

MAJOR DUDGEON IMMORTAL MEMORY (1927).

Major Dudgeon, proposing the toast of the evening, said:— Although this is the first occasion on which I have proposed "The Immortal Memory," I have, since the days of my childhood, been a devoted admirer of Robert Burns, and I esteem it a wonderful privilege to be entrusted with the principal toast in this dear old building with its undying memories and associations with our great Poet. It is now over a hundred and thirty years since the mortal remains of Burns were laid to rest in St. Michael's Churchyard, and yet to—night and during this week, a larger number of Clubs and Associations will be paying homage to his memory, than ever before have done so; surely this proves that Burns was not merely a great Scottish poet, but one of the most outstanding men that have ever lived in this world. Before I proceed to deal with what I believe to be the greatest influence that Burns has exercised over his countrymen during more than a century and a quarter, and through his countrymen, on the inhabitants of innumerable countries, I wish to pay my humble and devout tribute to his songs and poetry. To every noble thought and high purpose that found its place in the heart of man, some touching song or poem of the great bard, makes an irresistible appeal. On many an occasion has a poor voyager steering a difficult course through this world's tempestuous sea, turned to some lines of Burns, to give true expression to the feelings surging in the very depths of his soul. Permit me to deal briefly with the bard's appeal to a few of the outstanding passions that rule within the heart of man. Take gratitude — has finer expression ever been given to it than in the lines:—

"The bridegroom may forget the bride  
Was made his wedded wife yestreen;  
    The Monarch may forget the crown  
That on his head an hour had been;  
The mother may forget the child  
That smiles sae sweetly on her knee;  
Rut I'll remember thee, Glencairn,  
And a' that thou hast done for me:"

Then sympathy — what is more touching than:—

"Wee, modest, crimson—tipped flow'r,  
Thou's met me in an evil hour;  
    For I maun crush amang the stour  
Thy slender stem;  
To spare thee now is past my pow'r,  
Thou bonnie gem."

To those who have a contempt for snobocracy, what is more appealing than these lines:—

""What of Earls with whom you have supt,  
    And of Dukes you have dined with yestreen,  
Lord, an insect's an insect at most,  
Though it crawl on the curls of Queen."  
Then what can make the heart swell with patriotic fervour more than:—

"The Nith shall run to Corsincon,

And Criffel sink in Solway,  
E'er we permit a foreign foe  
-On British ground to rally."

Or

"In the field of proud honour our swords in our hands,  
Our King and our country to save.  
While victory shines on life's last ebbing sands,  
Oh, who would not die with the brave?"

Should the Scottish tradition for independence require strengthening, these lines must be advantageous:—

"To catch Dame Fortune's golden smile,  
Assiduous wait upon her.  
And gather gear by ev'ry wile  
That's justify'd by honor,  
Not for to hide it in a hedge,  
Nor for a train attendant,  
But for the glorious privilege  
Of being independent."

What can appeal with greater force to a man deeply in love than:—

"My love is like a red, red rose  
That's newly sprung in June.  
My love is like the melodie  
That's sweetly play'd in tune.  
As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,  
So deep in love am I,  
And I will love thee still, my dear;  
Till a' the seas gang dry."

If, by chance, the greatest passion that stirs human souls — freedom — requires a fillip, we turn to:—

"The solemn League and Covenant  
Cost Scotland blood — cost Scotland tears,  
But it sealed Freedom's Sacred Cause,  
If thou art a slave, indulge thy sneers."

or

"By oppression's woes and pains,  
By your sons in servile chains,  
We will drain our dearest veins  
But they shall be free."

Last, but not least, the passion for the brotherhood of mankind, which is gripping men and women of goodwill in every nation to—day, can surely find no greater inspiration than in the lines:—

"Then let us pray, that come it may —  
As come it will for a' that —  
That sense and worth o'er a' the earth,  
May bear the gree, an' a' that.  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's comin' yet for a' that,  
That man to man the wand. o'er  
Shall brithers be for a' that."

Magnificently as Burns has catered for every mood of man, it is his own wonderful personality that stands out with ever-increasing lustre. He was indeed a man that dared to be a man, free from cant and hypocrisy, with a breadth of mind and depth of vision that few, yes very few, men have ever equalled and none excelled. No man can estimate to-day the part that has really been played during the last hundred and thirty years by the works of Burns, in moulding the modern characteristics of the Scottish race. The Scottish nation has undoubtedly for centuries been a great one, but its people up to the nineteenth century, appeared to other nations very reserved — narrow in outlook and inclined to be hypocritical — and then this super-Scot appeared, and gave expression to the soul of our nation in verse and in song, written in one of the most expressive vernacular on earth. These songs and these verses spread from continent to continent, and gave a new and finer appreciation of the Scottish character. Scottish men and women going abroad, found that a favourable atmosphere had been created for them by Burns' works, and most of them played up to that atmosphere, for they found it was more advantageous from every point of view, than appearing as Scots used to do in the pre-Burns' period, as 'unco guid' but unco narrow and perhaps more than a trifle mean. I am convinced that the influence of Burns, through his works, has been the greatest factor during the last fifty or sixty years, in Scottish men and women playing an ever-increasingly important part in shaping the destinies not only of our mighty Commonwealth of free nations, but of the whole world. Even to-day, there are not a few critics of our national poet, and perhaps, as he was only human, in one or two minor respects the critics may have justification; but let us look at this broad-minded man with his most tender sympathies, from a broad-minded point of view, and then I have not the slightest doubt that an overpowering affection for the memory of this man and for his glorious works, will well up in our hearts, and we will thank God for giving our nation such a genius, who, with magic pen, has contributed song upon song and verse upon verse of exquisite beauty • and profound wisdom.

Burns realised that happiness was the one really big thing that is worth having in this world, and, dogged as he was by bad luck, he undoubtedly enjoyed life, and his songs and his poems have in generous measure contributed to the happiness of millions of men and women throughout the world.