

Mrs. Stevenson a Boon Companion to "Treasure Island's" Author

The Wife of Stevenson

Latest Biography Is a Story of Adventure and Romance

By Rebecca Drucker

FANNY OSBOURNE STEVENSON was so much the main-spring of the most productive years of Robert Louis Stevenson's life that a life of her is indispensable in the interests of the Stevenson which has gathered with such astonishing rapidity around his memory. But it is not for that academic reason alone that this biography is interesting. It is thoroughly justified as the portrait of an amazing, vivid, complex and adventurous woman, one apparently singled out by life for unique and romantic experience and endowed in turn with something of the grand manner for meeting it.

Her years with Stevenson have been amply published in the memoirs and letters. But rumor has often had its way with the time before her life with Stevenson. Her background was so unfamiliar to the world that knew Stevenson, the exigencies of their nomadic hunt for health so unfavorable to intimacy with many people, that a sort of mystery seems always to have overhung her. This biography is the work of her sister, Mrs. Nellie Van der Griff Sanchez. It is an easy narrative, unpretentious enough from a literary point of view, but intelligent and explicit enough to reveal Mrs. Stevenson to the world as a personality in her own right—a character as romantic in her way as Stevenson was in his.

Fanny Van der Griff Osbourne Stevenson was the daughter of Indiana pioneers, descendants of early Dutch and English settlers. There is a charming picture, quoted from her own story, "A Backwoods Childhood," of her life in Indianapolis, when that city was a mere backwoods, in which she sets down with a delightful simplicity and humor the outstanding figures of her family. She was a dark, spirited, precocious child—a sort of little ugly duckling, who flowered with her maturity into a really remarkable beauty.

She was married when she was seventeen to Samuel Osbourne, an adventurous young man of good Southern family. Soon after their marriage he went to serve in the Civil War and then went to try his fortune in the West. The gold fever had evaporated but the silver mining towns of Nevada and Montana were booming wildly. Fanny Osbourne followed with her child after his flickering fortunes as a mining prospector, experiencing the picturesque life of the mining towns of Nevada and Montana of the '60s. The ebb of the boom led the Osbournes settled in San Francisco, where Fanny Osbourne found a congenial place in the little group of really brilliant artists and writers whom San Francisco boasted at that time. She had a gift for drawing, which she cultivated devotedly, and something of a literary gift. It was then that the structural weaknesses of that immature marriage began to show. Osbourne's infidelities led to several tentative separations, and in 1870 Fanny Osbourne left her husband definitely, taking her three children with her. She went with them to Paris, where she supported her family by writing for the American periodicals, meanwhile enrolling herself and her young daughter in Julien's atelier. Her youngest child died at that time and in the depression of health and spirits following this loss Mrs. Osbourne was urged by a friend to go for a change to a little village in Grez, on the edge of Fontainebleau forest. This is where Fanny Osbourne met Stevenson.

It is plain that Mrs. Sanchez cannot resist making the most of the romantic features of that meeting. Women artists were still a rarity in those early '70s, and the little colony of British artists in Fontainebleau were appalled to learn that a woman artist, and an American at that, had come to invade their haunt. They sent a scout, Robert A. M. Stevenson, a cousin of Stevenson's, to bring back a report of the intruders. He failed to return, and so after a reasonable interval another emissary, Walter Simpson, was sent to bring news of him. He, too, remained strangely absent; the stage was now set for the appearance of the King himself. Stevenson himself went, and seeing through the doorway Fanny Osbourne's face framed in the lamplight, fell in love with her at first sight.

There followed the period during which, obscure and sick and poor, he followed her back to America—the time in which Fanny Osbourne won her divorce and Stevenson the grudging consent of his parents. When they were married it was not expected that he would live more than a few months. She lived always alert for a call to arms to struggle with the enemy that hovered over him. Their wanderings through the South Seas and in wild remote places were no hardship to her. She was a pioneer in spirit, and relished a call on her resourcefulness and courage. Once the disabling of their ship forced them to spend a good deal of time on a remote island, and the family complained of the restricted rations of fish and breadfruit which the place afforded. Thereupon, from some mysterious place in her kit she drew forth a quantity of seeds, and before the repairing of their ship was accomplished had a vegetable garden growing. She was a notable housewife, and on their Samoan island she was doctor and nurse to all the natives.

There are interesting sidelights on Stevenson himself. Mrs. Sanchez lived with them while they were in California. She says that he was much offended by the work of Zola and the naturalistic writers then coming into vogue and exacted from her a promise that she would never read those writers. Stevenson had a scrupulous regard for the soundness of his wife's opinion in literary matters, but their discussion of his work were often intense. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" was suggested by a dream Stevenson had, and he brought her the story, saying it was the best thing he had done. She thought it the worst, and after a protracted argument he burned it and rewrote the story entirely on a different angle.

There is the fascination of a picaresque novel in this book. The hardships of a wandering life were no hardships to Mrs. Stevenson. Like Stevenson, she loved wild places and adventurous people, brown, yellow or black. She would have stayed on in Samoa after his death but that it cut her off from her children, Lloyd Osbourne and Mrs. Salisbury Field. She thought Mexico, with the relics of its vanished civilization and the savage legends of its conquistadores, far more romantic than any place in Europe and she remained to the end devoted to her California.

As the Spirits Say.

The Englishman who conceals his identity under the pen name of "A King's Counsel" has added another volume to the collection of messages from the spirit world contained in "I Heard a Voice," which E. P. Dutton & Co. published last year. He has two young daughters who, it is said, have developed mediumistic faculties of a high order and it was through them that the messages narrated in "I Heard a Voice" were received. They have been the recipients also of all the messages in "A King's Counsel."



PORTRAIT of Sergeant Harry J. Adams, from "Soldiers All," a book of sketches by Joseph Cummings Chase, published by George H. Doran Company. Sergeant Adams is credited with the capture of more Germans than any other one American, 375 in all. The sketch is copyrighted by Joseph Cummings Chase

Torchy in the War

Mr. Sewell Ford's Veteran Hero Reappears in Series of Diverting Tales

SEWELL FORD seems to be an intellectually honest humorist, if that is not an anomaly. In the foreword to "Torchy & Vee" (Glode), the seventh volume of his Torchy stories, he explains that Torchy never got nearer the front than Bridgeport, Conn., because where Mr. Ford could not go he refused to send another. Torchy served during the war as a lieutenant in the Ordnance Department and his adventures with red tape, professional red-blooded Americans and "Reds" generally are far more entertaining than any overseas trip he might have made.

Torchy, who is a connecting literary link between Chimble McFadden and Ring Lardner's husher, is a trifle too painfully breezy and slangy to be entirely human. Sometimes he is compelled to remark on the Swiss navy and the humors of spilling soup, which is no way for Mr. Ford to treat a hero who has served him so long and so profitably. However, there is a genial atmosphere about the book, and some of the personages are quite genuine. The soldiers on leave who are delighted to do a fatiguing job in spare time for Lieutenant Torchy are, of course, impossible; but "near" Lieutenant Hartley, who reveals in wearing his uniform long after

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he is out of service and who, never having been further from New York than Camp Mills, longs for a continuation of the military régime, is a capital sketch. It is pleasant to record that he was brought back to civilian modes of thinking by a group of ex-doughboys headed by one "Beans," a physical humorist who would have made a splendid editor for a college comic.

The seventeen short tales in "Torchy & Vee" are uneven in merit and all of them are slight. But the book is thoroughly readable, and admirers of Mr. Ford's previous work will be glad to know that he has succeeded in making his latest effort just as diverting as his previous stories.

Historical Romance

Swashbuckling Tale of the Middle Ages

"LUCA SARTO," by Charles S. Brooks (Century) is a very workmanlike example of the historical novel. On a substantial ground of historical events is built a swift story of adventure and intrigue. Although the romance concerns itself with dynasties, with kings and popes and princes, there is painted around it an amusing and interesting picture of the motley life of Paris in the reign of the crafty King Louis XI.

The hero is, in the immemorial fashion of such heroes, a swaggering, roistering, vain, generous fellow—a Roman gentleman, who finds the air of Italy unhealthy for him when he finds that in defending his friend in a street brawl he has killed one of the noble Orsini. He travels on to Paris, and there by the accident of a storm, which forces a noble French girl to take refuge in his house for an hour, he finds himself in the center of a plot in which are conjured all the schemes by which the English houses of Lancaster and York, the French houses of Valois, Burgundy and Bourbon, the Italian Orsini and the cardinals of Rome struggled for power.

The sinister and malignant Louis XI dominates the book and makes a very satisfactory figure of a villain. There are hairbreadth escapes, fights in narrow passageways, villainy confounded and virtue rewarded—in fact, all the long disused paraphernalia of historical romance, refurbished and set in motion again with excellent results.

