

Mr W J DICKIE IMMORTAL MEMORY (1914).

Mr. Dickie, in proposing the toast of the evening, took as the text of the first part of his speech the line from the "Epistle to a Young Friend" (Andrew Aiken) — "A conscience but a canker." What a depth of tragedy, he said, the phrase expresses: a man pursued through life by a feeling of remorse, that eats into his very soul as "the wormi' the bud" destroys the blossom of the rose; an ever—present memory of some violence done to his own manhood, of some act or course of conduct that involved shame or suffering to a fellow—creature. In this and other passages we had the self—up braidings of a man conscious that he had personally fallen short of his ideal. They were a rebuke to indiscriminating pane gyrista; a rebuke also to the censorious. The black spots in the life of Burns were fewer than had been represented by some biographers, who indulged in a candour that outran the truth, and who painted in colours much darker than were warranted by fact. But the stains were in the marble, and no amount of washing would remove them. And no man would less desire than Burns himself to be presented to the world in the light of a false perfection. But the confession and the grief which ever and anon broke out in his poems, and which gathered. concentrated force in the line just quoted, proved that he carried through life an honest as well as a generous heart. His was not the debased spirit of a Byron, who gloated over sinister exploits. Burns was anxious to guard his young friend's life from a heritage of bitter memories such as his pleasant vices, his hot passion and weak will, had laid up for his own sensitive nature.

In ploughman phrases, God send you speed
Still daily to grow wiser;
And may you better reek the rede
Than ever did th' adviser.

In his references to "the happy fireside clime", in the Epistles and "The Twa Dogs," Burns had pointed the lowly but royal road to felicity; and in that surpassing picture of rural piety and domestic bliss, "The Cottar's Saturday Night," his warm prayer for the peasantry of Scotland was that they might be protected from "luxury's contagion, weak and vile." The voice of Burns rang out clear and strong, for a clean life and straight. His message to our own age, they might be sure, would be to shun those "wandering fires" of too absorbing and unregulated pleasure that lead astray so many from the domestic hearth, not in one rank but in all and which sometimes even seem to threaten to scorch the family life at its root. The speaker went on to speak of some of the outstanding qualities of the poetic genius of Burns, and closed with a quotation from the writings of Oliver Wendell Holmes, who acclaims a brother poet of the west as

Brave singer of the coming time,
Sweet minstrel of the joyous present,
Crowned with the noblest wreath of rhyme,
The holly—leaf of Ayrshire's peasant.
The toast was pledged in silence.