

Happy Birthday RLS, from his friend SRC.

The Friends who never met

*I have small right to speak of him. I was little to him; but then he was very much to me.
(SRC's tribute to RLS in 1894)*

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Introduction

'I love Jim Hawkins. On my soul I love him more even than Alan Breck. He is the boy we should all like to have been, though no doubt David Balfour is much more like the boys we were without the piety and the adventures.' (SRC reviews RLS)

The Scottish writers Samuel Rutherford Crockett (SRC) and Robert Louis Stevenson (RLS) never met. They had what we might today call a 'virtual' friendship, though they didn't have the benefit of Facebook or Twitter. They had to rely on postal services and many of the letters between them have been lost. 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the death of SRC and today (November 13th) is RLS's birthday. To mark both dates Cally Phillips of The Galloway Raiders, has put together a tribute to RLS which gives some insight into the friendship between two of Scotland's finest 19th century writers.

The Friends who never met

RLS was some 9 years senior to SRC. By a quirk of fate, as SRC went up to Edinburgh University in 1876, RLS was on a walking holiday in Ayrshire and Galloway, so their first chance to meet never happened. We all know how significant 'chance' meetings can be, but think less of the lost possibilities. Co-incidence is, after all, just the chance that happens. And in the case of SRC and RLS their paths were never to cross in life. But why not pause for just a moment and imagine how different both lives might have been if the 26 year old RLS had come across the 18 year old SRC by chance in Galloway in 1876. There's a story! Remember that at that point RLS hadn't even had his first short story published, though he was

contributing to magazines and SRC was on the cusp of finding out that journalistic writing was a way to supplement his meagre student bursary. They may never have met, but kindred spirits in some respects they certainly were and they became friends without ever actually meeting. In my experience some of the best friendships can be gained that way.

In 1885 RLS published *'A Child's Garden of Verses'* and in 1886 SRC published his own volume of poetry *'Dulce Cor.'* It was a privately printed volume and he sent RLS a copy in 1887. The first connection was established through poetry not prose.

SRC was now writing for the magazines and periodicals, the place RLS had begun to ply his trade the decade before. SRC was in his late 20's and RLS his mid 30's. Both were married with families to support. There the similarities ended. SRC was a minister in Penicuik and RLS was setting out on his South Sea Voyages.

The first letter SRC wrote to RLS was dated 7th September 1887. He sent *'Dulce Cor'* (published under the pseudonym Ford Berêton) and a letter explaining the connection. He got a response in spring of 1888 from RLS who was at Saranac. It said *'Dear Minister of the Free Kirk at Penicuik – for O, man, I cannae read your name!'* and thus the friendship began.

RLS must have read *Dulce Cor* at some point because he gave SRC advice which SRC both took to heart and quoted in his second declaratory letter to RLS which prefaced the 2nd edition of *'The Stickit Minister'* in 1893 *'Write... my Timothy no longer verse, but use good Galloway Scots for your stomach's sake – and mine.'*

In 1889 SRC was still minister at Penicuik (a place RLS knew well from his own childhood) and wrote to RLS following the Mauricewood pit disaster. He was involved in setting up a fund for widows and orphans and wrote asking for a contribution. Always generous, RLS sent one.

While still a minister, SRC continued to supplement his income, and scratch his creative itch by writing. He gave lectures on RLS and he also wrote articles about him for periodicals – most notably the following which appeared in *Bookman* magazine (1893.)

THE READER.

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

There is a faithful Scot on a hillside in Samoa, much given to boasting in print of his high-set, far-shining palace, his nineteen waterfalls, and the blue sky over all. This is public; but when a far-travelled, much-enduring letter, at once broad and slim, overtops the brae and bears down upon us, having for trade-mark the crow-toe calligraphy which at the distance of a long sea mile proclaims our Louis Stevenson, what a different take it is we hear. Instead of such public boastings, as of a night-returning boy who whistles loud to keep his courage up, we have only *'O why left I my hame'* with variations. *'Do you know,'* we read, *'that the dearest burn to me in the world is that which drums and pours in cunning simples in that glen of yours behind Glencorse old kirk.'* *'O that I were the lad I once was, sitting under old Torrance, that old shepherd of let-well- alone, and watching with awe the waving of the old*

black gloves over the Bible – the preacher’s white finger-ends meanwhile aspiring through. Man, I would even be willing to sit under *you*, a sore declension truly, just to be *there!*’

Wherever he may be, under south English ‘roof of pine’ or in Samoa on the back of the broad Pacific, Robert Louis Stevenson kindles like a flash to the memory of the country home of his boyhood. The eternal child in him rises to it like a trout at a fly.

‘O man, to listen to ye, is like a cast-back into my youth! And to think that you can step your front door and look out on Rullion Green and Swanston, Glencorse and Carnethy – and yet never think it worth your while!’

There is ‘a nameless trickle that springs in the green side of Allermuir, and is fed from Halkerside with a perennial teacupful’ – a streamlet with a brief race and no history, save that by its side a dreamy, loose-jointed stripling used to come and sit, and most industriously make bad verses. Beneath lies the Lothian plain dotted with villages, blue smoke blowing westward over it, while to seaward is the pyramid of Berwick Law with the Bass a-tiptoe looking over its shoulder. Beneath there is a fine tangle of moss and heather, peat-hag and bracken, in which to play at hunted Covenanter. It was just here that Robert Louis Stevenson found his articulate soul. The spring is still there, the trickle of water, the one inconsiderable but indubitable pool, overhung by the smallest stone that was ever called a ‘rock.’ But for literary purposes ‘tis an excellent rock. More excellent was it when our John-a-Dreams lay hid in the fastnesses and made a world for himself – or many worlds rather – some of which he has since annexed to English literature. Long and lazy, frank with himself and with his intimates, sulky with those unworthy to be admitted into his little world of imaginings, it is small wonder if many who then saw the moody boy, to this day retain the impression that he ‘had a want.’ Memory of Stevenson the Younger is mostly dead about the Pentlands. But some will still vaguely remember him as a lad ‘that lay about the dyke-backs wi’ a buik’ – this with the happiest touch of scorn for the ‘fecklessness’ of such a performance. ‘He wasna thocht verra muckle o’.’ ‘It wasna jaloosed (suspected) that he wad ever come to muckle.’ These are the sole impressions which the inquirer can now gather hereabouts of the boyhood of the romancer. In these latter unfavourable impressions, there is definite trace of the vigorously expressed paternal disappointment when one of the ‘strenuous family which had dusted from its hands the sand of granite’ took to lying about dykebacks and getting its fingers inky.

His literary works are totally unknown about Swanston and the Pentland edge. Only one old wife has an idea that there was a ‘laddie Stevenson’ who had written ‘something about the Covenanters,’ a creditable performance which was hardly to be expected of one who ‘favoured the Established Kirk.’ She is of opinion that she saw the identical pamphlet not so long ago. Here it is found after strict search, carefully preserved between the leds (boards) of the Bible- its green cover re-covered with an overcoat of brown paper which announces itself as having formed part of a teabag sold twenty-five years ago by a grocer of Penicuik. The ‘something about the Covenanters’ resolves itself into 'THE PENTLAND RISING, a Page of History, 1666. Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 17, Princes Street, 1866.' In the centre of the bold apple-green within the teabag cover, is the motto:

A cloud of witnesses ly here,
Who for Christ's interest did appear.
- *Inscription on Battlefield at Rullion Green.*

The little pamphlet of twenty-two pages, the earliest and rarest of Robert Louis Stevenson's works, is very accurately dated as having been completed at 'Edinburgh, 28th Nov. 1866,' that is, just a fortnight after he had completed his sixteenth year, and on the anniversary of the bi-centenary of the battle of Rullion Green. We may take it that the little pamphlet was written at Swanston with his eye on the immediate scene of the events. Childish enough in its writing, it is full of interest; and, though crowded with references to the authorities (Wodrow, 'Cloud of Witnesses,' Naphthali, 'Faithful Contendings,' Kirktoo, 'Outed Minister,' and even Defoe's 'History of the Church'), for directness of impression and clearness of narrative it might have been written by a simple-minded eye-witness. There is no doubt on which side are the young author's sympathies. He is frankly partisan, as indeed every Scot must be by nature. The 'persecutors' are all 'bloody-minded' and 'cruel.' In this strenuous advocacy we see the lad who had already acted it all out on the green Pentlands side. 'I skulked in my favourite wilderness like a Cameronian of the Killing Time, and John Todd was my Claverhouse, and his dogs my questing dragoons.' This is the true ineradicable way of learning history. The man who has thus learned his history may assume in later life a superficial calmness of criticism, he may read apologies for Clavers and Lag with resolve to rise superior to prejudice; he may even write them; but he will ever be Covenanter down at the heart of him, so that he cannot look upon a rusty old flag hung among bones and battle-axes in a museum without the water rising in his eyes, brimming to the overflow, and without gripping hands till the nails sink into the flesh to keep down something that takes him in the throat.

So it is strange in Stevenson's books, as well as in his conversation, to see his cosmopolitan ease, the calm light in the eyes which look out at once smiling and observant upon the wide world, in a moment exploded by a flash of suggestion from the bleak Nor'land where the whaups are crying about the Martyrs' graves.

