter a very doubtful note. You do not know how delightful this place is, nor how anxious we are for a visit. Look at the names: “The Solitude” – is that romantic? The palm-trees? – how is that for the gorgeous East? “Var”? the name of a river – “the quiet waters by”! ’Tis true, they are in another department, and consist of stones and a biennial spate; but what a music, what a plash of brooks, for the imagination! We have hills; we have skies; the roses are putting forth, as yet sparsely; the meadows by the sea are one sheet of jonquils; the birds sing as in an English May – for, considering we are in France and serve up our song-birds, I am ashamed to say, on a little field of toast and with a sprig of thyme (my own receipt) in their most innocent and now unvocal bellies – considering all this, we have a wonderfully fair wood-music round this Solitude of ours. What

can I say more? – All this awaits you. *Kennst du das Land*, in short. – Your sincere friend,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To W. H. Low

The verses enclosed were the set entitled “The Canoe Speaks,” afterwards printed in *Underwoods*. Stevenson was suffering at this time from a temporary weakness of the eyesight.

La Solitude, Hyères [April 1884].

MY DEAR LOW, – The blind man in these sprawled lines sends greeting. I have been ill, as perhaps the papers told you. The news – “great news – glorious news – second edition!” – went the round in England.

Anyway, I now thank you for your pictures, which, particularly the Arcadian one, we all (Bob included, he was here sick-nursing me) much liked.

Herewith are a set of verses which I thought pretty enough to send to press. Then I thought of the Manhattan, towards whom I have guilty and compunctious feelings. Last, I had the best thought of all – to send them to you in case you might think them suitable for illustration. It seemed to me quite in your vein. If so, good; if not, hand them on to Manhattan, Century, or Lippincott, at your pleasure, as all three desire my work or pretend to. But I trust the lines will not go unattended. Some riverside will haunt you; and O! be tender to my bathing girls. The lines are copied in my wife’s hand, as I cannot see to write otherwise than with the

pen of Cormoran, Gargantua, or Nimrod. Love to your wife. –
Yours ever,

R. L. S.

Copied it myself.

To Thomas Stevenson

La Solitude, Hyères, April 19, 1884.

MY DEAR FATHER, – Yesterday I very powerfully stated the *Hæresis Stevensoniana*, or the complete body of divinity of the family theologian, to Miss Ferrier. She was much impressed; so was I. You are a great heresiarch; and I know no better. Whaur the devil did ye get thon about the soap? Is it altogether your own? I never heard it elsewhere; and yet I suspect it must have been held at some time or other, and if you were to look up you would probably find yourself condemned by some Council.

I am glad to hear you are so well. The hear is excellent. The Cornhills came; I made Miss Ferrier read us *Thrawn Janet*, and was quite bowled over by my own works. *The Merry Men* I mean to make much longer, with a whole new dénouement, not yet quite clear to me. *The Story of a Lie* I must rewrite entirely also, as it is too weak and ragged, yet is worth saving for the Admiral. Did I ever tell you that the Admiral was recognised in America?

When they are all on their legs this will make an excellent collection.

Has Davie never read *Guy Mannering*, *Rob Roy*, or *The Antiquary*? All of which are worth three *Waverleys*. I think *Kenilworth* better than *Waverley*; *Nigel*, too; and *Quentin Durward* about as good. But it shows a true piece of insight

to prefer *Waverley*, for it *is* different; and though not quite coherent, better worked in parts than almost any other: surely more carefully. It is undeniable that the love of the slap-dash and the shoddy grew upon Scott with success. Perhaps it does on many of us, which may be the granite on which D.'s opinion stands. However, I hold it, in Patrick Walker's phrase, for an "old, condemned, damnable error." Dr. Simson was condemned by P. W. as being "a bagful of" such. One of Patrick's amenities!

Another ground there may be to D.'s opinion; those who avoid (or seek to avoid) Scott's facility are apt to be continually straining and torturing their style to get in more of life. And to many the extra significance does not redeem the strain.

Doctor Stevenson.

To W. E. Henley

La Solitude, Hyères, April 20th, 1884.

I have been really ill for two days, hemorrhage, weakness, extreme nervousness that will not let me lie a moment, and damned sciatica o' nights; but to-day I am on the recovery. Time; for I was miserable. It is not often that I suffer, with all my turns and tumbles, from the sense of serious illness; and I hate it, as I believe everybody does. And then the combination of not being able to read, not being allowed to speak, being too weak to write, and not wishing to eat, leaves a man with some empty seconds. But I bless God, it's over now; to-day I am much mended.

