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COMPANION

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Stevenson at the height of his fame

A ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON COMPANION

A guide to the novels, essays
and short stories

J. R. HAMMOND

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Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,
Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist:
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,
And something of the Shorter Catechist.
W. E. HENLEY, 'RLS'

With all my romance, I am a realist and
a prosaist, and a most fanatical lover of
plain physical sensations plainly and
expressly rendered.
R. L. STEVENSON
(1 May 1892)

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Frontispiece

Robert Louis Stevenson, *circa* 1893

- 1 Stevenson with his mother
- 2 Stevenson with his father
- 3 17 Heriot Row, Edinburgh
- 4 Stevenson as a young man
- 5 Fanny Vandegrift Osbourne
- 6 The cottage where *Treasure Island* was written
- 7 Vailima
- 8 Stevenson dictating at Vailima

For the provision of illustrations, and permission to reproduce them, grateful acknowledgements are made to: the Mansell Collection (frontispiece); Lady Stair's House Museum, Edinburgh (plates 1–8).

Preface

Stevenson, in common with H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett, is today paying the price for having been so immensely popular during and immediately following his lifetime. For many years he has been regarded as the author of a number of stirring adventure stories for boys, of a handful of pleasing essays and one or two travel books written in a vein of antique charm. So well known have been these aspects of his work, and so constantly in demand, that his more solid achievement as a novelist and short story writer has tended to be overlooked.

There are signs, however, that a dispassionate critical reassessment of his work is under way and it is hoped that this *Companion* will contribute towards that process. In recent years a number of new biographies have appeared – notably James Pope Hennessy's *Robert Louis Stevenson* and Jenni Calder's *RLS: A Life Study* – which have demonstrated for the first time the full extent of his creative achievement and the odds against which he fought throughout his life. The American scholar Roger G. Swearingen has in preparation a full-scale critical biography, the first attempt to write a definitive *Life* since that of Graham Balfour in 1901. A complete edition of Stevenson's letters is also in preparation, edited by Bradford Booth.

The present *Companion* aims to be a guide to the whole range of his prose – novels, romances, essays and short stories – and to enable the reader to follow his writings with a keener appreciation. It is my hope that it will be a 'companion' in the fullest sense, a book to have at one's elbow and on the reference shelf, a source of information, ideas and stimulus. Though Stevenson was only

forty-four when he died he wrote an immense amount, far more than is generally realised; a guide to his work has been long overdue.

I am indebted in particular to two reference works. First, *The Prose Writings of Robert Louis Stevenson: A Guide*, by Roger G. Swearingen – an excellent bibliography of Stevenson's writings. Second, *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, edited by Paul Maixner – a compendium of critical responses to the novels and essays, fully and helpfully annotated. Full details of these and other scholarly works will be found in the Select Bibliography.

For the texts of Stevenson's works I have consulted the best extant critical editions, though in some cases a variorum edition is not available. For the letters I have relied on the edition prepared by Sidney Colvin, particularly the revised and enlarged arrangement published in four volumes. I have also consulted a wide selection of critical, biographical and bibliographical works and reread the whole of Stevenson's fiction in the order in which it was written: I commend the latter experience to all who would seek a closer understanding of his art.

I wish to express my thanks to the National Library of Scotland, the City of Edinburgh District Council and Lady Stair's House Museum, Edinburgh, for their helpfulness and courtesy at all times. My appreciation is due to Mrs Carol Staves for typing the manuscript with such care, to Mrs Julia Steward for her encouragement and guidance on behalf of the publishers, and to my wife for her constant interest.

J. R. HAMMOND