

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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True Story of 'Treasure Island'

From Mrs. Salisbury Field, who as Isobel Field is known as the stepdaughter of Robert Louis Stevenson and the author of "This Life I've Loved," comes a letter in which she asks that the true story of the writing of "Treasure Island" be published.

Mrs. Field relates that the Stevenson copyright law has expired, so we have the right to use her enclosed extracts from an article written by R.L.S.

"So many different cities have claimed the honor of being the place where Treasure Island was written that I beg you to publish this, in order to clarify any erroneous impressions," wrote Mrs. Field who has been most generous to Monterey by giving her entire collection of Stevensoniana and the author's furniture and keepsakes to the Stevenson House here.

The articles are excerpts from "My First Book" – "Treasure Island" by Robert Louis Stevenson, according to Mrs. Field.

"It was far, indeed, from being my first book, for I am not a novelist alone. But I am well aware that my paymaster, the great public, regards what else I have written with indifference, if not aversion.

"In the fated year I came to live with my father and mother at Kinnaird, above Pitlochry" (Scotland) ... "I love my native air, but it does not love me; and the end of this delightful period was cold ... and a migration, by Strathaird and Glenshee, to the Castleton of Braemar My native air was more unkind than man's ingratitude; and I must consent to pass a good deal of my time between four walls in a house lugubriously known as "the late Miss McGregor's Cottage."

"And now admire the finger of predestination. There was a schoolboy in the late Miss McGregor's cottage, home for the holidays, and much in want of 'something craggy to break his mind upon.' He had no thought of literature; it was the art of Raphael that received his fleeting suffrages, and with the aid of pen and ink and a shilling box of water colors, he had soon turned one of the rooms into a picture gallery. My most immediate duty toward the gallery was to be showman; but I would sometimes unbend a little, join the artist (so to speak) at the easel, and pass the afternoon with him in a generous emulation, making colored drawings.

"On one of these occasions I made the map of an island; it was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully colored; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbors that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance 'Treasure Island'...."

Then Stevenson goes on to tell how he began his story which has lived all these years, and is known to every school boy and girl throughout this land. In honor of Stevenson, and in memory of that story, the San Francisco officials of the Panama-Pacific International Exposition named the man-made island on which it was held "Treasure Island."

He continues his explanation: "The next thing I knew, I had some paper before me and was writing out a list of chapters. How often have I done so, and the thing gone no further! But there seemed elements of success about this enterprise. It was to be a story for boys; no need of psychology or fine writing; and I had a boy at hand to be a touchstone. Women were excluded.

"I was unable to handle a brig (which the Hispaniola should have been) but I thought I could make shift to sail her as a schooner without public shame. And then I had an idea for John Silver from which I promised myself funds of entertainment; to take an admired friend of mine (whom the reader very likely knows and admires as much as I do); to deprive him of all his finer qualities and higher graces of temperament, to leave him with nothing but his strength, his courage, his quickness and his magnificent geniality, and to try to express those in terms of the culture of a raw tarpaulin.

(More to follow)