

Annie Ide's New Birthday



Most of us—especially when we are young—look forward to our birthday each year. Greeting cards arrive in the mail. There may be some exciting presents and perhaps a party with friends. It's a special day and it's fun to be the center of attention.

But suppose that special day happened to come on December 25, the biggest holiday of the entire year? No one would even notice an ordinary birthday in the middle of Christmas.

Annie Ide of St. Johnsbury had just such a birthday. Annie was born in 1876 and when she was fifteen her father went to the island of Samoa in the South Pacific. There he met Robert Louis Stevenson, the famous author of *Treasure Island*. The two men became good friends.

One day Annie's father told his friend that because his daughter was born on December 25, she had never had a real birthday celebration. Stevenson offered to give his birthday to Annie so she could have a day all her own. He mailed her a **document** that said,

"I, Robert Louis Stevenson, . . . have attained an age when, O, we never mention it, and . . . have no further use for a birthday of any description . . . do hereby transfer to . . . (Miss) A. H. Ide, all and whole my rights and privileges in the thirteenth day of November, formerly my birthday, now, hereby, and **henceforth** the birthday of the said A(nnie) H. Ide, to have, hold, exercise and enjoy the same in the customary manner, by the sporting of fine **raiments**, eating of rich meats and receipt of gifts, compliments and copies of verse, according to the manner of our ancestors."

Annie wrote to thank Stevenson. She wondered what he would do without a birthday. "As the years



Robert Louis Stevenson. Etching by W. Strang. Published in Stevenson's *Vailima Letters* (Chicago: Stone & Kimball, 1895). St. Johnsbury Athenaeum

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roll by you can grow no older . . . ,” she wrote, and “I shall be able to know of you then as a young man.” “But,” she wrote, “if I have two birthdays every year, I shall grow old at a terrible rate. The years will rush past me like an express train, and I shall soon be old enough to be your grandmother.”

The author liked Annie’s letter very much and wrote back right away. “You are quite wrong,” he said, “as to the effect of the birthday on your age . . . The 13th of November became your own and only birthday, and you ceased to have been born on Christmas day . . . You are thus become a month and 12 days younger than you were, but will go on growing older for the future in the regular and human manner from one November 13th to the next. The effect on me is more doubtful. I may, as you suggest, live forever; I might, on the other hand, come to pieces . . . at a moment’s notice.” He said he did not regret in the least having given his birthday to a girl who had never had one before.



“Vailima,” Robert Louis Stevenson’s home in Samoa. Annie Ide painted this watercolor in 1893 or 1894, when she lived nearby. Fairbanks Museum, St. Johnsbury

In 1893 Annie and her two sisters went to Samoa with their father. Annie met Robert Louis Stevenson and together they celebrated what had once been his and was now Annie’s birthday.

VOCABULARY

document— official legal paper

henceforth— from now on

raiments— clothes



Anne Ide about 1906. Photograph in **The Life of Henry Clay Ide** by Arthur F. Stone. Published by Anne Ide Cockran, 1935. Vermont Historical Society Library