

MR ANDREW CHARTERS IMMORTAL MEMORY (1966)

The world-wide appeal of Burns and the universality of his songs was emphasised by Mr Andrew Charters, depute chief constable of Ayr, when he proposed "The Immortal Memory" at Dumfries Burns Howff Club's anniversary dinner in the Globe Inn. Mr. Charters, who will be remembered by many Dumfries people as Detective-Inspector in the local constabulary, said they in Dumfries that night formed only one link in a great chain of remembrance and celebration - a chain which encircled the world.

The beginning of their dinner that evening would coincide with the last toasts of the Burns Supper in Calcutta. About the time they in the Globe were finishing, the tables in New York would just be spread, and when these Burns lovers were going off to their homes, the celebrations in far-off California would just be beginning. And so on around the world went the great circle of friendships for the poet, wherever the English language was spoken, or Burns had been translated. And let them recall all the time that the focus of much of the attention was on that very tavern in the Globe Inn.

To many people the annual world focus of attention in celebrating Burns's birth was an astonishing phenomenon, and he would like to pose the question why it was that whenever "Janwar win's blaw bleak an' cauld," there were countless gatherings, not only throughout Scotland, but also in Arctic regions and tropical zones, where the memory of the 'poet was honoured - among the snow-covered pinnacles of Communist Moscow, the towering sky-scrapers of Capitalist New York, the banqueting halls of great sophisticated cities, and in rough, humble, country huts beside the windswept moors.

Very recently there was celebrated the ter-centenary of Shakespeare, and the question might well be asked, "Why no Shakespeare Suppers?" Although one of the most stupendous intellects this world had ever known, Shakespeare was a mystery. He had bequeathed to humanity some truly wonderful characters, but of the author himself we knew very little.

Burns, however, was a magnet - an open book: here we saw a man who was bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. With Shakespeare, we had to stand pack, dazzled, at a respectful distance, but with Burns, we could still feel that he was one of ourselves. Burns's pedestal provides a target for those who would aim at him. The poet's showing up of hypocrisy and insincerity in public life, and even in the Church in his day, earned him much opposition, and he had many detractors - some of them seeming friends, and some open foes.

"We will always have those with us who will pervertly delicate them-selves to pry and burrow into the nooks and crannies of dead men's lives.

There will also be those whose pleasure and dedication it is to grapple into oblivion in search of blemishes or garbage, whose delight it is to chuckle over famous dead men's graves. Such persons do not seek to elevate Nature; they seek only to degrade genius.

If for a time in his later life he did quite an amount of drinking -some of it within this very tavern — it was an age when hard drinking was fashionable. If he sinned in this respect in some people's eyes, he sinned in company with English Prime Ministers,

Scots Lords of Session, grave dignitaries of the Church, and hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who went to their graves in an odour of sanctity, and whose epitaphs were a catalogue of all the virtues.

When Burns succumbed, it was to good fellowship. His failings were the failings of an over—warm heart and of a noble nature, excess in love, and excess in friendly sociality. We do not seek to palliate or excuse the self—confessed and oft—regretted sins and weaknesses of Robert Burns. His personal failings have been the theme of moralists for almost 200 years. For once let us leave them alone:

Referring to the poet's many wonderful songs, Mr. Charters said if ever there was a man who could write the songs of a nation, that man was Robert Burns. Because of his genius, Scotland had a wealth of song literature which was unsurpassed. Nor should it be forgotten that many of these songs were adaptations of old, vulgar, or earthly ditties collected by the poet from unsavoury sources. He used his genius on them, sorted out the dross and dirt, and made them fit to be sung by the greatest choir in any land.

Dumfries can be for ever proud that it was from this old town —indeed from the stagecoach on the very Plainstones outside here — that so many of these songs were sent forth to enrich and delight all corners of the world.

Mr. Charters concluded by reciting four original verses, the last of which was:—

“Tis right that Rab should honoured be;
Guid Neebors a', please rise wi' me,
Tak' glass in hand, and damned be he
This toast that spurns.

I give "The Immortal Memory" Of Robert Burns