

# A Nicht wi' Bobbie Burns

## All Stations on January 25



PROGRAMMES in celebration of Robert Burns will be broadcast on Friday evening, January 25. Typically Scottish they will be, and composed of the works of the famous ploughman poet, but they will make an appeal to all and not only to people whose ancestors hailed from the land north of the Tweed. To Scotsmen, Robert Burns is immortal, but he plays no small part in the life of the whole British people. Poems composed by Burns are held dear by all, and in songs such as "Auld Lang Syne" the English and the Irish join as lustily as the Scots, laugh as heartily over "The Deil's Awa," are thrilled by "Scots Wha Hae," and are touched by the pathos of his tender love poems. Who does not appreciate the sentiment expressed in "John Anderson, My Jo," the "Address to the Deil," the story of "The Twa Dogs," the address to a field mouse whose home he had overturned when ploughing, or "Tam O'Shanter."

ON January 25, 170 years will have come and gone since the young wife of a working gardener gave birth to her first child in an "auld clay biggin" near the town of Ayr. Nature afforded a cold and tempestuous welcome to the infant boy, and his life's journey of thirty-seven years was beset with troubles. His wanderings hardly extended beyond the confines of his native land. He strove with unfruitful soil and "searched old wives barrels" and left behind him only a little more of material possession than he brought. Now, the glory of his name is spread as wide as the world, and no son of Scotland has homage in comparison. As Sir James Barrie once said, "They have all to take the kerb for the exciseman."

On every anniversary of Robert Burns' birth countless thousands of his lovers throughout the world keep a

tryst with him. He is admitted by the highest authorities to have been the first poetic genius of the eighteenth century, but his countrymen do not base their devotion on literary attainments alone. It is the place he has in their hearts by which they judge him.

AS a growing boy he had a man's task, and the ploughman's stoop was fashioned which went with him all his life. He says himself that there was the "cheerless gloom of the hermit with the unceasing moil of a galley slave," but though his youth was hard and anxious it was a necessary prelude to his message.

THE shadow of poverty hung over his father's door, but he was brought up in surroundings of almost unrivalled natural charm, and his young heart was early stirred by the magic beauty of the world. He did not get more than three years' schooling, snatched at random from the times he could be spared from the labours of the field, but the impression which still persists that he was an unlettered peasant is entirely erroneous. He was extraordinarily well-informed, thanks to his father's efforts and his own intense desire for knowledge. He only lacked opportunity to acquire an advanced culture. In such a process he might have been robbed of the gay spontaneity which is his chief charm. One cannot, somehow or other, imagine him walking on academic stilts along the highway of life.

*Give me a spark o' nature's fire,  
That's a' the learning I desire.  
Then though I drudge through dub and mire,  
At plough or cart  
My muse though hamely in attire  
May touch the heart.*

A succession of unsuccessful farming ventures—a brief period in which he was feted and lionised at Edinburgh, which was then one of the leading social and literary centres in Europe—three and a-half years in Nithsdale, where he tried without avail to combine the dual role of farmer and exciseman—and four and a-half years in Dumfries, where he wrote songs of incomparable beauty, and served the Excise Board for £70 a year, is the story of his life.

IT has been the fashion to look upon it as a tragedy. Biographers and essayists have almost without exception mourned over him, but it is not improbable that the only tragedy was the supreme final one when death claimed him so early in his days. It is fortunate for us, says Mr. Joseph Hunter, in a recent British magazine, that he is his own best biographer. Bookish and unworldly men have failed to grasp the essential fact that he was a perfectly normal person with all the eccentricities of conduct and flaws of temperament which distinguish our kind, and that his divine gifts, so lavishly displayed, must not be the medium through which is exacted from him a standard of conduct above that of ordinary men. It was not altogether easy for a literary artist of the first order, who knew always how to think, but not always how to live, to accommodate himself to the discreet atmosphere of a country town in time of extreme political dissension. It is indeed a matter for wonder that in his lifetime he created so great a stir as he did, and Nathaniel Hawthorne is right in saying that "It is far easier to know and honour a poet when his fame has taken shape in the spotlessness of marble than when the actual man comes staggering before you, besmeared with the stains of his daily life."

It is by the glorious heritage which he has left us that we must judge Burns. When he came, literary taste was artificial, and effeminate, and poor, storm-racked Scotland was in peril of losing the individuality of her national utterance.

WITH a wave of the magician's wand, he changed it all. What had seemed vulgar and commonplace before, because it belonged to the everyday life, of thought, and speech,

and action, became transfigured, and appeared in the true beauty of its natural proportion by the touch of his genius. He is the most natural of poets, as he was the most natural of men. He speaks in the language of everyday life. No training in the schools is required to follow every line of his thought. He dignifies labour. He ennobles honest poverty. He clothes the thoughts of the humblest in the most beautiful raiment. His songs will remain his greatest source of power. They are tender as the early blossom and fragrant as the full-blown flower. Laughter ripples over their surface, and tears bedew them." A thousand years are in their substance. They are the emblems of a nation's soul. The late Professor Nichol compresses the much that may be said of these songs into these striking words: "There is the vehemence of battle—the wail of woe—the march of veterans 'red wat shod'—the smiles of greeting—the tears of parting friends—the gurgle of brown burns—the roar of the wind through the pines—the rustle of the barley rigs. All Scotland is in his verse."

## The Picnic Season

ALTHOUGH the picnic season is yet in full swing a large number of applications for special services have already been received at the various railway offices. The popularity of the "picnic train" is doubtless due to the low fares charged for both large and small parties, together with the special facilities provided for the conveniences of picnickers. An attractive booklet published by the Railway Department and widely distributed through New Zealand recently, contains useful information relative to the location of, and facilities available, at the principal grounds in the Dominion. A comprehensive mileage table is a feature of the publication and the fare to any desired ground can be readily ascertained by reference to the fare table.

It is interesting to note that approximately 300 trains of ten carriages each would be required to accommodate the 172,336 picnickers carried by rail last year.

Copies of booklet are obtainable at all railway stations.

## Fares Cut for Summer-time Picnic Trips

Again this year the Railways offer substantial reductions in fares for large or small picnic parties.

Schools, Friendly Societies, Trade or Industrial Unions, Religious Bodies, and Staff Picnics specially catered for.

Full particulars of fares, picnic grounds, etc., from any Station-master, Central Booking Office, Passenger Agent, or District Manager.

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