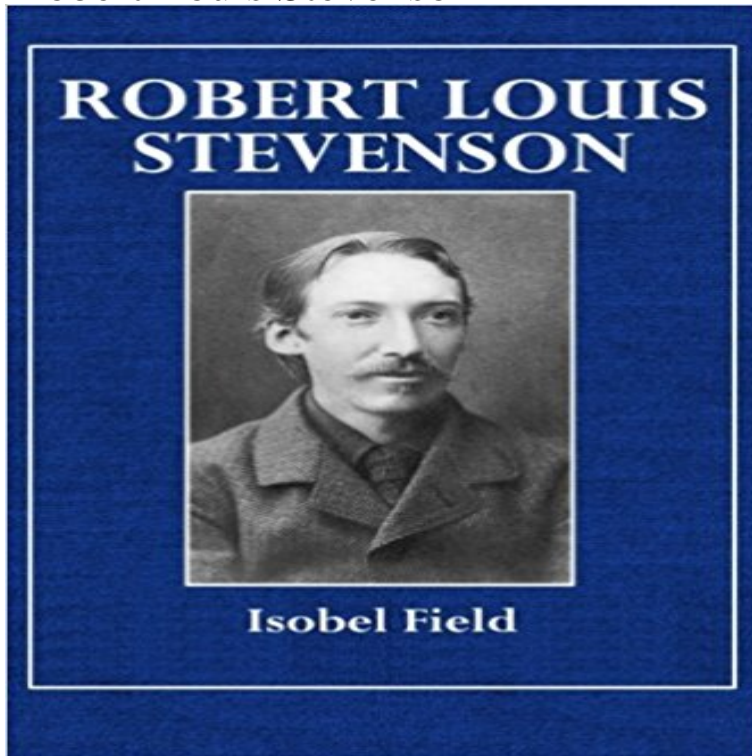


Robert Louis Stevenson



An excerpt from the beginning of the first chapter - The Child. BEFORE R. L. S. was known to the world as a writer, the name of Stevenson called to mind the lighthouses that guard the coast of Scotland and open in the dusk their flowers of fire. Twenty sentinels they stand, built upon rocks in the midst of angry seas, solidly defying the storms of the North while bearing mute testimony to the daring skill of their builders. It was from these brave men that Robert Louis Stevenson inherited his name and his courage. He wrote in *Underwoods*: Say not of me that weakly I declined The labours of my sires and fled the sea, The towers we founded and the lamps we lit, To play at home with paper like a child. But rather say: In the afternoon of time A strenuous family dusted from its hands The sand of granite, and beholding far Along the sounding coast its pyramids And tall memorials catch the dying sun, Smiled well content, and to this childish task Around the fire addressed its evening hours. He played with paper to such good effect that now the name of Stevenson spells romance, courage against all odds, and the bright gospel of hope. He was born in Edinburgh on the 13th of November, 1850, and christened Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson. The spelling, but not the pronunciation, of his second name was changed later and the Balfour dropped. The climate of his native land was a cruel one for a delicate child or perhaps the climate made the child delicate. At any rate, the story of his early life would be sad reading were it not for the radiance of his spirit that glowed through the dull clouds of ill-health like a burning lamp. When he was five years old he was asked by his mother what he had been doing, and the answer is the key-note of his character: I have been playing all day, he said, or at least I have been making myself cheerful. His eager eyes looked brightly through the mist of pain and found charm and interest in

everything about him. Through his rose-coloured glasses the next-door garden was a foreign land; he heard galloping hoofs in the wind at night, and his sick-bed, touched by the magic of his fancy, changed to The Pleasant Land of Counterpane. Once, he wrote, as I lay playing hunter, hid in a thick laurel, and with a toy gun upon my arm, I worked myself so hotly into the spirit of the play that I think I can still see the herd of antelope come sweeping down the lawn and round the deodar it was almost a vision.

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