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A STEVENSON LETTER HITHERTO
UNPUBLISHED

WHEN Robert Louis Stevenson was preparing to sail from London on August 21, 1887, leaving England for the last time, Edmund Gosse and others were on hand to see him off. Henry James brought a case of champagne for Stevenson to use on the voyage. For reading matter, Gosse long remembered that "the only book he [Stevenson] seemed to wish to carry away with him was Mr. Hardy's beautiful romance, *The Woodlanders*, which we had to scour London that Sunday afternoon to get hold of. In the evening . . . I . . . returned with the three volumes . . . wrapped up for the voyage next day."

On arrival in the United States, Stevenson went shortly to Saranac Lake in the Adirondacks. From there he wrote twelve articles, which appeared, one each month throughout 1888, in *Scribner's Magazine*. The fourth in the series was *Pulvis et Umbra*, of which Stevenson later declared: "I wrote it with great feeling and conviction: to me it seemed bracing and healthful. It is in such a world (so seen by me) that I am very glad to fight out my battle, and see some fine sunsets, and hear some excellent jests between whiles round the camp fire." This is the "Darwinian Sermon" to which Alice Brown refers in the study quoted later in this issue (see page 147).

Shortly after the appearance of this article, Stevenson wrote a letter to the editor of another New York magazine—a splendid letter which has not until now been published. The original holograph is now in the Colby College Library, and it was one of the high-lights in the anniversary exhibition in December. The mourning border of the paper on which the letter was written served as a reminder that R.L.S.'s father, Thomas Stevenson, a well-known lighthouse engineer, had died only the year before. The letter was written to Richard Watson Gilder, author of "The Sonnet" and for many years editor of the *Century*

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Magazine. The letter is undated, but Gilder marked it "Received April 3, '88." It contains a splendid tribute to Henry James:—

My dear Gilder,

I return herewith the sermon which I read long ago with interest: it is the best I have seen, and contains some good criticism. Please consider that my life is spent in offences and apologies; that my manner of attending to business is strange in the extreme; and the details of my system of neglecting it will (if the enquiry be thorough) occupy the greater part of the Day of Judgment. My friends are very lenient; you must try to imitate them; I should be pained indeed if you could not find it in your heart to forgive me my offence.

I am taking advantage of a day when I am ill and unable to work, to write a note or two, with my mind not particularly clear I confess, but my heart (I hope) in the right place. Is it true the James is to appear soon; I look for it with great pleasure. Have you, by any chance, seen his paper on Maupassant in a recent *Fortnightly*? If you have not, look it up, for it is exquisite. James's manner in these critical papers is my despair. I cannot conceive anything more essentially happy; and I do not like to think of my own big, red, Scotch Knuckles, after I have seen him toss his lace and flash his diamonds.

I shall look to see [you] before very long, for I am coming down like the possum. I shall go to the same hotel; pray keep it dark, I wish to meet *no one* but those I have met already; I shall hope to see you enter with forgiveness in your looks.

Yours very truly

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

"The James" which was "to appear soon" was Henry James's article, "Robert Louis Stevenson," which appeared in *The Century Magazine*, April 1888. The essay on "Guy de Maupassant" appeared in *The Fortnightly Review* for

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March 1888. Both these “critical papers,” as Stevenson called them, were collected by James in *Partial Portraits* (1888), the charm and urbanity of which are exquisitely suggested by Stevenson’s reference to seeing James “toss his lace and flash his diamonds.” The Colby Library can well be proud of owning the letter which glows with this tribute.



STEVENSON’S “CELESTIAL IDIOTS”

FIVE years after Stevenson’s death, his friend Sidney Colvin issued two volumes of his *Letters to his Family and Friends*. In the introduction Colvin remarked:

“In choosing from among [Stevenson’s letters] I have used the best discretion that I could. Stevenson’s feelings and relations throughout life were in almost all directions so warm and kindly that next to nothing had to be suppressed from fear of giving pain . . . Generally speaking, I have used the editorial privilege of omission without scruple where I thought it desirable.”

By a curious chain of circumstances, the Stevenson exhibition in the Colby College Library brought to light one of Sidney Colvin’s omissions. No matter what justification may have existed in 1899 for the suppression of an entire paragraph of a highly important letter, there is now, fifty years after Stevenson’s death, no longer any reason for the suppression. The letter was written by Stevenson to James M. Barrie on November 1, 1892. Barrie died on June 19, 1937, and when his library was sold in London, the letter from Stevenson came into the possession of William T. H. Howe, of Cincinnati, Ohio. Mr. Howe (now also deceased) supplied a typescript of the letter for the Hardy collection in the Colby library—since there were several allusions to Hardy in the letter. Eight years passed, before his typescript was set beside the printed version (*Letters*,