

MR. T. LAIDLAW , DUMFRIES —(1910).

Mr. Laidlaw, in giving the toast of the evening, "The Immortal Memory of Burns," began in very appropriate but unique fashion by reciting the lines:—

"E'en then a wish I mind its power,
A wish that to my latest hour
Shall strongly heave my breast,
That I for puir auld Scotia's sake
Some usefu' plan or beuk could make,
Or sing a sang at least."

Continuing, he said — Burns in his early youth had a great knack of being able to put words into rhyme, and often did he try his hand at making verses of poetry, but in his own estimation they fell far short of his expectations when they were completed, hence the words "Some usefu' plan or beuk could make." He did not despair of ultimate success. Like a great number of his countrymen, he kept reading and learning and plodding on, with the determination to get to the front, and he loved nothing better than to read the history of the deeds and doings of the noble and illustrious men of his country. It was the doings of such men that imbued him with the motive power to persevere and succeed, so that he also might be classed as one of Scotia's mighty sons. It is said that all things work together for our good, and the same must be said of Burns' works. He has given us of his best, and it is for us to cherish his works of art, and keep his memory evergreen. He loved his country, he loved the auld Scots language, he loved the wild animals of the field and the birds of the air, he loved the wild flowers of our hills and glens, and he loved the men and women of his native land. There is scarcely a song which he has sung but we find the one entwining and encircling the other as the ivy or the honeysuckle entwines around the oak. In his songs the love light of the eye sparkles in the dewdrop, on the gowan, and the sweet voice of the maiden finds its echo in the love song of the laverock. Each and everyone is more or less decked or clothed with the wild flowers of his native land. Even the climate of our country has been a big factor in some of the finest of his compositions. The bursting of the thunder storms in the wilds of Gallowa', it is said, gave birth to the greatest war song that ever was penned — "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled."

Is it wonder that, with a fertile brain such as his, with the vivid and erratic flashes of lightning, the deafening and crashing noise of thunder, and the rain coming down in blinding sheets in a wild and rugged moorland, he should have imagined himself with Bruce, and given us the words :-

"Lay the proud usurpers low,
Tyrants fall in every foe,
Liberty's in every blow,
Let us do or dee."

There is no half measure with Burns'; there must be no drawing back, no pointing the finger of scorn at the words :-

"Wha will be a traitor knave?

Wha can fill a coward's grave?

Wha sae base as be a slave

Let him turn and flee "

And he hands this great song down to you, to keep fresh in your memory the great deeds of your forefathers, to keep you fore-armed, so that, if ever need be, you will be found true to your country and your country's cause, and ready to take the field with the heart of a Wallace or the courage of a Bruce, determined, as of yore, to uphold your independence and to do or die. It also applies to your everyday walk in life, that whatsoever you take in hand, whether in the profession of a mechanic or a scholar, be sure you put your shoulder to the wheel to attain, and, if possible, surpass, the man whom you take to be at the head of his trade or profession. Never be a tyrant to your fellow—man, but be ever ready to lift him out of oppressions, toils, and, if possible, make his life worth living.

Time and chance are but a tide," and in more ways than one is this maxim true. Burns has wedded the auld Scots dialect with his songs: he was born at the right time to preserve for us in its entirety the auld Scots tongue. Burns could speak the English language fluently, but when he was writing his songs it was of no use to him. In form it was cold, stiff, and unwieldy, it had not the rich store of hamely kindness of feeling, therefore he wrote his works of art in his mither tongue. I have said he loved the wild flowers of his native land, the feathered tribes of the air, and the lower animals of our woods and fields. Each and every one came under the spells of his never flagging pen. In his quiet moments he loved to stray by winding Nith, or sit by Lincluden's ruined wa'; there he could wander or sit in the quiet shade, and listen to the sweet songs of the birds, or watch the denizens of the woods at play. Was it possible that in his writings he could ever forget them?

"Oft as by winding Nith I rousin' wait

The sober eve, or hail the cheerful dawn,

I'll miss thee snorting o'er the dewy lawn,

And curse the ruffians' aim, and mourn thy hapless fate."

Such is the verse on the wounded hare, and he gives it to you so that in your actions you will not willingly try to hurt your fellow—man, or even the lower animals of our fields, but try to give pleasure and endeavour to bring his words to the fruition of the widest brotherly love. The star of Burns keeps rising to the meridian, the flood tide of his love songs is still increasingly rising over all the world of true and honest thinking men, and hastening the day when

"Man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that."

Gentlemen, I give you "The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns."