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THE FATHER OF R. L. S.

THOMAS STEVENSON, THE LIGHT HOUSE BUILDER.

Thomas Stevenson was in a sense a greater man than his more famous son, Robert Louis. We are accustomed to speak of the latter's love of the spirit of adventure, of his life as having been picturesque and romantic and of his unfailing optimism even from his sick bed. These qualities have so seized hold of our imagination, that in looking so closely at the son we omit to consider the father from whom undoubtedly came this spirit of youthful adventuring and of brave endurance. The career of the elder Stevenson was full to overflowing of real adventure, of patient toil and cheery acceptance of dangerous tasks. A man of remarkable individuality and of unswerving rectitude in word and deed, he was truly a great Scot, though not yet given a volume to himself in the series of famous Scots. His imagination, though by no means ignoring the paths of literature, found fittest expression in those lasting memorials of stone and lime which encircle our wild coasts with guiding lights. Of these his son has sung in unforgettable verse:—

"Bright on the lone side, the founded reef,
The long, resounding foreland, Pharos stands.
These are thy works, O father, these thy crown."

A recent writer on Stevenson has described as futile any attempt to seek the origin of his qualities in the life history of either of his parents. We cannot agree with this dictum. There seems to be no difficulty in discovering in the romantic history of his paternal ancestors the secret of his own strength as a writer, and it seems equally easy to find the source of his graces of mind and heart in the family record of his mother's people. The history of the pious ancestral Stevensons is a wonderful saga of adventure. The great-grandfather, Alan Stevenson, a West Indian merchant, died at St. Christopher in 1774, leaving an infant son Robert. The young widow married again, one Thomas Smith, a merchant burgess of Edinburgh, and himself a widower. Smith was a solid, prosperous man, who from his activities in oils, amassed a fortune, and built himself "a land" at Nos. 1 and 3 Baxter's Place. Moreover, being of a mechanical bent he had made research into the subject of lighting and lighthouses, at a time when our coasts were lighted only at a single point. At then, too, the first board of Northern Lights was formed, and Smith became its engineer.

DESIGNED FOR THE MINISTRY.

Robert had been designed by his mother, for the ministry, that national refuge for the godly young Scot, but increasing years failed to convince him that there lay his life's work. Already interested in his stepfather's lighthouse scheme, he became associated with him in the work, and ultimately succeeded with him in the engineer to the Board. Their first light was that of Kinnard Head in Aberdeenshire, illuminated in 1787. Robert completed his initial success by marrying the daughter of his stepfather. He set himself to cultivate his natural talents and his professional abilities, and soon began to make a name for himself in civil engineering. His work filled his days with perils and escapes. To the remote parts of Scotland he journeyed at a time when dangers lurked everywhere. To him is due the inauguration of the Scottish lighthouse system, and under his superintendence, no fewer than 20 lighthouses were constructed and many improvements carried out. His lasting memorial is the Bell Rock Lighthouse, which took four years to build on a tidal rock buried 16 feet at high water springs. This Incecape or Bell Rock had been a terror to sailors for centuries. Southey celebrates it in "The Incecape Bell." It would be difficult to discover a finer record of human endeavour and high courage than the story of those four years of toil, a work crowned on 1st February, 1811, by the exhibition of a permanent light.

Three years later Sir Walter Scott made his celebrated voyage round Scotland with the Lighthouse Commissioners. Accompanying them was Robert Stevenson, whom Sir Walter thus describes in his journal:—"The official chief is Mr Stevenson, the surveyor-viceroy over the Commissioners—a most gentlemanlike and modest man, and well-known by his scientific skill." Thus met in the mystery of life's ways the Great Wizard and the grand-father of the coming, though lesser romantic. Altogether, Robert was a man of outstanding ability, of unwearied human kindness, and in every way a worthy progenitor of the R.L.S. Meanwhile, as we have seen, he had married and given hostages to fortune. One of these was born

in Edinburgh on 22nd July, 1818, and was named Thomas Stevenson. He became the father of Robert Louis.

A HIGH SCHOOL BOY.

Thomas received his education at the High School. Though his mathematical faculty was above the average, he showed an incapacity for arithmetical calculations. More important to himself as a future citizen, however, was his early interest in Latin literature and in the English classics. He became an enthusiastic book collector, thus providing himself an unfailing source of quiet happiness. Better still, he wrote English with grace, vigour, and distinction. His profession never was in doubt, and in his seventeenth year he entered his father's office, becoming a partner in the firm in 1846. Seven years later he and his brother David were appointed Engineers to the Board of Northern Lighthouse. He was the author of many inventions, none of which he patented, thinking that as a Government servant his original work was something due to the nation. He took part in the building of the Skerryvore, "the noblest of all extant deep-sea lights," and it is by his great work of lighthouse illumination that his name will be best remembered. By his efforts the "great sea lights in every quarter of the world shine more brightly." In later life professional recognition came to him, and in 1881 he became President of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The private side of this remarkable man's character is of even more interest. His son has told us that he was "a man of somewhat antique strain, with a blend of sternness and softness that was not wholly Scottish," and it would be difficult to say more in fewer words. They afford us a convincing likeness of that quiet, self-restrained, brooding man, whose thoughts on the verities of life were often morbid and whose inmost being was tinged with the Celtic melancholy. Again we learn that his talk was compounded of "much sterling sense and much freakish humour," a not inapt description of the talk of his son. A man of strong political prejudices, he was without the saving grace of his son's sunny Bohemianism. Hastily and impatient of contradiction, he was often involved in controversy, but he was incapable of resorting to unfair weapons or of bearing malice:—"I have the family failing of taking strong views," he wrote, "and of expressing those views strongly." This defect caused the temporary entanglement of father and son owing to fundamental differences of opinion regarding a profession and a religion for R.L.S. The father had apparently taken it for granted that his son would follow in the footsteps of the engineering Stevensons, though why the youth should build granite lighthouses because his father had done so, is not clear to us. His lighthouses were to be guiding lights to the souls of men, not to distressed mariners. Again, in religion the son refused to follow in the dry, soul-distressing paths of his father's Calvinistic faith. His was the cheerier, manlier, and nobler gospel of a wider human sympathy and of a larger toleration towards his erring fellow men.

FATHER AND SON.

The real difficulty was just that father and son looked upon this queer business of life from different angles. Both were real men, courageous in word and act, but the one was a modern, the other "of antique strain." In the presence of physical danger, the courage of one was superb, while during the interminable years of ill-health the indomitable spirit of the other never suffered extinction. Look at them again from the point of view of travel. The elder journeyed in remote places on the duties of his work, and was equally at home anywhere; the younger travelled constantly in an endeavour to outwit Death. But the genuine spirit of travel was in his very blood, put there by his paternal ancestors in whose nostrils was ever the salt tang of wastes of water. He was always thinking in terms of highways. A dozen passages leap to mind:—"The open air drunkenness grows upon the traveller with great strides, until he posts along the road and sees everything about him in a cheerful dream," and he never tires of urging upon us the sheer joys of hopeful travel, whether it be to heaven or merely to one's inn. Again, in the matter of religion both possessed sincerity and conviction; had they not done so there would have been no misunderstanding. They differed only in the manner in which they regarded their relation to the universe. Another common trait was their obvious interest in themselves, not self-interest, but an overwhelming notion that what they did and thought really mattered in this world. Why, there is no English writer, not even Charles Lamb, who put so much of himself into his books as Robert Louis; in truth they are him-

self, and we read them with the author at our elbow.

Such then was the elder Stevenson, a man of large liberality and unostentatious charity, not differing herein from Robert Louis. His mind and frame, like his granite lighthouses, were massive. Even the dwelling at 17 Heriot Row, which he bought in 1857, is the abode of a substantial citizen. In its large and ample rooms Robert found a land of romance. From those high windows which look north to the hills of Fife and south over the tree tops of Queen street, he gazed on a thousand activities of human life with joyous curiosity. Here facing the street is the window from which he saw Leerie going by

"For we are very lucky with a lamp before the door,
And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many more."

THE END OF A FULL LIFE.

Alas! we write of dead men, and Leerie and his world have vanished with "Yesterday's Sev'n Thousand Years." In this house, then, did Thomas Stevenson spend thirty years of a full life, sharing that toil and joy and sorrow that are laid upon all of the sons of men. As worldly matters go, he was successful, for he left a fortune of £26,918. In this place he watched the growth of his son to manhood, and lived long enough to understand that however they might differ it was only in matters of opinion, and that a man must carve out his own life and not be a mere copyist of another. Here also in due time came he from Bournemouth to die on 8th May 1887. In his death he showed an originality not dissimilar from that of his son, for "the deceased gentleman left an original prayer to be read at the funeral service." Robert Louis was too ill to accompany the funeral to the New Calton Burying Ground. We are told that as the coffin was being carried forth from the house he was seen with bowed head and with his long, dark face and black eyes framed in the upper window. Then he turned away. His Stevenson ancestors lie in a great tomb in the New Calton Cemetery; those who girdled our coasts with kindly lights now sleep secure under the shadow of Arthur's Seat. Of them he thought in far Apemama when he wrote:

"The artificers,
"One after one, here in this grated cell,
Where the rain erases, and the rust consumes,
Fell upon lasting silence."
We shall do well if we labour as sincerely, as hopefully, and as bravely as they.

James Fisher.

FOUR YEARS 328 DAYS OF WAR.

Britain was at war with Germany for 4 years 328 days—from August 4, 1914, to June 23, 1919. By a strange coincidence, the Peace Treaty was signed on the fifth anniversary of the assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand and his wife at Sarajevo, the spark that started the world war.

— 1914. —

Aug. 1.—Germany declares war on Russia.

Aug. 3.—Germany declares war on France.

Aug. 4.—Great Britain declares war on Germany.

— 1915. —

May 23.—Italy declares war on Austria.

— 1917. —

March 12.—Russian Revolution.

April 5.—America declares war on Germany.

— 1918. —

Sept. 30.—Bulgaria surrenders.

Nov. 3.—Austria signs armistice.

Nov. 9.—Kaiser abdicates.

Nov. 11.—Germany signs armistice.

— 1919. —

June 28.—Peace signed with Germany.

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