

# TREASURE ISLAND

by Robert Louis Stevenson

PRESTWICK HOUSE LITERARY TOUCHSTONE CLASSICS



UNABRIDGED WITH GLOSSARY AND NOTES

# TREASURE ISLAND



Robert Louis Stevenson



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# TREASURE ISLAND

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

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# Notes

What is a literary classic and why are these classic works important to the world?

A literary classic is a work of the highest excellence that has something important to say about life and/or the human condition and says it with great artistry. A classic, through its enduring presence, has withstood the test of time and is not bound by time, place, or customs. It speaks to us today as forcefully as it spoke to people one hundred or more years ago, and as forcefully as it will speak to people of future generations. For this reason, a classic is said to have universality.

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in November 1850 in Edinburgh, Scotland. His father was an engineer, and his mother was from a family of lawyers and ministers. Stevenson was a good student and enrolled in Edinburgh University's engineering department. He had, however, no real desire to join his father's engineering firm. Eventually, father and son reached a compromise, and it was decided that Stevenson would study law. He did eventually pass the bar exam, but he never practiced.

Stevenson's dissatisfaction with his father's uninspired aspirations was a sign of his disillusionment with the ideals of Victorian society. While the entire nation seemed to consider hard work its highest virtue, the young Stevenson dreamed of escape from engineering and law, from Scotland, and from Victorian responsibility in general. Such a desire to escape is evident in works like *Treasure Island*.

This desire for escape found expression in Stevenson's life as well. In 1876, on one of his visits to France, Stevenson met an American woman named Fanny Van de Grift Osbourne. She was more than ten years older than Stevenson, married, and had two small children. Stevenson fell deeply in love with Osbourne and followed her to California where she divorced her husband, freeing herself to marry Stevenson.



# Pointers

READING POINTERS

## Reading Pointers for Sharper Insights

Robert Louis Stevenson struggled to find a balance between freedom and responsibility. He emphasizes this conflict in *Treasure Island* in the disparity between respectful gentlemen like Livesey and Trelawney and the carefree pirates. Probably because of Stevenson's own ambivalence toward both duty and art, his works never clearly separate these opposing forces. The good and the bad are always bound to one another. In *Treasure Island*, for example, the dastardly pirate Long John Silver remarks how similar he is to the novel's upstanding young hero, Jim Hawkins. And Long John Silver, despite his deceit and treachery, is genuinely fond of Jim and treats him well.

In addition to the exploration of this conflict, the reader will want to pay special attention to the following themes and motifs developed throughout the book:

**Jim's search for a hero or role model.** A major aspect of this book is Jim Hawkins' growing up or "coming of age." Given everything he experiences in the story (saving lives, outwitting pirates, etc.), he emerges a man at the end of the novel. Yet, throughout the course of the story, he has had to "try on" various role models for the type of man he is going to become, including his father, Dr. Livesey, Squire Trelawney, and Long John Silver himself.

**The pointlessness of greed and materialistic longing.** The *only* motivation for every character in the book to seek the treasure is greed. While Livesey, Trelawney, etc., may be more honorable in their *actions*, their *motivation* is exactly the same as the pirates'. Yet this desire for riches does not seem to lead to anyone's complete fulfillment. The mutinied pirates are left on the island. Ben, who first "owned" the treasure, is a madman. Even Jim, the undoubted hero of the story, finishes his tale talking about his nightmares, not his wealth and satisfaction.



PART I  
THE OLD BUCCANEER

C H A P T E R I

THE OLD SEA-DOG AT THE “ADMIRAL BENBOW”

SQUIRE TRELAWNEY, Doctor Livesey, and the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17—, and go back to the time when my father kept the “Admiral Benbow” inn, and the brown old seaman, with the sabre-cut,<sup>†</sup> first took up his lodging under our roof.

I remember him as if it were yesterday, as he came plodding to the inn door, his sea-chest following behind him in a hand-barrow;<sup>†</sup> a tall, strong, heavy, nutbrown man; his tarry pig-tail falling over the shoulders of his soiled blue coat; his hands ragged and scarred, with black, broken nails, and the sabre-cut across one cheek, a dirty, livid white. I remember him looking round the cove and whistling to himself as he did so, and then breaking out in that old sea-song that he sung so often afterwards:

“Fifteen men on the dead man’s chest—  
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!”

<sup>†</sup>Terms marked in the text with (†) can be looked up in the Glossary for additional information.



in the high, old tottering voice that seemed to have been tuned and broken at the capstan bars.† Then he rapped on the door with a bit of stick like a handspike that he carried, and when my father appeared, called roughly for a glass of rum. This, when it was brought to him, he drank slowly, like a connoisseur, lingering on the taste, and still looking about him at the cliffs and up at our signboard.

“This is a handy cove,” said he, at length; “and a pleasant sittiated grog<sup>†</sup>-shop. Much company, mate?”

