

Mr HUNTER DUMFRIES IMMORTAL MEMORY (1900)

Mr. Hunter, in giving "The Immortal Memory," said that perhaps the greatest tribute that could be paid to the memory of Burns would 'e in South Africa at the present moment, where, even amidst the din of the battle and the miseries of the battle—field, Burns would not be forgotten. here was nothing more certain than that the thoughts of thousands of our soldiers would that night be dwelling on our bard. They at home were no doubt envied by our gallant brethren, and in particular were we that, night privileged in meeting under the roof of the Globe Hotel, made famous by the part it played in his famous career. It was apparent, however, that he could tell nothing new regarding the bard, and he could only claim for his few remarks what Carlyle stated was the secret or the increasing popularity of the works of Burns — sincerity. One fact that endeared Burns to him was that he was an exciseman, and everyone connected with the service was proud of that fact, as it had borrowed honour from his connection with it. A year ago he had attempted to refute the statement that our brethren South of the Border neither understood nor appreciated Burns, and now it gave him great pleasure to know the testimony of Dr Wallace — an authority on Burns — who had at the Burns Federation meeting made the remark that Scotsmen would have to look to their laurels if they did not wish to be out—stripped in their admiration of the poet by the Englishmen. Having referred to the fruitful subject—matter which the life and works of Burns had afforded to writers and orators alike, Mr. Hunter said the question which rose to the minds of most of them was, what effect would an ample endowment of the world's goods have made upon the poet's works? Carlyle, of all countrymen, had given the truest estimate of the bard. In him Carlyle recognised a brother genius, and yet he gave no hope that matters might have been different. Burns had had but his share of that treatment which the world accorded to all its men of genius; indeed as Carlyle said, "The world, it seems to us, treated him with more rather than with less kindness than it showed to such men We reckon that every poet of Burns' order is, or should be, a prophet and teacher to his age; that he has no right to expect great kindness from it, but rather is bound to do it great kindness, that the blame of any failure lies not with this world." From these words, they could see that Burns would have been a marvellous exception had he been blessed with genius, wealth and happiness. Was the life of Byron, the peer, any happier?

They knew that it was not so happy. But their thoughts that night, however, might be somewhat divided. The cause which had brought them there was no doubt uppermost in their minds, but they could not forget Lose who were bravely fighting for their country's honour and rights. He wondered what attitude the poet himself would have taken up at such a crisis in our history. Sir Walter Scott, then a boy of fifteen, has the honour of being in the company of Burns, and said he — "The only thing I remember which was remarkable in Burns manner was the effect produced upon him by a print of Burberry's representing a soldier lying down in the snow, is dog sitting in misery on one side — on t5he other his widow with a child in her arms. Burns seemed much affected by the print, or rather by the ideas which it suggested to his mind, and he actually shed tears."

One could not reconcile the idea of Burns standing coolly by at such a crisis with the teachings of the author of tile first war song ever written "Scots Wha Hae." At the time of the threatened French invasion Burns was one of the first to join the Dumfries Volunteers, and they knew that as a Volunteer, he did his duty nobly, in a spirit of enthusiasm, and as a poet—soldier he "did more

service than any other inhabitant of the realm from the Prime Minister downwards." Burns deserved well of his country for that song — "Does haughty Gaul invasion threat?" and for his "Poor and Honest Sodger," which became so popular that many were added to the ranks of the army. He gave the public a different impression of the soldier by investing with the finest human interest the career of a humble warrior. In conclusion, he would only add that he was proud to note that Dumfries still had men to volunteer to fight for their country and its liberties, and they should be likewise proud to have an example of over a century's standing in the immortal Burns.