

R.L. STEVENSON



Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–1894) was a prolific Scottish novelist, poet, and travel writer celebrated for classic works like *Treasure Island* and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Born Robert Lewis Balfour Stevenson on November 13, 1850, he later changed his middle name to Louis. Prone to illness, Stevenson spent many of his early winters in bed, entertained only by his imagination and a great love of reading, especially William Shakespeare, Sir Walter Scott, John Bunyan and *The Arabian Nights*.

Stevenson initially studied engineering at the University of Edinburgh to follow the family profession of designing lighthouses. He eventually switched to law to appease his father but was determined to become a writer. He made friends with the leading literary men of the time and began contributing essays to magazines.

In his search for a climate that would improve his health, Stevenson began to travel extensively across Europe, adventures that would later provide material for his early travelogues. The 1880s were Stevenson's most productive years. His first successful novel, *Treasure Island* was published in 1883 and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in 1886. Both of these novels have curious origins. A map of an imaginary island gave Stevenson the idea for the first story, and a nightmare supplied the premise of the second. In addition to memorable origins, these tales also share Stevenson's key theme: the impossibility of identifying and separating good and evil. *A Child's Garden of Verses* and *Kidnapped* were published in 1886. Stevenson's work was widely popular and received great critical acclaim.

Following his father's death in 1887, Stevenson's declining health prompted him to seek a new, restorative climate. He and his family travelled to the South Pacific in 1888. In 1890, they settled on the island of Upolu in Samoa, where the climate improved his health. The Samoan people, who adored him, gave him the name "Tusitala," or "teller of tales".

His writings on the South Seas include *A Footnote to History* (1892) and *In the South Seas* (1896). Stevenson died on December 3, 1894, in Vailima, Samoa, following a stroke. The Samoans carried his body to the summit of Mount Vaea, where he was buried overlooking the sea. His epitaph includes his famous poem, "Requiem". An unfinished novel, *Weir of Hermiston*, was published in 1896. Some literary critics consider it to be his best work.