

Memories and Portraits

Memories and Portraits by Robert Louis Stevenson is a reflective collection of essays that blend personal reminiscences with insightful observations on life, art, and human nature.

CHAPTER I. THE FOREIGNER AT HOME

In "The Foreigner at Home," the author reflects on the nuanced divisions of races and nations, emphasizing the peculiar experience of feeling foreign within the United Kingdom—a land of diverse dialects, landscapes, and heritages. This diversity, manifest in the stark contrasts between the bustling industriousness of England and the rugged, Gaelic-speaking regions of Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, underscores the complexity of national identity. Despite English dominance and the widespread reach of the English language globally, significant pockets of the UK maintain their distinct languages and traditions, illustrating that one need not cross seas to encounter foreignness.

The author critiques the quintessential English attitude of disinterest and superiority towards other cultures, including within the UK, where despite close geographic proximity, vast cultural misunderstandings and prejudices exist. This insularity is contrasted with the integration seen in French and Dutch colonies, where a mutual transfusion of cultures and prejudices occurs. The ignorance about domestic foreigners—Scots, in particular—is highlighted through personal anecdotes, showcasing the profound cultural and legal differences that separate Scotland and England beyond mere geography.

Furthermore, the narrative delves into the distinctive upbringing, education, and sensibilities of Scots versus English, shaped by their respective landscapes, histories, and societal structures. Through observations of architecture, societal interactions, education, and childhood experiences, the author draws a vivid contrast between the Scottish and English identities. He reflects on the unique Scottish consciousness molded by the nation's rugged terrain, tumultuous history, and Calvinist religious tradition, which instills in Scots a perspective that finds a peculiar kinship with the Highlander, despite historic enmities, and a distinct sense of otherness from their English neighbors.

Ultimately, "The Foreigner at Home" is an exploration of the intricate layers of national identity within Britain, emphasizing the nuanced estrangement felt by Scots in England—a feeling of being an outsider within one's own country, shaped by deep-seated historical, cultural, and linguistic divides.

CHAPTER II. SOME COLLEGE MEMORIES (2)

In the second chapter of "Memories and Portraits," the narrator reflects on his time at the University of Edinburgh with a mix of nostalgia and critique, noting the changes and continuities between his generation and the current one. He mentions how time swiftly changes the landscape of college life, highlighting his own experience of feeling aged when seeing his name listed among many successors in a university club's record, symbolizing the rapid passing of generations within the academic environment.

The narrator expresses a melancholic sentiment for the university's perceived decline since his departure, suggesting that the institution's glory days coincided with his tenure and perhaps that of his father before him. He observes that while certain elements remain good, overall, the university has deteriorated, though in his view, it began to do so subtly and gradually.

Central to his reflection is the memory of a specific, unnamed student, whose journey from a struggling, disheartened youth to someone who eventually finds his way, embodies the personal growth and transformation possible within the university setting. This character's development is used to illuminate the broader theme of youth's fleeting troubles and their eventual resolution with time.

Additionally, the chapter pays homage to several professors, contrasting them with their predecessors and marking the passage of time through their personalities and teachings. Figures like Tait, Lindsay, and Kelland are fondly remembered for their contributions to the narrator's education, both formal and through the life lessons they imparted unintentionally. The narrator also touches on his own shortcomings and the path not taken – particularly, his lack of engagement with Greek studies under Professor Blackie due to his deliberate truancy, which he somewhat humorously rationalizes as a form of learning in itself.

The closing passages are more introspective, questioning the price of rigorous academic pursuit against the backdrop of personal health and well-being. The narrative warns against the dangers of excessive study, illustrated through the anecdote of a fellow student driven to a state of terror upon realizing his own vulnerability after an intense period of preparation for exams.

Through these reflections, the chapter stitches together a tapestry of college memories that explore the complexities of student life, the enduring impact of mentorship, and the inevitable changes that come with the passage of time.

CHAPTER V. AN OLD SCOTCH GARDENER

In a reminiscent homage to a bygone era, the chapter explores the life and character of Robert, an emblematic figure of the old Scottish gardener, a breed fast becoming extinct in the face of modernity. Described with a blend of reverence and affection, Robert personifies the union of man and nature, echoing the idyllic harmony once found in Scotland's rural gardens. His figure, reminiscent of Don Quixote but seasoned with the austere ethos of the Covenanters, manifests an antiquated dignity that seems misplaced in the contemporary landscape of gardening.

