

J KEVAN McDOWALL, GLASGOW IMMORTAL MEMORY (1947)

Mr. McDowall, in submitting the toast of "The Immortal Memory," said:- A hundred and eighty-eight years have passed since the birth of Robert Burns, a hundred and fifty years since his death, yet a century and a half after his physical death, Burns lives more vividly than at any time during his earthly phase. This homage by a nation to a poetic son is unique. Warriors, liberators, poets, and writers adorn the pages of history. Among great warriors and liberators were Hannibal, Caesar, Napoleon, Bismark, Lenin, Washington, Bruce and Wallace. Their names pass down the ages. Frequently history is coloured by the point of the narrator. Sometimes it depends on the ultimate success

or failure of the cause. Bruce and Wallace were heroes to Scots. They were rebels to the English. Wallace was executed by Edward as a rebel. Hitler thought he had won the Second World War. If he had won, his name would have gone down through the ages as the greatest warrior of all, the hero who conquered the world - by his intuition. His opponents won. History will be different. Poets, writers and others receive varying measures of praise and recognition. Apart from religious observances, there is nothing comparable to the homage paid to Robert Burns. What are the reasons? Burns taught eternal love, of the poor, of the unfortunate, of the oppressed, of his fellow man, of woman, man's companion of the family of his homeland, of the animals of the earth, of the flowers of the fields, of Treat nature in all her many forms. He was intolerant of nothing but intolerance. He satirised hypocrisy. He championed democracy. As a true child of nature he possessed her inherent peculiarities. Some of these met with the reprobation of the smug and the intolerant. Burns' address to the Unco Guid is an unsurpassed gem of truth. An apostle is defined by Chambers's dictionary as the "principal champion of a new system." Burns was the apostle of world democracy. In his time - the days of the wee, wee German lairdie - the ordinary working man and peasant in Scotland lived little above conditions of slavery. Even in the days of our own grandparents, and in some cases parents, it was not uncommon for a man and wife to endeavour to bring up a large family on £40 per year or less - as in the case of Burns's parents - and to educate their children. Often, in Scotland, poverty, penury and starvation were the reward of long hours of labour. There was class distinction of a feudal character. To-day, Jock is as good as his master. Alas, in many cases he thinks he is a great deal better. The pendulum has swung. May it not swing too far. The mechanism of economics is delicate. We welcome the deliverance of the masses, but gratitude is mellowed by anxiety. Let not a new selfishness prevail. Let not anarchy reign. Beware of excessive entertainment, betting, gambling, idling, peremptory demands and lightning strikes. These are evils which will lead to conditions no less undesirable than those which existed in the time of Burns. May the working man realise his great good fortune in these days. Let him jealously guard, from abuse by his fellows, the privileges won after so many years of striving. The greatest force in bringing about the social revolution was the teachings of Robert Burns. Thomas Paine and others before Burns may have propounded social theories, and by them Burns may or may not have been influenced. The fact remains, that nothing in the social history of mankind equalled in irresistible appeal to humanity, the works of Burns.

Burns immortalised all he touched. He embellished to flourish in fields of glory the Ayrshire trees and woods. He painted in colours, brilliant and unfading hues, the hills

and woods and rivers and dales of his native land. He roused the nigh dormant national spirit of the Scots. He preserved their Doric tongue. Robert Burns asserted, and he established for all men for all time, the rights o' man — 'Tho' e'er sae poor.' He declared in immortal manner, not only for Scotland but for the world, the brotherhood of man. Let Scots unite in self—help. In internal Scottish affairs let us get away from the narrow—visioned governing bureaucracy of London. Let us build a happy, prosperous and contented Scotland, to form part of a great and happy Britain. Britain is the motherland of the first world—vide commonwealth of free peoples. That has proved — and will continue to prove the greatest force for good on earth. The body of Burns was buried a century and a half ago. On 21st July, 1946, the 150th anniversary of his death was commemorated at Dumfries in unforgettable demonstrations of homage. His soul as expressed in his immortal works lives to—day. It will live tomorrow and tomorrow. It shines on his fellow—man as the sun blazes from the skies. It sends from heaven rays radiating happiness and love of mankind.

'He passed through life's tempestuous night,
A brilliant, trembling, northern light.
ThrouTh years to come he'll shine from far
A fixed unsetting Polar Star.'

To—night we pay tribute to the master bard of all time. Similar gatherings and tributes are being held and paid to his memory throughout the world, even in remote lands, in the lone isles of the Pacific seas, wherever there are Scots. From the far ends of the earth, men, whose knowledge of Scotland and the Scots is little, come to Alloway, to see his lowly home, the banks and braes and the hills and dales of the land of the immortal bard. Let me conclude my humble tribute in the words of the great American lawyer and politician, Robert Green Ingersoll, on a visit to the cottage by the banks o' bonnie Doon:—

'Tho' Scotland boasts a thousand names,
Of patriot, King and Peer,
The noblest, grandest of them all
Was loved and cradled here.
Here lived the gentle peasant Prince, The loving Cottar King,
Compared with whom the greatest Lord Is but a titled thing.
And here the world through all the years,
As long as day returns,
The tribute of its love and tears
Will pay to Robert Burns.

A Toast -- The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns