Though Mr. Stevenson's prose volumes are more than twelve in number, and though he had been thought of essentially as a prose writer, the ivory shoulder of the lyre has peeped out now and then. I do not refer to his early collections of verse, to Not I, and Other Poems, to Moral Emblems, and to The Graver and the Pen. (I mention these scarce publications of the Davos press in the hope of rousing wicked passions in the breasts of other collectors, since my own set of them is complete.) These volumes were decidedly occult. A man might build upon them a reputation as a sage, but hardly as a poet. Their stern morality came well from one whose mother's milk has been the 'Shorter Catechism'; they are books which no one can read and not be the better for; but as mere verse, they leave something to be desired. Non ragionam di lor, ma guarda, if you happen to be lucky enough to possess them, e passa. Where the careful reader has perceived that Mr. Stevenson was likely to become openly a poet has been in snippets of verse published here and there in periodicals, and of a quality too good to be neglected. Nevertheless, the publication of A Child's Garden of Verses was something of a surprise, and perhaps the new book of grown-up poems, Underwoods is more surprising still. There is no doubt about it any longer. Mr. Stevenson is a candidate for the bays.

The Child's Garden of Verses has now been published long enough to enable us to make a calm consideration of its merits. When it was fresh, opinion was divided, as it always is about a new strong thing, between those who, in Mr. Longfellow's phrase about the little girl, think it very, very good, and those who think it is horrid. After reading the new book, the Underwoods, we come back to A Child's Garden with a clearer sense of the writer's intention, and a wider experience of his poetical outlook upon life. The later book helps us to comprehend the former; there is the same sincerity, the same buoyant simplicity, the same curiously candid and confidential attitude of mind. If any one doubted that Mr. Stevenson was putting his own childish memories into verse in the first book, all doubt must cease in reading the second book, where the experiences, although those of an adult, have exactly the same convincing air of candour. The first thing which struck the reader of A Child's Garden was the extraordinary clearness and precision with which the immature fancies of eager childhood were reproduced in it. People whose own childish memories had become very vague, and whose recollections of their games and dreams were hazy in the extreme, asked themselves how far this poet's visions were inspired by real memory and how far by invention. The new book sets that question at rest. ...

We now perceive that it is not invention, but memory of an extraordinarily vivid kind, patiently directed to little things, and charged with imagination; and we turn back with increased interest to A Child's Garden, assured that it gives us a unique thing, a transcript of that child-mind which we have all possessed and enjoyed, but of which no one, except Mr. Stevenson, seems to have carried away a photograph. Long ago, in one of the very earliest, if I remember right, of those essays by R. L. S. for which we used so eagerly to watch the 'Cornhill Magazine' in Mr. Leslie Stephen's time, in the paper called Child['s] Play, this retention of what is wiped off from the memories of the rest of us was clearly displayed. Out of this rarely suggestive essay I will quote a few lines, which might have been printed as an introduction to A Child's Garden:

"In the child's world of dim sensation, play is all in all. "Making believe" is the gist of his whole life, and he cannot so much as take a walk except in character. I could not learn my alphabet without some suitable mise-en-scène, and had to act a business-man in an office before I could sit down to my book. ... I remember, as though it were yesterday, the expansion of spirit, the dignity and self-reliance, that came with a pair of mustachios in burnt cork, even when there was none to see. Children are even content to forego what we call the realities, and prefer the shadow to the substance. When they might be speaking intelligently together, they chatter gibberish by the hour, and are quite happy because they are making believe to speak French.

Probably all will admit the truth of this statement of infant fancy, when it is presented to them in this way. But how many of us, in perfect sincerity, not relying upon legends of the nursery, not refreshed by the study of our own children's 'make-believe,' can say that we clearly
puzzle out each of the intimate addresses to his private friends with complete satisfaction.

to the public, and there must be hundreds of his admirers who will not miss one word of 'Tom Jones' over 'Peregrine Pickle.' There is no doubt that Mr. Smollett set our teeth on edge directly they start upon a career of confidential expansion; and this has nothing to do with any preference for

to whom we have scarcely patience to listen if they want to tell us that we have inherited a fortune, so it is in literature. Except that little class of

laid down in a matter which is one of individual sympathy. The discussion whether a writer may speak of himself or no is utterly vain until we

have extracted so much of the character of the man himself as he gives us in these one hundred and twenty pages.

everyday life of an author whose impersonal writings have given them so much and so varied pleasure. Not a dozen ordinary interviewers could

It would be easy, by multiplying examples, to drive home my contention that only two out of the very numerous authors who have written

It was explained to me one hapless day that the parables were of a nature to

instructing them; but only two, Mrs. Ewing in prose, and Mr. Stevenson in verse, have sat down with them without disturbing their fancies, and have looked into the world of 'make-believe' with the children's own eyes. If Victor Hugo should visit the nursery, every head of hair ought to be brushed, every pinafore be clean, and nurse must certainly be present, as well as mamma. But Mrs. Ewing or Mr. Stevenson might lead a long romp in the attic when nurse was out shopping, and not a child in the house should know that a grown-up person had been there. ...
The present writer is one of those who are most under the spell. For me Mr. Stevenson may speak for ever, and chronicle at full length all his uncles and his cousins and his nurses. But I think if it were my privilege to serve him in the capacity of Molière's old woman, or to be what a friend of mine would call his 'foolometer,' I should pluck up courage to represent to him that this thing can be overdone. I openly avow myself an enthusiast, yet even I shrink before the confidential character of the prose inscription to Underwoods. This volume is dedicated, if you please, to eleven physicians, and it is strange that one so all compact of humour as Mr. Stevenson should have noticed how funny it is to think of an author seated affably in an armchair, simultaneously summoning by name eleven physicians to take a few words of praise each, and a copy of his little book.

The objective side of Mr. Stevenson's mind is very rich and full, and he has no need to retire too obstinately upon the subjective. Yet I know not than anything he has written in verse is more worthily dignified than the following little personal fragment, in which he refers, of course, to the grandfather who died a few weeks before his birth, and to the father whom he had just conducted to the grave, both heroic builders of lighthouses:

Say not of me that weakly I declined
The labours of my sires, and fled the sea,
The towers we founded and the lamps we lit,
To play at home with paper like a child.
But rather say: In the afternoon of time
A strenuous family dusted from its hands
The sand of granite, and beholding far
Along the sounding coast its pyramids
And tall memorials catch the dying sun,
Smiled well content, and to this childish task
Around the fire addressed its evening hours.
[xxxviii]

This is a particularly happy specimen of Mr. Stevenson's blank verse, in which metre, as a rule, he does not show to advantage. It is not that his verses are ever lame or faulty, for in the technical portion of the art he seldom fails, but that his rhymeless iambics remind the ear too much now of Tennyson, now of Keats. He is, on the contrary, exceedingly happy and very much himself in that metre of eight or seven syllables, with couplet-rhymes, which served so well the first poets who broke away from heroic verse, such as Swift and Lady Winchilsea, Green and Dyer. If he must be affiliated to any school of poets it is to these, who hold the first outworks between the old classical camp and the invacing army of romance, to whom I should ally him. Martial is with those octosyllabists of Queen Anne, and to Martial might well have been assigned, had they been in old Latin, the delicately homely lines, 'To a Gardener.' How felicitous is this quatrains about the onion--

Let first the onion flourish there,
Rose among roots, the maiden fair,
Wine-scented and poetic soul
Of the capacious salad-bowl.

Or this, in more irregular measure, and enfolding a loftier fancy--

Sing clearer, Muse, or evermore be still,
Sing truer, or no longer sing!
No more the voice of melancholy Jacques
To make a weeping echo in the hill;
But as the boy, the pirate of the spring,
From the green elm a living linnet takes,
One natural verse recapture--then be still.
[xxxi]

It would be arrogant in the extreme to decide whether or no Mr. R. L. Stevenson's poems will be read in the future. They are, however, so full of character, so redolent of his own fascinating temperament, that it is not too bold to suppose that so long as his prose is appreciated those who love that will turn to this. There have been prose writers whose verse has not lacked accomplishment or merit, but has been so far from interpreting their prose that it rather disturbed its effect and weakened its influence. Cowley is an example of this, whose ingenious and dryly intellectual poetry positively terrified the reader away from his eminently suave and human essays. Neither of Mr. Stevenson's volumes of poetry will thus disturb his prose. Opinions may be divided as to their positive value, but no one will doubt that the same characteristics are displayed in the poems, the same suspicion of 'the abhorred pedantic sanhedrim,' the same fulness of life and tenderness of hope, the same bright felicity of epithet as in the essays and romances. The belief, however, may be expressed without fear of contradiction that Mr. Stevenson's fame will rest mainly upon his verse and not upon his prose, only in that dim future when Mr. Matthew Arnold's prophecy shall be fulfilled and Shelley's letters shall be preferred to his lyrical poems. It is saying a great deal to acknowledge that the author of 'Kidnapped' is

This volume is dedicated, if you please, to eleven physicians, and it is strange that one so all compact of humour as Mr. Stevenson should have noticed how funny it is to think of an author seated affably in an armchair, simultaneously summoning by name eleven physicians to take a few words of praise each, and a copy of his little book.
scarcely less readable in verse than he is in prose.

Notes
1. Dante, 'Inferno', iii, 51: Speak not of them, but look and pass.
2. Juliana Horatia Ewing (1841-85), daughter of Mrs Gatty (see n. 3 below), was author of 'The Brownies and Other Tales' (1870), 'Jackanapes' (1883), 'Daddy Darwin's Dovecote' (1884), etc. Most of her work first appeared in 'Aunt Judy's Magazine', edited by Mrs Gatty from 1866 to 1885.
3. Mrs Margaret Gatty (1809-73); her 'Parables of Nature' appeared in five volumes from 1855 to 1871.

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Robert Louis Stevenson (13 November 1850 – 3 December 1894) was a Scottish novelist and travel writer, most noted for Treasure Island, Kidnapped, Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and A Child’s Garden of Verses. Born and educated in Edinburgh, Stevenson suffered from serious bronchial trouble for much of his life, but continued to write prolifically and travel widely in defiance of his poor health. As a young man, he mixed in London literary circles, receiving encouragement from Andrew Lang. Robert Louis Stevenson is best known as the author of the children’s classic Treasure Island, and the adult horror story, The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. Both of these novels have curious origins. A map of an imaginary island gave Stevenson the idea for the first story, and a nightmare supplied the premise of the second. Throwing the first manuscript into the fire, he rewrote the tale as an allegory in another three days, and then polished it over six weeks. Although he would later claim that it was the worst thing he ever wrote, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde sold forty thousand copies in Britain during the first six months, and brought Stevenson more attention than he had previously ever known.