Does one but mention the Grassmarket to him, and it is no more Louis Stevenson of Samoa and the World that listens, but the lad who at sixteen wrote of young Hugh McKail who was martyred there in the flower of his youth; it is no intellectual Gallio, but one who, though he might have marched with the clans from the braes of Mar because the skirl of pipes makes him mad, yet longs like Peden to be 'wi' Ritchie' in the last stand which the preacher-soldier Richard Cameron made on Airs Moss. Artistic feeling, the society of many men, the influences of spheres where the Covenanters are only spoken of as ignorant rebels, have not changed the essential Covenanting base of Stevenson's character. Carlyle remained Annandale Dissenter till the day of his death. Whatever the rough insolence of his Annandale speech, Carlyle always acted as if in the presence of his mother's God. And does but a flag flutter, or a waft of smoke bring back the peat fires, and Robert Stevenson is back again in the much-enduring land, whose glories are forlorn hopes and whose victories the unconquerable despair of hopeless men fighting with their backs to the wall. This is that Pentland lad who wrote of the Covenant men in words which he may wish now to alter, but

whose spirit is still his own- 'Perhaps the storm of harsh and fiercely jubilant noises, the clanging of trumpets, the rattling of drums, and the hootings and jeerings of an unfeeling mob, which were the last sounds they heard on earth, might, when the mortal fight was over, when the river of death was passed, add tenfold peacefulness to the shores which they had reached.' A page further on we have a picture which gives us a glimpse of the eery and other-world element in the lad. 'Kirkton the historian and popular tradition tell us,' he says, 'of a flame that would often rise from the grave, in a moss near Carnwath, of some of these poor rebels; of how it crept along the ground, of how it covered the house of the murderer, and scared him with its lurid glare.'

The manner in which this is told leaves us little room to doubt that the picture of the flame-wrapped house and the persecutor within, clammy terror sitting in the inwards of his soul, was one which long haunted the imagination of the boy. The idea is one which came out of the same basket as the spiritual terrors of Dr. Jekyll, and of Gordon Darnaway in 'The Merry Men,' and of Uncle Ebenezer alone in the great house of the Shaws. It shows that Stevenson, even as a schoolboy, was continually wandering round the confines of the other world, and accompanying with the men of a time to whom such things as these were the sternest of realities-the days, indeed, when in the words of the famous rhyme-

'Hab Dab and Dawvid Dinn,
Dang the De'il ower Dabson's Linn.'

Stevenson never overwhelms his incident with landscape description like the school of William Black, in whose books the incident has often to dodge the pages of solid description in order to show its face at all. Nor, like some, does he go forward, habitually blind to outward nature, and only deign specially to look at a scene when he has occasion to describe it; he observes, as one might say, currently, often without being conscious of doing so.

We seldom find him sitting down to it, as it were, and saying, 'Lo, I will describe a landscape.' Yet even at sixteen, the boy who in the fulness of his powers was to write the marvellous description of the Merry Men of Aros, had begun to learn his trade. It is instructive to compare the following two passages:-'On such a night, he peers upon a world of blackness where the waters wheel and boil, where the waves joust together with the noise of an explosion, and the foam towers and vanishes in the twinkling of an eye. Never before had I seen the Merry Men thus violent. The fury, height, and transiency of their spoutings was a thing to be seen and not recounted. High over our heads on the cliff rose their white columns in the darkness; and the same instant, like phantoms, they were gone. Sometimes three at a time would thus aspire and vanish; sometimes a gust took them, and the spray would fall about us, heavy as a wave. Yet the spectacle was rather maddening in its levity than impressive by its force. Thought was beaten down by the confounding uproar; a gleeful vacancy possessed the brains of men, a state akin to madness; and I found myself at times following the dance of the Merry Men as it were a tune upon a jiggging instrument.'

Here the magic is due not to any very remarkable photographic accuracy of description, certainly not to the cataloguing which sometimes passes for realism, but to an author whose personality is never hid from us, and who is conscious of his power to charm us, making

himself part of what he describes, and throwing the limelight of his imagination upon the mad dance of the waters. This description is as successful as Barrie's island in the floods in the *'Little Minister'* and the Stonehenge scene in Thomas Hardy's *'Tess'* are the reverse, because Stevenson has not attempted to take more of possibility out of his characters than he had put into their natures. In *'The Merry Men,'* circumstance and personality go together, and mutually persuade us of the truth of each.

If a description written by Stevenson, the apprentice, be taken to compare with this masterpiece of the complete craftsman, the result is very instructive.

'The sun, going down behind the Pentlands, casts golden lights and blue shadows on their snow-clad summits, slanted obliquely into the rich plain before them, bathing with rosy splendour the leafless, snow-sprinkled trees, and fading gradually into shadow in the distance. To the south, too, they beheld a deep-shaded amphitheatre of heather and bracken - the course of the Esk, near Penicuik, winding about at the foot of its gorge-the broad, brown expanse of Maw Moss and fading into blue indistinctness in the south, the wild heath-clad Peeblesshire hills.'

Clearly, of course, this is the work of a beginner, but it is work done with an eye on the object carefully done too, for though the effect of the whole be commonplace, it is so because it is easier to describe the Day of Judgment than an ordinary sunset. From Rullion Green every word is true, absolutely and exactly. The sun does still 'slant obliquely,' the Moorfoots do curve round to form an amphitheatre, through which the Esk water runs. Maw Moss is still a 'broad, brown expanse.' On the whole in 'The Pentland Rising' we have a prentice work of no ordinary promise, and one which, written at the age of between fifteen and sixteen, reveals many of the most interesting and remarkable characteristics of a style and personality as unique as any in all English literature.

SRC

RLS and SRC 1893

A letter from Vailima by RLS to SRC later in 1893 suggests that he must have read SRC's *Bookman* article, and found it both nostalgic and amusing.

He wrote, asking SRC a favour *'Do you know where the road crosses the burn under Glencorse Church? Go there and say a prayer for me: moriturus salutat. * See that it's a sunny day; I would like it to be a Sunday, but that's not possible in the premises; and stand on the right-hand bank just where the road goes down into the water, and shut your eyes, and if I don't appear to you! Well, it can't be helped, and will be extremely funny.'*

*moriturus salutat. The latin here is incorrect and literally means 'die salute.' It is unlikely that RLS means the more familiar Moriturus te salutat which translates as 'we who are about to die salutes you.' And more likely an invective for SRC to 'salute' the dead RLS. Meaning the boy who is dead, rather than showing any prescience of his own demise.

At this point in 1893 SRC had yet to make his own literary breakthrough. He was somewhat despondent in his correspondence with RLS, suggesting that without someone to champion him, he'd stand no chance. RLS responded positively by telling him that if his work was good, it would find an audience.

In May 1893 RLS wrote to SRC:

I am glad to hear so good an account of your activity and interest and shall always hear from you with pleasure, though I am and must continue, a sprite of the inkbottle, unseen in the flesh. Please remember me to your wife and to the four year old sweetheart if she be not too engrossed with higher matters.'*

*The 'Sweetheart' referred to is SRC's oldest daughter Maisie whom he always referred to by this name – and about whom two children's books 'Sweetheart Travellers' (1896) and 'Sweethearts at Home' (1912) were published. 'Sweetheart' went on in her own right to become a novelist though her two published works 'A Gay Lover' (1925) and its sequel 'Safety Last' (1926) written under the name Miss Rutherford Crockett, are almost impossible to get hold of today. They are interesting none the less in that they offer a sort of ironic take on a sort of Woolfian modernism. And they serve to remind us that there are many, many writers who do not find fame (or fortune.) But we can find them if we go looking. And once we find them, they can also become friends we never meet.

In 1893 the collection of stories under the title '*The Stickit Minister*' was SRC's first opportunity for publication outside the periodicals. The regard he held RLS in is clear in his dedication:

Dedication to Robert Louis Stevenson
Of Scotland and Samoa

I dedicate these stories of that Grey Galloway land where about the graves of the martyrs
the whaups are crying – his heart remembers how.

In a letter from August 1893 RLS stated that he'd read '*The Stickit Minister*' and this was his comment: '*I have carried out my promise and read every word, and while some of your tales are a trifle light, and one at least seems too slender and fantastic – qualities that rarely mingle well, the fantastic demanding considerable solidity of texture –the whole book breathes admirably of the soil. 'The Stickit Minister,' and 'The Heather Lintie' are two that recur to me particularly, they are drowned in Scotland; they have refreshed me like a visit home.'*

Also, in response to SRC's dedication, RLS wrote a poem dedicated to SRC. It's a poem which is better known these days for its content than for the man to whom it was dedicated. Part of it features on the Crockett memorial in Laurieston.

To.S.R.Crockett

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

Grey recumbent tombs of the dead in desert places
Standing Stones on the vacant wine-red moor,
Hills of sheep, and the howes of the silent vanished races,
And winds, austere and pure!

Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,
Hills of home! and to hear again the call;
Hear about the graves of the martyrs the peewees crying;
And hear no more at all.

'*The Stickit Minister*' was a popular success and soon went into a second edition. The literary back and forth continued with SRC replying to RLS by including as preface:

A LETTER DECLARATORY TO THE SECOND EDITION

Dear Louis Stevenson —It is, I think, a remark of your own that the imprudences of men, even oftener than their ill deeds, come home to roost. At least, if you have not so remarked it, you have not lived so long without observing it. Now, in some wise, you have at least a god-papa's responsibility for the Stickit Minister, and if you have no spoon of silver for the poor fellow, you will be expected at the least duly to hear his catechism.