My father told him no, very little company, the more was the pity.

“Well, then,” said he, “this is the berth for me. Here you, matey,” he cried to the man who trundled the barrow; “bring up alongside and help up my chest. I’ll stay here a bit,” he continued. “I’m a plain man; rum and bacon and eggs is what I want, and that head up there for to watch ships off. What you mought call me? You mought call me captain. Oh, I see what you’re at—there;” and he threw down three or four gold pieces on the threshold. “You can tell me when I’ve worked through that,” said he, looking as fierce as a commander.

And, indeed, bad as his clothes were, and coarsely as he spoke, he had none of the appearance of a man who sailed before the mast,† but seemed like a mate or skipper, accustomed to be obeyed or to strike. The man who came with the barrow told us the mail had set him down the morning before at the “Royal George”; that he had inquired what inns there were along the coast, and hearing ours well spoken of, I suppose, and described as lonely, had chosen it from the others for his place of residence. And that was all we could learn of our guest.

He was a very silent man by custom. All day he hung round the cove, or upon the cliffs, with a brass telescope; all evening he sat in a corner of the parlor next the fire, and drank rum and water very strong. Mostly he would not speak when spoken to; only look up sudden and fierce, and blow through his nose like a fog-horn; and we and the people who came about our house soon learned to let him be. Every day, when he came back from his stroll, he would ask if any seafaring men had gone by along the road. At first we thought it was the want of company of his own kind that made him ask this question; but at last we began to see he was desirous to avoid them. When a seaman did put up at the “Admiral Benbow” (as now and then some did, making by the coast road for Bristol), he would look in at him through the curtained door before he entered the parlor; and he was always sure to be as silent as a mouse when any such was present. For me, at least, there was no secret about the matter; for I was, in a way, a sharer in his alarms.

He had taken me aside one day and promised me a silver fourpenny on

the first of every month if I would only keep my "weather eye open for a seafaring man with one leg," and let him know the moment he appeared. Often enough, when the first of the month came round, and I applied to him for my wage, he would only blow through his nose at me, and stare me down, but before the week was out he was sure to think better of it, bring me my fourpenny piece, and repeat his orders to look out for "the seafaring man with one leg."

How that personage haunted my dreams, I need scarcely tell you. On stormy nights, when the wind shook the four corners of the house, and the surf roared along the cove and up the cliffs, I would see him in a thousand forms, and with a thousand diabolical expressions. Now the leg would be cut off at the knee, now at the hip; now he was a monstrous kind of a creature who had never had but the one leg, and that in the middle of his body. To see him leap and run and pursue me over hedge and ditch, was the worst of nightmares. And altogether I paid pretty dear for my monthly fourpenny piece, in the shape of these abominable fancies.

But though I was so terrified by the idea of the seafaring man with one leg, I was far less afraid of the captain himself than anybody else who knew him. There were nights when he took a deal more rum and water than his head would carry; and then he would sometimes sit and sing his wicked, old, wild sea-songs, minding nobody; but sometimes he would call for glasses round, and force all the trembling company to listen to his stories or bear a chorus to his singing. Often I have heard the house shaking with "Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum," all the neighbors joining in for dear life, with the fear of death upon them, and each singing louder than the other to avoid remark. For in these fits he was the most overriding companion ever known; he would slap his hand on the table for silence all round; he would fly up in a passion of anger at a question, or sometimes because none was put, and so he judged the company was not following his story. Nor would he allow anyone to leave the inn till he had drunk himself sleepy and reeled off to bed.

His stories were what frightened people worst of all. Dreadful stories they were;—about hanging, and walking the plank,<sup>†</sup> and storms at sea, and the Dry Tortugas,<sup>†</sup> and wild deeds and places on the Spanish Main.<sup>†</sup> By his own account, he must have lived his life among some of the wickedest men that God ever allowed upon the sea; and the language in which he told these stories shocked our plain country people almost as much as the crimes that he described. My father was always saying the inn would be ruined, for people would soon cease coming there to be tyrannized over and put down, and sent shivering to their beds; but I really believe his presence did us good. People were frightened at the time, but on looking back

they rather liked it; it was a fine excitement in a quiet country life; and there was even a party of the younger men who pretended to admire him, calling him a "true sea-dog," and a "real old salt,"<sup>†</sup> and such like names, and saying there was the sort of man that made England terrible at sea.

In one way, indeed, he bade fair to ruin us; for he kept on staying week after week, and at last month after month, so that all the money had been long exhausted, and still my father never plucked up the heart to insist on having more. If ever he mentioned it, the captain blew through his nose so loudly that you might say he roared, and stared my poor father out of the room. I have seen him wringing his hands after such a rebuff, and I am sure the annoyance and the terror he lived in must have greatly hastened his early and unhappy death.

All the time he lived with us the captain made no change whatever in his dress but to buy some stockings from a hawker.<sup>†</sup> One of the cocks<sup>†</sup> of his hat having fallen down, he let it hang from that day forth, though it was a great annoyance when it blew. I remember the appearance of his coat, which he patched himself upstairs in his room, and which, before the end, was nothing but patches. He never wrote or received a letter, and he never spoke with any but the neighbors, and with these, for the most part, only when drunk on rum. The great sea-chest none of us had ever seen open.

He was only once crossed, and that was towards the end, when my poor father was far gone in a decline that took him off. Doctor Livesey came late one afternoon to see the patient, took a bit of dinner from my mother, and went into the parlor to smoke a pipe until his horse should come down from the hamlet, for we had no stabling at the old "Benbow." I followed him in, and I remember observing the contrast the neat, bright doctor, with his powder as white as snow, and his bright, black eyes and pleasant manners, made with the coltish country folk, and above all, with that filthy, heavy, bleared scarecrow of a pirate of ours, sitting far gone in rum, with his arms on the table. Suddenly he—the captain, that is—began to pipe up his eternal song:

"Fifteen men on the dead man's chest—  
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!  
Drink and the devil had done for the rest—  
Yo-ho-ho and a bottle of rum!"

At first I had supposed "the dead man's chest" to be that identical big box of his upstairs in the front room, and the thought had been mingled in my nightmares with that of the one-legged seafaring man. But by this time we had all long ceased to pay any particular notice to the song; it was new,

## GLOSSARY

### Part I: The Old Buccaneer

#### Chapter I: The Old Sea-dog at the “Admiral Benbow”

**sabre-cut** – A sabre is a sword with a curved edge. This description indicates that the man has a large, prominent scar.

a **hand-barrow** – a device made for carrying heavy objects, like chests, with poles positioned at either end for carrying; similar to a wheelbarrow

**capstan** – a large cylinder around which heavy cables are wound

**grog** – a strong liquor, usually rum

**sailed before the mast** – [slang] sailed on a ship

**walking the plank** – a punishment given to anyone who disobeyed the captain; it involved walking off a board sticking out from the ship over the ocean and being abandoned in the sea.

**Dry Tortugas** – islands off of the southern coast of Florida named by the explorer Juan Ponce de León; *Tortuga* is the Spanish word for *turtle*; the islands were named because of turtles that would rest there.

**Spanish Main** – an area off the coast of South America that extended from the Isthmus of Panama to the Orinoco River

“**‘true sea-dog’ and a ‘real old salt’**” – [slang] an experienced sailor

**hawker** – a businessman who sells his goods by calling out to passersby

**cocks** – the turned up angles of a hat brim

#### Chapter II: Black Dog Appears and Disappears

**tallow** – the color of wax; at the time the story was written, candles, soap, and lubricants were made from animal fats. The man described would, therefore, be white and very pale.

“**He was a pale...he wore a cutlass**” – This description of Black Dog takes note of his deformity. Both the captain and Black Dog are pirates, and Stevenson chooses to give them physical deformities to distinguish them from honest sailors.

a **smack of the sea** – [slang] seemed as if he had been a sailor

**fouled the tap** – ruined the tap on a barrel of ale

**his death-hurt** – a fatal wound

#### Chapter III: The Black Spot

**swabs** – a derogatory name for those men who were in charge of cleaning or “swabbing” the decks of ships; the speaker is insulting all doctors.

**yellow jack** – [slang] yellow fever

**lee** – the sheltered side of an island: *leeward*, away from the direction of a prevailing wind; the opposite would be *windward*, toward the direction of the wind. The terms *leeward* and *windward* are used in sailing.

## VOCABULARY

### To the Hesitating Purchaser

maroons – people who have been abandoned on an island

schooners – types of sailing vessels

### Part I: The Old Buccaneer

#### Chapter I: The Old Sea-dog at the “Admiral Benbow”

abominable – horrible, cursed

assizes – civil or criminal court cases

barrow – a wheelbarrow

bearings – locations

berth – a bed on a ship

clasp-knife – a pocketknife

coltish – lively, frisky

connoisseur – an expert, usually with regard to food or drink

dear – costly

diabolical – devilish, wicked, evil

hamlet – a village, town

handspike – a stick or bar used as a lever

incivility – rudeness, disrespect

livid – pale, ashen

magistrate – a judge

mail – the mail car

mought – [dialect] might

rheumatics – discomfort felt in the muscles or joints; rheumatism

ruffian – a thug, hoodlum

sittyated – [dialect] situated

tarry – black; the color of tar

trundled – moved, transported

tyrannized – dictated, bullied

weather eye – the ability to know what the weather will be

#### Chapter II: Black Dog Appears and Disappears

chine – the backbone, spine

cutlass – a sword with a curved blade

fancy – liking, taste

fawning – flattering

gabbling – mumbling

gales – forceful winds

gallows – a platform used for hanging people

hilt – the handle

hoar-frost – dew that has frozen to form a white coating; white frost