Robert emerges not just as a gardener but as a custodian of time-honored practices and beliefs, his life and labor inseparable from the garden he tends. This garden, nestled in the undulating embrace of nature, represents more than a mere setting; it becomes a testament to Robert's enduring aesthetic and values. The narrator acknowledges the challenge of capturing Robert's essence, fearing that any attempt would pale beside the vivid reality of his presence.

His introduction to gardening was not as a mere profession but as a calling, with a history of serving in grand estates now contrasted starkly against the modesty of his current station. This descent from grace, however, does not diminish his stature; rather, it amplifies the dignity with which he attends to his current domain, however humble it may be. Robert's interaction with his surroundings, the plants, and his employers reflect a complex interplay of respect, nostalgia, and a steadfast adherence to his principles.

Despite his fondness for gardening, Robert holds a discernible bias for the pragmatic over the ornamental. His preference for vegetables over flowers, save for a cherished affinity for foxgloves—a nostalgia-laden exception—underscores a utility-driven philosophy. This appreciation for utility extends to his bees, whose harmony and productivity captivate his imagination, symbolizing perhaps a simpler, more coherent world view.

Robert's life philosophy is deeply intertwined with his spiritual convictions, drawing heavily from the reservoirs of Biblical wisdom and Covenanter legacy. His narrative is imbued with scriptural references, and his interactions are guided by an ethos of peace, humility, and an overarching sense of duty and service. Unlike the gardeners of yore, who might have leaned heavily on sectarian doctrines, Robert's faith manifests

in deeds and gentle admonitions, devoid of dogmatic preachiness or condemnation of others.

The chapter not only pays tribute to a fading archetype but also weaves a narrative of continuity and change, reflecting on the constancy of certain values amidst the inexorable march of time. In Robert, the old Scottish gardener, we find the embodiment of a heritage that, while seemingly at odds with the present, continues to offer insights into a life lived with integrity, respect for nature, and unwavering fidelity to one's beliefs.

VII -Memories and Portraits

In "Memories and Portraits," the narrative delves deeply into the nature of happiness, self-awareness, and the value of friendships. The text begins by reflecting on the concept of self-forgetfulness as the essence of happiness, contrasting it with the metaphorical image of Prometheus still chained to the Caucasus, symbolizing the struggle of the individual with their own limitations and pains. The passage suggests a journey toward recognizing one's own fallibility and the deep, humbling process of learning from one's mistakes and misjudgments.

This acknowledgment of personal fallibility leads to an appreciation of friendships that protect and uplift. Friends are seen as vital intermediaries who not only shelter us from our own self-contempt but also integrate us into the fabric of collective existence, making our individual vices and virtues seem smaller in comparison. The loss of a friend is portrayed as a significant diminution of one's own life, akin to a wing of a palace falling away, highlighting the profound impact of such relationships on our identity and sense of belonging.

The narrative transitions to recounting the story of a vibrant and gifted young man, admired and loved for his potential, beauty, and grace, who ultimately succumbs to vanity and self-destructive choices, leading to his downfall. Despite his initial promise, his journey is marred by missteps and a lack of foresight, culminating in his return, broken and diminished, to a life of solitude and regret. However, in his decline and solitude, he discovers a depth of character previously unseen, manifesting resilience, a newfound understanding, and a gentler, more reflective disposition even as he faces his demise.

Through his struggle and transformation, those who remained loyal to him see not a story of failure but one of redemption and quiet success, emphasizing the complexity of human life and the potential for personal growth despite adversity. The chapter underscores the importance of friendship, the inevitability of human imperfection, and the possibility of finding dignity and wisdom in the face of adversity.

VIII -Memories and Portraits

In the chapter "Old Mortality" from "Memories and Portraits," the narrator reflects on his youthful experiences in a graveyard that sits juxtaposed between a prison and a quiet hotel, overshadowed by the bustling sounds of nearby rail traffic. This somber setting serves as a backdrop for his introspections on life, death, and the fleeting nature of human existence as he wanders among the graves, contemplating the lives of those remembered only by simple epitaphs. This graveyard becomes a place where the narrator confronts his own emotions, from unhappiness to fleeting moments of connection and flirtation with a housemaid from the hotel, signifying the transient nature of human experiences and emotions.

The chapter delves deeply into the narrator's ruminations on the anonymity of death, juxtaposed with moments of youthful exuberance and sorrow. He fixates on the ordinary and forgotten graves, contrasting them with the vivid memorial of a once-famous figure dressed in scarlet, highlighting the inevitability of oblivion despite one's achievements or fame. This observation leads the narrator to question the value of traditional commemorations and the concept of leaving a lasting legacy.

Through personal anecdotes and philosophical observations, the narrator critiques the superficiality of youth, its self-centeredness, and its struggle to recognize the value of life and the commonality of human experiences. He notes the naive rejection of mortality and the ambition that drives the young to scorn the limitations of their existence, even as they fail to engage fully with life. The graveyard, thus, symbolizes a place of reflection on the depth of life and the universal journey towards death.

The chapter also critiques the inadequacies of traditional sermons and literature in addressing the complexities of life, suggesting that more vivid and relatable narratives could better inspire the youth to embrace the immediacy and importance of their lives. It implies a journey from self-absorption towards a more observant and empathetic engagement with the world, as illustrated by the narrator's eventual observation of and reflection on the actions and feelings of others within the graveyard, signaling a tentative step towards understanding and connecting with the broader human experience.

"Old Mortality" is not just a chapter on youthful melancholy and philosophical musings in a graveyard; it's a contemplation on the ways in which we seek to find meaning and legacy in the brief, impermanent span of life, and a critique of the means by which society and tradition fail to adequately address these existential concerns. It's a narrative that weaves personal anecdote with philosophical insight to explore the universal themes of life, death, and the search for understanding and connection.

HAPTER XIV. A GOSSIP ON A NOVEL OF DUMAS'S

In "A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas's," the author explores the enduring appeal and personal significance of re-reading favorite books, likening them to cherished friendships revisited for various reasons. Among his most revisited works are novels by Scott, Shakespeare, Moliere, Montaigne, "The Egoist," and "The Vicomte de Bragelonne" by Alexandre Dumas. He candidly shares his estrangement from once familiar authors like Wordsworth and Burns, and his fluctuating relationship with the works of Virgil and Herrick.

The narrative delves into the author's deep attachment to "The Vicomte de Bragelonne," acknowledging a surprising devotion to a less celebrated sequel in Dumas's oeuvre. Initial encounters with the character d'Artagnan sparked a long-lasting fascination, propelled by the charm of the musketeers' adventures. Despite acknowledging the improbable and sometimes fantastical elements of Dumas's stories, the writer defends their human nature and moral foundation. Dumas's portrayal of characters, especially d'Artagnan, is lauded for combining virtue with realism, making them not only convincing but also deeply lovable.

The essay suggests that Dumas, through his vibrant storytelling and complex characters, particularly d'Artagnan, offers insights into life's ethical dilemmas and personal integrity. Dumas's preference for active virtues over passive ones, as exemplified in his characters' lives, reveals a morality of magnanimity and resilience. The affection for "The Vicomte de Bragelonne" lies not just in its thrilling narrative but also in its deeper reflections on friendship, honor, and the end of life. The author's engagement with Dumas's world highlights the transformative power of literature to enchant, teach, and provide companionship through its characters and their moral journeys.

VI -Memories and Portraits

In "A College Magazine," the writer shares a candid reflection on his boyhood to youth, marked by an incessant drive to master the craft of writing despite being labeled an idler. He describes a life immersed in words, carrying two books at all times—one for reading and one for writing. His days were filled with the quest to precisely capture the scenes around him through descriptive writing and poetry, not for any external purpose but as a self-imposed challenge to hone his skills in writing.

The narrative delves into the various methods he employed to cultivate his writing abilities. He recounts engaging in the practice of writing down conversations and dialogues from memory, an exercise that, while beneficial, only touched on the technical aspects of writing such as rhythm and word choice. More impactful, however, were his private endeavors to emulate the styles of authors he admired. By attempting to replicate the prose of literary figures such as Hazlitt, Lamb, Wordsworth, and many others, he embarked on a rigorous self-education in writing. Although he acknowledges the futility of these efforts in terms of immediate success, he credits them with providing him with a deeper understanding of language's rhythm, construction, and the coordination of parts.

His relentless pursuit of mastery led him to experiment across various genres and styles, from epic poetry to tragedy and prose, constantly switching allegiances among different literary influences in an attempt to capture their essence. Through these varied experiments—whether it was imitating the elegance of Sir Thomas Browne or the lyricism of Keats—he encapsulates his growth as a writer. Each attempt, irrespective of its success, was a step toward achieving his ultimate goal of literary proficiency.

The author's journey underscores a deep passion for writing and a commitment to self-improvement that transcended the mere desire for authorship. It was a quest for the art itself, driven by an internal wage to excel in writing. This chapter not only offers insight into the foundational years of a writer's development but also serves as an homage to the power of perseverance and the relentless pursuit of one's passions.

