

Mr Yelland -- Inland Revenue Immortal Memory 1898

Mr. Yelland, giving the toast of "The Immortal Memory," observed - I cannot help thinking that there is a certain amount of fitness in the fact that here within the very walls where Burns, the poet exciseman, used to delight his associates with his brilliant flashes of wit and humour, a very humble successor of his in the Excise Service should be allowed to add his mite to that vast volume of tribute which is being paid to-night the wide world o'er to Scotia's national bard, the immortal bard.

I, as an Englishman, say no need of praise can be too great to pay to the genius of Burns, and in connection with the commemoration of the bard's natal day it is particularly striking that while Scotland is fortunate in having produced such a singer, so also is the poet fortunate in having as his native land, one so able and willing to recognise his genius, and do it national honour. There have been men of genius burn in other countries - for instance, in England, where the works of Shakespeare, a superlative genius, are read by students of all civilised nations. Proud, however, as England undoubtedly is, she does not show her appreciation of the Bard of Avon in the warm-hearted manner Scotsmen, all over the globe, are showing their appreciation of Robert Burns to-night. Then in Ireland there arose a poet, Tom Moore, who, to a certain extent, did for the minstrelsy of Ireland, what Burns did for Scotland. He, of course, is loved and cherished in the hearts of Irishmen, but even that warm-hearted nation does not give visible signs of their appreciation of him, as Scotland does of her bard. I consider Burns and Scotland mutually fortunate in possessing and in loving and admiring each other, and I consider it an additional proof of Burns' genius that he had intuition to attune his muse so completely to the taste and ear of his compatriots, that their individuality is practically merged in each other, and it is this sense of unison with the poet himself, that makes Scotsmen of all ages and classes, rich and poor, learned and un-learned, unanimous in the appreciation of their beloved genius. I do not purpose inflicting upon you a long statement of facts in connection with the life of Robert Burns, as I am sure the majority of you are thoroughly conversant with this already. If there are any here who are not so acquainted I would point out that Lockhart, Currie, Allan Cunningham, Professors Wilson and Blackie, and many- others have provided standard works on the subject, which will amply repay the time necessary for perusal. Neither am I going to torture your ears by attempting to give you quotations from the bard's works. I can and do read them continually for my own instruction and amusement, but I regret that when it comes to proper pronunciation I most woefully fail. Even if I could get over the difficulties of pronunciation, I do not know that I would give quotations, because, besides the few that are quoted every day, there are hundreds of others equally deserving mention. Let each individual go to the writings personally, and then he will have his choice of any variety he may be in the humour for - grave or gay, humorous or sad, serious or satirical - they are all there, the delight and solace of Scotsmen near and far, and the admiration of Britons everywhere. gentlemen, I have only now to remind you that it is exactly 139 years to-night since the "Janwar' win' blew hansel in on Robin," and that we are here to do honour to the occasion. I am sure we here, so happily placed in Burns' land, among the scenes he so vividly and happily described, will not be behind any of admirers in the warmth and heartiness with which we drink to his memory. Gentlemen, I ask you to rise and drink in solemn silence to the glorious and immortal memory of Robert Burns.