

Rev JAMES CAMPBELL IMMORTAL MEMORY. (1940).

The Rev. James Campbell, minister of Durisdeer, was the guest of Dumfries Burns Howff Club at their annual dinner in the Globe Hotel, Dumfries, on Thursday evening. Mr. Campbell in his speech dealt with various aspects of the life and work of the poet — his early struggles prior to the publication of the Kilmarnock of his poems; the reception which the volume received and its influence upon the people of Scotland.

Mr. Campbell, after returning his thanks to the members of the Burns Howff Club of Dumfries for their kind invitation to address them, said he appreciated the honour not only on account of the fact that the Howff was consecrated by Burns's own use of it in his lifetime, but also because of the fact that Dumfries was the Mecca of those who had a love and respect for the great poet. His dust lay buried in

the Old Churchyard of Dumfries. In Dumfries he spent the lingering years of his life, and in Dumfries, in many respects, he attained to the expression, in the most wonderful forms, of his estimation of life.

Mr Campbell (continuing) said he wanted in the first place, to give a very short account of the beginnings of Burns's public career. At the Whitsunday term of 1786, when the Bard, farmer in Mossgiel, had attained the age of twenty—seven, he entered upon the most miserable period of his lifetime. He came to the lowest ebb of his fortunes in a life that, at any time, had never been prosperous. He was down at the heel, down at the mouth, down in the dumps, and down at the elbow, out of fortune and almost out of his mind. His one interest, at that time, was to get out of his native country. He had come to such a pass in his personal affairs that his one desire was to quit all associations whatever with his native land. He had had a bad harvest. He had misconducted himself, so as to arouse the hostility of the people whose friendship he desired. The only remedy was to turn and go as far away from the scenes of these miseries as he could. He decided to go to the West Indies. The only difficulty in bringing his intention to actual accomplishment was that he had not a copper, and it was on account of his utter poverty that his friends persuaded him to collect a number of poems which he had already composed, and put them in a book. It was only on account of that, that we became possessed of these wonderful poems circulated in print. Mr. Campbell said he mentioned that just to show that they were dealing there with what might have been a disaster, and yet something that proved to be most wonderful and fruitful.

Burns, advised by those who desired his welfare, was compelled to publish his poems. He had composed them without thought of publication, but thanks to the businesslike methods of his publisher in Kilmarnock, he was in one week the possessor of twenty pounds. Immediately on receipt of that twenty pounds, he proceeded to take out a passage from the port of Greenock to Jamaica. That showed that Burns did not think of his poems as those of a famous man. He did not expect to be received and blessed on account of his poetry. Indeed his determination after the success of the publication of his poems, indicated that he had no conception whatever of the future that lay before him. Turning to another date — the November Term of the same year — Mr. Campbell said Burns arrived in Edinburgh, and, to his astonishment, he found that his fame had gone before him. People received him with open arms; they rejoiced in his very company; they shouted his praise to the skies. He was like a man resurrected out of the grave and exalted to the heavens; he was boomed to the very echo. Everybody wanted to meet the great Burns, somehow or other. The race to have that acquaintanceship was of the most varied kind.

Dukes and Earls, Baronets and Knights, professors of theology and doctors of the Church, men of all ranks, merchants, storekeepers, tradesmen, boys, servant maids, and all classes of the community in Edinburgh and the surrounding country, rejoiced in Burns. His star had risen suddenly in the sky. It was a unique phenomenon. A new world was opened up, boundless possibilities lay before him, and for a short time a demand was made for a bigger edition of his poems.

Early in 1787, there was published the first Edinburgh edition of three thousand copies, and Burns as a result of that received at least five hundred pounds. In the space of six months he had earned more than he possibly could have earned in sixty years as a farmer. Yet he handed to his brother Gilbert, who continued to work the miserable farm at Mossgiel, the sum of two hundred pounds, in order to give him a start, and to show he had not neglected his family. They certainly must honour Burns for this, that he fought the good fight. Confronted with all kinds of obstacles and obstructions

and oppositions, sensible of deficiencies and troubles within and around, he fought till he won. The next thing was they rejoiced in Burns, not only as setting an example of a stout heart against a strong enemy, but in the fact that he also won a victory of the kind that we ought all to desire to win. He won the friendship and kindness of thousands. He won the esteem and goodwill of people he never dreamed of, and, if we ourselves could win the compassion and kindness and admiration and esteem of our fellow-men, we would have gained one of the finest victories we could possibly attain in life. They must also honour Burns for his genius, and for his great and wonderful art of expression, especially in poetry. As a poet, Burns came before them always as a singer of charity, a sweet singer of human sympathy. Always before his mind were the sorrows of the honest poor. He sympathised with the griefs, disappointments, sins, shames, troubles and trials of those with whom he had daily contact — with those of his own social level.

