

Mr R.L.Stevenson is surely a little unfortunate in his correspondents? For instance, it was very natural that he, a Scot abroad, should tell the members of a Scottish club at Honolulu, that he could not read *The Stickit Minister* ‘without a gulp,’ for the book had reminded him of ‘the graves of the Martyrs’ – (those coerced coercionists!)- and therewith the whaups, ‘calling above them his heart remembered how.’ Again, that on the strength of *The Stickit Minister* aforesaid, he should take advantage of ‘a letter to a friend,’ to equal Mr Crockett to the master by whom that gentleman lived and moved and had such being as was his - this, too, was natural, we make no doubt; for Mr Stevenson is nothing if not daring, and this is daring enough to make the common reader to turn and be changed, as by a hard knock in the pit of his stomach. ‘They do not derive from each other,’ he says: ‘they are complementary.’ *The Stickit Minister* is out of doors: Barrie is within doors. By different ways ye shall attain.’ Now this is all very nice for Mr Crockett: but – and here is the unfortunateness – it is also very good business for Mr Crockett’s publisher in that it enables him to rig the market in the matter of Crockett, by creating an artificial demand for his wares. For of course the ‘friend’ made haste to communicate so surprising a discovery on the part of a distinguished correspondent to the national newspaper; and now it figures as a sort of testimonial to the merits of Mr Crockett on the fly-leaf of Mr Crockett’s new venture; and it is set forth, together with the opinions of other ‘well-known critics, in a leaflet compiled with a view to the bold (not to say impudent) advertisement of Mr Crockett and all his works. Mr Stevenson, that is, is shown to the public in the act of recommending a book he has never read on the strength of a book he has read to singularly little purpose.’ Not even Mr Gladstone, that bill-sticking archangel (so to speak,) has ever, we believe, been made to do such duty. And it seems safe to assume that Mr Stevenson is not the man to relish the position; especially as this cheapening of his impressions of *The Stickit Minister* cannot but quicken such an expectation in favour of *The Raiders* as *The Raiders* itself most certainly must disappoint and kill.

The book has merits; there is no doubt of that. But it has not merits enough to blind you to its vices. To be plain, it is not authentic work; it is a piece of pure mimicry, and the writer is overbold in his choice of originals. On the one hand, he is not to be parted from his R.L.S; on the other he cannot refrain from his J.M.B. His hero recalls the oddest memories of David Balfour; he catches certain Stevensonian tricks of style in a way that, while it is very creditable to himself, is extremely irritating to his readers. Again, he might never have essayed to create a May Michief but for Babbie; nor to trot out a Sammlle Tamson but for the folk in Thrums; nor to picture the Sixteen Drifty Days but for the storm in *The Little Minister*. The intention is strictly honourable, of course. ‘Seulement,’ as the man say in *Les Faux Bonshommes*, the effect is very often disconcerting. There is no better model for a beginner in fiction than the R.L.S. of on *Kidnapped*, let us say. But one can *not* conceive of him putting the character of a Galloway laird (Early Georgian), and writing ‘donkey,’ for ‘cuddie,’ or allowing any thing in his pages to ‘execute a fandango’; while you are sure that he would rather die the death than see a man of his making, not ‘hanged’ but, ‘hung’ – like a picture or a piece of pork. Again, when Mr Crockett falls to his English, he is capable on occasion of ‘little tongues of *crawling* cloud,’ which first came ‘*shooting* down’ and then go ‘*curling* upwards like the winkers of an old man’s eye’: all in the space of a couple of lines; ‘Neither... or... or,’ he writes: and you are sure that this time his turn for mimicry has played him false. Achievements of the kind

may be 'Galloway in particular,' and also 'Crockett at his best,' as the publisher assures you that they are; but they do not conduce to a belief in the identity of Patrick Heron. In any case, they can hardly be the 'good Galloway Scots,' which Mr Stevenson demands of Mr Crockett; being indistinguishable from common Fleet-street English. The same imperfect mastery is shown in Mr Crockett's treatment of his second set of inspirations. Babbie is always charming; and very often she is so by reason of her wilful petulance, her gay indifference to the proprieties. But May Mischief is not: May Mischief is sometimes, at least, a tomboy and in the end is somebody not May Mischief. The Earl of Little Egypt, despite some touches here and there, is mainly incredible; for reasons the reader must discover for himself. The best you can say for Sammlle Tamson is that he is visibly strayed in Galloway, and should hie him northward to the tents of his kindred with all speed. Worst of all, perhaps, is the author's lack of art in the arrangement of his material. He is prodigal of incidents; but they are all too breathless (as it were) to convince you of anything but their own unreality. Adventure is hurled upon adventure; and nobody knows why. The characters turn up in all sorts of places; and your sole emotion is one of wonder how the d—l they got there. In Mr Crockett's conduct of his plot there is nothing of the too too obvious neatness of which we complained in *The Little Minister*; as there is nothing of the deliberate choice of means to an end the austere reserve of power, which delights one so in *Kidnapped* and *Catriona*. There is no atmosphere, no perspective, no sense of heat and cold. Nothing is realised: so that you no more believe in May Mischief in the Murder Hole than you do in Patrick Heron on the Wolf's Slock, on the ice, in the gypsy's hut; and you are as sure that the Loathly Dogs are 'jimmy' as you are sure that Captain Yawkins had read *Hard Cash* before he fired his parting defiance in the teeth of Lieutenant Mountenay, and that old Maxwell watched Mr Barkis go out with the tide, ere he proceeded to go and do likewise.

And yet the book has merits: merits of humour, character, description, dialect, intention above all. Mr Crockett has done the best in it he could; and that in these days of cheap and easy writing is much to his credit. You may read him with a certain entertainment or you may not: you must with a certain respect. You feel, too, that it is most unlucky for him that being 'complementary' (let us say) to so many others at once, he should be made the hero of a sort of 'corner.' But so it is; and even as we write somebody is comparing him to Mr R.L.Stevenson, even as that gentleman has already compared him to Mr J.M.Barrie. Is it not written that 'by different ways ye shall attain?'