R.L. STEVENSON: ATTITUDES TO RELIGION IN HIS LIFE AND WORKS.

John H. Lawson.

Thesis for the degree of M.Litt.

The University of Glasgow.

1973.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 – 1346

CONTENTS

Page

Preface and Acknowledgements i

PART I.

Religion in Stevenson's Life: Correspondence 1

PART II

The Semi-Autobiographical Work: Travel Books, Essays and Poems 82

PART III

Plays, Fables and Fiction 152

Conclusion 221

Appendix 1: The Critics and Religion in Stevenson's Works 1900-70 227

Appendix 2: Some Religious Allusions in the Sitwell Letters 232

Appendix 3: Comparative Attitudes to Religion in Stevenson and Tolstoy 235

Bibliography 237

Preface

It might seem to many who have read only R.L. Stevenson's most popular work that religion played but a minor part in such books as "Treasure Island", "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde", "Kidnapped" and "The Master of Ballantrae". Each of these four works seems to point to an author singularly uninterested, for his time, in spiritual matters generally and religion in particular. Of the four works mentioned, only of "Jekyll and Hyde" could the reader say, after a cursory analysis, that there was some emphasis on morality in the theme, and even then it is difficult at a first reading to detect any preoccupation with a specifically religious subject.

If the person in question has read somewhat deeper in Stevenson, for instance in the poems published in his lifetime, in "Memories and Portraits" and in the two selections of "Arabian Nights", along with, perhaps, "St. Ives", he may retain this opinion, only slightly dented by such poems as "The House Beautiful" and "The Celestial Surgeon". He would be quite correct in saying that these and similar poems show a certain religious faith but, isolated as they are, no great and abiding interest in their subject.

We might then turn to biographies of Stevenson written fairly recently and find no opposition to this point of view: in Furnas's "Voyage to Windward" we find little reference to religion after the usual presentation of Stevenson's 'Covenanting' childhood and where we do find it, in reference to "Lay Morals" and "Vailima Prayers", Stevenson's attitude is

claimed to be either 'a passing phase' or not fully-committed (in other words, containing something of hypocrisy). We find, furthermore, in such works as Hellman's "True Stevenson", statements which seem to assert that R.L.S. was always at least an agnostic if not an atheist. In general too modern critical works - they have been few and far between - assert, as Edwin M. Eigner does in "R.L. Stevenson and Romantic Tradition", that Stevenson was agnostic or a 'freethinker' in his later years. Despite the lack of evidence they bring forward, such apparent unanimity of opinion would seem to prove conclusively that there seems little point in undertaking research in this field at all; Stevenson in the first place seems uninterested in religion as a subject for the novel and in the second place (if we are to take their presumptions as true) seems to have been an agnostic, the two facts being no doubt interrelated.

This thesis will attempt to prove however that both Furnas and Eigner are wrong in this matter and in fact crucially wrong: that Stevenson's period of agnosticism lasted only for three or four years around 1873 and that he both believed in God and was a Christian (if an unorthodox one) for most of his life; and that religion while not of crucial importance for an appreciation of all Stevenson's major work was a theme which continued to feature in his writing and became crucial in several short stories, much of his poetry and non-fiction writings, and at least two novels - "Weir of Hermiston" and "The Ebb-Tide".

The thesis will be a study in both biography and criticism, attempting to throw light on Stevenson's religious attitudes and the effect of these on his writing. It will be in three sections the first of which will be purely biographical, making use of the published letters and unpublished material from The Beinecke Library at Yale University and the National Library of Scotland. In this part of the thesis the technique will be that of biography rather than criticism and an attempt will be made to clarify points overlooked or misinterpreted in Stevensonian biography up to now. The second section will concentrate on the semi-autobiographical work of Stevenson, the essays, non-fiction work and poems, relating these to biographical details. Stevenson's essays are more personal than those of most Victorian essayists - so much so that a reading of them is almost a groundwork for the study of his life. Even in less subjective essays such as "The English Admirals" and "Some Portraits by Raeburn" (to take examples from a single collection) elements of biography come to the fore. To a lesser extent this is also true of his travel work and non-fiction generally, although some works (for example "A Footnote to History") by their very nature preclude subjectivity in their treatment. The third section, that on the fiction, plays and fables, is of course the most objective in that the persona may not measure up to a full or even sketched picture of the author. The facts about religious attitudes evinced from the biographical and non-fiction sides of the question, however, will be of aid in evaluating the treatment of religion in the fiction and plays. In this way it

is hoped that a genuine contribution to the study of Stevenson biography and criticism will have been made, and the starting-point, perhaps,for a more detailed and exhaustive survey of the attitudes and influences in question,to be taken in hand when all extant Stevenson letters have been published.

A few words as to certain things in the text. When referring to the Beinecke Library letters I shall use the form: Beinecke (Mackay) no. x - 'Mackay' refers to the catalogue of the library, compiled by George L. Mackay. The number given is from this catalogue, which was published in 6 volumes between 1950 and 1964. Throughout I shall use the abbreviation "Tusitala" for the "Tusitala Edition" of the Works (35 Vols.). NLS is the National Library of Scotland, and the "Sitwell Letters" are the 102 letters from Stevenson to Mrs. Sitwell which are in that library - they were presented by Sidney Colvin in the 1920s. 'Vailima' is the home that Stevenson built for himself in Samoa and where he lived the last four years of his life. R.L.S. and R.A.M.S. are stock abbreviations for Stevenson and his cousin Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson; 'Fanny' refers to Stevenson's wife, Frances Vandegrift Stevenson.

Here I can make my acknowledgements. Firstly to the Department of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow for crucial assistance in terms of both finance and advice. To my advisor, Kenneth J. Buthlay, for unceasing help and advice. To Miss Marjorie Wynne of the Beinecke Library at Yale University (MS Room) for courteous help in collating and sending important material. To Miss Yeo and many others

of the MS room at the National Library of Scotland. To Prof. William Barclay of the Department of Divinity and Biblical Criticism for his help on two points of doctrinal difficulty. To Mr. Huisdean Duff (Dept. of Scottish History) for his help on many points of detail, especially in Scottish church history. To Miss Edith Ross and Mr. Stewart Porter for help in annotation and German respectively. To Mrs. J.C. Connelly without whose experience and professionalism this would have been in longhand and illegible. To my mother for help and advice under sometimes trying circumstances. To A.B. Lawson and J.M. McAllister for advice which was sometimes good and conversation which was often stimulating. In terms of the spirit I thank J. Sibelius, H.D. Thoreau, L. Wainwright III and, scarcely to be omitted,

R. L. Stevenson.

I. RELIGION IN STEVENSON'S LIFE: CORRESPONDENCE

There is at least one part of the life of R.L.Stevenson in which thorough research has been made as regards religious attitudes. This is the period of his childhood - a 'Covenanting childhood' as he calls it - a time when, all biographers agree, he was immersed in the varying streams and strands of Scots religion,from the stern orthodoxy of his father through the rather milk-and-water piety of his mother to the fervent Covenanting fundamentalism of his nurse, Alison Cunningham. Even those biographers who never mention religion as it affects RLS after they have dealt with his childhood feel obliged to give some notice in the earliest chapters of their books to the question. The reasons for this are pretty obvious - whereas religion is not an omnipresent factor in Stevenson's life after 1865, in his first fifteen years at least it was perhaps the most individual and noticeable influence on his mind. The examples of this are too many to go into; they can be found quite readily in all the biographies of Stevenson, in such works as "Memoirs of Himself" and his mother's "Baby Book", and in the Tusitala Letters.

The interesting thing about Stevenson biography, however, is the sudden disappearance of the subject of religion after these descriptions of his childhood; even a biographer such as Grahame Balfour[1], who acknowledges

1. Sir Grahame Balfour (1858-1929) was Stevenson's first and, some would say, his best biographer. His two-volume biography: "The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson" (London; Methuen & Co.) was published in 1901. The 'official' biography was to have been written by Sidney Colvin, but Mrs. Stevenson intervened, as Colvin was taking an unconscionable time to even start the project. Balfour in later life became an administrator in education, being Director of Education for Staffs. from 1903 to 1926. His "The Educational Systems of Great Britain and Northern Ireland" (1898) is one of the standard works in the field.

the writer's strong religious feelings, fails to analyse these in any real detail either in terms of biography or as they affect his work. Apart from Balfour and Kelman's "The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson",[2] there are no works on Stevenson's life which give religion a place of any major importance in his maturity; indeed Furnas, Stevenson's most recent and perhaps most readable biographer mentions religion only where he is attempting to deny its importance for the author's work. It is for the man's maturity that the major research on religion in this field must be done, then, and, of course, it is this period of his life which is of most importance for the works themselves.

Perhaps the salient feature of Stevenson's early maturity was the fierce argument he had with his father in the early 1870s. The general consensus of opinion on this is that it proved the turning point of his search for a vocation in life, that it clarified Stevenson's feelings in such a way that writing appeared to be the only work he could do without loss of self-respect, and indeed the only work he felt capable of doing. The period just preceding the quarrel, however, is of a similar importance for any study of RLS's biography in that the quarrel itself could have been only the culmination of a more gradual estrangement between father and son affecting the whole spectrum of their relationship, rather than solely in terms of the

2. Rev. John Kelman: "The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson" (Edinburgh and London; Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier; 1903). Kelman (1860?-1929) was in the Free Church and was one of the best preachers of his day. He had charges in Aberdeen (1891-97) Edinburgh (1897-1919), New York (1919-1924), and London (1924-25). Among his other works were "The Foundations of Faith" (1922) and one of the best books on the "Pilgrim's Progress": "The Road" (1911).

religious differences. The change of tempo and content in Stevenson's ethical and intellectual education brought about by his entrance to the University of Edinburgh in 1867 is something which has scarcely been looked at so far in studies of his life, despite the evidence of this set out in "Memoirs of Himself"[3] and "Selections from his Notebook".[4] It is of importance for this study however in that it will help us to understand the undercurrents of the quarrel itself.

Stevenson's letters of the pre-1873 period (at least those which have come down to us) can be divided into two groups - those to his parents, which tend to be slight, conversational and sometimes trivial in content; and those to his close friends of the period, notably his cousin, Robert Alan Mowbray Stevenson (RAMS),[5] and Charles Baxter,[6] whom he met at University, probably in 1868, and was to become his solicitor and legal advisor: these letters give a far different picture of the youth, a picture in many ways more like that of the mature Stevenson - intellectual, self-analysing, confused, serious. A very good example of this is his letter to RAMS of

---

3. Tusitala; XXIX, pp. 147-168.
4. " " pp. 171-194.
5. R.A.M.S. (1847-1900) became famous in the rather restricted circle of art criticism for his "Art of Velasquez" (1895, 1899) and his letterpress for Pennell's "Devils of Notre Dame" (1894) - see Millar's "Literary History of Scotland" (London; 1903)pp.177-78. He was blamed by R.L.S.'s parents for leading him away from Christianity in the early 1870s, and despite themselves, the friendship of the two cousins was never so close after the accusations.
6. Baxter (1848-1919) was for nearly 25 years a W.S. (Writer to the Signet) in Edinburgh and helped Colvin arrange the Edinburgh Edition (1895-96). From about 1885 he was R.L.S.'s only business advisor. Although Stevenson was probably more intimate with Henley, his friendship with Baxter was the longest lasting of his life.

October 2 1868, in which is shown both his early interest in religion and his manifest belief in God at this stage, along with that tendency to use religious phrases and allusions which was never to desert him:

> "Now the utmost I contemplate at present is a very low[7] step-teaching in a Sunday School. I think it is allways (sic) doing something, nay allways doing a very great deal. But - Have I the right to talk ex cathedra to poor boys when my own account is not made up, when my own life is a mere tissue of appearances and flimsy barriers that the first breath of temptation may blow to the winds? Again have I a right for that to hold back my labour from the vineyard, and condemn others whom my services might help, because my own soul is not well? Again, is it not allways something? 'That which a man doeth affects himself, but that which a man sayeth shall shake the very world.' If it was a reproach when hurled from head-wagging priests and pharisees to our Saviour on the cross, might it not be even a boast to such as I: 'Himself he could not save; and yet he saved others.' I think I shall take it up; and so, may God assist me."[8]

Along with the persistent self-analysis and self-doubt expressed in this extract, we see not only an interest in religion but also an obvious belief in the Christian God and in the efficacy of religious teaching and discipline for young people. He does not seem at this stage to doubt in any manner the existence of God as he was to in two or three years, mostly because of the influence of Bob Stevenson himself. One notices also the habit of using biblical and other religious allusions is very pronounced in this instance.

---

7. 'Low' here in the sense of 'small', not 'morally debased'.
8. George S. Hellman: "The True Stevenson" (Boston; Little, Brown & Co. 1925) pp. 121-122.

The terminology is again used in the same letter when Stevenson goes on to advise Bob to utilise his obvious (presumably artistic) talents, quoting his local minister on 'indolence mistaken for indisposition' and referring to the parable of the Talents[9] as illustration. The letter is wholly situated in terms of tone and content in Stevenson's pre-rebellion days but the self-doubting sentiments were to be mirrored, on a different plane of experience, in the Sitwell[10] letters (1873-1875). The difference I have mentioned above between this and the tone of correspondence with his parents, on the other hand, anticipates the widening of the breach between them.

Very little has been published in collections of letters which serves to illustrate the effect of his university education on Stevenson's relations with his parents, especially in terms of his developing doubts

9. Matthew; 25; 14-30. Two interpretations are given by The Dictionary of the Bible" (ed. Hastings; Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark) in its editions of 1905 and 1963 respectively. In the 1903 edition the obvious one of the necessity of a Christian accepting responsibility to himself and his fellow-men is given, while in the later edition, the simple idea has been transformed into that of the corruption of the original truths of Christianity by the teachers of the day. The version to be followed in the case of the extract quoted is undoubtedly the first of these.

10. Frances Jane Fetherstonhaugh, later Mrs. Sitwell and Lady Colvin (1839-1924) had married in 1856 the Rev. Albert Sitwell. The marriage was unhappy because of Sitwell's 'unfortunate temperament and uncongenial habits' (E.V. Lucas: "The Colvins and their Friends"; London; Methuen & Co. 1928; p. 64), and the final break came in 1873. Mrs. Sitwell had met Sidney Colvin in the late 1860s and a non-carnal friendship of a most peculiar kind grew up between the two - the same type of friendship that R.L.S. was to have with her. Colvin, for various reasons, could marry the lady only in 1901. Stevenson's relations with her were not sexual, but to judge by the Sitwell letters in the National Library of Scotland, they could not have been wholly platonic. In these letters, the young Stevenson's emotions range from a leaning on the older woman as a sort of mother-figure to sentiments more usual in the passionate love-letter.

about Christianity and the uses and abuses of religion generally. Certainly there is very little in the largest and most complete collection of published letters, the letters in Vols. XXXI to XXXV of the Tusitala Edition[11], on this crucial subject. Fortunately, however, in "Selections from his Notebook" and in at least one unpublished letter, we can trace the gradual change in Stevenson's attitude. In the Beinecke Collection at Yale University there is a letter to Bob Stevenson of a Tuesday in October 1872 which shows a definite development in his views although no reduction in his confusion: if anything he is more depressed with his general situation, and is in no sense sure of his disbelief in God:

> "There are a sight of hitches not yet (unravelled) : tangled in this Christian skein. Somehow, after the last talk or two I have had, I have been half inclined to take that ready cheerful acceptance, that welcome as of an old friend, with which I had met my new views, not so much as a proof of their fitness, as for a suggestion of some possible dishonesty to myself in the means I took to find them. One does get so mixed - my ears begin to sing, when I think of all that can be said on either side: and I do feel just now that hopeless emptiness about the stomach and desire to sit down and cry, that always does and always will result from a succession of small and irritating obstacles ..... I want an object, a mission, a belief, a hope to be my wife; and, please God, have it I shall ..... Here is another terrible complaint I bring against our country. I try to learn the truth, and their grim-faced dominies, their wooden effigies and creeds

11. Ed. Sidney Colvin (London; William Heinemann; 1924).

> "dead years ago at heart, come round me, like the wooden men in "Phantastes" [12] and I may cut at them and prove them faulty and mortal, but yet they can stamp the life out of me. What a failure must not this Christian country be, when I who found it easy to be a vicious good companion, find nothing but black faces and black prospects when once I try honestly to inquire into the words this very Christ of theirs spent all his life in speaking and repeating. When I think of this, look you, I grow as bitter against ministers and elders and the like as ever Falconer or you or Buckle.[13] Why should I be sitting up here at midnight writing nearly such morbid rubbish as I wrote to you so many years ago; why, messieurs les presbyteres - why, you black coated, black-faced race? Oh God I am not the man for work like this .....[14]

The change in the writer's attitude from the situation of 1868 is quite clear in this letter - the change from pretty definite Christian to somewhat confused agnostic or 'free-thinker'; the caustic criticism of the Scottish religious establishment; a certain new lack of direction in his quest for 'a mission, a belief, a hope' - all these show his progress towards a new kind of belief in the four years he was at university (also the four years that RAMS's influence was greatest on his thinking). It is also noticeable of course that he is still unsure about his position, and that he still sees Christ as a figure to live up to and admire.

---

12. One of the most famous fantasy novels ever written. The author, George Macdonald (1824-1905) was perhaps the greatest Scottish novelist between Scott and Stevenson, taking in not only the fantasy and children's novel, but also works rich in the dialect of his native Aberdeenshire and mostly on the subject of the religious life. "Phantastes" was published in 1858.

13. Falconer and Buckle must have been Stevenson's contemporaries at the University of Edinburgh.

14. Beinecke Collection (Mackay) no. 3557. (see Preface).

Even in 1872, less than five months before the famous 'difference' with his father, he is in no sense an atheist in the true meaning of the term; indeed his agnosticism as we have seen was an unsure one.

The only further evidence of Stevenson's religious attitudes in the 1865-1873 period are contained in two letters to his mother of 1868 and in his autobiographical "Memoirs of Himself" and "Selections from his Notebook". The letters give hints only of the crise de foi that was to come - in the September letter[14] (from Wick) he is bored by religious topics in the conversation of his hosts, while in the letter of October 2 he satirically says that he can make a 'withering blast of prophecy:- you have been at church.'[15] Nevertheless, it should be noted that in the September letter he can quote a hymn on God's omnipotence as being 'the verse I am so fond of'. It is highly unlikely of course that Stevenson would at this period have shared any of his religious doubts with his parents in the way he was prepared to do with RAMS, so that only these slight niggles would appear. In his own jottings and semi-autobiographical works, however, we are given a much clearer picture of his thoughts at this time.

In "Memoirs of Himself", for example, he divulges that his reading matter in the early 1870s was primarily in Morley's

14. Tusitala; XXXI; p. 18.
15. " XXXI; p. 20.

"Fortnightly Review"[16] and similar magazines giving the positivist and agnostic side of the question:

> "I was exceedingly well read and up in the last humours and fashions of the day. My text-book, or perhaps I should rather say my organ, was the "Fortnightly Review", where I had the satisfaction of finding something like my own views (it still seems to me exceptionally well expressed) and enjoying the ripe work of John Morley and his contributors." [17]

He had already come to hate the unhealthily pious boy whom he describes so well in this work - among other references he calls himself 'sentimental, snivelling, goody, morbidly religious'. The workings of his mind on the subject in his university days can only be seen, however, in the other fragment: "Selections from his Notebook" in which are set down aphorisms and precis of his random thoughts and opinions. Those relating to religion are interesting for the tone and the manner of approach of their author as much as their content. On the subject of religion,where before he was obviously emotionally involved he is now almost completely objective. This is no doubt explained by the fact that he is writing in an unemotional milieu, intellectualising his thoughts as he goes along; this kind of writing, however, not being intended for publication, is as personal in terms of beliefs as a letter would be. In most of the extracts of

16. John Morley (1838-1923) was editor of the "Fortnightly Review" from 1867 to 1882. A good friend of Gladstone and Chamberlain, he was later to serve in more than one Liberal government and to write the official biography of Gladstone. He was the most noted agnostic of his day, although agnosticism was not for him so essential a position as it was for his fellow-contributors to the "Review", e.g. Leslie Stephen.

17. Tusitala; XXIX; p. 164.

interest he approaches religion as the sociologist or anthropologist would, looking for archtypal traits and characteristics in the religions of the various early civilisations. He can use the teaching of Christianity to contemporary youth to illustrate the failure in the mass of men to formulate workable theories from the given individual facts,[18] examine the relation between Abraham and Isaac in terms of historical sociology[19] and feel unmoved by the Darwinian controversy to take sides either way in any absolute sense.[20]

On the other hand there are certain references which show a more committed mind on religious issues - after a section on the necessity of death he says: "..... but D.S.G. His will be done."[21] his eulogy to Ian John Stevenson (a Covenanting ancestor) seems to hint at a longing within Stevenson for a more certain religious faith;[22] and his criticism of the existing Scottish Calvinist consciousness is hardly uninvolved, as these extracts show:

> "The heart of the country has become so utterly divorced from nature by the influence of this terrifying dogma, that men fear even the caresses of their own children, lest they should make idols of them. 23. In the midst of such terrible and widespread gloom, it is in vain for worthy clergymen to carry about the petty pouncet-box of gospel hope: they have raised a spirit too potent for them to lay; all the rose-water theology in the world cannot quench the great fire of horror and terror that Christianity has kindled in the hearts of the Scottish people ....24 .... here as everywhere else, Knox seems to epitomise and incarnate the after history of the Church he founded - the nation he founded." 25

---

18. Tusitala; XXIX; p. 178
19. " " p. 180
20. " " p. 184
21 " " p. 173
22. Tusitala; XXIX, p. 189
23. " " p. 191
24. " " p. 192
25. " " p. 193

These quotes show the peculiar contradictions of his attitude to religion at this time: there can be no doubt that he was interested in the subject - the very number of times he uses religious motifs and allusions in his notebook proves this. He could be emotionally involved at this time (as seldom afterwards) in the bad effects of Calvinism in Scotland and yet he could not bring himself to disbelieve in a God - or so it seems - or to relinquish his identification with and admiration for the Covenanters. He can look at Christianity in abstract and sociological terms but still believe in the rightness of Christ's message. The feature which is common to all his thinking about religion at this time is that which was the salient feature of Bunyan's faith and perhaps the whole Protestant ethos; self-doubt and a confusion as to the right thing to believe.

This then is the background to what many have seen as the most important turning point in Stevenson's life - his quarrel with and temporary estrangement from his father, Thomas Stevenson. Although all biographers have rightly taken the view that the quarrel was solely about the difference in the religious attitudes between father and son, not one of them has in any way attempted to analyse the exact differences that existed between the two at the time. Furnas in "Voyage to Windward"[26] spends all the available space in attempting to explain why it was possible in nineteenth century Scotland to have such a serious argument

26. J. T. Furnas: "Voyage to Windward" (London; Faber & Faber; 1952) pp. 71-80. There is also a great deal of moralising on Furnas's part about Thomas Stevenson and the archetypal Victorian father.

over religion; unfortunately this is the most rather than the least exhaustive survey of the quarrel so far in print. The immediate description of the affair is given in a letter of Stevenson's to Charles Baxter, dated February 2 1873 and published in "RLS".[27] The version in the book by Ferguson and Waingrow is a much fuller account of Stevenson's moods at the time than that given in the Tusitala edition: this is perhaps due more than anything else to Colvin's[28] desire to make Stevenson appear mature and self-sacrificing at a time when he was actually tetchy and rather impertinent:

> "The thunderbolt has fallen with a vengeance now. On Friday night after leaving you, in the course of conversation, my father put me one or two questions as to beliefs, which I candidly answered. I really hate all lying so much now - a new found honesty that has somehow come out of my late illness - that I could not so much as hesitate at the time. You know the aspect of a house in which somebody is still waiting burial: the quiet step, the hushed voices and rare conversation, the religious litterature that holds a temporary monopoly, the grim, wretched faces; all is here reproduced in this family circle in honour of my (What is it?) atheism or blasphemy. ..... Imagine, Charles, my father sitting in the armchair,

27. Delancey Ferguson and Marshall Waingrow (ed.): "R.L.S.: Stevenson's Letters to Charles Baxter"(New Haven: Yale University Press; 1956) pp. 58-60.

28. Sir Sidney Colvin (1845-1927) was the man Stevenson left in charge of the editing of his letters after his death. Stevenson had met Colvin in 1873, and he was to remain one of R.L.S.'s closest friends until the latter's death in 1894. Colvin was director of the Fitzwilliam Museum from 1876 to 1884, when he became Keeper of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the British Museum. He kept this post until 1912. In 1911 he had been knighted. His most famous published work was his "John Keats, His Life and Poetry" (1917); he had also published lives of Landor (1881) and Keats (1887) for the "English Men of Letters" series. In 1895 he edited Stevenson's "Vailima Letters", and further editions of the letters were published in 1899 and 1911. He helped in the editing of the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-97) and edited the "Tusitala Edition". His editing of the letters was not of the best standard - he excised not only scandalous information but also gave a wrong picture of various crucial events of Stevenson's life; he further had the habit of interpolating parts of letters on to others of a different date but dealing with the same subject.

> "gravely reading Butler's 'Analogy'[29] in order to bring the wanderer back. Don't suppose I mean that jocularly - damn you! I think it's about the most pathetic thing I ever heard of ..... My mother (dear heart) immediately asked me to join Nicholson's[30] young man's class: O what a remedy for me! I don't know whether I feel more inclined to laugh or cry over these naivetes, but I know how sick at heart they make me ..... They don't see either that my game is not the light-hearted scoffer; that I am not (as they call me) a careless infidel. I believe as much as they do, only generally in the inverse ratio: I am, I think, as honest as they can be in what I hold. I have not come hastily to my views. I reserve (as I told them) many points until I acquire fuller information, and do not think I am justly to be called "horrible atheist". [31]

These extracts prove at least that the rebellion of the previous Friday could not have been based on a conscious atheism on Stevenson's part, however it may have been interpreted by his father. The idea that the quarrel was over a misunderstanding of the extent of his son's agnosticism is supported by the letter of February 15 1878 (see p. 31) and by a letter dated May 1874 to Mrs. Sitwell (in the National Library of Scotland collection[32]) which states that it was 'just as well I did write so and they should have heard for once something like an authentic utterance of what I feel', referring to a letter (not available) in which he obviously corrected some of his parents misconceptions about his beliefs. That his father especially presumed that his

---

29. Joseph Butler (1692-1752) was a widely read divine whose "Analogy of Religion" (1736) supported the concept of a God of Revelation.

30. Maxwell Nicholson (1818-1874) was minister of St. Stephen's Edinburgh.

31. Ferguson and Waingrow; op. cit. pp. 58-59.

32. Letter no. xxviii; MS 99. By this time the estrangement had ended to the extent that Stevenson's parents are now, in his words, 'very nice to me indeed'.

son had become a definite atheist is I think shown by the letter to Baxter[33]; what Stevenson actually did say can only be guessed at. Judging from certain poems and later letters he may have spoken with great scorn of the guidance that the ministers and priests of the day were giving the lay population - their failure to follow the precepts of Christ to any real extent, letting worldly considerations confuse and interrupt what Stevenson considered to be their duty. He may also have mentioned that he accepted the theory of evolution and did not take the Bible as being totally convincing (in parts of the Old Testament, for example). He may indeed have said he doubted the existence of a God but could not have said that he knew there was not a Divine Being. It is interesting that his mother, in her letter to Sidney Colvin of May 24 1896, should feel it necessary to explain her husband's feelings-rather than her son's-as being somewhat strange:

> "You see he took very strong views on religious subjects and thought it was his sacred duty to try and bring his son to a better mind. I have always felt grateful to Professor Charteris for persuading my husband to give up the attempt; he said 'just let him alone you will see that he will come allright in due time." [34]

33. Furnas (op. cit. p. 77) describes how one of the worst altercations came about when Bob pronounced that he did not know who had taught R.L.S. that 'the Christian religion was not true' but that he certainly hadn't.

34. Beinecke (Mackay) No. 5603. Archibald Hamilton Charteris (1835-1908) had charges in Ayrshire, Galloway and Glasgow (C. of S.) before becoming Professor of Biblical Criticism at the University of Edinburgh in 1868. He held this post for exactly thirty years. He was Moderator of the General Assembly for 1892. A close friend of Thomas Stevenson, he always advised both husband and wife that their son was less of an atheist and more a Christian, than they suspected.

The main source for Stevenson's state of mind in the two years from February 1873 to December 1874 is the collection of Sitwell letters at the N.L.S. most of which are of the 1873-75 period. The pain of the time following the quarrel - the accusations of his cousin,[35] the confrontations between his father and Bob Stevenson and his mother's bouts of hysteria - is given fully in these letters to his 'second mother' and in their truncated published versions; as this has already been gone into by Furnas[36] and is not specifically connected with Stevenson's religious beliefs, it is not necessary to deal with it here. What is important is to attempt to trace any change of attitude on religion during this stretch of time. A large number of the letters from the period in question (seven of a total of sixteen) were written in the single month of September 1873, no doubt for emotional reasons, in that R.L.S. felt the need for the comfort he could get from writing to his 'Madonna' especially at this time (the period of his cousin's deathbed damnation and his parents' most severe reactions to his 'atheism'). Apart from descriptions of his arguments and general depressions we have several pointers to religious attitudes. For instance, there is no doubt that he will never return to the child he once was, as perhaps his parents would have liked:

---

35. This was another cousin of Stevenson's who died in this year, but not before damning both R.L.S. and Bob as apostates and atheists.

36. op. cit. pp. 76-79.

> "I have been clearing out old drawers and coming across all sorts of traces of the little boy who was often awake all night in his room. I found a forlorn little yellow work into which he used to copy verses of the Bible on Sundays; the selection begins with 'Thou God seest *me*' and ends with 'All men have sinned' all laboriously and evenly printed out with a six-years' old unsteadiness." [37]

He has irrevocably passed by this more certain but morbid and introverted stage of his life, although he is hardly sure as yet of his new role either in terms of his own beliefs or of his future in the field of writing. The other letters to Mrs. Sitwell reveal both his complete lack of confidence in the trappings of conventional religion and the gradual change which made him a kind of Christian by 1878 if not by 1875. On the first point we have the letter of September 12:

> "This was my first visit to church since the last Sunday at Cockfield.[38] I was alone, and read the minor prophets and thought of the past all the time; a sentimental Calvinist preached - a very odd animal, as you may fancy - and to him I did not attend very closely." [39]

This illustrates very happily not only his continuing interest in religion (the minor prophets,) but his lack of sympathy for religion in its 'official' capacity: I will devote a section to his rejection of 'priestcraft' later in this study. We may guess that even a rejection of his religion in its official mantle would have wounded Thomas Stevenson to the quick and

---

37. N.L.S. Letter no. iii; MS99.

38. Cockfield Rectory in Suffolk where RLS had met both Mrs. Sitwell and Sidney Colvin in the late summer of this year 1873.

39. Tusitala; XXXI, p. 73.

The main source for Stevenson's state of mind in the two years from February 1873 to December 1874 is the collection of Sitwell letters at the N.L.S. most of which are of the 1873-75 period. The pain of the time following the quarrel - the accusations of his cousin,[35] the confrontations between his father and Bob Stevenson and his mother's bouts of hysteria - is given fully in these letters to his 'second mother' and in their truncated published versions; as this has already been gone into by Furnas[36] and is not specifically connected with Stevenson's religious beliefs, it is not necessary to deal with it here. What is important is to attempt to trace any change of attitude on religion during this stretch of time. A large number of the letters from the period in question (seven of a total of sixteen) were written in the single month of September 1873, no doubt for emotional reasons, in that R.L.S. felt the need for the comfort he could get from writing to his 'Madonna' especially at this time (the period of his cousin's deathbed damnation and his parents' most severe reactions to his 'atheism'). Apart from descriptions of his arguments and general depressions we have several pointers to religious attitudes. For instance, there is no doubt that he will never return to the child he once was, as perhaps his parents would have liked:

35. This was another cousin of Stevenson's who died in this year, but not before damning both R.L.S. and Bob as apostates and atheists.

36. op. cit. pp. 76-79.

> "I have been clearing out old drawers and coming across all sorts of traces of the little boy who was often awake all night in his room. I found a forlorn little yellow work into which he used to copy verses of the Bible on Sundays; the selection begins with 'Thou God seest me' and ends with 'All men have sinned' all laboriously and evenly printed out with a six-years' old unsteadiness." 37

He has irrevocably passed by this more certain but morbid and introverted stage of his life, although he is hardly sure as yet of his new role either in terms of his own beliefs or of his future in the field of writing. The other letters to Mrs. Sitwell reveal both his complete lack of confidence in the trappings of conventional religion and the gradual change which made him a kind of Christian by 1878 if not by 1875. On the first point we have the letter of September 12:

> "This was my first visit to church since the last Sunday at Cockfield.[38] I was alone, and read the minor prophets and thought of the past all the time; a sentimental Calvinist preached - a very odd animal, as you may fancy - and to him I did not attend very closely." 39

This illustrates very happily not only his continuing interest in religion (the minor prophets,) but his lack of sympathy for religion in its 'official' capacity: I will devote a section to his rejection of 'priestcraft' later in this study. We may guess that even a rejection of his religion in its official mantle would have wounded Thomas Stevenson to the quick and

---

37. N.L.S. Letter no. iii; MS99.

38. Cockfield Rectory in Suffolk where RLS had met both Mrs. Sitwell and Sidney Colvin in the late summer of this year 1873.

39. Tusitala; XXXI, p. 73.

that this above all led to the continuing coolness of their relations until R.L.S.'s marriage. He perhaps observed his son's obvious disgust with conventional religion in this facet and wrongly presumed that this was but the outside of a more lasting bitterness about the fundamentals of the faith. A further example of Stevenson's disaffection with the Church of his city and native land is to be seen in his letter to Mrs. Sitwell of October 5. It is probable that his mother would have been perceptive enough to note her son's boredom and communicate the fact to her husband, no doubt stoking the fires of the quarrel further:

> "I have been at church with my mother, where we heard 'Arise, shine', sung excellently well, and my mother was so much upset with it that she nearly had to leave church. This was the antidote, however, to fifty minutes of solid sermon, varra heavy." 40

His dislike of this kind of religion extends also to the typical religious conversations of the time, although he is bored by them rather than angered. In a long letter from Mentone, whither he had been sent in November on account of a collapse in his health, he writes of this feeling:

> "At the Romanes's I was entertained for some time with a lecture on the vanity of life, eternity, soul, don't mind not being able to do work, Hell, eternity, Jesus, love, eternity, future state, with my torial orial i do." 41

While we find much of this kind at this time, actual agnosticism or tirades against the Christian religion itself are seldom found. True, in a letter of October 6, he says,

---

40. Tusitala; XXXI, p. 83.

41. N.L.S. MS. 99 no. xvii. Part of a journal letter of November 30 to December 3, 1873.

referring to his tendency to be hardhearted, that "..... if there is a 'moral governor of the universe' he must feel beastily ashamed of having ever made me". On the other hand this is certainly the only 'agnostic' utterance he makes at this period, the great majority of sentiments being, significantly, of a very different order i.e. he is beginning to regret his earlier conduct and with it his flirtation with agnosticism. Of course this is a matter of hints and signs rather than prolonged and detailed utterance - we have to wait till February 1878 for that - but the signs themselves are definitely there. One of the most important letters to show this new tendency is that of September 24 1873, in which he seems to have weaned himself away from his exclusive admiration for Morley and the "Fortnightly Review":

> "On Saturday morning I read Morley's article aloud to Bob in one of the walks of the public garden. I was full of it and read most excitedly; and we were ever, as we went to and fro, passing a bench where a man sat reading the Bible aloud to a small circle of the devout. This man is well known to me, sits there all day, sometimes reading, sometimes singing, sometimes distributing tracts. Bob laughed much at the opposition preachers - I never noticed it till he called my attention to the other; but it did not seem to me like opposition - does it to you? - each in his way was teaching what he thought best." 42

42. Tusitala; XXXI; p. 81. If Colvin's dating of this letter is correct, the article referred to must be that of the "Fortnightly" of September 1, 1873 in which Morley castigates church control of education in England ("The Struggle for National Education" Part II). The article in question does not deal extensively with belief in God as such - in fact the most 'infidel' time of the "Fortnightly" was not to come till 1877 with articles like W.K. Clifford's "The Ethics of Religion" and Leslie Stephen's "The Scepticism of Believers". If Colvin has misdated the letter, its most likely date is some time in 1874 when Morley's "On Compromise" and his notes on "Theism" by Mill appeared in the magazine. If the dating is correct, the comparison Bob makes is one about the activities of the Church rather than Christianity, and Stevenson's failure to make the connection between the article and the man in the park is more readily understood.

Apart from showing a developing openness of mind on Stevenson's part, the extract gives added weight to the theory that his parents were correct in attributing the 'blame' for their son's religious attitudes at the time to his cousin; certainly in this letter his is the more definite reaction against at least one aspect of Christianity. Another (unpublished) letter of the same month seems to contradict the above letter in that in it, R.A.M.S. is seen as a protagonist for some belief in a life after death, a concept usually associated with Christianity and indeed other religions, while Stevenson himself takes an opposite viewpoint: R.L.S. is talking about his cousin:

> "His great hobby at present, my dear friend, is one that I am very glad to tell you. He is more and more strong every day against any dogma of extinction; more and more anxious to pull down the so-called scientific arguments against immortality. I do not know that I can quite agree with him; but what he says is still weighty. So, there is something good .... In Church this morning I am ashamed to say I was so superstitious as to pray; I thought I would have the chance at least. They were praying, then, for sick friends." 43

Set beside the previous letter, this one confuses the issue not a little. In the one Stevenson seems to be looking at Christianity in a more favourable light than his cousin, whereas it is Bob who in the second takes a more 'Christian' stance on the question of immortality; in the same letter Stevenson reveals himself enough of a believer to find solace in prayer: the contradictions are hardly decreased by this.

---

43. N.L.S. MS.99; Letter no. vi. (Fragment).

The only possible answer is complex - that while Bob was the more definite agnostic, R.L.S. had a stronger repugnance for the idea of immortality (especially in the conventional Christian sense - see p. 50); and that Stevenson was himself at this period, as I have suggested, starting on a road that was to lead him eventually to an unconventional Christianity. The strangest thing about these two quotes is Bob's position on immortality - it is stranger still to anyone who has read any of his unpublished letters or indeed to anyone who knows the rudiments of the history of the father/son quarrel of 1873. My own opinion, for what it is worth, is that Bob Stevenson, rather dishonestly, has decided to cool things down between father and son by trying to persuade R.L.S. to accept something he did not himself believe in; in this way he could at least assure himself afterwards that if there were to be a total break between father and son, he had not been wholly responsible and had at least tried to patch things up. This seems to me the only plausible explanation of some seemingly very inconsistent evidence.

The general trend of the letters to Mrs. Sitwell and others in the next two years is an obvious one - a movement towards a belief in a God and in some if not all the precepts of the Christian religion. The journal letter of November 30-December 3 1873 would seem to date this change of attitude from his illness of October/November and the beginning of his sojourn at Mentone: some of the most important parts of this letter have been left out of the published collection (Tusitala) by Colvin, but luckily the full letter is in the N.L.S. collection;

part of the letter deals with Stevenson's attitudes to Catholics and will be dealt with later. Here is the part which relates to the change of attitude to religion as a whole:

> "I think after the letter, that my father will give me an allowance whatever I do, or wherever I live; well that allowance, I must have quite free. I must not depend upon it at all. I must have that for 'my father's business' which I am truly impatient to be about. And now you see, dear friend, how I hope to begin: 'All men must live upon what they make alone'; that is the first member of any creed and I am going to begin by carrying out that. There are other commandments to follow; but they cannot be reached until the first is settled.
>
> You will not regard me as a madman, I am sure. It is a very rational aberration at least to try to put your beliefs into practice. Strangely enough, it has taken me a long time to see this distinctly with regard to my whole creed; but I have seen it at last, praised be my sickness and my leisure! I have seen it at last; the sun of my duty has risen; I have enlisted for the first time, and after long coquetting with the shilling, 'under the banner of the Holy Ghost!' " 44

It is almost too tempting to say that this proves a conversion to the Christian religion masquerading in one of its more usual Victorian disguises, that of duty. It is of course the religious allusions and usages, culminating in the well-known phrase of Heine (in the original German: 'bin ein fokher ritter von dem heil'gen Geist') which might lead us to believe that this is indeed a transformation on the religious

---

44. N.L.S. MS. 99 Letter no. xvi. The poem by Heine is in the "Harzreize"(written 1824; published in "Reisebilder" 1826-7); it is one of the four "Berg-Idylle" or "Mountain Idylls" which occur roughly in the middle of a work which is mostly prose. The poem is, in fact, a celebration of the Christian religion in terms of the Trinity - a rather romanticised ideal portrait of a faith he would officially join in a year. William Sharp's biography, a good introduction to the poet, reveals many similarities with Stevenson, most prominently on the question of dislike for priestcraft and official religion (see "Life of Heinrich Heine"; London; Walter Scott; 1888; p. 74-92 and 198-211).

plane. Had the second paragraph been included in isolation there would be very little doubt that this was the case - the Heine quote is tantamount to a statement of religious conversion, Heine himself having been converted from Judaism. The existence of the first paragraph means that there is the possibility of interpreting the duty mentioned as purely to do with his work as a writer. On the other hand we may say that R.L.S. was as clear within himself before he went to Mentone regarding his future as a writer as he was after the move; the 'duty' may still of course refer to his obligation to his parents and to himself to pay his way rather than receive contributions. The emotional strength of the sentiments in the second paragraph seem to me to point to something more than this, but either of the two interpretations is possible.

The theory of conversion I have introduced above is in some ways backed up by the letter of December 4 of the same year to Charles Baxter. Baxter had detected a new tone in a previous letter and accused Stevenson of a 'paroxysm of virtue';[45] Stevenson's answer is interesting:

> "Yes, I am as moral as ever; more moral. A man with a smashed-up constitution and 'on a diet' can be moral, at the lowest possible figure, and then I was always a bit of a Joseph, as you know. My whole game is morality now, and I am very serious about it." [46]

We cannot necessarily equate 'morality' with 'religion' in this, but the probability is, given evidence already presented,

---

45. Ferguson and Waingrow; op. cit. p. 34. Baxter to Stevenson.

46. " " " p. 35.

that it is valid to do so. The paucity, comparatively speaking, of letters in the late 1873 to early 1875 period to correspondents other than Baxter and Mrs. Sitwell is perhaps the main reason why it is impossible to be more definite on this equation at this time. Had Stevenson been able to write freely about his beliefs to his father at this period we might have had absolute proof of a definite change of heart on spiritual matters. Unfortunately the first letter we have to his father mentioning religion at any length is that of February 15 1878 which will be dealt with shortly. Other letters to Mrs. Sitwell from this period, however, to some extent support the theory that the 'change' came in these months. For instance in January 1874 Stevenson writes of how his ambition is to make things 'happier and better' and give a good example before men to 'show them how goodness and fortitude and faith remain undiminished after they have been stripped bare of all that is formal and outside'; he says that Mrs. Sitwell has already done this and that 'I shall follow and shall make a worthy life': all this is described as his 'creed and hope'.[47]

In June of the same year we see the continuing disagreement with his father over whether the non-Christian can be tolerated: his father cannot understand how anyone can fail to believe in his religion, and anyone who says he does not is 'ever a knave, a madman or an inconsiderate and culpable fool'. Thomas Stevenson is not here referring to R.L.S., but to a relation's coming marriage, her husband being presumably agnostic.[48] It is obvious that by this time there has been a significant change

47. Tusitala; XXXI; p. 124.
48. N.L.S. MS.99 Letter no. xli.

for the better or at least more cordial in the relationship of the two men; a discussion on the same subject in 1873 would have soon developed into an argument of a most bitter sort. Perhaps both men were now intent on avoiding getting too personal on matters of faith - this would also seem to be the case in a letter of December 29 1874 where R.L.S. reports on a discussion with his father in which the latter informed his son that he could never leave any money to anyone who was not a Christian. Stevenson is able to agree with his father on this and yet obviously made no statement in the conversation on his own beliefs as this may again have led to an 'unpleasantness'.[49]

As we arrive at the year 1875 and go beyond, we find that what references there are to his own religion are more certain and more positive. Firstly, in March 1875, Stevenson writes about Carlyle to Mrs. Sitwell:

> "The best trumpet that I can suggest is to read Thomas Carlyle's essay on Burns. Sick as I am of reading anything in which so much as the name of Burns appears, I was really electrified (beg pardon for the 'Daily Telegraphism') by this ..... I suscribe to that essay. My own is quite unnecessary. Do read it, it will do you good; it would do the dead good. It has reminded me once again of the great mistake of my life - and of everybody else's; that we are all trying to gain the whole world if you will, except what alone is worth keeping; our own soul. God bless T. Carlyle, say I ..... Read that essay, it is in Volume Two, and keep up your heart, Madonna. For myself, I am in a thrill of religion, but too cold, and too much soddened with much making of notes, to let any of my religion out in a very inspiring correspondence, I'm afraid." 50

49. Tusitala; XXXI; pp. 207-208.

50. " " p. 219.

The point of quoting this letter is purely to show that some change has taken place - the references to a spiritual change in the second part and the 'thrill of religion' in the third seem to indicate this (the contents of Carlyle's essay supply only the context in this respect for an interesting statement by Stevenson on his state of mind). By 1877, indeed, his new opinions about Christianity itself are clarified with the letter to his mother of 1877 (probably from Nemours in Fontainebleu), which is in the Beinecke Collection. A period of self-adjustment and reappraisal is coming to a close and he has grown out of any real doubts he had about Christ's teachings as helpful and necessary for him:

> "I don't believe you people know how much I care for you; I always get writing in this tune nowadays; for I feel so keenly that I do not make my love felt when I am with you. But if you will exercise a little faith, you may believe me - and I do not think you will believe over the mark. I have a bad character, and that makes me behave ill to you; but my heart is what you would wish. Also you may tell my father, for I think it will please him, that since I have been here, I have been meditating a great deal about Christianity and I never saw it to be so wise and noble and consolatry as I do now." 51

Before the most important letter on this subject Stevenson wrote is examined - i.e. the letter to his father from the 'Cafe de la Source' in Paris of February 15 1878 - it would pay to look back over what letters from this 1868-1878 period have to tell us about R.L.S.'s religious development. The first point to be made is that the evidence from published and unpublished sources which I have been able to gather is pretty sketchy for long periods - over a year in some cases.

---

51. Beinecke (Mackay) No. 3366.

Letters of interest in the ten years are mostly concentrated in a period of eighteen months to two years round the year 1873 - say from Summer 1872 to Summer 1874. There are no letters of interest for the years 1871 and 1876 (in all fairness one must say that the biggest published collection of letters has only one definite letter for 1871 and nine for 1876 - the second figure is very low for the average number per year and the first the least number for any year between 1868 and his death). The thinnest period in terms of religious interest is 1875-1878, during which time only two letters are worth examining on the subject of religious development as such. The most likely reason for this is that he is writing far less often to Mrs. Sitwell at this time and much more to his parents, with whom he was not yet prepared to broach the subject of his faith or the lack of it. As he wrote to Mrs. Sitwell sometimes three times in one week, the comparative paucity of letters of interest in the 1868 to summer 1873 and summer 1875 to early 1878 periods is explained by the fact that he was in correspondence with people he did not write to often, regularly, or for sustained periods. In the case of Bob Stevenson in the earlier term, Stevenson saw him regularly and therefore letters are not abundant; in the later period he does not comparatively speaking communicate much with anyone (including his parents), the only reason that can be surmised being his absorption in his artistic and literary endeavours in the milieu of Paris and Fontainebleu.

Because of this concentration on the 1872-74 period no overall picture of a religious development can be presented - this can only come when we have access to all Stevenson's extant letters and perhaps not even then, if the tendencies revealed in immediately accessible correspondence are repeated in all the letters. There is enough for the ten years I have mentioned to come to some tentative conclusions however. The main one would seem to be that Stevenson's rebellion on spiritual matters lasted a comparatively short time - from late 1872 to, perhaps, late 1873 or, more probably, sometime in 1874 - and that even in this period his agnosticism was of a very doubting variety - he felt and expressed some need for an omnipotent being even when he would not use the word 'God'. His aversion to churches and official religion, however, born at this time, was, as we shall see, a continuing factor in his view of religion until his death. What may have changed in 1872-3 and returned in the mid-1870s was his belief in the specifically Christian religion and God, and their capability of helping both himself and all men. What is obvious from the letters I have quoted above is that his rebellion did not sit lightly on him, that it confused rather than helped him in the long run, and that its only value for him was its strengthening of his resolve to go in for literary work as a career.

The exact nature of the father-son quarrel is still obscure - we can only say what it might and might not have been rather than what it was or was not. Because of later references

to misunderstanding on the part of Thomas Stevenson by his son,[52] especially in the February 1878 letter, we might conjecture that Stevenson had not expressed himself in atheistic or even strongly agnostic terms. This is supported by the expression in the first letter after the quarrel, to Baxter, (see p. 12) that he does not feel himself to be a 'horrible atheist', and is unsure what exactly his father has accused him of - atheism or blasphemy. What is almost certain is that Stevenson had interspersed his language at that fatal meeting with badinage and perhaps bitterness about 'God's ministers' and 'priestcraft' in general, and that his father connected his own belief in God with a corresponding faith that the contemporary church was communicating Christ's message correctly. Thomas Stevenson may have believed from his son's outbursts that he was an atheist and blasphemer when he was very far short from either of those things. In this case, we can see that the blame for the quarrel might have rested mostly on the side of the father's bigotry rather than the son's beliefs. On the other hand Stevenson also later refers to himself as being at that time an 'infidel', an 'atheist' and a 'blasphemer', especially in "Memoirs of Himself", where he describes how at this period blasphemy was 'all the rage' and how he tried to outdo W.K. Clifford in outrageousness.[53] The fact, however, that I have found no letters in which Stevenson outlines in any detail his belief in 'free thinking' or his disbelief in a God for the

52. The other main letter onthis line has already been quoted - i.e. that of May 1874 to Mrs. Sitwell (see p. 13).

53. Clifford (1845-1879) was one of the foremost agnostics of his day and much more extreme in his beliefs than Morley (see note 42). The reference to "Memoirs of Himself" is Tusitala; XXIX, pp. 166-167.

years in question leaves Stevenson's own claims of actual atheism during this period unfortunately unproven by his own hand. Certainly, if he was ever an atheist in any complete sense this could only have been in the period of late 1872 to 1874: in fact the period of rebellion may, as I have theorised, have lasted only from February 1873 to November of the same year. The only conclusion possible for the 1868 to 1878 period as a whole is, furthermore, that Stevenson began as a pretty orthodox Christian; indulged in a spiritual rebellion of one sort or other in his late university and immediate post-university years; and that from 1874 or 1875 began to develop away from the extremism of this time to an acceptance of a personal, partly-Christian, religion which he was to hold for the rest of his maturity. Thus all theories which call Stevenson a 'free thinker' for the whole or a great part of his mature years (cf. Eigner and Furnas) are patently false. If we look at evidence from the letters on what his religion was in his maturity we will find the invalidity of these theories only further underlined.[54]

The letter to Thomas Stevenson of February 15 1878 has been mentioned on more than one occasion previously as the most important for the study of religion and Stevenson; I therefore make no apologies for quoting the greater part of this long letter:

54. The other theory backed up most strongly by the evidence I have presented is that R.L.S. was in a continual state of flux about religion in these years and that he would be agnostic one minute and Christian the next. It was not in his character, however, to be so trivial and fickle in his beliefs - in literature, for instance, as in religion. Even if this theory is correct, it could only hold water up until 1876; after that date his belief in God and in Christian ethics is pretty solid.

"MY DEAR FATHER, - A thought has come into my head which I think would interest you. Christianity is among other things, a very wise, noble, and strange doctrine of life. Nothing is so difficult to specify as the position it occupies with regard to asceticism. It is not ascetic. Christ was of all doctors (if you will let me use the word) one of the least ascetic. And yet there is a theory of living in the Gospels which is curiously indefinable, and leans towards asceticism on one side, although it leans away from it on the other. In fact, asceticism is used therein as a means, not as an end. The wisdom of the world consists in making oneself very little in order to avoid many knocks; in preferring others, in order that, even when we lose, we shall find some pleasure in the event ..... I feel every day as if religion had a greater interest for me; but that interest is still centred on the little rough-and-tumble world in which our fortunes are cast for the moment. I cannot transfer my interests, not even my religious interests, to any different sphere.[55] If I am to be a fellow worker with God, I still feel as if it must be here. How, with all the disabilities he has charged me with, I do not see; nor do I require to see it after all. From time to time, He gives me a broad hint, and I recognise a duty. That must suffice; and between whiles we must go on as best we can.

In all this, I am afraid there will be a great deal that is disagreeable to you; but indeed with a little good will, you may find something else which ought to please you in these lines. I have had some sharp lessons and some very acute sufferings in these last seven and twenty years; more than even you would guess; I begin to grow an old man; a little sharp, I fear, and a little close and unfriendly; but still I have a good heart and believe in myself and my fellow men and the God who made us all. It is not for a few anonymous letters that I would give up mankind; nor for a few cancers that I would lose my trust in him who made me. The truth is great and it prevails within me. There are not many sadder people in the world, perhaps, than I ..... Well, I still hope; I still believe; I still see the good in the inch and cling to it. It is not much, perhaps, but it is always something.

55. Stevenson means by this that he feels a religion is useless for him if it is not based on ethical and moral considerations calculated from practical considerations.

"I find I have wandered a thousand miles from what I meant. It was this: of all passages bearing on Christianity in that form of a wordly wisdom, the most Christian, and so to speak, the key to the whole position, is the Christian doctrine of revenge. And it appears that this came into the world through Paul! 56 There is a fact for you. It was to speak of this that I began this letter; but I have got into deep seas and must go on.

There is a fine text in the Bible, I don't know where, to the effect that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord. Indeed, if this be a test, I must count myself one of those. Two years ago, I think I was as bad a man as was consistent with my character. And of all that has happened to me since then; strange as it may seem to you, everything has been, in one way or the other bringing me a little nearer to what I think you would like me to be. 'Tis a strange world, indeed, but there is a manifest God for those who care to look for him .....

P.S. While I am writing gravely, let me say one word more. I have taken a step towards more intimate relations with you. But don't expect too much of me. Try to take me as I am. This is a rare moment, and I have profited by it; but take it as a rare moment. Usually I hate to speak of what I really feel, to that extent that when I find myself cornered, I have a tendency to say the reverse. If this letter should give you pain, you have my authority to show it to MacGregor of St. Cuthbert's, and ask him; to no-one else in the clergy, but to him; I believe he will tell you there is some good in it." 57

---

56. Stevenson is obviously referring here to Romans, Chapter 12, verses 14-21; e.g. "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not." (14); "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." (19-20) Stevenson was obviously well read in this particular book as the other biblical quotation in this extract is from Romans 8:28. : "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to whom they are called according to his purpose." He is wrong, however, about the 'doctrine of revenge' coming into the world through Paul as there are various parts of the N.T. in which similar ideas are put forward (e.g. Matthew Ch.5). The quote from Romans is of course the best known on the subject.

57. N.L.S. MS.9898: ff.20-22. Parts in Tusitala XXXII; pp.41-42. 'Macgregor of St. Cuthberts' was the Rev. Jas. MacGregor (1832-1910) who was chaplain of the R.S.A. in 1877, and was to be Moderator of the General Assembly for 1891. It is indeed surprising that Stevenson could have applied himself for advice to any clergyman of his day - we remember his reaction to Nicholson's Sunday School class. But the reference seems to prove that he had.

The letter shows first of all of course that by this date Stevenson believed implicitly in a God - we may say because of the structure of the sentences and the use of the capital letter, in the Christian and Biblical God. We see also that his God is an omnipotent all-seeing being who leads every individual through his or her life by whichever route He wishes them to travel. His belief in a God, whether specifically Christian or not, was, as I will shortly demonstrate, the strongest and most lasting of his religious beliefs, all claims of 'agnosticism' and 'atheism' per se being all the more ludicrous for this fact. We note also, however, that Stevenson himself does not feel that a belief in his God and a belief in Christianity are one and the same. His feeling of affection for many Christian teachings has grown, and he feels that at its kernel there is a truth that he would accept. He does not describe himself as a Christian, nevertheless, whether a good or a bad one. He seems to be trying to fit Christian doctrines to ideas which he knows to be correct and which he means to live by: he can at no time accept a religion which is a fixed body of knowledge on spiritual and ethical matters and which is known by all Christians - his distrust of the Catholic above all Christian churches is perhaps based on this. Another part of this which we do not see in this letter is his contempt for the interpretation of Christianity adhered to by the majority of his peers in the Western countries: he feels that they have watered down Christ's teaching to an unimaginable extent - in this he is of course similar to many great writers, not only Heine from earlier in the century, but Tolstoy and

Kierkegaard in roughly contemporary society. There will be a section to follow on his great dislike for 'official' religion in most if not all its aspects - this will also be seen when we come to examine such works as "Lay Morals" and "New Poems".

His belief that a true Christianity could only be based on the Bible, a rather conservative one for his day and milieu, is quite clearly seen in this 1878 letter, not only in the biblical references, but in his obvious conception that the religion itself had to be based on and proved by the 'Word' (i.e. a written source). His main reading in the Bible must have been in the Gospels and the Pauline letters and he uses quotes from these sources to verify the beliefs he approves of as being the actual doctrines of Christianity - a Christianity which has been defiled by man's misinterpretation. The doctrine of kindness to both friends and enemies, one of the most corrupted in Stevenson's view, is quite clearly stated in Romans and is, he says, the basis of his idea of the true message of Christianity. He rejects asceticism as being the basis, and also the idea that one can be a Christian apart from one's fellow men: on the other hand he feels that selfishness of a kind is necessary and that helping fellow men has advantages for the self (presumably in non-spiritual terms) which not helping would cancel. This does not mean that he misjudges the importance of duties, which for him seem to be the way he recognises the 'broad hints' of God; although he does not speak of it, the conscience has no doubt a large part in this whole framework.

This letter gives a broad picture of the mature man's religious beliefs. These beliefs and attitudes are further illustrated, though not in such depth, by other letters

written between the early 1870s and his death. For the sake of clarity I will divide these under various headings covering not only his beliefs but also his attitudes towards contemporary religious manifestations - for instance Catholics and Missionaries (the last from his days in the South Seas - 1888-1894). A good place to begin is with his statements as to the nature of the God he believes in and the development if any in his view of this god. As one might expect, a person's view of his God at any particular time is affected by the person's physical and mental state at that moment. When a good friend dies young, for instance, or fate plays some kind of unexpected dirty trick, any individual would be expected to curse or complain to their god and even in some cases deny the god's existence or call it into question. We may therefore not be too surprised if Stevenson is saddened or angered by his fate and by 'God's will' at times, especially in his youth. For instance in a letter to Mrs. Sitwell of September 9 1873[58] he wonders "why God made me to be this curse to my father and mother"; on December 29 1874 he writes to her that he does not "fear anything in life, so long as you are left to me, and this cursed God does not torment me too much",[59] and in Spring 1875 he says (to Mrs. Sitwell again):

> "I do not think God dare vex us much more;
> I think he must be a little good." 60

There is a subtle change, however, when in his maturity he faces (for instance) the untimely death of his university friend, James Walter Ferrier, in September 1883: the bitterness

58. N.L.S. MS 99: Letter No. iv
59. N.L.S. MS 99: Letter no. liv.
60. N.L.S. MS 99: Letter no. lxv.

is there, but also a new kind of resignation to the ways of God:

> "Dear, dear, what a wreck; and yet how pleasant is the retrospect! God doeth all things well, though by what strange, solemn and murderous contrivances." 61

These rather angry references to the deity are few and far between, however, and occur mostly in his youth, and furthermore, in the stage of his most complete rebellion against all other manifestations in religion. Only in this period too do we feel that he is within an inch of continuing: 'and if God can allow this, I'll have nothing further to do with Him'. In his maturity, he wonders at his fate, but is to a much larger extent resigned to it.

If such references as those above are uncommon, they can not be as unusual as his approach to the deity in the letter of July/August 1876 to Mrs. Sitwell in which he takes up an attitude unknown in any other letter, but which should be looked at:

> "God help us all, amen. For I do cling a little to God, as I have lost all control of right and wrong. You can't think things both right and wrong you know; the human mind cannot do it, although I daresay it would be devilish clever if you could; and when you come to a stone wall in morals, you give them up, and damned to them ..... So I say I cling to God; to a nice immoral old gentleman who knows a little more about it than I do, and may, some time or other in the course of the ages, explain matters to his creature over a pipe of tobacco; nay, and he may be

61. Tusitala; XXXII; p. 259. Ferrier's death (he was born in 1851) was the first of three bereavements in Stevenson's life, the others being Fleeming Jenkin, who died in 1885 and his father, who died in May 1887. The effect of Ferrier's death on the author is described in "Old Mortality" and led to his revision of "Lay Morals", which had been started in 1879.

> "something more than this and give only that sense of finish and perfection that can only be had one way in the world. (daresay, it's all a lie; but if it pleases me to imagine it ....." 62

As I say, if the date (by Colvin) is correct, this is a strange letter to say the least - how then is it to be explained? Firstly we notice the tone of the missive is trivial and, in parts, obscure in comparison with the Paris (February 1878) letter to his father. Secondly, we know that the recipient is Mrs. Sitwell, his correspondent in the 'rebellion' period of 1873 to 1875, and he may be adopting an old style of expression in a letter to someone he knows will appreciate this and not a moral or preaching approach. If the theory of the 'change' in 1874 or 1875 is correct, the sentiments of this letter would seem to be very out of place, unless they have been 'put on' in this way to please an agnostic or free thinking correspondent, which Mrs. Sitwell certainly was. The only other logical explanation is that despite his statements of 1874 and 1875, Stevenson remained unsure of the existence of a God until 1877 or 1878 - or, as I have already suggested as possible, but unlikely, he may have believed in this God only in patches (perhaps when he needed His help), but not at other times. However, it is no doubt true that no man leads an entirely consistent life or indeed an entirely logical life for his biographers in the future - not everything will fit in. Because this is so unusual a letter for this period, and because it is the only one I have found which reveals the rather trivialising sentiments

62. N.L.S. MS 99; Letter No. lxxxviii. Most of this letter, but none of this section, is in Tusitala; XXXII, pp. 23-24. The published part is very illustrative of the cooling of Stevenson's attitude to Mrs. Sitwell by this date.

it does, perhaps the best method of dealing with it is as something inexplicable and the exception that proves the rule.

The majority of references Stevenson makes to God throughout the letters are to a helpful, kind, mysterious and, most commonly, omnipotent being and the determiner of each man's future life before his birth. As I have said, one feels that when he is feeling good, especially in his youth, his references to the deity will be correspondingly flattering or complimentary - for instance, as early as March 1872 he says in a letter to Baxter that in his country walk 'all the way along I was thanking God that he had made me and the birds and everything just as they are and not otherwise.'[63] The sentiments are similar in June 1883, when he writes to Henley of God in verse form:

> "Sursum Corda:
> Heave ahead:
> Here's luck.
> Art and Blue Heaven,
> April and God's Larks.
> Green reeds and the sky-scattering river.
> A stately music.
> Enter God.
>
> Ay, but you know, until a man can write that 'Enter God' he has made no art! " [64]

Other letters are more serious in tone and cannot be explained by Stevenson's good feelings or enjoyment of life at the time,-allowing that the second extract above might just as easily be analysed as a joy on the poet's part resulting from his belief in the creator of nature than the other way way about. Of more importance however for his religious

---

63. Ferguson and Waingrow; op. cit. p. 5.

64. Tusitala; XXXII; p. 249.

beliefs are his statements of belief despite trouble and vexation in his life - there are, significantly, more of these than the joyful type. In a journal letter of December 1874 to January 1875 he writes to his 'madonna' that 'we must just repeat after a better person: "Not as I will, but as Thou wilt."[65] This sort of thing, a sort of resignation in the sight of God to a predetermined life, is very prominent, especially in later letters: in April 1879 (there is some doubt about this date) he writes to Henley[66] in a fit of depression:

> ".....it is an empty stable that you can now shut, O death; the spirit has gone abroad, to ruin with the body! I can say candidly I am not afraid: God hears me and approves. Calamity comes too late. I now know that I can suffer, and not be permanently embittered or warped; for what then do I care? God, keep me brave and singleminded; God help me to kind words and actions; what more is there to pray for?" 67

This leaning on God is echoed in a letter to his father of August 1883 in which he says: 'However in all things God's will be done; it is better than ours at least, even for us.'[68] In October of the same year he writes again to his father, but at greater length (a letter occasioned by Ferrier's death): he is talking about his intention of rewriting "Lay Morals":

---

65. N.L.S. MS 99; Letter No. lv. The Biblical reference is to Mark; ch. 14 v.36.
66. William Ernest Henley (1849-1903) was Stevenson's closest male friend during the years 1875-1888. In the latter year an argument over the authorship of a short story, "The Nixie", claimed to have been written by Fanny, R.L.S.'s wife, soured the relations between the two men for the rest of their lives. Henley's rather disparaging article in "Pall Mall Magazine" of December 1901, which damned the 'seraph in chocolate' side of Stevenson's work, was a direct result, though a delayed one, of the quarrel over "The Nixie". In happier days, Henley collaborated with Stevenson in four plays, and wrote the best-known poem on him, beginning: 'Thin-legged! thin-chested! slight unspeakably .....' Henley is best known nowadays for his sabre-rattling verse (esp. 'Lyra Heroica' (1891); his "Book of Verses" (1888) which included his series "In Hospital"; and his edition of Burns (1896-7).
67. N.L.S. MS 26.8.2(ADV.);ff.11-12. This seems to have been been written after an attack of illness.
68. Beinecke (Mackay) no. 3466.

> "Here is a fine opportunity to pray for me: that I may lead none into evil. I am shy of it; yet remembering how easy it would have been to help my dear Walter and me, had any gone the right way about, spurs me to attempt it. I will try to be honest and then there can be no harm, I am assured; but I say again: a fine opportunity to pray for me. Lord, defend me from all idle conformity, to please the face of man; from all display, to catch applause; from all bias of my own evil; in the name of Christ. Amen ..... What you say about yourself I was glad to hear, a little decent resignation is not only becoming a Christian, but is likely to be excellent for the health of a Stevenson. To fret and fume is undignified, suicidally foolish, and theologically unpardonable; we are here not to make, but to tread predestined, pathways; we are the foam of a wave, and to preserve a proper equanimity is not merely the first part of submission to God, but the chief of possible kindnesses to those about us ..... Honesty is the one desideratum; but think how hard a one to meet. I think all the time of Ferrier and myself, these are the pair that I address. Poor Ferrier, so much a better man than I, and such a temporal wreck. But the thing of which we must divest our minds is to look partially upon others; all is to be viewed; and the creature judged, as he must be by his Creator, not dissected through a prism of morals, but in the unrefracted ray. So seen, and in relation to the almost omnipotent surroundings, who is to distinguish between F. and such a man as Dr. Candish, or between such a man as David Hume and such an one as Robert Burns." 69.

God as the arranger of lives and the only possible accurate judge of human affairs: what is demonstrated by this is Stevenson's idea of the necessity of accepting one's fate and also his belief that men are too ignorant to be judges of other men in any final sense. The main idea in it is again the omnipotence and omnicompetence of God and the smallness of man's

---

69. October 12 1883. Some in Tusitala; XXXII; pp. 272-273. Some in Balfour "The Life of R.L. Stevenson" (London; Methuen and Co. 1901) Vol. I p. 209. 'Candish' in this extract is almost certainly the Rev. Robert Candlish (1806-1873), one of the leaders of the Disruption of 1843 and called the "ruling spirit" of the Free Church after the death of Chalmers. He would obviously have been admired by Stevenson because he was the main proponent of Church Union in the ~~mid-1870s period~~ 1860s and early 1870s.

plans and schemes when compared to the eternal plan. This generally determinist view of the universe was to stay with him until his death, and indeed, the idea of God leading simple mortals 'whither they know not' is strengthened by the course of the years - and also no doubt by the more frequent recurrence of serious illnesses and his other two bereavements (his father's death most of all of course). Anyway, we find that in 1886 in a letter to Alison Cunningham, the 'Cummy' of his youth, he expresses a stronger sense of this, along with a rather pessimistic and Calvinist philosophy of life:

> "But we are not put here to enjoy ourselves: it was not God's purpose; and I am prepared to argue, it is not our sincere wish. As for our deserts, the less said about them the better, for somebody might hear, and nobody cares to be laughed at. A good man is a very noble thing to see, but not to himself; what he seems to God is, fortunately, not our business; that is the domain of faith; and whether on the first of January or the thirty-first of December, faith is a good word to end on." 70

Again he write to Barrie in 1893 that he is going to Honolulu 'upon what I suppose must be my Father's business for at least it's not mine';[71] and back in November 1881 he could write of this 'guiding' part of his god's nature in verse form (within a letter to Henley):

---

70. Tusitala; XXXIII; p. 65. Letter of New Year's Day 1886. This letter is also, perhaps,an example of taking up a state of mind to suit the correspondent, similar, but in the opposite stream, to the 'immoral old gentleman' letter to Mrs. Sitwell.

71. Beinecke (Mackay) no. 2637. It is interesting that Colvin in the Tusitala Letters (XXXI to XXXV) prints most of the letter, and indeed the sentence in which this phrase occurs, but omits this reference to a divine 'father'.

"Though men were strong as albatrosses
And women were as great as bulls
Believe me, the eternal Josses
Would override us all like fools.

Though men, like hippopotamusses
In double skin went mailed abroad,
God would invent new blunderbusses
And still, believe me, rule like God." 72

The fact that God is fundamentally good, kind and patient with the follies of men is part of Stevenson's idea of God's omnipotence: in the end his judgment is that, despite his own misfortunes, he has been lucky and God has been kind to him. This is illustrated in three letters from the last ten years of his life ranging from 1883 to 1894. The first is to Henley and is dated Autumn 1883 (written from Hyères, where Stevenson spent just over a year from March 1883 to May 1884). In the letter he talks of petty quarrels between himself and his friends:

"It seems to me, in ignorance of cause, that when the dustman has gone by, these quarrelings will prick the conscience. Am I wrong? I am a great sinner; so my brave friend, are you; the others also. Let us a little imitate the divine patience and the divine sense of humour, and smilingly tolerate those faults and virtues that have so brief a period and so intertwined a being." 73

A similar sort of description of the goodness of God, but in a more direct utterance of Stevenson's belief in the good

72. N.L.S. MS.26.8.2. (Adv.); ff. 62-63.

73. Tusitala; XXXII; p. 284.

effect on himself is given in a letter to P.G. Hamerton[74] of March 16 1885 - he is talking of his hemorrhage of the previous spring:

> "I am almost glad to have seen death so close with all my wits about me, and not in the customary lassitude and disenchantment of disease. Even thus clearly beheld I find him not so terrible as we suppose. But, indeed, with the passing of years, the decay of strength, the loss of all my old pleasant habits, there grows more and more upon me that belief in the kindness of this scheme of things, and the goodness of our veiled God, which is an excellent and pacifying compensation. I trust, if your health continues to trouble you, you may find some of the same belief." [75]

It is interesting that in this letter and on one of the few occasions he does so, Stevenson connects his faith and the development of it, with the many illnesses he had suffered since that first significant attack of autumn 1873. That there was some connection with his religious beliefs seems quite likely, in that being on the verge of death so often no doubt 'concentrates the mind wonderfully' and gives the individual in this situation a new view of life, especially in terms of its preciousness. It may be remembered that his period of rebellion came at a time when he had not experienced any truly serious illnesses, and when he did not have to flee Edinburgh every winter in case various illnesses were aggravated by the severe cold and wind. It is noteworthy in this context that his most 'believing' period was that of 1878 to his death,

---

74. Philip Gilbert Hamerton (1834-1894), not to be confused with J.A. Hammerton, the author of "Stevensoniana" (Edinburgh; John Grant: 1903), was editor of "The Portfolio" which he had founded with Richard Seeley in 1873, when Stevenson's first literary offering - "Roads" - appeared in it. Among his works of art criticism were "Landscape in Art"(1883) "A Painter's Camp in the Highlands" (1862); and "Round My House" (1876), written about his life in Autun.

75. Tusitala; XXXIII; p. 42.

when all his really grievous attacks occurred. There is little evidence from the letters themselves with which to verify this corollation, but some sort of connection seems likely.

The last letter of Stevenson's I would wish to quote on his belief in God and the nature of that God is one to the native chief Mataafa[76] in 1894, which expresses not only Stevenson's belief in the helpful nature of credence in God but also a new confidence born, perhaps, of a final acceptance of his place in the world and of God's acceptance of that place:

> "I have made frequent representations to the British and American Governments to obtain your pardon, but in vain. Be of good courage in the strength of the Lord. Hear what David says - My body and my heart were weak, but God is a strong rock and defence of my heart and my inheritance forever. Again he says the Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." 77

Many of Stevenson's statements about religion are made, not 'off the cuff', but in response to or agreeing with sentiments expressed in letters from his father. In two of these letters in the Beinecke Collection, we find ideas already expressed by Stevenson himself in letters I have previously quoted: that of resignation in the face of God's plan and that of God's general omnipotence:

---

76. Mataafa was a rebel king of the Samoans - and special enemy of the German influence on Samoa - who was imprisoned after an unsuccessful uprising in July 1893. He was deported first to the Tokelau Islands and later to Jaluit in the Marshall Island group.

77. N.L.S. MS 9891. Letter No. xxii.

> "I have lately seen that it is a horrid sin to be grumbling about God's Providence. I have been keeping God waiting for years for me and now when I don't at once get an answer to my prayers I take the pet forsooth ..... So I am fighting to get resignation and to be able to say God's will be done and to avoid the great family failing of using the language of exaggeration. All this is a kind of new work for me. I invite Louis to begin the same work. Tell him that from me." 78

and

> "I have been enabled every night to dedicate mind, body and soul to God to be disposed as to Him seems best, which is a very reasonable thing to do considering how wretchedly little we know of our own concerns and the reasons why God has put us here at all and how utterly inadequate the reasons for our being here appear to be, so far as we can discover." 79

These letters both dating from 1883 - the first is to R.L.S.'s wife and the second to himself - show very close similarities to his own thought in this period and afterwards - the idea of the powerless individual and the omnipotent God was certainly one that outlasted the life of the father in the mind of his son. The idea of resignation as put forward by Thomas Stevenson above was obviously influenced by Stevenson's letter to him of the previous month - his son seems in fact to have persuaded him to change his ideas on a point of religious belief. In the case of the sentiments of the second letter it is more than probable that the influence was in the other direction (i.e. from father to son) as the omnipotence of God was a perennial part of the

---

78. Beinecke (Mackay) no. 5794. Letter from Thomas Stevenson to Mrs. R. L. Stevenson. Dated 26 September 1883.

79. Beinecke (Mackay) no. 5776. Letter of Thomas Stevenson to R.L.S. Probable date October 1883.

father's philosophy. As I point out above, this element in the nature of Stevenson's God, though there in embryo form in the 1878 Paris letter, does not really come into prominence until the mid-1880s leaving plenty of time for influence (or inspiration) by letter and personal contact by Thomas Stevenson.* Although we may rightly say that there is a difference in enthusiasm or temperature between the two religious systems - the father's language bordering on that of the fanatic - and although it is the father and not the son that is actually obsessed with religion at this time, there can be no doubt but that a cross-fertilisation of ideas took place and that these ideas are mostly in the religious field.

The existence and nature of God for Stevenson must have been a most important if not a crucial question within the framework of his beliefs - of all references in letters and totally autobiographical works which might describe that group of beliefs, by far the greatest number are on this subject of the divine being. If we look further for details of his personal faith in his maturity we find all of these outnumbered by those on his dislike for the conventional face of religion in all its forms. However, these references and the letters in which they occur are of the first importance if we are to have an at all rounded picture of his religious attitudes. One of the most important letters for the rest of his beliefs is that of December 26 1880 to his mother, and as it contains further reference to

* But see also Appendix III, on Tolstoy's influence.

his God it makes a good connecting point with that side of his faith. He is obviously replying to a letter in which his mother has stated the need for some 'assurance' in life:

> 'The assurance you speak of is what we all ought to have, and might have, and should not consent to live without. That people do not have it more than they do is, I believe, because parsons speak so much in long-drawn, theological similitudes, and won't say out what they mean about life, and man, and God, in fair and square human language. I wonder if you or my father ever thought of the obscurities that lie upon human duty from the negative form in which the ten commandments are stated; or of how Christ was so continually substituting affirmatives. 'Thou shalt not' is but an example: 'Thou shalt' is the law of God. It was this that seems meant in the phrase that 'not one jot or tittle of the law should pass.' But what led me to the remark is this: A kind of black angry look goes with that statement of the law in negatives. 'To love thy neighbour as oneself' is certainly much harder, but states life so much more actively, gladly, and kindly, that you begin to see some pleasure in it; and till you can see the pleasure in these hard choices and bitter necessities, where is there any Good News to men? It is much more important to do right than not to do wrong; further, the one is possible, the other has always been and will ever be impossible; and the faithful desire to do right is accepted by God: that seems to me to be the gospel, and that was how Christ delivered us from the law. 80 Faith is, not

80. The references to the laws and Christ's delivering mankind from them are obviously to do with civil and secular law rather than the laws of the Church, although Stevenson would no doubt have been as unmoved by certain aspects of the 'Mosaic Law' as he would by most Church law (especially, for example, the Ten Commandments). The Biblical references are rather confused, not to say misquoted. The phrase he talks of; "not one jot or tittle of the law should pass' is, in fact, '....verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled'. (Matthew 5,18). There is a similar quote in Luke 16,17: "And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail'. The meaning of these two quotes is almost exactly opposite to Stevenson's: viz. that the Law (of God) is essential and everlasting. However, the general sense of Stevenson's opinion in this are verified by Galatians, in which book Paul tries to show that the Law of Moses is not so important as the lessons gleaned from Christ's teachings. For instance (Gal. 3.13): 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us'; and (Gal.3.11): 'But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith'. The two sets of quotes can be squared if both Stevenson and Paul are referring to the peripheral laws of Moses, while Christ in the Gospels is referring to the Law of God, which is not necessarily exactly the same as the Mosaic Law.

> 'to believe the Bible, but to believe in God (or, for it's the same thing, have that assurance you speak about) where is there any more room for terror? There are only three possible attitudes: Optimism, which has gone to smash: Pessimism, which is on the rising hand and very popular among clergymen who seem to think they are Christians - Lily, I daresay, for instance; and this Faith, which is the gospel. Once you hold the last; it is your business (1) to find out what is right and (2) to try to do it; if you fail in the last, that is by commission, Christ tells you to hope; if you fail in the first, that is, by omission, his picture of the last day gives you but a black lookout. The whole necessary morality is kindness; and it should spring of itself, from the one fundamental doctrine, faith. If you are sure that God, in the long run, means kindness by you, you should be happy; and if happy surely you should be kind." 81

Apart from the strictures on the 'parsons' and ministers, which will be dealt with under the general heading of 'official religion' most of this letter is to do with the personal faith of Stevenson. The most impprtant part of the letter in these terms is the end, where he makes the connection between the view of God as meaning 'kindness' to the individual and the necessity of being kind to others on earth. Stevenson is saying that there is a necessary connection between believing in God and acting properly on earth, the most important part of which is kindness to others. To take it further, he emphasises that it is the intention to be kind that matters, not the success of the individual in being kind. However he sees being kind as a hard choice and a bitter necessity, probably because it means a certain if not a complete denigration of the ego: it is because he sees this duty as being the central

---

81. Tusitala; XXXII; pp. 141-142.
Stevenson's reference to 'Lily' is probably William Samuel Lilly (1840-1919) who was Secretary of the Catholic Union of Great Britain from 1874. The work of Lilly's obliquely referred to is either his contribution to "The Contemporary Review" of January/February 1883: "The Religious Future of the World" or his book "Ancient Religion and Modern Thought" (1884)

problem in Christian ethics that he has no time for the negativity of the teachings of the Ten Commandments, and, more so, that of contemporary religious teachers. He also obviously believes that pleasure can be got, in the end, from the very facing up to these duties and hard choices, but that this kind of pleasure, because it is in a way selfless, is a much more valid kind than that resulting from pure hedonism.

Another noticeable thing in this letter is Stevenson's attitude to the 'Word' as it appears in the Bible. Although he says that faith is not 'to believe in the Bible' but 'to believe in God', he seemingly accepts everything that is put into the mouth of Christ in the gospels to be literally what He said. Therefore we have a very personal relationship to the figure of Christ, completely untrammelled by a more cautious modern approach to the authorship of Christ's sayings. By his day, of course the 'new criticism', especially the contribution from Germany, along with Renan's "Vie de Jesus" (1863) had changed the whole climate of ideas as to the 'Word of God' as spoken by the historical Christ figure. The fact that Stevenson takes none of this into account, and sees everything attributed to Jesus in the Bible as having been said by Him, points to his conservatism in most of these matters, especially towards the use of sociology in Biblical criticism. This rather naive faith in the absolute truth of the Gospels will be further observed when we come to "Lay Morals" in the section on semi-autobiographical work.

One of the concepts which seems never very far from Stevenson's whole religious philosophy is that of duty. He obviously sees duties in general to be unpleasant parts of any faith, but the things in the long run which test the individual's enthusiasm for putting his faith into action. In more than one letter he expounds his acceptance of the necessity of duties; for instance in that of November 30-December 3 1873 and that of February 1878 (the Cafe de la Source letter). Even in the 'rebellion' period he felt that the basis of Christianity was duty - the letter is of course to Mrs. Sitwell:

> "I am going to try for the best, and I hope more in the strong inspiration of your sympathy than ever Christian hoped out of his duty." 82

As late as November 1891 the question of duty was still crucial for him, as is shown in the following extract from a letter to Colvin:

> "The truth is, I was far through (if you understand Scots), and came none too soon to the South Seas, where I was to recover peace of body and mind. No man but myself knew all the bitterness in those days. Remember that, the next time you think I regret my exile. And however low the lights are, the stuff is true,[83] and I believe the more effective; after all, what I wish to fight is the best fought by a rather cheerless presentation of the truth. The world must return some day to the word duty, and be done with the word reward. There are no rewards, and plenty duties. And the sooner a man sees that and acts upon it like a gentleman or a fine old barbarian, the better for himself." 84.

82. N.L.S. MS 99; Letter No. iii. Dated September 8, 1873.
83. Stevenson is here referring to some essays written at Saranac Lake (in the Adirondacks) especially "Pulvis et Umbra"; "Letter to a Young Gentleman" and "A Christmas Sermon".
84. Tusitala; XXXIV; pp. 119-120.

The idea of duty as good and reward as bad in terms of the individual's aspirations is carried on in two letters separated by a space of six years. The first is to Charles Warren Stoddard[85] and is dated December 1880: Stevenson talks of a type of man who is doomed to 'a kind of mild, general disappointment through life':

> "I do not believe that a man is the more unhappy for that. Disappointment, except with one's self is not a very capital affair; and the sham beatitude, 'Blessed is he that expecteth little' one of the truest, and in a sense, the most Christ-like things in literature." 86

The second letter is of January 2 1886 to Edmund Gosse - this letter is also the most important one for the subject of immortality, which Stevenson regarded as potentially and in fact the biggest source of thinking about 'reward' in the life of the contemporary religious man. In the letter the subject of Fleeming Jenkin's death is broached:

> "I feel it little pain to have lost him, for it is a loss in which I cannot believe; I take it, against reason, for an abscence; if not today, then tomorrow, I still fancy I shall see him in the door; and then, now when I know him better, how glad a meeting! Yes, if I could believe in the immortality business, the world would indeed be too good to be true; but we were put here to do what service we can, for honour and not for hire: the sods cover us, and the worm that never dies, the conscience, sleeps well at last; these are the wages, besides what we receive so lavishly day by day; and they are enough for a man who knows his own frailty and sees all things in the proportion of reality. The

85. Stoddard (1843-1909) was the author of "Summer Cruises in the South Seas" (1874) and other books of Pacific travels, and bears the credit for renewing R.L.S.'s interest in the Pacific Islands during the author's first sojourn ~~there~~ in San Francisco in the 1879-1880 period.

86. Tusitala, XXXII; p. 137.

> "soul of piety was killed long ago by that idea of reward. Nor is happiness, whether eternal or temporal, the reward that mankind seeks. Happinesses are but his way-side campings; his soul is in the journey; he was born for the struggle, and only tastes his life in effort and on the condition that he is opposed. How, then, is such a creature, so fiery, so pugnacious, so made up of discontent and aspiration, and such noble and uneasy passions - how can he be rewarded but by rest? I would not say it aloud; for man's cherished belief is that he loves that happiness which he continually spurns and passes by; and this belief in some ulterior happiness exactly fits him. He does not require to stop and taste it; he can be about the rugged and bitter business where the heart lies; and yet he can tell himself this fairy tale of an eternal tea-party, and enjoy the notion that he is both himself and something else; and that his friends will yet meet him, all ironed out and emasculate, and still be lovable, - as if love did not live in the faults of the beloved only, and draw its breath in an unbroken round of forgiveness'. But the truth is, we must fight until we die; and when we die there can be no quiet for mankind but complete resumption into - what? - God, let us say - when all these desperate tricks will lie spellbound at last." 87

We may think this a very pessimistic letter, or at least a letter that reveals a pessimistic view of life. That this was not always how Stevenson felt will soon be demonstrated when we consider the exchange of letters with his father on the subject of 'resignation'. The reason for the pessimism in this letter is, no doubt, the death of Fleeming Jenkin[88], which had just occurred - there is obviously an element of self-pity in it which mirrors the kind of mood revealed in

---

87. Tusitala; XXXIII; pp. 71-72. Dated January 2, 1886.
88. Henry Charles Fleeming Jenkin (1833-1885) became Prof. of Engineering at Edinburgh in 1868, and was R.L.S.'s first intellectual friend and mentor (if we discount R.A.M.S.). Unusually for a scientist, his conversation was always full of variety and 'bottled effervescency.' Stevenson paid tribute to his influence for good, especially as regards religious opinions, in "Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin (first published in 1912) - see section of Thesis on Non-Fiction and Poetry.

letters after the death of Ferrier. Strangely enough, when his father died in 1887, there was much less of this type of reaction, the main reason being that Thomas Stevenson had been ailing for some time and had been unable to recognise the immediate members of his family - 'a shadow of his former self'; both Ferrier and Fleeming Jenkin had died unexpectedly and in their comparative youth (in the first case the death was unexpected by Stevenson rather than the Ferriers themselves).*

The main subject of the letter is immortality, and the merit of expecting it as a reward for 'good works' during the individual's lifespan. It is strange to find Stevenson denying the validity of one of the most important precepts of contemporary Christianity, but according to his belief in the paramount importance of duty - 'there are no rewards and plenty duties' - this is a logical, though we might think an extreme step. This may well have been a stumbling-block in the father/son religious difference which was never quite removed; the following letter from father to son shows the width of the gap between them on the issue:

> "There can be no true happiness apart from God. Though He has given us an intense desire for light, especially as to our own future destiny it cannot be expected that we can be happy if no light is given and we are to live all our days in suspense and anxiety as to what is to come after death. I have only very lately come to this that happiness is <u>absolutely impossible</u> without a written revelation from God as to what is to become of us and what He wants from us. This is my very latest discovery on this very important subject. Do you think this is heretical? Whether or no it is true, and farther, as a corollary there can be no true <u>physical</u> health apart from religion." 89

89. Beinecke (Mackay) No. 5780. Letter to R.L.S. of May 19, 1884.

* For the pessimism inherent in Stevenson's work from about 1884 see infra. pp. 130-138 and pp. 184-220.

It might perhaps be made out that a disbelief in 'eternal life' would put the individual in question outside the pale of Christianity altogether. Stevenson's belief in this respect would certainly not have been accepted as reconcilable with the Christian religion by his Victorian contemporaries, although there would be less difficulty nowadays, as I have been assured by a noted man in the whole field of theology and biblical criticism, Prof. William Barclay. If the real emphasis in Christianity is to be the ethical, practical side rather than the philosophical, judgments which deny Stevenson the title of Christian because of a disbelief in immortality (which the Christ-figure in the Gospels is not obsessed with, anyway, as the basis of the faith) are hardly to be accepted as particularly relevant. Nevertheless, beliefs of this kind are not quite orthodox Christianity even in our own age, although few of the more sophisticated of the faith would now claim immortality as a necessary part of that faith. We may see that in his day, Stevenson would have been an embarrassment to even the most liberal of churchmen on this point, and could never, in the contemporary climate, have been accepted as 'one of the flock'. It may even be that it was this subject above all which separated father from son in 1873 and after - if R.L.S.'s opinions were as strong in that year as they were in 1886. The case remains largely unproved, however, and the issue of 'official religion' seems as good a candidate for the root cause of the argument, as well as being one that is better documented.[90]

90. At least one letter points to a disbelief in immortality at the time - that to Mrs. Sitwell dated September 1873 (N.L.S. no. vi.) - already quoted.

Before we leave the subject of Stevenson's personal religion, four letters showing his essential optimism at this particular time in religious matters must be quoted. They all concern, more or less directly, opinions of Thomas Stevenson which his son feels to be dangerous to his (i.e. his father's) state of mind, and also, not true to the essential doctrines of Christianity. They centre round his father's definition of 'resignation' as a religious concept, which Stevenson had at first thought to be similar to his own, but found to his horror that it was exactly opposite. Most if not all of these letters are responses to some kind of depressing sentiments on the part of the father - the first extract, though short, sets the pattern:

> "I only say this in answer to your letter; I do not allow even repentence to pray on my health, which were to add another and worse sin. If a man does not choose to pull together enough manhood to correct his glaring sins, he may at least have enough not to whine." 91

The accusation of 'whining' is one that will be repeated in the other three letters, ranging from December 1883 to January 1885, although not always directly mentioning Thomas Stevenson's own 'whining'. In the letter dated 'last Sunday of '83' the references are not at all opaque, however:

> "I give my father up. I give him a parable: that the Waverley novels are better reading for every day than the tragic Life. 92 And he takes it backside foremost, and shakes

---

91. Beinecke (Mackay) No. 3465; Letter to Thomas Stevenson of January 11, 1883.

92. Stevenson had in a previous letter (December 20 1883) mentioned that Lockhart's "Life of Scott" (first published 1837-38) was a book 'above all things not to read', especially in his father's present temper. (Tusitala; XXXII; pp. 286-287).

> "his head, and is gloomier than ever. Tell him that I give him up. I don't want no such parent. This is not the man for my money. I do not call that by the name of religion which fills a man with bile .... There he is, at his not first youth, able to take more exercise than I at thirty-three, and gaining a stone's weight, a thing of which I am incapable. There are you; has the man no gratitude? There is Smeorach 93: is he blind? Tell him from me that all this is
> NOT THE TRUE BLUE!
> I will think more of his prayers when I see in him a spirit of praise. Piety is a more childlike and happy attitude than he admits. Martha, Martha, do you hear the knocking at the door? But Mary was happy. Even the Shorter Catechism, not the merriest epitome of religion, and a work exactly as pious although not quite so true as the multiplication table - even that dry-as-dust epitome begins with a heroic note. What is man's chief end? Let him study that: and ask himself if to refuse to enjoy God's kindest gifts is in the spirit indicated." 94

The son is obviously attempting to make his father feel better in his faith - something very difficult in the case of Thomas Stevenson, as his letters in general illustrate. The concepts of gratitude to God for His mercies and of a generally happy approach to one's faith (though not necessarily to one's own life) were, however, ones to which R.L.S. himself was always to ascribe. Indeed if God was, as he thought, always kind to His created objects, gratitude and a kindly approach to life were only logical and right on the part of each individual.

While Stevenson's own optimism is shown by these two extracts, the exact nature of the father's deviation from

---

94. Tusitala; XXXII; pp. 288-289. The letter is to Stevenson's mother.

93. Smeorach was a favourite Skye Terrier of the family's. The meaning of the reference is obscure.

his son's 'gospel' is left unclear, though there can be no doubt that Thomas Stevenson's letter had been a very depressing one. In the next letter, dated New Year's Day 1884, there are broader hints that the father's apostasy is over his misinterpretation (in his son's eyes) of Stevenson's agreement that 'resignation' was a good and necessary part of the duty of a Christian:

> "When I think of how last year began, after four months of sickness and idleness, all my plans gone to water, myself starting alone, a kind of spectre for Nice - should I not be grateful? Come, let us sing unto the Lord!
>
> Nor should I forget the expected visit, but I will not believe in that till it befall; I am no cultivator of disappointments, 'tis a herb that does not grow in my garden; but I get some good crops of remorse and gratitude. The last I can recommend to all gardeners; it grows best in shiny weather, but once well grown, is very hardy; it does not require much labour; only that the husbandman should smoke his pipe about the flowerpots and admire God's pleasant wonders. Winter green (otherwise known as Resignation, or the 'false gratitude plant') springs in much the same soil; is little hardier, if at all; and requires to be so much dug about and dunged, that there is little margin left for profit. The variety known as the Black Winter Green (H.V. Stevensoniana) is rather for ornament than profit.
>
> 'John, do you see that bed of resignation?' -'It's doin' bravely, sir.' - 'John, I will not have it in my garden: it flatters not the eye, and comforts not the stomach; root it out.' - 'Sir, I ha'e seen o'them that rase as high as nettles; gran' plants!' - 'What then? Were they as tall as alps, if still unsavoury and bleak, what matters it? Out with it, then; and in its place put Laughter and a Good Conceit (that capital home evergreen), and a bush of Flowering Piety - but see it be the flowering sort - the other species is no ornament to any gentleman's Back Garden" 95

95. Tusitala; XXXII; pp. 290-291. Stevenson returns to the subject of Lockhart's "Scott" in a letter of 12 March 1884 to Mr. Dick, for many years head clerk and confidential assistant in the family firm in Edinburgh. (Tusitala; XXXII; p. 297). In the letter he calls it the 'over-true life', and adds his comments on the Bible - 'a cheerful book' -; smaller works of devotion - 'dull and dowie' -; and a repeat of his opinion of the start as compared to the rest of the Shorter Catechism.

Stevenson signs the letter - "JNO. BUNYAN". Though couched in comical Bunyanesque and seemingly not too serious the letter nevertheless emphasises again Stevenson's optimistic view of life at this time, especially where it touched the subject of God's grace to men. The 'Resignation' which R.L.S. is so sarcastic about in this letter is not necessarily the same thing as that praised in the letter of 12 October 1883 - we have in the latter case after all, a belief in resignation in the sense of resigning to God as the leader of each man's footsteps and the determiner of both the joys and the setbacks of life, something rather different from the kind of resignation Thomas Stevenson must have been advocating. It seems that Stevenson's father had wanted to resign himself either to death itself or to an unhappy old age - the difference between the two 'resignations', whatever the father's brand might have been, was obviously that the son's type did not preclude a happy life while the father's did. Although Stevenson does not go so far as to call his father a 'whiner', there is some comparison between the attitudes of Carlyle in the following quote and those of Thomas Stevenson:

> "Yes, Carlyle was ashamed of himself as few men have been; and let all carpers look at what he did. He prepared all these papers for publication with his own hand; all his wife's complaints, all the evidence of his own misconduct: who else would have done so much? Is repentence, which God accepts, to have no avail with men? nor even with the dead?

> "I have heard too much against the thrawn, discomfortable dog: dead he is, and we may be glad of it; but he was a better man than most of us, no less patently than he was a worse. To fill the world with whining is against all my views: I do not like impiety. But-but - there are two sides to all things, and the old scalded baby had his noble side ..." 96

All these letters show Stevenson's belief in the necessity of optimism and gratitude to God for the believer, together with an obvious difference between his own and his father's attitudes. The optimism Stevenson usually showed was not, as we have seen, something he could keep up when faced with a bereavement - his reaction then, however, was a stoicism and a failure to become bitter with his god which one might think very unusual in the average man and average Christian. His general optimism in the early 1880s is all the more strange in the light of his continuing bouts of illness and his nearness to death on several occasions: indeed William Archer,[97] the dramatic critic and playwright, opened a correspondence with him castigating his optimistic philosophy, and stating that a person in constant pain could neither read or write books like Stevenson's. Stevenson of course answered that he himself was in constant pain or at least always with the fear of pain and probable death, therefore disproving Archer's theory.

---

96. Tusitala; XXXIII; p. 33. Stevenson is probably referring here to Carlyle's "Reminiscences" (1881) which laid bare the author's motives in his relationship with his wife, Jane Welsh Carlyle.

97. Archer (1856-1924)is best known as the first enthusiast for the plays of Ibsen whose "Collected Plays" were edited by him in 1906-1907. He also wrote "Masks or Faces" (1888) and Play-making"(1912), influential books on the drama; his only successful play was "The Green Goddess". The exchange of letters mentioned above took place in late 1885 over an article in the magazine "Time", long since extinct. Archer's main point was that Stevenson was praising the athletic man too highly in "An Inland Voyage" and "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes", and that his optimism in general in the later works was based on his health and athleticism. The letters in reply from Stevenson are in Tusitala;XXXIII,pp. 53-56, 58-62.

There are many of course who have claimed that Stevenson was basically a pessimist behind a veneer of optimism - this especially in reference to such essays as "Pulvis et Umbra" and "Old Mortality" and to the general atmosphere of the later novels from "The Master of Ballantrae" to "The Ebb-Tide". There seems some evidence to support this in the case of the novels, the change being so dramatic from works like "Kidnapped" and "Prince Otto" - the case of the essays is not proven, as there are more 'optimistic' examples by far in this field than the opposite. An examination of the letters, however, both published and unpublished, definitely limits his pessimism to periods of his life when a black look at the universe might be expected - e.g. during illnesses and after the two bereavements, and to the period of his later novels. What might be interpreted as pessimism by those unacquainted with his religious philosophy is more likely than not (especially in his earlier work) to be part of his belief in duty and his acceptance that duties are usually unpleasant. All in all there seems to be more evidence on the side of optimism than the other, at least until the last eight years of his life.

One of the most important aspects of Stevenson's religious attitudes is his general contempt for conventional religion and especially the activities of contemporary churchmen. Unlike many of the attitudes he came to in his maturity, his opinions on this side of the question had been pretty much the same in 1870 as they were to be in 1890. This was part of his 'rebellion' which may have started as early as that letter of 1868 to his mother in which he was rather sarcastic on the subject of his parents' churchgoing. Some

apposite letters have already been quoted: for instance the letter of October 1872 to R.A.M.S. in the Beinecke Collection in which he talks about the 'wooden effigies and creeds dead years ago at heart' of the contemporary Edinburgh religious establishment. Earlier in the same year, and while Stevenson was still writing as if he believed implicitly in a God, he could write to Baxter in the following terms:

> "When I am a very old and very respectable citizen, with white hair and bland manners and a gold watch and an unquestioned entree to the sacrament, I shall hear these crows cawing in my heart, as I heard them this morning." 98

We notice here the same type of criticism that will be revealed in many of the early poems - in this case the criticism, comparatively mild, is directed at the general older generation of church-goers in their most bourgeois manifestations: ministers and the other officials are not yet concerned. In two letters of 1874 we are shown his attitude to revivals, and this time the reaction is a much stronger one:

> "Have you been revivalled yet? They sent me magazines about it: the obscenest rubbish I was ever acquainted with ..... Why, I saw that bald-headed bummer J. Balfour had been describing a meeting he was at. He said, 'They then enjoyed very precious and manifest tokens of the Lord's presence.' If I had been there and sworn upon all the obscene and blasphemous phrases in my large repertory that God had <u>not</u> been there, they would have told me it was because my heart was hard .... O sapristi! If I had hold of James B. by the testicles, I would knock his bald cranium against the wall until I was sick." 99

98. Ferguson and Waingrow; op.cit. pp. 5-6. Dated 5 March 1872.
99. Ferguson and Waingrow; op.cit. pp. 41-42. Letter to Baxter of January 1874.

The other letter, from the same month, is couched in much more moderate terms:

> "I have some journals sent me about the Edinburgh revival and I have made myself nearly sick over them. It is disheartening beyond expression. I wish I had been there that I might have seen the movement near at hand; but I am afraid I should have taken up a testimony and made everybody at home very much out of it." 100

No doubt Stevenson looked upon revivals as the religion of the huckster, and it is perfectly within character that he should be so upset by them: although there is no material at hand on this one feels that he would have felt almost as strongly in his maturity about such a trivialising type of religion. Because the Moody and Sankey revivals were so successful at this time amongst the establishment, they can be taken as being part of the whole religious milieu to which R.L.S. was opposed.

His attitude to churchgoing is something we might expect to have changed since his childhood, and this is the case. In several letters from 1874 and 1875 his developed attitude to churchgoing is revealed: in the journal letter to Mrs. Sitwell of October 27 -31, 1874 there are three extracts of interest:

---

100. N.L.S. MS 99; Letter no. xix. Dated January 13-19 to Mrs. Sitwell.

> "This is the Fast day - Thursday preceding biannual Holy Sacrament that is - nobody does any work, they go to Church twice, they read nothing secular (except the newspapers, that is the nuance between Fast day and Sunday), they eat like fighting-cocks. Behold how good a thing it is and becoming well to fast in Scotland ..... I shall perhaps go to Church this afternoon from a sort of feeling that it is rather a wholesome thing to do of an afternoon; it keeps one from work and it lets you out so late that you cannot weary yourself walking and so spoil your evening's work ..... Today I have been to Church, which has not improved my temper I must own. The clergyman did his best to make me hate him, and I took refuge in that admirable poem the Song of Deborah and Barak ....." 101

Stevenson's opinions about churchgoing are obviously not so virulent as those about revivalism.[102] The references to the Church, though satirical, are, in this extract at least, marked by amusement rather than scorn. By the spring of 1875 he finds himself able to write about the situation in the Scottish Churches at the time, without any great disgust at the thought - the article he intended was eventually to be "An Appeal to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland":

> "I think I am going to make a figure in Scotch ecclesiastical politics; at least I am turning over in my own mind the expediency of the step, as I have been doing for some time back; and more and more as days go by do I seem to see my way to doing possibly some good with small chance of harm. If the Church be virtous enough to take my suggestion, it has the elements of life in it, and would live whether or no; I shall only give another heroic example for mankind; and of these we cannot have too many. If, on the other hand, it has too little virtue, or too much policy, I shall have done good service in unveiling a sham and struck another deathblow at the existence of superannuated

---

101. Tusitala; XXXI; pp. 188-190.

102. We may notice that R.L.S., while being bored and angered by the preacher, can still find work of religious interest satisfying to read.

> "religion. Besides, I am not politic in these matters. I prefer to see men noble, even if it be to the ruin of my own views; what I wish to see in the world is not the triumph of these views, but the multiplication of noble and disinterested men." 103

The general tenor of this is that the Church (in this case the Church of Scotland) though probably unsaveable, might still in Stevenson's mind claim for itself a place as a truly Christian one - by burying its differences dating from 1843 with the Free Church. One feels however that the writer's real expectation is - 'too little virtue or too much policy'. The fact that Stevenson was more than slightly confused over the respective roles of the Established Church and the Free Church in the current dispute will be gone into in the section of this thesis on the non-fiction works and poetry. Bearing this confusion in mind it is hardly surprising that there was no great reaction to the article.

In the same period as he announces his intention of writing the above article, he writes of present and past Sundays with their Church associations:

> "I had a nice time today, hanging about the church outside in the sunshine, hearing the psalms and the strong solitary voice of the preacher. All the same Sunday comes hard on me. The mind goes back of a Sunday; and repents ....." 104

and

> "I don't know why the recurrence of this day always depresses me; but it does. O the bitter, bitter, dead, empty life - it is dull and vile ..... I lick my greasy lips, "Give me some more pudding, please God. I am a good boy. This is the best of possible worlds and

---

103. Tusitala; XXXI; pp.231-232.
104. " " p. 233.

"you are a very fine fellow for having made it." 105

In other letters to Mrs. Sitwell from the same period we see the same sort of thing: in April, for instance, the bells on a Sunday remind him of 'all the weary Sundays of my childhood'.[106] By June, however, a slight change has taken place - he says: 'I've been to church, and am not depressed - a great step.'[107] The reason for his comparative contentment is not, however, anything said by the minister, old Mr. Torrance - 'a relic of times forgotten' - but due to the beauty of Glencorse Church and Kirkyard. The inability to get anything of worth in terms of teaching or inspiration from official Christianity remains. The strength of feeling in this letter, however, is less than those of 1872 and 1874: Stevenson seems to have accepted the fact that official Christian contemporaries will be unable to help him to any belief and now feels that being angry about them is a waste of energy. A more scathing attack on 'official religion' is of course made in the poems, especially in those unpublished in his lifetime - because of the strength of the feeling, all of these, as we will see, can be dated to the early or mid-1870s.

There are few letters on the subject of official religion in Stevenson's later years, but the contents of various non-fiction works, for instance "Edinburgh-Picturesque Notes" and "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes", fills up the gap to some extent. However, there are a few pointers

105. Tusitala; XXXI;pp.234. The second part of this extract is a satire by Stevenson on conventional and official attitudes to God. All these letters are to Mrs. Sitwell in the spring of 1875.
106. Tusitala; XXXI; p. 224.
107. Tusitala; XXXI; p. 238. R.L.S. talks of the Justice-General listening to Torrance 'as though it had all been a revelation'

as to how his attitude was changing. In November 1881, he can tell his father quite equably and without a jibe that he is 'certainly not a party man', refraining from any more amused comment than 'It is an odd list of names - Ch. of England, Ch. of Scotland, Free Kirk, Pessimist, radical, tory' showing a certain lack of respect (his father might think) in putting the names of denominations along with those of political parties. In general, however, as Stevenson begins to spend more time per year away from Scotland than in the country, his sarcasm for its institutions is watered down and made milder by distance from the subject and, perhaps, a favourable comparison with the corruption and cant in the religions and sects of other parts of the world. In the 1880s we have the 'Thamson and Johnson' correspondence between Stevenson and Baxter, in which mild amusement at the foibles and petty sins of church elders is mingled with a definite nostalgia for the old country - one example of the type of thing entailed should be sufficient: (Johnson has been accused of drinking despite his Blue Ribbon):

> "Whatever, I saw that I was by wi't. Says I, 'I leave the Kirk.' 'Weel,' says he, 'I think youre parfitly richt' and a wheen mair maist unjudeecial and unjudeecious observations. Noo, I'm a Morrisonian [108] an I like it fine. We're a sma' body but unca tosh. The prezentar's auld, tae; an' if ye'll meet wi' our opeenions - some o' them damned heterodox by my way o't, but a body cannae have a'thing - I mak nae mainner o'doobt but what we micht succeed him."[109].

108. The Morisonians were founded in 1843 and named after their founder James Morison (1816-1893). The body eventually merged with others to form the Evangelical Union.

109. Ferguson and Waingrow; op. cit. pp. 126-7.

The element of nostalgia and even revelling in the character of the two men is certainly more important in this than the element of criticism of their activities - R.L.S. is laughing more with Thamson and Johnson than at them. This softening of attitude to the Scottish part of 'official religion' is, as I have said, better illustrated by the poems, so I will leave the subject at this point.

The only reference to official religion in the letters of the period 1885 to 1894 is one of Spring 1891 the contents of which seem to show that Stevenson's opinions on officialdom and the institution and buildings constituting 'Church' had changed very little since the early 1870s - he is talking about the missionary, the Rev. James Chalmers:[110]

> "I shall look forward to some record of your time with Chalmers: you can't weary me of that fellow, he is as big as a house and far bigger than any church, where no man warms his hands." [111]

For the South Seas period, most of the evidence on opinions about conventional religion are in "In the South Seas", which will be dealt with in the second section. Two last extracts will suffice to round off the picture of Stevenson vis-a-vis 'official religion' as far as the letters are concerned. The first is a glimpse of the conservative side of Stevenson's ethos - he is giving his opinion of the latest version of the Bible:

---

110. The Rev.James Chalmers (1841-1901) was one of the best loved of South Seas missionaries and did most of his work in the Cook Islands and New Guinea. He was killed by cannibals and eaten at Dopima, New Guinea in early 1901. One of the reasons he got on well with Stevenson was because of his Scottish birth (at Ardrishaig,Argyll). His biography by Richard Lovett (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1902) includes several letters from Stevenson.

111. Tusitala; XXXIV; pp.55-56. Letter to H.B.Baildon from Vailima.Baildon (1849-1907) was an old schoolnote of Stevenson - he had met him in 1864. In later life Baildon was lecturer in English Literature at the University of Vienna and afterwards at Dundee.

> ".....(I shall) pray hard against temptation; although since the new Version, I do not know the proper form of words. The swollen, childish and pedantic vanity that moved the said revisers to put 'bring' for 'lead', is a sort of literary fault that calls for an eternal hell; it may be quite a small place, a star of the least magnitude and shabbily furnished ....." 112

Stevenson is here, more than anything else, protesting on behalf of the poetry of Authorised Version rather than specifically its theological merit; nevertheless, there is an element of conservatism and a looking back to old certainties of Biblical phrasing (the reference is presumably to 'Lead us not into temptation' in The Lord's Prayer). The other letter, although also on the subject of written religious material, is representative of the main stream of Stevensonian opinion on conventional religion in his day. It is included in the biography of Alexander Whyte by George Freeland Barbour,[113] and is probably dated 1883:

> "What we all owe to the Shorter Catechism it were hard to limit; We must have learned more philosophy, perhaps above all more <u>style</u>, than we or our teachers dreamed of: a more eloquent book, with so much method in the eloquence, being difficult to find. I am partly its obliged admirer, partly its conscientious enemy. The first question and answer - I wish the whole were in that strain - are purely sublime. Thence forward it is apt too much to dwell amongst cobwebs and split hairs, to forget the soul and its strong affections, to address itself to captious enemies rather than to young minds desiring guidance and requiring trumpet notes of encouragement. Not in this correct and somewhat leaden manner, but with a more

---

112. Beinecke (Mackay) no. 7991 Letter of June 6 1881 to Edmund Gosse. Gosse (1849-1928) met Stevenson in 1877 at the Savile Club. Gosse's great achievement was the introduction of the study of Scandinavian literature to British readers. More interesting for this study is his upbringing in the house of a Plymouth Brother, his father, which is recounted in "<u>Father and Son</u>"(1907). Gosse edited the Pentland Edition of Stevenson's works (1906-1907) and was the first to mention the possibility that changes in R.L.S.'s style and subject-matter were due to his illnesses: "<u>Critical Kitcats</u>" (London; William Heinemann; 1900).

113. "<u>The Life of Alexander Whyte</u>"; London; Hodder and Stoughton; 1923.

> "communicative and engaging ardour, should religion, philosophy and morals be presented. David, I find, was the man after God's own heart. The book smacks of the Long Parliament and the "constitutional party" in religion." 114

The more personal aspects of Stevenson's religion have now been dealt with and it only remains to chronicle his attitudes to three groups of people concerned with religion with whom he had some contact,and in at least one case, identification - these are the Covenanters, the Catholic Church and missionaries. Because each of these groups will be dealt with when we come to the non-fiction work, only a short history of Stevenson's connections with each will be presented here. Three important letters on each of the Covenanters and missionaries, and four on attitudes to Catholics should give an adequate enough introduction at this stage.

Stevenson's attitude to Catholics was a strange one for so tolerant a man, although not so strange when we remember the zealousness of his father for his own particular brand of faith as opposed to all others, along with the fact that the Catholic church, for many reasons,was rather unpopular in the Scotland of Stevenson's youth. The fact that the great majority of quotes by him on the subject are anti-Catholic is at least partly explained by the atmosphere of the time, much of which in all fairness was caused by the attitude of the Catholic church itself in mid-century: Pius IX's encyclical '<u>Quanta cura</u>' and the '<u>Syllabus Errorum</u>'(both 1864)

---

114 Barbour; op. cit. pp.240-241.

and the reaffirmation of papal infallibility in 1869 at the Vatican Council were indications that the pope was refusing to look the present age in the face, especially at a time when the Protestant churches were at least trying to come to terms with evolution and the New Criticism. Many of the Vatican's sillier pronouncements really angered the young Stevenson, for instance the ban on women singing in church:

> "I want to tell you something, Consuelo, that made one feel as if someone had struck me in the face; so deadly and shameless an insult to man and to woman and to that Christ they pretend to worship, it is. They have - the Pope has, I mean - taken steps for the utter suppression of a serious abuse. Certain inferior creatures, called women, have lately been permitted to outrage decency by singing God's praises in the houses kept sacred for the purpose; this affront to heaven shall be suppressed; is it not maddening! I am thankful my parents are honest Calvinists. Had they been Catholics this crime against humanity would have finished by utterly alienating me from them. I hate all Romanists." 115

We can see that this distrust of Catholicism, or at least its more insensitive dogmas, was not just a passing phase in Stevenson's life if we look at his letter of the summer of 1883 to M. Simoneau (a restauranteur and friend of the Monterey days). In it he compares Mexican Catholicism with the French genus:

> "Your stay in Mexico must have been interesting indeed: and it is natural you should be so keen against the Church. On this side, we have a painful exhibition of the other side: the librepenseur a mere priest without the sacraments, the narrowest tyrrany of intolerance popular, and in fact a repetition in the XIXth century of

115. N.L.S. MS 99, Letter No. xvi. Dated November 30 to December 3 1873 to Mrs. Sitwell.

> "theological ill-feeling minus the sermons. We have speeches instead. I met the other day one of the new lay schoolmasters of France; a pleasant cultivated man, and for some time listened to his ravings. 'In short,' I said, 'you are like Louis Quatorze, you wish to drive out of France all who do not agree with you'. I thought he would protest; not he! - 'Oui, Monsieur' was his answer. And that is the cause of liberty and free thought! But the race of man was born tyrannical; doubtless Adam beat Eve, and when all the rest are dead the last man will be found beating the last dog. In the land of Padre d. R. you see the old tyranny still active on its crutches; in this land, I begin to see the new, a fat fellow, out of leading-strings and already killing flies." 116

Stevenson's opinions are not those of a bigoted Catholic hater - so much is made clear in the travel books and in the following letter from Hawaii in which he admits his tendency to think the worst of the Catholic Church in referring to the work of the followers of Father Damien on the leper-isle of Molokai:

> "A horror of moral beauty broods over the place: that's like bad Victor Hugo, but it is the only way I can express the sense that lived with me all these days. And this even though it was in great part Catholic and my sympathies flew never with so much difficulty as towards Catholic virtues. The passbook kept with heaven stirs me to anger and laughter. One of the sisters calls the place 'the ticket office to heaven'. Well, what is the odds? They do their darg, and do it with kindness and efficiency incredible; and we must take folks' virtues as we find them, and love the better part." 117.

---

116. Tusitala; XXXII; p. 254. Padre d.R. was obviously a bastion, and (knowing Mexican history) probably a sanguinary bastion, of the Catholic church in Mexico (or perhaps New Mexico, which had not been organised as a state at that time). The last sentence is an oblique reference to "King Lear" (i.e. the image of boys killing flies 'for their sport').

117. Tusitala; XXXIII; pp. 259-260. See also essay section - "Father Damien" letter.

It is noticeable in this that it is the way that the Catholic layman and priest look at their 'reward' - a ticket office to heaven - which jars on Stevenson's nerves; this is a case where it is his personal religion with its special section on rewards that distances him further in sympathy from the Catholics. His overall opinion, however, is expressed in the second half of the extract, where he tries to justify their general naivety by interpolating what he accepts to be their particular virtues especially in situations like that at Molokai.

Our final quote however must be on the most common reaction of Stevenson to Catholics - amazement at their naivety and an almost wilful refusal to identify with them in any way. The following quote also proves that the difficulty of identification had not diminished in his South Seas days - the letter is written to Colvin from Vailima in June 1893:

> "I had two priests to luncheon yesterday; the Bishop and Père Remy. They were very pleasant, and quite clean too, which has been known sometimes not to be - even with bishops. Monseigneur is not unimposing; with his white beard and his violet girdle he looks splendidly episcopal, and when our three waiting lads came up one after another and kneeled before him in the big hall, and kissed his ring, it did me good for a piece of pageantry. Remy is very engaging; he is a little, nervous, eager man, like a governess, and brimful of laughter and small jokes. So is the bishop indeed, and our luncheon party went off merrily ..... One trait was delicious. With a complete ignorance of the Protestant that I would scarce have imagined, he related to us (as news) little stories from the gospels, and got the names all wrong! His comments were delicious, and to our ears a thought irreverent. 'Ah! il connaissait son monde, allez!' 'Il etait fin, notre Seigneur! etc." 118

118. Tusitala; XXXV; p.59. The two men mentioned were the Catholic representatives on Samoa. Balfour; op.cit. pp.53-54 gives Stevenson's much more flattering opinion of Père Simeon, the missionary to the Marquesas.

Considering all sides of the question we may say that a distrust of and amusement at Catholicism engendered in his childhood was never to leave him for the rest of his life; but that this distrust was alleviated by a tendency to be tolerant to all forms of religion, and a refusal to be in any way dogmatic on the form of belief of any individual. Further we may allow that he was unfortunate in his observation of the Catholic church in that, where he saw it most up to 1888, i.e. in France and Mexico, it was hardly at its most sympathetic at that time.

References to missionaries in the letters of Stevenson in the apposite period, 1888-1894, are more common than any other reference to religion for that period: an obvious fact if we remember that most of Stevenson's letters from Samoa are devoted to descriptions of his reactions to externals rather than revelations as to states of mind, for which the essays and poems are more valuable. As the missionaries and R.L.S.'s attitude to them will be dealt with in reference to "In the South Seas" and other works, an introduction to the subject is all that will be attempted here. Another reason why it is not necessary to deal with the theme at length is that his opinions on missionaries remained the same throughout his sojourn in the Pacific: viz. they were the best whites in the Pacific, but their responsibility to the natives was very great, and they had not always acted responsibly or with understanding in the past. Stevenson's affection for at least two missionaries, Chalmers and the Rev. W.E. Clark of the London Mission, was unbounded -

further quotes on Chalmers can be found in Tusitala; XXXIV; p. 33, and in Lovett's biography of Chalmers (see note 110); his opinion on Clarke is given in a letter of June 15 1892 to Colvin (Tusitala; XXXIV; p. 197) in which he states that he feels Clarke's sympathy for the natives and knowledge of life were due to the fact that he had a lay education and lacked a connection with a particular church. Of more interest at this stage are his general opinions on missionaries, which will be given in quotes from three letters dating from summer 1892 to summer 1894. The first was written to the Rev. R. Wardlaw Thompson on July 12 1892:

> "Your assurance that the directors 'will not be slow' to caution any who shall have overstepped 'the missionary character', is all that I could hope; and is much more than I had expected. The rest I will very willingly leave to time ..... Nor can I ever think it wise, in a moment of complicated claims and debateable legitimacy, that the mission, which is the organ of religion, culture and improvement, should be irretrievably committed upon either side." 119

The reference to 'either side' is to the two native and corresponding white camps in the rivalry and, later, war over sovereignty in the island. Although very sketchy the extract shows Stevenson's intense interest and anxiety about the missions in what he thought were crucial days for the southern Pacific, especially in terms of the survival of the indigenous races. Stevenson's considered opinion of the

---

119. Tusitala; XXXIV; pp. 206-207.

missions after at least five years of careful observation is given in an article written by the Rev. S.J. Whitmee for the "Glasgow Herald" of Jan. 1895 and reprinted in Balfour's notes for his biography of Stevenson, which are in the National Library of Scotland:

> "I think I shall be pardoned for speaking more fully on his attitude towards missionaries and mission work. From the time he settled in Samoa his attitude was one of friendliness, and he was always ready to help with his purse any objects which our mission had in hand. On one occasion I ventured to say to him: 'Mr. Stevenson, I wish you would tell me frankly what is your opinion of our mission work in these islands.' He gave me a graver look than usual and replied 'I do not think all you missionaries are equally wise, and some of the methods you employ, I might criticise, but I have nothing except admiration for the work that has been done. The presence of missionaries in Samoa is the redeeming feature in the contact of white men with the natives." 120

The letter to Whitmee gives concisely Stevenson's attitude to the missions - the details of this and how he came to his opinions will be seen in the non-fiction work - but one further letter, that of July 14 1894 to Miss Adelaide Boodle[121] cannot be omitted here. It deals with the duties of a missionary as R.L.S. saw them: the letter is in answer to one from Miss Boodle asking for advice as to whether she should join the missionary service:

---

120. N.L.S.; MS 9897; ff. 143-144.

121. Miss Boodle had been an attached friend of the Stevensons at Bournemouth (1884-1887) and a pupil of Stevenson in the art of writing. She had been trusted to keep an eye on Stevenson's interests in connection with the house ('Skerryvore') which had been let after their departure. She was to write "R.L.S. and his Sine Qua Non"(London; John Murray; 1926) one of the many rather dull biographical books written in the twenty-five years after his death.

> ".....So, at last, you are going into mission work? where I think your heart always was. You will like it in a way, but remember it is dreary long. Do you know the story of the American tramp who was offered meals and a day's wage to chop with the back of an axe on a fallen trunk? 'Damned if I can go on chopping when I can't see the chips fly!' You will never see the chips fly in mission work, never; and be sure you know it beforehand. The work is one long disappointment, varied by acute revulsions; and those who are by nature courageous and cheerful, and have grown old in experience, learn to rub their hands over infinitesimal successes. However, as I really believe there is some good done in the long run - gutta cavat lapidem non vi in this business - it is a useful and honourable career in which no one should be ashamed to embark. Always remember the fable of the sun, the storm, and the traveller's cloak. Forget wholly and for ever small pruderies, and remember that you cannot change ancestral feelings of right and wrong without what is practically soul-murder. Barbarous as the customs may seem, always bear them with patience, always judge them with gentleness, always find in them some seed of good; see that you always develop them; remember that all you can do is to civilise the man in the line of his own civilisation, such as it is. And never expect, never believe in, thaumaturgic conversions. They may do very well for St. Paul; in the case of an Andaman islander they mean less than nothing. In fact, what you have to do is to teach the parents in the interests of their great-grandchildren." 122.

Stevenson's policy of putting the interests of the native populations first is well demonstrated by this letter, as is his distrust of the old methods of dealing with such thorny subjects as cannibalism, prudish clothing and tapus. It is interesting however that he is not so hard on this aspect of the missionary's work and the lack of success at it in this letter as he is in "In the South Seas" written four years earlier. This would seem to suggest a change of opinion, however slight, in favour of the general missionary activities

---

122. Tusitala; XXXV; pp. 141-142.

during his six years in the Pacific. It is noticeable that his opinion on the mission ethos stands in roughly the same position as regards old and new as his overall religious position does - i.e. he is not a blatant condemner of the white influence in the Pacific, nor is he by any means a standard-bearer for that influence.

Finally, we come to something which has often been commented on, R.L.S.'s tendency to identify with the Scottish Covenanters, that group of religious zealots who have more than anybody else provided the Presbyterian side of Scottish Church affairs its only real martyr-heroes. The basis of Stevenson's identification is of course the influence of his nurse Alison Cunningham on his childhood - 'Stevenson's second mother' as she has been called. This has been gone into at length by Balfour, Kelman and others and need not be repeated here - suffice it to say that 'Cummy' was especially fond of the dramatic tales of the Covenanters, amongst them Wodrow's "Analecta" Patrick Walker's "Biographia Presbyteriana", "The Cameronian's Dream" and "The Cloud of Witnesses" and many more. Nevertheless, although the boyhood years have been thoroughly investigated, the development of the identification has not. We see from a letter of September 5 1868 that, at eighteen, the Covenanters still held power as a myth for Stevenson:

> "This morning I got a delightful haul: ... your letter of the fourth (letters and books surely misdated); papa's of the same day; Virgil's "Bucolics", very thankfully received; and Aikman's "Annals" [123] a precious and most acceptable donation, for which I tender my most ebullient thanksgivings. I almost forgot to drink my tea and eat mine egg.
>
> It contains more detailed accounts than anything I ever saw, except Wodrow, without being so portentously tiresome and so desperately overborne with footnotes, proclamations, acts of parliament, and citations as that last history ....." [124]

The fact that Stevenson enjoyed Aikman so much shows that he had not as yet any real objectivity on the subject (cf. "The Pentland Rising" : see non-fiction section), although he can prefer one source to another. From 1868 to the 1890s there are practically no letters at all dealing with the Covenanters in any detail - the only possible reason being that he was perhaps influenced by his developing very tolerant religious beliefs to dismiss the Covenanters during this period as bigoted fanatics, as was the developing theory put forward by contemporary Scottish historians especially Burton and, later, Mathieson and Lang. In only one letter (in the National Library of Scotland) from this period is there any reference to a Covenanting work - that of October 2 1873 to Mrs. Sitwell, in which he says he is reading the "Analecta" [125] and making 'notes as best I could'.

---

123. James Aikman: "Annals of the Persecution in Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution" (Edinburgh; Hugh Paton; 1842). One of the many works of Covenanting hagiography, completely biased in favour of the Covenanters.
124. Tusitala; XXXI; p. 20. To his mother.
125. Robert Wodrow (1679-1734) was the best known historian of the Covenanters in both the 18th and 19th centuries. His great work was "The History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland to the Revolution"(1721-1722); his "Analecta" was published by the Maitland Club in 1842-1843. Patrick Walker (1666-1745?) published lives of various Covenanters in the 1720s and early 1730s. These, along with Alexander Shields "Life of Renwick" were published in 1827 in "Biographia Presbyteriana".

It is not till May 1891 in a letter to Miss Boodle that he broaches the subject in any depth, and this is followed by one of December 7 1893 to J.M. Barrie, who had written to him of the close links both had with Edinburgh and Scotland and for advice as to the continuation of his literary career. Extracts from both letters will now be given, to illustrate Stevenson's ponderings of his debt to the Covenanters:

> ...."my old Presbyterian spirit - for, mind you, I am a child of the Covenanters - whom I do not love, but they are mine after all, my father's and my mother's - and they had their merits too, and their ugly beauties, and grotesque heroisms, that I love them for, the while I laugh at them; but in their name and mine do what you think right and let the world fall ....." 126

and, to Barrie

> "I have been returning to my wallowing in the mire. When I was a child, and indeed until I was nearly a man, I consistently read Covenanting books. Now that I am a grey-beard - or would be, if I could raise the beard - I have returned, and for weeks back have read little else but Wodrow, Walker, Shields, etc. Of course this is with the idea of a novel, but in the course of it I made a very curious discovery. I have been accustomed to hear refined and intelligent critics - those who know so much better what we are than we do ourselves, - trace down my literary descent from all sorts of people, including Addison, of whom I could never read a word. Well, laigh i'your lug, sir - the clue was found. My style is from the Covenanting writers. Take a particular case - the fondness for rhymes. I don't know of any English prose-writer who rhymes except by accident, and then a stone had better be tied around his neck and himself cast into the sea. But my Covenanting buckies rhyme all the time - a beautiful example of the unconscious rhyme above referred to.

126. Tusitala; XXXIV; p. 79.

> " Do you know, and have you really tasted these delightful works? If not it should be remedied; there is enough of the Auld Licht in you to be ravished." 127

The novel referred to in the second quote is "Heathercat" which Stevenson started in 1893 but left, after completing the first few chapters, for "St. Ives" and "Weir of Hermiston" (his original title for the book was to be "The Sweet Singer"). Stevenson's claim that his style was 'from the Covenanting writers' has been gone into thoroughly by Kelman, in what is perhaps the only detailed survey of religious allusion in Stevenson's work.[128] His conclusions, backed with persuasive evidence, show that R.L.S. was hardly exaggerating when he made the claim. Both quotes show R.L.S.'s love for the subject and a certain identification with the type of men the Covenanters were. Perhaps, above all, it was the fact that they were never compromisers in their religion, along with the security of 'knowledge' that comes with this - i.e. in terms of being correct in all their motives and aspirations - which made them attractive to him. Also, no doubt, their connection with Scotland and his youth, and the part of the Scottish countryside he knew best, made it inevitable that he would return to them when he had not seen his native land in five or six years. His real tribute to them is of course in some of his best work - "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes", "Travels with a Donkey", "Heathercat" and "Weir of Hermiston" - and can be dealt with when these works are.

---

127. Tusitala, XXXV; p. 93
128. Kelman, op. cit., pp. 69-79.

At the end of this biographical section we can take a cursory glance back at the general picture of Stevenson's life that can be found in his correspondence, although a full picture can only be given when the content of the work is taken with its context, which is the biographical side. Firstly, it is obvious that Stevenson, after the rebellion period proper - i.e. from early 1873 to 1875 - was a Christian in most if not all the ways by which we would today prove the fact. He was unconventional for his day in his obvious distrust of churchmen and churches, and the whole 'church government' side of religion, as with his views on life after death, but at no time in his maturity was he atheist, agnostic or 'free-thinking' if this last term is taken to include any doubt in the existence of a God.

Secondly, within the period with which most biographers are chiefly concerned, i.e. from 1875 to his death in 1894, there seems to have been a slight but continuing movement towards a more certain faith - whether this was helped along or not by his reaction to frequent serious attacks of illness remains unproved, but an interesting and not a demonstrably unsound theory. The major change in this respect was in his idea of God, which, as the years went on, developed towards a much more deterministic, indeed fatalist attitude to the deity. Although always tolerant, a new tolerance for the petty follies of the Scottish church

and the Roman Catholic church grew with his knowledge of men and institutions, though, in the case of the Catholics, the movement towards a complete toleration on his part was hampered by what he thought radical abuses of Christianity. In his maturity too he held on to a belief in the veracity of the Gospels as incorporating the actual words of Christ, very much against the findings of the 'New Criticism'. There can be no doubt that his belief was a very individual one, and not one that many came to in those days or, indeed, come to now. The true verification of all this comes, however, when these strands are traced through the published works, from the semi-autobiographical works, such as the non-fiction and poems,to the more objective works, needing interpretation rather than demonstration, such as the drama, fables, short stories and novels.

II. THE SEMI-AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORK:

TRAVEL BOOKS, ESSAYS AND POEMS.

The semi-autobiographical works of Stevenson fall naturally into three sections - poems, essays and what I shall call 'travel works'. The division of non-fiction prose works into these last two categories for study purposes is doubly valid in that the type of attitudes which emerge from the essays and from the other prose works of an autobiographical nature are not exactly similar. This is especially true in terms of comparative objectivity - in shorter essays the central shaping influence of Stevenson's personal beliefs is more apparent than in his more outward looking 'travel books'. This subjectivity is further illustrated when we look at the poems, in which Stevenson, when he talks of his religion, feels no need to relate his beliefs to any foci of interest outside his own consciousness. The 'travel works' on the other hand, and here I include such smaller essays as "A Winter's Walk in Carrick and Galloway"[129] and "Cockermouth and Keswick",[130] reveal how Stevenson's religious beliefs affected his attitude to particular groups and sects, e.g. Catholics and missionaries, rather than his personal attitudes to duty or immortality as they affect the Christian. To begin with these works of travel and proceed by way of the short essays to the poems is the best way to approach a body of writing which in itself is the point of transition between pure autobiography and the objective writings - the plays and fiction. It is also appropriate that we begin with the travel books in that they deal mostly with the kind of material we have just been discussing as regards the biographical side - Stevenson's attitudes to the manifestations of contemporary religion.

---

129. First published in the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898). Also in "The Illustrated London News" Summer 1896. The piece is a fragment and the title is misleading in that Stevenson has not reached Galloway where the fragment breaks off.
130. First published in the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898).

i) Travel Works.

The main works of Stevenson which can be classified as 'travel works' are "An Inland Voyage",[131] "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes"[132] "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes",[133] "Across the Plains",[134] "The Amateur Emigrant",[135] "Monterey"[136] "The Silverado Squatters"[137] "In the South Seas"[138] "A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa"[139] and "A Mountain Town in France."[140] Other works in the same milieu ("Forest Notes",[141] "Fontainebleu"[142] and "San Francisco"[143] for example) are not so important for this study; indeed of those mentioned, only the first three, along with "Monterey" and "In the South Seas" are of great interest in terms of religious attitudes. One of the commonest facets of Stevenson's reaction to contemporary Christianity was his distrust of Catholicism, which emerges clearly from the letters. A more complete picture of this is given by the non-fiction works, especially by the French

131. First published in April 1878 (London; C. Kegan Paul).
132. First published in June 1879 (London; C. Kegan Paul).
133. First published in "The Portfolio" June/December 1878. In book form Dec. 1878 (London; Seeley, Jackson and Halliday).
134. First published in "Longman's Magazine" July/August 1883. In book form April 1892. (London; Cassell & Co.)
135. First published in January 1895 (Chicago; Stone and Kimball).
136. First published as "The Old Pacific Capital"in "Fraser's Magazine" November 1880. In book form in "Across the Plains" (1892).
137. First published in "The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine" November/December 1883. In book form in December 1883 (London; Chatto & Windus).
138. First published as "The South Seas" in "Black and White" February/December 1892. In book form in 1896 (New York: Charles Scribner & Son).
139. First published in August 1892 (London; Cassell & Co.).
140. First published in a restricted edition in 1896 (London; Bodley Head), and in "The Studio" for December of the same year.
141. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine May 1876. In book form in "Essays of Travel" (London; Chatto & Windus; 1905).
142. First published in "The Magazine of Art" May/June 1884. In book form in "Across the Plains" (1892).
143. First published as "A Modern Cosmopolis" in "The Magazine of Art" May 1883. In book form in "The Edinburgh Edition(1894-98).

travel books. In "An Inland Voyage" the pattern of most future statements by Stevenson on Catholicism are laid down: they illustrate further, in the main, that lack of sympathy shown in the letters. In the "Inland Voyage" the allusions to Catholicism are, perhaps unfortunately, all to its unattractive side, or at least that side which was least likely to appeal to the orthodox Protestant. In an interesting passage Stevenson compares the magnificence of the great cathedral at Noyon with the ritual which takes place in it:

> "I could never fathom how a man dares to lift up his voice to preach in a cathedral. What is he to say that will not be an anti-climax? ....I could never rightly make out the nature of the service I beheld. Four or five priests and as many choristers were singing Miserere before the high altar when I went in. There was no congregation but a few old women on chairs and old men kneeling on the pavement. After a while a long train of young girls, walking two and two, each with a lighted taper in her hand, and all dressed in black with a white veil, came from behind the altar, and began to descend the nave; the four first carrying a Virgin and child upon a table. The priests and choristers arose from their knees and followed after, singing 'Ave Mary' as they went ..... I understood a great deal of the spirit of what went on. Indeed it would be difficult not to understand the Miserere, which I take to be the composition of an atheist. If it ever be a good thing to take such despondency to heart, the Miserere is the right music, and a cathedral a fit scene. So far I am at one with the Catholics: - an odd name for them, after all? But why, in God's name, these holiday choristers? why these priests who steal wandering looks about the congregation while they feign to be at prayer? Why this fat nun, who rudely arranges her procession and shakes delinquent virgins by the elbow? Why this spitting, and sniffing, and forgetting of keys, and the thousand and one misadventures that disturb a state of mind labouriously edified with chants and organings? In any play-house reverend fathers may see what can be done with a little art, and how to move high sentiments, it is necessary to drill the super-numeraries and have every stool in its proper place." 144

144. "An Inland Voyage"; Tusitala; Vol. XVII; pp. 80-81.

From certain of the sentiments expressed here it is clear that Stevenson is not really trying to sympathise with the Catholic ritual: the point about the Miserere and the way he makes it indicate this unmistakably and the tone of voice indeed in which he describes the actual content of the ceremonial - the very strangeness Stevenson seems to see - might not be found quite so readily in a more sympathetic Protestant or agnostic even of his own day. Finally, his rather disparaging comparison with 'any play-house' indicates no particular respect for the way the Church in question tries to put its analysis of the Christian message forward. The same tone can be heard in his description of the devotions of an old lady at the church at Pont Sainte Maxence (Dept. Seine et Oise):

> "She went from chair to chair, from altar to altar, circumnavigating the church. To each shrine she dedicated an equal number of beads and an equal length of time. Like a prudent capitalist with a somewhat cynical view of the commercial prospect, she desired to place her supplications in a great variety of heavenly securities. She would risk nothing on the credit of any single intercessor. Out of the whole company of saints and angels, not but one was to suppose himself her champion-elect against the Great Assize! I could only think of it as a dull, transparent, jugglery, based upon unconscious unbelief." 145

The fact that we need not, after all, go the whole way with Stevenson on his final interpretation of the woman's motives proves some of his bias - what he has obviously misunderstood is the unintellectual nature of the average French Catholic and the resulting lack of pure reason within his faith. He would probably have looked at all ritualistic manifestations of

145. Tusitala; XVII; pp. 95-96.

Catholicism as something unnecessary - an addition to the practical and spiritual work of a church which only served to divert attention from more important matters. On the other hand there is hardly a trace of pure Protestant bigotry in the work, and indeed more toleration of Catholicism than was usual in his day. For instance though his visit to the church at Creil (near Pont Sainte Maxence) is marked by the same distrust of ritual (he criticises especially the 'pass-book to heaven' concept),[146] he feels that it is only because he is a Protestant or was brought up a Protestant that he is unable to sympathise, and not because he sees more clearly than the Catholics:

> "I cannot help wondering, as I transcribe these notes, whether a Protestant born and bred is in a fit state to understand these signs, and do them what justice they deserve; and I cannot look so merely ugly and mean to the Faithful as they do to me ..... I see it as plainly, I say, as a proposition in Euclid, that my Protestant mind has missed the point, and that there goes with these deformities some higher and more religious spirit than I dream. I wonder if other people would make the same allowance for me! Like the ladies of Creil, having recited my rosary of toleration, I look for my indulgence on the spot." 147

This level of toleration, though hardly startling nowadays might have raised a few eyebrows in the 1870s, when even liberal churchmen still felt a certain superiority to Roman Catholicism unless they were of the Anglo-Catholic party or the higher Scottish Episcopal church. The climate of toleration which in the course of the century had grown up in

---

146. Tusitala; XVIII; p. 99. See p. 70.

147. Tusitala; XVII; pp. 99-100.

England had not been wholly paralled in Scotland, and the situation there was hardly bettered by the influx of the immediate post-Famine Irish catholics in the late 1840s. As I have already pointed out (pp. 68-69), the intellectual standing of the R.C. Church in the eyes of non-Catholics had taken a blow in the 1860s under Pio Nono from which it was hardly to recover by the end of the century. This to some extent led to a general suspicion of Catholicism in Britain and Protestant Germany at this time. Stevenson's toleration then can be seen as substantially greater than was usual in his time, but hardly reaching the level nowadays usual among educated people.

In "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes" and "In the South Seas" we find the same toleration mingled with mistrust which characterised the earlier book, undiminished in the eleven years which elapsed between the Cevennes and South Pacific books. In "Travels with a Donkey" he seeks out, presumably through curiosity, the Trappist monastery at Notre Dame des Neiges. The reaction of Stevenson to the monastery is substantially different from his reaction to the Ultramontane Catholicism of Noyon. The austerity and joyfulness of the monks' lives, even at the hour of death, seems to have struck a responsive chord in him. Here he analyses the Trappist vow of silence:

> "This austere rule entitles a man to heaven as by right. When the Trappist sickens, he quits not his habit: he lies in the bed of death as he has prayed and laboured in his frugal and silent existence; and when the Liberator comes, at the very moment, even before they have carried him in his robe to lie his little last in the chapel among continual chantings, joy-bells break forth, as if for a marriage, from the slated belfry, and proclaim throughout the neighbourhood that another soul has gone to God.
>
> At night, under the conduct of my kind Irishman,[148] I took my place in the gallery to hear compline and 'salve Regina' with which the Cistercians bring every day to a conclusion. There were none of those circumstances which strike the Protestant as childish or as tawdry in the public offices of Rome. A stern simplicity, heightened by the romance of the surroundings, spoke directly to the heart." [149]

Other experiences, however, from the same part of the book could only have cemented the more negative side of Stevenson's attitude to Catholics. In particular the attempt by a priest and an ex-soldier to convert him to the 'true faith' obviously tested him greatly; the two men made even the tolerance of R.L.S. wear thin through their insulting references to Protestantism and, especially to his father, 'the family theologian'[150]. Despite the buffetings, Stevenson is able to defend and maintain his belief in the relative unimportance of the church system by which the individual reaches to his god:

> "For one who feels very similarly to all sects of religion, and who has never been able, even for a moment, to weigh seriously the merit of this or that creed on the eternal side of things, however much he may see to praise or blame upon the secular and temporal side, the situation thus created was both unfair and painful. I committed

148. The 'Irishman' was the deacon of the monastery and possessed a more worldly attitude to his duties than the rest of the monks Stevenson met during his short stay.
149. Tusit.; XVII; pp. 193.
150. The argument and proselytising lasted a complete day, the worst insults coming in the evening. The reference is Tusit.; XVII; pp. 197-199.

> "my second fault in tact, and tried to plead that it was all the same thing in the end, and we were all drawing near by different sides to the same kind and undiscriminating Friend and Father. That as it seems to lay spirits, would be the only gospel worthy of the name." 151

Stevenson is hardly being honest with himself as to the relative distribution of his sympathy between Catholicism and Protestantism - so much has surely been amply demonstrated. If he had been altogether candid with himself he would no doubt have said that the attempted proselytising was a further example of something in contemporary Catholicism which led him to feel deep misgivings. The very strangeness for him of the first sight he got of the monastery with its 'medieval friar, fighting with a load of turfs'[152] and his extreme reaction to the sight - 'I went on slowly like a man who should have passed a bourne unnoticed, and strayed into the country of the dead' - belie the complete toleration Stevenson seems to be claiming as his. Indeed, on the next page to that of the 'toleration' quote, he tells us, again perhaps with a lack of complete candour, that because he is a 'faddling hedonist' he cannot totally sympathise with the Trappists.[153] Again, when he has left the monastery of Notre Dame des Neiges far behind and has been walking through the 'Cevennes of the Cevennes' - the land of the Camisards - he returns to the subject of his relative sympathy and antipathy as regards Protestant and Catholic:

---

151. Tusit. XVII; p. 198. There is a further example of Catholic proselytism in "A Mountain Town in France:" Tusit. XVII; p. 135.

152. Tusit.; XVII; pp. 184-185.

153. Tusit.; XVII; p. 199.

> "I own I met these Protestants with delight and a sense of coming home. I was accustomed to speak their language in another and deeper sense of the word than that which distinguishes between French and English; for the true Babel is a divergence upon morals. And hence I could hold more free communication with the Protestants, and judge them more justly, than the Catholics. Father Apollinaris may pair offwith my mountain Plymouth Brother 154 as two guileless and devout old men; yet I ask myself if I had as ready a feeling for the virtues of the Trappist; or, had I been a Catholic, if I should have felt so warmly to the dissenter of La Veriede. With the first I was on terms of mere forbearance; but with the other, although only on a misunderstanding and by keeping on selected points, it was still possible to hold converse and exchange some honest thoughts." 155

I think that the distrust of Catholicism so marked in both the letters and essays has now been adequately dealt with. The fact that it reached into the period of "In the South Seas" has already been noted in the section on correspondence - there are further examples in the book mentioned, notably where he is amused by the Virgin worship and love of sacred vessels among the Catholic missions.[156] It is important to note, however, that Stevenson refuses to let these bad experiences of the Roman ritual and R.C. fanaticism for conversion blind him to the genuine piety in the Trappist monks. He does not abandon all respect for Catholics because he has more often than not seen the worst of this Church and Faith; furthermore,

154. Father Apollinaris was the abbot of the monastery. Stevenson's "Plymouth Brother" was a man he met on the road near the end of his journey, in the Valley of the river Tarn (see Tusit. XVII; pp. 229-231). The man in question presumed that R.L.S. was of his persuasion in religion, and the two got on very well together - the Brothers seemed to agree with most of Stevenson's liberal opinions on entry into the heavenly kingdom. Stevenson admits to knowing little of the precepts of the faith of the Brethren - had he been alive to read Gosse's "Father and Son" he might have been exceedingly confused as to the true beliefs of the man he met on La Variede.

155. Tusit.; XVII; pp. 234-235.

156. Tusit.; XX; pp. 52, 106.

he gives them the benefit of every doubt that is going. On only one occasion however as far as I am aware does R.L.S. find himself comparing Protestant and Catholic to the advantage of the latter - this is about a year after the events narrated in "Travels with a Donkey", in winter 1879 at Monterey in California.[157] Significantly, however, it is not the official Catholic presence that is lauded but the Indian congregation of the Jesuit Mission at Carmel. The Jesuits had long since gone when Stevenson knew the mission but the Indians had the opportunity once a year to reiterate their faith. It is noticeable that though Stevenson's main grievance is against Anglosaxonry and the whites as whites in a multiracial environment - 'the millionaire vulgarians of the Big Bonanza' - he here associates Protestantism with white racism:

> "Only one day in the year, the day before our Guy Fawkes, the padre drives over the hill from Monterey; the little sacristy, which is the only covered portion of the church, is filled with seats and decorated for the service; the Indians troop together, their bright dresses contrasting with their dark and melancholy faces; and there, among a crowd of somewhat unsympathetic holiday-makers, you may hear God served with perhaps more touching circumstances than in any other temple under heaven ..... I have never seen faces more vividly lit up with joy than the faces of these Indian singers. It was to them not only the worship of God, nor any act by which they recalled and commemorated better days, but was besides an exercise of culture, where all they knew of art and letters was united and expressed. And it made a man's heart sorry for the good fathers of yore who had taught them to dig and to reap, to read and to sing, who had given them European mass-books which they still preserve and study in their cottages, and

157. Stevenson, who had met his future wife at Grez in Fontainebleu in 1877, had, by 1879, persauded himself that it was his duty to marry the lady - she was married already though estranged. He therefore started for America in August 1879, married in early 1880, and was back in Europe in August of that year.

> "who had now passed away from all authority and influence in that land - to be succeeded by greedy land-thieves and sacrilegious pistol-shots. So ugly a thing may our Anglo-Saxon Protestantism appear beside the doings of the Society of Jesus." 158.

It is interesting that Stevenson's sympathy for depressed and exploited native populations, so evident in "In the South Seas" should have existed almost at the same level in late 1879. Even here, however, Stevenson seems to recognise that a joy in an aspect of Catholicism is a very strange feeling for him - the last sentence and the very surprise expressed in it that he should prefer the Jesuits at any point to the religion he was brought up within seem to prove the point he makes himself, that 'my sympathies flew never with so much difficulty as towards Catholic virtues'.

The treatment of missionaries in the travel books is, unlike that of Catholicism, restricted to a particular span of years and to all intents and purposes, a particular book - "In the South Seas". With the exception of the Indian mission at Carmel there are no other analyses of missionary activity at any length until we arrive at the years 1888-1894; the fact that "A Footnote to History" is a purely historical work, and concerned with Samoan politics, high and low, means that "In the South Seas" is the only work of any length on the South Pacific period which is of any interest in terms of religion as such and the mission culture in particular. Whereas in the letters Stevenson wrote from the South Seas to Colvin, Miss Boodle and others, the emphasis was generally on the comparative merit of missionaries as compared to the other whites, in "In the

158. Tusit.; XVIII; pp. 141-142.

South Seas"it is their failings and lack of comprehension of their task which are very much in evidence. One reason for this is that the South Seas book as a whole was probably meant to overemphasise the dangers to native populations of too much contact with the worse kinds of whites, and to heavily underline the great burdens that the missionaries had to shoulder. Certainly the whole tone of the book is pessimistic; Stevenson seems to be saying that despite the right actions of some white administrators and missionaries, the effect of whites on the South Pacific would in the end prove disastrous, especially in the more vulnerable areas like the Marquesas. In a situation of declining population and 'culture shock', the responsibilities of the missionary were grievous and his power to change trends almost unchallenged:

> "In Polynesian islands he easily obtains pre-eminent authority; the king becomes his maire du palais; he can proscribe, he can command; and the temptation is ever towards too much. Thus (by all accounts) the Catholics in Mangareva, and thus (to my own knowledge) the Protestants in Hawaii, have rendered life in a more or less degree unliveable to their converts. And the mild, uncomplaining creatures (like children in a prison) yawn and await death. It is easy to blame the missionary. But it is his business to make changes. It is surely his business, for example, to prevent war; and yet I have instanced war itself as one of the elements of health. On the other hand, it were, perhaps, easy for the missionary to proceed more gently, and to regard every change as an affair of weight. I take the average missionary; I am sure I do him no more than justice when I suppose that he would hesitate to bombard a village, even in brder to convert an archipelago. Experience begins to show us (at least in Polynesian islands) that change of habit is bloodier than a bombardment." 159.

159. Tusit.; XX; p. 37. The reference to the beneficial aspect of inter-tribal warfare is to the effect this has on the numbers of population in the overpopulated islands. This was especially a problem in the Marquesas.

Stevenson goes on to delineate the true picture of the effect of the arrival of the whites on the chastity of the native women - that, in fact, the moral strictures of the missionaries either led to increase in lethargy and a seeming death-wish or, as a reaction, to an increase in the very thing they were campaigning against. He adds that the rest of the whites were, if anything, less moral and more sexually debased than the Polynesians.[160] His strictures are noticeably balanced, nevertheless, by statements (though much shorter in length) that the missionaries are, as he repeated many times, 'the best whites in the Pacific'. While still talking about the Marquesas, he follows a statement of this belief with a look at the virtues and vices, comparatively speaking, of married and celibate missionaries,[161] coming to the conclusion that the celibates (presumably for the most part Catholic) were better in that though tending to be deficient in such things as personal cleanliness, were more likely to subsume themselves into native life and be generally more sympathetic to native mores. He is pessimistic, however, about the influences surrounding the life of the native missionary, and sceptical about the wisdom of their extensive use by the mission organisations:

> "It might be assumed that native missionaries would prove more indulgent but the reverse is found to be the case. The new broom sweeps clean; and the white missionary of today is often embarrassed by the bigotry of his native coadjutor. What else should we expect? On some islands, sorcery, polygamy, human sacrifice,

160. Tusit.; XX p. 38.
161. Tusit.;XX pp. 73-74.

> "and tobacco-smoking have been prohibited, the dress of the native has been modified, and himself warned in strong terms against rival sects of Christianity; all by the same man at the same period of time, and with the like authority. By what criterion is the convert to distinguish the essential from the unessential? He swallows the nostrum whole; there has been no play of mind, no instruction, and, except for some brute utility in the prohibitions, no advance." 162

It is characteristic that R.L.S. does not wish to be unfair to native missionaries themselves. He disapproves of what they have been - wrongly - taught, not of the men themselves. He therefore fills the rest of the chapter of the book with descriptions of the unwhite courage of these same natives in their spreading of the Word. His measure of the difficulty of the 19th century white missionary to truly find the correct way to deal with all the habits and beliefs of the Polynesian, especially such things as tapus and cannibalism, is perfectly summed up in a short sentence from later in the book: 'The sister was very religious, a great church-goer, one that used to reprove me if I stayed away; I found afterwards that she privately worshipped a shark.'[163]

The quotation is also an instance of Stevenson's anti-Church stance which must now be examined. First the question of Stevenson's developing attitude to the Scottish Covenanters as revealed in the 'travel works' has to be looked at. The main source here is "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes", which though written about his native city, is in the form of a travel guide for visitors (the actual contents of the book are

---

162. Tusit.; XX, pp. 74-75

163. Tusit.; XX, p. 164.

hardly those of a work of travel in the sections we will be looking at). A quick glance at "The Pentland Rising"[164] is in order as a preliminary because that work gives very good indication of his earliest ideas on the subject, and the context by which later utterances should be judged. The subject of this, his earliest printed work, is the rebellion of Covenanters of 1666 which was the first serious challenge to Charles II in Scotland. Probably this affair was the least likely to have succeeded of all the risings, although it was also the campaign which in the long run reflected most credit on the rebels. Stevenson's attitude in the essay is predictable - he goes out of his way to present the Covenanting side as that more worthy of sympathy. The essay crudely and melodramatically puts Covenanters and Royalists on two respective stances of martyrdom and tyranny: in retrospect this seems the lynchpin of what purports to be a historical essay. Nevertheless, this is the first piece of work to chronicle an obsession, and the heroism of the Covenanters in "The Pentland Rising" is the same, as we shall see, as that of "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes". Stevenson's position in the contemporary argument among historians over the morality of the Covenanters is clarified at its end:

> "Bear this remonstrance of Defoe's[165] in mind, and though it is the fashion of the day to

164. First published in 1866(Edinburgh; Andrew Elliot) in a limited edition and in the Edinburgh Edition (1894-1898).

165. Defoe, hardly the darling of Scottish historians because of his activities in the Union negotiations in 1707, was obviously not totally opposed to the idea of Scots defying an unjust English law. He says, as quoted by Stevenson, that nature had dictated in this instance 'to all people a right of defence when illegally and arbitrarily attacked in a manner not justifiable either by laws of nature, the laws of God, or the laws of the country'. The quotation is from "Memoirs of the Church of Scotland" (1717).

> "jeer and to mock, to execrate and to condemn the noble band of Covenanters, though the bitter laugh at their old-world religious views, the curl of the lip at their merits, and the chilling silence on their bravery and determination, are but too rife through all society; be charitable to what was evil, and honest to what was good about the Pentland insurgents, who fought for life and liberty, for country and religion". 166

These sentiments would have angered such as William Law Mathieson[167] in Stevenson's own day, and would not win agreement from Professor Donaldson today. Stevenson's sentiments were no doubt clearer at the age of sixteen than they were at thirty, as can be seen in the section of "Travels with a Donkey" which deals with the Camisards[168] (roughly half the book - pp. 214-250 Tusitala; XVII), where comparison between the French and Scottish insurgents favours the former quite definitely. It seems inconsistent on R.L.S.'s part that he should to some extent decry the Covenanters in a book of 1879 while praising them in another of the same year - i.e. the Edinburgh book. One reason may be that he saw in the Camisards his own earlier image of the Covenanters - an image which had not included for instance the massacre of the defeated at Philiphaugh:

> "There was something in this landscape, smiling though wild, that explained to me the spirit of the Southern Covenanters. Those who took to the hills for conscience'

166. Tusit.; XXVIII; p. 110.
167. Law Mathieson (1868-1938) wrote mostly on Scottish History, and especially the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. Examples of his work, in which he takes a strongly nationalist line are "Politics and Religion, A Study in Scottish History From the Reformation to the Revolution"(1902) and "Scotland and the Union: 1695-1747" (1907)
168. The Camisards were Protestant rebels against the absolutist Catholicism of Louis XIV in the years 1702-1708. They centred their fight in the Florac and Pont de Montvert areas of the Cevennes. Stevenson's poem on the most colourful of their leaders, Jean Cavalier (1681-1740) is included in Janet Adam Smith: "Robert Louis Stevenson: Collected Poems" (London: Rupert Hart-Davis; 1971). Stevenson became so interested in Cavalier's career that he contemplated a biographical piece on him. Like the idea of the history of .../

> "sake in Scotland had all gloomy and bedevilled thoughts; for once that they received God's comfort they would be twice engaged with Satan; but the Camisards had only bright and supporting visions. They dealt much more in blood, both given and taken; yet I find no obsession of the Evil One in their records. With a light conscience, they pursued their lives in these rough times and circumstances ..... They knew they were on God's side, with a knowledge that has no parallel among the Scots; for the Scots, although they might be certain of the cause, could never rest confident of the person." 169.

However if we compare descriptions of the Camisards in "Travels with a Donkey" with those of the Covenanters in "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes" there seems little difference in his identification with each:

> "Strange generals who moved apart to take counsel with the God of Hosts, and fled or offered battle, set sentinels or slept in an unguarded camp, as the spirit whispered to their hearts!. And there to follow these and other leaders, was the rank and file of prophets and disciples, bold, patient, indefatigable, hardy to run upon the mountains, cheering their rough life with psalms, eager to fight, eager to pray ....." 170 (Camisards).

and, referring to the Martyrs' Monument in Greyfriars Kirkyard:

> "There is no moorsman shot in a snow shower beside Irongray or Co'monell; there is not one of the two hundred who were drowned off the Orkneys; nor so much as a poor, over-driven, Covenanting slave in the American plantations; but can lay claim to a share in that memorial, and, if such things interest just men among the shades, can boast he has a monument on earth as well as Julius Caesar or the Pharaohs .....

---

168. (continued).....
of the Scottish Highlands, the result was much gathering of evidence but no written outline.
169. Tusitala; XVII; pp. 231-232.
170. " " p. 215.

> "So long as men do their duty, even if it be greatly in a misapprehension, they will be leading pattern lives; and whether or not they come to lie beside a martyr's monument, we may be sure they will find a safe haven somewhere in the providence of God. It is not well to think of death, unless we temper the thought with that of heroes who despised it. Upon what ground is of small account; if it be only the bishop who was burned for his faith in the antipodes, his memory lightens the heart and makes us walk undisturbed among graves" 171 (Covenanters).

The really strong emotion on the author's part is of course connected with the Greyfriars scene rather than the one in the Cevennes: because the martyrs of Galloway and the eastern Borders were those he had heard of since his very youngest days he could not possibly have identified more with the Camisards than the Covenanters. Indeed, there is some evidence that Stevenson actually underwent the journey to the Cevennes because he was fascinated by the similarity between the Camisards and the Covenanters. There is no doubt that a change of attitude has taken place since 1866, however: in "The Pentland Rising" the position was one of partisanship while in "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes" and "Travels with a Donkey" it is identification. The identification is such, indeed, remembering also the statements in the letters

171. Tusitala; XXVI; pp. 165, 167. Greyfriars Kirkyard has in itself many connections with Stevenson's childhood and youth, being a place he frequented often, especially in his University days. Furnas (op.cit. p.50) talks of Stevenson's 'moping' there in morbid obsession in a place which is less than cheerful on a sunny day and on a rainy, says Furnas, 'the suggestion is markedly suicidal'. Furnas's whole argument here seems to be based on the fact that he himself felt depressed when he visited the churchyard! He seems to believe firstly that Greyfriars can give rise only to thoughts of death and, secondly, that the individual cannot think of death without being morbid. The very passages I have quoted from the chapter of "Edinburgh-Picturesque Notes" entitled "Greyfriars" surely gives the lie to this idea. Furthermore, if we read the fragment, "The Wreath of Immortelles" (Tusit.;XXX;pp.166-169), written about Greyfriars in R.L.S.'s days at college, the author's attitude can hardly be called morbid or sickly - rather the reverse in fact.

of 1893 to Barrie and others, that the rather fulsome claims of S.R. Crockett in "The Apprenticeship of Robert Louis Stevenson"[172] that Stevenson's character had an 'essential Covenanting base' do not appear so ridiculous after all. The treatment of the Covenanters in "Heathercat"[173] to a certain extent shows the Crockett thesis to be perhaps tainted with wishful thinking - Crockett himself had more of a Covenanting 'base' than R.L.S. It was Crockett not Stevenson who was to write heroic Covenanting novels - "Heathercat" itself was not to be about the 'moorland martyrs' in themselves but the Covenanting persecutions were to form a context for the adventures of the main protagonists.

Although the main religious interests in the travel books is centred on Stevenson's attitudes to the religious movements of his own time and of times gone bye, there is some information to be gleaned from this on more personal aspects. The main field here is Stevenson's attitude to conventional religion, especially in Scotland. The only difference that can be detected between what he says in the letters and in the travel works is the comparative strength of the feeling in the latter. Both in "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes" and "The Amateur Emigrant" are passages of extraordinary bitterness dealing with the worst

---

172. "The Bookman" Vol. III, p. 18 (March 1893). Crockett (1860-1914) was one of the Kailyard triumvirate of the later years of the nineteenth century, the others being 'Ian Maclaren' and J.M. Barrie. He wrote more than one novel on the Covenanters: "The Men of the Mosshags" and "The Banner of Blue" are two of these.

173. First published in "Edinburgh Edition"(1894-1898).

aspects of Scottish religion. The first is a categorical condemnation of that tendency to fragment, which was perhaps the most obvious feature of 19th century Scottish Presbyterianism. To illustrate the subject I will again resort to an important early essay which will amply explain some of the bitterness to be found in the later semi-autobiographical books: the essay is "An Appeal to the Clergy of the Church of Scotland".[174] This essay, probably written partly at his father's prompting, is concerned with the prospects for re-union in the 1870's between the Church of Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland, divided some years prior to R.L.S. birth by the Disruption of 1843. That event had been occasioned by the system of presentation of ministers to their parishes which was then in operation within the Church of Scotland. By the Patronage Act of 1712, the British government went back on one promise given by the 1707 Treaty of Union and authorised the presentation of ministers to a parish by the chief landowners or 'patrons' of that parish. Since that date the minority within the Church of Scotland totally opposed to this, desiring rather the original system of presentation and acceptance by the congregation concerned, had grown in numbers and eloquence until 1833 when, for the first time, this 'evangelical' movement within the Church was actually a majority. From that date there ensued the "Ten Years' Conflict" in which the Kirk, now dominated by the Evangelicals,tried on its own initiative to end Lay Patronage: this having failed the majority of Evangelicals walked out of the General Assembly of

174. First published in 1875 (Edinburgh; W. Blackwood & Sons) as a pamphlet. In book form in the "Edinburgh Edition".

1843 and formed a totally new Church - the Free Church of Scotland. The Established Church was left in the hands of the 'Moderates', the despisers of enthusiasm and evangelicalism in every form. Even this comparatively latitudinarian group regarded Lay Patronage with distaste, however, and modified the system considerably before doing away with it entirely in 1874 (not before getting the agreement of the Liberal Party under Gladstone, necessary for the passing of the repeal through Parliament).

The removal of what had been the immediate occasion of the Disruption might have been expected to lead shortly to reunion between the two Churches. The division between the two schools of thought, Evangelical and Moderate, deep enough in 1843, had, however, if anything, deepened by 1874, mostly because of the conservatives within the Established body. A further complication had appeared, however, with the creation of a third large Presbyterian church in Scotland in 1847 - the United Presbyterians; this group was totally opposed to the idea of establishment of a church, and these ideas were attractive to many in the Free Church. Abortive negotiations between the U.P.s and the Free Church had gone on in the 1860s and early 1870s - the failure of these gave some observers hopes that a Union between the two larger churches was a definite possibility. This, together with the repeal of Lay Patronage, seemed to Stevenson to remove all obstacles to the Free/Established church union, and it was in the hope of this that he wrote "An Appeal to the Clergy" in late 1874. The main burden of the essay is that the Church of Scotland should now make it easy for the Free Church

to return to the fold by offering honourable terms of settlement. Stevenson, throughout, is attempting to arouse the conscience of the ministers and elders on the issue:

> "Those who are at all open to a feeling of national disgrace look eagerly forward to such a possibility; they have been witnesses already too long to the strife that has divided this small corner of Christendom; and they cannot remember without shame that there has been as much noise, as much recrimination, as much severance of friends, about mere logical abstractions in our remote island, as would have sufficed for the great dogmatic battles of the continent." 175

We see here how seriously Stevenson took the problem. He saw that the division in the Church and the bitterness which that division aroused in both sides was good neither for the government of the Presbyterian churches in Scotland, nor for their reputation in Europe and further afield. At a time when orthodox Protestantism was being rocked by such issues as evolution and the Higher Criticism it perhaps seemed criminal to him that such comparatively trivial matters were occupying the attention of believers in Scotland: despite interest in the universities, the issue of the Higher Criticism especially was ignored in Scotland till the early 1880s when the Robertson Smith case forced the question forward.[176] If his anger is justified in this respect, it hardly is completely in imputing

175. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 125.

176. William Robertson Smith (1846-94) was the centre of a storm on the question of the Higher Criticism when the 1875 edition of the "Encyclopaedia Britannica" was seen to include an article 'Bible' which contained most of the new views. The wrangle in the Scottish establishment went on from 1876 to 1881 when Smith was deprived of his chair of Hebrew and Old Testament Criticism at the Free Church College at Aberdeen. His main opponent was Prof. Charteris whom we have already had reason to mention (see Footnote 34).

all the blame for the separation to the Established Church: in fact, the Free Church, dominated at this time by the Rev. James Begg,[177] were no more willing than the opposition to move towards compromise. But, at the time of writing, their full reaction was not known, the paper being written immediately after the repeal of the Patronage Act.

In a letter I have quoted (see pp. 62-63) we are given a further reason why he wrote the essay - to test the virtue of the Church and its readiness to witness to the true doctrines - as he saw them - of Christ as revealed in the Gospels. This is perhaps the main point of interest for Stevenson's personal religion found in the paper - this growing dichotomy between the truths of Christ's teaching, and how the churches were interpreting them. The following are three brief extracts from the essay to illustrate both its general tone and the particular points I have mentioned. The 'good men' in the first quotation are of course, the Free Church heroes of 1843:

a) "These good men have exposed themselves to the chance of hardship for the sake of their scruples, whilst you, being of a stronger stomach, continued to enjoy the security of national endowments. Some of you occupy the very livings which they resigned for conscience' sake." 178

177. Begg (1808-1883) was one of the last important Free Church ministers in 1875 to have actually participated in the Disruption itself. He was the greatest conservative in the Church on both union and innovations in ritual, and was opposed to the influence of both the 'Auld Kirk' and the U.P.s. He had been Free Kirk moderator in 1865. He will be mentioned again in reference to Stevenson's poem - "Embro'Hie Kirk".

178. Tusitala; XXVI; pp. 128-129.

b) "You owe a special duty, not only to the courage that left the Church but to the wisdom and moderation that now returns to it. And your sense of this duty will find a vent not only in word but in action. You will facilitate their return not only by considerate and brotherly language but by pecuniary aid; you will seek, by some new endowment scheme, to preserve for them their ecclesiastical status. That they have no claim will be their strongest claim on your consideration." 179

c) "And remember that it lies with you to show the world that Christianity is something more than a verbal system. In the lapse of generations men grow weary of unsupported precept. They may wait long, and keep long in memory the bright doings of former days, but they will weary at the last; they will begin to trouble you for your credentials; if you cannot give them miracles, they will demand virtue; if you cannot heal the sick, they will call upon you for some practice of the Christian ethics". 180

Stevenson's admiration for the self-sacrifice entailed in 'walking out' of steady employment in 1843 - despite the fact that the Free Church was almost immediately 'set up' again by contributions - is quite clearly seen in the first extract. Self-sacrifice in itself was something Stevenson prized above most things in the religious man, and this was obviously extended to churches. It is noticeable that he now requires that the Established Kirk should sacrifice something in their turn to those who wish to 'return to the fold'. The sentiments expressed in the final extract were a very strong point in Stevenson's belief - they are expounded at greater length in "Lay Morals"[181] (written in 1879 and 1883); indeed the

179. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 129.
180. " " pp. 129-130.
181. First published in the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898).

separation between true and official Christianity, as I have said, was something which Stevenson kept emphasising and which he continued to worry about.

The fact that Established Church and the Free Church alike ignored Stevenson's plea and that the split between the churches was as great in 1878 as it was four years earlier accounts for some of the bitterness present in "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes". Both in the first chapter of this work and in the fourth - "Legends" - his attack on the Free Kirk/Church of Scotland split is long and sustained. In the first he is content to emphasise the strangeness of the double General Assemblies to outsiders, and, indeed, to any thinking Christian. The second attack is much more harsh, almost vituperative. He has been recounting several of the legends of Edinburgh, noting among other things, the 'odour of sour piety' that surrounds the story of Major Weir, the warlock whose walking stick ran before him. It is in the story of the two Edinburgh sisters and their lifelong quarrel that his passions begin to come into play, however. The story was, simply, that of two Edinburgh sisters who when young had a grievous argument, over 'some point of controversial divinity belike', which separated them for the rest of their lives. The story is given its special meaning by the fact that they lived in the same room for the remainder of their lives and during all those years never talked to each other. This certainly arouses Stevenson's temper to a pitch seldom heard in his statements on Scottish religion:

> "Alas! to those who know the ecclesiastical history of the race - the most perverse and melancholy in man's annals - this will seem only a figure of much that is typical of Scotland and her high-seated capital on the Forth - a figure so grimly realistic that it may pass with strangers for a caricature. We are wonderful patient haters for conscience' sake up here in the North. I spoke, in the first of these papers, of the Parliaments of the Established and Free Churches and how they can hear each other singing psalms across the street. There is but a street between them in space, but a shadow between them in principle; andyet there they sit, enchanted, and in damnatory accents pray for each other's growth in grace. It would be well if there were no more than two; but the sects in Scotland form a large family of sisters, and the chalk lines are thickly drawn, and run through the midst of many private homes." 182.

His disgust at the partisanship of the divided Churches clearly extended to the nature of the faith they preached, as can be seen from this extract from the same work:

> "Indeed, there are not many uproars in this world more dismal than that of the Sabbath bells in Edinburgh: a harsh ecclesiastical tocsin; the outcry of incongruous orthodoxies, calling on every separate conventicler to put up a protest, each in his own synagogue, against 'right-hand extremes and left-hand defections'. And surely there are few worse extremes than this extremity of zeal; and few more deplorable defections than this disloyalty to Christian love. Shakespeare wrote a comedy of "Much Ado About Nothing". The Scottish nation made a fantastic tragedy on the same subject. And it is for the success of this remarkable piece that these bells are sounded every Sabbath morning on the hills above the Forth. How many of them might rest silent in the steeple, how many of these ugly churches might be demolished and turned once more into useful building material, if people who think almost exactly the same thoughts about religion would condescend to worship God under the same roof! But there are the chalk lines. And which is to pocket pride, and speak the foremost word?" 183.

182. Tusitala; XXVI, p. 159.
183. " " p. 160.

That these sentiments lasted at least until the writing of "The Amateur Emigrant" is obvious as there is a passage there which adds up to roughly the same thing - he says that 'one thing is not to be learned in Scotland, and that is the way to be happy' and that the 'Puritan school' (which he equates with Scottish religion in general) 'by divorcing a man from nature, by thinning out his instincts, and setting a stamp of its disapproval on whole fields of human activity and interest, leads at last to material greed.'[184] This attitude of disgust at certain aspects of Scottish religion remained almost unchanged until 1880. After Stevenson's trip to America, however, the attitude must have gradually changed, as I have suggested elsewhere in connection with the Thamson and Johnson letters. By the time of "In the South Seas", the attitude has changed almost completely - as witness the chapter of that work on 'Traits and Sects in the Paumotus' in which he compares the Paumotus with Scotland (because of the very fact of the proliferation of sects) in a manner of tolerance and amused acceptance.[185] As I have already proposed, it seems likely that with distance from the homeland came a greater appreciation of the comparative harmlessness of its more eccentric religious behaviour. Before he went to America in late 1879 he was usually in the year more often

184. Tusitala; XXIII; p. 31.

185. Tusitala; XX; pp. 147-156. Stevenson hints that one of the reasons why the islanders on the Paumotus are more lively and optimistic than the Marquesans is because they take an extreme interest in religious disputation - 'the Scotland of the South Seas'.

in Edinburgh and Scotland than out of it. After 1880, he was to be seldom seen there and never for more than two or three months in the summer - all because of health reasons.

In the book on the South Seas there are one or two other statements of opinion, not unconnected with the last, which are interesting. They make obvious the fact that Stevenson had not in any way changed his opinion on official religion in the space between the American trip and the South Seas period - except in the particular area of his attitude to Scottish religion. In his description of the Paumotus it is not the comparison with Scotland that makes him angry, but the puritanism which he does not now equate with specifically Scottish religion. He has just described how one of the main attractions of the Mormon church for the Paumotuans was the ban on various pleasures, especially the consumption of alcohol:

> "I said the virtues of the race were bourgeois and puritan; and how bourgeois is this! how puritanic! how Scottish! and how Yankee! - the temptation, the resistance, the public hypocritical conformity, the Pharisees, the Holy Willies, and the true disciples. With such a people the popularity of an ascetic Church appears legitimate; in these strict rules, in this perpetual supervision, the weak find their advantage, the strong a certain pleasure ....." 186.

The criticism here is of the general puritanism of contemporary (especially Victorian) Protestantism rather than the particular case of the Scottish type. He returns to the subject later on in the book: he is describing a church service in the Gilbert Islands:

---

186. Tusitala; XX, pp. 152-153.

> "On that day we made a procession to the Church, or (as I must always call it) the cathedral: Maka[187] (a blot on the hot landscape) in tall hat, black frock-coat, black trousers; under his arm the hymn-book and the Bible; in his face a reverent gravity: - beside him Mary his wife, a quiet, wise, and handsome elderly lady, seriously attired: - myself following with singular and moving thoughts. Long before, to the sound of bells and streams and birds, through a green Lothian glen, I had accompanied Sunday by Sunday a minister in whose house I lodged; and the likeness, and the difference, and the series of years and deaths, profoundly touched me ....." 188.

He goes on to describe the difficulty he had in keeping awake at the sermon (in Hawaiian): his conclusions are these:

> "I write of the service with a smile; yet I was always there - always with respect for Maka, always with admiration for his deep seriousness, his burning energy, the fire of his roused eye, the sincere and various accents of his voice. To see him flogging a dead horse and blowing a cold fire was a lesson in fortitude and constancy. It may be a question whether if the mission were fully supported, and he was set free from business avocations, more might not result; I think otherwise myself; I think not neglect but rigour has reduced his flock, that rigour which has once provoked a revolution, and which today, in a man so lively and engaging, amazes the beholder. No song, no dance, no tobacco, no liquor, no alleviative of life - only toil and church-going; so says a voice from his face; and the face is the face of the Polynesian Esau, but the voice is the voice of a Jacob from a different world." 189.

The emphasis on anti-puritanism in these extracts is an element of Stevenson's belief which does not really appear in the letters,

---

187. Maka was a Hawaiian missionary who was one of the main characters on the island of Butaritari, in the Gilberts. He was certainly a Protestant, possibly a Presbyterian.

188. Tusitala, XX, pp. 233-234.

189. " pp. 234-235.

although certainly there (implicit rather than explicit) in the short essays and the poems. While this is certainly part of Stevenson's philosophy, we notice that he does not take up a truly hedonist position: he sees alcohol, tobacco, etc. as 'alleviatives of life', momentary escapes from the truer, harder question of kindnesses and duties.

Further information on the more personal aspects of Stevenson's religion (apart from his attitude to contemporary religion) is difficult to find in the travel works. The nature of his God, his exact Christian beliefs are not spelled out in these books with anything like the clarity of the shorter essays or poems. There have been some pointers already, of course, to this, not least in the last quotes from "In the South Seas". In "An Inland Voyage" and "Travels with a Donkey" we see something of his extreme interest in religious subjects as such - in the first he says his visit to Noyon Cathedral was by far the most memorable event,[190] and in the second it almost seems as if he made the journey because of his interest in the Camisards and the monastic life of Notre Dames des Neiges. Religious allusions, too numerous to mention, keep cropping up: any intelligent reader of Stevenson's essays or fiction should be able to see how often even for his day he uses allusions to religious history and ritual in simile and metaphor. In terms of toleration of other sects, we have already noted his opinions on Catholics and some on various types of Protestant - he was

190. Tusitala; XVII, p. 82.
See Appendix II in which are given several interesting examples of use of religious allusion in Stevenson's correspondence with Mrs. Sitwell.

obviously no believer in any monopoly of salvation - this is made quite explicit in "Travels with a Donkey" (I have already quoted on this from Tusitala; XVII; p. 198). A further quote is perhaps in order finally attesting that it was not to Stevenson the type of faith a man held that damned or saved the individual but what kind of person he was:

> "He was, as a matter of fact, a Plymouth Brother, of what that involves in the way of doctrine I have no idea nor the time to inform myself; but I know right well that we are all embarked upon a troublesome world, the children of one Father, striving in many essential points to do and to become the same. And although it was somewhat in a mistake that he shook hands with me so often and showed himself so ready to receive my words, that was a mistake of the truth - finding sort. For charity begins blindfold: and only through a series of similar misapprehensions rises at length into a settled principle of love and patience, and a firm belief in all our fellow-men. If I deceived this good old man, in the like manner I would willingly go on to deceive others. And if ever at length, out of our separate and sad ways, we should all come together into one common house, I have a hope, to which I cling dearly, that my mountain Plymouth Brother will hasten to shake hands with me again." 191.

We see here not only his complete toleration of the ways of the other religions but also the doctrine of kindness which has been illustrated in the section on the correspondence. Further we see an earlier stage in his development away from a belief in immortality - he would like to think there was a life after death but can only say 'if there is ...'. A last slight contribution from the travel works on his more personal religious attitudes comes in "Cockermouth and Keswick", a fragment written at the very earliest stage of his career, in 1871. He is describing his thankfulness for the small and humane kindnesses

191. Tusitala; XVII; p. 230.

of a man, Smethurst, he had met in Cockermouth:

> "As I went, I was thinking of Smethurst with admiration; a look into that man's mind was like a retrospect over the smiling champaign of his past life, and very different from the Sinai-gorges up which one looks for a terrified moment into the dark souls of many good, many wise, and many prudent men. I cannot be very grateful to such men for their excellence, and wisdom, and prudence. I find myself facing as stoutly as I can a hard, combative existence, full of doubt, difficulties, defeats, disappointments, and dangers, quite a hard enough life without their dark countenances at my elbow, so that what I want is a happy-minded Smethurst placed here and there at ugly corners of my life's wayside, preaching his gospel of quiet and contentment." 192

Here again we see the idea of 'life's alleviatives' well to the fore, this time in the form of kindnesses of other people to the individual on the difficult path through life. However we should not take from this the idea that Stevenson always felt about the 'good, wise, and many prudent men' as he does in this very early work - he is more of the intolerant hedonist here than he would be for the last twenty years of his life. This was in a period when he had not experienced even the first crisis of his life, the quarrel with his father, let alone any personal bereavements: he was too callow a youth at this period for his philosophy to be rounded in any way. He entitles that section of the essay 'An Evangelist', and follows it with the description of 'Another' who is an Orangeman,and not 'kind' in any way to the young man: the antithesis of ideas is obviously intended to 'show up' the second man and we feel that his dislike of this kind of particularist evangelism would have been as strong in 1890 as it was in the early 1870s. However the attitude to authority

192. Tusitala; XXX; p. 62.

in the quote given was, as I have said, one that died with his youth. Although the travel works tell us a little about R.L.S.'s personal religion it is, as he might say himself 'a very little': more emphasis on this aspect is given in the shorter essays and essays proper and it is to these that I shall now turn.

ii) Essays.

Stevenson's shorter essays, when taken in toto, do not contain the amount of religious material that is to be found in the 'travel works'. This is only to be expected, as each short essay has a main theme which, generally speaking, is not diverted from, unless the author wishes to lay himself open to the accusation that he is not always 'to the point'. In essays on the portraits of Raeburn or on the movements of children we would not expect anything but passing mention of religion or religious topics. The proportion of Stevenson's essays which are solely about religion or morals is very small - the time spent on the subject in the whole body of the essays does not compare in any sense with that in the travel books. The essays we will be dealing with, however, especially "Lay Morals", "Reflections and Remarks on Human Life",[193] "Father Damien"[194] "Whitman"[195] (from "Familiar Studies of Men and Books"), "Pulvis et Umbra",[196] "A Christmas Sermon",[197]

193. First published in the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898).
194. "Father Damien. An Open Letter to the Rev. Dr. Hyde of Honolulu". First published in "The Scots Observer" May 1890. In book form in July 1890 (London; Chatto & Windus).
195. First published in "The New Quarterly Magazine" October 1878 as "The Gospel According to Walt Whitman". In book form in "Familiar Studies of Men and Books" (London; Chatto & Windus; 1882).
196. First published in "Scribner's Magazine" April 1888. In book form in "Across the Plains" (1892).
197. First published in "Scribner's Magazine" December 1888. In book form as above.

and of course his most direct religious statement, "Prayers Written at Vailima",[198] make up in terms of intensity of interest and importance for all those essays which are devoid of religious subject-matter.

As I have elsewhere emphasised, these essays give us more information on the basic beliefs of Stevenson - the personal and individual aspects of his religion - than on his opinions about contemporary religious groups and questions. Where he does mention contemporary religion, it is in its moral and ethical rather than 'church government' side - for instance, the effect of the Ten Commandments on Victorian religious life rather than the activities of the churches comprising that religious life. The basic statement of Stevenson's religious position is given in "Lay Morals" and "Reflections and Remarks" both written in the 1878-1880 period although the former was added to after Ferrier's death in 1883. Although earlier works are of interest and will be looked at - e.g. "Virginibus Puerisque"[199] (written in 1876) and "Whitman" (written in 1878) - the most complete statement is given in these essays of the late 1870s and it is with them that I shall begin.

"Reflections and Remarks on Human Life" (probably written before the other) is a collection of aphorisms and philosophical notes on proper approaches to life, given under various headings, e.g. 'Justice and Justification', 'Parent and Child',

198. First published in the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898)

199. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine" August 1876. In book form in "Virginibus Puerisque and Other Essays" (London; C. Kegan Paul; 1881).

'Discipline of Conscience', etc. The sections which are important for this study are 'Dialogue on Character and Destiny between Two Puppets', 'Solitude and Society', Discipline of Conscience' and 'Gratitude to God': these comprise about half the essay. The religious basis for the ethical propositions which are the subject of the essay is set out under these four headings. The 'Dialogue between Two Puppets' is an open allegory on the relation of the individual to God: one of the puppets (supposedly characters in a book) is Count Spada, a self-willed and egotistical Spanish nobleman - he is obviously to Stevenson the archetypal bad man. The other, a general of the Jesuits is, as far as we can see, what Stevenson would have thought the nearest possible thing to a good man. The two characters discuss the 'author' - almost certainly God: the 'book' in which they are appearing is therefore life. The first thing that is emphasised is Spada's selfishness and his lack of respect for his Creator - he here rejects the Jesuit's warning that his behaviour will lead to terrible punishment:

> "I despise your womanish presentiments,' replied Spada, 'and count firmly upon another volume; I see a variety of reasons why my life should be prolonged to within a few pages of the end; indeed, I permit myself to expect resurrection in a sequel, or second part. You will scarce suggest that there can be any end to the newspaper; and you will certainly never convince me that the author, who cannot be entirely without sense, would have been at so great pains with my intelligence, gallant exterior, and happy and natural speech, merely to kick me hither and thither for two or three paltry chapters and then drop me at the end like a dumb personage. I know you priests are often infidels in secret. Pray, do you believe in an author at all?' " 200.

200. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 79

The Jesuit, though confused as to God's intention, realises that Spada is a 'bad' man - 'the worst, indeed, that I have met within these pages' - and that God will have punishment in store for him. The argument continues with Spada ridiculing the idea that the 'author' has any intention of working for good in the world: to support this he gives examples of outwardly good men in the 'story' whose kindness and goodness have been met with tragedy rather than happiness. The priest then gives Spada his own view of God:

> "'The purposes of the serial story', answered the Priest, 'are doubtless for some wise reason, hidden from those who act in it. To this limitation we must bow. But I ask every character to observe narrowly his own personal relations to the author. There, if nowhere else, we may glean some hint of his superior designs. Now I am myself a mingled personage, liable to doubts, to scruples, and to sudden revulsions of feeling; I reason continually about life, and frequently the result of my reasoning is to condemn or even to change my action.' " 201.

The Jesuit is plainly a picture of Stevenson's own doubts and difficulties on the religious question - but, also, nevertheless of his view of how men should look at themselves and how they should develop their faith in God. Spada's reaction to the priest's statement is that he also believes in God, and that God seems at times to be on his side - Stevenson emphasises here the stupidity of the man who thinks he knows the mind of God; there is also some inference that Spada's 'author' or at least driving force is Satan rather than God. Spada cannot conceive an omnipotent God, and introduces the question of free will perhaps to confuse the issue: he certainly succeeds in this as far as the Jesuit is concerned, persuading him

---

201. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 79

that everyone has freewill up to a point. It could be that Stevenson introduces the idea - one he did not himself agree with - to show how the good and well-meaning man can be confused on difficult questions of belief by the wiles of the clever bad man. The next step in the argument is an eruption of self-pity from Count Spada, to the effect that the individual and especially himself cannot have any blame for his actions. The dialogue ends thus: if he is to be blamed for his actions, Spada says:

> " '.....I had rather be a telegram from the seat of war than a reasonable and conscious character in a romance;nay, and I have a perfect right to repudiate, loathe, curse, and utterly condemn the ruffian who calls himself the author.'
> 'You have, as you say, a perfect right', replied the Jesuit; 'and I am convinced that will not affect him in the least'.
> 'He shall have one slave the fewer for me', added the Count. 'I discard my allegiance once for all.'
> 'As you please', concluded the other, 'but at least be ready, for I perceive we are about to enter on the scene.'
> And indeed, just at that moment, Chapter xxxiv being completed, Chapter xxxv, "The Count's Chastisement", began to appear in the columns of the newspaper." 202.

The main point of the "Dialogue" is easy enough to see - the very title of the piece, with its reference to 'puppets' and the form in which the essay is set - the ridiculous situation of characters in a book thinking they have free will - show plainly that Stevenson's belief in the total omnipotence of God is the basis of the argument and the diversions from it.

---

202. Tusitala; XXVI, p. 82. The characteristics that Spada most often shows are those of Satan in "Paradise Lost " - unutterable pride and egotism. Stevenson could hardly be said, however, to have been 'of the Devil's party without knowing it': in the 'Dialogue' it is obviously the Jesuit for whom he has most affection. The fact that the 'good' character is a Jesuit says much for Stevenson's open-mindedness at a time when Jesuits were not exactly loved by even the most liberal Protestants.

His belief that humility is necessary for any individual who does not wish to 'end in hellfire' is also evident, as is the more philosophical point that men are driven by events rather than drive them - this is similar to much in Scott (R.L.S. thought Scott the best novelist in English: see "Random Memories: Rosa Quo Locorum")[203]. It seems likely from this also that Stevenson did not hold to any idea that God gave man free will as a test and then left him to be saved or damned by his own actions: he seems to have thought that all was predestined even down to the characteristics within each individual which would lead him in this or that direction. At this level, he believed, as Spada says, in 'pure Calvinistic election', but also that the individual does not in any way know if he is 'elected' or for what.

In the following section, 'Solitude and Society', the theme is personal conduct rather than belief in God and immortality. We find a familiar word in the Stevenson canon-duty-used to explain the need for all men to live in society. Although solitude may be attractive to the thinking man, it is the conduct of each individual to his fellow men which is crucial for his salvation. He must recognise that he is 'bound by the strongest obligations to busy (himself) amid the world of men if it only be to crack jokes'.[204] Although he does not explicitly say so it is the conscience which will then, or should then, dictate actions to the man in question. The

203. First published in the "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898).
204. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 83.

greatest duty that the conscience dictates is, to Stevenson, obvious:

> "It is our business here to speak, for it is by the tongue that we multiply ourselves most influentially. To speak kindly, wisely, and pleasantly is the first of duties, the easiest of duties, and the duty that is most blessed in its performance. For it is natural, it whiles away life, it spreads intelligence; and it increases the acquaintance of man with man." 205

He goes on to say that to be kind to others, which he sees to be the first duty of the Christian, is not only difficult and trying, but also 'unsightly' and 'humiliating' to himself; he further says that there is and can be no perfect virtue or unclouded kindness - there is a connection here with the character of the Jesuit in the previous section of the essay.

The theme is taken up again in 'Discipline of Conscience' the general idea of which is the possibility of misuse of conscience, that presumably God-given faculty, in the following passage, it is kindness to others which is the true goal of 'growing difficult' about one's own behaviour:

> "There is but one test of a good life: that the man shall continue to grow more difficult about his own behaviour. That is to be good: there is no other virtue attainable. The virtues we admire in the saint and the hero are the fruits of a happy constitution. You, for your part, must not think you will ever be a good man, for these are born and not made. You will have your own reward, if you keep on growing better than you were - how do I say? if you do not keep on growing worse." 206

---

205. Tusitala; XXVI; pp. 83-84
206. " " p. 85

Here we begin to see Stevenson's doctrine of the impossibility in life of total success in anything - what might be called his doctrine of 'faithful failure'. This is emphasised more in the later "Pulvis et Umbra" and "A Christmas Sermon", in what might be called his 'pessimistic' period of the last six years of his life. The idea of the good failing in their intentions is one which is common in Stevenson's work - we might give as examples the lack of success of Dick Shelton in "The Black Arrow" (1888), of Pinkerton in "The Wrecker" (1892) and David Balfour in "Catriona" (1893). It is a trait again reminiscent of Scott, especially in "Waverley" - this leading of the hero by events rather than by his own strength and will. In many ways Stevenson was the apostle - in the face of Victorian 'will-worship' - of the weakness rather than the strength of the individual will to shape events. In "Reflections and Remarks" the tendency is only hinted at - Stevenson does seem to be saying, however, that no-one should expect happiness in life, only to attempt and to continue attempting to be 'good'.

There can be no doubt that this aspect of his belief is connected to the 'hard life' theories - that pleasures are but relief from the real war of existence. He sums up this quite nicely a little further on in the section:

> "The study of conduct has to do with grave problems; not every action should be higgled over; one of the leading virtues therein is to let oneself alone. But if you make it your chief employment, you are sure to meddle too much. This is the great error of those who are called pious. Although the war of virtue be unending except with life, hostilities are frequently suspended, and the troops go into winter quarters; but the pious will not profit

> "by these times of truce; where their conscience can perceive no sin, they will find a sin in that very innocency; and so they pervert, to their annoyance, those seasons which God gives to us for repose and a reward." 207

Stevenson is certainly not pessimistic here but he does accept the point that the war of virtue is unending: he does not ridicule the whole concept as being simple or morbid, rather those who try to battle all the time, something he sees as a physical impossibility, at least for himself. The idea of the 'war of virtue' was to take a more exclusive hold of his consciousness in the future; for the moment, while believing in the war, it does not necessarily take up all his attention, as it may well have done some eight years later.

It is in the section 'Gratitude to God', however, that Stevenson connects all these statements on conduct with a specifically religious subject and shows again that his system is based on a belief in God. Two sizeable quotations from this section will illustrate this:

> "(1) To the gratitude that becomes us in this life, I can set no limit. Though we steer after a fashion, yet we must sail according to the winds and currents. After what I have done, what might I not have done? That I have still the courage to attempt my life, that I am not now overladen with dishonours, to whom do I owe it out to the gentle ordering of circumstances in the great design? More has not been done to me than I can bear; I have been marvellously restrained and helped: not unto us, O Lord!.
> (2) I cannot forgive God for the suffering of others; when I look abroad upon His world and behold its cruel destinies, I turn from Him with disaffection; nor do I conceive that He will blame me for the impulse. But when I consider my own fates, I grow conscious of His gentle dealing: I see Him chastise with helpful blows, I feel His stripes to be caresses; and

207. Tusitala, XXVI, p. 88.

> "this knowledge is my comfort that reconciles me to the world." 208

and

> "I speak for myself; nothing grave has yet befallen me but I have been able to reconcile my mind to its occurence, and see in it, from my own little and partial point of view, an evidence of a tender and protecting God. Even the misconduct into which I have been led has been blessed to my improvement. If I did not sin, and that so glaringly that my conscience is convicted on the spot, I do not know what I should become, but I feel sure I should grow worse. The man of very regular conduct is too often a prig, if he be not worse - a rabbi. I, for my part, want to be startled out of my conceits; I want to be put to shame in my own eyes; I want to feel the bridle in my mouth, and be continually reminded of my own weakness and the omnipotence of circumstances. (5) If I from my spy-hole, looking with purblind eyes upon the least part of a fraction of the universe, yet perceive in my own destiny some broken evidences of a plan and some signals of an overruling goodness; shall I then be so mad as to complain that all cannot be deciphered? Shall I not rather wonder, with infinite and grateful surprise, that in so vast a scheme I seem to have been able to read, however little, and that that little was encouraging to faith?" 209.

This certainly cements the proof that Stevenson believed in God in the late 1870s, something already shown by the Cafe de la Source letter of February 1878 (see pp. 30-31). The extent of his belief in the concept of an omnipotent and 'guiding' God is clearly shown, in almost the same intensity as is to be seen in the later poems. He obviously believes in sins, and in the forgiveness of a good God. Although he says that he cannot forgive God for His conduct to others, this can be seen, in the light of the remainder of the extracts, to be

---

208. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 87. The numbers in the quote are Stevenson's own.
209. Tusitala; XXVI; pp. 87-88.

probably due more to Stevenson's lack of understanding than to any cruelty in God. He feels that God both leads the individual onwards and provides him with a conscience to sense when he has done wrong. It is interesting that he should also say (outwith these quotations) that though he has not suffered any major 'sorrow or perplexity' he has, by faith in his god, already reconciled his mind to the possibility of future pain - he has therefore prepared himself in 1880 for pains he would not have to deal with till 1883, the year of Ferrier's death.

The style and focus of "Lay Morals" is subtly different from that of "Reflections and Remarks". Though the former is also mostly about the conduct of the individual, the emphasis is on the comparative hypocrisy of contemporary beliefs and ideals. There is certainly more anger in the presentation than in the other essay, as well as more idealism. The point has been made by Kelman[210] that Stevenson expects ordinary mortals to act in Christlike ways - to take literally and act on the Christian precepts. This is the main burden of the first chapter, in which he tries to show that for the establishment to lay down laws for young men is hypocritical. Here is an example of the central position:

210. Kelman; op.cit.pp.89-92. Unfortunately Kelman seems to think that even attempting to change the people so that they will eventually literally be Christlike (or at least follow Christian precepts to the letter) is a totally useless occupation - a position that would hardly be accepted by all modern theologians. His comparison of Stevenson's views with Tolstoy's is not altogether a happy one (see Appendix III).

"Take a few of Christ's sayings and compare them with our current doctrines.
'Ye cannot, 'He says,'serve God and Mammon.' Cannot? And our whole system is to teach us how we can!
'The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light. 'Are they? I had been led to understand the reverse: that the Christian merchant, for example, prospered exceedingly in his affairs; that honesty was the best policy; that an author of repute had written a conclusive treatise, "How to make the best of both worlds". Of both worlds indeed! Which am I to believe then - Christ or the author of repute?
'Take no thought for the morrow.' Ask the Successful Merchant; interrogate your own heart; and you will have to admit that this is not only a silly but an immoral position. All we believe, all we hope, all we honour in ourselves or our contemporaries, stands condemned in this one sentence as unwise and inhumane. We are not then of the "same mind that was in Christ". We disagree with Christ. Either Christ meant nothing, or else He or we must be in the wrong." 211

He can use humour too to help in making his meaning crystal clear:

"It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' I have heard this and similar texts ingeniously explained away and brushed from the path of the aspiring Christian by the tender Great-heart of the parish. One excellent clergyman told us that the 'eye of a needle' meant a low, Oriental postern through which camels could not pass till they were unloaded - which is very likely just; and then went on, bravely confounding the 'kingdom of God' with heaven, the future paradise, to show that of course no rich person could expect to carry his riches beyond the grave - which of course, he could not and never did. Various greedy sinners of the congregation drank in the comfortable doctrine with relief. It was worth the while having come to church that Sunday morning! All was plain. The Bible, as usual, meant nothing in particular; it was merely an obscure and figurative school copy-book; and if a man were only respectable, he was a man after God's own heart." 212.

211. Tusitala; XXVI, p. 8.
212. " " pp.42-43.

This attack on respectability is probably the most striking feature of Stevenson's approach in the essay to his task of teaching 'any young man, conscious of his youth, conscious of vague powers and qualities' a serious doctrine for living in the world. Although he tries in his introduction[213] to assert that an atheist should find himself as much at home in "Lay Morals" as a believer would, the general gist of the work is a comparison of true Christian presumptions and the uses to which a hypocritical establishment puts them, together with hints as to how a young man might pick his way through the hypocrisies and eventually get at what was true for him.

An avenue of approach which is not ignored, however, is to attack the negativity of certain biblical statements and the negative way in which others are interpreted. This problem has already been gone into in connection with the letters (see p. 46), but the statement in "Lay Morals" is a much fuller one. It is contained in Chapter Two, the first chapter being concerned, as the first of the two quotations indicates, with the 'hard sayings' of Christ and the impossibility of calling oneself a Christian if one does not agree with and try to live up to these. In a way the second chapter goes back on the first in that Stevenson tries to invent reasons why the Ten Commandments should not be literally acted on as if the word of God. It seems that where he can accept a precept he allows it to be a touchstone of the true faith, and where he cannot, it is not a necessity for the true

213. Tusitala; XXVI; p. 3.

believer to hold to it. He tries to find a spirit that underlies the words of the Ten Commandments, because the 'letter is not only dead, but killing';[214] the spirit he finds however is perhaps too personal to be altogether convincing as a law or true precept for others. This is especially so with his analysis of "Thou shalt not steal",[215] in which his own experiences of guilt at having to live on his father's money make him try to widen 'stealing' to include this. Obviously he can only illustrate from his own experience but the extension would tend to confuse the whole issue of the commandment. His main point is that any religion or group of ideas passed down from generation to generation can only succeed if there is room for personal-individual-interpretation: he forgets that he has just given absolute definitions to the 'hard sayings' of Christ. Here is his statement of the uselessness of precepts and trite commands:

> "Only Polonius, or the like solemn sort of ass, can offer us a succinct proverb by way of advice and not burst out blushing in our faces. We grant them one and all, and for all that they are worth; it is something above and beyond that we desire. Christ was in general a great enemy to such a way of teaching; we rarely find Him meddling with any of these plump commands but it was to open them out, and lift His hearers from the letter to the spirit. For morals are a personal affair; in the war of righteousness every man fights for his own hand; all the six hundred precepts of the Mishna cannot shake my private judgment; my magistracy of myself is an indefeasible charge, and my decisions absolute for the time and case. The moralist is not a judge of appeal, but an advocate who pleads at my tribunal. He has to show, not the law, but that the law applies. Can he convince me? then he gains the cause. And thus you find Christ giving various counsels to various people, and often jealously careful to avoid a definite precept." 216

214. Tusitala; XXVI, p. 11.
215. " " pp. 13-19.
216. " " p. 21.

Apart from the point of the lack of logical cohesion of the various parts, several other things are noticeable in "Lay Morals". Firstly something which I have mentioned before, his view of Christ as a living person, and of the words of Christ's as being words that were without doubt spoken. He very definitely sees Christ as a person, and the words He says as having an importance far greater than any other source in the Bible. In this way he no doubt saw himself as a true Christian - one who was a believer in the actual words of Christ and their absolute meaning. When it came to what might be called 'inferior sources' such as the Old Testament and the Mosaic law (including the Commandments) his belief was, as we have seen, not all-embracing or in any way crucial to his central philosophy.

A further thing to be noticed is the basic individualism of his beliefs: each man journeys his own path to salvation, and society can in no way intervene to order or even suggest how he should reach his goal. This fits in pretty well with the weltanschauung in the novels, each individual being placed in a position where he has continually to make his own decisions, and where he journeys is usually his fate alone. Although he does not believe that the pursuit of solitude or asceticism is an honourable or moral ideal - anyone who reads "Thoreau"[217] will find this clearly stated - Stevenson probably in the long run found this more admirable than being 'respectable' and

217. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine" March 1880 as as "Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions". In book form in "Familiar Studies of Men and Books" (1882).

never seeking to question the moral and ethical status quo. His belief in the duty of helping one's fellow men, and in duties within society as such did not in fact blind him to the illogicality and sometimes the destructive nature of society's laws; though his anger against conventional hypocrisy in matters of religion was a permanent feature in his philosophy, after "Lay Morals" and "Reflections and Remarks on Human Life", he would never again emphasise its anti-social and anti-humbug face with anything like the same passion or in anything like the sustained depth of these two works.

If we look briefly now at other essays of interest, we find many points of contact with these works and a few significant divergences. Perhaps the essay most similar in style and content to "Lay Morals" is "Father Damien", which was written about ten years after his incomplete thesis on morals, though published before it (see p.105). The similarity is in the strength of Stevenson's anger at an aspect of religious hypocrisy. He finds himself in the perhaps peculiar position of defending a Catholic missionary who is above the general run of Christians, against the attack of a Protestant (either Congregational or Presbyterian) who in many ways sums up in himself all that Stevenson most despised in contemporary religion. The author's emotions are perhaps more strongly engaged here than in"Lay Morals" mostly because Dr. Hyde, the Protestant missionary involved, not only acted in a way more hypocritical than even Stevenson had expected, but also had acted in what Stevenson would have called 'an ungentlemanly manner' to one who could in no way defend himself - Damien had been dead for some years.

His repugnance for Hyde is obvious, and is not diminished by the fact that while Damien chose to die by ministering to a leper colony, Hyde took the easy option of remaining in Honolulu in a congregation of merchants and colonials. Damien might be seen as being near anough to Stevenson's view of the true Christian. Stevenson's attack on Hyde is for all these reasons, boundless. Here are two examples:

> "I imagine you to be one of those persons who talk with cheerfulness of that place which oxen and wainropes could not drag you to behold. You, who do not even know its situation on the map, probably denounce sensational descriptions, stretching your limbs the while in your pleasant parlour in Beretania Street." 218

and, referring to Hyde's accusation that Damien was a 'coarse man' and a 'peasant':

> "Damien was 'coarse'.
> It is very possible. You make us sorry for the lepers who had only a coarse old peasant for their friend and father. But you, who were so refined, why were you not there, to cheer them with the lights of culture? Or may I remind you that we have some reason to doubt if John the Baptist were genteel; and in the case of Peter, on whose career you doubtless dwell approvingly in the pulpit, no doubt at all he was a "coarse, headstrong" fisherman! Yet even in our Protestant Bibles Peter is called Saint." 219

Before considering the group of pessimistic essays written in 1888 - I will call them the 'Saranac Essays' as they were all written while Stevenson was sojourning in the Adirondacks (October 1887 to April 1888) - I shall look briefly at "Whitman" as that essay not only serves as a good introduction

---

218. Tusitala; XXI; p. 33.
219. Tusitala; XXI; p. 37. The reference to 'even .... our Protestant Bibles' seems to indicate that Stevenson might have become comparatively less critical of Catholic and more critical of Protestant missionaries in the two years he had spent in the South Seas. On the other hand, he may simply be referring to the fact that the word 'Saint' is not a very Protestant term.

to the examination of the 'pessimistic' essays of 1888, but also as a good example of Stevenson's identification with an author he thought to be Christian. The essay, in keeping with the optimism of Whitman himself, takes a brighter view of the universe than is to be found in most of Stevenson's work, even at this time. Stevenson is more enthusiastic about Whitman than any of the other figures in "Familiar Studies of Men and Books", probably because his religious system was the nearest to Stevenson's own:

> "Each person is, for himself, the keystone and the occasion of this universal edifice. 'Nothing, not God,' he says, 'is greater to one than oneself is;' a statement with an irreligious smack at the first sight; but like most startling sayings, a manifest truism on a second. He will give effect to his own character without apology; he sees 'that the elementary laws never apologised'. 'I reckon', he adds, with a quaint colloquial arrogance, 'I reckon I behave no prouder than the level I plant my house by, after all.' The level follows the law of its being; so, unrelentingly, will he; everything, every person, is good in his own place and way; God is the maker of all, and all are in one design. For he believes in God, and that with a sort of blasphemous security. 'No array of terms', quoth he, 'no array of terms can say how much at peace I am about God and about death.'" 220.

and

> "For all the afflicted, all the weak, all the wicked, a good word is said in a spirit which I can only call one of ultra-Christianity; and however wild, however contradictory, it may be in parts, this at least may be said for his book, as it may be said of the Christian Gospels, that no one will read it, however respectable, but he gets a knock upon his conscience; no one however fallen, but he finds a kindly and supporting welcome." 221

---

220. Tusitala; XXVII; p. 67

221. " " pp. 70-71.

We see from these quotations that the kernel of Stevenson's faith was already present in 1878 - the dislike of respectability, the emphasis on conscience, the acceptance of the true message of the Gospels, the fundamental individualism at the centre. What is different here from later work is the optimism - the feeling that the individual will succeed in life if only he is truly Christian, which means for Stevenson 'ultra-Christianity'.

By 1881 however, with the appearance of "Virginibus Puerisque" (Part II),[222] we begin to see the hints of the pessimism which would come to a full flower in the later 1880s. It is educative to compare the style and content of "Virginibus Puerisque" (Part I) with the second part - the first written five years earlier is obviously a work of youth taking a rather trivial attitude to his subject of the necessity or otherwise of marrying, while the second shows a new feeling of responsibility towards those he is advising (similar to the seriousness of "Lay Morals"). Although the end of Part II is written in Stevenson's 'young man's style' pessimism and a thoughtful looking back at past years are the main features:

> "And the true conclusion of this paper is to turn our back on apprehensions, and embrace that shining and courageous virtue, Faith. Hope is the boy, a blind, headlong, pleasant fellow, good to chase swallows with the salt; Faith is the grave, experienced, yet smiling man. Hope lives on ignorance; open-eyed Faith is built upon a knowledge of of our life, of the tyrrany of circumstance

222. First published in "Virginibus Puerisque and Other Papers" (1881).

> "and the frailty of human resolution. Hope looks for unqualified success; but Faith counts certainly on failure, and takes honourable defeat to be a form of victory. Hope is a kind old Pagan; but Faith grew up in Christian days and early learnt humility."223

When Stevenson talks about 'Faith' here we sense from knowledge of other works that it is his own faith he is talking about - the doctrine of failure is here seen for the first time, and will be an integral part of his belief from now on. The pessimism is perhaps muted here but it is certainly present. Again, Stevenson seems to see this pessimistic or at least unhopeful attitude as a kernel of Christianity: this would appear to be the meaning of 'Faith grew up in Christian days'. In this essay, however, the 'pessimism' is not complete, and we do not get here the fatalistic and absurdist views of the universe which are common to "Pulvis et Umbra" and "A Christmas Sermon",- what we have is the sad acceptance of failure without any of the bitterness of the Satanac Essays.

It is difficult to discover whether the pessimism of "Pulvis et Umbra", "Beggars"[224], "A Christmas Sermon" and "Some Gentlemen in Fiction" was something which had developed over a considerable period, or whether there is some element in them of Stevenson's reaction to his father's death in May 1887. There is certainly evidence that the mood was reflected elsewhere than in the essays - his first 'gloomy' novel "The Master of Ballantrae", which in many ways is close to terrifying in

223. Tusitala; XXV, p. 19.
224. First published in "Scribner's Magazine" March 1888. In book form in "Across the Plains" (1892).

the darkness of the vision of tragedy found within, was written in 1887 and 1888; furthermore, after 1888 most of the novels have darker themes than previously: man's brutality and materialism ("The Wrecker", 1892), the failure of the individual to act as he would like ("Catriona", 1893), or the depths of evil in the minds of men corrupted by self-pride ("The Ebb-Tide", 1894). There is certainly a case, then, for attesting that the new 'pessimism' was not just a reaction either to the death of his father, or to the move to Saranac Lake in its desolate site in the high mountains of Upper New York State.

There is no real or substantial difference between the separate 'Saranac Essays' in terms of degree of optimism or pessimism - if they are about morality, they are pessimistic. Here are two examples:

> "For nowadays the pride of man denies in vain his kinship with the original dust. He stands no longer like a thing apart. Close at his heels we see the dog, prince of another genus: and in him too, we see dumbly testified the same cultus of an unattainable ideal, the same constancy in failure. Does it stop with the dog? We look at our feet where the ground is blackened with the swarming ant: a creature so small, so far from us in the hierarchy of brutes, that we can scarce trace and scarce comprehend his doings; and here also, in his ordered politics and rigorous justice we see confessed the law of duty and the fact of individual sin. Does it stop then with the ant? Rather this desire for well-doing and this doom of frailty run through all the grades of life: rather is this earth, from the frosty top of Everest to the next margin of the eternal fire, one stage of ineffectual virtues and one temple of pious tears and perseverance. The whole creation groaneth and travaileth together. It is the common and godlike law of life." 225 ("Pulvis et Umbra")

225. Tusitala; XXVI, p. 66.

> "To look back upon the past year, and see how little we have striven and to what small purpose; and how often we have been cowardly and hung back, or temerarious and rushed unwisely in; and how every day and all day long we have transgressed the law of kindness; - it may seem a paradox, but in the bitterness of these discoveries, a certain consolation resides. Life is not designed to minister to a man's vanity. He goes upon his long business most of the time with a hanging head, and all the time like a blind child. Full of rewards and pleasures as it is - so that to see the day break or the moon rise, or to meet a friend, or to hear the dinner-call when he is hungry, fills him with surprising joys - this world is yet for him no abiding city. Friendships fall through, health fails, weariness assails him; year after year, he must thumb the hardly varying record of his own weakness and folly. It is a friendly process of detachment." 226 ("A Christmas Sermon").

It is noticeable that in both extracts we are given the points of contact with Stevenson's religion-individualism, the concept of sin, the 'law' of kindness, duties in various contexts. Furthermore, though pessimism as to the rewards of life is the main thing we notice, this pessimism is not depression or despondency about life, more resignation to an inevitable failure in one's ambitions. There is however a certain increase in bitterness and a greater anxiety to get this pessimistic and, strangely, ascetic message across compared with "Virginibus Puerisque. Part II". What this is obviously leading him to is the total fatalism of his last days, seen especially in "Vailima Prayers" and "New Poems", where the complete subserviance to God is perhaps a mark of a complete surrender of responsibility and of the hope that his actions would at any time result in good. This pessimism, as I think I have shown, was something that developed in the middle period

226. Tusitala; XXVI; pp.74-75.

of Stevenson's life, and was not, as some critics have claimed, always there, underlying what might be called Stevenson's optimistic pose. In this as in other things, Stevenson's attitudes changed during his lifetime.

The final and most obvious guide to Stevenson's religious opinions in his works is probably the "Vailima Prayers". By the very fact that they are prayers they offer no analysis of issues, but simply mirror Stevenson's feelings towards his God at a point in time. Certain elements are common to most of them, but we cannot expect to find the key and basis of all that has gone before - life is not so simple. The main strand in the "Prayers" is, in fact, that dependence on God mentioned earlier in a number of contexts. There is much emphasis on God leading, God helping, a truly omnipotent God, and also, consequently, on the comparative weakness and ignorance of men. Concepts which also figure strongly are kindness to others and honour (the latter idea often mentioned in "Father Damien" for obvious reasons). A connection with both "Father Damien" and "Lay Morals" comes in the first prayer, "For Success":

> "Let peace abound in our small company. Purge out of every heart the lurking grudge. Give us grace and strength to forbear and persevere. Offenders, give us the grace to accept and forgive offenders. Forgetful ourselves, help us to bear cheerfully the forgetfulness of others." 227

In another, we find something of the pessimism about life which was noticeable in the Saranac essays:

---

227. Tusitala; XXI, p.5.

AT MORNING

> "The day returns and brings us the petty round of irritating concerns and duties. Help us to play the man, help us to perform them with laughter and kind faces, let cheerfulness abound with industry. Give us to go blithely on our business all this day, bring us to our resting beds weary and content and undishonoured, and grant us in the end the gift of sleep." 228

The emphasis on the omnipotent God is perhaps seen most in "For the Family":

> "Help us to look back on the long day that Thou hast brought us, on the long days in which we have been served not according to our deserts but our desires; on the pit and miry clay, the blackness of despair, the horror of misconduct, from which our feet have been plucked out. For our sins forgiven or prevented, for our shame unpublished, we bless and thank Thee, O God. Help us yet again and ever. So order events, so strengthen our frailty, as that day by day we shall come before Thee with this song of gratitude, and in the end we be dismissed with honour. In their weakness and their fear, the vessels of Thy handiwork so pray to Thee, so praise Thee. Amen". 229

A deep analysis of these prayers is perhaps impossible - they speak for themselves. The emotions and feelings in them are too Stevensonian for anyone to believe that they do not come from a totally sincere faith. We can certainly say that they prove beyond a doubt that Stevenson was every bit as much as believer in God at Vailima as he had been in the previous fifteen years. What we have discovered about Stevenson elsewhere - his Protestantism, his identification with the Covenanters, his doubt in all 'official' practising creeds, his distrust of codes of precepts, his hatred of the conventional, his sympathy for the missionary ideal (though not necessarily for all missionaries) - none of these things

228. Tusitala; XXI; p. 7
229. " " p. 14.

can be proved by "Vailima Prayers". The reason for this, we may think, is because the "Prayers" are in themselves faith in its barest essentials and represent the purest and simplest of Christian beliefs. It would be difficult indeed for anyone who has closely examined religion in Stevenson's other works to believe that the sentiments expressed in these prayers are not genuine, or are not, indeed, the natural conclusion to the development of his attitudes to religion.

iii) Poems

The poems Stevenson wrote in his maturity are arguably his least objective works - if they are poems of religious interest that interest will be a direct statement. Stevenson's method, in almost every case, is to find verse-forms that will suit the particular emotion involved, rather than to distance himself from the action and feelings by means of characters or narrators.[230] It should be emphasised at the beginning, however, that only a comparatively small percentage of his poems are of interest for this study. "A Child's Garden of Verses",[231] "Moral Emblems"[232], and "Ballads"[233] are of no real relevance, as two are both for children and childlike, and one is narrative verse on Ancient Polynesian themes and totally unconcerned with Stevenson's

230. A possible exception would be some of the Scots poems, which he may have written in the persona of 'Thamson' his amiable but hypocritical ex-Church elder.
231. London; Longmans, Green & Co.; 1885.
232. Including "The Graver and the Pen" and "Moral Tales". First published in "Edinburgh Edition" (1894-1898).
233. London; Chatto & Windus; 1891.

religious or moral opinions. Furthermore, in the remaining three groups, "Underwoods",[234] "Songs of Travel",[235] and "New Poems"[236] there are obviously only a certain percentage of any religious interest, others being love poetry, social poetry, personal poetry on issues other than of religious import, light verse, etc. The number of poems of interest is higher in the case of "New Poems" than it is in either "Underwoods" or "Songs of Travel": it is fair to say that of the latter two books, "Underwoods" has the higher claim to attention in terms of number of poems dealing with religion, but the other is, perhaps the more revealing.

Of the section in "Underwoods" that is in Scots, roughly half (seven out of sixteen poems) deals with religion in one way or another, from the satire of "Embro' Hie Kirk" at the one extreme to the commitment and soul-searching of "Late in the nicht in bed I lay" at the other. That the one epitomises an earlier period of versifying - the mid-1870s, and the other a later, the post-1880 period, I hope to prove by the rest of my examination. It is difficult to find a more severe satire on Scots religion in Stevenson than 'Embro Hie Kirk' - the use of Scots, always a good medium for satire, undoubtedly gives the poem an added bite. Stevenson takes the character of an enthusiastic church conservative who advises

234. London; Chatto & Windus; 1887 (2 editions).
235. London; Chatto & Windus; 1895.
236. "New Poems" were originally published by the Boston Bibliophile Society in 1916 and 1921 as "Poems Hitherto Unpublished" ed (1916) G.S. Hellman; (1921) Hellman and William P. Trent. The Tusitala edition of the "Works" also includes under "New Poems" poems from "Additional Poems" - "Pentland Edition" (1906-1907), "Miscellanea" - "Vailima Edition" (1921-1923), and other unpublished poems.

two fellow Free Church tories to take the most extreme measures to stop 'innovations' in the kirk, such as the introduction of an organ into St. Giles:

"Up, Niven,[237] or ower late - an' dash
Laigh in the glaur that carnal hash;
Let spires and pews wi' gran' stramash
Thegither fa';
The rumlin' kist o' whustles smash
In pieces sma!

Noo choose ye out a walie hammer;
About the knottit buttress clam'er;
Alang the steep roof stoyt an' stammer,
A gate mischancy;
On the aul' spire, the bells' hie cha'mer,
Dance your bit dancie.

Ding, devel, dunt, destroy, an' ruin,
We' carnal stanes the square bestrewin'
Till your loud chaps frae Kyle to Fruin,
Frae Hell to Heeven,
Tell the guid work that baith are doin'
Baith Begg an' Niven." 238

The fact that Begg died in 1883 puts this poem before that date, and in tone, it is somewhat similar to the "Appeal to the Clergy", published in 1875, and to "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes". There is certainly a difference in tone between this and both "A Lowden Sabbath Morn" and "The Scotsman's Return from Abroad" - Balfour ("Life") dates the former 1887 and the latter 1880. These two poems, though

237. There can be no doubt at all that Stevenson is confused as to this name. There is no record of anyone named Niven helping James Begg in his fight against innovations in the Kirk. I can only give two theories both of which are largely due to the research of Mr. Huisdean Duff of the Department of Scottish History. The first is that Stevenson is confusing the James Begg of his own day with his father, James (1763-1845) who had in 1808 put out a treatise against the use of organs, published in Glasgow by Niven. The second is that Stevenson simply had forgotten a surname when he wrote down 'Niven' - that he should have remembered Dr. William Nixon (1803-1900) who was Moderator of the Free Kirk in 1868 and had taken the same stand as Begg over many issues as Begg's 'second-in-command'.

238. Tusitala; XXII; p. 180.

gently satirical, have as much of nostalgia for the religious differences in Scotland as they have criticism of them - there is no 'teaching' moral here. The general effect is almost one of longing for these well-tried, quirky, ineffective but familiar solutions to the gulf between God and man. In "A Lowden Sabbath Morn", for instance, Stevenson almost borders on 'kailyard' sentimentality - he talks of the church bell which 'just a wee thing nearer brings the quick an' deid'; his 'plou'man' who fills up the day of rest with the Kirk is not to be smiled at but to be identified with. The same sentiments may be seen in the well-known poem "To S.R. Crockett" ("Songs of Travel") - hardly diminished, perhaps strengthened by a further six or so years:-

> "Be it granted me to behold you again in dying,
> Hills of home! and to hear again the call;
> Hear about the graves of the martyrs the peewees crying,
> And hear no more at all." 239

There are fewer personal religious poems in "Underwoods" than in "Songs of Travel" and "New Poems", the lack being most noticeable in the Scots poems. In the 1887 collection at least, Stevenson's Scots voice is used almost exclusively, as a kind of mask to distance himself from his subject. On at least one occasion, however, we have a more direct statement of feeling on religion in the poem "Late in the nicht in bed I lay" which I presume, without

239. Tusitala: XXII, p. 168.

verification, to be of the mid-1880s. It is a poem of self-questioning, though it seems to begin in much the manner of "Holy Willie's Prayer", telling of he who by 'God's especial grace' dwells in middle class security. The second part of the poem is more directly Stevensonian: he questions himself thoroughly and is honest enough to admit that he hardly deserves 'sic graces'. In this examination of a Scots religious character, the author brings out the better parts of the Scottish Calvinist conscience - the Protestant conscience is possibly a better phrase. In the final verse, he feels, in his guilt, quite ready to die and go to Hell because of his comparative comfort on Earth:-

"For God when jowes the Judgment-bell,
Wi' His ain Hand, His Leevin' Sel',
Sall ryve the guid (as Prophets tell)
Frae them that had it;
And in the reamin' pot o' Hell
The rich be scaddit.

O Lord, if this indeed be sae,
Let daw that sair an' happy day!
Again 'the worl', grown auld an' grey,
Up wi' your aixe!
And letthe puir enjoy their play -
I'll thole my paiks." 240

Not only the idea of the rich not having deserved their leisure, but also the self-sacrifice entailed in the final acceptance of damnation, together with the thought for others it implies, is surely one of Stevenson's most cherished ideals.

240. Tusitala; XXII, p. 125.

If we take the poems in English from "Underwoods","Songs of Travel" and "New Poems", and group those of religious interest, where possible, in terms of certain and projected dates of composition, we find some guidance to the biographical development of Stevenson's religious leanings. The most obvious development from early to late poems is one towards a more directly stated religious faith. Thus, those poems written in the 1888-1894 period, when they deal with religion, are more direct statements both of the author's belief in God, and, crucially, of God's power over man, His guiding influence, which man may not understand, but which he should realise is there. Of this type are:- "He hears with gladdened heart the thunder",[241] "To Mother Maryanne",[242] "The Woodman",[243] "Tropic Rain",[244] and "Evensong".[245] (All these are in "Songs of Travel", "Tusitala Edition", Vol. XXII). Of course, even between these five there are differences, the most extreme perhaps being between "The Woodman" and "Evensong", the one an admission of life as war, but judged as such by God - the powerful, cruel and Calvinist God, passing all human understanding; the other a simple admission of God's guiding the author's path. Here are contrasting sections from the two:-

---

241. Undated in either Balfour or Janet Adam Smith "Collected Poems".
242. Dated 1889 (Balfour).
243. Dated 1890 (Balfour).
244. Dated 1890 (Balfour).
245. Undated in either Balfour or Smith but presumably 1893-94.

"Here also sound Thy fans, O God,
Here too Thy banners move abroad;
Forest and city, sea and shore,
And the whole earth, Thy threshing-floor!
The drums of war, the drums of peace,
Roll through our cities without cease,
And all the iron bells of life
Ring with the unremitting strife." 246

and

"So far have I been led,
Lord, by Thy will:
So far I have followed, Lord, and wondered still.
The breeze from the embalmed land
Blows sudden towards the shore,
And claps my cottage door.
I hear the signal, Lord - I understand.
The night at Thy command
Comes. I will eat and sleep and will not
question more." 247

Perhaps a phrase from "Tropic Rain" will clarify a connection between the God of "The Woodman" and the God of "Evensong":

"And all the sinews of hell slumber in summer air;
And the face of God is a rock, but the face of the
rock is fair."248

The English poems in "Underwoods" show that poems of roughly the same kind as "Evensong", or at least containing roughly the same type of approach to a deity, were being written in the earlier 1880s. We might mention "The House Beautiful" (1881-1887),[249] "The Celestial Surgeon" (1882: Balfour);[250] "Not yet, my soul" (1880: Balfour)[251], "It is not yours, O mother, to complain" (1880: Balfour),[252] and the

246 Tusitala; Vol. XXII, p. 163.
247 " Vol. XXII, p. 169.
248 " Vol. XXII, p. 166.
249 " Vol. XXII, p. 70-71. Undated in either Balfour or Smith.
250 " Vol. XXII, p. 84
251 " Vol. XXII, pp. 86-87.
252 " Vol. XXII, pp. 87-88.

introduction to part of "Travels with a Donkey": "A Camp" (1878)[253]. Also in "Underwoods", we have poems of slightly different approach; for example:- "Our Lady of the Snows" (1878: Balfour)[254] and "The Sick Child" (1873-1886?)[255]. In the former, Stevenson upbraids the monks of Notre Dame des Neiges for their running away from life - he sees God as the God of action in the world in the poem, of necessity indifferent to the monks' escapism. Nevertheless, his attitude to this God is not one of obvious belief, rather acceptance. In "The Sick Child", the mother quietens the child by saying that "the kind God" will bring the morning: this could, however, be a simple remembrance of the author's own childhood, rather than any statement of belief in God. The mother may indeed be criticised for giving an "easy answer" to the child's problem. In the version in "The State", Janet Adam Smith points out, two extra verses appeared, in which a fearful, powerful God is almost resented by the author:-

> "O, when all golden comes the day,
> And the other children leap
> Singing from the doors of sleep,
> Lord, take Thy heavy hand away!
> Lord, in Thy mercy heal or slay!" [256]

Although this is small enough evidence of the earlier Stevenson, it at least mirrors, explains and dates some of the many undated poems in "New Poems" and "Collected Poems". In the Tusitala edition of the "Works" we have the most

---

253. Tusitala, Vol. XXII, p. 92. Presumably written in 1878 though undated in either Balfour or Smith.
254. Tusitala, Vol. XXII, pp. 84-86.
255. Tusitala, Vol. XXII, p. 89. Janet Adam Smith posits 1873 as a possible date: the poem was first published in 1886 in "The State".
256. Janet Adam Smith: op. cit. p. 482.

"New Poems" ever published, a total of 242 poems. Of these, Janet Adam Smith, in the 1971 edition of "Collected Poems", included 113, thus leaving out 129. In addition the Smith volume includes twenty-nine poems not included in any of the collected volumes. It is interesting to note that of this twenty-nine only three are of interest in terms of religion, whereas of the 129 unprinted in the "Collected Poems", thirty poems are of interest: a comparison of 10% with 23.2%. It may be that Miss Adam Smith feels that a number of the more religious poems are of less art. However, if we add to this the fact that she seldom makes a comment on a religious poem in the 'Notes' section of a book - for instance, she fails to notice not only "The House Beautiful", but also "Evensong", Embro"High Kirk", "Late in the nicht" etc. - if we recognise this also, we may be justified in feeling that there is an element of bias in her selection from the poems available.

In "New Poems" there are, because of the sheer number, more poems of all types of religious interest. Of direct statement of religion, in similar terms to the poems I have mentioned above, in the 1895 collection, we have, for instance, "All influences were in vain",[257] "Ad se Ipsum",[258] "It's forth across the roaring foam",[259] "An English Breeze",[260] "Prayer",[261] "Since Thou hast given me",[262] "Sonnet to the Sea",[263] and "Men marvel at the Works of Man".[264] All

257. Tusitala, Vol. XXIII, pp. 95-96. Not included in "Collected Poems"
258 " " p. 134 "
259 " " p. 160 "
260 " " p. 161 "
261 " " p. 165 "
262 " " p. 193 "
263 " " p. 201 "
264 " " p. 220-221 "

these have the same sort of trust in God and leaning on Him that we see in "Evensong". I will quote the whole of "Ad se Ipsum" as an example:-

> "Dear sir, good-morrow! Five years back,
> When you first girded for this arduous track,
> And under various whimsical pretexts
> Endowed another with your damned defects,
> Could you have dreamed in your despondent vein
> That the kind God would make your path so plain?
> Non nobis, domine! O, may He still
> Support my stumbling footsteps on the hill!"

Because of the reference here to Stevenson's wife I am inclined to date this in the 1883-1885 period. In general, it seems to me that the break in style of religious poem comes as early as 1878 or so; that those which damn religion satirically (or its bourgeois manifestations) apart possibly from "Embro' High Kirk" come from the pre-1878 period, along with those which use religious imagery for secular ends - a habit of Stevenson's "Mrs. Sitwell" period (1871-75).* An example of the latter use, one of the few examples in the poems, in fact, is - "You looked so tempting in the pew" (Tusitala, XXIII, p. 106), which emphasises the barrenness of religion compared with the erotic excitements that can occur in the pews. Perhaps a more important example (in that it should certainly be dated in the early 1870s) is - "Love is the very heart of Spring", which Balfour dated 1876, but which I am inclined to think slightly earlier, it being so similar to sentiments expressed in the early unpublished

---

* See Appendix II.

Sitwell letters in the National Library of Scotland. Stevenson, in this poem, repeatedly uses the line "Incense before love's altar bring", which I think shows that religion was an important subconscious element even when Stevenson was outwardly rejecting it. It is, of course, his attitude that is different in this and the last mentioned from later efforts: Stevenson is much more trivial, light-headed. Religion is not a thing to be instantly respected, but something whose imagery may be used to enhance more important things. As I have said, this is not at all common in his poetry, though very much more common in his early "love" letters.

Another side of what must be the earlier poems on religion is, of course, his identification of religion as a whole with middle-class values. The two most vitriolic poems on this subject are "A Valentine's Song"[265] and "Hail! Childish Slaves of Social rules",[266] which follow each other in the "Tusitala" edition. Both are attacks on Mrs. Grundyism ('Mrs. Grundy' is mentioned in both poems) which associate Edinburgh Presbyterianism with sad asceticism and 'holier than thou' attitudes. If anything, the first seems the less mature, in that he does not seriously discuss religion, condemning it out of hand:-

> "Stand on your putrid ruins - stand,
> White neck-cloth'd bigot, fixedly the same,
> Cruel with all things but the hand,
> Iniquisitor in all things but the name.
> Back, minister of Christ and source of fear -
> We cherish freedom - back with thee and thine
> From this unruly time of year,
> The Feast of Valentine". [267]

265. Undated in Balfour; not included in Smith.
266. " " " " " "
267. Tusitala, Vol. XXIII, p. 123.

The second poem, though on roughly the same theme, analyses the "social laws" of the Church and official representatives of God more closely. The sneer at 'fine, religious, decent Folk' is still there, but the thoughts are those he would develop later in "Appeal to the Clergy" and "Lay Morals". His attack, now, is not on the sourfacedness of the official Christian but on his dishonesty:-

> "Ye dainty-spoken, stiff, severe
> Seed of the migrated Philistian
> One whispered question in your ear -
> Pray, what was Christ, if you be Christian?
> If Christ were only here just now,
> Among the city's wynds and gables
> Teaching the life He taught us, how
> Would He be welcome to your tables? 268

There is more maturity in this than the last, and more evidence of the thought he was to give this subject in such as "Lay Morals".

We have further examples of the comparison of religion with a hedonistic existence in "If I could arise and travel away"[269] and "As Daniel, bird-alone, in that Far Land",[270] in both of which the idea of 'official' religion is found wanting when compared with other systems of value. The interesting thing is that though the latter is dated by Balfour 1872, the former is as late as 1882-1883. The difference between the two is that while the earlier, no doubt, shows a predilection for religious imagery, the later poem in rejecting a system of moral or religious laws "the Ten Commandments", leaves room for a rejection of the hedonism

268. Tusitala, Vol. XXIII, p. 125
269. " " p. 150
270. " " p. 206.

that is the main moving point in "As Daniel, bird-alone". In the later poem, Stevenson is obviously contrasting the moral code of the "Ten Commandments" with a practical hedonism, and by the end of the poem, the rejection of the moral law is seen as less desirable than rejection of the hedonism which had seemed at first to triumph. In the last verse, the poet says that the individual may become the hypocritical "religionist" at the same time as he rejects the moral laws. In this sense, there is a very great difference between the earlier and later poems, a difference in maturity more than anything else. In other words, Stevenson has matured beyond the simple rejection of 'official' religion of the 1870s, to perhaps a thoughtful, though not altogether painless, acceptance of some of the old religious standards. In 1879, in "Lay Morals" he could reject the "Ten Commandments" as a barren system of rules through which the true Christian could easily see; in 1883, he possibly feels that the Commandments in themselves are an extremely exacting standard, and are so much more easily by-passed than adhered to.

The "New Poems", especially in the Tusitala edition, can then sketch out a rough scheme of progress from an indifference to religion (though with an unconscious proneness towards it), through a stage of exacting religious idealism, exemplified by the satires in Scots, and other attacks on 'official' religionists, to a position of belief in a God who leads, yet is harsh in His demands - the 'rock' of "The Woodman" and "Tropic Rain". It is also a movement from mild rebellion against a too harsh God to an acceptance of that God's direction

of all human affairs and even Stevenson's rebellion. That the position of a kind of rebel was to some extent maintained is shown in "The Woodman", as elsewhere; but, as time went on, the rebellion was very much more muted and the trust less so. This explains the preponderance in "New Poems" of poems expressing reliance in God rather than any kind of rebellion (however muted) against the deity. Although any dating of these poems is open to criticism, and, though certain poems do not fit the pattern I have presented, the general progression is quite clear and the development of Stevenson's religious beliefs quite apparent.

III. PLAYS, FABLES AND FICTION

The difference between the works of Stevenson that have already been looked at and those still to be examined is basic - it is one of comparative objectivity, the statements in the non-fiction group being always Stevenson's own, whereas in the plays, fables and fiction they are put into the mouths of others. We can never be absolutely sure for instance, whether the character of the title in "Admiral Guinea" is saying what Stevenson might have said, or whether he is an example of objective reporting. All we can do is to connect a character's religious opinions and utterances with Stevenson's own, and come out with a rough certainty that such a character's religion was good or attractive to Stevenson and another's bad and not to be copied. The "Fables"[271] are in a way something apart from the other fictional and dramatic works; they have almost a place of their own in his work, nothing except perhaps "Dialogue between Two Puppets" being anything like any of them. As they are more direct than the other works we have yet to deal with - plays and fiction, it is best that they should be examined first.

i) Fables

The connecting link in the "Fables" with the essays is the first fable - "The Persons of the Tale", (there are nineteen fables in all of which the longest is about one-third short story length). In this the similarities to the "Dialogue"

271. First published in "Longmans Magazine" September/October 1895. In book form in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and Other Fables" (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1896).

are very obvious, as it consists of a conversation between Silver and Smollett (from "Treasure Island"), again on the subject of the "Author", and again with both affirming that 'he' has more love for the one character than the other. Although the conversation is not so theological this time, though there are moments where the allegory seems not intended at all and Stevenson is talking only about a book and two characters, the position is roughly the same as in the "Dialogue": Smollett obviously takes the part of the Jesuit, and Silver of Spada. The 'good' figure is hardly changed - still unsure but steadfast in duty - while Stevenson's liking for Silver makes him tone down the man's 'badness':

> (SILVER) "And to get into soundings for once. What is this good? I made a mutiny, and I been a gentleman o'fortune; well, but by all stories you ain't no such saint. I'm a man that keeps company very easy; even by your own account, you ain't, and to my certain knowledge you're a devil to haze. Which is which? Which is good, and which bad? Ah! You tell me that! Here we are in stays, and you may lay to it!'
> 'We're none of us perfect,' replied the Captain. 'That's a fact of religion, my man. All I can say is, I try to do my duty; and if you try to do yours, I can't compliment you on your success.' " 272

The difference is of course that there are no tirades from Silver on the existence of the author and no insults or blasphemies from him either. Indeed, when asked if he believes in an author, Silver says: 'And who better'n me?'. The character of Smollett varies from his Jesuit original (the fables were probably written from 1887 to 1894) only in that

---

272. Tusitala; II; p. 225.

Smollett seems to believe in his own goodness more than the Jesuit - he has no humility of the kind his predecessor possessed:

> "'I see he's giving you a long rope,'[273] said the Captain. 'But that can't change a man's convictions. I know the Author respects me; I feel it in my bones .....' " [274]

The pride of the 'good character in the later 1880s, then, makes him a less Stevensonian figure in terms of identification, while Silver's lack of pride compared to Spada, and greater acceptance of his fate, makes the 'bad' man much more likeable - this perhaps exemplifies a movement away from 'black and white' images of morality in Stevenson's psychology in the 1880-1888 period.

The main fables of the collection, "The House of Eld" and "The Touchstone", are concerned with the individual and society, although specifically religious topics are absent - both show that Stevenson has retained the idea that any notion of 'good and bad' fostered and forced on the individual by society cannot of necessity be all-encompassing or true for everyone. What he seems to have learned by the time of writing "The House of Eld" is that revolutions can only be successful with great pain and destruction to people and institutions that are themselves dear to the revolutionary:

> "Old is the tree and the fruit good,
> Very old and thick the wood.
> Woodman, is your courage stout?
> Beware! The root is wrapped about
> Your mother's heart, your father's bones;
> And like the mandrake comes with groans." [275]

---

273. Smollett is referring here to the 'author' i.e. God.
274. Tusitala; II; p. 224
275. " V; p. 92

The dangers of radicalism are further emphasised in the next fable, "The Four Reformers" which begins with 'sensible' innovations and ends with the four heroes abolishing the Bible, the laws, and, finally, mankind. This growing conservatism seems to be another side of the pessimism and growing dependence on God that ,as we have seen,characterises his last ten or so years. A more truly religious message is contained in four shorter fables: "The Reader", "Something in It", "Faith, Half-Faith, and no Faith at All", and "The Poor Thing". In "Something in It", the white missionary faced with the truth behind an island superstition - Stevenson was a definite believer in Hamlet's 'more in heaven and earth than is dreamed of your philosophy' - is saved from death by uttering a pure Stevensonism:

> "That is not the point", said the missionary. "I took the pledge for others, I am not going to break it for myself." 276.

This is the 'one pin-point of truth' in the missionary's philosophy, and it re-emphasises one of the bases of Stevenson's Christianity.

"The Reader", one of the shortest of the "Fables", represents a very different part of his philosophy, though complementary to the other - his idea of God as the Rock, silent and immovable. The hard fact in the story for the 'reader' is that death only proves the fact that has not been recognised by the individual in his life, that he has been in God's hands all his life. The 'reader' cannot accept this all-seeing control of God, and puts

---

276. Tusitala, V; p. 99

the 'impious' book on the fire. Stevenson's moral is plain, and is quite evident to any reader of the later poems, and "The Ebb-Tide:

"The coward crouches from the rod,
And loathes the iron face of God." [277]

Both "The Poor Thing" and "Faith, Half-Faith and No Faith at All" deal with the question of ultimate and continuing belief in God. "The Poor Thing",[278] though disguised rather heavily in the fable mode, is, in fact, a story of how a totally unforeseeable chain of circumstances can come to pass through the medium of faith. Though the context is not, on the surface, that of Christianity or a belief in God, the fatalism of the story, in which a completely unamiable character comes to marry a princess, is the fatalism of Stevenson's religion at the end of his life. It should be noticed that the hero never loses his faith in God even though the 'miracles' that do occur seem outside the Christian tradition. It is Stevenson's position here as in "Something in It" that there are many ways to the same end, and that faith in any kind of Divine Being is in itself a creative force.

The fable "Faith, Half-Faith and No Faith at All" is the one most instantly recognisable as part of Stevenson's Christianity. Though the context is that of the pagan god Odin the comparisons to be made are quite obvious. A priest, a 'virtuous person', and an 'old rover' go on a pilgrimage. The priest and the 'virtuous person' discuss the meaning of their faith. The priest bases his faith on visible miracles and the

277. Tusitala: V; p. 94

literal and absolute truth of the Bible - he is twice dumb-founded to find the ground taken from under him. He finds no basis whatsoever for his faith - he is 'no faith at all'. The virtuous person scoffs at the trivial basis of the priest's religion; he is confident that Odin and his right will eventually prevail (in other words he is confident that his election is sure - in Calvinist terms - and that he will have his reward in the end). The end of the fable proves him to be 'half-faith':

> "At last one came running, and told them all was lost: that the powers of darkness had besieged the Heavenly Mansions, that Odin was to die, and evil triumph.
> 'I have been grossly deceived', cried the virtuous person.
> 'All is lost now', said the priest.
> 'I wonder if it is too late to make it up with the devil?' said the virtuous person.
> 'Oh, I hope not', said the priest. 'And at any rate we can but try.'
> 'But what are you doing with your axe?' says he to the rover.
> 'I am off to die with Odin', said the rover". 279

Although this can perhaps, because of the strength of the idealism be associated with the late 1870s and early 1880s - with "Lay Morals" - there are few other things in Stevenson's works which combine in such a short space most of his religious beliefs: the anti-Catholicism in his projection of the priest as 'no faith at all', his rejection of 'rewards' in religion, his dislike of conventional hypocrisy, his acceptance that the 'miracles' of the Old Testament are not necessarily true, his love of the self-sacrificing man - all are there in a very small fable. Indeed, the more we look at the "Fables" the more of

279. Tusitala, V; pp. 101-102.

moral or religious significance do we find - the significance of each seems to deepen with every new reading. They without doubt show a mind vitally interested in moral problems and in belief, and also a talent and skill in turning these raw materials into their perfect fictional jackets. They take up a tiny proportion of his total opus, but are of an importance that belies their size.

ii) Plays

In his lifetime, Stevenson published four plays, all of them collaborations with W.E. Henley: "Deacon Brodie" (written in 1878),[280] "Admiral Guinea",[281] "Beau Austin"[282] (both of these written in 1884) and "Macaire" (written in 1885).[283] One other play for which Stevenson was partly responsible has been published since his death: "The Hanging Judge" (written in 1887)[284], a collaboration with his wife, Fanny Vandegrift Stevenson. Stevenson wrote at least one other play - "Monmouth" - probably in the 1871-1873 period; it remains unpublished. Of the five plays to which I have access, only two, "Deacon Brodie" and "Admiral Guinea", are of any real interest for the purposes of this study. Both are, as plays, disfigured (as were the great majority of English plays at that time) by their gross melodrama and pseudo-classical

280. Privately printed in 1880; in book form in "Three Plays" (London; David Nutt; 1892).
281. Privately printed in 1884; in book form as above.
282. " " " " " "
283. " " " 1885; in book form in "Four Plays" (London; William Heinemann; 1896).
284. Privately printed in 1914; in book form in the "Vailima Edition" (1921-23).

form. Indeed it is doubtful whether any drama critic of thirty years later, not to speak of contemporary critics, could hail any of these plays as masterpieces even in their own restricted field.

The most 'Stevensonian' of the plays - those in which R.L.S.'s influence is stronger than Henley's - are the two already singled out. "Deacon Brodie" has a direct hint of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" running throughout the plot in the 'double' character of the respectable deacon. ("The Hanging Judge" has much the same atmosphere if not the close correlation with "Jekyll" that the earlier play has). The 'split character' in "Deacon Brodie" is as pronounced as it is in the novella - the tragedy is almost as great. In the "Deacon" however, the 'good' side of Brodie's character is far better developed than the 'evil', and to a large degree both 'good' and 'bad' are functions of societal morality rather than spiritual and animal impulses. Religion, in the play, is seen both as a purely social phenomenon and as a part of the individual's life and consciousness of self. Brodie, at one point, shows that even as the burglar he is well-immersed in society's values (the first of which is undoubtedly also Stevenson's):

> "Why, man, if under heaven there were but one poor lock unpicked, and that the lock of one whose claret you've drunk, and who has babbled of woman across your mahogany - that lock, sir, were entirely sacred. Sacred as the Kirk of Scotland; sacred as King George upon the throne: sacred as the memory of Bruce and Bannockburn." 285

The first part of this is meant to comment ironically on the second: Stevenson believed in sacrifice for one's friends; he

285. Tusitala; XXIV, p. 26.

certainly did not put this on a par with religious orthodoxy, the divine right of kings and patriotism. The view we are given of Brodie here is of a person who is essentially confused as to social values, but what is interesting for this study is Brodie's use of 'sacred' as an adjective understood as meaning a great deal. Moore's reply, that he 'ain't a parson, I ain't' is significant for an analysis of Brodie's character, and through him, Stevenson's. An immediate parallel from a work written roughly three years later is Israel Hands in "Treasure Island" and, after another three years, Pew in "Admiral Guinea".

A further example of Brodie's religiosity comes in Act I, Tableau III, Scene III, where the singing of a hymn drives him to reflect on his actions. The hymn or psalm emphasises both God's power of damnation and His forgiveness, leaving Brodie even more confused as to whether he should persevere in his double life or end it by emigrating and starting his life again. He is brought back to awareness of his present circumstances before he can in any sense make a decision. By the time he has reached home again (Act II, Tableau IV, Scene I), he has returned to his usual position of condemning all in society as "rogues all", and overturns his previous statements by calling the church bells the "trumpets of respectability" (in "The Hanging Judge", the bells have another function - to remind the sinning judge, Harlowe, of his conscience).[286] This confusion as to the right thing to do at any given time remains throughout the play until Brodie's capture, where he at last attains something like the stature of a whole man. Brodie's

286. Tusitala; XXIV; pp. 282-283.

fear and belief in an all-powerful and avenging God is clear throughout the play, side by side with his contempt of identification with society in its religious form. On God he is not confused; for instance, when Mary says, going out, (Act II, Tableau IV, Scene VI):- "God forgive you!", Brodie's words are "Amen, But will He?" [287] Again, when, after his murder of Ainslie, he returns to his room to find his door open and his absence detected, he cries:-

> "O! ..... Open, open, open! Judgement of God, the door is open!" 288

Finally, Brodie's last scene is presented as a scene of repentance. At the end of the third from last scene, Mary, the sister, begs the Deacon to "kneel, pray" and to "repent and join us". At the end of the play, Hunt arrives to arrest the Deacon, who, in Stevenson's terms, repents by taking the whole guilt on himself:-

> "In all this there is but one man guilty; and that man is I. None else has sinned; none else must suffer." 289

The point about repentance is proved by his dying words ("the new life ..... the new life!"), which we presume to have no ironic but a purely melodramatic meaning - that he is going on to a more perfect life, and that he is now sure of God's forgiveness. Brodie cannot be seen, however, as a purely religious character - the question of his repugnance for, yet identification with, the trammels and hypocrisies of society is more important for an analysis of him.

---

288. Tusitala; XXIV; p. 79.

289. " XXIV; p. 82.

John Gaunt, the "Admiral Guinea" of the play of that name, is a wholly religious character - he thinks in religious terms and his decisions are based on the Bible or on his interpretation of God's law. The story of "Admiral Guinea" is basically that of Gaunt's coming to know himself; but in no sense from 'evil' to 'good' as in "Jekyll", or even "Brodie". Gaunt's religiosity, based on his wife's teachings and his experience of the death of slaves on his last voyage as a slaver, is seen nowhere in the play as being 'a bad thing'. Rather, in comparison with the slaver and marooner of the old days- personified in some sense by the villain, Blind Pew[290] - the new Gaunt is positive and active goodness. The progression, in the story, is the simple one from the authoritarian Gaunt to the more humble Gaunt; he finds in fact that he has others than himself to think of. He feels himself quite justified in condemning the marriage of his daughter to Kit, a privateersman as he once was himself; (indeed, what we see of the latter through the play gives no certainty that Gaunt is incorrect in his opinion). His condemnation comes from a deep belief in the 'angry God':-

> "Arethusa, you at least are the child of many prayers; your eyes have been unsealed; and to you the world stands naked, a morning watch for duration, a thing spun of cobwebs for solidity. In the presence of an angry God, I ask you: have you heard this man?"

and

290. In "Admiral Guinea" it is more difficult than in "Deacon Brodie to apportion characters to Stevenson or Henley. Gaunt is obviously Stevenson's; Kit, Mrs. Drake and perhaps Arethusa, probably Henley's work. Pew may have been a collaboration, though there are definite echoes of Silver and Israel Hands in some of his soliloquies.

and

> "You speak of me? In the true balances we both weigh nothing. But two things I know: the depth of iniquity, how foul it is; and the agony with which a man repents. Not until seven devils were cast out of me did I awake; each rent me as it passed. Ay, that was repentance. Christopher, Christopher, you have sailed before the wind since first you weighed your anchor, and now you think to sail upon a bowline? You do not know your ship, young man: you will go le'ward like a sheet of paper; I tell you so that know - I tell you so that have tried, and failed, and wrestled in the sweat of prayer, and at last, at last, have tasted prayer." 291.

The power that Gaunt is given here and elsewhere, and his sympathetic treatment, leads one to suspect that the author is very much with the man, and identifies with him at least in part. Pew, the liar and vagabond, because of his lack of honour and his complete selfishness, could surely not have been any kind of hero for Stevenson at any stage. Stevenson does not quite see him as an early Huish, but his soul is undoubtedly not savable:

> 'PEW: "Is he still on piety?"
>
> ARETHUSA: "O, he is a Christian man!"
>
> PEW: "A Christian man, is he? Where does he keep his rum?" ' 292.

Pew's life is bound up in his search for money (cf. Villon), to sate his vices of rum and lechery: he is the ultimate materialist, and therefore not of Stevenson's hall of heroes. He dies unrepentant, like James Durie, but has none of the admirable qualities of the Master of Ballantrae.[293] Gaunt, on

---

291. Tusitala; XXIV; pp. 138-9.
292. Tusitala, XXIV; p. 144.
293. He is prevented from being a completely unsympathetic character through the fact that the song he perpetually sings - "Time for us to go" - is extremely catching and even amiable.

the other hand, becomes wholly admirable from a position of powerful and sincere belief in God, by seeing that Arethusa may save Kit in much the way Hester, his late wife, had saved him. Even when quite sure of his position, Gaunt feels that he has been unkind to Kit, who has put forward kindness to others as a basis of 'true-blue piety'. After he has explained to Arethusa the basis of his own belief - his wife and the results of his 'murder' of his slaves - he softens and promises to seek guidance in prayer on the proposed marriage. Despite Pew's attempt to incriminate Kit, Gaunt's faith in the man grows rather than recedes, although, on the face of it, he condemns him out of hand. At the end, he accepts him readily, blaming himself for his 'self-righteousness'. Even here, on the other hand, he feels Kit may revert to the privateer - 'but O, walk humbly' is his final advice.

Stevenson must have seen Gaunt as a most admirable character even in his sterner days: there is much even in the early part of "Admiral Guinea" that echoes much elsewhere in Stevenson - Christianity as the hard faith; God who forgives, but not the unrepentant evil; God as a "rock",hard but secure. Especially in some of the poems and fables, Stevenson himself seems to be taking this view of the severe God, although a God who forgives the kind and self-sacrificing. He seems, most commonly perhaps as he neared the end of life, to have preferred a clear-cut faith of good and evil, sin and repentance, to a more modern and perhaps more vague Christianity. It is certainly quite Stevensonian to maintain, as Gaunt does here, that it is man who is cowardly, selfish and often despicable,

rather than God who is over-harsh and uncaring. The hard Calvinist side of the 'Stevensonian ethos' is something which seems always since his youthful atheist days to have been there, but to have been, at the same time, resisted. Therefore, he can see both the point of the clear-cut severe faith, and fit this to his ideas about kindness to others, as well as looking to himself and his own virtues and sins: in "Admiral Guinea", we have Gaunt seeing deeply into Kit's character, and, in a sense, predicting his downfall in the carouse with Pew; and at the same time, we have Kit giving hints to Gaunt about kindness to others and the virtue of personal forgiveness. Doubts as to which of these facets should rule in the true Christianity were, I believe, strong in Stevenson, at least until the Vailima period. That he thought both important cannot be doubted.

iii) Fiction

The general reading public, if they have read Stevenson at all, have usually confined themselves to the novels and short stories; this might also be said of critical opinion - we may remember that the last two books to deal with the works rather than the man both confined themselves to the fiction (I am talking of Eigner and Robert Kiely's "Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure").[294] Whether we feel this is fair or not considering the excellence of Stevenson as an essayist and travel writer, it cannot be denied that this is the case. It is, furthermore, disturbing that the public in

294. Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press; 1964.

general know only a fraction of that fictional output - they are few indeed who have read "Prince Otto",[295] "The Wrecker",[296] "The Black Arrow,"[297] or even "Catriona",[298] while fewer than we might think have read or heard of "The Master of Ballantrae"[299] or "St. Ives"[300]. In the field of shorter fiction, only "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde",[301] has always been popular and "Thrawn Janet"[302] interesting - more because of its Scots than because of its theme, in Scotland at any rate. Public ignorance is then endemic even in the field where Stevenson is most popular, and which, everything taken together, is probably the genre in which he made his most distinctive contribution to literature. As this thesis will be concentrating on several of the lesser known novels and stories, it is hoped that some doors at least to a more equable viewing of Stevenson will be opened.

Because the three longer works I will be looking at closest all fall within the period of five years between 1889 and 1894, I think an examination of novels and stories of interest should be linked closely to date of writing and publication: in this way, any development in choice of theme or motifs can be seen. There are of course, many stories that I will not look at at all - e.g. the "New Arabian Nights"[303] and "Dynamiter"[304] collections, "St. Ives" and "The Wrong Box"[305] -

295. London; Chatto & Windus; 1885. Serial in "Longmans Magazine", April/October 1885.
296. London; Cassell & Co.; 1892. Serial in "Scribner's Magazine"; August 1891/July 1892.
297. London; Cassell & Co. 1888. Serial in "Young Folks"; June/October 1883.
298. London; Cassell & Co. 1893. Serial in "Atalanta";January/May 1893.
299. London; Cassell & Co.; 1889. Serial in "Scribner's Magazine"; November 1888/October 1889.
300. New York; ; 1897. Serial in the "Pall Mall Magazine";
301. New York; Charles Scribner's Sons; 1886. "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde".
302. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine" October 1881. In

...../over

all of which, being humorous writings (the second and fourth are collaborations), are outwith the scope of this study. Stevenson did not think religion a subject to be laughed at or made fun of, at any level beyond the rather facile jibes of the hero of "St. Ives" at the expense of Scots religion scattered through the book: there is, consequently, little about his beliefs in these books.

There seems to be three periods in Stevenson's career as a fiction writer when religion comes into prominence as an issue or a theme. These are from 1877 to 1881, from 1883 to 1886, and the last five or so years of his life, from 1889. This is not to say that all or anything like all the fiction in one of these periods will be of interest - for instance, in the years 1889 to 1894 Stevenson wrote "St. Ives" and helped to write "The Wrong Box". Furthermore the reason why religion should come to the fore at these particular periods is hard to judge - except for the last period, during which a strengthening of Stevenson's religion undoubtedly took place. A tentative guess as regards the first period mentioned might be that he was reacting to a new-found faith and wished to put his new views on paper: we have already seen a change in the tone of his essays after the 1878-1880 period which in itself was connected to Stevenson's philosophy of life and religion. The middle period of four or so years, in which he wrote "Markheim"[306] and "Olalla",[307] both very much

302 (contd....) In book form in "The Merry Men and Other Tales" (London; Chatto & Windus; 1887)
303 London; Chatto & Windus; 1882 (2 eds.).
304 London; Longmans, Green & Co.; 1885. Collaboration with Mrs. Stevenson.
305 London; Longmans, Green & Co.; 1889. Collaboration with Lloyd Osbourne, Stevenson's son-in-law.
306. First published in "Unwin's Annual for Christmas 1885. In book form in "The Merry Men and Other Tales"
307. First published in "The Court and Society Review" for Christmas 1885. In book form as above.

concerned with religion, is less easy to explain - why should not the short stories and novels of 1882 and 1887-8 be as interesting for this study as those of 1881 or 1889? Perhaps the wisest course in this predicament is to leave well alone and admit that religion is not a permanent theme even in the fiction. In this way one avoids at least the rather ludicrous situation that the most recent writer on Stevenson's work gets himself into - i.e. of trying to prove that one motif is present in all Stevenson's fiction.[308]

It is a significant fact however that Stevenson's first try at the medium of fiction should be so full of his attitudes to moral and religious questions - I am talking about "A Lodging for the Night"[309] which was written in 1877 and put before the public in the "Temple Bar" for October of that year. It is certainly a moral tale of the most direct kind, all the action of the piece leading up to the confrontation of two styles of life and codes of ethics at the end of the story. The main protagonist is the famous French satirist and gutter poet, Francois Villon; if we did not know Stevenson's own code of honour and general conduct, we might think Villon was actually the tale's hero. Although to some extent the reader of "A Lodging for the Night" is meant to identify with Villon as the unhappy dupe - he is robbed and 'framed' after a murder - it is quite obvious that Stevenson dislikes the man intensely.

---

308. I am referring here to Eigner and his obsession with the Doppelgänger motif.

309. Published in book form in "New Arabian Nights" (1882)

The story and Stevenson's meaning in it are much clarified by a reading of the article on Villon in "Familiar Studies of Men and Books" entitled "Francois Villon, Student, Poet and Housebreaker".[310] In this essay he makes clear his admiration for Villon as a poet, the only French poet of 'a silent century', but also his detestation of the man's whining selfishness and gutter morality. He emphasises most of all Villon's claims that the poor must have bread at any cost, then refutes the argument by attesting that millions of fifteenth century Frenchmen must have been poor, but disdained to steal or murder for bread. His attack on Villon as a man extends to his criticism of the "Large Testament", Villon's major opus, during the course of which, commenting on the darkness of Villon's world-view, he says that the Frenchman's eyes were 'sealed with his own filth'.

We may guess then that Stevenson will not be taking Villon's side in any argument on morals and questions of truth. Although de la Feuille, the old knight who gives Villon his shelter and a meal, is not, obviously meant to be Stevenson himself or even what he would like to be, his words and opinions on Villon are also the author's:

> "Your mouth is full of subtleties, and the devil has led you very far astray; but the devil is only a very weak spirit before God's truth, and all his subtleties vanish at a word of true honour, like darkness at morning ....You speak of food and wine, and I know

310. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine" August 1877

> "very well that hunger is a difficult trial to endure; but you will not speak of other wants; you say nothing of honour, of faith to God and other men, of courtesy and love without reproach. It may be that I am not very wise - and yet I think I am - but you seem to me like one who has lost his way and made a great error in life. You are attending to the little wants, and you have totally forgotten the great and only real ones, like a man who should be doctoring a toothache on the Judgment Day." 311

The whole story is to some extent an explanation of spiritual concepts which Stevenson wished to advertise as worthwhile and necessary for the leading of a good life. He puts these concepts in the mouth of de la Feuille, and compares them with those of Villon: self-sacrifice placed beside selfishness; honour beside unconscious self-debasement, etc. Thus in his first published fiction Stevenson brings forward concepts which are at least related to the developing religious side of his nature.

In "The Pavilion on the Links" [312] the issues are not so clear-cut; there are no moral arguments presented to the reader on a plate in a dialogue as there are in the Villon story - the "Pavilion" is to a great extent pure adventure story with, perhaps, a thin layer of surface interest in ethical questions. Although the plot as such turns on purely secular considerations, the characterisation of Cassilis (the narrator), Northmour and Huddlestone, the fraudulent banker,

---

311. Tusitala; I; pp.238-239.

312. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine" September/October 1880. In book form in "New Arabian Nights" (1882)

was obviously conceived in terms of a religious message. The difficulty is to get at the true meaning of these religious interpolations - the continual reminder that the unimaginative Cassilis is an orthodox Christian, the atheism of the Byronic Northmour, and the 'conversion' of Huddlestone. We cannot say that Stevenson's identification with his narrator is in any way certain, especially if we take the following quote:

> "It relieves my heart to make this confession even now, when my wife is with God, and already knowsall things, and the honesty of purpose even in this; for while she lived, although it often pricked my conscience, I had never the hardihood to undeceive her. Even a little secret, in such a married life as ours, is like the rose-leaf which kept the Princess from her sleep." 313

Although there are obviously sentiments here that Stevenson thought admirable and to be copied, especially the kindness of Cassilis towards his wife, the complete belief in immortality was certainly not Stevenson's, so there is some point in saying that Cassilis, for all his admirable qualities, was looked at with some objectivity by the author. The other characters, Northmour the atheist and Huddlestone the Christian convert, are much less Stevensonian, even though the atheist is seen to be the most consistent of the three 'religious' characters - keeping his position while Cassilis seems to be pious or not as the occasion dictates. It is Northmour in fact who is given the 'parting shot' - he has just honourably given up the girl he loves to Cassilis (a very Victorian thing to do and not what usually happens in

313. Tusitala; I; p.179.

Stevenson's work):

> ' "Well, God bless you, Northmour!" I said heartily.
> "Oh, yes," he returned. ' 314

We cannot finally take anything much from the story in terms of religious beliefs, or of any obvious moral in the action. Stevenson is obviously not prepared in this case to take the question of personal religion any further than to observe three different reactions to life.

The first novel that Stevenson wrote was "Prince Otto", though his first published one was of course "Treasure Island".[315] Neither book is about religion, but, strangely, characters who mainly talk in religious terms and concepts are crucial to the action of both. "Prince Otto" is Stevenson's homage to George Meredith - a book primarily of manners and petty intrigue in a Ruritanian setting. In this context it is strange, indeed, to find a scene of religion and a character, Colonel Gordon, whose main part in the story is to persuade the Prince of his duties towards his wife and his country. Although the Gordon scene may disturb readers who are looking for continuity of plot and atmosphere, there can be no doubt that under the structure of courtly romance can be detected, throughout the novel, a vein of realism which culminates in the Gordon scene. There is a moral intended in the quest of the Prince to find himself, although he himself does not seem to be

---

314. Tusitala; I; p. 216.

315. First published in "Young Folks" October 1881/January 1882. As a book in December 1883 (London; Cassell & Co.).

quite flesh and blood; and Gondremark, the Machiavellian counsellor, is an entirely real character. Nothing prepares the reader however for the heightening of tone and moral argument in the third last chapter which "Treats of a Christian Virtue" (that of forgiveness). The Aberdonian colonel, though pretending himself to believe in a 'sound creed and a bad morality', gives the Prince and Gotthold the opportunity of seeing beyond their preoccupations with their worldly situations to the moral implications of their actions in their goldfish-bowl state. Gordon himself up to this point has been characterised as being by repute a man who will do anything as long as it is in his interests, which usually means as long as it is his duty (not in the Stevensonian meaning of the word of course):

> (GONDREMARK): "We will intrust the captaincy to the Scotsman Gordon: he at least will have no scruple." 316

and

> (COUNTESS VON ROSEN): "It is Gordon, I see, that you have charged with it. Excellent: he will stick at nothing." 317.

When we actually hear and see the colonel, on the other hand, we find him to be very different from his description: whether this is meant to show a lack of insight on the part of Gondremark and the Countess - the 'evil' characters of the novel - or whether we are to see Gordon as an essentially ambiguous character it is difficult to discern. Gordon certainly appears amiable in his conversations with the Prince and Gotthold, the

---

316. Tusitala; IV; p. 100

317. " p. 124.

librarian, rather than shifty or unscrupulous. On the other hand he is obviously no guru or soothsayer, someone who knows more than others about life: the intention may be to show that the Prince comes to his final self-knowledge as a matter of chance, much as at the beginning of the book he comes across the simple farmhouse, the place where he gets his first inkling of what his subjects really think of him. The final piece of information as to what he should do was perhaps meant to come to him in the same way, from someone he would least expect to teach him anything.

The lesson he is given is certainly one couched in Christian terms, though not in any way preached. Gordon begins by contradicting the Prince in his refusal of forgiveness to Gotthold, who had misunderstood the situation between Otto and his wife and had argued with the Prince over his conduct towards her. Gordon immediately brings in the 'doctrine of the means of grace' which had been taught him in Scotland, but only in terms of offering to turn on the carriage lights.[318] He goes on later, however, to maintain that the two men must find forgiveness difficult because of the 'goodness' of their lives i.e. only those who have sins on their conscience can come to see the necessity of a Christian forgiveness. Again there are echoes of Stevenson's 'hard life' and 'necessary failure' theories:

> "I will talk of not forgiving others, sir, when I have made out to forgive myself, and not before; and the date is like to be a long one. My father, the Reverend Alexander Gordon, was a good man, and damned hard upon others. I am what they call a bad one, and that is just the difference. The man who

318. the pun no doubt intended.

"cannot forgive any mortal thing is a green hand in life." 319

Gotthold is driven to admit his 'secret tipplings' by the force of Gordon's arguments (rather than by the magnetism of Gordon himself) and Otto to see that the final selfishness towards his wife was to abandon her to the dangers of the 'Revolution' inspired by Gondremark. Gotthold and the Prince are made friends again by Gordon's intervention and Otto sees his true duty towards his wife - the final reconciliation in love between husband and wife is to come in the last chapter. Gordon's appearance on the scene then, and the injection in the plot of part of what for Stevenson was Christianity, taken together are a crucial stage in Otto's quest. It should be remembered however that these are only a part of the circumstances leading to Otto's fulfilment - it requires Seraphina's stabbing of Gondremark and the shake-up this gives her ago to take place before both lovers are ready to be reconciled.

It may also be noticed that the Gordon scene does have all the flavour of an interpolation, and nothing in the plot before the episode gives us any reason to expect it. There is nothing inevitable in the way the action of the story moves towards the scene, as there is in the Von Rosen/Gondremark/Seraphina part of the plot, and although one might have forecast that other than personal and egotistical considerations would have to enter Otto's mind at some stage, we are nowhere led to expect such a specifically Christian one. It tells us much about the author that he should pick so committed a message and type of ethical system to 'fill a hole' in the construction

319. Tusitala; IV; p. 172

of his story, and furthermore, that he should make Otto and Gotthold react to this religious message as if it was something undoubtedly true, something scarcely to be argued with, something that had been there all the time, only unnoticed.[320]

When most people cast their minds back to their last reading of Stevenson's most famous novel, "Treasure Island", they no doubt fail to remember any religious or indeed any moral message at all - the general critical opinion is that the book is primarily for boys, and that morals and religion in good boys' story would be a meaningless excresence. The fact is however that for one reason or another Stevenson inserts two scenes of religion into the book.[321] Both are to a certain extent essential to the plot, the scene with and activities of Ben Gunn perhaps more than the other, the dialogues between Jim Hawkins and the wounded Israel Hands on the "Hispianiola". Neither of the scenes is in any way illustrative of Stevenson's own religion, except in that Hands's beliefs-'I never seen good come o'goodness yet. Him

320. A further connection with Stevenson's religious system in "Prince Otto" is the emphasis on luck, or at least the bankruptcy of the idea that the individual, however cunning, can control events completely - it is the revolutionary party that comes to power in the end (what Gondremark had looked for) but his plans for more complete power have been seen to fail and he has been stabbed and almost killed by Seraphina. Although there is no direct hint of Stevenson's future fatalistic ideas and doctrine of the all-seeing and all-working God, the very fact that so much befalls by chance and all well-laid schemes are defeated, points in this direction.

321. In MS.9898 in the National Library of Scotland there is an unpublished letter to his father in which Stevenson seems to be saying that Thomas Stevenson had suggested the religion in Ben Gunn's utterances, as he was to do with "Kidnapped" (the scene with Henderland, the S.S.P.C.K.man)

as strikes first is my fancy .....'-are in many ways the exact opposite of Stevenson's. He is perhaps R.L.S.'s only unreservedly bad man (even Huish has courage) and in a way suffers in terms of realism because of this. In the case of the 'converted' Benn Gunn, the fact that he is a convert from the morality of a pirate does not effect in any way the action of the story except in that he proves a most valuable ally to the side of 'the right'. The story provides little evidence of Stevenson's beliefs although, as is the case with "Prince Otto", we find him interpolating points of religion and morality where we would least expect them.

If only one of the novels of the early 1880s has anything of interest in terms of Stevenson's view of religion and life, there are at any rate three short stories in which religion plays a major part - they are "Thrawn Janet", "The Merry Men"[322] and "The Body-Snatcher"[323] all written in 1881 and all more or less in the genre of the Edgar Allan Poe short story. The first named is of course one of Stevenson's best-known works, and is his only prolonged experiment in Scots prose, if we except "The Tale of Tod Lapraik" in "Catriona". It is significant that both tales are about the supernatural and more explicitly the diabolic, in much the manner and style of Scott's "Wandering Willie's Tale". Stevenson's opinions in

322. First published in "The Cornhill Magazine" June/July 1882.

323. First published in "The Pall Mall Gazette" Christmas 1884. In book form in 1895 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons).

"Thrawn Janet" are not exactly easy to trace but illustrations of his unique approach to religion are certainly there. There is no figure in the story who says anything definitely 'Stevensonian' in terms of morals and ethics, but his treatment of the various characters is educative. The Rev. Soulis is a 'moderate' who takes charge of a parish, Balweary, presumably in one of the Covenanting areas: either Ayrshire, or Galloway or the east Border country. The first part of the story deals with his seemingly courageous fight against the superstitions of the parish, for which task his modernist training has stood him in good stead. When he comes up against Janet McClour's satanism he rejects it as madness until the facts are proved to him in the grisliest of denouements. The irony of the story - the definitive Stevenson touch - is that the butt of most jokes in this sort of situation, the superstitious village community, have been quite justified in warning Soulis about Janet:

> "The younger sort were greatly taken we'his gifts and his gab; but auld, concerned serious men and women were moved even to prayer for the young man, whom they took to be a self-deceiver, and the parish that was like to be sae ill-supplied. It was before the days of the moderates - weary fa' them; but ill things are like guid- they baith come bit by bit, a pickle at a time; and there were folk even then that said the Lord had left the college professors to their ain devices, an' the lads that went to study wi' them wad hae done mair an' better sittin' in a peat-bog, like their forbears of the persecution, wi' a Bible under their oxter an'a spirit o' prayer in their heart." 324

324. Tusitala; VIII; pp.110-111.

The unusual thing about this is that the villagers are right both about Soulis and about the satanic happenings in the parish; Soulis is totally and crucially wrong, and, as the villagers also predicted, has not enough hold on his own faith to resist the activities of the Devil. The story is, of course, strictly a horror story, with all the atmosphere of less successful attempts at the genre. Few such attempts, however, have conjured up the wickedness of the Infernal One as vividly as Stevenson does here, excepting of course such greater masterpieces as Hogg's "Confessions of a Justified Sinner." The anti-Moderate stance of the villagers is to some extent Stevenson's own: he prefers the honest fanaticism of the Covenanters to the socialised and effete piety of their intellectual opposites. It is after all the 'moderates' of their day and the actual descendants of the original Moderate party that he criticises so much in "An Appeal to the Clergy". His identification is all with the enthusiast side of Scottish religion, and not with the other: he distrusts most the ministers who find their faith and their pleasures to be easy enough on their consciences. The conscience of Soulis at least is touched by what he has seen - perhaps to the breaking-point of sanity. He becomes a 'hellfire' preacher, obviously because he has seen the results of hellfire; the outcome is strictly logical and symmetric. We cannot say that Soulis's religion before or after his brainstorm is Stevenson's - his religion is different and equally far away from both. What seems the point of the story is that no purely intellectual faith in a religious man can gain him converts or sustain him in hours of extreme need, and that for an 'official' religionist, the first necessity is to

understand and appreciate the people to whom he is ministering.

In "The Merry Men" we have a story of much greater symbolic power than "Thrawn Janet" if only because there is less in it of the pure horror story or 'creepy-crawly', despite the appearance at the end of the mysterious black man from the sea. The 'devil' in this story is the sea, and, at particular points of the story, the answer to the menace of the sea is seen to be Christianity. First of all there are the names of the wrecked ships and of the island - "Esprito Santo", Christ-Anna" and "Aros Jay" (anglicised Gaelic for 'The House of God'). Each of these is meant to symbolise to some extent a challenge to the 'charnel ocean', the thing that has so obviously affected Gordon Darnaway's sanity. The point is made at the climax of the tale, just before the black man shows himself in the hulk of the wrecked "Christ-Anna", just before Darnaway sees that a judgement has at last come to him:

> "I said no more, for we had now begun to cross a neck of land that lay between us and Sandbag; and I withheld my last appeal to the man's better reason till we should stand upon the spot associated with his crime. 325 ..... When we came to the grave I stopped, uncovered my head in the thick rain, and, looking my kinsman in the face, addressed him.
> 'A man,' said I, 'was in God's providence suffered to escape from mortal dangers; he was poor, he was naked, he was wet, he was weary, he was a stranger; he had every claim upon the bowels of your compassion;

325. As might be guessed from the quote, Darnaway's 'crime' was the murder of the only survivor of a wreck. At the start of the story Darnaway is seen as simply dishonest and unfeeling in his garnering of lumber from the wrecks caused by the 'Merry Men'. As the story develops, his fanaticism about the power of the sea and his looking-forward to the almost inevitable wrecks become more and more obvious.

> "it may be that he was the salt of the earth, holy, helpful, and kind; it may be he was a man laden with iniquities to whom death was the beginning of torment. I ask you in the sight of Heaven: Gordon Darnaway, where is the man for whom Christ died?'
>
> He started visibly at the last words; but there came no answer, and his face expressed no feeling but a vague alarm. 'You were my father's brother,' I continued: 'You have taught me to count your house as if it were my father's house; and we are both sinful men walking before the Lord among the sins and dangers of this life. It is by our evil that God leads us into good; we sin, I dare not say by His temptation, but I must say by his consent; and to any but the brutish man his sins are the beginning of wisdom. God has warned you by this crime; He warns you still by the bloody grave between our feet; and if there shall follow no repentance, no improvement, no return to Him, what can we look for but the following of some memorable judgment?'
>
> Even as I spoke the words, the eyes of my uncle wandered from my face. A change fell upon his looks that cannot be described; his features seemed to dwindle in size, the colour faded from his cheeks, one hand rose waveringly and pointed over my shoulder into the distance, and the oft-repeated name fell once more from his lips: 'The Christ-Anna' " 326

Darnaway's repetition of the name of the ship on this occasion is naturally different in kind to previous occasions: this is his judgment and his sins have discovered him. Secondly, the whole tone of the passage is I think recognisably as that of Stevenson's own religion - especially in the description of the death of the shipwrecked man at Darnaway's hands, and in Charles's analysis of the mercy of God and His dictates on sin and redemption. The whole Christian concept as Stevenson sees it is used in the story to combat the evil of the sea - the duel is most graphically presented in the episode where Charles is diving for treasure and makes a gruesome find:

---

326. Tusitala; VIII; pp.47-48.

> "I lost one hold, was flung sprawling on my side, and instinctively grasping for a fresh support, my fingers closed on something hard and cold. I think I knew at that moment what it was. At least I instantly left hold of the tangle, leaped for the surface, and clambered out next moment on the friendly rocks with the bone of a man's leg in my grasp.
>
> Mankind is a material creature, slow to think and dull to perceive connections. The grave, the wreck of the brig, and the rusty shoebuckle were surely plain advertisements. A child might have read their dismal story, and yet it was not until I touched that actual piece of mankind that the full horror of the charnel ocean burst upon my spirit. I laid the bone beside the buckle, picked up my clothes, and ran as I was along the rocks towards the human shore. I could not be far enough from the spot; no fortune was vast enough to tempt me back again. The bones of the drowned dead should henceforth roll undisturbed by me, whether on tangle or minted gold. But as soon as I trod the good earth again and had covered my nakedness against the sun, I knelt down over the ruins of the brig, and out of the fulness of my heart prayed long and passionately for all poor souls upon the sea. A generous prayer is never presented in vain; the petition may be refused, but the petitioner is always, I believe, rewarded by some gracious visitation. The horror, at least, was lifted from my mind. ....." 327

Here we have the perfect antithesis of the sacred and the profane - prayer and the sea. We need not of course take it from this that Stevenson himself had some abiding horror of the sea, only that he recognised something about it that, for instance, Conrad could not - this, together perhaps with the evil in "The Ebb-Tide"[328] comprises Stevenson's "Heart of Darkness". What we can see after observing the letters and essays, is that the Christianity presented as the opponent and cure of the particular devil of "The Merry Men" is Stevenson's own, and that the fabric of the tale is built round the context of a confrontation between God and one of the Devil's works.

---

327. Tusitala; VIII; pp.29-30.
328. London; William Heinemann; 1894. As a serial in "To-Day" November 1893/February 1894.

The third story written in 1881 which is of interest is "The Body-Snatcher", not one of Stevenson's more successful attempts at the macabre (it was not published in book form, according to his own wish, until after his death). Even in this rather lurid tale there is a quickening of religious interest in the characterisation of the anatomists and the 'Resurrection Men' - throughout the story the actions of the men are shown to be unchristian in a specific sense. Stevenson presents a milieu where none of the characters are admirable, including Fettes, the narrator of the actual happenings-(the murders, the resurrections and the ghastly climax)- if not of the complete story. Fettes lacks knowledge of himself by Stevenson's exacting standards:

> " 'Conscience! Hear me speak. You would think I was some good, old, decent Christian, would you not? But no, not I; I never canted. Voltaire might have canted if he stood in my shoes; but the brains'-with a rattling fillip on his bald head-'the brains were clear and active and I saw and made no deductions.' " 329

At least twice in the course of the action the non-Christian nature of the anatomists' activities is emphasised - rather obviously and unfortunately without much art. The first occasion is when Macfarlane talks of their 'hopelessness in any Christian witness-box'; the second, the description of the Glencorse burial and disinterment. The church in the village society is definitely not to be mocked - the community at Glencorse is simple, the farmer's wife who had 'been known for nothing but good butter and godly conversation' is no hypocrite to be defiled in exhumation by unhypocritical 'freethinking' men. The author's opinion of the body-snatchers is obvious, his identification

329. Tusitala; XI; p. 185.

with the 'sanctities of customary piety' surprising when we think of his diatribes against some aspects of the same thing:

> "It was part of his trade to despise and desecrate the scrolls and trumpets of old tombs, the paths worn by the feet of worshippers and mourners, and the offerings and the inscriptions of bereaved affection". 330

The structure of the story is such that Stevenson can further emphasise the moral nullness of the villains by showing them thoroughly enjoying their supper after the exhumation. Fettes's earlier speech on 'cant' is enlarged on by another in which he describes as 'cant' - 'Hell, God, devil, right, wrong, sin, crime, and all the old gallery of curiosities'. The tale is, we might surmise, marching towards judgment for the sinners but it is the rather ramshackle ending which kills the story as art: events have been obviously moving towards an ending of this type, but its execution is hurried and unconvincing. The skein of Christian ethics is quite clear throughout, though, especially in the attack on the unthinking treatment of the country people by the guilty anatomists; we might say in this case that it is out of place and that a more Poean approach, though less interesting for this study, would have suited his subject more.

When we turn to the 'middle period' of novel and story writing, we find "The Black Arrow" (written in 1883) to be the first work of any interest. In terms of this study two points are worth making about the book which has perhaps justly been called Stevenson's least satisfying novel. Firstly, we

---

330. Tusitala; XI; p.198.

see the appearance of the 'failure' doctrine which Stevenson was beginning to find more important at this time. All the characters in the novel, including Dick Shelton, the boy-hero, fail to achieve success in their plans. Shelton himself succeeds in the short term in some of his escapades, but, for instance, does not avoid making an enemy of Arblaster the honest old seaman whose life he has ruined, all in the cause of his 'side' in the Wars of the Roses. There are two religious characters in the novel who have already failed - Lawless as a monk, and Sir Oliver Oates as a priest. The one could not separate his overpowering hedonism from the pursuit of an ascetic life while the other has 'sold out' to an evil man and is seen for most of the book as the henchman of a completely Machiavellian figure, Sir Daniel Brackely. Even Sir Daniel, however, fails in his search for the side that is bound to win, and finally backs a loser, at this stage, in the Lancastrian cause. Aside from the love story between Dick and Joanna Sedley, the outcome for all the main protagonists is a dark one excepting Lawless and Dickon Crookback, the only character in the book who is able to make events rather than be dragged along by them, and this through a purely hellish energy. Finally, we are left with a situation where it is obvious that no-one knows exactly how things will turn out, a kind of absurdist universe where 'ignorant armies clash by night'.

The second point is not so crucially important for his other fiction, but perhaps still worth making: it is that Stevenson obviously intended to portray a society ruled by

religion in which the religious leaders had reneged from their duties, leaving the populace completely without recourse to spiritual comfort. It is because Stevenson wants to emphasise this aspect of the society that we have the over-use of religious diction - 'By the rood', 'By the mass' etc; in this situation the figures of Lawless, monk turned thief, and Oates, priest turned lickspittle, are only the obvious signs of the decay of a religion whose grip on the hearts of the people is daily relaxing and which is hourly moving at an unsteady pace towards its greatest challenge, the Reformation. Although Stevenson rather overdoes this side of the story - again he seems to be caught between two thematic stools - he does succeed in revealing one side of a society which has hopelessly lost its way and is waiting patiently for the new dawn.

The other novels in the years 1883 to 1888 need not detain us long. Neither "Kidnapped"[331] nor "Jekyll and Hyde" nor "The Master of Ballantrae" can be analysed in terms of Stevenson's religious beliefs, although each has a religious side. "Kidnapped" for instance, that most adventurous and perhaps least moralistic of Stevenson's books, introduces religion as one of the sides of Davie Balfour's Lowland character. The very beginning of the story has David leaving his father's house accompanied by the kindly minister of Essendean, Mr. Campbell, who 'put me on my guard against a considerable number of heresies, to which I had no temptation, and urged upon

331. London; Cassell & Co; 1886. As a serial in "Young Folks" May/July 1886.

me to be instant in my prayers and reading of the Bible'.[332] Later on in his journeys David meets two catechists, one Stevenson's by now habitual misuser of religion - a robber and a murderer - and the other the Edinburgh S.P.C.K. man, Henderland, with whom he is glad to pray:

> ".....though I was a good deal puffed up with my adventures, and having come off, as the saying is, with flying colours; yet he soon had me on my knees beside a simple, poor old man, and both proud and glad to be there." [333]

This scene however is the only one of note in terms of David's own religion in either "Kidnapped" or the later sequal "Catriona", and although there is a sense of the continuing background of the hero in Lowland religion, the image of Mr. Campbell of Essendean seems to recede rather than grow brighter through the action. It may be Stevenson's plan to emphasise this decay of David's religion - it may even be that he is meant to be something of an anti-hero, rather than the person in the two books we are supposed to identify with.

In Stevenson's famous novella, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" the specifically religious is again hard to find. There is some evidence however that the standards against which Stevenson is judging the characters of both Jekyll and Hyde are specifically Christian ones. If we compare Stevenson's story with most of the less inept cinema and television presentations, we find much more emphasis on the moral and religious questions of the 'good' of Jekyll and the 'evil' of Hyde in the original.

---

332. Tusitala; VI; p. 3.

333. " " p. 114.

While the modern presentation emphasises the monster in Hyde and the brute base of man, Stevenson himself was as, if not more, interested in the growth of Jekyll towards self-knowledge. It is significant in this context that when Jekyll momentarily 'becomes himself' again, his acts of charity are seen as specifically Christian:

> "He came out of his seclusion, renewed relations with his friends, became once more their familiar guest and entertainer; and whilst he had always been known by charities, he was now no less distinguished for religion." 334

The same thing in Jekyll's own words has a more Stevensonian ring:

> "Hyde had a song upon his lips as he compounded the draught, and as he drank it pledged the dead man. The pangs of transformation had not done tearing him, before Henry Jekyll, with streaming tears of gratitude and remorse, had fallen upon his knees and lifted clasped hands to God. The veil of self-indulgence was rent from head to foot. I saw my life as a whole: I followed it up from the days of childhood, when I had walked with my father's hand, and through the self-denying toils of my professional life, to arrive again and again with the same sense of unreality, at the damned horrors of the evening .....I resolved in my future conduct to redeem the past ; and I can say with honesty that my resolve was fruitful of some good. You know yourself how earnestly in the last months of last year I laboured to relieve suffering, you know how much was done for others and that the days passed quietly, almost happily for myself." 335

The self-realisation of Jekyll is the apex of the development of his character as recorded in his 'Full Statement of the Case'. That a judgment is to come, as it came in "The Body-Snatcher", and in the form of the involuntary return of Hyde, is foreshadowed at the beginning of his statement where he talks

---

334. Tusitala; V; p. 30.
335. " " pp. 68-69.

of 'that hard law of life which lies at the root of religion' - perhaps the nearest phrase in the book to a repetition of Stevenson's own religion. There are of course other elements in Jekyll's character, those that lead him to his fate, which counteract this belated 'goodness' even at the period of his 'conversion'.[336] A knowledge of similar conversions in at least two other works - "The Wrecker" and "The Merry Men", taken with Jekyll's own, show that Stevenson believed at least in the regenerative qualities of the act of prayer. Although Jekyll himself is nothing like a 'good' man, the 'goodness' that was in him was inevitably associated in the author's mind with Christian good, or at least what he took to be Christian good.

With "The Master of Ballantrae" we begin to see the pessimism, foreshadowed in "The Black Arrow", which was a particular feature of the more serious works of Stevenson's last six years. The story is tragic in itself and in its implications, with its theme of the barriers which grow up between members of families, and the hatreds that can develop easily when one brother seems to be favoured by parents or circumstances more than the other. It is, again, a story of failure - the failure of James Durie to obtain an inheritance he thinks rightly his, the failure of his brother to rid himself of his tormentor, the failure of the father to set up either of his sons in confidence, of Henry's wife in marrying a man she did not love, and even of Mackellar on more than one

336. See, among others, Eigner, op. cit.

occasion to persuade the Duries as to their best interests. The characters seem to be puppets before circumstance, and the only individual who has the strength of will to move events is, like in "The Black Arrow", the only truly diabolic figure - James Durie. Apart from the general pessimism of the story and the weakness of the main characters, there is little in it connected with religion. True, there are scenes where religion is used for the wrong motives - by Mackellar when he prays to the Lord to take the life of the Master as well as his own;[337] by Henry Durie, again a prayer for the death of his brother - 'Smite him, O Lord, upon the evil mouth'[338] -; and by Hastie, the vicious ex-divinity student who performs the last rites over a man who is actually not dead - a double travesty in fact.[339] Apart from these isolated incidents, which contribute to the general feeling that there is no real opposition to the devilry which is the main feature of the book, there are no religious references of any interest. It is difficult to see any real moral to the story, Christian or otherwise - perhaps any kind of moral would spoil the general effect of the tragedy as it unfolds. There can be no doubt that Stevenson's own creed is significantly absent, and perhaps, after all, it is this absence and what results from it that he is trying to illustrate.

Two shorter stories from the 'middle period' are of great interest - "Markheim", written in 1884, and "Olalla", written a year later. The first is the story of a murderer's

337. Tusitala; X; p. 165.
338. " p. 127.
339. " p. 218.

road to repentence, in which he is helped by a mysterious stranger who intrudes in the place of the crime, an antique shop. We are taken through the stages of Markheim's self-realisation until we reach his final rejection of ego and acceptance of self-sacrifice. His whole life has been characterised by 'ugly and strenuous' action, 'random as a chance medley', and he has not ceased to commit crime after crime. The coming of the 'visitor' who is both his tempter and his conscience makes him think again over his past life and actions, and in the end decide to give himself up to judgment. We see here repeated, but more vividly and succinctly, Stevenson's idea of the events shaping and driving the man - Markheim has a conscience but events have never allowed him to use it; it is his failure in itself to make any hard decisions concerning himself that has led him finally to murder:

> ' "I will propound to you one simple question," said the other, "and as you answer, I shall read to you your moral horoscope. You have grown in many things more lax; possibly you do right to be so; and at any account, it is the same with all men. But granting that, are you in any one particular, however trifling, more difficult to please with your own conduct, or do you go in all things with a looser rein?" ' 340

The question would be one that Stevenson himself would ask of anyone coming for ethical advice or encouragement - we may refer here to "Reflections and Remarks" and "Lay Morals". Markheim's final self-sacrifice is the logical outcome of what has gone before, and it is only on the final page that we see the 'visitor' to be something more than some sort of psychological extension of Markheim himself:

---

340. Tusitala; VIII; p. 108.

> "Markheim steadily regarded his counsellor. 'If I be condemned to evil acts,' he said, 'there is still one door of freedom open - I can cease from action. If my life be an ill thing, I can lay it down. Though I be, as you say truly, at the beck of every small temptation, I can yet by one decisive gesture, place myself beyond the reach of all. My love of good is damned to barrenness; it may, and let it be! But I have still my hatred of evil; and from that, to your galling disappointment, you shall see that I can draw both energy and courage.'
> The features of the visitor began to undergo a wonderful and lovely change: they brightened and softened with a tender triumph; and even as they brightened faded and dislimned. But Markheim did not pause to watch or understand the transformation." 341

This is surely the 'sinner that repenteth' of the Christian faith - the action of the story even takes place on Christmas Day. The religious allegory of what we have seen happen is thus revealed, and again, it is as if it had been there all the time.

"Olalla", although written one year after "Markheim", is completely different at least as far as width of vision goes (it is certainly not very concise). The story has some points of comparison with "The Merry Men" and "Thrawn Janet" in its theme of the confident hero meeting with things quite beyond his imagination - in the former Charles Darnaway meets with thehorror of the sea; in "Thrawn Janet", Soulis, the educated Moderate, meets with the grisly results of satanism. The corresponding theme of "Olalla" is the violence of the madness and the vampirism of Olalla's mother. Throughout the tale, religion is seen as a pacifying and sane-making force when, sincerely held, as it is in the case of the young girl. Her faith is obviously ascetic, as her dwelling-place high in the sierra would symbolically imply, and as the wording of her verses shows:

---

341. Tusitala; VIII; p. 106.

"Pleasure approached with pain and shame,
Grief with a wreath of lilies came.
Pleasure showed the lovely sun;
Jesu dear, how sweet it shone!
Grief with her iron hand pointed on
Jesu dear, to Thee!" 342

It is interesting that "Olalla" should contain Stevenson's longest description of a passionate love, and in this rather one-sided affair the author makes sure to make the hero a complete dullard. Throughout he fails to understand the true nature of his surroundings, and the true nature of Olalla herself; the first is mostly because of personal disinterestedness, the second because of the strength of his passion for the girl. We should therefore view the end of the work as underlining the relationship of the two people: Olalla tries to explain her reliance on Christ to the narrator, and he fails truly to understand her identification with Him. In the following she makes the last of a long series of attempts at explanation:

"'I have laid my hand upon the cross,' she said. 'The Padre says you are no Christian; but look up for a moment with my eyes, and beyond the face of the Man of Sorrows. We are all such as He was - the inheritors of sin; we must all bear and expiate a past which was not ours; there is in all of us - ay, even in me - a spark of the divine. Like Him, we must endure for a little while, until morning returns bringing peace.' " 343.

Anyone who knows of Stevenson's lack of identification with Catholicism as such may think that the hero's reply to this, though not spoken, is what Stevenson would have said of it.

342. Tusitala; VIII, p. 143
343. " " pp. 166-7.

On the contrary, the author gives Olalla all the great speeches, and does not cast any shadow on her motives for refusing the narrator's plea for marriage. She is ultimately the more serious of the two - she is also, by the way, a more serious religionist than the 'official' religious figure - the Padre. The latter is throughout characterised as a man who is interested primarily in the social/secular side of his job: he cuts rather a ludicrous figure beside Olalla, and even the narrator, who can himself be overcome by a kind of religious fervour:-

> "Love burned in me like rage; tenderness waxed fierce; I hated, I adored, I pitied, I revered her with ecstasy. She seemed the link that bound me in with dead things on the one hand, and with our pure and pitying God upon the other; a thing brutal and divine, and akin at once to the innocence and to the unbridled forces of the earth." 344

Stevenson returns here to an emphasis on the hard, almost cruel God: indeed the whole story may be a kind of parable on the necessity of hard decisions in life. It is emphasised again in the first extract quoted, where we notice that Olalla's view of life is that it is something 'we must endure a little time'. The hard Christian truth is emphasised more in "Olalla" than in "Markheim", but the view of life, and to some extent the pessimism underlying both, are their author's.

In the third and final period of fiction-writing to be

---

344. Tusitala; VIII; p. 154.

dealt with, that lasting from 1889 to Stevenson's death in 1894, the trend towards a more pessimistic view of life is more marked. Apart from the two rather light-hearted and trivial novels already mentioned (i.e. "The Wrong Box" and St. Ives") in all Stevenson's fiction after "The Master of Ballantrae" we find a darker view of life - no shining heroes, only two characters are exceptions and both are religious: Tarleton in "The Beach of Falesa" and Attwater in "The Ebb-Tide". Even in "The Wrecker", the first work in terms of chronology to be dealt with, the optimism of the capitalistic ventures of Pinkerton and Dodd in the story's first part are only a kind of preparation for the cathartic violence of the 'Flying Scud' massacre - the central point of the book, and the pin round which all else revolves.

The butchery scene on the 'Flying Scud' and the following scene of prayer throw light on all the previous machinations of the two plots i.e. Loudon Dodd's and Carthew's (they are of course linked by Dodd's narration and his journey to and from the wreck of the 'Flying Scud' on Midway). The main theme of the novel connecting both strands or lives is the search for material gain that begins with Dodd's education in an American 'business school', and is present even in the 'Prologue' and 'Epilogue'. The final terrible results of the almost maniacal money-grubbing that goes on are the massacre and to a lesser extent the 'unmanning' of Pinkerton in the San Franciso crash - Pinkerton has been characterised throughout as the typical optimistic, amiable, go-getting American money-man.

The scene which puts all this into focus is the scene of prayer following the massacre which takes place at the behest of Mac, the Scotch-Irish boatswain and handyman, who had struck the first blow in the battle. It is worth quoting in full:

> " 'Captain Wicks,' said he, 'it's me that brought this trouble on the lot of ye. I'm sorry for ut, I ask all your pardons, and if there's anyone can say "I forgive ye", it'll make my soul the lighter.'
>
> Wicks stared upon the man in amaze; then his self-control returned to him. 'We're all in glass houses here' he said, 'we ain't going to turn to and throw stones. I forgive you, sure enough; and much good may it do you!'
>
> The others spoke to the same purpose. 'I thank ye for ut, and 'tis done like gentlemen' said Mac, 'But there's another thing I have upon my mind. I hope we're all Prodestans here?'
>
> It appeared they were; it seemed a small thing for the Protestant religion to rejoice in!
>
> 'Well, that's as it should be' continued Mac. 'And why shouldn't we say the Lord's Prayer? There can't be no hurt in ut'.
>
> He had the same quiet, pleading, childlike way with him as in the morning, and the others accepted his proposal, and knelt down without a word.
>
> 'Knale if ye like'! said he, 'I'll stand'. And he covered his eyes.
>
> So the prayer was said to the accompaniment of the surf and seabirds, and all rose refreshed and felt lightened of a load. Up to then, they had cherished their guilty memories in private, or only referred to them in the heat of a moment, and fallen immediately silent. Now they had faced their remorse in company and the worst seemed over. Nor was it only that. But the petition "Forgive us our trespasses", falling in so apposite after they had themselves forgiven the immediate author of their miseries, sounded like an absolution.
>
> Tea was taken on deck in the time of the sunset, and not long after the five castaways - castaways once more - lay down to sleep." 345

345. Tusitala, XII; pp. 386-387.

This scene is made all the more outstanding in "The Wrecker" by the fact that both Loudon Dodd and Carthew have been disinclined to take religion seriously at all. Indeed, in the case of Dodd, religion and the churches, if mentioned at all, are mentioned as being negative concepts and institutions. The two most noticeable cases of this are concerned with the family of Loudon's uncle in Edinburgh,[346] and with his new found sense of adventure on Midway Island, while he is breaking up "The Flying Scud".[347] In both cases, Dodd is antipathetic rather than sympathetic to religion or Christianity at least in its organised form. These events happen, however, when Loudon is still without some of the ghastly knowledge of the world that he will get as a result of the solution of the 'Flying Scud' mystery. One senses that he, no less than Carthew, is chastened by the story of what happened to the ship of Midway Island, and it may be Stevenson's intention to emphasise this by putting the last scene of the story in the church at Manihiki, where R.L.S. finds him.[348] In terms of plot rather than individual character, the scene shows us that even people who have been engaged in a massacre may have their consciences relieved to some extent by appeal to a superhuman authority. It may be said that the meaning of the thing is that it takes a truly horrific end to an affair of 'capitalism' to force the men involved to think in terms other than materialist, even if only for a moment. Surely this is an earlier version of the story in "The Ebb-Tide",

346. Tusitala; XII; p. 77
347. " " p. 221
348. " " pp. 401-403.

which ends much more clearly in a conversion, mostly because the side of the 'good' is taken by a living being, Attwater. In the earlier novel, there is no-one to tell the protagonists what is morally right and wrong; they have only their egos to guide them and in this way are sure that only money brings happiness in this life, and only the searching for it, excitement. Things of the spirit are definitely and defiantly case aside, as irrelevant rather than as painful or "too real". Only when blind murderous instinct has almost inexplicably taken the upper hand, have the men to fall back on the only other authority they know, and that only until their consciences have been salved and they are ready to continue their materialistic activities. There is no doubt that the scene of the crew of murderers at prayer has a crucial symbolic significance for the rest of the plot. There can be no doubt, furthermore, that Stevenson himself believed in the power of prayer to purge sins, as there can be no doubt if we only read "Prince Otto" that he also believed in the power of Christian forgiveness. The main point of the novel, however, is that once again the 'still small voice' is seen to be totally absent from the activities of the main characters, although Dodd at the end and Pinkerton after his 'crash' may have decided to live to different ideals than before. Although there is some excuse for the general critical opinion that the book is uneven artistically, there can be no excuse for failing to recognise the anti-materialist moral of the story, as so many critics have done.

In his last four years, all Stevenson's serious work in fiction is set either in Scotland or in the South Seas. In terms of the Scottish side, the works of importance are "Heathercat", his unfinished Covenanting story, "Catriona", his extension of "Kidnapped" and, "Weir of Hermiston", the work which, though unfinished, is said to contain his finest prose fiction writing. All three reflect the return of interest in the Covenanters, although the Covenanting scenes in "Catriona" are confined to Andie Dale and his "Tale of Tod Lapraik". In "Heathercat", the only fictional work in which the Covenanters are described at any length, Stevenson's attitude to them is, as we might expect, based on the identification with them we have noticed so often already. We see immediately that Stevenson's Covenanters are not similar to Scott's in "Old Mortality", and that his opinions on them are well outwith the general intellectual conception of his own age propagated by Grant, Aytoun, Hill Burton, and shortly after Stevenson's death, by William Law Mathieson. The very fact that he shows so much sympathy for McBriar, the chief conventicler of the district, and so little, comparatively speaking, for Haddo, the hedonistic and irreligious incumbent of the parish church, shows us his position right away. This is only re-emphasised when he describes their rhetoric at a conventicle:

> "Their images scarce ranged beyond the red horizon of the moor and the rainy hill top, the shepherd and his sheep, a fowling-piece, a spade, a pipe, a dunghill, a crowing cock, the shining and the withdrawal of the sun. An occasional pathos of simple humanity, and frequent patches of big biblical words, relieved the homely tissue. It was poetry apart; bleak, austere but genuine, and redolent of the soil." 349

349. Tusitala; XVI; pp.162-163.

On the other hand, MacBrair is no hero, is as tarnished as his opposite number, Haddo. The one is licentious, irreligious, but very human, the other is fanatically religious, totally sincere, but prone to poke his nose into other people's business, and to fall back on the "cutty-stool" mentality. MacBrair's suppressed violence is also hinted at in the argument scene with Haddo, though it is hardly mirrored in Stevenson's treatment of the conventicle minister who seems to talk in a more defensive, even conventional mood in the safety of the hill-end of Drumlowe. Again, we can sense Stevenson's sympathies are more with Ninian Traquair than with his wife, although he does not make her the woman Scott would have done. On the other hand, the husband is totally materially minded even in his dealings with his son, so that in the end the scales are almost evenly balanced. There is a marked change of tone from the Stevenson of "The Pentland Rising" and "Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes" in "Heathercat", but the author still obviously prefers an honest fanatic to the Haddo type, the 'Moderate' of his day.

There are some similarities between certain characters in "Heathercat" and certain in "Weir of Hermiston": the two most obvious cases are Francie Traquair, who has some similarity to the young Archie Weir, and his mother, who in her piety at least resembles Mrs. Weir. The upbringing of the two boys is essentially the same except that Mrs. Weir's religion is partly based on "kindness", while Mrs. Traquair is of the true

Covenanting blood and is openly intolerant of those who "comply" with the State's wishes for an Episcopalian system. The hold of Mrs. Weir on young Archie is stronger than that of Mrs. Traquair, because Traquair of Montroymount himself has more time for young Francie than Weir of Hermiston has for his son. Therefore, the novel is hardly begun before Francie is having serious doubts about his mother's teachings; in other words, he inwardly believes in them less than Archie Weir does his mother's. Francie sees the defect in his mother's reasoning, which he uses to suspend his belief in the all-righteous truth of the Covenanters:

> " 'O hellish compliance!' she exclaimed. 'I would not suffer a complier to break bread with Christian folk. Of all the sins of this day there is not one so God-defying, so Christ-humiliating, as damnable compliance'; the boy standing before her meanwhile and brokenly pursuing other thoughts, mainly of Haddo and Janet, and Jock Crozer stripping off his jacket. And yet, with all his distraction, it might be argued that he heard too much, his father and himself being "compliers" - that is to say, attending the church of the parish as law required." 350

There are further similarities between the treatment of Weir and Traquair even down to a fight with a rival youngster on the road. However, "Weir of Hermiston" brings Archie's

---

350. Vail. XVIII, p. 456.
Of Stevenson's two other unfinished novels "The Young Chevalier" and "The Great North Road"(both first published in the limited Edinburgh Edition (1894-1898) only the latter is of any interest to this study in that it does contain two scenes in which Jonathan Heldaway expresses his doubt in the goodness of God when He continues to allow poverty in the world: 'Do I mind for God, my girl?' he said; "that's what it's come to be now; do I mind for God?" ' Holdaway is obviously a similar case to Sir Oliver Oates and Mackellar, a man who expects the misuse of Christianity to bring personal dividends. He is, interestingly enough, the only character in Stevenson's novels to use the argument against the existence of a 'good' God most often heard in the twentieth century: that of God's fundamental inhumanity.

story much further than "Heathercat" brings Francie's. Most of the religious talk and imagery occur in the first chapter - "The Life and Death of Mrs. Weir"[351] - and are solely present in Mrs. Weir's own words and actions. Archie Weir when grown to manhood shows no sign of his mother's piety, but every sign that the one lesson learnt by heart was that logically his father was destined irredeemably for the fire and brimstone, and that he thoroughly deserved it. We feel, in this context, that Archie's dislike for his father is only submerged by the dressing-down he is given by him and the friendly advice given by Glenalmond, and that it was meant to burst out again at some later juncture.

The religion of Mrs. Weir is used skilfully by Stevenson to be the conscious base of Archie's dislike for his father, which is not stemmed by the fact that Adam Weir has little time for either wife or son. Mrs. Weir on the other hand loads Archie with her attentions and stories of the Covenanters and, especially, the Praying Weaver's stone of Balweary, making sure to make the black as black as possible and the white as white. As Dalyell and Bloody Mackenzie are described in minute detail, Archie begins to see the similarity with his father, who is also a "persecutor" of simple folk in the law-courts. The step is quite easy to the denouncing of his father at the hanging of Duncan Jopp as a "God-defying" murderer, for his father had seemed to take just the pleasures in hanging Jopp as Claverhouse, Dalyell and the rest had taken in persecuting the "saints". The images of the "Killing Times"

351. Tusitala; XVI; pp.3-16.

can therefore be seen to leave a heavy shadow on the protagonists of a period in the early nineteenth century, and though Archie grows out of a total belief in what his mother had taught him, he believes enough of it to continue to execrate his father.

It is not only through Mrs. Weir that the images of the violent seventeenth century cast their shadow - there is also the mysterious influence of the Praying Weaver's stone. It should be noted that both Archie's crucial meetings with Christina take place at the Weaver's stone, and that both are connected with some reference to the Weaver himself. In the first instance, Archie remembers the story of the Weaver as told by his mother and compares Christina to it:-

> "He had retained from childhood a picture, now half-obliterated by the passage of time and the multitude of fresh impressions, of his mother telling him, with the fluttered earnestness of her voice, and often with dropping tears, the tale of the "Praying Weaver", on the very scene of his brief tragedy and long repose. And now there was a companion piece; and he beheld, and he should behold forever, Christina perched on the same tomb, in the grey colours of the evening, gracious, dainty, perfect as a flower ..... 352.

This serves as a prologue for Stevenson to enlarge on the idea of the closeness of the generations and the inevitability of Fate, which was an idea he had already expounded in several of his essays, notably "The Manse" (1887) and, of course, in "Olalla". "Weir of Hermiston" seems definitely to point to a more extreme form of this idea, that the blood of one generation, however distant, can materially affect the conduct of the present one, and that a supernatural control is exercised by the earlier over the later. The elder Kirstie's

352. Tusitala; XVI; p.91

remark about the "omen" of bad luck already associated with the Stone - the death of the sweetheart of her youth, Tam, - only hardens the impression that the Covenanter's death has affected all the future in this weird way. Kirstie doesn't put it quite like this, but the point seems to be one that Stevenson laboured to put forward:

> "'It's strange ye should forgather there tae'God! but yon puir, thrawn, auld Covenanter's seen a heap o' human natur since he looked his last on the musket-barrels, if he never saw nane afore,' she added, with a kind of wonder in her eyes." 353

Beside this supernatural control of Fate by History or historical personages, the church-life in the district of the period - both regular and irregular - seems mundane. Torrance, the village minister, is surrounded only by images of boredom and security - his message, though as sincere as Mrs. Weir's, is not so effective. Even Gib Elliot, the outcast minister of "God's Remnant",seems of no significance except as an echo of the original Covenanter - he is not only a second "Praying Weaver", but also, as one of the Four Black Brothers, a representative of the unthinking violence which was one of the hallmarks of both the Covenanters (cf. MacBrair in "Heathercat") and their persecutors. If we take the usual analysis of Stevenson's intentions for the remainder of "Weir of Hermiston" to be correct, Archie Weir is to murder Frank Innes by the Praying Weaver's stone, thus perpetuating the curse or "omen" of the place. Because of this brooding presence of the Covenanters, it is even possible

353. Tusitala; XVI; p.116.

to see "Weir" as the Covenanting novel that we would expect Stevenson to have written, his identification with the people and the period having been so great all his life. The Covenanters themselves, however, are only the vehicle for the deeper theme of the connection of any present generation to its ancestry, both in personal characteristics and in more mystical, perhaps supernatural attributes. Certainly if we connect the Weaver's Stone with Mrs. Weir and the elder Kirstie, and the latter with the Elliots, as Stevenson seems to want us to do, and all of them with their Covenanting ancestors, a pattern is bound to appear. Whether this theme can itself be connected to the obvious father/son theme of Adam and Archie Weir by any other person or proclivity than Mrs. Weir and her antecedants is uncertain but perhaps unnecessary: it would be difficult at any rate to connect Adam Weir's forbears - we are told little enough about them - to either side of the Covenanting story. Nevertheless the image of the Weaver's Stone stands above the rest, as potent a symbol, we may say, as the Standing Stones in Grassic Gibbon's "Sunset Song": there can be no denying it, and its general effect; the more the intricacies of the text are examined, the more we seem to see of those at first glance invisible threads connecting present to past and the living to the long dead.

Of the side of Stevenson's religion which embraces conduct to others, there is also some trace, although the picture is not so complete. Without knowing the ending of the story and

what in detail happens to the main protagonists, we cannot really say much except in relation to the character of Archie. His religious upbringing has obviously bequeathed to him a strong and clamant conscience - it is this that tells him that his father's acts are 'God-defying', and it is this that brings him to his mature opinion of the man. What Archie does not have is the virtue of forgiveness, and I feel we are meant to see the conflict within one man of these two admirable qualities. However, as I have said, we just do not have enough to make any final judgments about this side of the religious question. In many ways "Weir of Hermiston" is not so concerned with specifically moral questions as other Stevenson novels and stories - in this it resembles "The Master of Ballantrae", where it is the tragedy of life that is looked at rather than the minutiae of conduct. Both books have a more cosmic vision than the others - we feel we are in the presence of great artistic concepts. It may be that an injection of Stevenson's spiritual beliefs in either book would have meant the flawing of the tragic vision that the one spells out and the other seems to be leading up to.

The third Scottish novel in this last stage of Stevenson's fiction writing, "Catriona", does not depend on religious themes to the extent that, manifestly, the other two do. What we do learn from it is that Stevenson's position in "The Black Arrow", "Markheim", and "The Wrecker" has not changed: if "Kidnapped" is the chronicle of David Balfour's success in avoiding redcoats

and procuring his inheritance, "Catriona" is the story of how he attempts to see justice done James of the Glens, fails, and then is partly recompensed for effort by gaining the hand of Catriona in marriage. It is not the wooing of the fair maiden on a foreign shore, cleverly done though it is, that is of interest, but the author's analysis of the pitfalls of life that wait for the well-meaning. Apart from this by now common dark view of life - associated with his fatalism - there is little else in the novel that can be connected with Stevenson's religion. Balfour's piety, rocky enough when he left Essendean, has withered away to nothing, unless we are to see it somehow as the driving force behind his search for justice for the wronged Highland chief. An opposite interpretation is equally possible, however - that David has become by now the complete anti-hero, and that it is a subconscious unwillingness to do what duty tells him he must that makes him fail in his task. Although the book is of no central importance for this study, there are these small points - moral rather than specifically religious - which enable us to connect it to our general theme of study.

The final group of stories to be looked at have South Seas settings - only two of the four Stevenson wrote are of interest: "The Beach of Falesa"[354] and "The Ebb-Tide". The two combine

354. First published in "Illustrated London News" as "Uma" July/August 1892. In book form in April 1893 in "Island Nights' Entertainments" (London; Cassell & Co.). The two other South Seas tales, published along with the "Beach" in the 1893 book, were "The Bottle Imp" (first published in "Black and White" March/April 1891) and "The Isle of Voices" (first published in "The National Observer" February 1893). Though to a certain extent moralistic, neither of these tales is specifically concerned with Stevenson's religious beliefs or attitudes.

to give an adequate summing-up of Stevenson's religious philosophy within the discipline of the novel and short story; the second of the two is indeed the most important work of all in terms of this study. Religion is not the central point of "The Beach of Falesa" (written in 1892), but it is an important one. In it we have two sides of man's use of the spiritual - the strengthening of the hero's resolve to fight evil by the missionary, Tarleton, and the cynical hold exercised by the villainous Case on the minds of the natives by means of the misuse of native religion. We find in "The Beach of Falesa" what has already been observed in "In the South Seas and the letters from Vailima - Stevenson's dislike of white interruption of native rituals and traditions. Indeed, the only whites presented fully to us who are at all admirable are Tarleton and the Catholic priest, Galuchet. The narrator, despite his love for Uma, and despite the reader's natural identification with the challenger of the villain, is himself a boor and a bigot, who believes all Kanakas inferior animals. An example of Wiltshire's opinions, of his fundamental Yahooism is given below. We also see again Stevenson's comparative admiration for the missionaries. Wiltshire, surprisingly, feels 'cheap' at having to sign a paper by which he marries Uma for a week, but not for quite the reasons we might expect:

> "A man might easily feel cheap for less. But it was the practice in these parts, and (as I told myself) not the least the fault of the white men, but of the missionaries. If they had let the natives be, I had never needed this deception but taken all the wives I wished, and left them when I pleased, with a clear conscience." 355.

355. Tusitala; XIII; p. 10.

The talk between Wiltshire and Tarleton in chapter three[356] emphasises the point of Wiltshire's lack of comparative virtue. Wiltshire tells us again of his contempt for missionaries because they were "Kanakaised, and suck up with natives instead of with other white men like themselves". Tarleton, in comparison, makes a splendid figure in his sparkling outfit, despite the fact that he is sick with fever. In the interview, in which, despite their differences, the two men agree to an alliance, it is the missionary who is the most effective planner and has the most humour. In recounting the episode where Case shames him in front of the native populace by pretending to draw a dollar from his hat, Tarleton can comment on it thus:

> "As for myself, I stood amazed! The thing was a common conjuring trick which I have seen performed at home a score of times; but how was I to convince the villagers of that? I wished I had learned legerdemain instead of Hebrew, that I might have paid the fellow out with his own coin." [357]

Instead, in the atmosphere of the "Beach of Falesa", Tarleton is a kind of god-figure, as is hinted by his immaculate appearance and constant uprightness. He has the same sense of power about him as Attwater has in "The Ebb-Tide", although we know nothing of his religious beliefs. He is a man who wishes above all to "do well for these islands". Finally, although Tarleton does not in fact arrange the climax of the

---

356. Tusitala, XIII; pp. 34-45.
357. " XIII; p. 43.

story, the death of Case, he arrives with the native-chief, Mala, in order no doubt to prevent an upset when the chief sees the body of his once friend and master. All in all, Tarleton represents the good in this story, and acts for the good also.

The individual who is the enemy of both Wiltshire and Tarleton in the book is the trader, Case, who, it should be noticed, uses religion and superstition to control both whites and natives. He uses Rendall's hatred of Catholics to control him; he uses the superstition of the native missionary, Namu, to minimise his effect; he uses the religion of the Falesans to keep them coming to trade with him and him alone; and perhaps more interesting, he feels it in his interest to sour relations between the Christians of the island, no doubt to make the natives more dependent on himself as 'guru'. We feel that it is Case who has taught them to say "Popey no good". In "The Beach of Falesa" though Stevenson dislikes Wiltshire for his racialism, he abominates Case; similarly, in "The Ebb-Tide", as we shall see, he cannot identify wholly with Attwater but has total contempt for Huish. The main difference between the two is that while "The Beach of Falesa" has Tarleton, "The Ebb-Tide" has no completely admirable figure, although of course the author identifies somewhat with both Attwater and Herrick. As in the other South Sea book, in the "Beach" a far from good man is set to catch a much worse one; the difference is that Wiltshire has the help of a better man.

There is, however, only one novel in which Stevenson uses his views of religion as the starting point and main theme: this is "The Ebb-Tide" which he wrote in 1893 in collaboration with his son-in-law, Lloyd Osbourne. Osbourne's contribution to the work, as with "The Wrecker", was not great, being confined to parts of the description of Tahiti in the first four chapters. In "The Ebb-Tide", Stevenson focuses squarely on the problems of God, fatalism and the conduct of life; in fact, almost all the salient points of his religious philosophy are examined in it. The method of doing this he uses is the somewhat schizophrenic one of separating the two main pillars of his faith - kindness and consideration for others and the all-seeing omnipotent God - and setting them up against each other. Thus we have in Davis, Herrick and Huish comradeliness, mutual kindliness, and, in Herrick and Davis at least, a conscience; and in Attwater a total belief in God, in fatalism, in the 'hard life' and in duty. Which is the stronger of the two? Which is capable of producing the most evil? These seem to be the questions Stevenson sets out to answer, and we will examine what that answer is in a moment.

The story in itself is easily told. Three beachcombers on Tahiti, down on their luck, suddenly, almost miraculously, have their luck changed by the offer made to one of them to captain a ship, with champagne as the cargo, to Sydney. The reason the ship is offered to the man is that it has been infested with plague, and no one respectable would take the job.

Davis, the man in question, accepts the offer with alacrity, insisting that his two friends accompany him as mate and chief hand. The former sea-captain has no intention, however, of going to Sydney, but to Peru, where he may sell the cargo, and perhaps also the ship, and the three can have made something, for them, approaching a fortune. However, it is found, once they are at sea, that the 'cargo of champagne' is, in fact, mostly water - the original owners had planned to 'lose' the ship and collect on the insurance. After various plans are tried and fail, a second miracle helps the trio out of their difficulty: this is their sighting of an 'unmarked' private Pearl Island, just when it seemed that they would perish in the open ocean for lack of provisions.

It is at this point that the "Trio" become a "Quartette" with the introduction of Attwater, who, with three native companions is in charge of the island - the majority of natives have been killed by an epidemic of plague. Once safe, Davis and Huish begin to plan the death of Attwater for the gain of the hoard of pearls he is undoubtedly keeping on the island. After much soul-searching, Herrick, having failed to commit suicide, joins Attwater in the defence of the island. The final denouement comes when Huish - the one who hates Attwater the most- attempts to 'turn the tables' on him by throwing vitriol while under a 'flag of truce'. Attwater notices a peculiarity in Huish's movement, however, shoots at the hand covering the bottle, and then administers the coup de grace when it is obvious that Huish is in diabolical

pain. Davis is converted to Christianity (perhaps through a brainstorm), but Herrick goes on his way, with a new respect for Attwater, but, like Fettes in "The Body-Snatcher", draws no conclusion from what he has seen.

These bare bones of the tale leave out the most important theme, that which binds all these facts together and explains all of them: the doctrine of fatalism, combined with the doctrine of judgment for sins committed, and the antithesis of the kindness of Christianity and the harshness of the Christian God. It is a story which begins with the trio 'on the beach', but not morally debased: they have committed no heinous crimes as yet. They are 'going down slow', but their collective will resists the fact at every point. Of the three, Herrick, though adept only at failure, is the most sympathetic, because he is the one with the most conscience even in the matter of writing home to the 'girl he left behind'. The point is, however, that as strong a facet of Herrick's character as this guilty conscience - he is not 'easy on himself' - is his failure at any point to live up to this conscience. He lacks the will to follow any activity through to success, even in his attempt at suicide. Furthermore, his self-pity is cloying and at times totally unsympathetic - 'What must I do? If I can't do anything, be merciful and put a bullet through me; it's only a puppy with a broken leg!'[358] He is by no means a wholly sympathetic

358. Tusitala; XIV; p. 118.

character, but, of the three beachcombers is the one into which Stevenson put most of himself.

Captain Davis is a somewhat ambiguous character. There is something likeable about his friendliness to Herrick and Huish even in their worst moments of, respectively, self-pity and bitter vulgarity; he is sentimental about his wife and children - there is something quintisentially human about him, even in his love of alcohol, the thing that has put him 'on the beach' to start with. On the other hand, he is a gross self-deceiver, and his conscience is not as well developed as Herrick's; furthermore, he uses his love for his wife and children for selfish ends - there is a kind of obscenity in his use of his children's prayers to persuade Herrick to join the enterprise of the plague-ship:

> ' "Are you going to desert me in my hour of need? - you know if I've deserted you - or will you give me your hand, and try a fresh deal, and go home (as like as not) a millionaire? Say no, and God pity me! Say yes, and I'll make the little ones pray for you every night on their bended knees. 'God bless Mr. Herrick!' that's what they'll say, one after the other, the old girl sitting there holding stakes at the foot of the bed, and the damned little innocents ...." he broke off. "I don't often rip out about the kids" he said; "but when I do, there's something fetches loose." ' 359.

There is a moral defunctness about this and other similar attempts that leaves a nasty taste in the mouth. The conscience of Davis, as I have said, is not so well-developed as Herrick's, and his pride, in a way, despite himself, is greater - it is

359. Tusitala; XIV; p. 29.

pride that gives him the energy to plan his activities, and it is his lack of conscience thatallows that they are mostly blackguardly or, in the end, strictly evil.

Stevenson's obvious dislike of Huish can be compared to only two other characters in his fiction - Villon in "A Lodging for the Night" and Hands in "Treasure Island". In both these characters, however, there are 'saving traits' - especially in Hands who noticeably accepts the fact that he is 'bad'. Villon's poetry and his cynical wit to some extent make up for his total selfishness and lack of honour: furthermore, he would not throw vitriol, being the henchman rather than the activist. Huish's 'good' point is his courage - courage that is always used in his own interests and to inject some of his own vulgarity into the world. It is interesting that Stevenson should have the same contempt for the Cockney that was such a mark of the thought-processes of Lockhart and John Wilson seventy years previously: it may well be an inescapable bias for the literate Scot.

These are the men, then, that make their pilgrimage to the pearl island, unknown as their destination is when they start out. In the first part of the book, however, we have many hints that the three are making a kind of pilgrimage to find themselves, that the end of the story will be a specifically religious affair, and that it will entail a judgment of God on the three men. Huish at the very beginning gives us his position as regards religion: he talks about

'the rot there is in tracts', and Herrick's magic carpet dream as being like "Ministering Children". Davis, though he rejects Herrick's conscientious scruples, presumes that Herrick's arguments are religious, showing the subconscious state of mind that will appear in his conversion after the death of Huish:

> ".....if you thought about this father I hear you talk of, or that sweetheart you were writing to this morning, you would feel like me. You would say, what matter laws, and God, and that? My folks are hard up, I belong to them, I'll get them bread, or, by God! I'll get them wealth, if I have to burn down London for it." 360

and

> "Don't think, if you refuse this chance, that you'll go on doing the evangelical: you're about through with your stock; and before you know where you are, you'll be right out on the other side." 361

It must be remembered that Herrick in no sense himself associates his conscience, which Davis is attacking here, with religion or God. The fact that Davis presumes that religion is behind Herrick's position tells us more about the Captain than it does about the man he is trying to convince.

As the escapades of the three men grow gradually more nefarious, more religious allusions and comparisons are brought in: the friendship of Herrick with the crew of Kanakas, for example. It is a case of the corrupted white men making friends with pious black innocents, who continually shame him by their kindness and lack of subtlety. It is

---

360. Tusitala; XIV; p. 29.
361. " " pp. 29-30.

significant that the grim story of Wiseman and Wishart, the original captain and mate of the 'Farallone', follows directly after Stevenson's description of the Kanakas: following immediately after this are Herrick's thoughts on life after death, and the likelihood of some kind of hubris in the after-life.[362] It is in their present life that judgment is to come, however, and this is only re-emphasised, when,at the time of the discovery of the Champagne Fraud, the author brings in allusions to 'the voice of trumpets' sounding,[363] and Davis alludes to 'Old Man Destiny'.[364] All this is leading up to the moment when the 'non-existent' island appears on the horizon.

It can be seen, therefore, that events have been worked in such a way that some kind of amazing circumstance is half-expected, and some event of religious significance will happen. Herrick has been offered, in the first half of the book, the good and the bad: the bad is strong and tempting, while the good is seen only in glimpses, and is comparatively weak. The infamy of the three desperadoes has also been growing, from a simple act of plunder, but ending soon, with the possibility of a massacre on the pearl island (cf. "The Wrecker").

God's judgment on the three men is at hand, however, and in the person of Attwater, the fourth character in the

362. Tusitala; XIV; p. 51
363. " p. 58
364. " p. 60

story. His position as a kind of Gideon - angel of the Lord - or even a kind of demi-God, is very obvious. He is the complete fatalist and he, somehow, knows the plans of the three men of the"Farallone" before they have even attempted to get any information from him. Although he seems inhuman, as well as superhuman, much that he says is purely Stevensonian. He discusses with Herrick the diving activities on the island, and then asks him if he is fond of parables:

> " 'O yes!' said Herrick.
> 'Well, I saw these machines come up dripping and go down again, and come up dripping and go down again, and all the while the fellow inside as dry as toast!' said Attwater;
> 'and I thought we all wanted a dress to go down into the world in, and come up scatheless. What do you think the name was?' he inquired.
> 'Self-conceit,' said Herrick.
> 'Ah, but I mean seriously!' said Attwater.
> 'Call it self-respect, then!' corrected Herrick with a laugh.
> 'And why not Grace? Why not God's Grace, Hay?' asked Attwater. 'Why not the grace of your Maker and Redeemer, He who died for you, He who upholds you, He whom you daily crucify afresh? There is nothing here,' - striking his bosom - 'nothing there' - smiting the wall - 'and nothing there' - stamping - 'nothing but God's Grace! We walk upon it, we breathe it; we live and die by it; it makes the nails and axles of the universe; and a puppy in pyjamas prefers self-conceit!' " 365.

Attwater obviously has what Herrick, Davis and, of course, Huish lack: thankfulness for God's mercies, that aspect of Stevenson's religion so much a part of the later poems. If we take the whole story in terms of the Grace of God, He has been extremely kind to the beachcombers, saving them twice -

365. Tusitala; XIV; pp.87-88.

firstly, over the captaincy of the plague-ship, and secondly in their sighting of the island when food stocks were running down. On no occasion has there been any gratitude on their part - only further sinning. They are given no third chance - Attwater is not that kind of man.

There are aspects of Attwater that are 'repulsive' as Herrick claims - his cruelty, his lack of mercy. If he is a tool of God, he is solely a tool of God's anger and judgment - the hard face of God, and of life. He can be seen at no point as a human being, and there are very few details about his past life in the book. He is interested in money, and makes his island pay, but he is more interested in judging - 'I gave these beggars what they wanted: a judge in Israel, the bearer of the sword and scourge' - and in the character of his religion - 'religion is a savage thing, like the universe it illuminates; savage, cold and bare, but infinitely strong'. He is what would today be called a fanatic, but to Stevenson, his purpose is more symbolic. He is the strong-willed man of faith who must, and does, conquer the evil that has grown up between the three men. He is the hard face of the triumph of 'good'; he is also the man with the axe in "The House of Eld" and "Faith, Half-Faith and No Faith At All". He believes in the omnipotent God, and seems to need no conscience.

Stevenson, as we can see, in the composite Davis/Herrick personality and in the Attwater personality, set up a confrontation between conduct and belief. Belief is always

the stronger, and must win in the end. The conclusion of the tale is the only possible one in which some 'good' can be salvaged: Herrick must journey on to his inevitable fate, but Davis is 'saved'. In the fate of Herrick we see yet another of the sides of Stevenson's developed religion, that pessimism which is so much the theme of the later fiction. In "The Ebb-Tide" we have most of the main points of Stevenson's religion - and it is the only long work of fiction to have so much of his religious side. It is the culmination of a part of Stevenson's experience which was always vital to him, and it is apposite that his last finished novel - and as a work of art one of his best - should bring together the strands of his experience and belief in so complete a fashion.

CONCLUSION

The influence of religion on the life of R.L. Stevenson is more easily traced than its effect on his work. Those unpublished letters that are immediately available only tend to support the evidence already published in the letters of the Collected Editions. In other words, the basic outline of Stevenson's religious biography are pretty obvious for anyone who takes the time to study the published letters and the better works of biography (e.g. Balfour, and, with reservations, Furnas). The simplest part of the story to research is the changes in religious attitudes that took place in the 1870s: from extremely religious boy to rebellious, agnostic (perhaps atheist) young man, and then the movement in the reverse direction, back again to a belief in God and what he took to be the true Christianity. It is not the difficulty of finding the facts on these matters that has prevented critics and biographers from researching the topic, but the lack of enthusiasm for making the slight effort involved.

When we come to look at the religion of Stevenson's maturity, however, especially the content of his faith rather than its tendencies, we are faced with more testing problems. One example - what exactly is the relation between 'conscience' and 'duty', two concepts always very near the centre of his philosophy. The most likely explanation is that God gives the individual a conscience by which he recognises the duties he has to perform: it is then presumably, as Stevenson says in

a letter to his mother (see p.47), up to the person concerned as to whether he fulfils his obligation or commits the sin of 'omission', and fails to move or act on the particular duty. Stevenson obviously thought that performing and enacting 'duties' was a grievously difficult task even for a man of below average egotism. As he grew older he seems to have seen conscience and duties as increasingly important, and eventually, in such works as "The Wrecker" and "The Ebb-Tide" as being of crucial importance, a matter, literally, of life and death.

The introduction of a pessimistic strain into the later work may have been connected with the more frequent and serious illnesses and the bereavements of the 1880s. The particular type of pessimism involved is quite clear - it is connected with Calvinist and medieval Catholic ideas of life as a 'vale of tears', as something hard and often painful for which pleasures are but alleviating mercies. It may be that Stevenson, if told by a contemporary that his work in his later years denoted him a pessimist would have answered that he only reported how life really was, and that he would not have written, for instance, the 'Saranac essays' if he did not think he was dealing with the truth. It is of course in his very choice of subjects for his essays and later stories that Stevenson is pessimistic and it is because he chooses the darker sides of man's experience that he deserves the epithet 'pessimist'.

It is as difficult to gauge the exact extent of Stevenson's determinism as it is to find out the true relationship between concepts like 'conscience' and 'duty'. The ideas that God rather than his individual will 'directs his feet' is certainly an important factor in the later poems; in the prose work as a whole, however, the religious side of his fatalism is seldom found, being found really only in "Markheim" and "The Ebb-Tide". He perhaps considered it too strange a doctrine to find any easy acceptance amongst those who usually read him - the extreme reaction against "The Ebb-Tide" would certainly have justified such an anxiety. His serious illnesses again could have led him to this kind of mentality, especially as he had already developed a strong belief in a fatherly God. His continuing nearness to death and the impossibility of stopping the attacks of illness by his own will or action may have made every survival seem increasingly miraculous and the sign of a strong and merciful guiding hand. The fatalistic element of his belief in God seems, from the evidence of the poems, to have been a factor which increased in importance for Stevenson as the 1880s went on, although present to some extent in the late 1870s.

One of the most obvious aspects of his religion, especially in the 1870s, is his distrust of the conventional religious ideals of his own day. Although this is quite apparent as a major factor in "Lay Morals" and most of the essays and travel books dating from 1878 to 1882, there seems to have been a tapering off of interest and a cooling of passion on these

questions after the early 1880s. In many ways it seems that with the development of a more pessimistic view of life, some of the strength of his anger at contemporary religious humbug evaporated, to return only in moments of petty irritation (for instance at Catholic ritual) or, in the case of the 'Damien letter', in instances of extreme anger at hypocrisies which he could only see as monstrous. In the period before 1878, on the other hand, we have a more swingeing criticism - although sometimes rather trivial - and if we look as far back as the early 1870s, the period of his strongest rebellion against convention in all its aspects, we find, of course, complete cynicism about contemporary religion.

On the question as to whether Stevenson's religion was in fact Christianity, we can reply straight away that the word itself covers a multitude of virtues and sins and has not been defined succinctly or with final emphasis by any modern theologian. Stevenson himself might have answered that he was one of the few Christians of his day, taking literally the words of Christ and relegating such secondary sources as the Ten Commandments to their proper place: this is the answer at any rate of the author of "Lay Morals". Doctrinally, only Stevenson's refusal to believe in the future state as set out in his letter of January 1886 to Edmund Gosse (see pp.50-51) would have in his own day cast doubt on his

right to call himself or be called a Christian. Present day theology, however, would almost certainly assert that Stevenson's doubts on the matter were not crucial to the definition of the Christian, and that the main qualification needed was an aspect in character rather than doctrinal perfection. This is presuming, of course, that Stevenson rejected the whole notion of a future state and eventual immortality. I myself believe that he rejects immortality as a conscious reward for good works on earth - 'there are no rewards and plenty duties'. In other words, it is the psychology of expecting to be saved that does not fit in with his view of life. Again we come across the Spartan though non-ascetic side of his philosophy - he rejects something that would lighten life's burden considerably because he believes life should be hard for all men. He probably did believe in a future state, but not as something to be expected or to base conduct on in everyday life.

When we look for the extension of all these beliefs in the works of Stevenson we will obviously find them most directly stated in the semi-autobiographical work, especially in 'straight reporting' like "Travels with a Donkey" or Edinburgh - Picturesque Notes". In the more imaginative work, however, it is more difficult to trace all the skeins of his religion through the actions and words of his characters. There are only a few of the short stories and novels in which his religious philosophy is given anything

like full play - "The Ebb-Tide", "The Merry Men", parts of "The Wrecker", the end of "Prince Otto", "Markheim", "Olalla" and a few others. In "Weir of Hermiston" and "Heathercat" he uses aspects of his own biography in the mother/son relationship, but does not make any of the characters repeat or stand for parts of his own developed religion, not even Archie Weir, who in other ways is so much a picture of the young Stevenson. On the other hand, without adequate knowledge of Stevenson's religious beliefs it is not easy to understand his position in "The Ebb-Tide", "Olalla" or even "A Lodging for the Night", or the basis of the pessimism and realism that appear in all the later fiction with the exception of "The Wrong Box" and "St. Ives". It is perhaps for this reason that critics find "The Wrecker" for example, an 'unequal' work, and have not been able to fully appreciate "The Ebb-Tide". It may also be for this reason that so many continue to see Stevenson as the author of children's adventure stories, and fail to give him any position as a serious commentator, as he certainly was, on nineteenth century life and values, and on the working of religion and morality in every individual.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

The Critics and Religion in Stevenson's Works 1900-1970

As I say in the preface and the section on Stevenson biography, notice from the critics of the effects of religion on Stevenson's life is pretty meagre. In terms of the works, there has, grudgingly, been some notice of religion, but only in three books. They are Kelman's "The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson", Furnas's "Voyage to Windward" and Eigner's "Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition". Of the three, only Kelman gives any real analysis of the subject, although even he is easily diverted from the subject at hand to vaguer concepts of personality and such chapter titles as "Manliness and Health" and "The Instinct of Travel". In fact, although his general approach and conclusions must be agreed with, he has little to offer in the field of a real analysis of religion. Furthermore, he feels it his duty to uphold Stevenson as primarily and always an optimist, and without really attempting to prove his assertions. Here is an example of this:

> "When he became a man, there were some childish things which, happily for himself, he did not put away. The glee of childhood remained with him as a constitutional optimism, a natural tendency, like that of his mother, to look upon the bright side of things." 1

Furthermore, and perhaps more important in terms of what he sets out to do - to find Stevenson's religious opinions through his works - there is never any attempt to

---

1. Kelman, op. cit. p. 248.

examine an individual work and the religion in it in a critical fashion. In fact, his book is a literary biography without literary criticism or the use of biographical techniques, and what we get in the end is Kelman's subjective view of Stevenson - what he would have liked him to be rather than what he was. In this he resembled his fellow-Scot, S.R. Crockett, who, in his "Bookman" article on "The Pentland Rising", already referred to (see p. 100), tries to prove Stevenson much more the biased lover of the Covenanters than he really was. Despite all this, however, Kelman at least recognises from the work that, as Balfour had already asserted, Stevenson was a religious man for all his maturity.

The more modern critical works are much less worthwhile in terms of the study of Stevenson's religious beliefs and how they affect his work. Both Furnas and Eigner presume without any semblance of proof that Stevenson's rebellion of 1873 to 1875 stayed with him in spirit until his death. Here is Furnas on "Lay Morals":

> "By the mid-eighties his brash agnosticism was fading. "Lay Morals", the bare existence of which so annoyed Henley, promised a liberal use of the word 'God' that, he assumed, would distress 'the conscientious atheist, that strange and wooden rabbi'. But the end of the fragment still found him pondering honesty, God so far pretty well neglected. At Bournemouth his passing affair with Tolstoi may have helped to restore the concept." 2

What, we may well ask, of the poems, letters, fables and the "Vailima Prayers"? Furnas has at least an answer for

---

2. Furnas; op. cit; pp. 207-208. He no doubt omits the first half of "Lay Morals", Ten Commandments and all, as being not to the point!

the last work - and ingenious are his conclusions! R.L.S. made up the "Prayers" , seemingly, because he wanted to feel big with the Samoans ('short on Western-style moral niceties' but 'long on formal religious observance'), and to please his mother (op. cit. p. 334). He certainly put things he actually believed into them, Furnas says, but, really, he was quite above it all! In the prayers we have, of course, kindness to others, the omnipotent God etc., but Furnas has not, it seems, met with these concepts before. In other words, he has not read the letters or the poems in toto, or he has skipped over all the religious references. He does not want to believe that Stevenson ever became a believer in Christianity or God, and he goes very near to saying Stevenson was hypocritical in writing "Vailima Prayers". It is an unfortunate thing to say about by far the most readable and intelligent biography of Stevenson, but its whole thesis is married by Furnas's complete inability to conceive a 'change back' in Stevenson's religious attitudes and, what certainly seems to be the case, his failure to do any real research on the subject.

Furnas can almost be excused for his honest mistake (and perhaps for his own philosophical proclivities) when his book is compared with Eigner's. Eigner is condemned from the start, of course, for trying to fit all Stevenson's fiction into his theory of dualism. He brings what is obviously an extensive knowledge of European and American literature to bear on Stevenson and the 'doppelganger' motif, but in the end fails to convince. His only attempt at dealing with

Stevenson's religion is in his chapter "The House of God" (op. cit. pp. 116-142), in which he deals mostly with "Markheim" and "The Merry Men". His point is that in none of the fictional work, apart from the earliest novels, is Stevenson himself or his opinions, to be recognised in any of the characters. He seems to be suggesting that in the action of "Markheim" and in the religious opinions of Charles Darnaway in "The Merry Men" there is nothing particularly Stevensonian. Here is his summing-up of "The Merry Men":

> "That Stevenson, who was a free-thinker in 1881, could have regarded Gordon Darnaway's death as, in any way, a judgment of God is certainly not to be thought of. "The Merry Men" and the other works of this chapter do not view reality in a Christian context. Stevenson is not busy separating the sheep from the goats". 3

Eigner's presumption that Stevenson was a free-thinker in 1881 is not backed up by fact or research - it is simply wishful thinking. He has earlier attempted to discuss the religious element in "Markheim", but immediately becomes involved in a discussion of Tolstoyan Christianity - obviously this is an extension of Furnas's thoughts on the same thing. He certainly knows of none of the statements Stevenson makes in letters of the late and mid-1870s, or of the religious attitudes in the travel books. He is, in fact, basing one presumption on another, that of Furnas that Stevenson was always a 'Freethinker'. Kelman himself foresaw the trouble all those years before - he is talking about the 'rebellion' of 1873:

---

3. Eigner, op. cit.p p. 142.

"On the other hand there are sure to be some who like it so well that they refuse to recognise any later aspect, and insist on retaining the youthful revolutionist for the final picture of the man." 4

---

4. Kelman; op. cit.; p. 106

APPENDIX II

Some Religious Allusions in the Sitwell Letters

Religious allusions in Stevenson's work are many and widespread. He will introduce at the drop of a hat a simile referring to some obscure point in the history of the Huguenots or the Covenanters as if the reader will immediately know what he is talking about. He likens many things to churches and cathedrals, the latter especially being a favourite image. There is undoubtedly a large store of subconscious memory of his youngest days which he has to use or get rid of in some way - the simplest way for him is to put them into his essays and fiction. One of the most interesting of these manifestations comes in the unpublished and published Sitwell Letters, and as they may well be unfamiliar to the average Stevenson scholar I will here give quotations from four of them.

The aspect of religious allusion which occurs in the Sitwell letters, and not in the published works, is the passion of Stevenson's feelings when he uses them - i.e. he has the habit of using religious allusion to express his love for his 'madonna' (a religious term in itself). Take as an example this (very Catholic) reverie of December 1874:

> "I will not have a sad deity in my chapel, she must be all smiles, and peace must look eloquently out of her eyes .....so, there's a hymn to myself, by way of conclusion. And now let us put out the tapers for a while (for we must be thrifty in this chapel, and the priest needs some of them to study by, so that he may be a worthy priest): only the little red heart-shaped lamp, let us leave burning, just before the shrine: it has not been extinguished since it was first lighted eighteen months ago among the summer trees; and it is the rule of my order that it shall be kept ever trimmed and bright....." 1

---

1. N.L.S. MS.99 Letter No. L111 (Christmas 1874).

Or consider this even more emotional outburst, this time on a more Protestant theme. It is from June 1874 (or possibly 1875):

> "You may remember that I used to desire to outlive you: I have changed my cue: I should be left to speak in the words of surely the most affecting historical document in the world - Emery Tylney's character of George Wishart 'O that the Lord had left her to me, her poor boy, that she might have finished what she had begun' [2] .....And the saying in my mind attaches itself to you: I have had to explain all round that you might understand the full meaning of the words, and how they are not simply my words, but have been sanctified by the fire of martyrdom and the name of one of the good, pure, quiet, delicate spirits of the earth; and you needed to know that, to know why I like to apply them to you." [3]

In this extract it is obvious the hold religious literature has on him. One hardly expects the 'most affecting historical document in the world' to be part of Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"! The presumption in both quotes of course is that Stevenson worships Mrs. Sitwell as the Virgin Mary - a kind of goddess, at any rate if not 'the Mother of the Church'. It is this strange idea of worshipping women - Barrie had something of the same trait - that persuades the reader of these letters that he had had no real sexual contact with his 'second mother,' that the situation was much as Furnas describes it in "Voyage to Windward", especially in the 'afterthought' entitled 'Controversy' (see op. cit. p. 401). To re-emphasise this from some unpublished material I shall end with two further

---

2. Stevenson is referring here to Wishart's words about his mother as reported by Tylney and not, as Colvin affirms (Tusitala; XXXI; p. 231), substituting 'her' where the original was 'him'.

3. N.L.S. MS99. Letter No. XXXVIII.

examples of this 'priest-goddess' relationship. Firstly from a letter of September 15 1873:

> "But hope is pleasant, if it does not make the heart sick, and that is not possible between you and me. I trust you, my dear friend, to the outside of faith; I don't ask any miracles from any deity; I believe." 4

and secondly, dated just eight days later:

> "I feel as if the letter would come tomorrow, now I have prayed faithfully. I have swung the censer before no empty shrine." 5

---

4. N.L.S. MS 99. Letter No. vii.
5. " " " " ix.

APPENDIX III

Comparative Attitudes to Religion in Stevenson and Tolstoy.

Much has been made of Stevenson's 'debt' to Tolstoy and the similarity of their approach to religion and God. The first thing to make clear is that, of Tolstoy's religious works, Stevenson could only have read a certain proportion. Obviously he could not have read "Resurrection" (pub. 1899) or "The Christian Teaching" (1898) or "What is Religion" (1902); because of the time-lag in translation he probably did not read "A Criticism of Dogmatic Theology" (1891) or "The Kingdom of God is Within You" (1893-4);because of the difficulty in getting books to him while on his travels, he possibly did not read "On Life" (1888) and "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" (1886). The purely religious books of Tolstoy that he may have read were "A Confession" (1884) and "What I Believe" (1884), Tolstoy's earliest attempts at purely religious writing; also, of course, he would have read the great novels.

If Stevenson 'took' anything from Tolstoy in terms of increase in his own religious belief, it would have been in the area of determinism and fatalism: the theme of "War and Peace" and "Anna Karenina". It is quite possible that it was the influence of Tolstoy that led Stevenson to the fatalism and belief in the 'guiding hand' which are so much a feature of the later works, especially the poems. We must be on our guard, however, against drawing too many conclusions - after all, in 1878, he already believed in a God; his stance

against conventional religion was already a part of his credo in 1879; his belief in kindness to others was already there when he went to the Cevennes.

When we actually compare the Tolstoyan system with Stevenson's beliefs we find immediately some obvious differences and discrepancies. Firstly, Stevenson's religious attitudes were never systematised in the way Tolstoy's were: he was no grand philosopher of history, and even "Reflections and Remarks" is, despite its numbered division of sentences and paragraphs, hardly a 'religious system'. Secondly, Stevenson is much more interested in conduct, in such things as conscience and duty than Tolstoy is. Only in the field of Christian love does Tolstoy come down for long from his philosophical heights: we may say of course that love is the basis of true Christianity, and its very absence from much of Stevenson's work casts doubt on his Christianity - perhaps he took the fact for granted. Thirdly and lastly, there is little in Tolstoy of Stevenson's Calvinism: the hard life, the hard faith, and the hard God. It would have been difficult, in fact, for anyone raised in the Orthodox tradition to have approached Stevenson in this.

These are only pointers to future students of the philosophies of the two men - the similarities are certainly there. It cannot be emphasised enough, however, that religious background counts for much, and there are bound to be great differences between the philosophies of men from cultures so much divorced from each other in their history and their ideas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1) Works and Correspondence of R.L. Stevenson

Collected Works: "Tusitala Edition" (ed. Sir Sidney Colvin); London; William Heinemann; 1923-24.

Ferguson, Delauncey and Waingrow, Marshall: "R.L.S. Stevenson's Letters to Charles Baxter"; New Haven; Yale University Press; 1956.

Smith, Janet Adam (ed.): "Henry James and Robert Louis Stevenson. A Record of Friendship and Criticism"; London; Rupert Hart-Davis; 1948.

Stevenson, R.L.: "Collected Poems" (ed.Janet Adam Smith); 2nd ed. London; Rupert Hart-Davis; 1971.

2) Stevenson Bibliography

Mackay, George L. (comp.): "A Catalogue of a Collection of Writings by and about Robert Louis Stevenson formed by Edwin J. Beinecke" (6 vols.): New Haven; Yale University Press; 1950-64.

Prideaux, Col. W.F., C.S.I. : "A Bibliography of the Works of Robert Louis Stevenson"; London; Frank Hollings;1903.

3) Biographies of Stevenson.

Balfour, Sir Graham: "The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson" (2 vols.); 2nd ed.; London; Methuen & Co.; 1901.

Furnas, J.C. : "Voyage to Windward: The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson"; London; Faber & Faber; 1952.

Masson, Rosaline: "The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson"; London/Edinburgh; Chambers; 1923.

Steuart, John A.: "Robert Louis Stevenson: Man and Writer" (2 vols.); London; Sampson, Low, Marston & Co.; 1924.

4) Books and Articles about Stevenson.

Baildon, H. Bellsyse: "Robert Louis Stevenson: A Life Study in Criticism"; London; Chatto & Windus; 1901.

Barrie, J.M.: "Robert Louis Stevenson" in "An Edinburgh Eleven",; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1924.

Black, Margaret Moyes: "Robert Louis Stevenson" (Famous Scots Series); Edinburgh; Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier;n.d.

Boodle, Adelaide A.: "R.L.S. and his Sine Qua Non"; London; John Murray; 1926.

Brown, George E.: "A Book of R.L.S."; London; Methuen & Co.; 1919.

Burton, Rev. J.W.: "Robert Louis Stevenson and Missions" in "The Missionary Review of the World"; Vol. L; October 1927.

Chalmers, Stephen: "The Penny Piper of Saranac", Boston; Houghton Miffhin Co.; 1916.

Chapman, John Jay: "Robert Louis Stevenson" in "Emerson and Other Essays"; New York; Moffatt, Yard & Co.; 1909.

Chesterton, G.K.: "Robert Louis Stevenson"; 2nd ed.; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1927.

Colvin, Sir Sidney: "Memories and Notes of Persons and Places"; London; Edward Arnold; 1921.

Crockett, S.R. : "The Apprenticeship of Robert Louis Stevenson" in "The Bookman"; Vol. III; March 1893.

Daiches, David: "Robert Louis Stevenson" (The Makers of Modern Literature); Norfolk, Conn; New Direction Books; 1947.

Dalglish, Doris N.: "Presbyterian Pirate: A Portrait of Stevenson"; London; Oxford University Press; 1937.

Dawson, W.J.: "The Religion of Robert Louis Stevenson" in The Bookman" (New York); Vol. XXXII; September 1910.

Eigner, Edwin M.: "Robert Louis Stevenson and Romantic Tradition"; Princeton; Princeton University Press; 1966.

Elwin, Malcolm: "The Strange Case of Robert Louis Stevenson"; London Macdonald; 1950.

Gosse, Edmund: "Critical Kit-Kats"; London; William Heinemann; 1900.

Gwynn, Stephen: "Robert Louis Stevenson"; London; Macmillan & Co.; 1939.

Hammerton, J.A. (ed.): "Stevensoniana"; Edinburgh; John Grant; 1910.

Hellman, George S.: "The True Stevenson"; Boston; Little, Brown & Co.; 1925.

Johnstone, Arthur: "Recollections of Robert Louis Stevenson in the Pacific"; London; Chatto & Windus; 1905.

Kelman, John: "The Faith of Robert Louis Stevenson"; (2nd ed); Edinburgh/London; Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier; 1904.

Kiely, Robert: "Robert Louis Stevenson and the Fiction of Adventure"; Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press; 1964.

Lang, Andrew: "Recollections of Robert Louis Stevenson" in "Adventures Among Books"; London; Longmans, Green & Co.; 1912.

"Mr. Stevenson's Works" in "Essays in Little"; London; Longmans, Green & Co.; 1912.

Lucas, E.V.: "The Colvins and Their Friends"; London; Methuen & Co.; 1928.

MacCulloch, J.A.: "R.L. Stevenson and the Bridge of Allan"; Glasgow; John Smith & Son; 1927.

Mackay, Margaret: "The Violent Friend: The Story of Mrs. R.L. Stevenson"; London; J.M. Dent & Sons; 1969.

Maclaren, Malcolm: "Cummy" in "The Bookman"; Vol. LXX; May,1926.

McLaren, Moray: "Stevenson and Edinburgh"; London; Chapman & Hall; 1950.

Masson, Rosaline: "Robert Louis Stevenson"; London; T.C. & E.J. Jack; n.d. (ed.) "I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson"; Edinburgh; W. & R. Chambers; 1922.

Morris, David B.: "Robert Louis Stevenson and the Scottish Highlanders"; Stirling; Aeneas Mackay; n.d.

Simpson, Eve Blantyre: "Robert Louis Stevenson's Edinburgh Days"; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1914.

Stern, G.B.: "Robert Louis Stevenson" (Writers and Their Work; No. 27); London, Longmans, Green & Co. 1961.

Swinnerton, Frank: "R.L. Stevenson. A Critical Study"; London; Secker; 1914.

'A.H.T.': "The Ebb-Tide" in "The Cambridge Review", November 22, 1894.

5) Scottish and European Religious History

Aikman, James: "Annals of the Persecution in Scotland from the Restoration to the Revolution"; Edinburgh: Hugh Paton; 1842.

Andrew, I. Graham: "A Brief Survey of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge"; Edinburgh; C.J. Cousland & Sons; 1957.

Barbour, George Freeland: "The Life of Alexander Whyte"; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1923.

Barr, James : "The Scottish Church Question"; London; James Clarke & Co.; 1920.

Campbell, John Macleod : "The Nature of the Atonement"; London; James Clarke; 1959.

Fleming, J.R.: "A History of the Church in Scotland, 1843-1874"; Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark; 1927.

"A History of the Church in Scotland, 1875-1929"; Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark; 1933.

Froude, James Anthony : "The Nemesis of Faith"; London; Walter Scott; 1904.

Highet, John : "The Scottish Churches"; London; Skeffington & Son; 1960.

Hutton, John A.: "Ancestral Voices"; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1915.

Kellett, E.E. : "A Short History of Religions"; Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1962.

Kierkegaard, Søren : "The Last Years: Journals 1853-1855" (trans. Ronald Gregor Smith); London; Collins: The Fontana Library; 1968.

Knickerbocker, F.W. : "Free Minds: John Morley and his Friends"; Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press; 1963.

Morley, John Viscount : "Recollections" (2 vols.) London; Macmillan & Co.; 1917.

Macpherson, John : "A History of the Church of Scotland"; Paisley; Alexander Gardner; 1901.

McNeill, John T.: "The History and Character of Calvinism"; New York; Oxford University Press; 1962.

Reardon, Bernard M.G.: "Religious Thought in the Nineteenth Century"; Cambridge; The University Press; 1966.

Renan, Ernest : "Life of Jesus" (trans. William J. Hutchison); London; Walter Scott; 1897.

Scott, A. Boyd: "Christ: The Wisdom of Man"; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1928.

Spence, Gordon William : "Tolstoy the Ascetic"; Edinburgh/London; Oliver & Boyd; 1967.

Tolstoy, L.N., Count : "A Confession", "The Gospel in Brief" and "What I Believe" (trans. Aylmer Maude); Vol. 11 "Works" Tolstoy Centenary Edition; ed. Aylmer Maude; London; Oxford University Press; 1933.

: "On Life" and "Essays on Religion" (trans. Aylmer Maude): Vol. 12 "Works" Tolstoy Centenary Edition; ed. Aylmer Maude; London; Oxford University Press; 1934.

Vidler, Alec. R. : "The Church in an Age of Revolution" ("The Pelican History of the Church" Vol. 5); Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1968.

Walker, Rev. Norman L. : "Chapters from the History of the Free Church of Scotland"; Edinburgh; Oliphant. Anderson & Ferrier, 1895.

Welch, Claude : "Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century"; (Vol. 1: 1799-1870); New Haven; Yale University Press, 1972.

Wenley, R.M. : "Aspects of Pessimism"; Edinburgh; William Blackwood; 1894.

Whyte, Alexander : "A Commentary on the Shorter Catachism"; (Handbooks for Bible Classes and Private Students); Edinburgh; 1879.

Willey, Basil : "Nineteenth-Century Studies"; Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1969.

"More Nineteenth Century Studies"; London; Chatto & Windus; 1956.

6) Literature and Religion

Gunn, Giles B. (ed.): "Literature and Religion"; London; SCM Press; 1971.

Wilson, Rev. S. Law : "The Theology of Modern Literature"; Edinburgh; T. & T. Clark; 1899.

7) Other Works Used or Referred to.

Barrie, J.M. : "Margaret Ogilivy by Her Son"; London; Hodder & Stoughton; 1896.

Bridgwater, Patrick : "Nietzsche in Anglosaxonry"; Leicester University Press; 1972.

Charteris, The Hon. Evan, K.C. : "The Life and Letters of Sir Edmund Gosse"; London; William Heinemann; 1931.

Connell, John (John Henry Robertson): "W.E. Henley"; London; Constable & Co.; n.d.

Crockett, S.R. : "The Stickit Minister and Some Common Men"; London/Glasgow; T. Fisher Unwin; 1894.

Daiches, David : "Critical Approaches to Literature"; London; Longmans, Green & Co.; 1969.

Gifford, Douglas (ed.) : "Scottish Short Stories: 1800-1900" (The Scottish Library); London; Calder & Boyars; 1971.

Gosse, Edmund : "Father and Son"; Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1970.

Hazlitt, William : "Works" Vol. VII; ed. Waller and Glover; London; J.M. Dent & Co.; 1903.

Heine, Heinrich : "Die Harzreise"; German Classics Series, Vol. VIII; Oxford; The Clarendon Press; 1935.

Latourette, K.S. : "A History of the Expansion of Christianity", Vol. V. "The Great Century in the Americas, Australasia and Africa A.D. 1800-1914" ; London; Eyre & Spottiswoode; 1943.

Lockhart, John Gibson : "Narrative of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Begun by Himself"; London; J.M. Dent & Sons; 1922.

Lovett, Richard : "James Chalmers, His Autobiography and Letters"; London; The Religious Tract Society; 1902.

Millar, J.H. : "A Literary History of Scotland"; London; T.Fisher Unwin; 1903.

Moorehead, Alan : "The Fatal Impact: The Invasion of the South Pacific 1767-1840."; London; Hamish Hamilton; 1966.

Osbourne, Lloyd : "The Queen Versus Billy and other stories"; London; William Heinemann; 1900.

Ramsay, Dean : "Reminiscences of Scottish Life and Character"; Edinburgh; Robert Grant & Son; 1947.

Sharp, William : "Life of Heinrich Heine"; London; Walter Scott; 1888.

Stevenson, Thomas : "Christianity Confirmed by Jewish and Heathen Testimony"; Edinburgh; Adam & Charles Black; 1884.

Tolstoy, L.N. : "Childhood, Boyhood, Youth"; (trans. Rosemary Edmonds); Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1972.

: "The Cossacks", "Family Happiness", "The Death of Ivan Ilyich" (trans. Rosemary Edmonds); Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1972.

Troyat, Henri : "Tolstoy" Pelican Biographies (trans. Nancy Amphoux); Harmondsworth; Penguin; 1970.

Whitman, Walt : "Leaves of Grass" and Democratic Vistas"; London; J.M. Dent & Sons; 1912.

Wittig, Kurt : "The Scottish Tradition in Literature"; Edinburgh/ London; Oliver & Boyd; 1958.