

STORIES of New Jersey

As a child Robert Louis, as he was known, was so often ill that a formal education was impossible, but having a natural curiosity he learned from his family and the world about him. At his father's suggestion he studied in turn engineering and law, but he had no taste for either profession.

He had always desired to be a writer and had trained himself by constant reading and by jotting ideas into a notebook. When some of his essays were published and attracted attention, his father agreed to support the young man until he established himself as an author.

In 1875 Stevenson went to France. It was at Grez in the following year that he met Mrs. Osbourne who was later to become his devoted wife, critic and nurse.

In 1877 Stevenson's first story was published, A Lodging for the Night. Among his later popular books was Travels with a Donkey, a description of a walking trip through French mountains with no companion but Modestine, the engaging but contrary donkey which carried his camping equipment.

In 1879 Stevenson went to California where for a time he was ill and also suffered real privation. Here he continued his writing, and read several books by the American novelist, Herman Melville. These tales of the South Seas undoubtedly influenced his final choice of a home. When Thomas Stevenson learned of his son's financial need, he promised him £250 a year. This income enabled Stevenson to marry Mrs. Osbourne. She already had a daughter and a son who were both devoted to their stepfather and later assisted him in his work.

While on a visit with his wife to his parents in Scotland, in 1881, Stevenson started work on Treasure Island, a pirate tale which was first called The Sea Cook after Long John Silver, the most picturesque character in the book. It was written to please Lloyd Osbourne, then a boy, who asked his stepfather to write "something interesting." Stevenson started by drawing a chart of the island, and wove a story around it. The book took to growing by a chapter a day. It appeared in Young Folks as a serial, but strangely enough it was not well received. Two years later when Stevenson's reputation had grown, Treasure Island appeared in book form and achieved immediate popularity. Elderly men, dignified magistrates and statesmen--among them Prime Minister Gladstone--read the book avidly and became boys again. Serious-minded reviewers were vociferous with praise. Andrew Lang, the author, said "This is the kind of stuff a fellow wants. I don't know, except Tom Sawyer and the Odyssey, that I have ever liked any romance so well." The book is a crystallization of the pirate dreams of adults by day and of children by night; of fascinating wickedness and ageless romance; of men like Long John Silver, the most convincing rascalion of them all.



The Saint Gaudens Medallion