Mr. Campbell went on to pay tribute to the sincerity of Burns's early works, and referred in particular to the verses dedicated to his prayer on the prospect of death, which, he said, were written when he was only seventeen years of age. Burns had written his paraphrase of the 19th psalm by the time he was twenty. There they had a soul smitten with the most profound melancholy. In virtue of the awful harshness of his early life, the poet wrote of the sorrows and sadness of his fellow—men.

He was not, however, in those days confined to sadness and sorrow. He was a sweet singer of living nature, and he was interested in everything in nature that had life, with the greatness of his charitable heart. There was the vermin of the field, the mouse, the daisy, there was the wretched thing he saw on the woman's bonnet; the death of the old ewe; the farmer's address to his mare. There was constantly before him living nature, about which he spontaneously sang.

Turning to the social life of the poet, Mr Campbell said that Burns was a great man for conviviality, and they found his social and convivial spirit expressed in "Jock was fou'," "Tam was glorious," "Tam lo'ed him like a very brither; they had been fou' for weeks thegither."

But, best of all was "The Jolly Beggars." They had those rascals of society, rascals and outcasts, but Burns himself saw them not only, in their ugliness, but in their humanity and possibilities, in their stout facing of the world, enjoying the night, and not even for a moment thinking of the day. Mr Campbell said he esteemed Burns in the sense that a certain writer had stated: "If a man has ambition, he will seek the company of those above him. If vain, he will take the company of those beneath him; and if a man is a true social soul he will seek to have the company of his class." Dealing with Burns as a pleader for better life, Mr. Campbell said that the late Lord Balfour, a leading man in his Majesty's Government of the day, when he received the freedom of the town of Dumfries, took the opportunity of delivering a very fine address on the Immortal Memory of Burns. In the course of it, he said: "Burns, after all, had no conscious mission in life. He was quite unconscious of a definite aim and purpose in the use of all his great ability." Again and again this same thought was reproduced by writers. With all due respect to these distinguished men, Mr. Campbell said he did not think he could agree with them. He was inclined to think that Burns had an aim. Burns did not rhyme for fun. If it had not been for the noble aim in Burns's life, he would not have been what he was. Had Burns lived to—day, he would have joined the A.R.P. or something like that. He would have done as he once proposed to do:—
I'm twenty—three and five foot nine,
I'll gaun and be a sodger.

They remembered the lines when Burns joined the Dumfries Volunteers:—

Does haughty Gaul invasion threat':

Then let the loons beware, Sir:

There's wooden walls upon our seas

And volunteers on shore, Sir:

Burns was no pacifist. When he thought of peace, he thought of it as within the borders of his own land, of peace within his own parish, within the bosom of his own family.

Never-theless, he was tile champion of universal peace. If he had had his own way, he would have brought about universal brotherhood and that was what we wished to—day, goodwill, recognition of common interests and common origins. Burns's great aim was to seek brotherhood amongst men. Burns hated the idea of being a slave. Poverty to him was a condition of slavery.

He demanded this great and noble thing — freedom for himself and for his fellows. He demanded brotherhood, as the source of peace, and the will that the country should be defended against its enemies. in conclusion, Mr. Campbell spoke of the present value of Burns — the memory of Buns. The value of his productions had gone up. Would the value of the man be continued? They themselves were met that night to honour a most worthy man. He sometimes picked up the poems of Burns, and he trembled to read the beauty, the wonderful insight, the charm and splendour of the poet's ideas. No other book, apart from the Holy Scriptures, could bring into a man's mind such a dignity, worthiness and nobility of human life.

The toast was honoured by the company in silence.