

## Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson 1850-94.

Robert Louis Stevenson wis born in Edinburgh and gaed tae Edinburgh Academy atween 1861 and 1863, but he wis aye nae weel as a bairn and his faimly tuik him abroad for the sake o his health. Efter, he cam back tae Edinburgh and studied Engineerin at Edinburgh University. His faither wis a weel-kent engineer wha biggit lichthooses. Young Robert, hooivver, wisnae happy at the engineerin sae he chynged tae the law and becam an advocate in 1875. He didnae settle at that either and wis aye ettlin tae be a writer. Efter traivellin in France and Belgium, he scribed *Inland Voyage* about a canoe trip and *Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes*. He met Fanny Osborne in France and follaed her tae America whaur he merrit her in 1880. He brocht her hame tae Scotland, but aroon thon time he wis stertin tae suffer fae tuberculosis. In spite o that, he wrocht awa at essays, short stories, travel sketches and novels. In 1889, he gaed tae bide in Samoa, whaur he wis gien the byname o Tusitala (the teller o tales) and spent five happy year there afore he deed in 1894.

### Wirks

*Thrawn Janet* and ithir cuttie stories.

*The Merry Men*

*The New Arabian Nights*

*Treasure Island* (His first big success. Ane o thae buiks awbody suld read.)

*Kidnapped* (Adaptit for theatre, film and TV and aye a guid read.)

*Catriona* (A sequel tae *Kidnapped* wi a bit o love interest and plenty o adventure.)

*The Master of Ballantrae* (Blacker than his earlier buiks and mair o a study in evil.)

*The Strange Case o Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (We are that fu o preconceived notions about this book, wi seein films and comedy sketches and the like, that ye micht think ye ken whit it is about athoot readin it. Nae wey. This is ane ye maun read for yersel. It's nae lang and it's telt fae different pynts o view makkin it aw the mair interestin tae read.)

*The Black Arrow* (Nae ane o his best but still a guid yarn.)

*Weir of Hermiston* (Unfineeshed but mony fowk think it micht hae been his best wirk.)

*Virginibus Puerisque* (A Collection o Essays.)

*Familiar Studies of Men and Books* (A Collection o Essays)

*A Child's Garden of Verses*.

# *Weir of Hermiston*

Available online (printer friendly) at:

[http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/s/stevenson/robert\\_louis/s848wh/index.html](http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/s/stevenson/robert_louis/s848wh/index.html)

Richt handy! Ye can search it for characters, quotes and key wirds. Ye'll be able tae search for any references in thir pages that ye want tae see for yirsel.

## **Characters**

**Adam Weir, The Lord Justice-Clerk, Lord Hermiston**, faither o Archie.

Stevenson said he based this character on Robert McQueen of Braxfield, ane o the judges in late eichteen century Scotland. Like Lord Braxfield, Lord Hermiston haed nae time for the fantoosh customs o refined Edinburgh society. They were baith strang agin the French and agin Republicanism. We can see Hermiston's dislike o the French in sic instances as whan Hermiston referred to a leg of meat that he wisnae pleased wi as a 'Raadical gigot.' Baith Hermiston and Braxfield were fond o their claret and baith haed a pawky sense o humour. Baith were were clivvir men o the Law wha cairried oot their duties on the bench wi muckle abeility and great severity. Lord Hermiston wis cried 'Hanging Hermiston' by the mob as he drave by in his cairriage. Lord Braxfield spak braid Scots and ae accused appearin afore him haed tae ask for an interpreter. On anither occasion, an accused got aff because he wis charged wi stealin shirts and whit he actually stole wis shifts. Braxfield exclaimed wi some justification that the Croon suld hae caed them 'sarks', whilk unisex name wad hae covered baith types o garment. Hermiston, tae, spak Scots on and aff the bench.

Lord Hermiston is in mony weys nae drawn sympathetically in the novel. He is seen as coorse-mannert, forbiddin tae luik at, and seems completely athoot ony shaw o sentiment or sympathy.

On the ither haund, he pit up wi his wife's bad hoosekeepin maist o the time - his wine wis mair important tae him than his vivers - altho whiles he demanded that a bad meal be taen awa and replaced wi bread and cheese. He wis 'a stoical old voluptuary, contented with sound wine and plenty of it'. He wisnae that muckle bathered by his wife's daith, but he shawed a wee bit o pity for her aince she wis deid that he didnae seem tae shaw in life.

He didnae spend muckle time wi Archie as a bairn and haed nae idea whit wey tae speak tae a wee lad, but he was patient eneuch wi him when he couldnae dae difficult Latin and as time gaed by, an affection growed for his son that he culd neither unnerstaun nor express. We get a wee notion o his feelins in the anecdote telt by Dr Gregory in Chaipiter Twa.

Hermiston's interview wi Archie in Chaipiter Twa gies a guid pictur o the auld lawyer. Een here he wis judicial, listenin tae whit Archie haed tae say, albeit wi his 'Hanging Face' on, and mensefu and considert in his sentencin. This is the scene in whilk he is at his maist human. Hoo often haes yer ain faither/mither/teacher endit a tellin aff wi 'And just try to be less of an eediot.'?

*Crackin quote:*

- Ø *Lord Hermiston was course and cruel; and yet the son was aware of a bloomless nobility, an ungracious abnegation of the man's self in the man's office.*

There is guid as weel as bad in awbody. Duality is ane o the themes that Stevenson returns tae mony times, maist obviously in *The Strange Case o Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Whaur else micht ye find duality explored in Scottish Literature?

**Jean Weir (née Rutherford)** Archies's mither.

Mrs Weir is the subjeck o the first chaipiter. She comes fae an auld faimly wi a colourfu past. Her ain faither haed been the foonder o a Hell-Fire Club, ane o the licentious, even Satanic, organisations that some fashionable young men belanged tae at the time. The men o her brainch o Rutherford faimly were aw wild and wicked and cam tae a bad end. The women they merrit were, by contrast, aw peelie-wallie sowls and Jean tuik efter them. A bonnie bairn, she'd got mair dwaibly as she grew up and fowk were fair surprised that she merrit ava. Wi her husband she assumed an air o 'tremulous composure'. She wisnae verra bricht, she wis a waefu hoosekeeper, she wis fair taen up wi releegion, and her son wis the apple o her ee.

When the faimly wis bidin at Hermiston, she culd relax, for Kirstie luikit efter the hoose there and wis richt fond o Jean. There Jean haed time tae shew and read her releegious buiks. Her husband haed telt her she maun hae a walk ilka day and she aye did, whiles takkin Archie wi her. She wad tak him up tae the Deil's Hags and sit wi him on a stane whaur a covenantin weaver wis buried, greetin and talkin til him aboot releegion and the auld days o the Covenanters, in spite o the fact that ane o her ancestors haed rade wi Dalyell's men and haed persecuted and killed Covenanters. She haed howps that her son micht ae day be a meenister. Whan the bairn questioned her aboot the wey his faither's occupation as a judge squared wi her releegious teachin, she wantit the wit tae gie him a reasoned, honest answer, and passed his questions aff wi mair releegious platitudes.

She seemed tae hae some forkennin o her deith. The last nicht o her life she pit aw her effort intae makkin a pair a slippers for her man. He mockit her. Neist day, she set oot for her walk as he ordered, een altho she wis plainly nae weel. She returned apparently fair bathered that her man wisna 'speeritually minded'. Then she deed.

Pynts tae ponder:

- Ø Whit wis the attraction atween Adam Weir and Jean Rutherford. Whit kind o a coortship haed they?
- Ø Whiles, Jean haed problems reconcilin her ain views wi that o her man in sic a wey as no tae be disloyal tae him in front o the bairn. Find and discuss an exaample o this in Chaipiter Ane.
- Ø 'Mrs Weir's philosophy of life was summed up in one expression – tenderness.' Find exaamples o this. Whit wey did her philosophy o life differ fae that o the parish meenister (Ch 1)? Why did Stevenson mak her like this and whit are the implications o her character for the ither characters in the buik?
- Ø Whit clues mak ye think she micht hae kent she wis suin tae dee?

**Kirstie Elliott**, hoosekeeper at Hermiston

She wis 'a woman in a thousand, clean, capable and noteable'. Lord Hermiston liked her weel and respeckit her. He thocht she liked him as weel, but she hatit him and wis on the side o his wife, Jean. She wis sonsie, strang and fit, wi a mass o fair hair, but she wis on the wrang side o 50. Although she wis related tae the Elliotts o Cauldstaneslap, she haed a mysterious rivalry wi Hob's wife aboot shawls, which is nivvir clarified in the buik as it stauns. She wisnae on guid terms wi them ava. Whit she felt for Archie wis 'the loyalty of a clanswoman, the hero-worship of a maiden aunt and the idolatry due to a god.' Whan Frank Innes arrived at Hermiston, she saw him as her rival for the affections o Archie.

**Kirstie Elliott** of Cauldstaneslap.

Kirstie, or Christina tae gie her her Sunday name, wis a young woman fae a faimly in whilk the men were lawless and the women were 'chaste and faithfull' but fu o recklessness and passion. She wis the neice o the hoosekeeper at Hermiston. Dark and bonnie, she spent some time wi her brither, Clem, in Glasgow and some o her claes were finer than ye micht expect for a country lass. We see her in the kirk as bonnie, vain, flirty and a wee bit silly. Again, at the Weaver's Stane, her vanity, temper and passion laid the foonds o tragedy.

**Archie Weir**, Weir of Hermiston

As a bairn, he spent a lot o time wi his mither. She wis a muckle influence on his life, but he wis an intelligent bairn and stertit tae question her logic fae an early age. He wis no a physical feartie, as can be seen by his fecht wi the laddie fae the Potterrow.

He wis mair fastidious nor his faither wha disgustit and embarrassed him. There are occasions aw the wey throu the buik whaur he gied the impression o bein jist a wee thing snobbish.

He seemed tae hae awthing that wad mak him a popular student but he haed his faither's austerity and reserve. As Frank Innes said o him 'I know Weir, but I never met Archie.'

Whaur he differed fae his faither wis in his sensitivity tae the thochts and feelins o ithirs (wi the exception o his ain faither, wham he disnae een try tae unnderstaun). It wis eneuch tae gain his sympathy that Jopp haed a sair thrapple. He wis moved by bonny things like scenery and wee spinkie flooers. Maist o the time, he wis pliable, easy sweyed. He lived wi his faither, resentin him, yet polite. He hatit his faither, yet a talk wi Glenalmond chynged his mind. The appearance o Glenkindie wis jist aboot eneuch tae tae chynged it back again. He pit up wi Frank whan ony sensible body wad hae telt him tae awa hame. He lat auld Kirsty and Frank influence his behaviour tae young Kirsty, shewin the seeds o his ain destruction.

**David Keith Carnegie, Lord Glenalmond**

Lord Glenalmond wis anither o the Law Lords, and the ae companion o Lord Hermiston that Archie didnae think coorse. He wis ower 60 year auld, tall and thin wi lang features and delicate haunds. He had gentleness and grace that Archie thocht attractive. Maist o the time he spak English. The complete opposite in mony weys o Lord Hermiston, he still respeckit him as a lawyer and as an honest man.

It is tae Lord Glenalmond that Archie gaed efter his interview wi his faither. Like Dr Gregory, Lord Glenalmond wis a guid psychologist and, although he didnae tak sides atween faither and son, he guidit Archie tae a balanced viewpynt. A painfu moment for Archie in this encounter is whan Glenalmond said ‘Let an old man say it, for once, and not need to blush: I love you like a son.’ We micht be mair inclined tae interrogate that statement than a reader in Stevenson’s time, sae dinnae rush tae read ower muckle intil it. Luik for mair evidence. It micht be mair appropriate tae see it as a leiterary device tae pynt up the apparent indifference o the undemonstrative Lord Hermiston and his inability tae express his love as a faither. Whit dae ye think?

### **Frank Innes**

‘By nature a thin, jeering creature.’ No sae much a freen as an acquaintance. He did hae the decency to try tae save Archie fae himsel efter Jopp’s trial but it wisnae lang afore he wis yaising Archie’s behaviour tae tak credit tae hissel. He comes tae Hermiston dishonourably tae escape his debts in Edinburgh. Tae pey his losses on the horses, he selt his law books that hadnae been peyd for and a warrant wis grantit for his arrest. His freenship wis obviously nae sincere. The aulder Kirstie wisnae impressed wi him, een if he did try tae get roond her by praisin her scones. Only the wee 12-year-auld maid wis taen in by his guid luiks an superficial cherm. Whan he cam tae Hermiston, he gaed tae the club. We’re nae telt it is a Hell-fire Club, but the thocht haes been plantit in wir mind; we ken that there is something a wee bit disreputable aboot this kind o socialisin. He is devious in the wey he undermines Archie and spreads rumour aboot him, aw the time lettin on that he is a guid sympathetic freen and he enjoys the pooer that he gains ower Archie.

### **Dr Gregory**

He appears as a minor character but his brief appearance afore Archie faces his faither efter Jopp’s trial maks Archie see his faither in a new licht and ane that hechtens the drama at this crucial moment.

**Lord Glenkindie**, judge, obnoxious freen o Lord Hermiston and Lord Glenalmond.

**Hay of Romanes** and **Pringle of Drumanno**, lairds and neibours o Hermiston.

**Hob, Gib, Clem, and Dand Elliott**, young Kirstie’s brothers.

# *Weir of Hermiston*

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## **Cuttie Outline**

### **Life and Death of Mrs Weir**

Introduces Archie's mither. Shaws whaur a large pairt o his character cam fae. Ye can tell a wheen o things about Lord Hermiston fae his relationship wi his wife tae. Archie questions the ethical aspects o his faither's profession. Jean dees.

### **Father and Son**

Hermiston and Archie's relationship whan Archie wis a bairn. Hermiston's devotion tae his wark, his coarseness, his drinkin. The contrast atween Hermiston and Glenalmond. Hermiston looes Archie. Archie is indifferent.

### **In the Matter of the Hanging of Duncan Jopp**

1813. By chance, Archie observes his faither tryin a shilpit wallydrag wi a sair thrapple. His faither maks nae secret o that fact he's ettlin tae hing the puir cratur. Archie is owercome wi horror and recoils fae his faither. At the execution he cries oot 'I denounce this God-defying murder.' Frank Innes tries tae calm him doon. At the Speculative Society, Archie aince mair expresses his disgust at the hingin. On his wey hame he meets Dr Gregory. Interview atween Lord Hermiston and Archie. Archie to be sent tae Hermiston as laird.

### **Opinions of the Bench**

Archie visits Lord Glenalmond wha gies his opeenion o Lord Hermiston. Lord Glenkindie arrives.

### **Winter on the Moors**

Description o Hermiston. Archie briefly socialises and then gets mair reclusive. The aulder Kirstie's love o Archie and her relationship wi her faimly. The Elliotts.

### **A Leaf from Christina's Psalm-Book**

Archie late for the kirk. His thochts. Younger Kirstie sees Archie in the kirk. Her vanity and confusion. He speaks til her efter the kirk. Her Glasgow claes. Kirstie at hame. She pits on mair swanky claes for gaen oot in the gloamin. Dand flatters her and warns that she'll stert tellin lees whan she's coortin. She meets Archie at the Deil's Hagg and taks tent tae please him. She gets back hame in time for prayers and lees tae Dand about her stockins.

### **Enter Mephistopheles**

Frank Innes haes lost his siller backin horses. Tae raise siller, he haes selt his law books afore they were peyed for. The book-seller haes a warrant taen oot for his arrest sae he taks himsel oot o the wey, tae Hermiston. He lets on he is jist visitin for the sake o freenship and the fishin. The twa young men are nae compatible. Frank maks a stir wi the local gentry but auld Kirstie, the shepherd and ithir country folk dinnae tak til him. The wee maidie is fair smitten wi him. He spreads the byname o 'The Recluse' tae refer tae Archie and lets on that Archie haes left Edinburgh on accoont o a scandal. Wi a bit o double bluff, he tells awbody that it wis naething serious but alloos folk tae think that he is jist makkin licht o it for Archie's sake and implies that he is worried about Archie. He finns oot about young Kirstie and pynts oot tae Archie that her faimly is no guid eneuch and his faither wad be displeased. Archie gaes tae bed and Frank gloats at his ain sense o poer ower Archie.

### **A Nocturnal Visit**

Aulder Kirstie's sexual jealousy. She wrestles wi her conscience and warns Archie agin triflin wi her neice.

### **At the Weaver's Stone**

Kirstie is upset because Archie wants tae talk tae her seriously. He tries tae explain that meetin in secret is wrang. She feels rejecktit. She kens somebody maun hae been speakin til him. She resents that they suld hae influenced him and pretends that her ain faimly haes spoken tae her. Archie is angry. Then the daft gowk says that there maun be nae scandal for his faither's sake. Kirstie can see that he is upset but he has upset her and she wants tae hurt him. Her passion is at odds wi his reason. He haes talked aboot mairriage but is feart for whit his faither wad say. Kirstie is ambeetious tae be Mrs Weir. He tells her baith her aunt and Frank spak til him the nicht afor. She is aboot tae breenge aff in a temper but she braks doon and greets. He taks her in his airms, but he cannae unnerstaun whit he haes done tae mak her angry.

The buiks braks aff.

### **Whit happens neist?**

Stevenson's stepdochter and amanuensis said that the story wis intendit tae cairry on wi Archie keepin tae his intention nae tae tarnish Kirstie's guid name and he keeps awa fae her. Frank taks advantage o the situation tae seduce her. Auld Kirstie sees there is something wrang wi her neice and accuses Archie. He confronts her and she confesses but he still looes her and kills Frank at the Weaver's Stane. Kirstie's sisters are oot tae tak revenge on Archie wha they think is their sister's seducer, but he is arrested for murder, tried afore his ain faither (a thing that culd nivvir hae happened in a Scottish Coort) and sentenced tae death. The aulder Kistie finns oot wha the real seducer wis and tells her brithers. They rescue Archie fae the jile and he and Kirstie escape tae America. Lord Hermiston dees o the shock and we dinnae ken whit wis tae happen tae auld Kirstie.

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## Notes

When this buik wis written, maist o Stevenson's readers wad hae kent the bible weel and wad hae learnt at least a wee bit o Latin at the school. These notes are intendit tae gie ye a wee bit o backgroun knowledge aboot things that are no ayewis easy tae find in dictionairs tae mak ye mair like the reader Stevenson haed in mind.

### Introductory

**Claverhouse** – John Grahame of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, kent as Bonnie Dundee or Bluidy Claverhouse, dependin on whit side ye were on yersel, focht for James II agin William III. He wis defeated by an army o covenanters at Drumclog but commanded the cavalry whan the Covenanters were defeated at Bothwell Brig. Efter that, he rade oot fae 1682-85, wi his moss troopers, huntin doon Covenanters and he and his moss troopers wad cut them doon or shuit them, een on a Sunday at their worship.

**Old Mortality** a Covenanter celebrated by Walter Scott in a novel o the same name.

**Cameronians** supporters o Richard Cameron, ane o the leadin Covenanters. A regiment wis raised in 1689 and cried the Cameronians efter him and aw. It wis tae be organised like a Presbyterian kirk, ilka company haein an Elder an ilka man cairryin a Bible.

### Chapter Ane

**Lord Justice Clerk** Whan the Heich Coort o Justiciary wis reformed in 1672, the Lord Justice Clerk wis made its heid. He is the second maist senior judge in Scotland, neist tae the Lord Justice General.

**Lord Advocate** Heid o the Croon Office and Procurator Fiscal Service

### George Square

Pairt o the auld George Square still stauns and the offices o Scottish Language Dictionaries is in ane o the bonnie auld buildings occupied by Edinburgh University's School o Celtic and Scottish Studies. We hae a rare view o the Meadows, jist like Lord Hermiston.

### Raadical gigot

The radicals were in favour o major politeecal reform. They were thocht tae hae sympathies wi the French. Lord Hermiston is clearly no o this poleetical persuasion, hence the reference tae the French dietary delicacy o puddocks.

### Mary and Martha

A biblical reference. Martha wis strang and practical and Mary wis verra pious.