Insatiable gulf, greedier than hell, and more silent than the woods of Styx, have you or have you not lost the dedication to the *Child's Garden*? Answer that plain question as otherwise I must try to tackle to it once again.

Sciatica is a word employed much by Shakespeare in a certain connection. 'Tis true, he was no physician, but as I read, he had smarted in his day. I, too, do smart. And yet this keen soprano agony, these veins of fire and bombshell explosions in the knee, are as nothing to a certain dull, drowsy pain I had when my kidneys were congested at Nice; there was death in that; the creak of Charon's rowlocks, and the miasmas of the Styx. I may say plainly, much as I have lost the power of bearing pain, I had still

rather suffer much than die. Not only the love of life grows on me, but the fear of certain odd end-seconds grows as well. 'Tis a suffocating business, take it how you will; and Tyrrel and Forest only bunglers.

Well, this is an essay on death, or worse, on dying: to return to daylight and the winds, I perceive I have grown to live too much in my work and too little in life. 'Tis the dollars do it: the world is too much. Whenever I think I would like to live a little, I hear the butcher's cart resounding through the neighbourhood; and so to plunge again. The fault is a good fault for me; to be able to do so, is to succeed in life; and my life has been a huge success. I can live with joy and without disgust in the art by which I try to support myself; I have the best wife in the world; I have rather more praise and nearly as much coin as I deserve; my friends are many and true-hearted. Sir, it is a big thing in successes. And if mine anchorage lies something open to the wind, Sciatica, if the crew are blind, and the captain spits blood, one cannot have all, and I may be patched up again, who knows? "His timbers yet are (indifferently) sound, and he may float again."

Thanks for the word on *Silverado*. – Yours ever,

The Sciaticated Bard.

To Trevor Haddon

The allusions to Skelt, the last of the designers and etchers of cheap sheets illustrating the popular dramas and melodramas of the day, will need no explanation to readers familiar with the essay *A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured*.

La Solitude, Hyères, April 23rd, 1884.

DEAR MR. HADDON, – I am pleased to see your hand again, and, waiting my wife's return, to guess at some of the contents. For various things have befallen me of late. First, as you see, I had to change my hand; lastly I have fallen into a kind of blindness, and cannot read. This more inclines me for something to do, to answer your letter before I have read it, a safe plan familiar to diplomatists.

I gather from half shut eyes that you were a Skeltist; now seriously that is a good beginning; there is a deal of romance (cheap) in Skelt. Look at it well, and you will see much of Dickens. And even Skelt is better than conscientious, grey back-gardens, and conscientious, dull still lives. The great lack of art just now is a spice of life and interest; and I prefer galvanism to acquiescence in the grave. All do not; 'tis an affair of tastes; and mine are young. Those who like death have their innings to-day with art that is like mahogany and horse-hair furniture, solid,

true, serious and as dead as Cæsar. I wish I could read *Treasure Island*; I believe I should like it. But work done, for the artist, is the Golden Goose killed; you sell its feathers and lament the eggs. To-morrow the fresh woods!

I have been seriously ill, and do not pick up with that finality that I should like to see. I linger over and digest my convalescence like a favourite wine; and what with blindness, green spectacles, and seclusion, cut but a poor figure in the world.

I made out at the end that you were asking some advice – but what, my failing eyes refuse to inform me. I must keep a sheet for the answer; and Mrs. Stevenson still delays, and still I have no resource against tedium but the waggling of this pen.

You seem to me to be a pretty lucky young man; keep your eyes open to your mercies. That part of piety is eternal; and the man who forgets to be grateful has fallen asleep in life. Please to recognise that you are unworthy of all that befalls you – unworthy, too, I hear you wail, of this terrible sermon; but indeed we are not worthy of our fortunes; love takes us in a counterfeit, success comes to us at play, health stays with us while we abuse her; and even when we gird at our fellow-men, we should remember that it is of their good will alone, that we still live and still have claims to honour. The sins of the most innocent, if they were exactly visited, would ruin them to the doer. And if you know any man who believes himself to be worthy of a wife's love, a friend's affection, a mistress's caress, even if venal, you may rest assured he is worthy of nothing but a kicking. I fear

men who have no open faults; what do they conceal? We are not meant to be good in this world, but to try to be, and fail, and keep on trying; and when we get a cake to say, "Thank God!" and when we get a buffet, to say, "Just so: well hit!"

