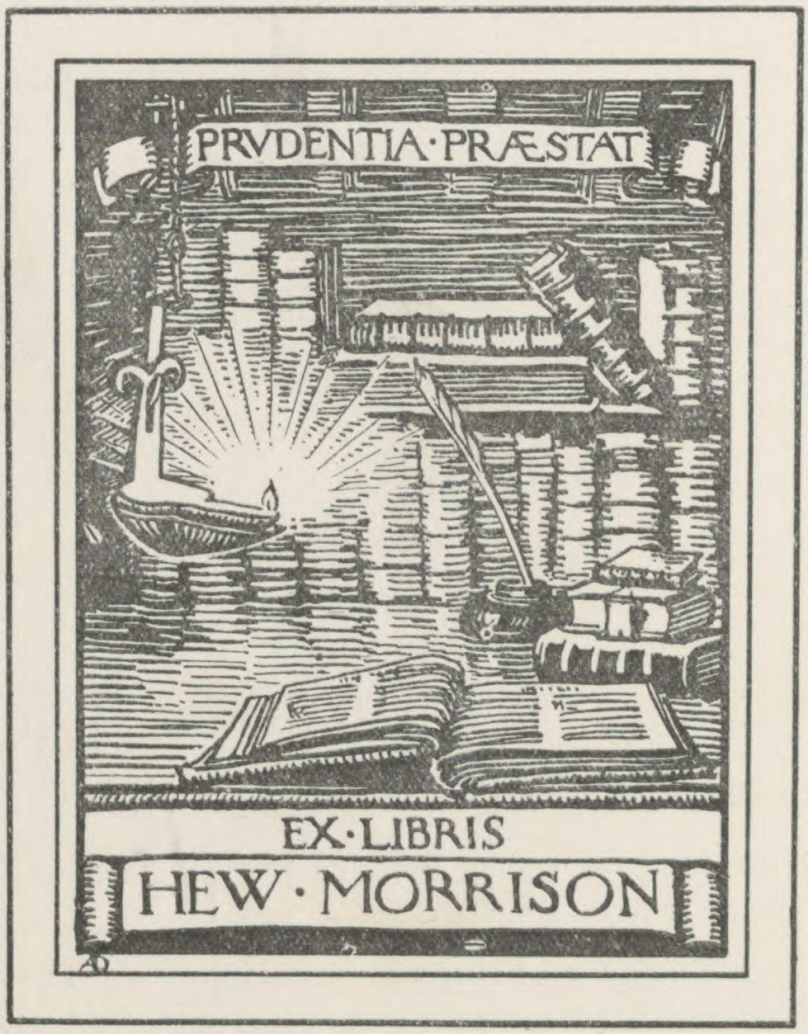
REMINISCENCES OF KILRENNY



47 CLUNY GARDENS
EDINBURGH

29th Dec 1911

Dear Dr Morrison,

The enclosed book "Reminiscences of "Kilkenny" may interest you. It is a small memorial of my Uncle Bailie Lumsden of Auchterther and I have been keeping my

9

Cousins to compete it

Best wishes to

you all for the

coming year.

Believe me,

Yours sincerely

G Somerville

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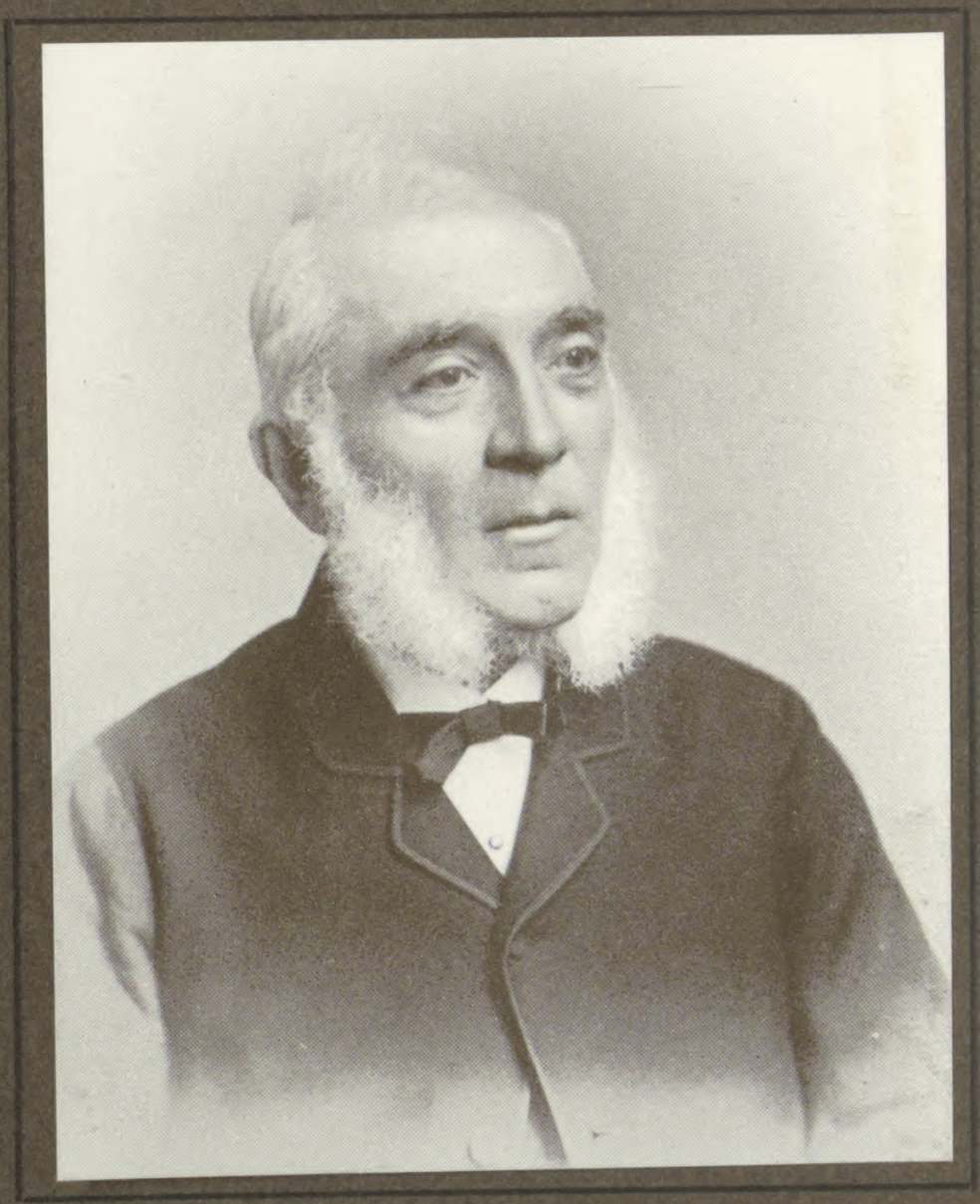
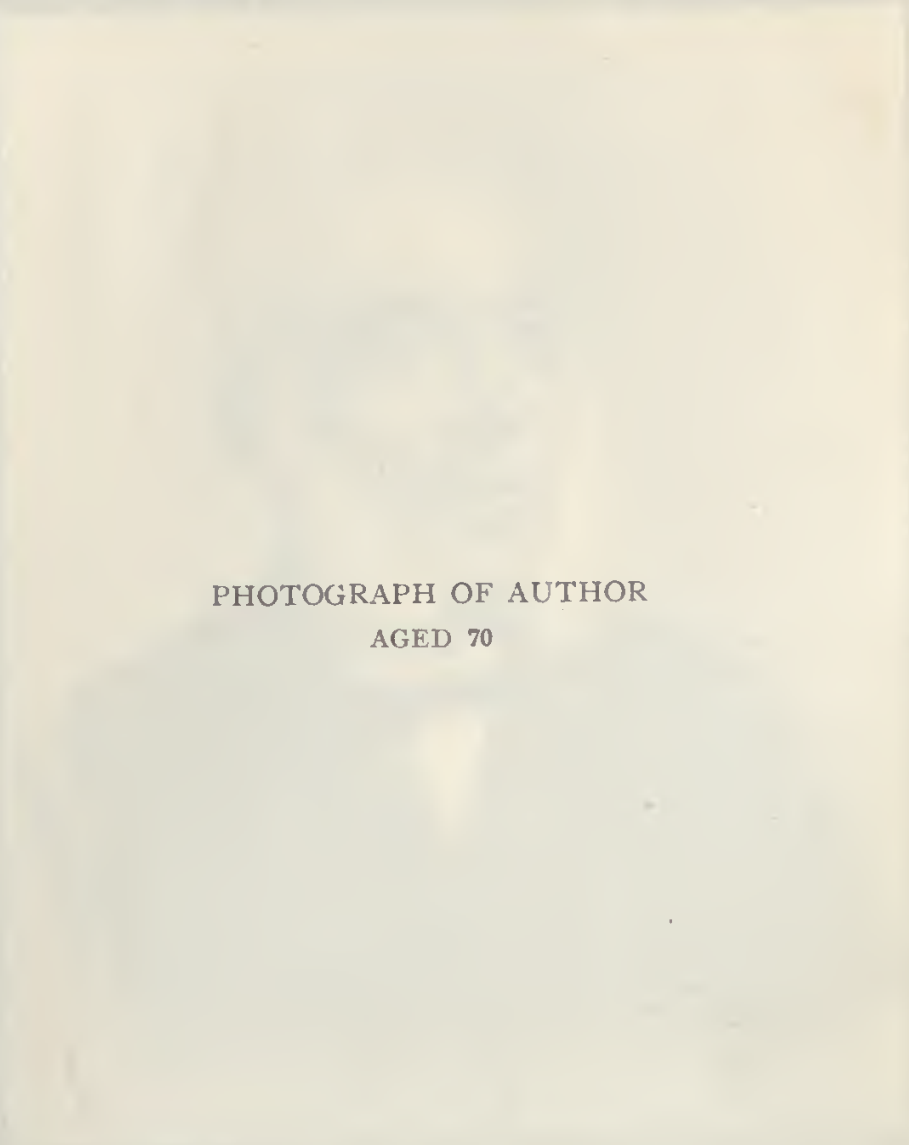
REMINISCENCES OF KILRENNY AND OTHER PAPERS





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REMINISCENCES OF KILRENNY

AND OTHER PAPERS BY DAVID LUMSDEN

EDINBURGH
PRIVATELY PRINTED
1911

PREFACE

DAVID LUMSDEN, the author of the papers printed in this volume, was a native of the village of Kilrenny, near Anstruther, in the county of Fife. He was born in 1827, and died at Anstruther in December 1909, in his eighty-third year. After receiving his early education in the village school, he became apprentice to his uncle, a watchmaker in Pittenweem. He was subsequently for a short time in Edinburgh, and thereafter settled in Anstruther, where he carried on business for many years until he retired in 1896.

