

J. ANDERSON-WILSON IMMORTAL MEMORY (1965)

The principal speaker of the evening was a past president of the Burns Federation, Mr J. Anderson —Wilson, and he started his immortal Memory to the Bard by saying :— "To be asked to give this toast is an honour, but to be asked to give it in the Howff is the supreme honour. Here one gets the feel of the Bard, the sense, the atmosphere."

Quoting from one of the first Burns suppers ever to be held, in Huddersfield, over 200? years ago, Mr Wilson said "It is the glorification of Burns that brought us together."

During his stay in Dumfries, the poet's outpouring of work had reached its highest pitch, said Mr. Wilson, and it was significant that people who had received letters from Burns in those days had kept these letters, his magnetic powers making them realise the value of what they had.

He went on to refer to what he called an outstanding mystery. Burns had travelled up the west coast of Ayrshire and had seen the Firth of Clyde, but he had never written of it. He lived when the new town of Catrine was being developed, but he never wrote of it. There was never a mention of these things nor a mention of the new iron works started then in his area. The poet, suggested the speaker, probably hated all this.

As for the Bard's appeal to all classes, this was explained by

Wilson:—"He wrote the language of his life and times. He wrote a picture and people could see it in his writings. Tales like Tam o' Shanter and The Twa Dugs — one could see this in the words."

The country also owed Burns a great debt for his efforts to preserve the language, said Mr. Wilson. Nowadays television, records and radio were ruining all this.

Towards the close of his speech, Mr. Wilson told of a Burns supper held last week in Sheffield when, at the table, one of the showpieces had been a set of silver candlesticks and snuffers which Yorkshire—based Scots had sent to Bonnie Jean, the poet's widow, in 1821, as a tangible expression of their appreciation of Robert Burns. On the silver was engraved this quatrain which summed up the poet's worth in a few words. It ran:—

"He pass'd thro' life's tempestuous night
A brilliant trembling northern light,
Thro' years to come to shine afar,
A fixed unsetting Polar star."

This set of silver was now owned, said Mr. Wilson, by Colonel Hutchinson, a descendant of Burns who lives in Southern England, and this same descendant was one of the designers of the new Forth road bridge.