CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

# A Sea Change

*THE first time I saw Robert Louis Stevenson was at Waterloo Station... my attention was attracted by a passenger, of a strangeness of appearance almost grotesque, emerging from a compartment in the Bournemouth train which had just arrived... He was tall, thin, spare – indeed, he struck me as almost fantastically spare: I remember thinking that the station draught caught him like a torn leaf flowing at the end of a branch. His clothes hung about him, as the clothes of a convalescent who has lost bulk and weight after long fever. He had on a jacket of black velveteen... a flannel shirt with a loose necktie negligently bundled into a sailor's-knot, somewhat fantastical trousers, though no doubt this effect was due in part to their limp amplitude about what seemed rather the thin green poles familiar in dahlia-pots than the legs of a human creature. He wore a straw hat, that in its rear rim suggested forgetfulness on the part of its wearer, who had apparently, in sleep or heedlessness, treated it as a cloth cap... The long, narrow face, then almost sallow, with somewhat long, loose, dark hair, that draggled from beneath the yellow straw hat well over the ears, along the dusky hollows of temple and cheek, was what immediately attracted attention. But the extraordinariness of the impression was of a man who had just been rescued from the sea or a river... That it was not merely an impression of my own was proved by the exclamation of a cabman, who was standing beside me expectant of a 'fare' who had gone to look after his luggage: 'Looks like a sooercide, don't he, sir? one o' them chaps as takes their down-on-their luck 'eaders inter the Thimes!'*

*The stranger, who had been standing as if bewildered, certainly irresolute, had dropped his book, and with long, white, nervous fingers was with one hand crumpling and twisting the loose ends of his plaid or rug. Suddenly the friend whom he was expecting came forward. The whole man seemed to change. The impression of emaciation faded; the "drowned" look passed... But the supreme change was in the face. The dark locks apparently receded, like weedy tangle in the ebb; the long sallow oval grew rounder and less wan; the sombre melancholy vanished like cloud-scud on a day of wind and sun, and the dark eyes lightened to a violet-blue and were filled with sunshine and laughter...*[1]

THERE was nothing fanciful about this record of a chance encounter on a railway platform by the Scottish writer William Sharp. For Louis in the 1880s to spend a day or two with friends in London was like a drowning man coming up for air. The change in his health since his American adventure had been catastrophic, forcing him to lead the life of a chronic invalid. The days were now gone when he could stay with Henley or Colvin for weeks on end, enjoy long lunches at the Savile and walk the streets all night. Until Louis went to America, he had been able in the five years since his return from Mentone to eat, drink and make merry in Scotland, England and France with hardly a day spent ill in bed. The disease of which he received a 'regular skinful' had lain dormant and he had all but forgotten the dreadful day when he learned he was 'limed' for life. But by the August of 1879, with Louis still three months short of his 29th birthday, his health was beginning to fail.

On August 6, aboard the SS Devonia as she lay with her sea-signal flying at the Tail of the Bank off Greenock, Louis wrote to Colvin, enclosing a letter to break the news of his American journey to his parents. His covering note was bleak: 'I have never been so much detached from life; I feel as if I cared for nobody, and as for myself I cannot believe fully in my own existence. I seem to have died last night; all I carry on from my past life is the blue pill, which is still well to the front... I have a strange, rather horrible, sense of the sea before me, and can see no further into the future...'[2]

The active ingredient of blue pill, or 'blue mass', was mercury, the specific treatment for syphilis. It could be prescribed for other ailments, however, and may have been a legacy from the time of the swollen testicle. From time to time Louis made reference in letters to liver trouble, which may also have produced the itching symptoms known as pruritus. But his remark to Colvin suggests he had been taking blue pill for some time.

There seemed little hope in his heart of a simple, joyous reunion with Fanny, whom he believed to be very ill. In a note scribbled to Bob on the tender going down the Clyde, he had written: 'I must try and get her to do one of two things. I hope to be back in a month or two; but indeed God alone knows what may happen; it is a

wild world.'[3] Since a month in California would be inadequate to complete a divorce, it is not clear what Louis hoped for - to return with a woman still married to another man, or to be given an unequivocal statement by Fanny that she would never be his, releasing him from any moral obligation he might feel since he had slept with her. Neither Henley nor Colvin believed in what their friend was doing, although they seemed to think Louis was merely having a meeting with Fanny in New York. In a letter to Baxter, Henley conceded: 'After all, it was his duty, and to have done it will comfort and cheer him a good deal... I hoped she would be brave and generous enough to give him up... So far as I can see, the one thing to be feared for him is that he may be induced to go to Monterey, and there get mixed up once more in the miserable life of alarms and lies and intrigues that he led in Paris.'[4]

A journey to California could not be undertaken lightly by a young man in poor health. At Greenock, Louis wrote out a last will and testament along with half a dozen valedictory letters to his friends. He was concerned about Walter Ferrier – their combined health problems made it quite possible they would never meet again. In a farewell letter to Baxter, Louis wrote: 'Remember me in the kindest way to Ferrier and to yourself, old man. *Je te serre la main. Portes toi bien*.'[5]

Between Greenock and New York lay 11 days aboard an emigrant ship. The Devonia was a modern vessel, offering commodious cabins to around 100 first-class passengers. Most emigrants, however, travelled in steerage, around 800 in close-packed bunks with little ventilation in bad weather. Louis, who was desperate for coin and had to finish The Story Of A Lie for the New Quarterly, paid an extra two guineas for a second-class 'slantindicular cabin with the table playing bob-cherry with the ink-bottle'[6]. There also each day he wrote up notes for the book that would be The Amateur Emigrant.

At mealtimes Louis found it impossible to distinguish between the tea and the coffee, except 'I found I that I could sleep after the coffee and lay awake after the tea, which is proof conclusive of some chemical disparity'[7]. In addition to porridge, second cabin passengers enjoyed curious breakfasts of Irish stew, fish or rissoles. Dinner, taken in the middle of the day, consisted of soup and roast fresh beef or boiled salt junk, followed by duff or 'a saddle-bag filled with currants under the

name of plum pudding'[8]. For tea, Louis had left-overs from the first-class saloon.

Any romantic notions about emigration were soon dispelled. His fellow emigrants were fleeing a recession that had thrown thousands out of work: 'We were a company of the rejected; the drunken, the incompetent, the weak, the prodigal, all who had been unable to prevail against circumstance in the one land, were now fleeing pitifully to another; and though one or two might still succeed, all had already failed.'[9] Yet amid this Louis found hope in the shape of an 'ugly, merry, unbreeched child of three' who happily ran about the ship, his face smeared with suet and treacle: 'To meet him, crowing with laughter and beating an accompaniment to his own mirth with a tin spoon upon a tin cup, was to meet a little triumph of the human species.'[10]

With no washing facilities in steerage, the stench of human sweat and vomit became unbearable. At night Louis abandoned his bunk and lay on the cabin floor, 'where although I ran the risk of being stepped upon, I had a free current of air... and from this couch, as well as the usual sounds of a rough night at sea, the hateful coughing and retching of the sick and sobs of children, I heard a man run wild with terror beseeching his friend for encouragement. "The ship's going down," he cried with a thrill of agony. "The ship's going down."'[11]

There was little risk of that, although Louis was concerned one night to discover an elderly man 'grovelling on his belly in the wet scuppers and kicking feebly with his outspread toes. He had been sick and his head was in his vomit. We asked him what was amiss; and he replied incoherently, with a strange accent and in a voice unmanned by terror, that he had a cramp in the stomach...' Finding him a doctor involved Louis in an odyssey around the ship, from the officer of the watch on the bridge to a steward who told him: 'That's none of my business - I don't care.' Eventually the officer's wrath was aroused and the doctor found.[12]

The first-class passengers generally remained aloof, except when three found their way onto a stretch of deck where Louis and some other steerage passengers sat huddled in the lee of a deckhouse. The gentleman and two young ladies appeared 'picking their way with little, gracious titters of indulgence and a Lady Bountiful air about nothing, which galled me to the quick... It was astonishing what insults these

people managed to convey by their presence. They seemed to throw their clothes in our faces. Their eyes searched us all over for tatters and incongruities. A laugh was ready at their lips; but they were too well-mannered to indulge it in our hearing. Wait a bit, till they were all back in the saloon, and then hear how wittily they would depict the manners of the steerage!'[13]

Yet the poor emigrants kept up their spirits all evening with dancing and fiddle music, until the first-class passengers gathered above to enjoy the strains of working-class vivacity. Louis joined in with gusto, as well as playing cards and dominoes and taking part in party games.

He reacted to the stories of less affluent passengers with easy tolerance. The story of one man, ruined by a drunken wife whom he had tried to reform and set up in a cook-shop, would have shocked Mrs Grundy: 'One week my old acquaintance, getting earlier through his work, came home on the Friday instead of the Saturday, and there was his wife to receive him, reeling drunk. He "took and gave her a pair o' black eyes", for which I pardon him, nailed up the cook-shop door, gave up his situation, and resigned himself to a life of poverty with the workhouse at the end.'[14]

Nor could Louis take a high moral tone with the stowaways on board, two of whom had been pardoned on condition that they worked their passage. One of them, Alick, would only scrub decks when an officer was in sight. The other, a handsome young man from Devon, 'was as willing as any paid hand, swarmed aloft among the first, pulled his natural weight and fierily upon a rope, and found work for himself when there was none to show him'. He was, Louis noted, 'strongly under the influence of sex. If a woman passed near where he was working, his eyes lit up, his hand paused, and his mind wandered...'[15]

If Louis was similarly stirred by the strapping young Irish blonde who seemed quite taken with this stowaway, he kept it to himself. His thoughts were fixed on a more complicated forthcoming encounter with a little, dark-eyed American woman still married to her unfaithful husband. Any dream of a lasting relationship with Fanny would have to be achieved in the teeth of Mrs Grundy's disapproval. An intriguing Scots girl who fascinated Louis on board the Devonia had a similar burden to bear:

*She was poorly clad on the verge, if not over the line, of disrespectability, with a ragged old jacket and a bit of a sealskin cap no bigger than your fist; but her eyes, her whole expression and her manner even in ordinary moments, told of a true womanly nature, capable of love, anger and devotion... there was usually by her side a heavy, dull, gross man in rough clothes and chary of speech and gesture, not from caution but poverty of disposition... On the Thursday before our arrival, the tickets were collected; and soon a rumour began to go round the vessel; and this girl with her bit of sealskin cap became the centre of whispering and pointed fingers. She also, it was said, was a stowaway of a sort; for she was on board with neither ticket nor money; and the man with whom she travelled was the father of a family, who had left wife and children to be hers...*[16]

Louis now was going to California to ask a woman to leave her husband, if not her children, to be his. It would one day be alleged that he had also left another woman in Scotland pregnant with his child. Yet when the Devonia docked in New York, the fires of resolve still burned bright in the dark eyes of the bag of bones known as Louis Stevenson as he stumbled across the quayside, dripping in a downpour: 'One sees it is a new country, they are so free with their water.'[17] By 6pm he was emerging into West Street aboard a baggage wagon, en route to cheap lodgings at Reunion House, 'board and lodging per day 1 dollar, single meals 25 cents'[18]. The Irish proprietor, Michael Mitchell, knew Louis's second-cabin acquaintance Jones, and gave them a room together.

Louis and Jones then sallied forth with umbrellas and found a French resturant with 'so-called French wine'[19] and real French coffee. They returned replete to their lodgings, where Jones took the bed and Louis the floor. He got little sleep with 'the itch' which kept him scratching himself all night as he sat on the floor wearing only trousers. By the time he got to a pharmacist the following day, 'my wrists were a mass of sores; so were many other parts of my body. The itching was at times overwhelming, at times, too it was succeeded by furious stinging pains, like so many cuts with a carriage whip.... I was ready to roll upon the floor in my paroxysms. The gentleman in fine linen told me, with admirable gravity, that my liver was out of order, and presented me with a blue pill, a seidlitz powder and a little bottle of some salt and colourless fluid to take night and morning on the journey. He might as well

have given me a cricket bat and a copy of Johnson's dictionary.'[20]

In a letter to Henley, Louis described his affliction as 'an unparallelled skin irritation' but the following few words have been heavily scored out. One editor of Louis's letters would claim they read 'very similar to syphilis'[21]. Next day the rain was still crashing down as he set out on various errands in New York prior to boarding the train that evening. At the post office there was worrying news of Fanny, 'inflammation of the brain; from anxiety and wretchedness says the doctor'[22]. Louis posted off The Story Of A Lie to Colvin – '31pp in ten days at sea is not bad'[23] – saying he would accept £50 from the New Quarterly. In the uncharted territory ahead, money would be critical.

Yet he then went on to a bookseller and purchased six fat volumes of Bancroft's History of the United States, perhaps a justifiable expense to help pad out his literary journalism. His investment in a copy of his own Travels With A Donkey - 'By Stevenson,'[24] the bookseller observed - was less justifiable unless he planned to give it to Fanny. Or perhaps he wished to show it to the American publishers on whom he called - they all showed him the door, in sharp contrast to the way they would treat the author of Jekyll and Hyde eight years later.

At 5pm, Louis arrived at the Ferry Depot of the railroad, carrying a valise, a knapsack and a railway rug, into the bag of which were stuffed the six volumes of Bancroft. The depot was packed for the train west, with a backlog of passengers from four emigrant ships, 'a babel of bewildered men, women and children... the whole system, if system there was, had utterly broken down under the strain of so many passengers'[25]. Clutching his ticket, Louis followed a porter downhill from West Street to the river. In the packed crowd there was 'no fairway through the mingled mass of brute and living obstruction' into which the porters charged 'like maddened sheep dogs'[26]. There was a real danger of being crushed to death and he would recall how 'with my own hand... I saved the life of a child as it sat upon its mother's knee... It will give some idea of the state of mind to which we were reduced if I tell you that neither the porter nor the mother of the child paid the least attention to my act'[27].

They were herded onto a river boat for Jersey City, where the landing 'was done

in a stampede... People pushed and elbowed and ran... One child, who had lost her parents, screamed steadily and with increasing shrillness as though verging towards a fit'. Yet at the railroad station they found all the cars locked and Louis sat on his valise for an hour on the draughty, gaslit platform. He bought six oranges, of which two were good. Flinging the other four under the cars, he was astonished to see 'grown people and children groping on the track after my leavings'. At last Louis could climb aboard where, with true Edinburgh *sang froid*, he took out a clothes brush 'and brushed my trousers as hard as I could until I had dried them and warmed my blood into the bargain'. At last, the whistle blew, the train lurched forward and Louis was 'away across the continent tonight'. The lights of Philadelphia had slipped past the window before he lost consciousness.[28]

Next morning he awoke to find the train stopped in the middle of green, open, undulating country not unlike England or France. With an artist's eye he pinpointed the difference, that 'the sun rises with a different splendour in America and Europe. There is more clear gold and scarlet in our old country mornings; more purple, brown and smoky orange, in those of the new'[29]. The train was waiting for another to pass, which it duly did, its bell ringing loudly. By Pittsburgh that evening, Louis had not eaten for 30 hours.

At the station dining room he had his first encounter with a black American who 'did me the honour to wait upon me after a fashion, while I was eating; and with every word, look and gesture marched me further into the country of surprise'. With nothing to go on beyond the writings of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Louis had 'come prepared to pity the poor negro, to put him at his ease, to prove in a thousand condescensions that I was no sharer in the prejudice of race'. Yet he found the waiter a self-assured man of the world, 'and armed with manners so patronisingly superior that I am at a loss to name their parallel in England...'[30]

Reboarding the train just after midnight, Louis managed to sleep but woke next morning to find the car freezing cold and crossing the plains of Ohio. He diverted himself by chatting with the child of a Dutch widow to let her sleep. Inside he felt devoid of emotion, a travelling shell of the person he once was. Keeping one eye on the child, he wrote to Colvin: 'I had no idea how easy it was to commit suicide. There

seems nothing left of me; I died a while ago; I do not know who it is that is travelling...