V -Memories and Portraits

The chapter narrates the author's experiences and reflections on failure, learning, and the pursuit of success in literary endeavors. Initially, he expresses a strong inclination towards learning from his failures, acknowledging the shortcomings in his work with a discerning eye. Despite enjoying the process of creation, he rarely shares his work with friends, choosing instead those who would offer candid feedback, emphasizing the value of honest critique in his development as a writer.

The author's journey is influenced significantly by his interaction with the Speculative Society, a prestigious group with a rich history of notable members, located within the University of Edinburgh. This society provides a communal space that promotes intellectual engagement and creativity, albeit with a lingering tension between its privileges and the University's regulations.

A pivotal moment arrives when the author engages with a former university acquaintance, presented as a genteel yet elusive figure, who had ventured into the challenging realm of periodical publication. This individual, embodying both the aspirations and the vulnerabilities of creative ambition, eventually faces a tragic downfall, underscoring the harsh realities and ephemeral nature of success in literary pursuits.

The narrative reveals a contemplative perspective on the allure and perils of ambition, as the author and his companions embark on founding a University magazine. Fueled by a mix of youthful optimism and sober self-awareness, this endeavor symbolizes both a reach for recognition and an intimate confrontation with the potential for failure.

The chapter is imbued with introspection, focusing on the personal and collective journeys of the author and his peers as they navigate the complex landscape of intellectual and creative aspiration. Through reflections on failure, ambition, and the fleeting nature of success, the author captures the essence of a transient yet impactful phase of life, marked by the pursuit of literary expression and the inevitable encounters with personal limitations and the impermanence of achievements.

I -Memories and Portraits

In the chapter "A Humble Remonstrance," the author contemplates the intriguing perspectives of Mr. Walter Besant and Mr. Henry James on the art of fiction, despite their distinct differences as writers—James being meticulous and Besant more genially whimsical. Their agreement on discussing the "art of fiction" as a distinct entity from the "art of poetry" prompts a reflection on the true nature of fiction and its broader application across various art forms, suggesting that fiction permeates all arts, including prose, poetry, and even sculpture and painting, serving as a universal story-telling element rather than a standalone category.

The discussion then shifts to question the limitations imposed by defining fiction solely as a modern English phenomenon, bound by its material form (notably, the three-volume novel format). By questioning the necessity of qualifying fiction as "in prose" and "fictitious," the author illuminates how these boundaries overlook the essence of narrative art. He argues that fiction transcends medium and factual accuracy, exemplified by works ranging from "The Odyssey" to "Pilgrim's Progress," which, despite their varied forms, all engage in the art of narrative.

The heart of the chapter delves into the essence and methodology of narrative art, proposing that it doesn't strive to replicate life's chaos but instead offers a refined, emblematic abstraction. The comparison to geometry's abstract notions versus tangible nature emphasizes that art, including narrative fiction, simplifies and stylizes reality to convey deeper truths, eschewing life's complexity for a more profound, albeit less direct, engagement with human experience.

The exploration further categorizes novels into three principal types: adventure, character, and dramatic. Each category is distinguished by its primary focus—be it the thrill of exploration, the depth of individual traits, or the intensity of emotions driving human conflicts. The author underscores the varied techniques and objectives inherent to each type, arguing that the true craft of fiction lies not in its fidelity to life's minutiae but in its capacity to distill and elevate universal themes through the lens of these differing focuses.

Moreover, the chapter critiques the conventional expectations from each novel type, advocating for a flexibility that allows stories to resonate on their inherent terms rather than conforming to rigid constructs. By challenging these norms, the narrative advocates for a broader, more inclusive understanding of fiction that celebrates its diversity and its unifying core—the transformational power of storytelling.

Ultimately, "A Humble Remonstrance" champions the richness of fiction as an art form that transcends simplistic classifications, urging readers and writers alike to appreciate the multifaceted ways narratives reflect and reshape the human condition.

CHAPTER XIII. A PENNY PLAIN AND TWOPENCE COLOURED

In "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured," the chapter delves into a nostalgic reminiscence of childhood through the lens of Skelt's Juvenile Drama, a series of theatrical prints that captured the imagination of the young narrator. The Skelt dramas, which passed through various hands—Park's, Webb's, Redington's, and finally Pollock's—have mostly vanished, becoming treasures as unattainable as Raphaels, except for a few collectors and perhaps in museums.

The narrator recounts the joy of owning and engaging with these dramas, such as "Aladdin," "The Red Rover," and "The Blind Boy," among others. Each play, represented by vivid and dramatic characters and scenes, kindled the imagination, offering gateways into stirring narratives and adventures. The thrill of acquiring these plays, particularly on visits to a stationer's shop in Leith Walk, is described with palpable excitement. The shop, with its display of a working theater and stacks of plays, was a magnet for boys, drawing them with the promise of adventure and spectacle.

The process of selecting a play, under the watchful eyes of shopkeepers who were wary of time-wasters, is humorously and affectionately portrayed. The excitement of bringing home a new drama, the anticipation of painting the characters 'twopence coloured,' and the somewhat disappointing realization that the actual stories often couldn't live up to the imaginative scenarios conjured by the illustrations and character plates, are vividly recounted.

The chapter explores the concept of "Skeltery," describing it as a quality inherent not just in these dramas but in the adventure and romance that enrich a child's world. It captures a bygone era when these paper theaters could spark endless creativity and bring to life the most exotic and thrilling narratives, showing how these experiences left a lasting impact on the narrator's perception of the world, infusing everyday life with a sense of drama and romance reminiscent of Skelt's plays.

The nostalgic journey through childhood memories emphasizes the profound influence of Skelt's dramas on the narrator, illustrating how these simple pleasures shaped his imagination, his appreciation of stories, and his understanding of the world. The chapter concludes by reflecting on how the enchanting world of Skelt, with its heroes, villains, and grand adventures, continues to echo in the narrator's life, demonstrating the enduring power of childhood imagination and its ability to transform the mundane into the magical.

CHAPTER VII. THE MANSE

"Memories and Portraits" Chapter VII, "The Manse," dives into the nostalgia and rich history of a Scottish manse and its surroundings, intricately woven with the author's reflections on heritage and identity. The narrative starts with a vivid recollection of the Water of Leith, a river that held the author's fascination in his youth, and a particular spot by a water door that represents a portal to cherished memories. This setting serves as a backdrop to the old manse, a dwelling that, through the author's child-size perspective, appeared grand and bustling with life. The manse, enveloped in a garden divided into provinces by a great hedge of beech and dominated by sounds of nature and milling, was a hub for a large family whose descendants scattered across the globe, enriching the familial tapestry with experiences from afar.

The chapter delves into the life and character of the author's ancestor, a minister who resided at the manse, portraying him as a figure of simplicity, dedication, and influence, albeit distant and strict. Through anecdotes, including a touching interaction where the author, as a child, recites a psalm to his grandfather, the narrative reveals the complexities of relationships and the grandeur in the simplicity of daily living and family expectations.

Further reflections ponder the author's inheritance from his ancestor, drawing parallels and contrasts not only in physical traits and interests but also in immaterial legacies such as a love for Shakespeare, lifestyle choices, and even future ailments. The narrative then expands into a broader contemplation on ancestral connections, musing on the interwoven lives of various family members across generations and how these connections form the tapestry of one's identity. It touches on the notion that personality traits, interests, and even our physical journey through life are deeply influenced by those who came before us.

Towards the end, the chapter evolves into a poetic musing on the essence of inheritance and identity, suggesting that our present selves are an amalgam of countless lives and experiences from our lineage. It hints at the idea that our current experiences, locations, and even our very beings are but brief moments in a much larger narrative of our family's history, implicitly questioning the nature of self and the influence of the past on our current identity and choices, thus weaving a rich tapelet of personal and collective history interlaced with reflections on nature, legacy, and the continuity of life across generations.

IV -Memories and Portraits

In "Memories and Portraits," the narrator recounts his vivid memories of Earraid, an islet located near the Ross of Mull, framed by the Sound of Iona and the open sea. He first encountered Earraid through the perspective of a cabin port, where he observed its serene landscape and a simple, stone house surrounded by the life of its inhabitants. This initial encounter was part of a visit aimed at establishing a base for the construction of a lighthouse on a remote rock, Dhu-Heartach, to aid seafarers navigating the perilous Atlantic.

Years later, the narrator revisits Earraid, now transformed into a bustling construction site with cottages, engineering facilities, and a thriving community of workers involved in the lighthouse project. The islet serves as a quarry and living quarters for the men who are to build the lighthouse on Dhu-Heartach. On Sundays, the island's atmosphere transitions into one of serene stillness, with the workers resting and participating in Sabbath services, bringing a sense of humanity and a pause in their toils.

The narrator also describes journeys to Dhu-Heartach, an inhospitable rock amidst the roaring sea, where the lighthouse stands as a testament to human determination against the forces of nature. These expeditions highlight the contrast between the tranquil life on Earraid and the daunting, dangerous work at sea.

Despite the industrial activity, the narrator finds solace in the untouched parts of Earraid, which connect him with its ancient, unchanged essence, much like the monks and Norsemen who encountered it centuries before. He reflects on the timeless beauty of the isle, its flora, fauna, and the endless dance of the waves against its shores, finding a deep affinity with the natural world that remains undisturbed by human endeavor.

Throughout his narrative, the narrator contemplates the larger context of his experiences—the ongoing war in France, the imminent challenges of adulthood and the competitive struggle of human existence. His recollections of Earraid become a bittersweet *mélange* of personal growth, the inevitability of change, and a profound connection to a place that represents both the constancy of nature and the transitory nature of human life. Amid these reflections, friendships forged on the island serve as a conduit for youthful ponderings on the future, making Earraid a crucible for the narrator's early understanding of his place in the world.

CHAPTER XII. THE CHARACTER OF DOGS

The character of dogs is intricately tied to humans, reflecting not just a close association but a profound influence shaping their behavior, morals, and social structures. Dogs have willingly accepted a subordinate role, mirroring human civilization to an extent while retaining their distinctive instincts and characteristics. Their position as man's companions has led to a variety of interpretations about their nature—some view them as mere automatons driven by instinct, while others see in them a capacity for deeper emotions and social complexities.

Dogs' inability to communicate through speech significantly shapes their interaction with the world and their human partners. This lack of speech hinders their intellectual development in certain ways but also spares them from human follies like superstition. The text explores the intricate behaviors of dogs, highlighting their capacity for deceit, their responsiveness to human emotions and norms, and their profound sense of loyalty and duty. Despite their more primal instincts, dogs develop elaborate social etiquettes and a keen sense of their place in human society, often driven by a desire for acceptance and praise.

The book delves into distinctions between dogs, emphasizing the variability in their conduct, which can be as diverse and complex as that of humans. Some dogs display an extraordinary sensitivity to moral and social codes, showing loyalty, gratitude, and a sense of duty that rivals human complexity. These animals navigate their relationships with humans and other dogs through a sophisticated understanding of social hierarchies and expectations, often sacrificing their natural instincts to uphold these bonds.

Moreover, the text reflects on the moral compass of dogs, depicting scenarios where they grapple with choices that demonstrate a clear understanding of right and wrong, loyalty, and gratitude. Through anecdotes of dogs choosing between conflicting loyalties or demonstrating guilt over misdeeds, the narrative portrays them as beings of considerable emotional depth and ethical consideration, capable of a level of reasoning and feeling that challenges simplistic notions of animal instinct.

Ultimately, the chapter posits that dogs, through their close association with humans and despite their lack of speech, exhibit a complex social and moral life. They adapt to human society not just by instinct but through a nuanced understanding of their social environment, striving to maintain their status and relationships within it. The portrayal of dogs challenges readers to reconsider the depth of animal emotions and intelligence, suggesting that our companions are guided by a blend of instinctual behaviors and learned responses deeply influenced by their human associations.

CHAPTER IX. THOMAS STEVENSON - CIVIL ENGINEER

Thomas Stevenson, remembered more in professional circles than in public fame, made significant contributions to lighthouse engineering which impact mariners worldwide. Despite his limited presence in London and his preference for his Edinburgh surroundings, his innovations in lighthouse technology earned him recognition globally, even in places as remote as Peru, often being mistakenly associated more with literary achievements like those of his son, rather than his own technical advancements.

Born in Edinburgh in 1818, into a lineage deeply entrenched in the field of lighthouse engineering, Thomas worked alongside his brothers and successors to erect numerous lighthouses and conduct various engineering projects with a focus that spanned the globe. His work was vital in the advancement of lighthouse optics, revolutionizing the safety of sea navigation through his inventions, which, despite their extensive use, he never patented, prioritizing public benefit over personal gain.

His scientific curiosity was as broad as his professional endeavors, delving into waves, meteorology, and particularly optics, contributing significantly to our understanding and application in these areas. Yet, his lack of formal mathematical training didn't deter him; he leaned on collaborations and a keen natural understanding to realize his inventive concepts.

Beyond his professional legacy, Thomas Stevenson is memorialized as a complex individual of profound intellectual and emotional depth. His interests spanned from theology to natural science, and his conservative viewpoints were heavily influenced by a deeply rooted chivalry. His generosity extended beyond his immediate professional contributions to impactful charitable works and unwavering support for the Church of Scotland.