I have been getting some of the buffets of late; but have amply earned them – you need not pity me. Pity sick children and the individual poor man; not the mass. Don't pity anybody else, and never pity fools. The optimistic Stevenson; but there is a sense in these wanderings.

Now I have heard your letter, and my sermon was not mal-à-propos. For you seem to be complaining. Everybody's home is depressing, I believe; it is their difficult business to make it less so. There is an unpleasant saying, which would have pricked me sharply at your age. – Yours truly,

Robert Louis Stevenson.

To Cosmo Monkhouse

La Solitude, Hyères [April 24, 1884].

DEAR MONKHOUSE, – If you are in love with repose, here is your occasion: change with me. I am too blind to read, hence no reading; I am too weak to walk, hence no walking; I am not allowed to speak, hence no talking; but the great simplification has yet to be named; for, if this goes on, I shall soon have nothing to eat – and hence, O Hallelujah! hence no eating. The offer is a fair one: I have not sold myself to the devil, for I could never find him. I am married, but so are you. I sometimes write verses, but so do you. Come! *Hic quies!* As for the commandments, I have broken them so small that they are the dust of my chambers; you walk upon them, triturate and toothless; and with the Golosh of Philosophy, they shall not bite your heel. True, the tenement is falling. Ay, friend, but yours also. Take a larger view; what is a year or two? dust in the balance! 'Tis done, behold you Cosmo Stevenson, and me R. L. Monkhouse; you at Hyères, I in London; you rejoicing in the clammiest repose, me proceeding to tear your tabernacle into rags, as I have already so admirably torn my own.

My place to which I now introduce you – it is yours – is like a London house, high and very narrow; upon the lungs I will not linger; the heart is large enough for a ballroom; the belly greedy and inefficient; the brain stocked with the most

damnable explosives, like a dynamiter's den. The whole place is well furnished, though not in a very pure taste; Corinthian much of it; showy and not strong.

About your place I shall try to find my way above, an interesting exploration. Imagine me, as I go to bed, falling over a blood-stained remorse; opening that cupboard in the cerebellum and being welcomed by the spirit of your murdered uncle. I should probably not like your remorsees; I wonder if you will like mine; I have a spirited assortment; they whistle in my ear o' nights like a north-easter. I trust yours don't dine with the family; mine are better mannered; you will hear nought of them till 2 A.M., except one, to be sure, that I have made a pet of, but he is small; I keep him in buttons, so as to avoid commentaries; you will like him much – if you like what is genuine.

Must we likewise change religions? Mine is a good article, with a trick of stopping; cathedral bell note; ornamental dial; supported by Venus and the Graces; quite a summer-parlour piety. Of yours, since your last, I fear there is little to be said.

There is one article I wish to take away with me: my spirits. They suit me. I don't want yours; I like my own; I have had them a long while in bottle. It is my only reservation. – Yours (as you decide),

R. L. Monkhouse.

To W. E. Henley

La Solitude, Hyères [May 1884].

DEAR BOY, —*Old Mortality*⁹ is out, and I am glad to say Coggie likes it. We like her immensely.

I keep better, but no great shakes yet; cannot work – cannot: that is flat, not even verses: as for prose, that more active place is shut on me long since.

My view of life is essentially the comic; and the romantically comic. *As You Like It* is to me the most bird-haunted spot in letters; *Tempest* and *Twelfth Night* follow. These are what I mean by poetry and nature. I make an effort of my mind to be quite one with Molière, except upon the stage, where his inimitable *jeux de scène* beggar belief; but you will observe they are stage-plays – things *ad hoc*; not great Olympian debauches of the heart and fancy; hence more perfect, and not so great. Then I come, after great wanderings, to Carmosine and to Fantasio; to one part of *La Dernière Aldini* (which, by the by, we might dramatise in a week), to the notes that Meredith has found, Evan and the postillion, Evan and Rose, Harry in Germany. And to me these things are the good; beauty, touched with sex and laughter; beauty with God's earth for the background. Tragedy

⁹ The essay so called, suggested by the death of J. W. Ferrier. See *Memories and Portraits*.

does not seem to me to come off; and when it does, it does so by the heroic illusion; the anti-masque has been omitted; laughter, which attends on all our steps in life, and sits by the deathbed, and certainly redacts the epitaph, laughter has been lost from these great-hearted lies. But the comedy which keeps the beauty and touches the terrors of our life (laughter and tragedy-in-a-good-humour having kissed), that is the last word of moved representation; embracing the greatest number of elements of fate and character; and telling its story, not with the one eye of pity, but with the two of pity and mirth.

R. L. S.

To Edmund Gosse

Early in May Stevenson again fell very dangerously ill with hemorrhage of the lungs, and lay for several weeks between life and death, until towards the end of June he was brought sufficiently round to venture by slow stages on the journey to England, staying for two or three weeks at Royat on the way. His correspondent had lately been appointed Clark Reader in English Literature at Trinity College, Cambridge.

[La Solitude, Hyères] From my bed, May 29, 1884.

DEAR GOSSE, – The news of the Professorate found me in the article of – well, of heads or tails; I am still in bed, and a very poor person. You must thus excuse my damned delay; but, I assure you, I was delighted. You will believe me the more, if I confess to you that my first sentiment was envy; yes, sir, on my blood-boltered couch I envied the professor. However, it was not of long duration; the double thought that you deserved and that you would thoroughly enjoy your success fell like balsam on my wounds. How came it that you never communicated my rejection of Gilder's offer for the Rhone? But it matters not. Such earthly vanities are over for the present. This has been a fine well-conducted illness. A month in bed; a month of silence; a fortnight of not stirring my right hand; a month of not moving without being lifted. Come! *Ça y est*: devilish like being dead. –

Yours, dear Professor, academically,

R. L. S.

I am soon to be moved to Royat; an invalid valet goes with me! I got him cheap – second-hand.

In turning over my late friend Ferrier's commonplace book, I find three poems from *Viol and Flute* copied out in his hand: "When Flower-time," "Love in Winter," and "Mistrust." They are capital too. But I thought the fact would interest you. He was no poetist either; so it means the more. "Love in W.!" I like the best.

To Sidney Colvin

Enclosing some supplementary verses for the *Child's Garden*.

Marseilles, June 1884.

DEAR S. C., – Are these four in time? No odds about order. I am at Marseille and stood the journey wonderfully. Better address Hotel Chabassière, Royat, Puy de Dôme. You see how this d – d poeshie flows from me in sickness: Are they good or bad? Wha kens? But I like the *Little Land*, I think, as well as any. As time goes on I get more fancy in. We have no money, but a valet and a maid. The valet is no end; how long can you live on a valet? Vive le valet! I am tempted to call myself a valetudinarian. I love my love with a V because he is a Valetudinarian; I took him to Valetta or Valais, gave him his Vails and tenderly addressed him with one word,

Vale

P.S.– It does not matter of course about order. As soon as I have all the slips I shall organise the book for the publisher. A set of 8 will be put together under the title *An Only Child*; another cycle of 10 will be called *In the Garden*, and other six called *Bedtime* to end all up. It will now make quite a little volume of a

good way upwards of 100 pp. Will you instruct Bain to send me a Bible; of a type that I can read without blindness; the better if with notes; there is a Clarendon Press Bible, pray see it yourself. I also want Ewald's History in a translation.

R. L. S.

To Sidney Colvin

The play of *Deacon Brodie*, the joint work of R. L. S. and W. E. H., was to be performed in London early in July.

[*Hotel Chabassière, Royat, July 1884.*]

DEAR S. C., – Books received with great thanks. Very nice books, though I see you underrate my cecity: I could no more read their beautiful Bible than I could sail in heaven. However I have sent for another and can read the rest for patience.

I quite understand your feelings about the *Deacon*, which is a far way behind; but I get miserable when I think of Henley cutting this splash and standing, I fear, to lose a great deal of money. It is about Henley, not Brodie, that I care. I fear my affections are not strong to my past works; they are blotted out by others; and anyhow the *Deacon* is damn bad.

I am half asleep and can no more discourse. Say to your friends, “Look here, some friends of mine are bringing out a play; it has some stuff; suppose you go and see it.” But I know I am a cold, unbelieving fellow, incapable of those hot claps that honour you and Henley and therefore – I am asleep. *Child’s Garden* (first instalment) come. Fanny ill; self asleep.

R. L. S.

To Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Stevenson

Hotel Chabassière, Royat [July 1884].

