



The Hair Trunk or the Ideal Commonwealth: An Extravaganza

Robert Louis Stevenson

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Half a dozen young men find themselves at the end of their university years facing the awful prospect that they must now support themselves. They decide to found an Ideal Commonwealth, in the Navigator Islands - Samoa (where, by a wonderful coincidence, a decade later, Stevenson himself eventually settled and where he died and is buried). Here - they reason - work and money, dreary offices and dreary jobs, will not be known or needed. But capital is required to start even an Ideal Commonwealth. One of their number knows of "a real, glowing, gaudy, old-high treasure" - gold and jewels in a trunk in a family castle in the Scottish Highlands, theirs for the stealing, and . . . Robert Louis Stevenson began writing the comic novel *The Hair Trunk or The Ideal Commonwealth: An Extravaganza* in April or May 1877, when he was twenty-six, and left it unfinished - after 30,000 words, in nine chapters - two years later. It shows a side of him whom most readers have never known existed: a satirical Stevenson making great fun, in a manner worthy of his contemporaries Gilbert and Sullivan, of the events and passions, the personalities and the predicaments, of his day. Previously published only in a French translation, it now takes its rightful place among his memorable early works of fiction. Transcribed, introduced, and annotated by the noted scholar Roger G. Swearingen from Stevenson's unpublished manuscript (now in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California), this edition reveals glimpses of the author's developing literary skills and his complex and often madcap personal temperament. The extensive and illustrated annotations are fascinating in themselves, not least for the references to the contemporary late-Victorian scene.

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