

A. THOMSON - IMMORTAL MEMORY 1933.

The members of the Dumfries Burns Howff Club held their annual dinner in the Globe Hotel on Wednesday evening, when the toast of "The Immortal memory" was proposed by Mr. A. A. Thomson, the well-known journalist and author, whose books, "The Burns We Love," "Let's See the Lowlands," and "Let's See the Highlands," have been exceedingly popular through Scotland. . Mr Thomson, in an eloquent address, spoke of the bard as, above all, the poet of friendliness between man and man. The Chairman, in introducing Mr. Thomson, said Mr. Thomson was no stranger to the Howff Club. He was no stranger in Scotland. From the books he had written and from his own personality he was known throughout the length and breadth of Scotland as a fervid Scot although he preferred to live in England. That day, members of the club were present at the Mausoleum, where the ceremony was simple, touching and impressive. The placing of their tribute of flowers on the tomb of the beloved dead was a token of reverence and affection, and it was with reverence and affection that he was sure Mr. Thomson would address them.

Mr. Thomson, in submitting the toast of "The Immortal Memory," said:- When, a little over a year ago, I had the honour of addressing this club, I said these words, and will say them again:- "That to speak of Robert Burns in the town whose streets he walked, in the very Howff where that deep, rich voice was heard in song and laughter, and sometimes in heart sorrow - tills indeed, might make the proudest man humbler." And the prouder I feel of the honour you do to me, the more sincerely do I feel a true humility. The most lovable of Englishmen, Charles Dickens, speaking of Christmas, said:- "May Christmas be as near to you as I am myself, and I in the spirit at your elbow." And, as with the most lovable of Englishmen, so with the most lovable of Scots, may we not feel that here in this town, in this howff, and on this night with the blast of Janwar' wind skirling awa' oot bye, that he is with us in the spirit au our elbows. So perhaps we might consider him, not so much the hero-poet of his native land, though he was a hero poet – he was the happy warrior just as Wallace and Bruce were happy warriors. But that is no all. Nor will we consider him as poet on our lovely countryside of wimpling burns and chanting birds, of heather, moorland, and the caller air that breathes into a Scot the breath of life. Not even as the singer of the enchanting love songs that thrill the heartstring through the breast - for that is not all. But rather let us think of him as the Friend at our elbow, for above all he was the poet of friendship between man and man, brither for a' that. We are not here to defend his memory - that memory needs no more defence than does the flower in the dell, the stream in the glen, or the sun in the sky. We are here to give back a little of the something he gave with all his great heart - friendship. He gave it freely to father, brother, and comrade, to plough horse and the collie dog that barked joyfully at his heels - even to cowering, timorous beasties and ilka happing bird. He has laughed and sung in this howff. He has sat in this very chair. And here he has drunk the cup of kindness yet. It is that cup of kindness that we raise; it is that hand of friendship that we clasp.

"Then here's a hand, my trusty frien',
And gie's a hand o' thine."

His love of Scotland and of humanity, which burned like a living flame, shone brighter in his songs. Logic may hold the intellect, the lofty epic line may appeal to the cultured few, but song is enshrined in the heart of a people. It touches something elemental in nature, the heart's core of man. Song can be the poor man's one contact with hope

and beauty, the only thing in his life that holds the touch of the Eternal Melodies. The songs of Burns came — and they still come — to a people, flowing forth as simply and as naturally as ilka bird song o' its love. There is hardly an emotion in all the rich variety of human experience that does not instantly call up a line or a melody of Burns. Rollicking laughter, aching sorrow, manly pride, the love of a lad for a lass, loneliness, compassion — and, above all, true friendship. So the songs of Burns will sweeten and gladden the hearts of a people as long as Scottish hearts shall beat and man shall pursue his eternal journey beyond the sea, beyond the stars. Long before the thousand books were written, a traveller in Scotland met an old man by the wayside, a bent and wrinkled old body, knappin' stanes at the side of the road. But when the traveller mentioned the name of Robert Burns, the old man's back straightened and his eye flashed fire. "Robert Burns," he said, "He had the heart of a man in him. He was all man and all heart. And there's nothing at least in a poor man's experience, either bitter or sweet, which can happen to him, but a line of Burns springs into his mouth and gives him the courage and the comfort that he needs." That is the friendship that he gives us, and more. All the things that are true and lovely and simple in life he has brought within the grasp of the humblest heart and hand. The scholar and the critic may explain many things, but none can ever express what Burns has brought home to the social, honest, friendly man, the sting of the caller air on the cheek, the rustle of woodland leaves, the wimple of a burn, the song of lovers in a cornfield, the cosy comfort of the ingle, the love of weans and wife, the joy of battle, without the dull hate of wars. These are the things that will endear and endure till a' the seas gang dry. So our friend is in the spirit at our elbow

We cannot see the sturdy figure with the Ploughman's stoop. We cannot hear that rich deep voice, with its magical tone that could wile the very birds from the trees. We cannot see those dark eyes, those lustrous eyes, that were like coach—lamps alight on a dark road — eyes of which Scott said, "I never saw such an eye in human head." Yet though we cannot see him we feel his presence, a kindly gracious and joyous presence, a Scot among Scots, a brither among brothers, a friend at our elbow. I ask you to be all upstanding and drink to him who had "misfortunes great and sma', bit aye a heart abune them a'." — the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns."