

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Journey Into Exile

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

*...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.¹*

THE Pentland Hills above Swanston would haunt Louis's imagination until the end, emerging through these lines penned in Samoa in 1893. That was the year Cummy finally broke with the past and left the waterman's cottage next to Louis's old summer home, where until the age of 71 she had kept house for her brother. Occasionally she would still receive a letter from her 'laddie', who had grown up to dedicate his Child's Garden of Verses to her:

*From the sick child, now well and old,
Take, nurse, the little book you hold...²*

Sadly the sick child might now be older, but in the years between his return from America and his final exile from the land of his birth he had remained far from well. Now, as the pen scratched across the paper in Samoa, he was travelling in his mind across the lawn at Swanston to the door in the garden wall, leading out to the foot of the Hare Burn that ran down from the Pentlands, little more than a trickle 'that springs in the green bosom of Allermuir, and is fed from Halkerside with a perennial teacupful, and threads the moss under the Shearer's Knowe, and makes one pool there, overhung by a rock, where I loved to sit and make bad verses'³.

During Louis's earlier exile from home in Bournemouth, he had begged his old

nurse a favour: 'Some day climb as high as Halkerside for me (I am never likely to do it for myself) and sprinkle some of the well water on the turf. I am afraid it is a Pagan rite, but quite harmless, and ye can sain it wi' a bit prayer. Tell the Peewies that I mind their forbears well. My heart is sometimes heavy and sometimes glad to mind it all...'⁴

LOUIS had said farewell to the Pentlands in the summer of 1882. Just before he went up to Kingussie in search of health-giving Highland air, he and Fanny drove out to Swanston Cottage, now the summer home of a Dr Taylor since Tom Stevenson had given up the lease while Louis was in America. As Fanny chatted to the Taylors, Louis slipped out into the garden and climbed the small hill behind the house. Flora Masson, the girl he once wanted to marry, would tell how 'as the time passed and he did not return, his wife went out to find him and beg him to come indoors again; but she discovered him standing on the old knoll, above the quarry garden, high up among the wind-blown fir-trees - standing as if in a dream, looking out upon the hills; and, seeing him there, his wife came softly away - a little vexed - back into the house without him... he was taking his last long look at the Hills of Home.'⁵

A few weeks later, Louis left Scotland in search of warmer climes. Fanny was unwell and unable to accompany him, staying on in Edinburgh while Bob was pressed into service to accompany his cousin to Montpellier in the South of France. In the old spirit of jink, Bob decided it would be amusing to pretend to be his cousin's servant and, to the bafflement of French innkeepers, the pair journeyed south like D'Artagnan and Planchet or Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Yet no sooner had they reached Montpellier than Bob got a message that Louisa was unwell, and had to return at once. For nearly a fortnight Louis was on his own, suffering severe indigestion - '*une conflagration, quoi...* Young women in the family may tremble and flee'⁶ - and turning such a bright red after each meal that he feared he might suffer a stroke. Instead, he had a minor but lingering haemorrhage. In the depth of depression, he wrote to his wife: 'I do not ask you to love me any more. I am too much trouble. Besides I thought myself all over last night; and, my dear, such rubbish. You cannot put up with such a man...'⁷

Fanny arrived at last and by the middle of October they had found winter quarters at St Marcel in the hills above Marseilles. Its situation was beautiful but it had been left in a filthy state. Louis joked in a letter to his father: 'I fear there are fleas - it is called Campagne Defli - and I look forward to tons of insecticide being employed.'⁸ In more serious vein, he would break the news to his parents that he could never live in Scotland again: 'The tragic folly of my summers is at an end for me; twice have I gone home, and escaped with a flea in my ear; the third or fourth time, I should leave my bones with a general verdict of "sarved him right for a fool".'⁹

Yet Louis's health fared little better at Campagne Defli, with continual haemorrhages. Worse still, there was an outbreak of fever, possibly typhus, in St Marcel. By tradition, the villagers processed with the dead on the lids of their coffins prior to burial, and when a man's body, 'hideously swollen in the stomach', was left lying this way by the gates of Campagne Defli, Fanny knew she had to get Louis away. Sam's arrival from school in England complicated matters, and on New Year's day, still suffering a haemorrhage, Louis was sent off on his own to the Grand Hotel in Nice.

Fanny paid dearly for her decision not to accompany him. They had arranged that Louis would write or telegraph to say he had arrived safely. Deliberately or otherwise, he failed to do so. After four days with no message, Fanny flew into a panic: 'I went to Marseilles and telegraphed to Toulon to the gare, and to the bureau of police at Nice. All the people at Marseilles said it was no use; that I had better pack up my things and go back to Scotland. It was very plain, they said, that he had been taken by a violent haemorrhage on the train, had got off at some little station unable to speak, and was now dead and buried... everyone was furious with me; they were all fond of Louis and they said I had let a dying man go off alone.'¹⁰

By the time Fanny arrived at the hotel in Nice she was almost in hysterics: 'I ran up to his room where I found him reading in bed, and never dreaming of such a thing as seeing me.'¹¹ Louis was contrite, while Fanny took several days at the Grand Hotel to recover from the shock. St Marcel in the hills was clearly not good for Louis, so, while Fanny hunted for a healthier location along the coast, he stayed at various

hotels in Marseilles. There, tucked up in the Land of Counterpane, he turned out nursery verses for a project he had conceived in Braemar after seeing a book of children's poems illustrated by the artist Kate Greenaway. He sent off batch after batch of what would become *A Child's Garden of Verses* to Henley in London, saying: 'I cannot tell you how happy they make me.'¹²

By mid-February the Stevensons had extricated themselves from the lease for Campagne Defli - 'Hooray! hooray! hooray! Got rid of the house; grrrrrrreat success!'¹³ - and found a new home in Hyeres. It was like a doll's house, originally an exhibit at the 1878 Paris Exposition where Louis and Fleeming Jenkin may even have seen it before it was dismantled and moved to the Mediterranean. Despite having rooms so small that you could barely turn around in them, Chalet La Solitude was set in a beautiful garden, large and wild, with winding paths and old grey olive trees where nightingales nested and sang. Here Louis would claim to have been happy for the one and only time in his life.

