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Colman's Mustard



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D.48

A JACOBITE WHO JOKED

Centennial of Andrew Lang

(Condensation of a talk prepared by ALAN MULGAN, and broadcast from 2YA)

WE are told we needs must love the highest when we see it, and no doubt we should. But in literature, as in life, it is not only the highest that attracts. Sometimes the lesser man is loved better than the greater. Charles Lamb has won much more affection from his readers than Milton. Many a smaller man than Lamb on the roll of letters keeps a place of his own with the lover of books long after he has passed away.

So we mark to-day (April 2, 1944) the centennial of Andrew Lang, who was not a great poet or a great prose writer, but who was very gifted in both lines. He was, indeed, a minor genius. The charm of the man, which is still fragrant after many years, lies not only in these gifts, but in his rare personality, his versatility, his gaiety, the breadth and depth of his interests, his zest for life, and his genius for friendship. For more than 40 years he was a figure that none could ignore. He was leader-writer, essayist, poet, novelist, critic, publisher's reader, anthropologist, historian and translator. So large and varied was his output that someone said he must be a syndicate. Yet he found plenty of time to fish for trout, and if you went to Lord's for an important match, you would probably see him sitting through the afternoon there, for cricket was another of his loves. Parodying an old ballade, he wrote one of the best cricket poems:

*The burden of hard hitting—Slog Away!
Here shalt thou make a "five" and there
a "four,"
And then upon thy bat shall lean and say,
That thou art in for an uncommon score.
Yea, the loud ring applauding thee shall
roar,
And thou to rival Thornton shall aspire,
When low, the umpire gives thee leg-
before,
This is the end of every man's desire!*

And the envoy of this ballade runs:

*Alas, yet hieer on youth's hither shore
Would I be some poor player on scant hire
Than king among the old who play no more,
This is the end of every man's desire!*

This man who could enjoy cricket in the sun co-operated in what is probably the most popular translation of Homer. He wrote a sonnet on the *Odyssey*, which is fit to go into the best company; he was a pioneer in modern anthropology; he wrote, among other books, a history of Scotland and a biography of Joan of Arc; besides writing novels of his own, he collaborated in one with Rider Haggard; and as an essayist he was one of the most learned and witty of his time.

He Preferred Journalism

Lang got a fellowship at Merton College, and might have settled down for the rest of his life as a don. But the

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