

THE MAN WHO SOLD HIMSELF

By GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

STEVENSON was still alive when John Paul began to write essays, stories, and poems and dramas. The master sat at the big desk facing the big window, to watch, to correct, to do with the matter. He was not the master of earthy things, where the master of the spirit, that was John Paul was of the spirit. That was the greatest fighter of the century had already looked into the world from his sick room. And it was well known when the doctors gave him a week to live he was ready to begin again.

John Paul, being of a prodigiously tough body and extraordinary courage, could not hope to emulate his master's grim struggle with disease, but the lesson, after all, was no richer for the sick than for the healthy. It is as hard to sit still and compose what you want to play, as to compose what you want to play when you are half blind with pain and weakness.

John Paul was 14 years old when he received the first lesson. It was never his ambition to copy Stevenson's style, but by a steady application of Stevenson's methods and courage to arrive at a style of his own. To substitute matter he barely cast a thought in those early days of his apprenticeship. It was style that he was after, even more than the matter. He was after the co-ordination of parts. He would swallow a book as completely and almost as quickly as you may swallow an application of Stevenson's methods and courage to arrive at a style of his own.

I do not wish to advance that John Paul's imitation possessed more than a superficial quality of his original. They were exercises, like the finger work which your virtuoso must go through with in his teens if ever he is to make his instrument sing like a bird or roar like a storm.

John Paul was never going to be a virtuoso of letters, a little bird, not of the singing kind, often whispered of as much in the past as in the present. It might be that only the most carefully chosen in the highest places would know the difference, or even that Time himself, with his unerring eye, would be the first to find him out. "I will do," wrote John Paul in his teens, "the very best that is in me to do. Who cares if the monument that I shall erect tumbles? No! For I shall have done a man's work in a world that is often clamorously contented with less."

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But the dean was not obliged—at first. Indeed, certain dangerous ideas flashed from his eyes, when, on returning to his modest house, he found his neat front hall completely disordered by the presence of three flour barrels, filled to the brim with manuscript. Paul's neat, flexible hand. But the dean ran out of fuel; the fire died in his eyes. He showed his teeth, he smiled, and then he laughed a great roaring laugh, and, dining that night with the eminent dean of the law school, he told the story and the story spread.

In his professors John Paul detected a new and gratifying twinkle of approval.

One day crossing the campus he came face to face with the president, and the professor of comparative history. This one, who knew John Paul, whispered that winter, and, in order to salute the great man, John Paul bowed and touched his forehead with his hand, glancing sideways "with goat's eyes askance" the while.

The president had eyebrows like Thrasher's nests. Under them a pair of reddish-brown eyes twinkled amazingly. Two eyes twinkled, and then suddenly, to John Paul's horror, for a fleeting instant, but one. The president had winked at him. After that everybody winked. And word was passed to the faculty to some such effect as this:

"Witness for conduct unbecoming a gentleman (which God forbid) let John Paul alone."

He tasted popularity. And at first it perplexed him. "It's very curious," thought he; "here I am no different from them. I was a month ago, but now everybody scrapes acquaintance, and laughs when I speak. They pass me for a humorist. I think I am a little fellow, and all because I sent a few barrels of selected manuscripts to an old-fashioned gentleman with unusually sound teeth."

However, John Paul's popularity came, it seems that he had the faculty to hold it, for it stayed. Very many thought it was his plan at this time to practice writing and to search for the truth until he was 20. He did not wish to publish a line until he was reasonably sure of his matter and his manner. His father was dead and his mother did not believe in young men working in offices unless they had to. She trusted John Paul and trusted that he knew what was best for himself. So, when the sons of other well-to-do mothers were graduated and went downtown and learned to chatter about stocks and bonds and nothing better, and some things worse for all the rest of their lives, she saw with equanimity her own son depart on a series of travels which he thought would be good for him and knowledgeable.

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At the Country Club John Paul found friends, borrowed flannels and made one of a four at tennis. It was proposed that there be corner bets of \$10 on each set. "What you like," said John Paul, aloud. "But himself he said, 'If we lose the first set I can always explain it away.'"

But he and his partner won that set (a very close one), and the next and the next, and when John Paul went up to shower and change he was short \$10, and the world seemed to him an encouraging and kindly place.

That night he risked his little all in a poker game, and won a hundred and ninety odd dollars. And thereafter for two years (it was very hard for him to sell stories at first) he supported himself by betting and playing games of chance and skill.

Then a curious thing happened. He fell passionately and despairingly in love, and his luck left him. But his stories were beginning to sell enough to support life and he withdrew gradually and forever from the green baize and the betting ring. And was neither better, I think, for his experiences nor worse; only a little more knowing.

CONTINUED TOMORROW.

He would swallow a book.

Very well of him in the little world under the great elms, and there were some who loved him and whom he loved back.

While John Paul was at college he lost Stevenson and found Kipling. The pilgrimage which he had planned to make to Stevenson's home in the South Seas, was off, and he went through the first great grief of his life. His comfort was certain plain tales from the Indian Hills, printed in double columns, and without covers. He was sitting unconfortably when he opened the book and began to read; he had not moved when he began to read some of the stories for the second time.

He was never in doubt as to "their greatness." He made his first trial, of literary judgment and knew that it was sound as a bell. Till that day he had never seen Kipling's name. In all his after days it was as familiar to him as his own, a tall, an inspiration, a classic. Here was a man who used old English in the newest and most brilliant ways. Even Stevenson sent his messages by stage coach, but the telegraph, telegraphed, telephoned, cabled, heliographed and rocketed. Better than this, his were the messages of things as they are; spoke the wolf in the jungle what was in his heart and the serpent down under the sea; the Christian and the pagan each what was truest and humanest in himself without gloss or convention. And well that there was some poetry thrown into the bargain, for excepting for "Christabel" and the "Ancient Mariner" and some of Poe there had never been any poetry in John Paul's life before.

For the first time he had some inkling of the sort of thing he would one day wish to write himself, namely, the truth about things, ugly or beautiful, but the truth. "You must," he thought, "write ugly for the sake of ugliness, or beautiful for its sake, but the two in their just mixture as the truth itself has them."

He began from that period to look down on fiction which had any purpose but that of truth-telling; or which were clumsily written. The milk and sugar school of novels, and novels with an idea of reforming something or other he held in special contempt. "Only tell the

truth," he thought; "only let people know themselves and other people, and all the reforms which the world needs will transpire automatically." The longer he lived the surer he became that the truth is what the world most needs; the unvarnished truth, clearly and