*Of where or how, I nothing know;*
*And why I do not care;*
*Enough if, even so,*
*My travelling eyes, my travelling mind, can go*
*By flood and field and hill, by wood and meadow fair,*
*Beside the Susquehannah and along the Delaware.'*[31]

The Dutch widow awoke. While happy to accept Louis as her protector, she seemed to hold him in contempt as she talked incessantly of her late husband and a subsequent handsome admirer whose reluctance to marry her was the cause of her now going west. Louis, who bought fruit and candy for her children and had slept on the floor to give her more room on the seat, was fascinated by a woman so pragmatic and honest that on parting she could only say: 'I'm sure we all *ought* to be very much obliged to you.'[32]

Perhaps it was his unfortunate habit of scratching himself that caused her to look askance. Whatever his affliction, it was taking its toll by the time they reached Chicago where Louis, after a meal of ham and eggs, lay flat out and semi-conscious on some steps 'like a dying hermit in a picture'. When the train came in, he slid down to the platform like a man in a dream: 'It was a long train, lighted from end to end; and car after car, as I came up with it, was not only full but overflowing. My valise, my knapsack, my rug, with those six ponderous tomes of Bancroft, weighed me double; I was hot, feverish, painfully athirst; and there was a great darkness over me, an internal darkness, not to be dispelled by gas. When at last I found an empty bench [on the train], I sank into it like a bundle of rags; the world seemed to swim away into the distance; and my consciousness dwindled within me to a mere pin's head, like a taper on a foggy night'[33].

By next morning, Thursday, August 21, he had rallied enough to eat a breakfast of porridge, hot cakes and coffee at Burlington upon the Mississippi. The long day was relieved only by the sight of the conductor getting rid of a drunk man, 'in three motions, as exact as a piece of drill', by twitching him out of his seat, marching him

down the car and hurling him out onto the track from the slowly moving train. Angrily getting to his feet, the man shook his bundle of possessions menacingly in the air with one hand 'while the other stole behind him to the region of the kidneys. It was the first indication that I had come among revolvers, and I observed it with some emotion'. The conductor, coolly standing hand-on-hip on the steps, stared the man out and the gun never came into play. As the car erupted with peals of laughter, Louis realised: 'They were speaking English all around me; but I knew I was in a foreign land.'[34]

A little before nine that evening, the train pulled in to the Pacific Transfer station at Council Bluffs, Iowa. Here all passengers going west would have to change to the Union Pacific train which did not leave until next day. Louis, still unwell, could not face a night in the 'kind of caravanserai set apart for the emigrants' and checked in at the Union Pacific Hotel. For the next nine nights, he would be on emigrant trains, made up of third-class cars with few mod-cons, hitched on to freight wagons and travelling at a snail's pace - all other trains had precedence and there was no telling how long the journey would take. It took a good part of Friday to put the train together and load it up into segregated cars - for women and children, for men travelling alone, and for the Chinese. Inside there was barely room to sit, although passengers were encouraged to team up and buy boards and cushions to lay between benches as a makeshift bed. Louis's air of unrespectability was such that an elderly man refused him as a partner.

Eventually he was paired off with a Pennsylvania Dutchman who had been in the navy and had no problem with an emaciated Scotsman with burning eyes who kept clawing at himself to allay the itch. The Dutchman and a young man with asthma even went into partnership with Louis to buy a tin washing dish, a towel and a brick of soap with which they took turns to carry out precarious ablutions on the outside platform of the car. Likewise they clubbed together to buy coffee, sugar and the necessary vessels to make a brew on the stove with which each car was equipped.

Yet Louis would have little appetite. He was now running a temperature, burning up and with the weight dropping off him. In a car full of emigrants, many facing a harsh and precarious future, there was little room for pity and some laughed at the

comically scratching Scotsman. Yet the newsboy, normally so casually callous as he hawked his wares along the train, took pity on the sick man and slipped into his hand a large, juicy pear to slake his burning lips. Ill health was catching up fast on the once-carefree Bohemian, and there seemed more to it than scabies and exhaustion. The torments that would rack his body during the year ahead might have respectable origins, but could equally well be the work of an old enemy lurking within. Syphilis worked insidiously, enlarging the heart, weakening blood vessels and attacking the central nervous system. Skin rashes and ulcers, hair loss and temporary blindness might also be attributed to the disease. A German contemporary of Louis, the playwright Oskar Panizza, would catalogue the afflictions to which a syphilitic might look forward.

*After two or three years his liver and his other organs will be like lead weights in his body; he will think of light foods. Then one of his eyes will begin to smart. Three months later it will close. After five or six years his body will begin to tremble and burn like a firework; he will still be able to walk, and will look anxiously to see if his feet are still attached to his body. A little later he will prefer to stay in bed because the warmth will do him good... He will become pious, very pious, ever more pious...*[35]

While exaggerating for black comic effect, Panizza had detailed personal knowledge of the disease, having contracted it as a medical student in the early 1870s. Louis's description of his own collection of symptoms as they emerged during his emigrant journey was more restrained: 'My body, however, is all to whistles; I don't eat, my blood has broken out into a kind of blister, blain, blight and itch business, which is far more distressing than you might fancy...'[36] Yet even this was too much information for Mrs Grundy. In Colvin's edited version of this letter, the 'blister, blain, blight and itch business' would be blue-pencilled.

Day after day, the train went on at snail's pace across America, stopping to offload freight or let trainloads of more affluent passengers past. At times the fetid closeness of the car became unbearable and Louis would haul his tormented carcass up onto the roof: 'Desolate flat prairie upon all hands. Here and there a herd of cattle, a yellow butterfly or two; then a wooden church alone in miles of waste; then a windmill to pump water. When we stop, which we do often, for emigrants and

freight travel together, the kine first, the men after, the whole plain is heard singing with cicadae.'[37] Soon after the train left Laramie, he began to feel really ill:

*That was a night which I shall not readily forget. The lamps did not go out; each made a faint shining in its own neighbourhood; and the shadows were confounded together in the long hollow box of the car. The sleepers lay in uneasy attitudes; here two chums alongside, flat upon their backs like dead folk; there is a man sprawling on the floor, with his face upon his arm; there another half seated, with his head and shoulders on the bench... it was surprising how many groaned and murmured in their sleep... Although it was chill, I was obliged to open my window; for the degradation of the air soon became intolerable to one who was awake and using the full supply of life. Outside, in a glimmering night, I saw the black, amorphous hills shoot by unweariedly in our wake. They that long for morning have never longed for it more earnestly than I.*[38]

He watched the dawn come up over a barren, treeless landscape with long, sterile canyons in which the whistle of the locomotive howled like the wind in the dark streets of Edinburgh had done while a small boy in Heriot Row lay terrified, praying for the morning and a return to normality. Unable to bear it, Louis drew a small bottle of laudanum from his knapsack and took a swig. A warm wave of comfort and security suffused his troubled body, as if he were a drowsy child being laid down gently by his nurse. As Cummy wrapped the warm blankets around him he could feel no pain, just a delicious sense of drifting and slipping away...

Ogden, Utah, and time to change trains. After more than 90 hours the Union Pacific car stank like a travelling menagerie. But the Central Pacific car to which they now transferred for the final four-day leg to San Francisco was clean, newly varnished and far more spacious. Yet Louis was unable to sleep and spent another night walking to and fro. By day he chatted idly with his fellow passengers or drowsed away on laudanum...

'O! I hope he's not going to die,' cried a woman's voice. Her concern was not for Louis but a man from Kansas who had suffered an epileptic fit: 'It would be terrible to have a dead body!'[39]

The ghostly figures beside the tracks were not the dead but the dispossessed. It was only three years since Custer's defeat at the Little Bighorn, but the Indians Louis

saw were neither warlike nor victorious. In another 11 years the massacre at Wounded Knee would snuff out the last fear of any Indian resistance.

