

## Edward Irenaeus Prime-Stevenson (Xavier Mayne) (1868-1942)

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Novelist, journalist, independent scholar, and music critic, Stevenson was the first American to deal openly with homosexuality, both in a fictional setting and as a transmitter of the ideas about homosexuality as put forth by Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing.

Edward Stevenson was born on July 23, 1868, in Madison, New Jersey, the youngest son of Paul E. Stevenson, a Presbyterian minister who became principal of a classical school in Bridgewater, New Jersey, and then in Madison. Stevenson's mother, Cornelia

Prime, came from a family of distinguished literary and academic figures; she was fifty-two at the time of Edward's birth.

Although admitted to the New Jersey Bar, Edward Stevenson never practiced law but instead pursued a career as a writer, which he had begun while still in school. His first novel, *White Cockades* (1887), is a boy's book about Bonnie Prince Charlie. Twenty years later Stevenson, writing under the pseudonym of Xavier Mayne, commented on this work: "... passionate devotion from a rustic youth towards the Prince and its recognition are half hinted as homosexual in essence" (1908, p. 367). Many novels and short stories followed, of which several were based on the theme of passionate male friendships.

Stevenson developed an international reputation as a man of letters, specializing in musical, dramatic, and literary criticism. He was at various times on the staff of the *Independent*, *Harper's Weekly*, and other publications. In the 1890s, he began dividing his time between Europe and the United States, and his life and outlook became increasingly cosmopolitan. Eventually he claimed mastery of nine languages, Asian as well as European. After the turn of the century he became an expatriate, residing mostly in Italy. His reasons are clearly expressed in his writings: the United States

(as well as England) had an atmosphere that was oppressive and laws that were dangerous to a man such as himself, who was a lover of other males.

Stevenson's place in homophile literature is assured through two works: *Imre: A Memorandum*, the first American novel to deal openly and sympathetically with male homosexuality, and *The Intersexes*, the first book in the English language to discuss all aspects of homosexuality.

*Imre: A Memorandum* was self-published in Naples in 1906. It is best appreciated as a didactic work, an apologia for "The Friendship which is Love—the Love which is Friendship" (these words appear on the book's title page). We may presume it is also an expression of Stevenson's own tastes and opinions.

The novel's plot is meager enough. In a small Hungarian town, Oswald, an Englishman who is "past thirty" meets and falls in love with Imre, a twenty-five-year-old Hungarian officer who is from an old and proud but impoverished Transylvanian family. Imre "was of no ordinary beauty of physique and elegance of bearing, even in a land where such matters are normal details of personality." He possessed "a pair of peculiarly brilliant but not shadowless hazel eyes." Though his features were delicate, they were "without womanishness," for "Imre was not a pretty man; but a beautiful man." His body is described thus: "Of middle height, he possessed a slender figure, faultless in proportions, a wonder of muscular development, of strength, lightness and elegance." Imre was a star athlete in sports ranging from gymnastics to swimming, fencing, target shooting, and horse riding:

Yet all this force, this muscular address, was concealed by the symmetry of his graceful, elastic frame. Not till he was nude, and one could trace the ripple of muscle and sinew under the fine, hairless skin, did one realize the machinery of such strength. (Mayne, 1908, p. 367)

Oswald and Imre spend much time together, mostly in conversation. About halfway through the book, following an intense discussion of friendship, Oswald begins a confession, which goes on for almost fifty pages. He tells the story of his life; reviews the work of Krafft-Ebing and others on uranianism; discusses the love-friendship of Ancient Greece; cites many famous men who were lovers of their own kind; and finally, using the familiar form of address, declares his love for Imre.

Imre appears to rebuff Oswald. In an anguished speech he pledges undying friendship, but implores Oswald never again to speak of what he had told him—"Never, unless I break the silence." Circumstances separate the two friends for awhile. Imre's communications become increasingly affectionate, and at last they are reunited. In a hotel room, Oswald is sexually aroused when Imre puts his arm around Oswald's shoulder, and struggles

"in shame and despair to keep down the hateful physical passion which was making nothing of all my psychic loyalty" (Mayne, 1908, pp. 367-368). Apparently with a visible erection as a sign of his "sensual weakness," Oswald falls away from Imre, certain that his friendship would be lost forever.

However, Imre, voluntarily breaking the agreed-upon silence, delivers a confession of his own. Declaring his love for Oswald, he recounts his own experiences and love inclinations, which parallel those of Oswald. The dramatic high point of the novel is reached in Imre's resounding declaration: "Look into thyself, Oswald! It is all *there*. I am a Uranian, as thou art. From my birth I have been one. Wholly, wholly homosexual, Oswald!"

After more talk, they take a walk in the moonlight. Finally, back in the hotel room, Imre puts his arm around Oswald and delivers the final speech, which concludes: "Come then, O friend! O brother, to our rest! Thy heart on mine, thy soul with mine! For us two it is surely is . . . Rest!" (Mayne, 1908, pp. 368-369). It is by no means described, but we may dare to imagine that they then take off their clothes and get in bed.

Stevenson's magnum opus, *The Intersexes: A History of Similosexualism As a Problem in Social Life*, was also privately printed, apparently in Rome in 1908, in a limited edition of 125 copies. It is dedicated to the memory of Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902), the author of the best-seller *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886).

An astonishing range of topics is covered in the 646 pages of Stevenson's book, including animal studies, similisexual love in the ancient world and among primitive peoples, gay geniuses, literature with homoerotic themes, ancient and modern legislation, male prostitution, blackmail, and violence.

Stevenson begins by addressing the book to the "individual layman," paying tribute to "medical psychologists," and explaining the basic concepts and terminology that he uses. Throughout *The Intersexes* Stevenson employs the terminology of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), as popularized by Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935) and Krafft-Ebing. The term "intersexes" is a translation of the German *sexuelle zwischenstufen* (intermediate sexual types or sexual intergrades), the notion being that homosexuals are psychologically, and sometimes also physically, in between real (i.e., heterosexual) men and women.

In Ulrichs' sexual taxonomy, males are divided into three main categories: (1) the *Dioning* or normal male (called *Urianaster* when he acquires Urning tendencies!); (2) the *Urning* or homosexual male; and (3) the *Urano-dioning*, a male who is *born* with a capacity for love in both directions. Stevenson uses the English form, uranian, with its female counterpart uraniad for lesbians. (In Plato's *Symposium*, Pausanias postulates *two* gods of love: the Uranian [Heavenly] Eros governs principled male love, whereas

the Pandemian [Vulgar] Eros governs heterosexual or purely licentious relations.)

The reliance upon Ulrichs, Hirschfeld, and Krafft-Ebing is unfortunate, as it dates the book and creates a conceptual muddle. Elsewhere in *The Intersexes*, Stevenson shows that gay men can be every bit as masculine as straight men and sometimes more so. One of the longest chapters in the book covers the uranian and uraniad in the military and athletics. We are assured that "In the army and the marine we find the Uranian in enormous proportion," and that these uranians are characterized by "bodily vigour" and "virile courage." A dozen pages are enthusiastically devoted to the phenomenon of soldiers who sell their bodies to other males.

Ulrichs and Hirschfeld notwithstanding, Stevenson is fascinated by the concept that man-to-man love is "a supremely virile love": "Is there really now, as ages ago, a sexual aristocracy of the male? a mystic and hellenic brotherhood, a sort of super-virile male?" (Quotation in *Imre*, p. 1, attributed to "Magyarbol", another of Stevenson's pseudonyms).

Stevenson places great emphasis on the aesthetic dimension of male love, especially for the more masculine type of uranian who possesses a "super-seding sense of the beauty of the male physique and male character." He praises the Ancient Greeks for having: "a temperament at once rugged and yet aesthetically sensitive as in no other race."

Stevenson eloquently describes the high esteem with which male love was held in the ancient world, especially Greece. He puts forward the "startling but irresistible conclusion" that the condemnation of similitsexual love is entirely a product of Christian morality which, going against our classical heritage, is "simply a relic of ancient Jewish semi-civilized dispensations." Throughout the book he characterizes the source of oppression in such terms as the "narrow Jewish-Christian ethics of today."

Stevenson drew upon almost everything that had been written on similitsexualism in the early homosexual rights movement and in psychiatric literature. In addition, he recorded his own extensive observations of the Uranian scene in the cities of Europe and the United States. There are hundreds of case studies, newspaper accounts, and stories from the grapevine.

In his final chapter, "Is the Uranian a Higher or a Lower Sex and Type in the Scale of Humanity?," Stevenson grapples with a paradox that tormented him. On one hand, uranian types included vigorous and masculine men of the highest character. On the other, there could also be "countless ignoble, trivial, loathesome, feeble-souled and feeble-bodied creatures." He was horrified that the ranks of man-loving men included:

Those patently depraved, noxious, flaccid, gross, womanish beings! Perverted and imperfect in moral nature and even their bodily tissues! Those homosexual legions that are the straw-chaff of society; good for nothing except the fire that purges the world of garbage and rubbish! (a passage from *Imre*, p. 116, cited in *The Intersexes*, p. 588)

Nevertheless, Stevenson is convinced that the "uranian passion . . . is largely salutary," and he holds up the ideal:

Happiest of all, surely, are those Uranians, ever numerous, who have no wish nor need to fly society—or themselves. Knowing what they are, understanding the natural, the moral strength of their position as homosexuals; sure of right on their side, even if it be never accorded to them in the lands where they must live; fortunate in either due self-control or private freedom—day by day, they go on through their lives, self-respecting and respected, in relative peace. (Mayne, 1908, p. 515)

Considering their scarcity, it is difficult to gauge the influence of Stevenson's books on the homophile movement. *The Intersexes* is cited in Magnus Hirschfeld's 1914 magnum opus, *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und des Weibes*. Some members of the homophile intelligentsia read them. Both *Imre* and *The Intersexes* were reprinted in 1975 as part of the Arno Press series on homosexuality. Unfortunately, they were so poorly reproduced that many pages are almost illegible.

At any rate, both books are precious repositories of information, and should be studied by every aspiring gay scholar.

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