An Artist and an Island

Rockwell Kent's Book Is, as He Calls It, a "Journal of Quiet Adventure"

By T. R. Ybana

SUMMER before last Rockwell Kent, artist, did what all artists must yearn to do at least once in their lives. He cut himself loose from the metropolis where he lived, which in his case was New York, left far behind him cares and indifferent public and hostile critics and, with his little son, journeyed to Alaska and from the Alaskan mainland to a remote place called Fox Island.

There the artist and his son found an old Swede, who was leading a hermit's life on the island. Unlike most hermits, the Swede was a sociable chap and readily fell in with the Kents' plan to spend the winter on the island. The old Swede led them to a disused shack, the Kents went back to the mainland for provisions, and soon the strange colony of three was harmoniously installed on the islet, ready to face the Alaskan winter, far from civilization and Washington Square.

Of that winter Kent tells in "Wilderness" (Putnam's); he tells of it both in words and in pictures, which he has interspersed in plenty through his pages. The book is, as he calls it in his title, "a journal of quiet adventure." There are no thrilling escapes or anything of the sort; just the life from day to day amid the loneliness of the northern wastes, the howling of storms about the shack, the elaborate games solemnly played at by young Kent, the ruggedness and honesty of old Olson the Swede. Simple matters like the death of a magpie become momentous in a narrative like this; and there is a word of thrill in Olson's entry in his quaintly spelled diary, apropos of a day when the weather left much to be desired: "Raining like hell."

Olson is a delight. The artist and his little son, suddenly dropped in on the old Swede's hermit life, cause him to swell all up with pride. Over on the mainland the Philistines twist him about the Kents—why, they ask, should

amusing little satire on a type of man not uncommon in Alaska: "Once a miner died and presently found his way to the gates of heaven. 'What do you want?' said St. Peter. 'To come in, of course.' 'What sort of man are you?' 'I'm a miner.' 'Well,' said St. Peter, 'we've never had any one of that kind here before, so I suppose you might as well come in.'"

"But the miner, once within the gates, fell to tearing up the golden streets of heaven, digging ditches and tunnels all over the place and making a frightful mess of it all. At last a second miner presented himself at the gates.

"Not on your life," said St. Peter. 'We have one miner here and we only wish we knew some way to get rid of him. He's tearing up the whole place.' 'Only let me in,' said the second miner, 'and I'll promise to get rid of that fellow for you.' So St. Peter admitted him.

"This second miner easily found the other, who was hard at work amid a shower of flying earth. Going up to him he cried in an undertone: 'Partner! They've struck gold in hell!'

"The miner dropped his work and sprang toward the gates. 'Peter, Peter! Open, open! Let me out of heaven, I'm off to hell!'

When it comes to the pictures which Mr. Kent has filled his book, the present reviewer goes on strike. He is not an art critic. There are persons unkind enough to whisper to him that he can go right ahead with a clear conscience and criticize Mr. Kent's work. But he refuses. All he knows is that they resemble the work of William Blake. Why didn't this reviewer drink more tea at artist studios in bygone wasted years? Art is Oolong and time is fleeting. Why didn't he remember that and qualify himself years ago for writing a high-brow review of "Rockwell Kent's work in Blake and white?" But he didn't.

anybody wish to live on such a God-forsaken spot as Fox Island? Olson retorts: "You damned fools, you don't understand an artist at all. Do you suppose Shakespeare wrote his plays with a silly crowd of men and women hanging around him? No, sir, an artist has to be left alone."

Rockwell Kent, the artist, thrives on the novel mode of life. He cooks delicacies, prepares elaborate menus for little feasts. He gives to the world the recipe for one of these delicacies on the solemn condition that it be called "Fox Island Corn Soufflé" wherever it may be used.

He likes Olson and the natives of the mainland.

"It's truly a satisfaction," he says, "to be in a country where men are alert enough to take no offense at Shakespearian wit, where enterprise is so common a virtue that it arouses no suspicion, and where it is the rule to mind your own business."

In the Alaskan atmosphere he goes at his work with the vigor of a new youth. All the little details of his life as an islander suggest subjects; even while doing the daily chores he can work.

"In the midst of letter writing I stop to note down a dramatic cloud effect. If I'm out of doors busy with the saw or axe I jump at once to my paints when an idea comes. It's a fine life and more and more I realize that, for me at least, such isolation—not from my friends but from the unfriendly world—is the only right life for me."

The artist also finds time for this

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