

PROVOST JARDINE, ANNAN — Immortal Memory (1922).

The annual celebration of the Dumfries Burns Howff Club was held 'd.li their most appropriate headquarters, that old fashioned hostelry, the Globe Hotel, on Wednesday night. A company of close on 100 assembled for the occasion, and the festive board was presided over by Mr. A. Shankland, vice—president, who sat in Burns' chair, which is only taken out for this occasion. For "The Immortal Memory," the punch bowl and toddy ladle in use at the time Burns frequented the Globe Hotel, were used. Provost Jardine, in proposing "The Immortal Memory," said:- "On behalf of the citizens of Annan, the members of the Annan Burns Club, and on my own behalf, I thank you for the kindness that you have extended to me, the honour you have conferred on me, and the trust you have reposed in me, in inviting me to the Queen of the South to perform such a high and honourable office as that with which I am entrusted in connection with your time honoured and flourishing club, and particularly in this historic building so remarkably associated with Robert Burns both before and after his residence in Dumfries. Here in the snuggerly down below he often met his friends, and, seated in his favourite corner by the fireside, delighted them with his inimitable humour, melted their hearts with the tenderness of his pathos, and electrified them with his unrivalled eloquence, until the small wainscoted apartment became a very temple of the muses. I will, without further delay, submit for your acceptance the toast with which I am entrusted, The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns."

Soul of the Poet: wheresoe'er

Reclaimed from earth, thy genius plume

Her wings of immortality.

Suspend thy harp in happier sphere,

And with thine influence illumine

The gladness of our jubilee.

Personally, I may say that the record of the life and works of Robert Burns has always had for me a special interest, and I believe of the bar, as well as admirers of his genius, and are proud to show at all times their appreciation of the poet, and particularly on this anniversary of his birth. I shall never forget visiting one golden autumn day he cottage where the illustrious poet first saw the light, and reverently entering the portals of the auld clay biggin'," standing with bared head on the spot where 163 years ago,

"A blast o' Janwar' win'

Blew hansel in on Robin."

And, as I stood unbonneted in the room where he was born, it was with a feeling of pleasure and pride, mingled with awe greater than I would feel, loyal though I am, did I stand under the dome and within the tapestry walls of a gorgeous palace that had sheltered a hundred kings - for,

"In native dignity he stood above the kings of earth,
And placed the majesty of man above the badge of birth."

It was an "auld clay biggin " once, and nothing more, but it has been transfigured by "the light that never was on sea or land," the light of genius, and to-day it is

a shrine, and as the Mohammedan wends his way to Mecca, and the pious devote hastens at stated times to visit the shrine of his patron saint, so crowds of pilgrims from all parts of the world are proud to pay their tributes and devoirs at this birthplace of one of the most extraordinary geniuses the world has ever seen. On that eventful day, as I mused amid the ruins of Alloway Kirk, stood on the picturesque Roman arch with my hand on the "Key-stone o' the brig," so graphically portrayed in "Tam o' Shanter," and wandered up and down the "Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon," my spirit took fire, and with heart charged with emotion, I lost sight of the things of earth, and as I reverently trod the classic ground, thinking over the past, it seemed to me that I was accompanied by the veritable Lord of the Mb...nor, the immortal one himself, and as long as I live, will I remember with gratitude and pleasure, the hours that I spent in his own domain - a domain of which Scotsmen, and especially Ayrshire men, may well be proud, a land taken in conjunction with Dumfries-shire, well-named "The Land o' Burns," redolent with memories and fragrant with recollections and reminders of the wonderful genius,

"Who walked in glory and in joy

Behind the plough upon the mountain side."

Although other poets call forth our deepest esteem and our highest admiration, Burns commands and excites our warmest sympathy, our deepest love, and our profoundest veneration. We have noticed the fact. Let us now consider the reason why it is so. It is not alone because he stands out in strong relief among his poetic brethren for bold originality of thought, energy, of expression, of sparkling wit, delightful humour, exquisite tenderness, and heart-melting pathos. There is something peculiarly interesting in the life of Burns, there is something altogether unique in his poetry, so much so, that it does not matter who reads his works, or if studies his life; it does not matter whether they are high or low, rich or poor, learned or unlearned, prince or peasant, whatever their degree, their creed, or their station in life, the effect is the same. His works are not merely read, they are commented on and enjoyed, and his life is studied, and the slightest detail in connection with it communicated from one to another, until it is consigned to the immortal custody of the press, in such a way as is almost, if not altogether, without parallel in the history of literature. Every one, whatever his condition in life, seems to be lovingly interested in the Bard of Coila. And why is this? It is, in my opinion, because of the hardships he endured from his youth upward his trials, troubles, and misfortunes, his fervid humanity, ardent patriotism, sturdy independence, indomitable courage, large heartedness, and deep love of his fellow men, of all dumb animals, and of everything animate and inanimate, and by reason of the tact that he is never tired of enunciating the great truth that, in the words of E. L. Linton, "far beyond the form is the spirit, far greater than Society is Man." it is because he hates cruelty and wrong, despises meanness, scorns oppression, and is the sworn enemy of all malice, hatred, un-charitableness, and evil speaking; and of discord and strife of

every description. And, above all, he is pre-eminently the poet of the heart, and being that in the best and highest sense of the term, speaking right out of the depths of his own heart, whether he is moving to tears or inciting to smiles, he calls forth the warmest affections of our heart., and we feel when we are reading either his inimitable poems, his unrivalled songs, or his eloquent letters, that we are, so to speak, enveloped in the fascinating personality of the poet himself. Our love for Burns is of a personal nature, because he speaks to us through his life and through his works like brother speaking unto brother, and he is endeared to us all the more because of his trials, his vicissitudes, his weaknesses, and his contrite confessions. He is our revered teacher and elder brother, and as such we are irresistibly drawn to him, and we study and honour him accordingly.

But there are some who are never tired of dinning into our ears with a persistency worthy of a better cause, that Burns had many grave faults, and so on, and so forth. In reply, I may state that I have considered these at length in what, I trust, was a dispassionate and becoming spirit. To the uncharitable scandalmongers, literary and otherwise, who are continually harping upon Burns' imperfections, and who ignore or are oblivious of their own failings, and who are, in nothing, so industrious as in noting and commenting on their "Neighbour's faults and folly!" and who, given their own way, would leave "Not even Lancelot brave, nor Galahad clean!"

and to the literary ghouls who would forsake an ambrosial repast to "prey on garbage," and who make it their business to hold their orgies at the tombs, and feast on the frailties of the departed, my answer is that Robert Burns wrote ten years before he died, in "A Bard's Epitaph," which was published in 1786, and all throughout his life and writings afterwards, makes open and humble confession of his failings and faults, sorrowful and penitently. I will quote you one verse of this pathetic poem I have just mentioned, asking you to take particular notice of the second word in the first line of the stanza. It reads as follows:-

"The poor inhabitant below

Was quick to learn and wise to know,

And keenly felt the friendly glow,

And softer flame

But thoughtless follies laid him low

And stain'd his name:"

What more does any mortal man want? "Let him that is without sin cast the first stone." In conclusion, so far as this branch of the subject is concerned, I would draw the attention of the scandal-mongers, literary ghouls, and the censorious and acrimonious hypercritics, and chronic fault-finders, and their congeners, who seem to be always with us and always on the prowl, to the following lines written by Lord Tennyson:- "He gave the people of his best,

His worst he kept, his best he gave,

My Shakespeare's curse on clown and knave

Who will not let his ashes rest."

But the "glory dies not, and the grief is past."

And we are met together this evening for a higher purpose than to upbraid our Poet with his failings. We are met to pay our tribute to his excellences as a man, and his genius as a poet. We are met to commemorate the anniversary of his birth, because we recognise in Robert Burns one of the greatest benefactors of the human race. Burns is indeed the cherished minstrel of the Scottish people, but he is none the less the favourite minstrel of different races of men in other lands. There are men of countless nationalities who will yield to none, not even to Scotsmen, in their admiration for Robert Burns, and distinguished poets authors of many nationalities have written eloquently in his praise. Here are two proofs of what I say, if indeed they are needed. In Westminster Abbey, the Valhalla of England, there is a monumental bust of Robert Burns, occupying a prominent position close to the sculptured image of William Shakespeare, the incomparable dramatist of whom England is so justly proud, which bust was subscribed for by 20,000 admirers of our Poet the world o'er, including all kinds and conditions of men, from Royalty downwards. In the entrance to the National Museum at Washington, United States, there are two pillars, one of which is surmounted by a bust of George Washington, the father of his country; and the other is surmounted by a bust of Robert Burns, the national poet of Scotland. Verily, an interesting and suggestive circumstance, especially when taken in connection with the conference which is being held in the city I have just mentioned, and which, we trust, will result in the much-desired disarmament, and thus form the prelude to a permanent and universal peace, in keeping with the principles and spirit of our Poet, who has so sweetly sung and so prophetically, of peace and of the brotherhood of man. I hold that he who best represents his country best represents his race, for human nature is the same throughout the world, and a truly- inspired poet is one of God's most valuable gifts to the children of men, and is sent to his brethren everywhere that he may open still wider the gates of knowledge, admonish, teach, and stimulate us to do our duty to our Maker, and to our fellowmen; impart to us fresh truths before undreamt of, and reveal to our admiring gaze, new beauties in the radiant sky and the glistening earth. Such was Robert Burns, of whom it may be truly said, that he is not for one nation merely, but for all the world, and like the myriad-minded Shakespeare, "Not for an age, but for all time."

He died at the early age of thirty-seven, but he accomplished a great work, and, I doubt not, fulfilled his mission, and though it is one hundred and twenty-six years since he died, he lives in his immortal works, which are more read, more appreciated now than ever they were, and he reigns in more hearts, and over more subjects, than any potentate on earth, be they King, Queen, Emperor or Czar. The lovers of Burns form a great fraternity all over the world; their grip is a strong and hearty clasp of the hand, of the manly, not of the fish—like, or pump—handle arder; while the rules and regulations of the confederacy are registered in a volume of Robert Burns' works. They are bound together by the same ties, cherish the same manly sentiments, and delight in the same motto, which is perennial in its fresh-ness and eternal in its truthfulness, for it is

"The rank is but the guinea's stamp,

The man's the gowd for a' that.

And I am optimistic enough to believe that the generous ideas contained in this sub-lime strain are at least, in some measure, helping to expedite the advent of that glorious, that radiant day, when, in word and in deed,

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

encouraged and stimulated by the words of this noble song:—

"The workman striking at the forge, or staking at the plough,
Looks up with nobler gaze to find God's finger on his brow;
Feels man is man though russet robed and smacking of the soil.
That all are brothers, whether born to titles or to toil."

Who knows but the spirit of the bard may be hovering around us this evening. He is dead, say you? Ah no: my friends, not dead: God is the God of the living, not the God of the dead. It is true that the mortal remains, the worn—out casket that contained the priceless jewel of the poet's soul, is laid in St. Michael's Churchyard, Dumfries, beside the river whose praises he loved so well to sing; but the spirit of the bard returned to the Giver, and I would fain believe enjoys_ that repose in the spirit—land it never knew on earth. The spirit—land: That land that seems so near, and yet so far away, nevertheless I am inclined to think nearer than many of us have any idea of, when I reflect that there are things visible and invisible, and how incapable we are of drawing the line between the material and the spiritual world. Yea,

"His spirit now seeme.h to hover beside us,
The sepulchre stone was laid o'er him in vain;
He is here as God's teacher to prompt and to guide us,
And bonnie, sweet Robin is nae dead and gane."

Of a verity, Robert Burns is with us to—night, and all that is noblest and grandest about him is permeating the universe. His influence is felt,

his songs are sung, his poems are recited, his letters read, wherever there are hearts to feel, and minds wherewith to think. Yes, he liveth on, he liveth ever; to cheer the despondent, to teach the uninformed, to infuse new life and energy into the breasts of the weak, the poor, and the oppressed,

and to comfort by his presence the homes of the humblest and we are all here this evening to pay tribute with grateful hearts to Robert Burns, the High Priest of Nature, the poet, reformer, and the heart—cheerer,

'Through whose life and through whose music an electric tremor ran,

Of the dignity of labour and the brotherhood of man."

We hear him in the song of the bird, in the murmur of the stream, in the sighting of the zephyr, in the wintry blast, in the thunder's roar, and in the cadences of Nature by flood and field; and, above all, in the beating of the human heart, with whose innermost recesses he was so profoundly conversant.

Robert Burns is now only all that I have said: he is the poet King, not only of Cal-edonia, but of an empire as wide as the realms of thought. His crown is a wreath of holly, with which he was invested by the Muse of Coila herself, his sceptre is a rough burr thistle, his insignia of royalty a wooden plough transformed into a harp, decked with garlands and tipped with fire. Over the length and breadth of the land, on the lonely veldt, and in the crowded cities of South Africa; amid the sheep walks of Aus-tralia; on the mountainous slopes of New Zealand; among the floating islands of China; on the banks of the Ganges; on the steppes of Russia; amid the spicy groves and smiling valleys of the West Indies; in the shadow of the Pyramids; on the vast savannah rolling prairies, and -countless plains of the new world, countless thousands are paying their allegiance to him, and all are his subjects here, and engaged in the same interesting ceremony. And so it will continue to be while the heather blooms, the lark sings,

and the "Wee, modest, crimson—tipped flow'r" grows amid the stubble and lea; as long as Ayr gurgling kisses his pebbled shore, and sweet Afton flows gently among its green braes; while the Nith glides past classic Ellisland, sweeps by the venerable ruins of Lincluden Abbey consecrated by the poet's genius, and leaves the foot of the hill where he rests in peace in the Queen of the South. And the strains of "Auld Lang Syne" will melt the heart, and the martial ode of "Scots wha hae" will lire patriotism in Scotland's sons and daughters until the "great ribs of Nature break,"

and the River of Time is merged in the fathomless Ocean of Eternity. The telegraph wires are pulsating with his name, the air is vocal with his praise. And his presence haunts this room to—night, I ask you, gentlemen, to rise to your feet, and with gratefu1 and reverent hearts, pledge the toast

"The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns."