

DAVID WALKER, MINER, COALSNAUGHTON ,IMMIORTAL MEMORY.

At the 65th anniversary dinner of the Dumfries Burns Howff Club, which was held in the Globe Inn an Monday evening, 26th January, 1953, the principal guest was Mr. David Walker, a miner from Coalsnaughton, Tillicoultry, who proposed "The Immortal Memory." Mr. Walker, who is a native of Dumfries and whose mother belonged to Thornhill, chose, as his theme, "Burns, Patriot," and, in an eloquent and informative address, he emphasised the important part played by Burns through his works in helping the Scottish people to regain their dignity, national pride and independence, after the country's fortunes had been at a low ebb. Mr. Walker said it was a privilege and honour for him to be invited by the Howff Club to travel from the banks of the Devon to the banks of the Nith to propose the immortal toast of our National Bard. He feared, however, that he was here at somewhat of a disadvantage, because he was at the Howff Club's dinner last year and enjoyed one of the most illuminating and sincere addresses that he had ever listened to. Wherever the Rev. Wm. Rock, who proposed immortal memory on that occasion, was speaking that night he would get the same attention and his audience would enjoy him just as they in the Globe Inn had last year. Mr. Rock had dealt with many traits in the poet's character. He (Mr. Walker) was afraid he was going away from the usual procedure to deal with one of the great loves of his life — his love for his country. Burns loved his country with an intense and passionate love. He had rightly and justly been called the Patriot Bard, but of the thousands of Scotsmen all over the world gathered together at that time to commemorate his birth and revere his memory, how many of them realised how much they owed to Burns and the influence of his writings? During his early manhood the spirit of Scotland was at a very low ebb. A feeling of apathy descended on the country and Burns set out to change it all and succeeded, far greater than any man of his time, in proving adequately the old adage that the pen was mightier than the sword. From the depth of a patriotic heart he interpreted the lives, feelings and manners of the Scottish peasantry as they had never been interpreted before and never could be again. Referring to Burns' poem, "The Cotter's Saturday Night," which he described as perhaps one of the greatest of Burns' poems, he said it was a poem which glorified the lives of the simple, hard—working members of the community and in it he expressed his conviction of that inherent majesty and deep religious character of the Scot. The poem showed how Burns could reverence the old national pride. No wonder the peasantry of all Scotland loved him as perhaps people had never loved a poet. He was not only the interpreter of Scottish peasantry, however, he was the restorer of Scotland's nationality. If the Scottish men and women came to love and cherish their country with a pride unknown to other people about the 18th century, they owed it in a very large measure to Burns, who had turned their fears into high hopes. The last but perhaps the greatest influence of all were the songs of Burns, Mr. Walker said. It was in his songs that his soul came out freshest and brightest. It was as a song writer that his fame had spread widest and would last longest. In all forms of literature the song was the most penetrating and in that language Burns was a master, but no one knew better than he did how much he owed to the old forgotten song writers of his country. From early boyhood, he studied the old tunes and words, and he treasured every scrap of literature which touched on the spirit of Scotland.

The songs of Burns interpreted the lives of the Scottish people. Every phase of Scottish life was brought out in them. It was not long until his songs were being sung

throughout the length and breadth of the land, not only from the humble homes of the cotters, but in the great homes and castles.

Burns made a simple appeal to the people, as from one Scot to another. He appealed to them to do their bit to lift Scotland out of the pit of despondency into which she had been rapidly descending. Before the death of Burns, the Scots were beginning to lift up their heads again. They were beginning to take a new interest in life and, in the short space of a generation between the lives of Burns and his father, Scotland had risen to perhaps the greatest height she had ever achieved. She had won recognition in almost every field of human endeavour. Looking back on the Scotland of Burns' time, and on the redeeming of

the people and the country in so short a time, they must realise there was some force driving them on. There must have been some inspiration, and the greatest inspiration of all was the influence of the writings of Robert Burns. If Burns owed his birthright to Scotland then Scotland owed a great deal to her beloved son. He prevailed upon the people to realise their true worth and exhorted them on to greater efforts, enabling them to regain their dignity, national pride and independence, which would always be characteristic of the Scots' race.