A month ago when, entirely without permission, I dedicated the first edition of my prose first-born to you, shame kept me from further connecting you with what no one but yourself might ever read. As for you, I had you in a cleft stick, as you shall presently hear. But now a second edition and a preface imperatively required have together thawed my blateness. But it occurs to me that you may deny any parental responsibility, even vicarious. Well, as much is mostly done on these occasions. In that case we will proceed to lead the proof. You have, no doubt, forgotten a power of good law in your time, and might have forgotten even more had you ever known it. But not the wit of the Great Lord President himself in his best days could have shaken this case of mine.

Let me then suggest to you Saranac Lake, a bleak sheet of ice 'somewhere in America'—east winds, hotels with a smell of cooking in the corridors, melting snows, and mountains. It is near flitting and settling day with you there, and as your custom is, you are owing a many letters—to me among others, epistles one, two, and three. For days you have passed your desk with a kind of pride and wicked pleasure in stubbornly defying your conscience.

But one morning in the gloaming, Conscience has you down before you were fairly awake, and right grimly takes certain long arrears out of you. Then, according to your own account, your cries of penitence might have been heard a mile. In this abased condition, the Black Dog riding hard on your back, you made yourself responsible for words to the ensuing effect: 'Write,' you said, 'my Timothy, no longer verse, but use Good Galloway Scots for your stomach's sake—and mine. There be overly many at the old tooth comb!'

Well, 'tis scarce fair to hold you to it, I know; but, your Will thus fleeing in a mere *sauve qui pent*—conscience hot-foot after you, hectoring with victory—‘If you do, I'll read it every word,’ says you. And so I had you.

Often when in my turn the Black Dog hath been upon me, and I seemed to see plainly that no Adam's son would ever read a single line, least of all a reviewer—have I rubbed hands and laughed to think of you in that spotless linen suit, sitting, as you imagined, safe and cool under whatever may be the Samoan substitute for a rose.

But I hold to my pound of flesh. Will you, nill you, you must read—and every word.

Nevertheless, if you find anything here, even a thousand sea miles from good, it is so because ever since Saranac, I have been, like Macready in Edinburgh when the Great Unknown came in, 'playing to Sir Walter.'

S. R. CROCKETT.

While there is a light-hearted and ‘Scots’ humour element to these writings, it’s also clear that for SRC, advice from RLS was like gold-dust. In May 1893 RLS explained about the role of ‘the public’ in publishing.

‘There are two publics; one about 10,000 persons, who like literature qua literature if its good and about 100,000 persons who like ink upon paper if it’s interesting. You can’t live on the first public but the first public with its 10,000 voices is the great advertiser, they dance with the 100,000, they meet him at dinner, and they sell your book whether it likes or not.’

The advice may or may not have proved a comfort. Despite the success of ‘*The Stickit Minister*,’ SRC was still waiting for his public to buy and sell his romances. He didn’t have long to wait. 1894 was to prove a significant year, both for SRC and RLS.

RLS and SRC 1894

A.P. Watt (the original literary agent) and T.Fisher Unwin (the top new writing publisher of the day) had taken a chance on SRC in 1893. Sales of ‘*The Stickit Minister*’ suggested it was a gamble that would pay off with careful management. Capitalising on their investment, in 1894, Crockett’s star was on the rise. Two short works were serialised: the weirdly Gothic Covenanting story ‘*Mad Sir Uchfred of the Hills*’ and the more contemporary, realist ‘*The Great Preacher*’ (retitled ‘*The Playactress*’). ‘*The Lilac Sunbonnet*’ was being serialised in *The Christian Leader* magazine and in March, ‘*The Raiders*’ was published in its entirety as a novel. We can assume that one of the first things SRC did after publication of ‘*The Raiders*’ was send RLS a copy. Certainly, writing in May 1894, RLS said that he’d received ‘*The Raiders*’ a month ago but hadn’t read it yet. ‘*But I shall read it soon. In the meanwhile, what a success you have had! And how grateful you should be, and with how much penitence you should recall your faithless and dispirited words of last year.*’

As RLS’s star was about to be extinguished, SRC’s was burning at its brightest. He was T.Fisher Unwin’s bright new talent and his agent, A.P.Watt was working hard on his behalf, providing him with at least as much work as he could handle (including raiding a huge back catalogue of stories) and offering many market openings through serialisation of his work.

While mentorship from a better known writer was (and is) undoubtedly useful to an aspiring writer, this was the kind of championing that Crockett needed to shift gear from part time to full time writer. Indeed it was only a year later that SRC gave up the ministry in favour of writing full time. He never looked back.

By 1895 of course, RLS was dead and SRC at least partially stepped into the void. He thus becomes part of a chain stretching from Walter Scott, John Galt, James Hogg and RLS, all of whom he respected and in whose company he is not overwhelmed or outclassed as a writer.

