

Vailima,
Samoa,
May 17th 1893

Dear Mr Crockett

I do not owe you two letters, nor yet nearly one, sir! The last time I heard of you, you wrote about an accident, and I sent you a letter to my lawyer, Charles Baxter, which does not seem to have been presented, as I see nothing of it in his accounts. Query, was that lost? I should not like you to think I had been so unmannerly and so inhuman. If you have written since, your letter also has miscarried, as is much the rule in this part of the world, unless you register.

Your book is not yet to hand, but will probably follow next month. I detected you early in the Book man, which I usually see, and noted you in particular as displaying a monstrous ingratitude about the foot-note. Well, mankind is ungrateful; "Man's ingratitude to man makes countless thousands mourn," quo' Rab -- or words to that effect. By the way, an anecdote of a cautious sailor: "Bill, Bill," says I to him, "or words to that effect."

I shall never take that walk by the Fisher's Tryst and Glencorse. I shall never see Auld Reekie. I shall never set my foot again upon the heather. Here I am until I die, and here will I be buried. The word is out and the doom written. Or, if I do come, it will be a voyage to a further goal, and in fact a suicide; which, however, if I could get my family all fixed up in the money way, I might, perhaps, perform, or attempt. But there is a plaguey risk of breaking down by the way; and I believe I shall stay here until the end comes like a good boy, as I am. If I did it, I should put upon my trunks: "Passenger to -- Hades."

How strangely wrong your information is! In the first place, I should never carry a novel to Sydney; I should post it from here. In the second place, Weir of Hermiston is as yet scarce begun. It's going to be excellent, no doubt; but it consists of about twenty pages. I have a tale, a shortish tale in length, but it has proved long to do, The Ebb Tide, some part of which goes home this mail. It is by me and Mr. Osbourne, and is really a singular work. There are only four characters, and three of them are bandits -- well, two of them are, and the third is their comrade and accomplice. It sounds cheering, does n't it? Barratry, and drunkenness, and vitriol, and I cannot tell you all what, are the beams of the roof. And yet -- I don't know -- I sort of think there's something in it. You'll see (which is more than I ever can) whether Davis and Attwater come off or not.

Weir of Hermiston is a much greater undertaking, and the plot is not good, I fear; but Lord Justice Clerk Hermiston ought to be a plum. Of other schemes, more or less executed, it skills not to speak. I am glad to hear so good an account of your activity and interests, and shall always hear from you with pleasure; though I am, and must continue, a mere sprite of the inkbottle, unseen in the flesh. Please remember me to your wife and to the four-year old sweetheart, if she be not too engrossed with higher matters. Do you know where the road crosses the burn under Glencorse Church? Go there, and say a prayer for me: moriturus salutatur. See that it 's a sunny day; I would like it to be a Sunday, but that 's not possible in the premises; and stand on the right-hand bank just where the road goes down into the water, and shut your eyes, and if I don't appear to you! well, it can't be helped, and will be extremely funny.

I have no concern here but to work and to keep an eye on this distracted people. I live just now wholly alone in an upper room of my house, because the whole family are down with influenza, bar my wife and myself. I get my horse up sometimes in the afternoon and have a ride in the woods; and I sit here and smoke and write, and rewrite, and destroy, and rage at my own impotence, from six in the morning till eight at night, with trifling and not always agreeable intervals for meals.

I am sure you chose wisely to keep your country charge. There a minister can be something, not in a town. In a town, the most of them are empty houses -- and public speakers. Why should you suppose your book will be slated because you have no friends? A new writer, if he is any good, will be acclaimed generally with more noise than he deserves. But by this time you will know for certain . -- I am, yours sincerely,
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON.

P. S. -- Be it known to this fluent generation that I, R. L. S., in the forty-third of my age and the twentieth of my professional life, wrote twenty-four pages in twenty-one days, working from six to eleven, and again in the afternoon from two to four or so, without fail or interruption. Such are the gifts the gods have endowed us withal: such was the facility of this prolific writer!

R. L. S.