

Robert Burns --- Scotland's Immortal Poet

Interesting Lecture from 2YA.



FREQUENTLY one hears the question, "Why is it that Scotsmen, no matter in what part of the world they happen to be, continue to retain all the characteristics peculiar to their country, despite the fact that they have been and are in the midst of a totally different environment, and why in particular do they persist in the habits of wearing the native dress and retaining an active interest in the celebrations in connection with anniversaries of the great days in Scottish calendar?"

That is a big question to answer which, fully, would take too long. Suffice it to say that the true Scot inherits a high degree of love for his own country and for the habits and customs of his own people, and his continued interest in Scotland and Scottish affairs is responsible for the enthusiasm which is in evidence when he participates in any of the celebrations. One might be inclined to say that such evidence of love of one's own particular country was too selfish, but such an assertion could well be answered by the statement of no less an authority than Mr. Stanley Baldwin, the Premier of Great Britain, who declared recently that "Scottish nationalism is one of the most prized products of the British Empire. The purest nationalism is like the finest love of one's own home. The greater the love of one's own home the greater the love of one's own country. The love of one's own country expands into the love of all one's own people throughout the Empire, and is the beginning of that brotherhood which alone can make peace upon earth."

The Burns programme was the celebration of the birth of one who has done much, if not most, towards keeping alive the flame of Scottish nationalism, and at the same time propounded as no other writer has ever done, the teaching of the brotherhood of man—I refer to Scotland's immortal Bard, Rabbie Burns.

IN his preface to the "Kilmarnock" edition of his poems, Burns "begs his readers, particularly the Learned and the Polite, who may honour him with a perusal, that they will make every allowance for education and circumstances of life." That note appeals in pathetic force, but surely there is no need now, for any "allowances" to be claimed, because the "circumstances of life," which encompassed Robert Burns, humble farmer, result only in increased admiration for Rabbie Burns, Scotland's national poet, and one of the world's greatest song and lyric writers.

It is not my intention to dwell at any length upon the early life of Burns; the thirty-seven years, which spanned his life, from the "clay bigging" at Alloway to the gauger's cottage at Dumfries, contains but one illuminating event, in so far as the recognition of his genius was concerned, and that was his memorable and triumphant visit to Edinburgh in 1786. For the rest, there is on the one hand the hard farm labour, the failures, the dashing of hopes, the dreary dullness of poverty and the darkness of dissipa-

tion. On the other, we have the promptings of genius, the close communion with nature, the greatness of heart, the unbounding patriotism and the joy of the poet who can move a nation to song—is it not all reflected in his verses?

It is indeed in his poems that the life of Burns should be studied. The "circumstances of life" can be ignored—the man becomes absorbed in the

take, is that Burns was uneducated. From his earliest years his education was very carefully attended to by his father—a thoroughly well educated man—and we have the recorded testimony of his old schoolmaster, to prove that Burns's education was really of a superior order even for lads in his own station of life. Burns could read French fairly well and gave it a more or less careful study and

JANUARY 24, 1929, was an interesting night for all listeners at all interested in the work of the great Scotsman, Robert Burns. The unique programme will long be remembered by all those who were privileged to hear it, and can be regarded as one of the finest programmes that has yet been put on the air. Several correspondents to 2YA have asked for a synopsis of the address delivered by Mr. R. H. Nimmo, Chief of the Wellington Caledonian Society, and Dominion Chief of the Scottish Federation. Accompanying is the full address, which should be of very great interest to all who heard and appreciated the programme.

poet: but before passing on to a study of Burns as he is portrayed in his poetry, I should like to correct two wrong impressions, which seem to have become established in the minds of the majority of those who have written or spoken of Burns during recent years. One frequently hears him referred to as though he were simply a peasant or at the best, a superior ploughman. It is not correct to dub him by the first designation, for peasant, according to the commonly accepted meaning of the word, he never was. Neither is it right to regard him simply as a ploughman, for although he often spoke of his holding the plough and the independence which it gave him, he was a ploughman only on his own and his father's farms. He was really what we to-day would regard as a small farmer. Don't think for one minute that I mention this in any spirit derogatory to either peasants or ploughmen. Far from it. I recognise and appreciate the true nobility of lowly toil too much to glance askance at any work, which is of practical utility, whereby a brother-man earns an honest livelihood, but I cannot see the sense of giving these two classes the credit of producing our heaven-inspired poet, when he really belongs to another class—a class, which, in peace or war, supplied the brain and muscle of Scotland for centuries—the small working farmer, from whose cottages have come forth sons who have graced the pulpit, the bar and the academy, who have added to the mechanical wealth and genius of the country and have carried its banner, the blue cross of St. Andrew—in triumph all over the world.

ANOTHER commonly accepted idea, which to me seems quite a mis-

"Our Monarch's hindmost year but ane
Was five-and-twenty days begun,"
'Twas then a blast o' Janwar' win'
Blew hanel in on Robin."

If it is mentioned that George II is the monarch to whom he refers in the first line we have no difficulty in recognising the fact that he was born on January 25, 1759.

When he wrote the song from which the foregoing lines are quoted it would almost seem as though Burns foresaw his destiny, for he goes on to say:—

"The Gossip keekit in his loof,
Quo' she, wha lives will see the
proof,

This waly boy will be nae coof;

I think we'll ca' him Robin.

He'll hae misfortunes great and sma'

But aye a heart aboon them a';

He'll be a credit till us a'—

We'll a' be proud o' Robin."

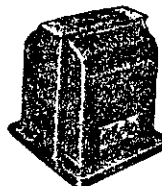
And where is the Scot who is not proud to claim the common Scottish name with Burns? On January 25 Scotsmen in almost every country in the world will meet to worship at the shrine of Burns, to pay homage to the illustrious memory of the immortal bard.

LOVE and conviviality are the chief notes of Burns in his lighter vein. The celebrated club at Tarbolton, of which every member was found to be a "professed admirer of one or more of the fair sex," indicates a very different state of public opinion on this subject from that of our reticent times: in those days, it was considered the most natural thing in the world to win a girl's love and then make a song of it. Burns gives us an insight into this side of his character in "Oh, my luve's like a red, red rose," "Mary Morrison," and that most poignant of songs of parting:

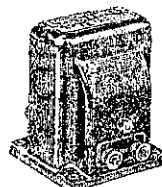
"Ae fond kiss and then we sever;

Ae farewell and then forever!

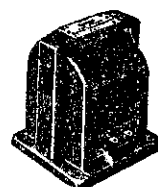
Deep in heart wrung tears I'll pledge thee,



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