His melancholic disposition and introspective nature often conflicted with his personal sense of purpose, yet his dedication to his work and his contributions to natural science provided a respite. Stevenson's life, marked by intellectual brilliance and emotional complexity, left a lasting impact not only through his advancements in engineering but also in the imprints he left on the hearts of those who knew him intimately, remembering him as much for his distinctive personality as for his professional achievements.

CHAPTER XV. A GOSSIP ON ROMANCE

To him, as to the child, the romance which he contemplated sufficed for its own delight; words were but an instrument to call it up; if the words were true enough to bring him face to face with what he knew and saw, he cared not if they were inept, nor did he pause to seek the happiest phraseology. And hence it is that, while there are pages in his novels compared with which much of Homer and Shakespeare is spiritless and cold;

while the scene at the spring in GUY MANNERING, and the nocturnal advent of Meg Merrilies upon the scene, are, for my own taste, worth all CLARISSA from end to end; yet the true buttonholing quality of the great artist is not there. The inspired passages are but patches - precious and memorable, indeed, beyond the price of rubies, but still patches - upon a texture of insufficient literary art. Defoe and Richardson, aiming lower, have built whole books in a fit key of language; but on Defoe's highest level of excitement, and throughout the length of Clarissa's dying meditations, it is plain their method would have been impossible. That method, indeed, like Scott's own, consisted in getting closer and closer to the facts; even had the subject fitted, words so studied and so just, as theirs were, must have bottled up the volatile essence and fixed the scene in one form for ever. Whereas, the romantic scene must change with every mood of mind; and to read Defoe or Richardson is to read for ever the same ingots of thought, but to study Scott - as you might study Shakespeare - is to confront Proteus in the middle of his transformations.

The sum of a thousand interests and sought-after incidents, "A Gossip on Romance" by Stevenson explores the essence of romantic literature, its appeal, and its necessity within the spectrum of literary arts. Stevenson posits that the true enjoyment of reading unfolds when the experience is so immersive and vivid that it intercepts our ability to engage with reality, instigating a dance of kaleidoscopic images in our minds. He recalls the simple, yet potent pleasures of childhood reading adventures, where the content was less consequential than the thrill of imagining.

Stevenson delineates between the realms of eloquence, character, and thought against the brute excitement of the incident. His preference leans toward encounters that are rich with drama and suspense—qualities that, to him, epitomize the essence of engaging narrative. Further, he argues for the intrinsic human penchant for stories that evoke a desire for adventure or romance, revealing how early literary pleasures shape our subsequent narrative preferences.

Stevenson further broadens his analysis by distinguishing between active and passive pleasures derived from literature, emphasizing that the most enduring tales are those that resonate on a personal level, allowing readers to transpose themselves into the narrative. This immersion is the highest achievement of the romantic story, where the authenticity of the experience, rather than analytical or moral scrutiny, becomes paramount.

In the nuances of narrative and incident, Stevenson explores how certain tales and characters become deeply engraved in collective memory, far surpassing stories that, while intellectually or morally superior, lack the elemental spark of adventure or relatability. He exemplifies this through tales like "Robinson Crusoe," with its memorable incidents that infinitely enchant the imagination, in stark contrast to character-driven narratives that might not captivate in the same manner.

Ultimately, Stevenson champions the significance of romantic literature not for its instructional value but for its power to captivate and transport. He argues that the essence of romance lies not just in grandiose adventures or dramatic occurrences but in the ability to transform the mundane into something thrilling and memorable. Through engaging storytelling, a narrative can invoke a profound sense of wonder, adventure, and connection, thus fulfilling the innate human craving for stories that resonate with personal aspirations and dreams.

III -Memories and Portraits

In "Talk and Talkers (6)" from "Memories and Portraits," the author differentiates among various styles and content of conversation, particularly highlighting the joys and insights gained from conversing with older individuals. The text navigates through the preference for lively debate over comfortable, luminous talk, suggesting that the energetic exchange, the clash of differing opinions, is not only a test of dexterity and honesty but also a means to self-awareness and mutual respect. This is contrasted with the gentle, restorative nature of quiet, reflective discussion, especially as shared with elders, who offer both wisdom and

perspective wrought from a lifetime of experiences.

Elders are portrayed in dual roles: as anecdotic sharers of life's lessons and as wise, silent observers. The discussion elaborates on how the aged, through either vibrant storytelling or reflective silence, contribute significantly to the personal growth of younger individuals. Their experiences serve not just as tales but as teachings on life's transient struggles, offering solace and courage to face one's own battles. Particularly, the narrative venerates the company and counsel of aged persons for their unique ability to blend the harsh truths of life with a gentle delivery, making their guidance palatable and valued.