*I saw no wild or independent Indian; indeed, I hear that such avoid the neighbourhood of the train; but now and again at way-stations, a husband and wife and a few children, disgracefully dressed out with the sweepings of civilisation, came forth and stared upon the emigrants. The silent stoicism of their conduct, and the pathetic degradation of their appearance, would have touched any thinking creature, but my fellow passengers danced and jested round them with a truly Cockney baseness. I was ashamed for the thing we call civilisation...*[40]

The train was now passing through California, forging across alkali desert and sage-brush country and stopping for supper at Elko. There Louis noted ragged tramps or hoboes, 'land stowaways', slipping out from under the cars where they had been riding. His own Bohemian appearance was such that he was accosted on the platform by the manager of the local theatre who was short of musicians for the orchestra. On learning Louis was no such thing, the man had to hand over five dollars to a companion: 'You see, sir,' added the latter to me, 'he bet you were a musician; I bet you weren't. No offence, I hope?'[41]

With this piece of jink to cheer him, Louis's spirits rallied. He now had the sense that every beat of the engine, every rattle of the car, was bringing him nearer to Fanny. On the night of August 29, a fellow passenger with whisky on his breath shook him awake and insisted he come outside to see the new country they were now passing through, a land of pine forests, rocks and waterfalls, barely discernible in the dark but curiously reminiscent of Scotland: 'The air struck chill, but tasted good and vigorous in the nostrils – a fine, dry, old mountain atmosphere. I was dead sleepy, but I returned to roost with a greatful mountain feeling in my heart.'

By daylight the scenery seemed still more familiar: 'It was like meeting one's wife. I had come home again – home from unsightly deserts, to the green and habitable corners of the earth.'[42] A day's journey took them to Sacramento, and before dawn the following day the train terminated at last upon the Oakland side of San Francisco Bay. Louis gathered up his valise, knapsack and travel rug with its bookish burden and made his way to the ferry terminal.

*The day was breaking as we crossed the ferry; the fog was rising over the citied hills of San Francisco; the bay was perfect – not a ripple, scarce a stain, upon its blue expanse; everything was waiting, breathless, for the sun. A spot of cloudy gold lit first upon the head of Tamalpais, and then widened downward on its shapely shoulder; the air seemed to awaken, and began to sparkle; and suddenly 'The tall hills Titan discovered', and the city of San Francisco, and the bay of gold and corn, were lit from end to end with summer daylight.*[43]



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[1] William Sharp, Literary Geography, The Country of Stevenson.
[2] RLS to Sidney Colvin, Greenock, August 6, 1879. Yale 639, MS Yale.
[3] RLS to Bob Stevenson, Greenock, August 6, 1879. Yale 641, MS Yale.
[4] WE Henley to Charles Baxter, Shepherd's Bush, London, August 16, 1879. Yale 642, MS Yale.
[5] RLS to Charles Baxter, Greenock, August 6, 1879. Yale 640, MS Yale.
[6] RLS to WE Henley, New York, August 18, 1879. Yale 644, MS Yale.
[7] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, The Second Cabin.
[8] Ibid.
[9] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, Early Impressions.
[10] Ibid.
[11] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, Steerage Scenes.
[12] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, The Sick Man.
[13] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, Steerage Scenes.
[14] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, Steerage Types.
[15] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, The Stowaways.
[16] Ibid.
[17] RLS to Sidney Colvin, New York, August 18, 1879. Yale 643, MS Yale.
[18] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant, New York.
[19] Ibid.
[20] RLS, The Amateur Emigrant.
[21] RLS to WE Henley, New York, August 18, 1879. Yale 644, MS Yale.
[22] Ibid.
[23] RLS to Sidney Colvin, SS Devonia, August 17, 1879. Yale 643, MS Yale.
[24] RLS to Sidney Colvin, New York, August 18, 1879. Yale 643, MS Yale.
[25] RLS, Across The Plains, Monday.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] RLS, Across The Plains, Tuesday.
[30] Ibid
[31] RLS to Sidney Colvin, On the Train, August 20, 1879. Yale 645, MS Yale.
[32] RLS, Across The Plains, Wednesday.
[33] Ibid.
[34] RLS, Across The Plains, Thursday.
[35] Oskar Panizza, The Council of Love, A Celestial Tragedy.
[36] RLS to WE Henley, Crossing Nebraska, August 23, 1879. Yale 647, Text Silverado Museum.
[37] Ibid.

[38] RLS, Across The Plains, The Desert Of Wyoming.
[39] RLS, Across The Plains, Fellow Passengers.
[40] RLS, Across The Plains, Despised Races.
[41] RLS, Across The Plains, To The Golden Gates.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.