It was his first real home with a family of his own. Sam came out to Hyeres and was soon pedalling around the neighbourhood on his bicycle. Louis was well enough to take an afternoon stroll into town, for once neatly attired and with his hair cut short, to pass the time of day with Powell the English chemist or his wine merchant Le Roux. Mornings, until it was time for lunch with a salad and an excellent vin de pays, were reserved for work. He took infinite pains that year with his novel *Prince Otto*, polishing it into a masterpiece of style. Yet it would never contain an ounce of the vitality he poured into *Treasure Island*, which was about to make Robert Louis Stevenson a household name...

At a London publishing house, the burly, one-legged man swung himself into the editor's office and threw a heavy bundle of magazine proofs down on the desk, crying: 'There's a book for you.' William Ernest Henley constituted a formidable boarding party and, by the time the smoke cleared, Cassell had surrendered and begun to discuss terms. When Louis received Henley's letter, confirming the deal, he was beside himself: 'Dear child, O golden voice, enchanting warbler of the evening glade, sun of the ardent tropic, angel friend: One Hundred Pounds (and to a beggar) TAKE IT, O TAKE IT! LET IT WAVE!'¹⁴ His hand had still not stopped trembling

when he wrote to his parents the same day: 'A hundred pounds, all alive, oh! A hundred jingling, tingling, golden, minted quid... I have today paid my rent for the half year...'¹⁵

The days of earning a miserable £20 a book from Kegan Paul were over. As Long John Silver caught the imagination of the British public, Henley proved an astute literary agent, negotiating a string of book contracts that at last brought Louis close to financial independence. Yet Henley would never take a penny in commission, always remembering how Louis had restored him to life after two years in the Old Infirmary: 'I'll see you dam first. If you must think of percentages, remember the old one-pound notes at Portobello.'

Improved finances allowed the Stevensons to employ a maid. Valentine Roch, an intelligent, Swiss-born Frenchwoman of 22, would stay with them for the next six years, despite difficult patches with Fanny who was never comfortable with servants. With Sam and Valentine now at La Solitude, the little chalet was bursting at the seams. Its occupants took turns at being ill, with Louis at one point the only one out of bed. Sam's health in particular gave cause for concern, with Fanny fearing he had a consumptive lung, so at the end of June the family removed to Royat.

On the way they passed through Clermont-Ferrand, where Louis's father had arranged for him to cash some circular notes of the British Linen Company. But, according to Colvin: 'His appearance had the usual, almost magical, effect of arousing in the business mind suspicions, amounting to conviction, of his dishonesty. The men in office roundly told him there was no such firm among their correspondents; that they more than suspected him of having come with intent to defraud, but as an act of kindness would give him five minutes to make himself scarce before they sent for the police.'¹⁶

By now Louis had spotted the British Linen Company's letter of authorisation in a pigeonhole, and drew it forth in triumph. Proud and scornful as D'Artagnan, he demanded to see the bank's senior management 'and when they appeared, exposed to them with a torrent of scornful eloquence their misconduct of his business, and drew a terrifying picture of the ruin that they must inevitably reap from such treatment of distinguished foreign clients. His triumph was complete; the whole

house, partners and clerks, abased themselves in regrets and apologies, and escorted him to the door with fawning demonstrations of respect.¹⁷

So delighted was Louis by this victory over Gallic Grundyism that he designed a medal to commemorate the *Strages Bankerorum*¹⁸, or 'massacre of the bankers'. It was the kind of comic story that would once have reduced Ferrier, literary scourge of the Philistine Sutton, to tears of mirth. But poor Ferrier would soon be beyond laughter and pain - when Louis returned that September to the little chalet at Hyeres, a letter arrived from Henley, informing him his friend was dying at the age of 33.

It came as a terrible blow, as if suddenly a part of himself were slipping away, 'my poor past, and the poor world, to lose the kind face'¹⁹. Although Louis had managed to call briefly on Ferrier while passing through London, there had been no time to renew the old intimacy. Now there never would be. Quickly he penned a note to *le jeune et beau*, who would never grow old, and enclosed it in his reply to Henley. Soon afterwards, news of Ferrier's death reached La Solitude.

With a heavy heart, Louis wrote to Henley: 'Well, my dear boy, the end has come and I have another letter to James Walter written which shall now be burned. I thank God he is out of the battle; tell me how he went. My poor, besotted gentleman. O what regrets, what regrets! ... I wish to God I could have gone to the funeral even. Christ pity us: the hearse to take him away, that old fount of laughter...'²⁰

Ferrier's body, destroyed by chronic Bright's disease leading to kidney failure, had been brought back to Edinburgh and laid to rest with his father and mother in the West Kirk churchyard off the Lothian road. Henley, recalling Ferrier's glory days as one of the merry band of musketeers, put his feelings into a poem:

*Our Athos rests - the wise, the kind,
The liberal and august, his fault atoned,
Rests in the crowded yard
There at the west of Princes Street.*²¹

Louis wrote to Ferrier's sister Coggie: 'They say Walter is gone. You, who know how I have neglected him, will conceive my remorse... 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... He is the first friend I have ever lost...'²²

The death hit Louis so hard - 'bust me horrid'²³ - because the young and beautiful Ferrier had been the one who first shared his dream of literary success. Louis had always regarded Ferrier as somehow better and more gifted than himself, and to see such promise destroyed by drink, 'alas to sink so low, alas to do so little'²⁴ brought great pain. Ferrier's novel *Mottiscliffe* had been a frivolous, inconsequential, young man's book, but no more so than Louis's early work. Had Ferrier not lost his grip, he might have equalled or surpassed the literary achievement of his great-aunt Susan. Yet above all Louis felt the loss personally: '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 weatherbeaten, 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...'²⁵

Writing like this made Louis so upset that Fanny forbade him to do it. Yet he continued to pour his feelings into the essay *Old Mortality*, which featured a much-euphemised portrait of his friend. At the same time Louis was trying to rationalise his own feelings of guilt, telling Ferrier's sister: 'I was certainly not the best companion for Walter, but I do believe I was the best he had. In those early days he was not fortunate in friends - looking back I see most clearly how much we both wanted a man of riper wisdom.'²⁶

The moralising Louis, or 'Shorter Catechist' as Henley called this aspect of his friend's character, sought release in letters to his father: 'The curious affair of Ferrier's death has sent me back on our relation and my past with much unavailing wonder and regret... A feeling of that which lacked with Ferrier and me, when we were lads together has put me upon a task which I hope will not be disliked by you: a sketch of some of the more obvious provinces and truths of life for the use of young men...'²⁷

This project, a reworking of the *Lay Morals* which Louis had started in 1879, did

not get far. But the memory of his debauched student days with Ferrier prompted him to turn now to *The Travelling Companion*, the story of a prostitute which he had planned at Pitlochry, as a warning or reproach to the kind of young men he and Ferrier once were. 'I am writing an unpleasant tale,' he confessed to his father. 'It is supposed to be highly moral, and it had need, for it is not gay.'²⁸

Yet if all this talk of morality was supposed to bring Louis and his father closer, it did not succeed. Tom Stevenson was sinking into a deep Calvinist gloom. Louis told his mother: 'I give my father up... I don't want no such parent... I write him a whole letter, begging 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... here am I married against everybody's wishes, and the marriage recognised to be a blessing of the first order, A.1. 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?'²⁹

Yet the December of 1883 had begun as a good month. Louis had all but finished his novel *Prince Otto* and was looking forward to a long-awaited visit from Henley and Baxter, to whom he continued to write in jocular Tamson/Johnson vein. The running joke continued about the collection plate, although it is impossible to read Louis's frivolous letter heading of 'Toddy Vale, by Kilrummer'³⁰ without recalling the sad, alcoholic fate of Ferrier. And for those inclined to believe the theory that Louis had become a father in 1879, the apparently humorous postscript could be construed in darker vein as a coded instruction to his lawyer: 'I'll hae to pay for the wean. In a so-ca'd Christian country! Mercy me!'³¹

Louis had again been spitting blood, and was still recovering when Baxter and Henley arrived at last in Hyeres with the New Year. He insisted, against all sensible doctor's orders, that they should depart together on a pleasure trip to Monaco, Monte Carlo and Mentone. A good time was had but, after Henley and Baxter had made fond farewells in Nice, Louis started running a fever and, on January 21, his health took a sharp turn for the worse. Fanny hunted all over Nice for a doctor and

eventually found one who pronounced his patient was dying. He suggested she should send for a male friend or relative at once. In a panic, Fanny telegraphed Sir Walter Simpson - but it seems Etta would not countenance him galivanting off to France. Yet again, it fell to Bob to come to the rescue.

A telegram from Fanny to Henley arrived at 11 at night. At once, the one-legged man took a cab in search of his wealthy art collector friend Constantine Ionides to borrow travelling money for Bob. By midnight, cash in hand, Henley was heading for 9 Alpha Place in St John's Wood, where Bob lived next door to a house of ill repute. Henley, going in error to the door of No 7, 'knocked up a yellow-haired person in the exercise of her calling, and brought her shivering to the door, to tell me I had made a mistake'³². Reluctant to risk waking more strangers, he went back home to get the right address before trying again. 'The clock struck two as I started upon Bob's bell. Ten minutes after he was quaking before me. I handed out the notes, told him to leave at ten that morning, and returned to my own house. It was three ere I laid me down; the tireddest sorrowfullest gent in all London.'³³

At the time, the comedy of this incident was lost on Henley, Bob and Baxter who all believed Louis was dying. Yet reports of his imminent demise were an exaggeration, despite the welter of doctors contacted not only by Fanny but by Louis's parents in hysterical telegrams from Heriot Row. Their son would not die this time, but getting him safely from Nice to Hyeres was a problem and Bob's arrival was a godsend. Eventually the Stevensons arrived in Hyeres by carriage, only to find the horses could not get up the slippery hill to La Solitude. Everyone got out and Louis 'like a naughty child, stood before the horses and defied fate, and consequently was nearly run over'³⁴. Eventually he took Bob's arm and was supported up to the chalet.

Bob left Louis in the care of Fanny and Valentine Roch. To cheer him up, Fanny made up some ludicrous stories inspired by a Fenian terrorist outrage in London - on February 27, a portmanteau packed with dynamite had been detonated by a timing device in the cloakroom at Victoria Station, while several others failed to explode at other London rail termini. From this grew *The Dynamiter*, a collection eventually rewritten by Louis as *More New Arabian Nights*. While less artistic than

the first collection, the stories possessed a raw energy lacking in their predecessors, or in the highly-polished but largely lifeless Prince Otto. Much though Louis's literary friends might disparage Fanny's influence, she did help give his work a more populist, commercial edge.

At the start of April, 1884, Coggie Ferrier arrived on a visit. *Le jeune et beau's* sister was just the tonic Louis needed, 'she is as good as a regiment; huge fun; and she and Fanny get on nicely'³⁵. Yet Louis's delight was marred by eye trouble that rendered him almost blind until he had to wear green goggles and, at one stage, have his eyes bandaged. Blindness is not normally a side-effect of tuberculosis, but Louis would have known it could be a complication of syphilis. As he lay in almost total darkness, forbidden to move and bound up like a corpse in a coffin, who knows what fears of paralysis or worse passed through his head, or what courage he drew on to maintain his sanity?

Coggie was still at La Solitude a month later, when Louis's health hit crisis point. Something in his chest gave way, so that 'the blood spurted all over everything in a moment. He was almost strangled with it... I caught nearly a pint of blood in a basin besides what went on towels and things'³⁶. So wrote Fanny at 3am on May 3, as Coggie lay exhausted and asleep on the sofa after the two women had spent hours with the ergotin bottle, struggling to get the bleeding under control. Louis slept for three hours, then 'awoke and poured, literally poured forth another volume of blood equal in quantity to the first. He is very weak and getting light headed... If it is not the end, Henley, it is the beginning of the end...'³⁷

Fanny's urgent letter sought Henley's help in consulting Dr Zebulon Mennell, the one physician she felt she could trust. Dr Vidal in Hyeres had diagnosed a burst artery but did not inspire confidence. Fearing Louis was dying, Henley convened a meeting with Baxter and Bob at which they signed a paper guaranteeing Mennell's fee if he would set out from London at once. Louis's father, whose own health was precarious, could not be told how ill his son was. On May 6, as Mennell headed for Hyeres, Fanny described Louis's condition: 'Great discharge of black blood and matter with occasionally a little fresh blood... Heavy night sweats and fever coming and going. I have told him that Mennell is coming. He wrote on a paper: "John

O'Tripes has ruined me. I cannot pay.'"³⁸

Mennell's fee of ten guineas a day plus expenses would eventually come to £106 - nearly a third of Henley's annual salary - although Tom Stevenson eventually reimbursed it. On May 7 the doctor arrived in Hyeres, expecting to see a dying man, but found the case was not quite hopeless. He stayed a week, left long and clear instructions and reported to Baxter: 'I see no reason why he should not live for some years to come and even get much stronger than he is now... The haemorrhage may come on again at any time and so end his life but I do not think it will if they do what I have told them.'³⁹

Fanny would claim that the shock of seeing Louis through this crisis turned her hair white. 'The horror of that night is indescribable,' she told Baxter. 'They say it will certainly happen again, perhaps many times, or the next may be his last, so that is to be my life; to live and sleep and sup with terror.'⁴⁰ Yet Louis himself coped remarkably well with the psychological stress of imminent death, which would follow him for the remaining decade of his life, and he seemed almost to revel in it. When Fanny had been in hysterics as the blood poured from his chest, he told her calmly: 'It is easy to die this way: no pain.'⁴¹

But Fanny's nerves were shattered, and her new habit of scrutinising every copy of *The Lancet* for possible threats to Louis's health convinced her they must leave Hyeres. A Mediterranean climate and a garden full of nightingales were of no use if the reliable doctors Louis needed were in England. When Mennell gave the all-clear for Louis to return, he turned his back with great regret on the little French chalet where he had been so happy and submitted to the strict sick-room regime that would lead to his incarceration within a respectable villa called Skerryvore, with no more life than a weevil in a biscuit.

Yet in the July of 1884 there was nothing funereal about the Stevensons' arrival in Bournemouth, where 16-year-old Sam was now in his last few weeks at school before following in his step-father's footsteps to Edinburgh University. Sam would recall: 'It was lovely autumn weather when RLS and my mother arrived. They were in the highest spirits; everything pleased them; and although they were carrying all they possessed with them, and had neither home nor plans - and ought to have been

rather forlorn, one should think - they were as happy as grigs...'⁴²

They found lodgings in a guest house called Wensleydale, where Henley paid them an extended visit. Fanny, still deeply in debt to the one-legged man for dispatching Mennell to Hyeres, could hardly object to his noisy presence, even if his new playwrighting escapades with her husband in search of gold did sap Louis's strength. The plays they wrote - including *Beau Austin*, completed in four days at Wensleydale - would all come to naught. But Sam, who continued to hero-worship Henley even after the quarrel with Louis had turned him bitter, would always recollect his life-affirming presence: 'Henley came - a great, glowing, massive-shouldered fellow with a big red beard and a crutch; jovial, astoundingly clever, and with a laugh that rolled out like music. Never was there such another as William Ernest Henley...'⁴³

Yet even as the two friends laughed together like overgrown schoolboys, Louis had a sense of growing old. In a letter written the day after his 34th birthday, he complained to his piratical friend: 'You now come waltzing around like some light-hearted monarch; essentially jovial, essentially royal; radiant of smiles. And in the meanwhile, by a complementary process, I turn into a kind of hunchback with white hair! The devil.'⁴⁴

Looking back, Lloyd Osbourne would recollect the change in Louis after Henley left Wensleydale: 'He was never afterward so boyish or so light-hearted; it was the final flare-up of his departing youth. The years that followed, however full they were of interest and achievement, were grayer; it was a soberer and a more preoccupied man that lived them.'⁴⁵

On leaving rented lodgings and becoming a householder for the first time at Skerryvore, Louis immersed himself in his work. There might be little scope now for real living, but the life of his imagination was boundless and produced some of his greatest writing, including *Kidnapped* and *Jekyll and Hyde*. When Bluidy Jack gave him respite, he could see visitors and make new friendships, from Sir Percy Shelley, son of the poet, to the American novelist Henry James. Literary fame also brought Louis a fan club in the shape of Adelaide Boodle, an intense young woman who came knocking on the door in fear and trembling to seek an audience with the great

man, and ended up becoming a friend. Harder to deal with were Louis's parents, who would overstay their welcome and taxed Louis's strength - especially his father, rendered cantankerous and difficult to handle by his own illness and sometimes unable to recognise even old friends. Now and then Louis would risk the train journey into London to stay for a day or two at 'the Monument', as he called Sidney Colvin's home at the British Museum. But when Bluidy Jack was on the ascendant, Louis would be confined once more to bed, unable to move or talk and communicating by scribbling on a slate, like the dumb pimp he had once observed in Edinburgh. In these dark times 'Mr Dumby', as he styled himself, had just Fanny and sometimes Lloyd for company - and Valentine Roch.

