

SIR JOHN W. BUCHANAN—JARDINE IMMORTAL MEMORY 1931

Sir John W. Buchanan—Jardine, of Castle Milk, was the guest of the Dumfries Howff Club at their celebration of Burns' anniversary in the Globe Hotel on Monday night, and in proposing "The Immortal Memory" he spoke of the strong national spirit inspired by the works of the National Bard, and of his essential humanity.

The Chairman, introducing Sir John, said there was no doubt some might think it presumption on his part, he not being a native of Dumfries, to attempt to introduce their guest. Although an incomer, he was not long in learning that the most honoured and the most respected name in Dumfriesshire was that of Sir Robert Buchanan—Jardine, the father of their guest. He thought they would agree with him when he said that Sir John had followed the family traditions, and that he was the most honoured, the most respected, and the most generous landlord in Dumfriesshire. They all knew what Sir John had done for his tenants — how he had helped them over the stile these last few years, not only by giving a rebate of rent, but in many other ways. Sir John was also known by other qualities. He was known all over Great Britain as a good and keen sportsman. Some of them, no doubt, had been thank-ful to Sir John when they had a "bob" on some of his horses. He, at least, had ventured a shilling on his horse, "Nothing Venture," and had not been sorry for it.

Sir John had a rousing reception on rising. He said he felt that in the first place he must say that it was a great honour to be asked to be the guest of the Howff Club that evening, and to propose "The Immortal Memory" of the National Bard. The undertaking would be considered a very serious one, even at a dinner so far away as Winnipeg, Hong Kong, or Timbuctoo, but in Dumfries, which was almost in the bull's eye of the Burns' country and in a club where most of the most of the members knew a good deal about the subject, and where some were indeed authorities, he might be forgiven when he said it was with a certain trepidation that he approached the task. He felt himself hardly sufficiently qualified to speak at a gathering such as that, where so many of those present were so much better authorities on the Poet than he himself was. He had often been asked by people who had not the good fortune to be Scotsmen, why it was that Scotsmen attached so much importance, and how it was that among Scotsmen such tremendous enthusiasm was inspired by their National Poet, Robert Burns. "Why," said such people, "don't you get up just as much enthusiasm for Thomas Carlyle or Sir Walter Scott, or other great men that Scotland has produced in other spheres, such as Raeburn, the great artist?" These men were, of course, very great in some ways, perhaps in some ways almost as great as Burns, and they might even have made as great a mark at the time they lived. It was perhaps very difficult to answer the question propounded, but the way he answered it to his own satisfaction was that Thomas Carlyle or Sir Walter Scott or Raeburn might just as well have been Englishmen, or, for that matter, Hungarians, for the things they did and the things they wrote, while remarkably good, were not essentially national — as was the work of Burns. The sentiments which they gave voice to, although they were undoubtedly Great Scotsmen, did not typify the nation. They did not bring home one's nation-ality to one in the same way as Burns did. He once attended a Burns' dinner in Hong Kong, and that experience enlightened him as to the intensity of Scottish nationalism.

His hearers that evening would have been as astonished as he was at the tremendous gathering that turned out. Some of them he never suspected of being Scotsmen before, and it was surprising to find that many of them proved, to be tremendous

authorities on Scotland's National Poet. At that function it was a novelty indeed to partake of a haggis cooked by a Chinaman. The evening went off very well, and a real Burns' spirit predominated. The whisky they drank was not made by Chinamen, and he could assure them it was all right. What was it exactly about Burns that appealed so much to Scotland as a nation?

Firstly, he thought, it was the Poet's essential nationalism — he did not mean nationalism of the military kind, what one might almost call the war—like enthusiasm that sometimes passed for nationalism — an everyday commonplace human sort of nationalism of which Burns' works were so full. When one found one-self far away from home, one did not forget that he was a Scotsman, but he was apt to forget the little incidents of everyday life, and it was these things Burns clothed with fresh beauty, and brought back to one's mind in the most striking manner. It always appeared to him that one of Burns' greatest geniuses was his ability to write about commonplace, ordinary, everyday occurrences, not great heroic events or astounding circumstances, but everyday sentiments and ideas. To these he gave a special character and beauty all his own. Let them consider "The Cotter's Saturday Night." There they had depicted an episode in everyday life, immortalised and made vital for all time. Then there was "The auld farmer's New Year morning salutation to his auld mare, Maggie." There they had the story of a typical old farmer going out on New Year's morning and seeing his mare, and unconsciously cast his mind back twenty—nine years, to the time when the old mare was rather better than she was then. That was a thing he often did with his horses. How natural was the reflective spirit of the following verses:—

"Thou ance was i' the foremost rank,
A filly, buirdly, steeve an' swank;
An' set weel down a shapely shank,
As e'er treard yin;
An' could hae flown out owre a stank,
Like ony bird.
It's now some nine—ant—twenty year
Sin' thou was mu guid—father's meere;
He gied me thee, o' tocher clear,
An' fifty mark;
Tho' it was sma', 'twas weel—won gear,
An' thou was stark."

These were sentiments which anyone might experience on a New Year's morning. He did not know of any nation that had had person in its history the parallel or the peer of Burns in respect to the expression of such feelings. Nations might have had great national heroes who were the counterpart of Robert Bruce or William Wallace, but they had not a Robert Burns. The other great claim of Robert Burns was his essential humanity, his deep insight into the affairs and emotions of the human heart. There was nothing dry or austere either about the Poet's works or his temperament. He was a man who enjoyed the good things of life very much — and after all who did not — and made no bones about it. Most people who wrote or recorded their feelings through the instrumentality of art expressed themselves in high—flown sentiments and points of view that perhaps the ordinary person could not quite share in to the same extent as the author might have done on the inspiration of the moment. But though Burns' works were very highly inspired, he wrote in a sort of humorous, natural vein about the thoughts and ideas which flitted across his mind. The thoughts were such as occurred to men irrespective of rank, and as such their appeal never lost its charm. His poems

dealing with the lasses were always light—hearted and cheerful. Obviously he quite realised his own failings, and realised he had been made a fool of once or twice, but devil a bit did he care, he was going to have another go. It was the spirit of the thing that appealed to the speaker so much in Burns. Referring to the Poet's residence in Dumfries, he was sorry to say that that really proved his undoing, because, although he was a sort of convivial fellow before that, the hospitality of Dumfriesians in the eighteenth century proved too much for him. That was often held up against him, and people often said he was a drunken, fellow but one must remember that it must have been very difficult indeed for him, situated as he was. Everybody wanted to treat him and being naturally a very cheery fellow and not liking not to drink with this fellow and that, it was difficult to him. In the same circumstances many of those present that night would doubtless have found it difficult to be different. That night they were surrounded by Burns' traditions and associations, and it was pleasant to think that the poet passed many a cheery evening in the place where they were gathered together. They in Dumfries had a heritage, which was denied admirers of the Poet in almost every other part of Scotland. That they appreciated the privilege of their position was evidenced by that and similar functions in the town that evening. He asked them to pledge in silence "The Immortal Memory."