MY DEAR PEOPLE, – The weather has been demoniac; I have had a skiff of cold, and was finally obliged to take to bed entirely; to-day, however, it has cleared, the sun shines, and I begin to

Several days after. – I have been out once, but now am back in bed. I am better, and keep better, but the weather is a mere injustice. The imitation of Edinburgh is, at times, deceptive; there is a note among the chimney pots that suggests Howe Street; though I think the shrillest spot in Christendom was not upon the Howe Street side, but in front, just under the Miss Graemes' big chimney stack. It had a fine alto character – a sort of bleat that used to divide the marrow in my joints – say in the wee, slack hours. That music is now lost to us by rebuilding; another air that I remember, not regret, was the solo of the gas-burner in the little front room; a knickering, flighty, fleering, and yet spectral cackle. I mind it above all on winter afternoons, late, when the window was blue and spotted with rare rain-drops, and, looking out, the cold evening was seen blue all over, with the lamps of Queen's and Frederick's Street dotting it with yellow, and flaring eastward in the squalls. Heavens, how unhappy I have been in such circumstances – I, who have now positively forgotten the

colour of unhappiness; who am full like a fed ox, and dull like a fresh turf, and have no more spiritual life, for good or evil, than a French bagman.

We are at Chabassière's, for of course it was nonsense to go up the hill when we could not walk.

The child's poems in a far extended form are likely soon to be heard of – which Cummy I dare say will be glad to know. They will make a book of about one hundred pages. – Ever your affectionate,

R. L. S.

To Sidney Colvin

I had reported to Stevenson a remark made by one of his greatest admirers, Sir E. Burne-Jones, on some particular analogy, I forget what, between a passage of Defoe and one in *Treasure Island*.

[*Hotel Chabassière, Royat, July 1884.*]

... Here is a quaint thing, I have read *Robinson, Colonel Jack, Moll Flanders, Memoirs of a Cavalier, History of the Plague, History of the Great Storm, Scotch Church and Union*. And there my knowledge of Defoe ends – except a book, the name of which I forget, about Peterborough in Spain, which Defoe obviously did not write, and could not have written if he wanted. To which of these does B. J. refer? I guess it must be the history of the Scottish Church. I jest; for, of course, I *know* it must be a book I have never read, and which this makes me keen to read – I mean *Captain Singleton*. Can it be got and sent to me? If *Treasure Island* is at all like it, it will be delightful. I was just the other day wondering at my folly in not remembering it, when I was writing *T. I.*, as a mine for pirate tips. *T. I.* came out of Kingsley's *At Last*, where I got the Dead Man's Chest – and that was the seed – and out of the great Captain Johnson's *History of Notorious Pirates*. The scenery is Californian in part, and in part *chic*.

I was downstairs to-day! So now I am a made man – till the

next time.

R. L. Stevenson.

If it was *Captain Singleton*, send it to me, won't you?

Later.— My life dwindles into a kind of valley of the shadow picnic. I cannot read; so much of the time (as to-day) I must not speak above my breath, that to play patience, or to see my wife play it, is become the be-all and the end-all of my dim career. To add to my gaiety, I may write letters, but there are few to answer. Patience and Poesy are thus my rod and staff; with these I not unpleasantly support my days.

I am very dim, dumb, dowie, and damnable. I hate to be silenced; and if to talk by signs is my forte (as I contend), to understand them cannot be my wife's. Do not think me unhappy; I have not been so for years; but I am blurred, inhabit the debatable frontier of sleep, and have but dim designs upon activity. All is at a standstill; books closed, paper put aside, the voice, the eternal voice of R. L. S., well silenced. Hence this plaint reaches you with no very great meaning, no very great purpose, and written part in slumber by a heavy, dull, somnolent, superannuated son of a bedpost.

To W. E. Henley

I suppose, but cannot remember, that I had in the meantime sent him *Captain Singleton*.

[Hotel Chabassière, Royat, July 1884.]

DEAR BOY, – I am glad that – has disappointed you. Depend upon it, nobody is so bad as to be worth scalping, except your dearest friends and parents; and scalping them may sometimes be avoided by scalping yourself. I grow daily more lymphatic and benign; bring me a dynamiter, that I may embrace and bless him! – So, if I continue to evade the friendly hemorrhage, I shall be spared in anger to pour forth senile and insignificant volumes, and the clever lads in the journals, not doubting of the eye of Nemesis, shall mock and gird at me.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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