The author also discusses the differing natures of conversation based on gender dynamics, expressing a nuanced view on how men and women engage in discourse. Women, as depicted, bring a particular skill to conversation, managing it with grace and wit yet often circling around contentious issues rather than confronting them directly. This difference not only highlights the societal constructs around gender behaviors but also delves into how these dynamics affect the depth and outcomes of discussions. The chapter concludes with reflections on the artificiality of certain social interactions, particularly in the drawing-room, where conversations are often navigated away from conflict or too deep an intellectual challenge, mirroring broader societal constraints and expectations.

Overall, "Talk and Talkers (6)" is a contemplation on the art of conversation, celebrating its forms and functions while also acknowledging its limitations, shaped by social constructs, personal preferences, and the inherent nature of human interaction. The text emphasizes the value of engaging with the wisdom of the elderly and ruminates on the complexities of gendered communication, all within the scope of understanding the human condition through dialogue.

CHAPTER X. TALK AND TALKERS

Sir, we had a good talk. - JOHNSON. As we must account for every idle word, so we must for every idle silence. - FRANKLIN.

The art of conversation is celebrated as a noble ambition, with the potential to influence public opinion, correct errors, and shape literature. Good talk necessitates a balance between giving and taking, while written words remain static, incapable of evolving with the speaker's thoughts. Talk is unencumbered by the restrictions of literature, allowing for a freer exchange of ideas and a more vivid engagement with life's complexity. It is within conversation that we truly learn about our era and ourselves, making articulate discussion a central duty of humanity. Engaging in conversation, according to the text, is one of the most accessible and enriching experiences, capable of complementing education, deepening friendships, and providing enjoyment regardless of age or health.

The text also explores the dynamics of conversation, arguing that it often thrives on a competitive spirit, albeit a friendly one. Through talk, individuals engage in a mutual exploration of each other's personalities and ideas, with each participant seeking to assert themselves while being open to the viewpoints of others. This exchange is likened to a contest, where through the process of engagement, participants can experience personal growth and deeper understanding.

Moreover, the text identifies the essential components for stimulating conversation, including humor, the sharing of experiences, and the spontaneous generation of ideas. It emphasizes the importance of adaptability and creativity in discussion, suggesting that the best conversations arise from a willingness to explore various topics with enthusiasm and an open mind.

The chapter discusses different conversational styles and individual characteristics that make certain people particularly engaging talkers. It celebrates the diverse methods of expression, from eloquent speech to thoughtful deliberation, and highlights the joy found in the exploration of ideas among friends. In doing so, it

presents conversation as a lively, intellectually fulfilling activity that mirrors the richness of human experience and the varied landscapes of individual minds.

In conclusion, the text places conversation at the heart of human connection and intellectual exchange, presenting it as both an art and a critical means of navigating the complexities of life and relationships. Through vivid portraits of ideal talkers and the dynamics of dialogue, it champions talk as a medium for learning, bonding, and the joyful exchange of ideas.

II -Memories and Portraits

In "Memories and Portraits," the writer delves into the essence and methodology of novel writing, emphasizing that novels are not mere transcripts of life but rather focused simplifications of certain aspects of life. This simplification, as argued, is what constitutes a novel's merit—highlighting that complexity in character and plot, often admired in works by great authors, is underpinned by a foundational simplicity that contributes to their excellence.

The discussion transitions to the contemporary literary scene, highlighting Mr. W. D. Howells, a novelist noted for his narrow convictions and an insular focus on his and his contemporaries' works. Howells is portrayed as a purist of his literary school, enthralled by the progression in art comparable to advancements in science and dismissive of past literary forms. Despite his adherence to the day's orthodoxies, which the writer deems no less trivial than those of any other era, Howells' work is recognized for its inherent romantic quality and distinctions—even when it diverges from his own principles—and is appreciated for the very unorthodoxy he consciously shuns.

The essay critiques Howells' excessive pursuit of the 'centrally human' at the expense of individual uniqueness, arguing for the value of the exceptional, personal, and the irregular in enriching literary works. It suggests that in striving to capture what is normative or typical, there runs the risk of producing works that are devoid of life and relevance—essentially, risking the vital essence of romance and individuality in literature.

The text implies a call for balance between the individualistic and the universal, the exceptional and the normal, cautioning against the reduction of literature to societal norms and advocating for the embrace of personal insight and romantic ideals as legitimate subjects of literary exploration. Such a balance, it suggests, is essential for the true romance of man to flourish in literature, beyond the confines of societal expectations and literary norms.