### I to the hills

The stert o ane o the metrical psalm (121) as sung in the Church of Scotland

### Naphthali,

Anither biblical reference. He wis the son o Jacob and an ancestor o ane o the twal tribes o Israel. His land lay tae the Nor-Wast o the Sea o Galilee.

### **Potterrow**

A street near tae George Square, muckle chynged by redevelopment sen syne. It wis jist whit ye wad think fae the name – a street whar potters turned their pots and jougs and cups and mugs. They were muggers! See [www.dsl.ac.uk](http://www.dsl.ac.uk).

**Judge not that ye be not judged** King James' Bible Matthew VII v. 1

**Beam and mote** King James' Bible Matthew VII v.1-5

## **Chapter Twa**

### **Corderius**

wis the Latin name for Mathurin Cordier a scuilmaister born in Normandy, wha tocht Calvin at Paris afore muivin tae Geneva. He scribed buiks for bairns, includin fower Latin buiks that were yaised for generations o wee scholars.

### **Papinian** (Aemilius Papinianus)

wis ane o the maist kenspeckle o the Roman lawyers. A freend o the Emperor Septimius Severus, he wis pit tae daith by Severus' son Caracalla.

**Speculative Society** An Edinburgh University Society still in existence the day, wi mony distinguished members.

### **Rhadamanthus**

In Greek mythology he wis the son o Zeus and Europa . He wis the judge o the sowels o the deid and his name is associatit wi a stern judge.

## **Chapter Three**

**Obiter Dictum** A remark made in the passing.

## **Chapter Fower**

**in apicibus juris** literally ‘ in the heich places o the law’ – the obscure and learnit aspects o the law.

### **tigris ut aspera**

A leiterary raither nor a legal quote. Fae Horace 1.23

*Atque non ego te tigris ut aspera  
Gaetulusva leo frangere persequor*

*And yet I like a tiger that is fierce  
Or a Gaetolian lion do not pursue to tear you apart.*

## **Chapter Five**

**ipsissimus** his very self

## **Chapter Sax**

**Dutch-bottomed** The Dutch were reputed to be heavy drinkers. They (and their ships) were also said to be broad in the beam.

## **Chapter Seivin**

**Tantaene irae** Can there be such anger?

An allusion to Virgil's Aeneid: *Tantane animis caelestibus irae* Can there be such anger in celestial minds?

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**Extracts from Pitcairn's Criminal Trials** – jist tae let ye see whit punishments were gien for whit crimes. This is in the leid o the day, but wirk awa at it . Read it alood and ye'll find it easier tae unnerstaun.

## **Child Murder**

**Jan 29 1619**

**Bessie Weir**, servand to James Lowriestone in Over Gogar. Dilaitit of the crewell and vnnatural Murthour of hir awin infant bairne, borne and brocht furth be hir, in fornicatioun, to James Threipland in Biggar; committit vpon the xx day of Januar instant, about midnicht, within ane yaird lyand to the said James Lowriestones hous in Ovar Gogar, immediatelie eftir hir delyuerie thairof.

VERDICT. The Assyse, all in ane voce, be the mouth and declaration of Robert Wilkie in Rathobyres, chancellor, in respect of the said Bessie her Judiciall Confessioun of the said cryme, ffand and pronuncit, and declairit her to be culpable and convict thairof.

SENTENCE. To be tane to the Castell-hill of Edinburgh, and thair hir heid to be strukin frome hir body; and all hir guidis, gif scho ony hes, to be escheit. &c.

## **Theft**

**June 25<sup>th</sup> 1614 Ando Yule**, borne in Clermond, vnder the Laird of Dairsie. Dilaitit and accuset for the steilling and away-taking of tua pair of scheittis, ane pair of blankettis, ane littil panne, and ane suord, pertaining to William Persone, in the Hill of Bathe. Grantit the samyn to be of verritie, and cravet God mercie thairfoir; and offerit him self in our soueraine lordis will, and his heines Justice will, for the saidis crymes: quhome the Justice ressaut.

SENTENCE. to be scourget throw the burgh of Edinburgh and to be banischet furth thairof for euir: And gif euer he war apprehendit for Thift heiraftir, sould be hangit to the died, but fauour.