Back in 1894, their correspondence turned to a shared interest: The Covenanters. RLS had long thought of writing something on the theme (but then he 'thought' about writing many things that never made it to fruition) and SRC must have written telling him something about *'Men of the Moss Hags'* which he was researching as it had been sold to *Good Words* magazine as their lead serial for 1895.

RLS wrote his reply to SRC in May 1894. *'I say, if you're on the Covenanting racket, let the wheels of your chariot move a little slower for pity's sake. Is it Cameronians you are after?'*

This may well have been the last letter from RLS to SRC and my current research has been unable to find any comment from RLS about *'The Raiders'* to SRC – which is a shame – that's a review I would love to read.

So many people find the natural successor to *'Kidnapped,'* in *'The Raiders,'* yet SRC himself suggested that it owed more to James Hogg's *'Brownie of Bodsbeck.'* Certainly the character of Silver Sand, who enjoys 'playing the bogle' harks back to tales of Aiken Drum. But all writers are magpies and SRC, like RLS before him, borrowed extensively from history, myth, legend and the stories of those who went before. So it's not surprising when we find similarities. Look more carefully and you'll see at least as many points of difference as of similarity. That said, if you enjoy the 18th century adventure romances of RLS you may well enjoy those of SRC. But you can no more define Crockett by *'The Raiders'* than you can limit Stevenson by naming him writer of *'Kidnapped.'* Those who sell books for a living like to find points of commonality to promote their product but as readers we'd do well to just read the text as we find it and enjoy the stories for what they are without trying to draw too many comparisons or conclusions. SRC and RLS were much more than their 'bestselling' works and the reader prepared to go on a personal journey of exploration, untrammelled by reviewers and publishers with axes to grind or marketing opportunities to promote, will find much more in their fiction than they are ever likely to be 'sold.'

The fact remains that RLS died in 1894 and in some respects one might see SRC as taking over the mantle of adventure romance writing from him. SRC was enthusiastic about RLS's style and the two writers certainly worked within the same romance tradition of writing. It was a tradition that fell out of favour with the literary elite in favour of modernism, realism and urbanism became the fashion. To my mind they share another common feature. For many years R.L. S was ignored or undervalued in the canon of Scottish writing, considered no more than a children's writer (in itself rather a patronising stance) but more recently he is being acknowledged as the great Scottish writer he undoubtedly was. Let's hope that in years to come SRC may achieve the same recognition.

The Death of a Friend

SRC was never one to forget a friend and in 1894 he had been commissioned to write about RLS's books - then the news broke of RLS's death and he was tasked with writing a memorial piece instead. This shows in what regard SRC held RLS and is a fitting way to finish this birthday 'tribute.'

Crockett's memorial piece in 'The Bookman' of January 1895.

Sitting alone by the sea in the mid days of November, I wrote a little article on what I loved most in the works of Robert Louis Stevenson, and it was set in type for the January Bookman. In itself a thing of no value, it pleased me to think that in his far island my friend would read it, and that it might amuse him. I have tried and failed to revise it in the gloom of the night that has come so swiftly to those who loved him. It would not do.

How could one alter and amend the light sentences with the sense of loss in one's heart? How sit down to write a 'tribute' when one has slept, and started, and awaked all night with the dull ache that lies below Sleep saying all the time, 'Stevenson is dead! Stevenson is dead!'

It is true also that I have small right to speak of him. I was little to him; but then he was very much to me. He alone of mankind saw what pleased him in a little book of boyish verses.

Seven years ago he wrote to tell me so. He had a habit of quoting stray lines from it in successive letters to let me see that he remembered what he had praised. Yet he was ever as modest and brotherly as if I had been the great author and he the lad writing love verses to his sweetheart.

Without reproach and without peer in friendship, our king-over-the-water stood first in our hearts because his own was full of graciousness and tolerance and chivalry.

I let my little article be just as I wrote it for his eye to see, before any of us guessed that the dread hour was so near the sounding which should call our well-beloved 'home from the hill.'

S. R. CROCKETT. Penicuik, Midlothian. December 19th, 1894

MR. STEVENSON'S BOOKS. By S. R. CROCKETT.
(Bookman, January 1895)

In sunny Samoa, more thousands of miles away than the ungeographical can count, sits 'The Scot Abroad.'

For thus Burton the historian, sane, sage, and wise, wrote of Mr Robert Louis Stevenson before his time. It is the wont of Scotland that her sons, for adventure or merchandise, should early expatriate themselves. The ships of the world in all seas are engineered from the Clyde, and a 'doon-the watter' accent is considered as necessary as lubricating oil, in order that the plunging piston rods may really enjoy their rhythmic dance. If you step ashore anywhere 'east of Suez and the Ten Commandments,' ten to one the first man of your tongue who greets you, will hail in the well-remembered accent of the Scotch gardener who chased you out of the strawberry plots of your unblessed youth.

But to us who 'stop at home, on flowery beds of ease,' made aware of ourselves only when the east wind blows and we think that we are back in St. Andrews, the typical 'Scot Abroad' is neither Burton's Gentleman Companion at Arms nor the oily chief engineer, but Mr. Stevenson.

On high in a cool bowery room on the hillside, looking down on the league-long rollers forming themselves to be hurled on the shore, sits one with his heels on the coco matting of Samoa, but his head over the Highland border. The chiefs gather for palaver (or whatever they are pleased to call hunkering-and blethering out there), and they tell the Tale-teller of heads taken and plantations raided. And he stays his pen and arbitrates, or he 'leaves for the front,' as though he were plenipotentiary of the Triple Alliance. But all the while it is James More Macgregor who is marching out arrayed in a breech-clout and a Winchester 'to plunder and to ravish' -or carry off an heiress lass from the lowlands as was good Macgregor use and wont.

They call the beautiful new complete 'Stevenson' which Mr. Sidney Colvin and Mr. Charles Baxter have contrived and organised, the 'Edinburgh' edition, because though the stars of the tropics glow like beacons, and in Apia the electric light winks a-nights like glow worms amid a wilderness of green leaves, yet to the lad who sits aloft there are still 'no stars like the Edinburgh street lamps.' But my own local enthusiasm are duller, for the last night I was in Edinburgh I saw a wind (Rajputana and Edinburgh are the only two places where you can see wind)- I saw a wind, with the bit between its teeth, run off with itself down that romantic wall of hotels, which in the night looks like the thunder battered wall of the Dungeon of Buchan. I saw it snatch out a dozen gaps in the converging perspective of the gulamps, and bring down the chimney-cans crashing on the pavement like forest leaves in a November blast. So Mr. Stevenson, who does not live there, 'for love and euphony' names his collected edition (to which be all good luck and fostering breezes) 'The Edinburgh Edition.' I have just seen the first volume, which in its brightness and beauty seems a summary of all the perfections, and whose print recalls that in which the early novels of Scott were set up. Mr. Hole's portrait suffers a little from the excessive size of the hands, but in spite of this is by far the most characteristic Stevensonian portrait ever done, and represents him exactly as his friends remember him at the most productive period his genius has yet known.

To me the most interesting thing in Mr. Stevenson's books is always Mr. Stevenson himself. Some authors (perhaps the greatest) severely sit with the more ancient gods, and serenely keep themselves out of their books. Most of these authors are dead now. Others put

their personalities in, indeed; but would do much better to keep them out. Their futilities and pomposities, pose as they may, are no more interesting than those of the chairman of a prosperous limited company. But there are a chosen few who cannot light a cigarette or part their hair in a new place without being interesting. Upon such in this life, interviewers bear down in shoals with pencils pointed like spears; and about them as soon as they are dead-lo! begins at once the 'chatter about Harriet.'

Mr. Stevenson is of this company. Rarest of all, his friends have loved and praised him so judiciously that he has no enemies. He might have been the spoiled child of letters. He is only 'all the world's Louis.' The one unforgivable thing in a chequered past is that at one time he wore a black shirt, to which we refuse to be reconciled on any terms.

But when he writes of himself, how supremely excellent is the reading. It is good even when he does it intentionally, as in 'Portraits and Memories.' It is better still when he sings it, as in his 'Child's Garden.' He is irresistible to every lonely child who reads and thrills, and reads again to find his past recovered for him with effortless ease. It is a book never long out of my hands, for only in it and in my dreams when I am touched with fever, do I grasp the long, long thoughts of a lonely child and a hill-wandering boy thoughts I never told to any; yet which Mr. Stevenson tells over again to me as if he read them off a printed page.

I am writing at a distance from books and collections of Stevensoniana, so that I cannot quote, but only vaguely follow the romancer through some of his incarnations. Of course every romancer, consciously or unconsciously, incarnates himself, especially if he writes his books in the first person. It is he who makes love to the heroine; he who fights with the Frenchman 'who never can win'; he who climbs the Mountain Perilous with a dirk between his teeth. But Mr. Stevenson writes the fascination of his personality into all his most attractive creations, and whenever I miss the incarnation, I miss most of the magic as well. Jim Hawkins is only 'the Lantern Bearer' of North Berwick Links translated into the language of adventure on the high seas -the healthier also for the change. I love Jim Hawkins. On my soul I love him more even than Alan Breck. He is the boy we should all like to have been, though no doubt David Balfour is much more like the boys we were without the piety and the adventures. I read Stevenson in every line of 'Treasure Island.' It is of course mixed of Erraid and the island discovered by Mr. Daniel Defoe. But we love anything of such excellent breed, and the crossing only improves it. Our hearts dance when Mr. Stevenson lands his cut-throats, with one part of himself as hero and the other as villain. John Silver is an admirable villain, for he is just the author genially cutting throat. Even when he pants three times as he sends the knife home, we do not entirely believe in his villainy. We expect to see the murdered seaman about again and hearty at his meals in the course of a chapter or two. John is a villain at great expense and trouble to himself; but we like him personally, and are prepared to sit down and suck an apple with him, even when he threatens to stove in our 'thundering old blockhouse and them as dies will be the lucky ones.' In our hearts we think the captain was a little hard on him. We know that it is Mr. Stevenson all the time, and are terrified exactly like a three-year-old who sees his father take a rug over his head and 'be a bear.' The thrill is delicious, for there is just an off chance that after all the thing may turn out to be a bear; but still we are pretty easy that at the play's end the bearskin will be tossed aside, the villain repent, and John Silver get off with a comfortable tale of pieces of eight.

No book has charted more authentically the topographical features of the kingdom of Romance than 'Treasure Island.' Is that island in the South or in the North Atlantic? Is it in the 'Spanish main'? What is the Spanish main? Is it in the Atlantic at all? Or set a jewel somewhere in the wide Pacific, or strung on some fringe of the Indian Ocean? Who knows or cares? Jim Hawkins is there. His luck, it is true, is something remarkable. His chances are

phenomenal His imagination, like ours, is running free, and we could go on for ever hearing about Jim. We can trust Jim Hawkins, and void of care we follow his star.

O for one hour of Jim in the 'Wrecker ' to clear up the mystery of the many captains, or honest and reputable John Silver to do for the poor Scot down below in a workman-like manner when he came running to him, instead of firing as it were 'into the brown' till that crying stopped -a touch for which we find it hard to forgive Mr. Stevenson -pardon, Mr. Lloyd Osbourne.

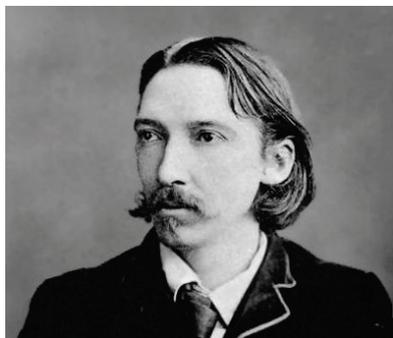
Again, Alan Breck is ever Alan, and bright shines his sword; but he is never quite Jim Hawkins to me. Nor does he seem even so point-device in 'Catriona ' as he was in the round house or with his foot on the heather. But wherever Alan Breck goes or David Balfour follows, thither I am ready to fare forth, unquestioning and all-believing.

But when I do not care very much for any one of Mr. Stevenson's books, it is chiefly the lack of Mr. James Hawkins that I regret. Jim in doublet and hose-how differently he would have sped 'The Black Arrow'! Jim in trousers and top hat-he would never have been found in the 'Black Box,' never have gone out with Huish upon the 'Ebb Tide.' John Silver never threw vitriol, but did his needs with a knife in a gentlemanly way, and that was because Jim Hawkins was there to see that he was worthy of himself. Jim would never have let things get to such a pass as to require Attwater's bullets splashing like hail in a pond over the last two pages to settle matters in any sort of way.

I often think of getting up a petition to Mr. Stevenson (it is easy to get around Robin), beseeching 'with sobs and tears' that he will sort out all his beach-combers and Yankee captains, charter a rakish saucy-sailing schooner, Ship Jim Hawkins as ship's boy or captain (we are not particular), and then up anchor with a Yo-Ho-Cheerily for the Isle of our Heart's Desire, where they load Long Toms with pieces of eight, and, dead or alive, nobody minds Ben Gunn.

Further information

The Stevenson Community



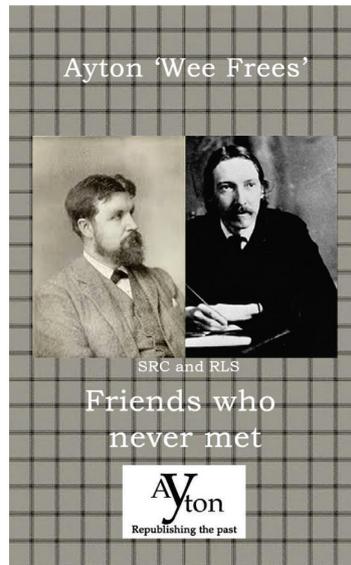
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The Galloway Raiders



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Established in 2012, Ayton Publishing are committed to republishing the writing of ‘forgotten’ Scottish authors. To that end our first full collection – the 32 volume edition of S.R.Crockett’s Galloway based novels ‘The Galloway Collection’ was published on the 100th anniversary of his death on April 16th 2014.

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