Louis got on well with Valentine and loved to tease her. When she was in favour, he called her 'Joe'; when she excited his displeasure, she became 'Thomassina'. One day he handed her a scrap of newspaper wrapper on which he had written:

*A dearer I do not know than Joe,
A sadder girl has rarely been than Thomassine,
Joe is my friend - so may she always be,
And for Joe's sake that darker Thomassine wants a true friend in me.*⁴⁶

When Fanny developed cabin fever and had to get away from constant attendance on the invalid, Valentine would take over her duties and sleep in Louis's room. This practical arrangement caused a few raised eyebrows, but there is no evidence of impropriety and Louis was hardly in a fit state for hanky-panky. Years later, the pragmatic Valentine described this period:

It was when he was left entirely alone to the mercies of the servants, as frequently happened, that we knew him best... When he was too ill even to read or write I felt we must amuse him some way or other, and we resorted to all kinds of clownish feats. Once I disguised myself in men's clothes and demanded an interview. He received me very politely and asked what he could do for me.

"A contribution for a library."

"How much do you want?"

"Oh, anything you would give."

*"Oh Joe, you funny fellow, why don't you ask for a pound - it is worth it."*⁴⁷

The relationship between Valentine and Fanny was more strained, perhaps by sexual jealousy. Years later it would end in Fanny accusing the French girl quite improbably of dishonesty and sacking her. But in later life Valentine still recalled her time with Louis with fondness: 'I know that his teachings and the few years passed with him have helped me greatly to have a better conception of life - and later on when it came to a "Parting of our ways" it helped me to bear many injustices which nearly broke my heart.'⁴⁸

Relations between Louis and Fanny were as normal as they could be in the circumstances. Despite illness, they managed a sex life, to which Louis referred indiscreetly in a letter to Henley. Apologising for losing a day's work on yet another play collaboration, he explained: 'The fact is I got my little finger into a steam press called the Vandergrifter (patent) and my whole body and soul had to go through after it. I came out as limp as a lady's novel, but the Vandergrifter suffered in the process, and is fairly knocked about... I am what she has made me. The embers of the once gay R.L.S.'⁴⁹

An invalid who boasted of 'Vandergrifting all the afternoon'⁵⁰ clearly had some life in him yet, although there were no resulting offspring. Fanny was now in her mid-forties and Louis's sexual history may have left him infertile, although he did make cryptic remarks about wishing he'd had the courage to have children. While still at Hyeres, he had written in curiously facetious fashion to the Simp: 'I must tell you a joke. A month or two ago, there was an alarm: it looked like family. Prostration: I saw myself financially ruined. I saw the child born sickly etc. Then, said I, I must look this thing on the good side; proceeded to do so studiously; and with such a result that when the alarm passed off - I was inconsolable!'⁵¹ More evidence of this appears in a poem by Louis, perhaps written at this time:

*God gave to me a child in part
Yet wholly gave the father's heart –
Child of my soul, O whither now,
Unborn, unmothered, goest thou?...*

My voice may reach you, O my dear –

*A father's voice perhaps the child may hear;
And pitying, you may turn your view
On that poor father whom you never knew...⁵²*

Could the person who wrote this be the father of a four-year-old boy, growing up in poor circumstances in Scotland with a mother who had no contact with Louis, apart from receiving occasional small sums via his lawyer? This is what would be claimed in the 1920s. In the notebook containing the above poem is a fragment of verse which does not appear to refer to a miscarriage but to a child the author abandoned, after the mother had left him.

*Where art thou gone? And where is she?
Alas! She too has left me, O my child,
As you I left,...*

Louis may simply have been play acting, imagining a scenario for a poem. Otherwise these lines might support the claims made by an alleged illegitimate son, 30 years after Louis's death – claims seemingly incompatible with the image of a kind man who loved children. But in Victorian times illegitimate children were not always acknowledged, and Louis's curious, elliptical way of referring to certain other matters suggests he may have had difficulty acknowledging such things even to himself. Despite apparently clear physical symptoms of tuberculosis, he would sometimes pretend his medical problem was simply 'nerves', as years previously he had transformed the roseola of syphilis into measles. Would Louis likewise be capable of blocking an illegitimate son out of his consciousness? It seems scarcely credible. To do so, he would have to be 'in denial', with his internal Jekyll and Hyde refusing to acknowledge each other's presence.

During the Stevensons' first year in Bournemouth, Louis's old friend Fleeming Jenkin had been going through a difficult time in Edinburgh, overworking and dealing with domestic tragedies - in a year, he and his wife had each lost both parents. The Jenkins needed a break and planned a second honeymoon in Italy. But before they set off, Fleeming had an injury to his foot which required minor surgery in Edinburgh. Sadly, other surgeons had not adopted the antiseptic techniques

pioneered by Lister and, on June 12, 1885, Jenkin died of blood poisoning at 52.

The news of his death hit Louis hard, but not so hard as Ferrier's. Jenkin had been more an alternative father figure than a friend of the bosom. Louis wrote at once to Anne Jenkin – 'You know how much and for how long I have loved, respected and admired him...' ¹⁵³ – and later volunteered to take on the burden of writing Jenkin's biography, involving long correspondence and meetings with his widow for the best part of two years. Anne Jenkin left Edinburgh soon after her husband's death and the big house in Great Stuart Street, scene of so many happy memories as Louis and his fellow actors paraded in their finery, was shut up in silence and eventually sold.

Further tragedy had touched the life of Leila Scot Skirving, who had once played the vivacious Mabel Chester to Louis's Sir Charles Pomander. Married in 1883 to a young Irish surgeon, Leslie Maturin, Leila was widowed the following year at the age of 30 when he took ill and died while treating patients at the Cork Street Fever Hospital in Dublin. Much of the news from Edinburgh was sombre and sad, and it was now apparent that Louis's father was in terminal decline. Louis, despite his own illness, was determined to do his filial duty and, in April, 1886, took his father for a health cure at Smedley's Hydropathic in Matlock, Derbyshire. There the pleasures of being rubbed with tepid vinegar and chilli paste soon began to pall and, despite the gentle but firm presence of Tom Stevenson's valet, the old man could be a handful: 'My father, I'm sorry to say, gave me a full dose of Hyde this morning. He began about breakfast as usual; and then to prove himself in the right and that he did well to be angry, carried on a long time (obviously on purpose) about the moon. I was very severe with him, and refused to speak again till he was quiet.' ¹⁵⁴

Three months later, Tom Stevenson was beaten to the grave by his brother David, whose mental health had disintegrated likewise before death. Tension ensued between Heriot Row and Uncle David's sons Davie and Charlie, who were convinced Louis's father took more than his entitlement from the family business. This added further to the unpleasantness Louis had to cope with at arm's length from his sick bed in Bournemouth while still labouring over Kidnapped. He sought emotional release in playing the piano badly – his skills always fell far short of his genuine love of music. There were worries also about young Sam - a year into his

engineering studies at Edinburgh, he was flunking exams and had to give up in the middle of one because of trouble with his eyes. Fanny and Louis feared he might go blind, but spectacles eventually solved the problem. In the November of 1886, instead of continuing with his studies, Sam was sent off at the age of 18 to convalesce in Barbados.

This would also protect him from any scandal arising from the mysterious disappearance of his father. Since the divorce, Sam Osbourne's contact with his son had been patchy and his financial support non-existent. He preferred to spend his salary on women - first his second wife, Rebecca Paul, then many others in San Francisco. By the summer of 1886, his sex life had become so complicated that he may have decided on a fresh start. One day, after leaving the law courts, he simply ceased to exist. At home his wife waited in vain. Had her husband been murdered? Or drowned? Or committed suicide? A bag was found on the seashore, containing clothes that might have belonged to him. Otherwise nothing.

The news was broken to Fanny in a letter from Dora Williams, who enclosed newspaper clippings. With Louis's public profile as a successful author increasing daily, Fanny was acutely sensitive to any scandalous publicity regarding her ex-husband, telling Colvin: 'The papers say there are "evil rumours" concerning him, one being that he has deserted his miserable wife and fled with a young girl employed in his office.'⁵⁵ By the following spring, the stories about Sam Osbourne were becoming so persistent that young Sam, newly returned from the West Indies, abandoned the first name he shared with his father and announced he would henceforth be Lloyd.

His father never did resurface. It was just the kind of conduct Louis would have expected. Yet by now he had more than enough family cares of his own, with his parents staying at Skerryvore. His father, suffering from jaundice and wandering in his mind, was clearly not long for this world. In a letter to Fleeming Jenkin's widow, Louis confided: 'My father is still very yellow, and very old, and very weak, but yesterday he seemed happier, and smiled, and followed what was said; even laughed I think. When he came away, he said to me, "Take care of yourself, my dearie," which had a strange sound of childish days, and will not leave my mind.'⁵⁶

As Louis contemplated the prospect of his father's death, his religious sense became more heightened. The ungodly, 18-year-old Lloyd found the new atmosphere at Skerryvore wearisome, with Louis reading Russian authors and espousing a form of Tolstoyan Christianity. To make matters worse, he developed a strong, Quixotic desire to become a martyr to a cause. The newspapers were full of the plight of an Irish family named Curtin in County Kerry, where the tenantry were up in arms against their landlords. John Curtin had been mortally wounded while fighting off a band of moonlighters who attacked his farm, but managed to shoot one of them - in revenge for which the whole countryside around had boycotted his family, keeping them virtual prisoners in their home. No one in England, let alone the Government, seemed prepared to help. To the chivalrous Louis, this was like a red rag to a bull and he conceived the hare-brained idea of going to live in the farmhouse with the Curtin women. He was in no shape physically to protect them, but the presence of the author of *Treasure Island* in their midst would make it hard for the British authorities to ignore their predicament.

Lloyd was still trying to persuade his step-father to come to his senses when the situation was overtaken by events. On April 21, Tom Stevenson had returned to his native Edinburgh for the last time, leaving Louis to sort out the increasingly acrimonious dispute with his cousins Davie and Charlie. Soon a letter from Louis's mother informed him his father was sinking fast. He telegraphed that he was heading north. By the time they arrived on May 6, Louis's father could no longer recognise him.

*So went he in the glory of his age;
But in the nice contrivance of his mind
Time the untoward stole with disaster in,
Brought some disorder
Once more I saw him; he, the lofty man
Where oft with friends and company, his tongue
Was as the trump to laughter, sat altered
Or something like his likeness. 'Look,' said one,
Unkindly kind, 'look up, it is your boy.'*

*And the dread changeling gazed at me in vain.*⁵⁷

At 69, Tom Stevenson had survived all his brothers and sisters, but the time had now come to join poor Alan and the others. On May 7, Louis wrote to his uncle's widow, Aunt Alan: 'He suffers not at all, is really unconscious; yet he ate some luncheon yesterday, and the day before smoked a cigarette. He used to say his idea for a happy death was that a man should smoke his pipe on his last day. I am the more deceived if he has not come very near to it...'⁵⁸

That night, at 45 minutes after midnight on the Lord's Day, Louis's father passed away in his sleep. For 37 years the devout, benevolent lighthouse engineer and his rebellious, Bohemian son had loved each other and driven each other to distraction. Now it was over and Louis felt numb and empty. He and Fanny did their best to comfort his widowed mother and shoulder the burden of sorting out Tom Stevenson's estate. Louis was really in no fit state to do it, and for the sake of his health was obliged to spend his last three weeks in Edinburgh cooped up in Heriot Row.

Bob and Katharine arrived from London in time for the funeral on May 13. Louis was too ill to go, and Bob was in poor shape himself but agreed to take his cousin's place as chief mourner, with Katharine and Fanny to support the deceased's widow as the coffin was carried to the family vault in the New Calton Burying Ground. The black-plumed procession ran to between 40 and 50 carriages and upwards of 100 mourners. In a letter to Colvin, Louis remarked: 'The funeral - abominable business, as ever I saw - would have pleased him: it was the largest private funeral in man's memory here.'⁵⁹ Never good at consoling others suffering bereavement, Louis did his best to come to terms with it himself: 'Now he rests; it is more significant, it is more like himself; he will begin to return to us in the course of time as he was and as we loved him. My favourite words in literature, my favourite scene - 'O let him pass' - Kent and Lear - was played for me here in the first moment of my return. I believe Shakespeare saw it with his own father. I had no words; but it was shocking to see...'⁶⁰

Louis was left to sort out his father's will with the family lawyer, John T Mowbray. His father had left all his estate in life rent to his mother, barring a

bequest to the Edinburgh Magdalene Asylum and a small, £20 annuity for Cummy. Louis would only inherit if he outlived his mother, which he felt was unlikely, and he feared there might be no provision at all for Fanny and his step-children. The way the will had been drafted, there was even a possibility that everything would go to the Church of Scotland on his mother's death, and sorting the matter out gave Louis much anxiety.

His uncle, Dr Balfour, examined him and declared he must leave Britain, recommending the climate of Colorado. Yet it took Louis weeks to persuade his grieving mother that she must come with them. Eventually he told her: 'Not only would we not go to America without you, we should not persist in trying it if we did not believe it would be, on the whole, the best for you. I have been a bad enough son all round; I would now be decently good.'⁶¹

Although Louis might not have acknowledged it, there was little chance now that he would ever return to Scotland or see his friends there again. Charles Baxter's subdued visits to Heriot Row were the last time they would speak together and recall the sad-happy times of their youth - although Baxter would remain loyal in Louis's service, half a world away, until the end. Poor Ferrier was already beyond all human contact, although his grave was but a ten-minute walk from Heriot Row, and the Simp was now living the life of a country squire in Ayton, down near the Border, where Etta indulged his passion for golf. The Baronet had just become a published author with *The Art of Golf*, a classic text to this day. He sent a copy to Louis, who replied: 'A lot of it is very funny, and I liked the fun very well; but what interested me most was the more serious part...'⁶² Old friends and relations called at Heriot Row to offer condolences and bid Louis farewell. Among them was his favourite Balfour cousin, Henrietta, whose husband recalled their last meeting: 'He could not come down to lunch, so I went and saw him in bed. He looked very frail and far through.'⁶³

Dawn broke on the last day of May, and Louis's last sight of the city of his birth. He said farewell to the two small rooms at the top of the house where he had spent so long struggling to write, and had poured out his soul to Mrs Sitwell during the terrible year of tension with his father. Downstairs he and Fanny breakfasted with

his mother in the room where Louis had once gulped down his coffee each morning and fled from the religious mania tearing the family apart. Now, as the bags and boxes were loaded into the growler outside, he may have wandered into his father's study, still lined with all the old man's books, or through into the dining room where elegant young ladies had once listened in awe to young Louis's dinner-table displays of verbal pyrotechnics.

And then it was time to go, with a kiss for his mother and a wave to the servants as he and Fanny stepped down to the pavement where he had played as a boy, and down which a young Mr Hyde had once glided after dark into a lamplit, vicious fairy land. The gardens in which Louis had walked with Cummy were full of sunshine, with no hint of the terrors they had held on windy nights. It was a glorious summer morning. The cabbie whipped up his horse and the growler headed for the Caledonian Railway station. As they turned into Princes Street, two familiar figures on the pavement caught Louis's eye. One was the recently widowed Leila Maturin, the other the young woman he had once hoped to make his wife. Flora Masson would never forget her last sight of him:

A slender, loose-garbed figure stood up in the cab and waved a wide-brimmed hat.

'Good-bye!' he called to us. 'Good-bye!'

'It is Louis Stevenson!' said my companion; 'they must be going away again.'

Was this the Louis Stevenson of the 'Seventies, the boy who played truant from the college classes, the 'queer, lank lad in a velvet coat' whose brilliant talk had so perplexed and charmed us? This figure, standing up in the open cab, waving the wide-brimmed hat, was an older man, an invalid, a wanderer; a man who had felt warmer sun's rays than ever warm Edinburgh stones, and had, I am sure, battled with harder winds than ever blow in Edinburgh. This was Louis Stevenson, the brilliant and distinguished Man of Letters of whom his native City was very proud.

The cab passed. The gray vista of our Northern Capital, the long line of Princes Street, was at its very best as Louis Stevenson looked back at it and us, over the back of the open cab, still waving his hat and calling 'Goodbye!' That little bit of west-endy, east-windy Edinburgh, with the gray and green of the Castle Rock and the gardens on the one side, and Princes Street itself, glittering in the sunshine, on the other! It was Edinburgh's last sight of

*Louis Stevenson, and Louis Stevenson's last look back at the City that was his birthplace, in which he had been so happy and so miserable; that he had chafed against and railed at; that he was to write about and dream about in exile, and to love immeasurably to the end.*⁶⁴

Crack goes the whip, and off we go;
The trees and houses smaller grow;
Last, round the woody turn we swing;
Good-bye! Good-bye, to everything!⁶⁵

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¹ RLS, To S.R. Crockett (On Receiving A Dedication).

² RLS, Dedication to A Child's Garden of Verses.

³ RLS, Pastoral, Memories and Portraits.

⁴ RLS to Alison Cunningham, Skerryvore, Bournemouth, April 16, 1887. Yale 1795, Facsimile The Writers' Museum, Edinburgh.

⁵ Flora Masson, I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Rosaline Masson.

⁶ RLS to Bob Stevenson, Montpellier, October 1, 1882. Yale 991, Text British Library.

⁷ RLS to Fanny Stevenson, Montpellier, October 2, 1882. Yale 993, MS Yale.

⁸ RLS to his Father, Marseille, October 17, 1882. Yale 1002, MS Yale.

⁹ RLS to his Parents, Campagne Defli, St Marcel, late October, 1882. Yale 1007, MS Yale.

¹⁰ Fanny Stevenson to her Mother-in-Law, St Marcel, January 15, 1883. Yale 1040, MS Silverado.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² RLS to WE Henley, Marseille, mid-February, 1883. Yale 1058, MS National Library of Scotland.

¹³ RLS to his Parents, Marseille, February 15, 1883. Yale 1060, MS Yale.

¹⁴ RLS to WE Henley, Hyeres, May 5, 1883. Yale 1097, MS National Library of Scotland.

¹⁵ RLS to his Parents, La Solitude, Hyeres, May 5, 1883. Yale 1098, MS Yale.

¹⁶ Sidney Colvin, Memories and Notes.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ RLS to Charles Baxter, La Solitude, Hyeres, October 3, 1883. Yale 1152, MS Yale.

¹⁹ RLS to WE Henley, La Solitude, Hyeres, early September, 1883. Yale 1135, MS National Library of Scotland.

²⁰ RLS to WE Henley, La Solitude, Hyeres, mid-September, 1883. Yale 1137, MS National Library of Scotland.

²¹ WE Henley, Envoy – To Charles Baxter.

²² RLS to Elizabeth Anne 'Coggie' Ferrier, mid-September, 1883. Yale 1138, Text Colvin Letters.

²³ RLS to Bob Stevenson, La Solitude, Hyeres, September 30, 1883. Yale 1148, MS Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

²⁴ RLS to WE Henley, La Solitude, Hyeres, September 19, 1883. Yale 1140, MS National Library of Scotland.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ RLS to Elizabeth Anne 'Coggie' Ferrier, La Solitude, Hyeres, September 30, 1883. Yale 1146, MS

Yale.

²⁷ RLS to his Father, La Solitude, Hyeres, October 2, 1883. Yale 1150, Text Anderson Galleries Sale Catalogue, New York, February 1916.

²⁸ RLS to his Father, La Solitude, Hyeres, September 25 or 26. Yale 1142, MS Yale.

²⁹ RLS to his Mother, Hyeres, December 30, 1883. Yale 1205, MS Yale.

³⁰ RLS to Charles Baxter, Toddy Vale, by Kilrummer. December 7, 1883. Yale 1191, MS Yale.

³¹ Ibid.

³² WE Henley to Charles Baxter, London, January 29, 1884. Yale 1261, MS Yale.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Fanny Stevenson to her Mother-in-Law, c February 17, 1884. Yale 1220, Text Balfour extract, National Library of Scotland.

³⁵ RLS to his Parents, La Solitude, Hyeres. Yale 1248, MS Yale.

³⁶ Fanny Stevenson to WE Henley, Hyeres, May 2/3, 1884. Yale 1270, MS Yale.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Fanny Stevenson to WE Henley, Hyeres, May 6, 1884. Quoted by Mehew in Yale Letters, Vol IV, p290.

³⁹ Dr Zebulon Mennell to Charles Baxter, May 17, 1884. Quoted by Mehew in Yale Letters, Vol IV, p290.

⁴⁰ Fanny Stevenson to Charles Baxter, Hyeres, May 13, 1884. Quoted by Mehew in Yale Letters, Vol IV, p291.

⁴¹ Fanny Stevenson to WE Henley, Hyeres, May 10, 1884. Quoted by Mehew in Yale Letters, Vol IV, p291.

⁴² Lloyd Osbourne, *An Intimate Portrait of RLS, Stevenson at Thirty-Five*.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ RLS to WE Henley, Bournemouth, November 14, 1884. Yale 1330, MS National Library of Scotland.

⁴⁵ Lloyd Osbourne, *An Intimate Portrait of RLS, Stevenson at Thirty-Five*.

⁴⁶ Valentine Roch, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ RLS to WE Henley, Skerryvore, Bournemouth, February 6, 1886. Yale 1542, MS National Library of Scotland.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ RLS to Sir Walter Simpson, Hyeres, December 31, 1883. Yale 1208, MS Yale.

⁵² RLS, *God Gave To Me A Child In Part*

⁵³ RLS to Anne Jenkin, Skerryvore, Bournemouth, June 14 or 15, 1885. Yale 1445, MS Lord Jenkin of Roding.

⁵⁴ RLS to his Mother, Matlock Bridge, April 16, 1886. Yale 1598, MS Yale.

⁵⁵ Fanny Stevenson to Sidney Colvin, Bournemouth, May 1, 1887. Quoted by Mehew in footnote to Yale 1779.

⁵⁶ RLS to Anne Jenkin, Skerryvore, Bournemouth, April 7, 1887. Yale 1789, Text Colvin's *Galleys, Silverado*.

⁵⁷ RLS, *The Last Sight*.

⁵⁸ RLS to Margaret Scott Stevenson, 17 Heriot Row, May 7, 1887. Yale 1808A, MS Copy, Jean Leslie.

⁵⁹ RLS to Sidney Colvin, 17 Heriot Row, late May, 1887. Yale 1820, Facsimile British Library.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ RLS to his Mother, London, July 1, 1887. Yale 1849, MS Yale.

⁶² RLS to Sir Walter Simpson, British Museum, London, July 1887. Yale 1852, Text Colvin Letters.

⁶³ James Milne, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson.

⁶⁴ Flora Masson, *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Rosaline Masson.

⁶⁵ RLS, *Farewell To The Farm, A Child's Garden of Verses*.