TREASURE ISLAND

Robert Louis Stevenson

With an Introduction by Douglas Wilson



To S.L.O., an American gentleman in accordance with whose classic taste the following narrative has been designed, it is now, in return for numerous delightful hours, and with the kindest wishes, dedicated by his affectionate friend, the author.



TO THE HESITATING PURCHASER

If sailor tales to sailor tunes,
Storm and adventure, heat and cold,
If schooners, islands, and maroons,
And buccaneers, and buried gold,
And all the old romance, retold
Exactly in the ancient way,
Can please, as me they pleased of old,
The wiser youngsters of today:

—So be it, and fall on! If not,
If studious youth no longer crave,
His ancient appetites forgot,
Kingston, or Ballantyne the brave,
Or Cooper of the wood and wave:
So be it, also! And may I
And all my pirates share the grave
Where these and their creations lie!



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ark Twain once defined a classic as a book that everyone wants to have read, but nobody wants to read. By that cute definition, *Treasure Island* is not a classic at all. It is a book that is preeminently readable, and not only so, but it is readable by a demographic group not known for its prowess in the literary arts—viz. young boys. This is a book that is pitched almost perfectly to the imagination of a young boy, and on top of that it serves as a rollicking good story for everyone else. It is the archetypical pirate story.

The World Around

Treasure Island was first published in 1882. That was an eventful year, and since Stevenson's adventure novel was full of mayhem, we should begin with some of the real-time mayhem of 1882. That was the year that Queen Victoria was almost assassinated while boarding a train. And elsewhere in the world, somebody else who was a better shot successfully assassinated Morgan Earp in Tombstone, Arizona. Not only so, but the famous outlaw Jesse James was also killed in that year.

In the world of music, Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture premiered in Moscow. Chuck Berry was not yet born. In the world of electricity, which was much younger than the world of music, Thomas Edison tested the first grand scale use of his new-fangled light bulb at Pearl

Street Station in New York. Also in that same year, Edison created the first electric Christmas tree lights. This reduced the number of lit candles on Christmas trees, which was never a good idea in the first place.

Although we were still some distance from the World Series, the first national championship baseball series was played in 1882, pitting Chicago against Cincinnati. As a number of these events indicate, we were on the threshold of the modern world.

About the Author

Robert Louis Stevenson was a Scottish writer of the Victorian era. He was born in Edinburgh in 1850, and died in Samoa in 1894. Known for many books, including *Kidnapped*, and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *A Child's Garden of Verses*, he is best known for *Treasure Island*, the prototypical story of pirate lore.

He came from a pious Presbyterian family, Scots style, and much of his life and writing is dominated by his tragic revolt against that heritage. Stevenson was the most difficult kind of infidel—he had been brought up in a sincere and conscientious Calvinism, which he rejected in favor of the loose living of the literary set. Like many Scots children of that era, he had the Shorter Catechism memorized. His father, Thomas Stevenson, took his son's infidelity hard, believing that it rendered his "whole life a failure." One of his son's literary friends was W.E. Henley, author of *Invictus* ("I am the master of my fate / I am the captain of my soul").

It would be easy to dismiss the elder Stevenson as an austere old-school Calvinist, one who drove his son away with a rod of hard rigor, that being the caricature of Calvinism. But the reverse is more likely the truth. Because of Stevenson's sickly childhood and life, and because of his father's genuine tenderness, it is likely that the younger Stevenson was simply spoiled. Thomas Stevenson was still supporting

the map to a nearby gentleman named Squire Trelawney. They realize what they have in their possession—a map to the treasure horde of the old pirate Captain Flint—and so the squire organizes an expedition to find it.

Unfortunately, Trelawney is somewhat foolish, naïve, and talkative, and the ship he commissions winds up with a crew that is largely comprised of Flint's old pirate crew. There are some honest sailors in their midst, but by and large, the whole expedition is a bad business. The captain of the ship is Captain Smollet, who is one of the honest ones.

The principal villain is the ship's cook, Long John Silver, a larger than life character, the great "stand-out" character in the book. When Jim happens to overhear Silver plotting the inevitable pirate mutiny, he warns the good guys, and forewarned is forearmed.

When they come to the island, the two forces are divided. The good guys occupy a stockade on the island at first, but then the positions are reversed and the pirates hold the stockade.

An old pirate named Ben Gunn had been marooned on the island years before, and as it turns out *he* had discovered the treasure some time before, and removed it all to his cave.

When they leave the island with the treasure, they maroon the remaining pirates, although they do take Long John Silver with them. In a port of call on the way home, Silver slips away with some of the treasure, and disappears from the story forever. But not from our hearts.

Worldview Analysis

Treasure Island is certainly a story of treasure (and greed and ambition), and on top of that it is a rollicking good swashbuckler, a true adventure story. But the central treasure "gained" in the book is that of Jim's courage and maturity. This is a coming-of-age story come in the form of an adventure story.

When the story opens, Jim is a timid boy. By the end of the book, he has outwitted pirates, killed Israel Hands, set his mother up financially for life, and made a truly courageous decision for the sake of keeping his word.

In addition to being a coming-of-age story, it is also a "quest" story. The quest is to recover Flint's treasure, and there are various obstacles or guardians in the way. These guardians include the pirates at the Admiral Benbow Inn, the machinations of Long John Silver, and the helpful "obstruction" of Ben Gunn.

When the book opens, Jim has lost his father, and in the course of him coming of age, he grows to the point where he does not need a surrogate father—although various fathers are "offered." Among the contenders would be Squire Trelawney, who is too foolish, Captain Smollett, who is too strait-laced, and then, at the other end of the spectrum, Long John Silver, who is preeminently likeable, but is also unfortunately a scoundrel. Apart from his wickedness, he would have been a great dad.

So, to recap, a boy finds a treasure map, and together with some trustworthy friends, goes in search of that treasure. Some pirates, whose treasure it was, find out about the expedition and insinuate themselves into the crew, in the hopes of getting their hands on the swag again. A rollicking good time is had by some of the characters, and certainly by the reader, and who but an astounding *dullard* would think of trying to write a "worldview guide" for something like this? The next thing you know, someone is going to put out worldview study questions for the *Tintin* comic book series.

Part of our problem is that we tend to think we are turning everything into a "subject." As a result of that, we think we are becoming increasingly studious and scholarly. What is actually happening is that the current is running the opposite direction. The entertainment imperative is creeping into everything. It used to be that to have an entertaining book like *Treasure Island* incorporated into the

curriculum would have been scorned by schoolmasters from here to Timbukthree. In school you studied "the greats" and you entertained yourself with well-written popular literature on your own time, preferably under the covers and with a flashlight.

The nervousness of the older grammarians is certainly vulnerable to ridicule whenever we look at a book that was once "popular literature," but which has proven itself a classic over time. But our lax standards would be an easy target for these nervous grammarians and schoolmasters from two centuries ago were they to travel down to our time, discovering here that you can attend various universities to take courses in *Demystifying the Hipster* (Tufts), *The Sociology of Miley Cyrus: Race, Class, Gender, and Media* (Skidmore), and *Kanye Versus Everybody!* (Georgia State University). We are at the bottom of a slippery slope that perhaps began by studying *Pride and Prejudice* instead of *The Odyssey* in the original Greek.

C.S. Lewis represented the sentiment of this older perspective very well.

There is an intrinsic absurdity in making current literature a subject of academic study, and the student who wants a tutor's assistance in reading the works of his own contemporaries might as well ask for a nurse's assistance in blowing his own nose.*

But be that as it may, here we are now, and *Treasure Island* is in your curriculum. Here we are now, and you are reading it. The fact that you are enjoying it thoroughly is simply a by-product, and that can't really be helped. Try to keep a solemn face on it, as this is part of your education.

This is a story of high adventure, and this book is one of the books that helped establish the era of piracy on the high seas as a fixed era in the Western imagination. We might as well try to understand why we like it so much.

^{*} C. S. Lewis, "Our English Syllabus," in *Image and Imagination* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), EPub Edition, 30.



PART ONE THE OLD BUCCANEER



1: THE OLD SEA-DOG AT THE "ADMIRAL BENBOW"

QUIRE TRELAWNEY, Dr. Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17__ and go back to the time when my father kept the Admiral Benbow inn and the brown old seaman with the sabre cut first took up his lodging under our roof.

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow—a tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man, his tarry pigtail falling over the shoulder of his soiled blue coat, his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails, and the sabre cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cover and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sang so often afterwards:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars. Then he rapped on the door with a bit of stick like a handspike that he carried, and when my father appeared, called roughly for a glass of rum. This, when it was brought to him, he drank slowly, like a connoisseur, lingering on the taste and still looking about him at the cliffs and up at our signboard.

"This is a handy cove," says he at length; "and a pleasant sittyated grog-shop. Much company, mate?"

My father told him no, very little company, the more was the pity.

"Well, then," said he, "this is the berth for me. Here you, matey," he cried to the man who trundled the barrow; "bring up alongside and help up my chest. I'll stay here a bit," he continued. "I'm a plain man; rum and bacon and eggs is what I want, and that head up there for to watch ships off. What you mought call me? You mought call me captain. Oh, I see what you're at—there"; and he threw down three or four gold pieces on the threshold. "You can tell me when I've worked through that," says he, looking as fierce as a commander.

And indeed bad as his clothes were and coarsely as he spoke, he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast, but seemed like a mate or skipper accustomed to be obeyed or to strike. The man who came with the barrow told us the mail had set him down the morning before at the Royal George, that he had inquired what inns there were along the coast, and hearing ours well spoken of, I suppose, and described as lonely, had chosen it from the others for his place of residence. And that was all we could learn of our guest.

He was a very silent man by custom. All day he hung round the cove or upon the cliffs with a brass telescope; all evening he sat in a corner of the parlour next the fire and drank rum and water very strong. Mostly he would not speak when spoken to, only look up sudden and fierce and blow through his nose like a fog-horn; and we and the people who came about our house soon learned to let him be. Every day when he came back from his stroll he would ask if any seafaring men had gone by along the road. At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him ask this

question, but at last we began to see he was desirous to avoid them. When a seaman did put up at the Admiral Benbow (as now and then some did, making by the coast road for Bristol) he would look in at him through the curtained door before he entered the parlour; and he was always sure to be as silent as a mouse when any such was present. For me, at least, there was no secret about the matter, for I was, in a way, a sharer in his alarms. He had taken me aside one day and promised me a silver fourpenny on the first of every month if I would only keep my "weather-eye open for a seafaring man with one leg" and let him know the moment he appeared. Often enough when the first of the month came round and I applied to him for my wage, he would only blow through his nose at me and stare me down, but before the week was out he was sure to think better of it, bring me my four-penny piece, and repeat his orders to look out for "the seafaring man with one leg."

How that personage haunted my dreams, I need scarcely tell you. On stormy nights, when the wind shook the four corners of the house and the surf roared along the cove and up the cliffs, I would see him in a thousand forms, and with a thousand diabolical expressions. Now the leg would be cut off at the knee, now at the hip; now he was a monstrous kind of a creature who had never had but the one leg, and that in the middle of his body. To see him leap and run and pursue me over hedge and ditch was the worst of nightmares. And altogether I paid pretty dear for my monthly fourpenny piece, in the shape of these abominable fancies.

But though I was so terrified by the idea of the seafaring man with one leg, I was far less afraid of the captain himself than anybody else who knew him. There were nights when he took a deal more rum and water than his head would carry; and then he would sometimes sit and sing his wicked, old, wild sea-songs, minding nobody; but sometimes he would call for glasses round and force all the trembling company to listen to his stories or bear a chorus to his singing. Often

I have heard the house shaking with "Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum," all the neighbours joining in for dear life, with the fear of death upon them, and each singing louder than the other to avoid remark. For in these fits he was the most overriding companion ever known; he would slap his hand on the table for silence all round; he would fly up in a passion of anger at a question, or sometimes because none was put, and so he judged the company was not following his story. Nor would he allow anyone to leave the inn till he had drunk himself sleepy and reeled off to bed.

His stories were what frightened people worst of all. Dreadful stories they were—about hanging, and walking the plank, and storms at sea, and the Dry Tortugas, and wild deeds and places on the Spanish Main. By his own account he must have lived his life among some of the wickedest men that God ever allowed upon the sea, and the language in which he told these stories shocked our plain country people almost as much as the crimes that he described. My father was always saying the inn would be ruined, for people would soon cease coming there to be tyrannized over and put down, and sent shivering to their beds; but I really believe his presence did us good. People were frightened at the time, but on looking back they rather liked it; it was a fine excitement in a quiet country life, and there was even a party of the younger men who pretended to admire him, calling him a "true sea-dog" and a "real old salt" and such like names, and saying there was the sort of man that made England terrible at sea.

In one way, indeed, he bade fair to ruin us, for he kept on staying week after week, and at last month after month, so that all the money had been long exhausted, and still my father never plucked up the heart to insist on having more. If ever he mentioned it, the captain blew through his nose so loudly that you might say he roared, and stared my poor father out of the room. I have seen him wringing his hands after such a rebuff, and I am sure the annoyance and the terror he lived in must have greatly hastened his early and unhappy death.

All the time he lived with us the captain made no change whatever in his dress but to buy some stockings from a hawker. One of the cocks of his hat having fallen down, he let it hang from that day forth, though it was a great annoyance when it blew. I remember the appearance of his coat, which he patched himself upstairs in his room, and which, before the end, was nothing but patches. He never wrote or received a letter, and he never spoke with any but the neighbours, and with these, for the most part, only when drunk on rum. The great sea-chest none of us had ever seen open.

He was only once crossed, and that was towards the end, when my poor father was far gone in a decline that took him off. Dr. Livesey came late one afternoon to see the patient, took a bit of dinner from my mother, and went into the parlour to smoke a pipe until his horse should come down from the hamlet, for we had no stabling at the old Benbow. I followed him in, and I remember observing the contrast the neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow and his bright, black eyes and pleasant manners, made with the coltish country folk, and above all, with that filthy, heavy, bleared scarecrow of a pirate of ours, sitting, far gone in rum, with his arms on the table. Suddenly he—the captain, that is—began to pipe up his eternal song:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest— Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum! Drink and the devil had done for the rest— Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!"

At first I had supposed "the dead man's chest" to be that identical big box of his upstairs in the front room, and the thought had been mingled in my nightmares with that of the one-legged seafaring man. But by this time we had all long ceased to pay any particular notice to the song; it was new, that night, to nobody but Dr. Livesey, and on him I observed it did not produce an agreeable effect, for he looked up for a moment quite angrily before he went on with his talk to old

Taylor, the gardener, on a new cure for the rheumatics. In the meantime, the captain gradually brightened up at his own music, and at last flapped his hand upon the table before him in a way we all knew to mean silence. The voices stopped at once, all but Dr. Livesey's; he went on as before speaking clear and kind and drawing briskly at his pipe between every word or two. The captain glared at him for a while, flapped his hand again, glared still harder, and at last broke out with a villainous, low oath, "Silence, there, between decks!"

"Were you addressing me, sir?" says the doctor; and when the ruffian had told him, with another oath, that this was so, "I have only one thing to say to you, sir," replies the doctor, "that if you keep on drinking rum, the world will soon be quit of a very dirty scoundre!!"

The old fellow's fury was awful. He sprang to his feet, drew and opened a sailor's clasp-knife, and balancing it open on the palm of his hand, threatened to pin the doctor to the wall.

The doctor never so much as moved. He spoke to him as before, over his shoulder and in the same tone of voice, rather high, so that all the room might hear, but perfectly calm and steady: "If you do not put that knife this instant in your pocket, I promise, upon my honour, you shall hang at the next assizes."

Then followed a battle of looks between them, but the captain soon knuckled under, put up his weapon, and resumed his seat, grumbling like a beaten dog.

"And now, sir," continued the doctor, "since I now know there's such a fellow in my district, you may count I'll have an eye upon you day and night. I'm not a doctor only; I'm a magistrate; and if I catch a breath of complaint against you, if it's only for a piece of incivility like tonight's, I'll take effectual means to have you hunted down and routed out of this. Let that suffice."

Soon after, Dr. Livesey's horse came to the door and he rode away, but the captain held his peace that evening, and for many evenings to come.



2: BLACK DOG APPEARS AND DISAPPEARS

was not very long after this that there occurred the first of the mysterious events that rid us at last of the captain, though not, as you will see, of his affairs. It was a bitter cold winter, with long, hard frosts and heavy gales; and it was plain from the first that my poor father was little likely to see the spring. He sank daily, and my mother and I had all the inn upon our hands, and were kept busy enough without paying much regard to our unpleasant guest.

It was one January morning, very early—a pinching, frosty morning—the cove all grey with hoar-frost, the ripple lapping softly on the stones, the sun still low and only touching the hilltops and shining far to seaward. The captain had risen earlier than usual and set out down the beach, his cutlass swinging under the broad skirts of the old blue coat, his brass telescope under his arm, his hat tilted back upon his head. I remember his breath hanging like smoke in his wake as he strode off, and the last sound I heard of him as he turned the big rock was a loud snort of indignation, as though his mind was still running upon Dr. Livesey.

Well, mother was upstairs with father and I was laying the break-fast-table against the captain's return when the parlour door opened and a man stepped in on whom I had never set my eyes before. He