

DR C. CLAYSON IMMORTAL MEMORY. (1963).

It would have been a bad thing for Scotland but a better thing for the world, if Robert Burns had been born a twentieth century Russian rather than an eighteenth century Scot. This startling statement came last night from Dr C. Clayson, physician superintendent of Lochmaben Chest Hospital, when he proposed "The Immortal Memory" to members of Dumfries Burns Howff Club in the Globe Inn.

Dr Clayson gave this reason: "One of the things Burns knew was the difference between patriotism, which is the spirit of freedom, and nationalism, which is the spirit of conquest."

The speaker added: "To—day we have got these values mixed so that we can no longer distinguish between the one and the other, and are, indeed, a little uncertain as to what patriotism and freedom mean.

"I suppose the real problem of the 20th century is this whether in an increasingly complex state of society requiring ever more planning and ever more controls for its preservation, individual freedom can be sustained.

"One half of the world is ruled by men who believe that freedom can be so preserved. The other half is ruled by men who believe that it can not.

"Politicians seem unable to solve this problem, but I know well what Robert Burns would have said about it 'Freedom stand , or freedom fa', Let him follow me.'

Soon, hoped Dr Clayson, another Robert Burns will arise and sing the songs of freedom in the lands where liberty is lost.

Earlier in his talk Dr Clayson spoke about Burns's waywardness, his wit and his wisdom.

WAYWARDNESS. This term applied to Burns, said the speaker, was a typical example of the British habit of understatement. But if they were to be honest with Burns or with themselves, they could not ignore this perversity.

There always had been such men and there always would be. For the most part they could go to their graves unwept, unhonoured and unsung, and be heard no more. But if one of them happened to be a genius, then everything he did was re—membered ?? he good for the dateless delight of all men; and the bad for the biased persecution of a bigoted biographer or for the somewhat repetitive fiction of a minor novelist.

WIT. They had it on the highest literary authority that brevity was the soul of wit, and next to Shakespeare, none knew better than Burns how to employ the fewest words for the most pungent meaning. "Nursing her wrath to keep it warm" would never be improved on no matter how many erring husbands returned home late to oratorical wives. Robert Burns' deft touch "Her nose and chin they threaten ither", had also put Willie Wastle's wife among the immortals.

WISDOM. The third of Burns' outstanding qualities, said Dr Clayson. It was not wisdom for his personal guidance, but the wider wisdom which went to the heart of great issues. Curiously enough, this was divorced from his best poetry — for instance "is there for honest -poverty "

I suggest that as a poem it is not in the top rank, said the speaker. Indeed, it is perhaps not a poem at all, but a piece of rhyming political proportion, in which "Robert Burns overstated his case because he let his feelings run away with him.

Dr Clayson went on to speak of english poetry and dialect poetry, and said that the greater part of the critical explanation of Burns's English poetry lay in the birth of poetry itself. In considering the genesis of poetry and the tests of poetry, it came, figuratively speaking, in two ways — from the heart and from the head.

From the HEART it was poetry of inspiration — coming with a sudden rush and in the language which was most natural to the poet, from the HEAD it was all intellectual exercise, and the poet worked at it day in, day out. And whilst the end result might be something of genuine beauty, it never could have the touch and sparkle of sheer inspiration. Such was Burns's English poetry.

The test of poetry was two fold. First test was — "Does the reader appreciate the music of the language,?" The second test — "Does the reader grasp the poet message?" The poem to the field mouse was a gem on both counts, for it was the poetry of inspiration. The poem on the wounded hare might lack something on the first test, but lacked nothing on the second for the same feeling of compassion for a fellow creature in distress, came straight from the poet to the reader to evoke the latter's sympathy.

A hundred years from now, men and women will still remember with gratitude a field mouse and a wounded hare, for these were made imperishable: Made imperishable by a man who loved all living things.

They all knew, said Dr Clayson, that his greatest work comprised his Scots dialect poetry, and in three fields he was unchallengeable. "Tam o' Shanter" was the finest narrative poem we have.

"Holy Willie's Prayer" is the most perfect satire which certain immature intellects who presume to call themselves satirists to—day, would do well to study and meditate upon.

But the real miracle of Robert Burns, said the speaker, was his songs.