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STEVENSON
AND
MARGARITA

by WILL H. LOW





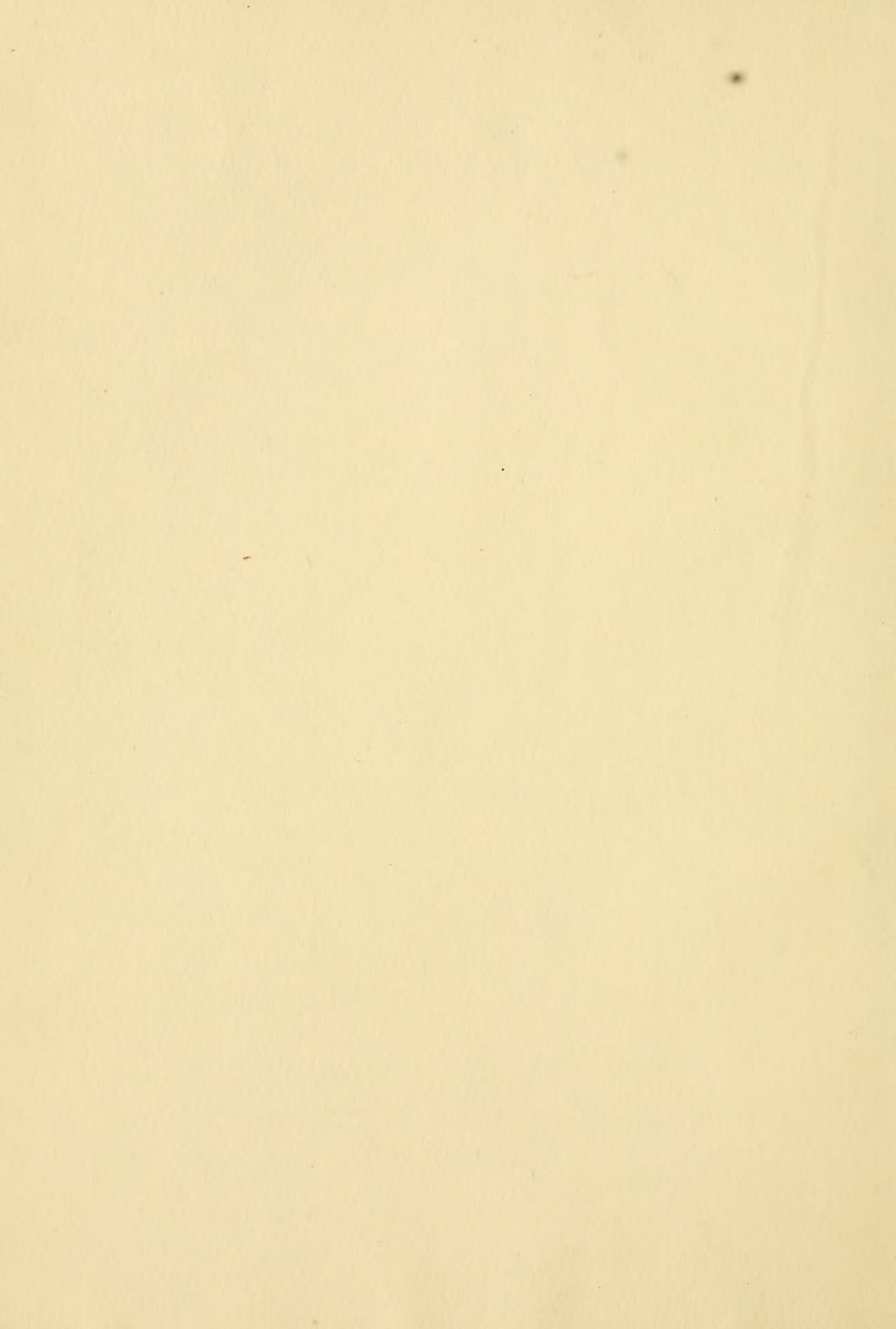
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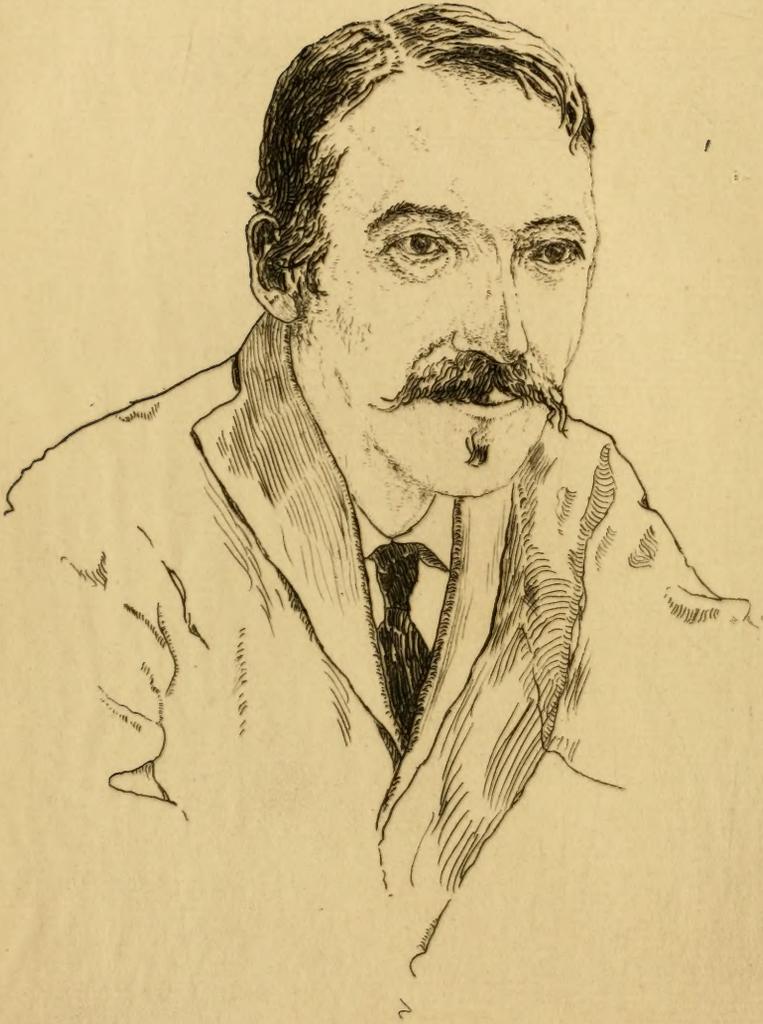




STEVENSON AND MARGARITA

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

HOSKING



STEVENSON AND MARGARITA

By
WILL H. LOW

*With an etching by
Arthur N. Haskins*



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*V*IRGIL of prose! far distant is the day
When at the mention of your heartfelt name
Shall shake the head, and men, oblivious, say:
'We know him not, this master, nor his fame.'
Not for so swift forgetfulness you wrought,
Day upon day, with rapt fastidious pen,
Turning, like precious stones, with anxious thought,
This word and that again and yet again,
Seeking to match its meaning with the world;
Nor to the morning stars gave ears attent,
That you, indeed, might ever dare to be
With other praise than immortality
Unworthily content.



*Not while a boy still whistles on the earth,
Not while a single human heart beats true,
Not while Love lasts, and Honour, and the Brave,
Has earth a grave,
O well-beloved, for you!*

FROM ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON: AN ELEGY.
By Richard Le Gallienne



FOREWORD

A compelling and satisfactory biography of Robert Louis Stevenson is wholly a matter of the future. The figure we see in the pages of Mr. Balfour's two volumes is not the person of our imaginations,—not all that we have pictured of a personality at once so human and so lovable as dear R. L. S. must have been. Mr. Balfour has succeeded somewhat in giving us the prototype of a literary gentleman quite politely staged; we ask for a fuller drama, we want the many-sided man; and, somehow, we suspect that Stevenson was all that.

It was Henley who described him as

*“Valiant in velvet, light in ragged luck,
Most vain, most generous, sternly critical,
Buffoon and poet, lover and sensualist:
A deal of Ariel, just a streak of Puck,
Much Antony, of Hamlet most of all,
And something of the Shorter-Catechist.—”*

Surely such a character is worthy of his Lockhart or his Boswell.

Up to the present moment the best portrait of R. L. S. may be secured from his “Letters.” And while, as an amazing body of literature these stand nobly alone, we, in our Gargantuan moods, still demand fuller particulars.

FOREWORD

Here and there among frail pages of reminiscences and from stray articles and odd volumes, we have intercepted paragraphs which have given us delightfully refreshing and human phases of Stevenson's checkered existence—added glimpses of the man not on dress parade: and we have half a notion that a distinct genius for such matters will feel the urge to weave these rare threads into a complete and definitive design, which will present the ultimate portrait in all its complexity. In all our several literatures we have hardly a more captivating figure.

There is one book in especial to which we may turn for one of those illuminating shafts thrown conspicuously upon our writer, and that volume is none other than one referred to by Stevenson's able son-in-law. Mr. Lloyd Osborne says in part:

“It is a pleasure to praise Will Low's ‘A Chronicle of Friendships,’ in which, in my opinion, Stevenson is more illuminatingly revealed than in anything ever written of him. Here is the true Stevenson—the Stevenson I would fain have the reader know and take to his heart—boyish, gay, and of all things approachable to the poorest and shabbiest; a man bubbling over with talk and no less eager to listen;

FOREWORD

a man radiating human kindness and good will, in whom the gift of genius had not displaced the most winning, the most lovable of personal qualities.”

Here is appreciation, indeed. And, furthermore, the statement furnishes a background for the whimsical tale recounted herein, and which first appeared in Mr. Christopher Morley's column, "The Bowling Green." Mr. Will Low has consented to let us salvage this delectable bit and preserve it in separate form for those who follow with unceasing interest the ever-alluring Stevenson myth. Mr. Low assures us that Mr. Morley furnished the title, which, in itself, has a distinct verve,—at least to the point of piquing our curiosity. And while Stevenson may or may not have had several love affairs, the amorous slant of this particular tale is far removed from Aphrodite's realm.

It seems almost needless to state that our thanks are due to both Mr. Low and Mr. Morley for allowing us to reprint the tale, and also to Mr. C. B. Gilbert for his Villon-like *ballade*.

ARTHUR N. HOSKING



BALLADE DE LA FUMÉE

A PIPE and a book at the close of the day,
After the tumult and shouting are through!
There, mon ami, is an excellent way
Solid enjoyment to find, voyez vous!
If you're a reader of Stevenson too
(If you are not—well, I hope that you choke!)
Doubtless you've wondered, as smoke rings you blew,
What kind of tobacco did Stevenson smoke?

Think you 'twas shag that he crammed in his clay,
Briar, or meerschaum of glorious hue?
(Shag e'er made fit Sherlock Holmes for the fray—
Helped him unravel the mystical clue),
Was it from "Gold Leaf" contentment he drew?
Or "Medium," or "Tawny" he'd use to invoke
Clio, Melpomene, and all their crew?
What kind of tobacco did Stevenson smoke?

Was it "Waverly Mixture" he used to allay
Nerves that were frazzled and temper askew,
Or "Thick Twist," or "Three Men"? 'Tis like that he may
Have smoked some of these—there are many that do.
Could it be "Dog's Wool" he packed in his flue,
Or "Latakia" (if under the yoke
Of Turkish he bowed)? . . . What a theme to pursue!
What kind of tobacco did Stevenson smoke?

L'ENVOI

Prince I am putting the question to you:
Dites-moi, s'il vous plait—grant your jester his joke—
Would you give up your brand to smoke his, if you knew
What kind of tobacco did Stevenson smoke?

C. B. GILBERT.



STEVENSON AND MARGARITA

A Love Story

By

WILL H. LOW

AMONG the few fine things remaining in this topsy-turvy world of ours; amidst the barbed wire entanglements not yet cleared away, where we carry on as best we may; over the trenches in whose depths so much that was esteemed precious has been buried, and in whose digging so many strange things have been brought to light; is the sustained interest in all that R. L. S. was, said, did, or wrote! And now The Bowling Green brings up the question of the kind of tobacco he used. Well, that depends. In those early days when with his cousin Bob he trod the Lothian way, and explored all the nooks and corners of his native Edinburgh, he probably smoked shag, or whatever came his way and was cheapest. And he probably consumed it in a pipe, for even as he sailed away from Antwerp on the "Inland Voyage," never having been in a sailing canoe before, he tied his sheet and lighted his pipe!

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But I never remember having seen him with a pipe; the cigarette triumphed, and in the early days at Barbizon, Grez, or Paris, he paid duty to the Government monopoly, and smoked the *tabac de la régie*, as we all did. It's a fine honest smoke, whether bought at *deux sous à fumer* from the lady who dips her fingers into the receptacle sunken in the counter behind which she sits, extracts and weighs the exact amount purchasable for two sous, twists it deftly into a cornet of paper and presents it with a smile and a "*Voilà Monsieur;*" or bought, by the more affluent, by the package as simple *Caporal* at ten sous, *Maryland* or *Scaferlati supérieure* at twelve or sixteen. "Rank!" I have heard returned members of the A. E. F. characterize it, wedded as they are to the strange compounds of glycerinized beflavored alfalfa rife upon our market; of which the law of libel forbids specification.



In the California sojourn in 1880 I know not what R. L. S. smoked, "Mrs. Miller's Own" perhaps, if there was nothing cheaper; but, in the unforgettable fortnight he passed under my roof in the rue Vernier, Paris, in '86, I think he fell back as easily into the habit of using the French tobacco, furnished by the house, as he did into

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all the intimacies we resumed after eight years of separation. Upon his second arrival in this country in '87, however, I undertook a severe though kindly received supervision of his smoking habit. The limited supply of tobacco brought from England had been nearly exhausted by the prolonged voyage of the *Ludgate Hill*, and there were three votaries of the cigarette, R. L. S., his wife, and the, somewhat to my surprise since the days of Grez, sufficiently-grown-up-to-smoke Lloyd Osbourne. Of course then as now the French *tabac de la régie* was procurable with a little trouble, but, like many other delights of that dear land, its tobacco in our clear dry climate loses something of its savor. And so, soon after my return from my student days in France, in 1878, I had discovered a tobacco of my own. It was in exploring Broadway, then little changed during my five years of absence, that I chanced into a store nearly opposite the Post Office: that monument of mid-republican architecture, even then a blot upon the city-scape, and only now after many years threatened with destruction. The shop was a large fine emporium dedicated to the smoker, kept by one John Blakely. Explaining with some particularity my desires, Mr. Blakely opined that a blend of tobaccos of his own mixing would satisfy my craving. This

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mixture, of good Virginia, a little Turkish, and a trace of Perique, after a short trial pleased me, and on subsequent visits to the tobacconist I inquired why having taken the trouble to put it up in tins and bestow the melodious name of *Margarita* upon it, he had taken no steps to advertise its merits or place it on sale elsewhere. He made answer that upon its merits alone a wide distribution had resulted, many tins of it finding appreciation as far as away as Australia or New Zealand. This statement I would not doubt, but nearer home, in a subsequent faithful adherence to this blend for thirty years or more, I never met one who knew or used *Margarita*, beyond the comparatively few who had adopted it upon my enthusiastic recommendation.



When the Stevensons came to port a new field of missionary endeavor was opened, to which for a time at least they succumbed. A supply of *Margarita* went with them to Saranac, whence, some time after, came this characteristic wail, which I copy from *A Chronicle of Friendships*, as it does not appear in the more official *Letters*:

Sir, since 2 P. M. yesterday, a period of nearly eighteen hours, the wretched man who

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now addresses you has not smoked. The same length of time has elapsed since the high-bred Lloyd Osbourne has Broken Tobacco. The famine has passed through all the usual stages; tissue paper from between visiting cards and 'baccy from the bottom of pockets having been consumed; but now, sir, the last 'ope has waltzed into space, and neither Osbourne nor myself can blink the conviction that

H'all is over,
Farewell.

When our memorial notices are written this will be a shrewd cut at the States, under whose banner we perish. Well, I am done with the passions of mortality—Farewell! but if a tin of *Margarita* and a mass of cigarette papers came by post, without prejudice to another tin in the general packet, it would not find me alive of course but it might be handy to my executors. Sir, Yours,

R. L. S.

Tins of *Margarita* followed, and if I remember rightly, some quantity of it figured among the ship stores which I saw R. L. S. eagerly draw up, review, revise, and constantly add to, the following spring at Manasquan, for the prospective provisioning of the *Casco*. Yes, *Margarita* was

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the only brand of tobacco which Stevenson celebrated in such touching terms; and when one reflects on the far-reaching result of the mention of another brand, in *My Lady Nicotine*, it will be seen that the eventual fate of *Margarita* might have been avoided had this commendation been given to the public in time.

For a year or two after, following a sojourn of some months abroad, I sought the abiding place of *Margarita* with a view of renewing my allegiance, only to find the shop vanished and to learn of the death of its proprietor. Some time passed when I, still mourning the lost *Margarita*, passing through one of the down-town streets leading off Broadway, saw the name Blakely emblazoned on the window of a tobacconist. I entered, found a son of the father, learned that he still put up *Margarita*, heard of its (her?) voyaging to far off climes once more, while still clinging to an aversion to publicity.



To shorten a story which has strayed far from that of R. L. S., the time came when the abode of *Margarita* was absorbed in a great chain of cigar stores. Still, no longer young, *Margarita* clung to her home, and the blended tobacco bearing her name could not be

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found elsewhere, all other stores of the chain disclaiming knowledge of her identity. Then came the World War, but *Margarita* was still to be found at the one and only store by—perhaps—her one and only admirer. Finally we entered the war, and then, late in 1917, came the announcement that the entire output of the factory where this unique tobacco was blended was to be taken over by the United States Government for the benefit of our army overseas.



I trust that *Margarita* had her part in the victory: but since then, through these halcyon days of peace, her soothing presence has been sought in vain. A total disappearance of the elusive brand is probable, a vanishing in smoke—perhaps in that of battle—which will be mourned by those admirers in the Antipodes as it is, most sincerely, by one here. It is only a partial consolation for the renunciation of one of the pleasures of a somewhat prolonged youth to have found another likable tobacco, of a more manly name, that, grown, manufactured, and packed in this country, is then sent abroad, to return here, where, after some coquetting with a protective tariff, it can be procured. But *Margarita* was once esteemed by R. L. S. and the long line

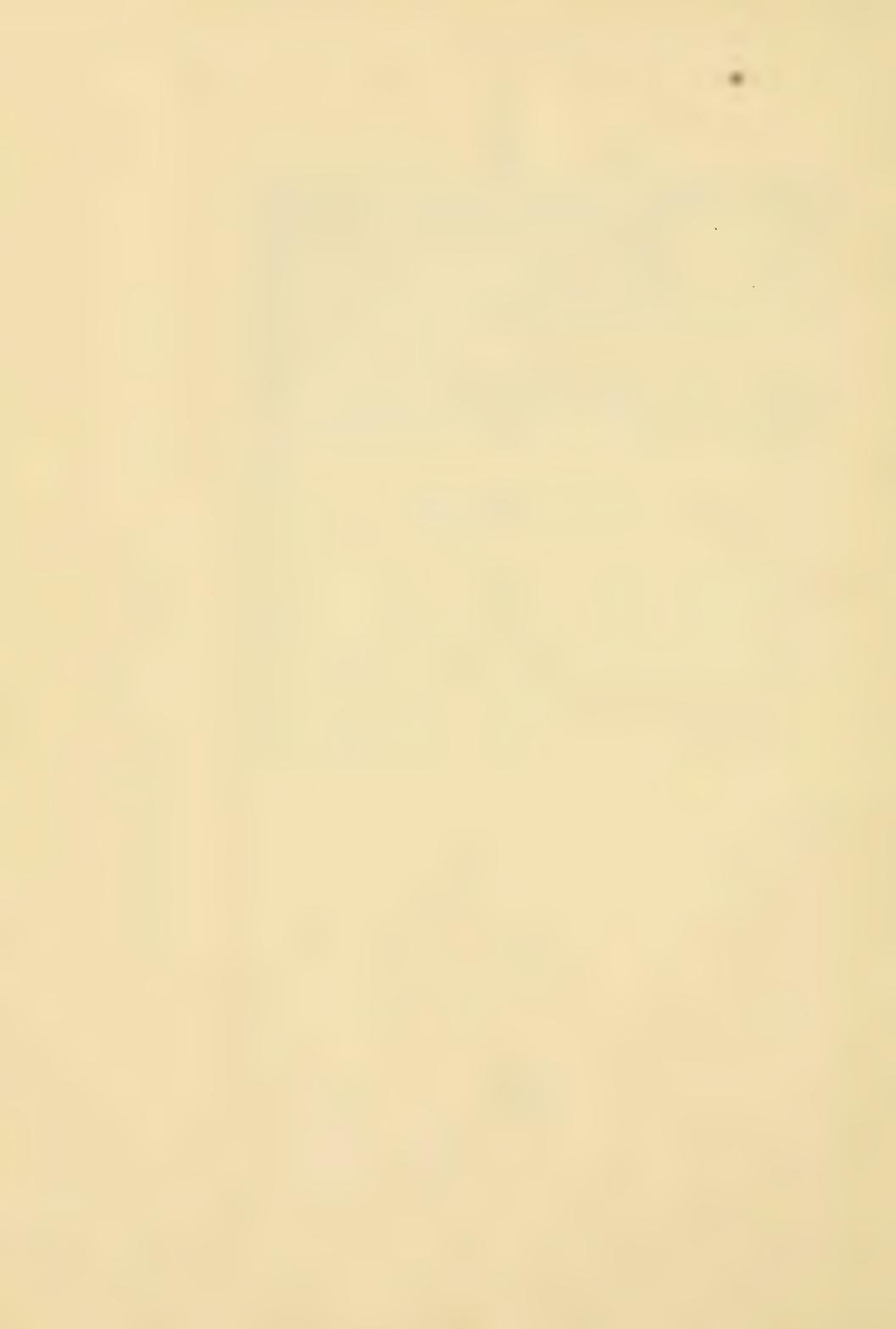
STEVENSON AND MARGARITA

of markings on the mantel-shelf in the Baker cottage at Saranac Lake, the house which a band of pious admirers seeks to preserve as a memorial to the much-loved Louis, were undoubtedly made by the slowly extinguishing shreds of the blended *Margarita*.

For the cigarette served as a punctuation mark to the talk of R. L. S., or the pause in the research of his phrase as he wrote. And the question of his preference for any tobacco must also consider the extreme attenuation of his cigarette; a few shreds of the soothing herb rolled almost to the diameter of twine in a wisp of rice paper. These, consumed in a few moments, afforded the delicate hands a continuous task, a momentary and beneficent putting on the brakes to the swift movement of the "machine" that from the *Inland Voyage* by enchanted ways brought us to *Weir of Hermiston*.

*H*ERE THEN ENDS STEVENSON AND MARGARITA A LOVE
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