In 1880, Mr Lumsden entered the Town Council of the burgh of Anstruther Easter, and was a magistrate for several years. He also became a member of the School Board.

One who was well acquainted with Mr Lumsden, in paying a tribute of respect on

his decease, speaks of him as a well-known and striking personality in the old burgh, and characterises him as upright, independent, and fearless, possessed of unusual intellectual vigour combined with solid common sense, and endued with a saving grace of humour, a shrewdness of outlook and a charity in judgment of character and motive which helped to increase the high esteem in which he was held by all who were acquainted with him.

Mr Lumsden's interest in his native village remained unabated throughout his long life, and the volume has been compiled with the object of bringing together in print for the benefit of friends and others interested certain articles he wrote reminiscent of the Kilrenny of seventy years ago, and also his appreciations of our national poet, Robert Burns, whose works excited his keen admiration.

The illustrations of Kilrenny are reproduced from sketches by Mr Lumsden's daughter Euphemia. Several photographs, taken at different periods of his life, have also been introduced.

G. S.

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REMINISCENCES OF KILRENNY*

Among the numerous advantages and privileges bestowed on those who reside in the rural villages and districts throughout our land, the frequent intercommunication resulting from the continual extension of the railway system of travelling may assuredly be said to take a most prominent position. That cheap and rapid mode of conveyance has not only enabled the dwellers in the remote corners of the country to visit on business or pleasure the great centres of life and industry, but has likewise encouraged the dwellers in these busy hives to lay aside the cares and worry of business for a time at least and to set out on a holiday excursion, to seek in a change of air and scene

* Written in 1898.

relief from the depressed feeling begotten of a long winter residence in the crowded workshops and smoky atmosphere of the large cities and towns.

The custom of having a holiday trip once a year may now be said to have settled into a fixed habit, so much so that the summer-time and the holiday season have become synonymous terms. Of late years the shores of East Fife have offered many attractions to visitors, attractions that were undreamt of in the not very distant past. While Elie, and, in the further east, Crail, may be said to receive the largest share of patronage from those who court the invigorating breezes borne across the great North Sea, the other intervening towns are now enjoying a fair share of popularity. Even the village of Kilrenny, of which we intend to relate a few discursive reminiscences, is found to claim its admirers. Well it may, for we think there will be a consensus of opinion among those who have been so fortunate as to visit the sweet village that Nature has lavished her favours on Kilrenny in no stinted measure.

Had it not been that the iron steed has careered on its journey round the East Neuk in close proximity to Kilrenny, the village might still have been to a great extent overlooked. But the traveller possessed of an eye for the beautiful can scarcely fail to catch on the journey such a glimpse of the village as will induce him to pay it a leisurely visit and thus submit it to a closer examination than is possible from a railway train going at full speed. One result has been that Kilrenny has of late years become a happy hunting-ground for those who in the prosecution of their art are ever on the look-out for tit-bits of scenery worthy to be transferred to canvas, and several beautiful sketches of the nooks and surroundings of Kilrenny have of late been executed.

The view from the "smiddy brae" looking toward the churchyard is exceedingly interesting and beautiful. No doubt a tinge of melancholy is apt to cast its shade over the scene, as the prospect includes in the foreground the last resting-place of past generations of a wide parish, while many permanent

memorials of the departed that affection has reared meet the eye. Still, the scene is charming, and cannot fail to arrest the attention of even an ordinary observer, especially when the adjacent trees are in full foliage, while for the whole length on one side of God's-acre the rippling burn flows, singing a perpetual lullaby to the sleepers resting near. Many a time in boyhood's days we have stood on the bridge that spans the Gellie and watched the stream when in time of spate it sent down its muddy waters in volumes to the sea, there to be received by the parent source, and anew purified and wafted aloft on the breeze to complete once more its beneficent circuit.

Approaching from the west, we have certainly the most comprehensive view of the village, flanked as it is on one side by the mansion-house of Rennyhill, and on the other by the Manse, each with beautiful surroundings, while intervening a lovely background of trees meets the eye. On a summer evening, when the setting sun lights up the tinted foliage, the scene is sufficient

KILRENNY CHURCH

of itself to stamp on the memories of the villagers an undying attachment to the home of their childhood.

Our earliest recollections carry back to somewhat near the time of the passing of the first Reform Bill, and we can call to mind the joyous fireside scenes when our *paterfamilias* and a farmer neighbour—a staunch Whig—gloated over the pages of the *Scotsman* in these eventful days. It was a treat to watch the two enthusiastic disciples of Earl Grey rejoicing over the passing of a measure which they seemed to believe would hasten the advent of millennial times. "Rin doon, laddie, for the *Scotsman*," is an order we can never forget. To a youngster it was no pleasant duty to execute the order in the dark winter evenings, for in those days the belief in ghosts and apparitions was still prevalent, and, our home being located on the outskirts of the village, we had to traverse a path that led through a clump of large trees, and it required no great effort of the imagination to convert an old grizzled-looking elm tree into something uncanny.

So we ran the risk of being inveigled by some of those nightly wanderers who might have been prowling around; but we always escaped. Of course, we are aware now that we should have had naught to fear on the return journey, for we held the *Scotsman* in our hand, and could not have possessed a more effectual talisman, as undoubtedly that newspaper has in its day helped to rid the world of many bogies. The *Scotsman* at the time referred to was in its infancy, and in point of size and comprehensiveness of its contents would contrast unfavourably with the splendid daily broadsheet of the present time. It is now like an old acquaintance, whose company has become one of the necessities of daily life to many thousands.

In the days of boyhood, when one first looks out on his immediate surroundings, the whole scene seems to wear a stereotyped aspect. Thus did it appear to us that our native village and the dwellers therein had existed in all past time as we then found them. We must advance a stage on life's

journey ere we discover that the great law of change is written on all things present. In early life we could not conceive the possibility of the village being complete without the old residenters, many of whom were possessed of strongly marked individuality. Now, when they have passed away, the village seems the poorer by their absence. The noble old trees still adorn it, the burn still pursues its course, and the ring of the blacksmith's anvil is still heard at the familiar place; but "the fathers, where are they?" No, we cannot imagine that Kilrenny could be complete without the presence of old Sandy Forbes, Gow Grieve, Willie Corstorphine and his donkey, and other members of the group of worthies to whom, in fancy, we assigned an existence coeval with the old elms that adorned the banks of the Gellie. In those days there was little or nothing in the undeviating course of the life of the villagers that might be said to be possessed of interest to the younger generation; and as there is a continual thirst for novelty and recreation present in the

juvenile mind, we used to seek gratification of this desire by stealing into the shoemaker's shop or the smithy to listen to the nightly discussions of the evening visitors.

In our earliest years we were accustomed to listen to the music of the anvil. During the long winter evenings no other sound broke the prevailing silence. Still, the cheerful ring proclaimed that an earnest worker not far off was at the post of duty; for no man looks more in earnest than the smith at his forge, as with repeated blows he works the heated metal into the desired shape.

Ruminating over the smithy scenes in those days of the past, we never fail to recall to memory the familiar face of honest George Wilson, one of the smith's assistants. For many long years did George trudge between his dwelling and his anvil; regularly as the hour approached he made his appearance to resume his daily toil as long as strength was granted; but at last his arm grew feeble, and after a period of increasing weakness he passed to his rest. Of him it may be truly said, "He was faithful over a few things."

Another worthy son of Vulcan, John Herd, was frequently engaged to assist at the smithy. John's home was in the neighbouring town. Often a tap was heard in the evening at our cottage door, followed by the query, "What o'clock is it, please?" Frequently the reply was, "Just on the chap o' eight." John would cheerily express his thanks, and, with a lighter heart, step down the brae to close the work of the day.

The evening gathering of cronies in the weaver's shop formed an important link in the social life of the village. It afforded an opportunity for discussing questions of interest, when they gladly

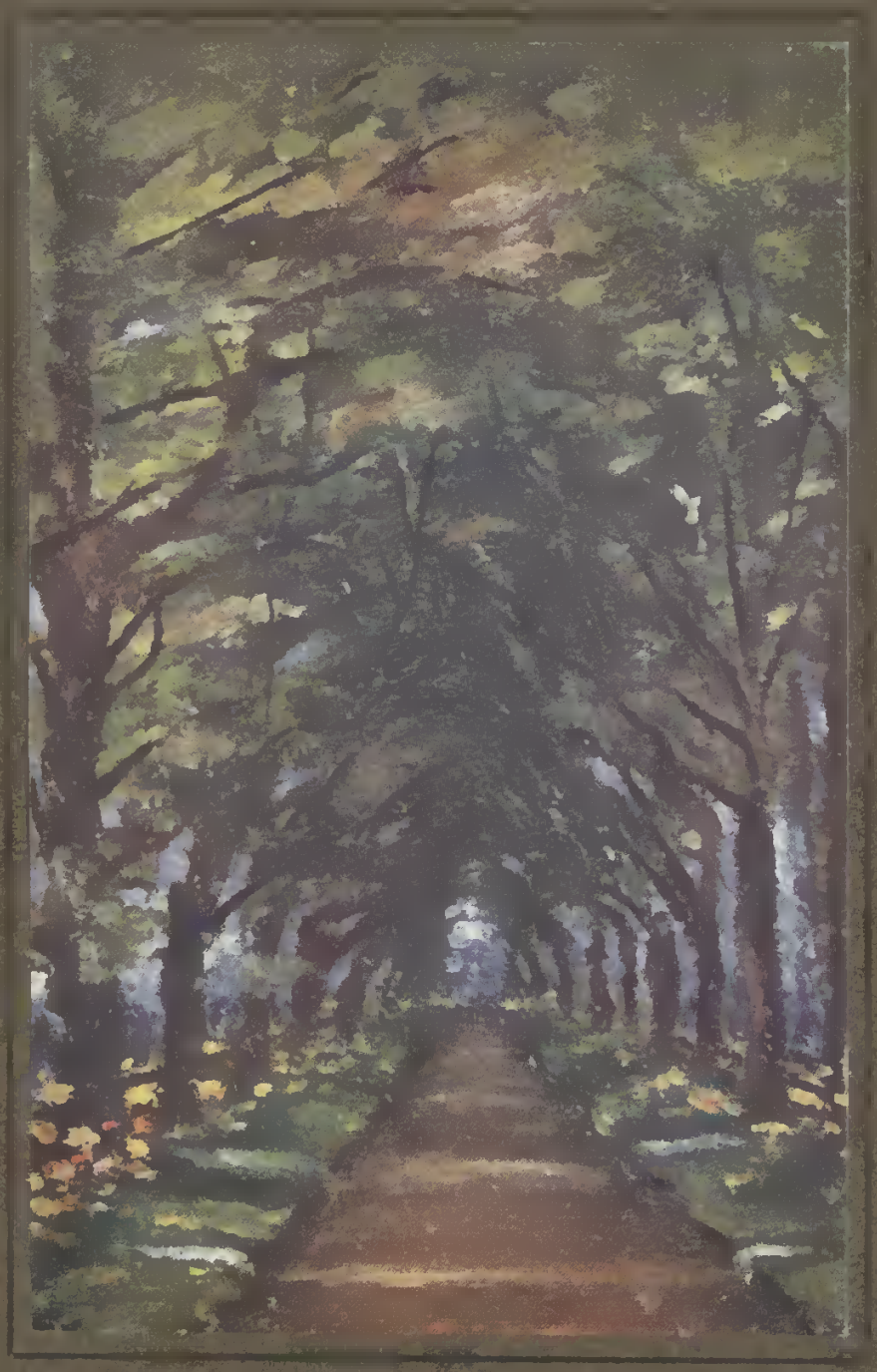
> "Laid aside all private cares
> To mind the Kirk and State affairs."

They were quite prepared to consider any subject that arose in the course of their conversation. One night the subject of vegetarianism came up for discussion. It will readily be believed that not one of the company was likely to suffer from over-indulgence in roast beef. However, the pros and cons were duly discussed. The

old slater declared as emphatically as liberal charges of snuff would permit articulation, "I think that I could dae wi' a beefsteak oftener than I git it." Tammas Slater, who eked out a living by disposing of the produce of the old Manse garden, said that although he had a "guid yaird" he ate little that grew in it except a "guid tawtie"; he cared little for "grossets or ony kind o' sma' fruit"; and wound up with the remark, "For an apple, I couldna taste it." "Man," responded the knight of the shuttle, "you would hae been a grand chield to pit in the Gairden o' Eden!"

When the wave of Chartism passed over the country, its effects were only slightly felt among the village politicians. One of them, however, avowed himself a confirmed adherent of the sweeping programme of the Chartists on all points. This enthusiast was encouraged by a fellow-villager, who laughed in his sleeve at the whole agitation. Returning from his weekly toil on a Saturday evening, the earnest disciple of the new political creed called on his friend, who asked him how things were moving.

INNERGELLIE AVENUE



"I've got a start," he replied. "I've got a fine mould, and I'm thrang in the e'enin's casting pretty bullets. Man, we'll shoot them doon like craws! Hoo are ye gettin' on yersel?"

"Weel, I can scarcely say that I've got a start made yet; I canna fa' in wi' lead handy."

"What!" was the rejoinder. "Tak' an' rive a bit aff the riggin' o' the kirk; it'll a' hae to come doon at ony rate!"

Sixty years ago Kilrenny could boast of a thriving Debating Society, which, while it provided a little variety to the uniform jog of everyday life, no doubt helped to quicken the intellectual powers of its members. Every opportunity that occurred for securing a little innocent social enjoyment was welcomed. At the quarterly meetings of the Newspaper Club the village laureate, James M'Gill, generally had a song of his own composition prepared for the occasion. He would unfold his manuscript and commence his song. As he proceeded, his enthusiastic gesticulations increased; and at the close, the paper was often flying in fragments across

the table. But a round of applause rewarded the bard.

Among the village notables there was one who was the object of constant dread among the school-children. When at large they could not resist the temptation of having a frolic across the burn among the trees, and there they trespassed on the domain held in charge by the park-keeper, James Paterson, and his dog "Betty." James was a man of austere countenance, the expression of which could best be defined by the almost obsolete Scotch word "camscheugh." We recollect how, in passing, we used to give him a wide berth, while a feeling of gladness came over us when his eyes were not turned in our direction. On one occasion a troop of boys had crossed the Gellie to have a romp among the trees during the school interval. Suddenly the shout of James was heard, accompanied by the barking of his dog. A general stampede was the instant result. As a rule James was satisfied if he got the territory under his charge cleared of the intruders, but on this occasion he continued the chase beyond

the precincts of the grounds, following up, while the trespassers made off in different directions. One boy, who had not joined the offenders and who had naturally expected that innocence would protect him from the wrath of James, kept his position in the school playground. James seized him, and, although he stoutly protested his innocence, proceeded to flog him, remarking: "If you dinna deserve it the noo, you'll deserve it some ither time!" James as an institution was incomplete without his collie. "Betty" was believed to be toothless, and was in reality a harmless animal; but her bark when in pursuit was quite enough to strike terror among the juveniles, backed up as it always was by the loud threats of her master.

Passing over many recollections of village life and character in the past, we must not forget to refer to old Willie Corstorphine and his donkey. In his earlier days Willie was employed as a labourer at the lime work, which was for a number of years in operation on the farm of Cornceres in the vicinity. When age, with its accompanying frailties,

overtook him, he was enabled to acquire a donkey, with which he perambulated the district. Although his lot in life was one of the humblest, by faithful attention to simple duties he made himself useful to those whom he served. Not always did he dispose of the contents of the baskets borne by his donkey; but he took the negative replies of his patrons with much good-nature, and a humorous remark was all that was heard as he made for the door. On one occasion we saw him call at a house, and on finding the door locked he crossed to another dwelling where the door was open; but a voice from within exclaimed: "My mither's no' in!" "The ta'en's no' in and the tither's oot," said Willie, and, gently urging on the donkey, he continued his round. In dealing with his customers he never let an opportunity pass of playing an innocent trick on them. If a guidwife remarked: "I'll no' be needin' onything till ye come back again," Willie would call next door, and immediately repeat his previous visit, saying loudly: "I'm back again, Jenny!" The humorous ruse often resulted in a sale. At one time Willie

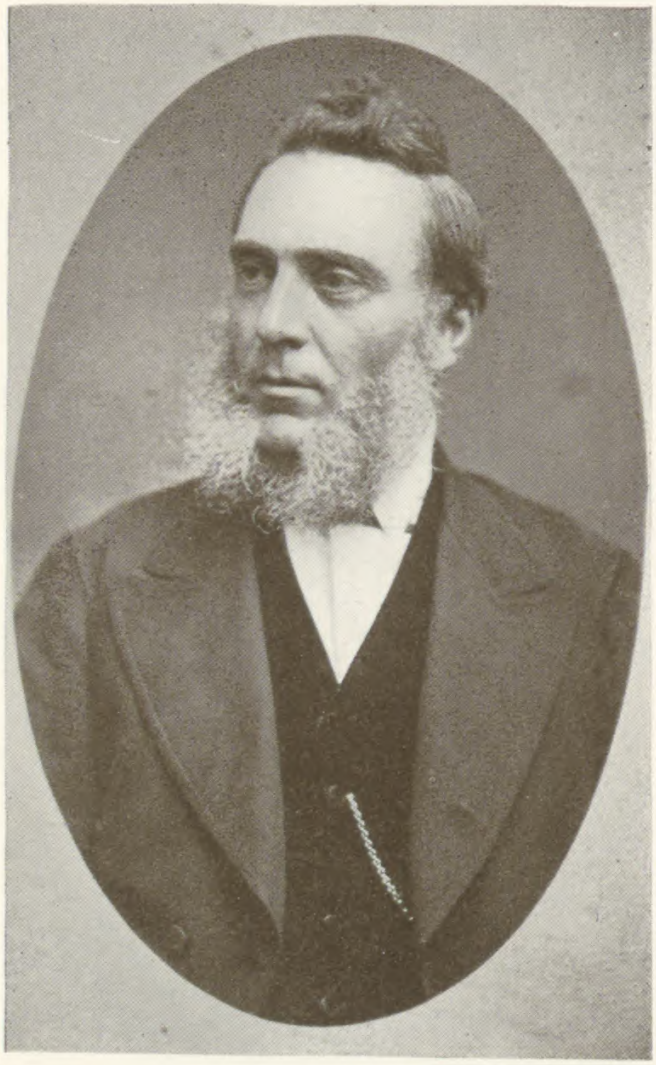
tried an addition to his company on the road, someone having presented him with a small dog, whose acquaintance was much sought after by the rising generation. On Willie being pressed to divulge its name, he replied to the youngsters, "Askum" (Ask him). The urchins were sorely puzzled to know why the dog never looked up nor wagged his tail when saluted with a whole shower of "Askums." Further interrogations of Willie on the subject were useless.

Willie Corstorphine had grasped the principles of the co-operative system of trading long before they had been put in practice to the extent witnessed in modern times. On one occasion he was induced to make an effort to enlighten the minds of the villagers on this important question. He mounted to the top of Jenny Dennis' outside stair and held forth in dead earnest. "My friends," said Willie, "it's union we want to keep a shop o' oor ain, whaur we'll git a'thing we need. I'll carry awa' bread and bring in butter and eggs, or I may tak' shoon to the country and we'll git a' the profit tae oorsels. It's union

we want!" At this point Willie's vocabulary failed him.

In two capacious panniers slung across the back of his ass, Willie carried a supply of groceries, bread, etc., to meet the wants of his up-country customers; and on his return journey he brought a stock of eggs and dairy produce, for which he seemed to find a ready demand. He was a man of strict integrity of character, and was treated kindly at the various farms he frequented. He had an endless store of anecdotes illustrative of pawky Scotch humour, and we believe that he repaid much of the kindness shown to him by shaking up his budget and relating a string of stories at the firesides of the friends who sheltered him during his wanderings. His masterpiece in the way of entertainment was the recital of "Watty and Meg." Some coaxing was required to induce him to make a start, but, when he got fairly under weigh, he went through the piece with great gusto.

For many years Willie was almost blind, but his donkey had traversed the same ground so often that it seemed to remember



THE AUTHOR
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every turn and nook of the road. Indeed, if the ass had been favoured with the gift of speech possessed by a certain historic quadruped of the same species, it might have transacted the business in the absence of its master. Increasing infirmities at last forced Willie to "seek the chimney-nook of ease" and to part with his old companion. He proclaimed a raffle in the village to dispose of the donkey, and he afterwards handed the proceeds to his wife Nellie, who in her turn deposited them in a quiet corner to lie till wanted.

The raffling transaction occurred at the time of the Chartist agitation, and a waggish friend of Willie resolved to have some amusement with him over the money realised for the donkey. Entering Willie's humble dwelling after nightfall, and assuming for the nonce a high-strung Cockneyfied lingo, he thus accosted Willie: "Well, old man, how are you? I presume that you will not be aware who I am? I may tell you at once that I am a Chartist delegate, and I am taking up collections in cash for the purpose of enabling

us to carry our Bill through Parliament, so I have looked in to get your subscription."

Willie replied that he was a "puir auld man," and had "naethin' tae gie awa'."

"Don't tell me that," responded the sham collector; "we are fully acquainted with everyone's circumstances, and I am credibly informed that you raffled a donkey the other day. You must have the money by you. I believe you have it in this old chest."

He proceeded to lift the lid, when Willie, finding that things were looking serious, simultaneously shouted at the full pitch of his voice to his wife: "Nellie, the Chartists have come to tak' awa' the donkey's siller!"

The pseudo delegate disappeared from the scene in hot haste, and Willie and his wife rejoiced that their treasure was safe. Among the village worthies of his day there was no one who received a warmer fireside welcome than "Wandering Willie," as he was frequently called.

It was a red-letter day in the annals of Kilrenny when a public clock was placed in the church tower, the funds requisite to

defray the expense having been subscribed by the parishioners. It will now be above sixty years since the pendulum performed its first swing within the spire and the flight of time was publicly announced to the villagers. The inauguration of such a boon was deemed worthy of celebration in rhyme by the village bard. A stanza of his effusion still lingers in our memory. It ran as follows :—

"Kilrenny folk are proud and vain,
They've got a timepiece o' their ain ;
When first the hammer struck the bell,
Like music thro' the air it fell.
Auld Eppie ran to Betty Broon,
And Betty hirpled thro' the toon ;
She left her rock and pickle tow
And cared na' tho' they'd gane alow,
But wi' the bairnies took the play,
And span nae mair that lee-lang day."

The public timepiece would no doubt be fully appreciated by the villagers, for in those days not many were in the happy possession of house clocks. Even the old "wag-at-the-wa'," although industriously hawked from door to door, had not then become popular. We have been told of an original and ingenious method which was long ago adopted

by the dwellers in remote country districts to secure a matin call. Having got a brood of chickens, they watched for a cock that crowed at a given hour, and it was observed that it continued to proclaim the morning at the same hour or nearly so. The other chanticleer members of the brood were sacrificed, and the one that was up to time became the horologe of the domicile.

We have vivid recollections of the sudden disturbance of the monotony of the village life on at least one occasion. On a beautiful summer evening, when looking out at the cottage door, we were startled to hear the sound of music across the burn. Hastening in the direction from which the sound proceeded, we found to our joy that a caravan had taken its stand on a piece of vacant ground in the centre of the village. The caravan consisted of an old rickety waggon drawn by a steed of corresponding character, that one would suppose to be sufficiently burdened with carrying its own tail. By the time we reached the spot the proprietor was busy punishing an old drum and fiercely

blowing a shepherd's reed. Pausing, he announced to the group of onlookers that they had now an opportunity of witnessing several of the wonders of nature, notably a fat lady and a giant, and the general invitation was issued: "Walk up, ladies and gentlemen: the charge for admission is only a penny; boys and girls a halfpenny." Having, after some canvassing, been provided with our passport, along with our juvenile friends we mounted the steps that led to the interior. After all who were inclined had accepted the repeated invitation, a curtain, that partitioned off the spectators from the prodigies behind it, was raised, and, sure enough, there were revealed the fat lady and the giant. The former, to all appearance, must have added considerably to the task imposed on the poor old quadruped that led the van. The giant was to us far more interesting; he might have been serviceable as a fire-escape. All too soon the show was over, the steps that led to the interior were removed, the door was closed, the giant would no doubt be folded up, and the fat lady

denuded of her stuffings; old Ginger was reyoked, and crawled out of the village, while the youngsters, who had paid their first visit to Wonderland, escorted the troupe for some distance on their journey westward.

One of the most attractive features of the sweet scenery around must claim special attention—namely, the Manse, with its immediate surroundings. Situated on the rising ground eastward of the path leading from the highway towards the sea, the Manse, while making no pretence to architectural adornment, yet presents a charming aspect, viewed from the high ground beyond the burn. The prospect includes the beautiful sloping garden bounded by the Gellie, embosomed among the trees and wandering underneath, and here assuredly all will admit that wood and water have combined to adorn a situation which a late eminent Scottish artist declared could not be surpassed. Fit vantage ground, indeed, for one whose duty it is on occasion to portray the joys of paradise, for already he may be said to have reached the "half-way house"!

SMITHY BRAE
KILRENNY

Our reminiscences of Kilrenny possess little interest except for residenters or for natives at a distance, who may be glad to learn that the village is still looking fresh and fair. With a pardonable fondness for the scenes of our early days, we are sometimes inclined to rank Kilrenny as the queen of Fife villages. Arrayed in her green mantle in the summer season, she invites all who approach to pause and enjoy the peaceful scene.

NOTES FOR SPEECH

As CHAIRMAN at BURNS ANNIVERSARY MEETING, ANSTRUTHER, *January* 1887

This now brings us to the toast of the evening, "The immortal memory of Burns," and I feel assured that it will meet with the old hearty reception at your hands, however feeble the language in which its proposition may be clothed. I am certain that here there is a social group of Scotsmen who are not ashamed but proud to avow themselves warm admirers of their National Bard. Search for a needle with a magnet, and, if the needle come within the range of the mysterious influence of the magnet, it will be drawn towards the latter. So if we search a crowd anywhere for a Scotsman, should one be present, here is the magnet whose

mysterious influence will attract him and titillate a chord in his bosom—the music of "Auld Lang Syne." Burns, in his own day, when his sweet lyrics and humorous or sarcastic sallies claimed and secured public notice and consequent admiration, found an appreciative audience in his own loved Scotia. He addressed a patriotism that was, and is, undying in the bosoms of Scotsmen, a love of justice that was the inheritance of the descendants of the heroes of Bannockburn, and a love of Nature that was nursed by the contemplation of the rugged mountain and sweet rural scenery of the "land of the mountain and the flood." Hence the national heart, as it were, responded joyfully to the sentiments contained in his noble yet touching effusions. What is there in Burns' productions that guarantees him an ever-increasing popularity? Doubtless that popularity rests on the solid foundation of truthfulness and sincerity. We take it also in some sense to arise from the fact that we feel he is yet almost a living presence in our midst. Other poets of no mean order have been gifted to

Scotland, and their works merit our admiration, but when we take up Burns we feel as if the voices of his heroes and heroines were yet audible. Take "Tam o' Shanter" as an illustration. In reading this masterpiece of poetic genius we feel as if we were located in the tavern enjoying Tam's hilarity, listening to the Souter's queerest stories and the landlord's laughing chorus. As the hour approaches when the company must separate, we feel apprehensive of the fate of Tam. The "keystane o' nicht's black arch" is reached, but a fearful ordeal has Tam to pass through before he reaches the next keystane —the keystane o' the brig. Mounted on his grey mare, he disappears in the darkness, a darkness only relieved by the lightning's flash. We follow him until he is safe across the brig—Maggie, minus her tail, carrying Tam home to settle accounts with his wife Kate, who would be in fine trim to square up with him. The whole scene is so faithfully and humorously made to pass before us that we have been almost as good as eye-witnesses.

It will, we believe, be universally admitted that the welfare or happiness of the great bulk of humanity will be chiefly influenced by their relation to those things that touch them closely. In fine, the enjoyment of life will be determined by the domestic atmosphere; and although Burns had left us no other legacy than the "Cottar's Saturday Night," he would have been entitled to our lasting gratitude. The number of happy homes in a State will assuredly furnish the best criterion of its stability and of the justness of the laws that regulate its public affairs. Burns has elevated the fireside and erected around it a fortification of song. Burns never dreamed that he "dwelt in marble halls." He was pleased to be the exponent of humble social life. If there flow forth from the blithe firesides of Auld Scotland the sweet notes of "Afton Water" or "The Birks o' Aberfeldy," we may safely conclude that we have there the pulsations of a healthy social life, especially if it is crowned, as Burns has crowned it, with an exhibition of piety that sheds a very halo of heavenly

radiance over the roof-tree of a virtuous household.

As patriotic well-wishers of our native land we can crave for her no greater blessing than an ever-increasing number of such happy homes as we have depicted in this living sketch :—

"O Scotia ! my dear, my native soil !
For whom my warmest wish to Heaven is sent !
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content !
And, oh ! may Heaven their simple lives prevent
From luxury's contagion, weak and vile !
Then, howe'er crowns and coronets be rent,
A virtuous populace may rise the while,
And stand a wall of fire around their much-loved isle."

We presume that no one, especially no Scotsman, can thoughtfully peruse and study the complete writings of Burns without feeling stronger in spirit, more nerved and braced for life's battle, more resolved to value sincerity and moral courage as a thousand times superior to the mere accidents of birth or fortune. Should poverty or obscurity be his lot, he is reminded that

"It's no in titles nor in rank,
It's no in wealth like Lon'on bank,
To purchase peace and rest:
It's no in makin' muckle mair;
It's no in books; it's no in lear;
To make us truly blest:
If happiness hae not her seat
And centre in the breast,
We may be wise, or rich, or great,
But never can be blest.
Nae treasures, nor pleasures,
Could mak' us happy lang;
The heart aye's the part aye,
That makes us right or wrang."

In midst of misfortune he is reminded that

"The honest heart that's free frae a'
Intended fraud or guile,
However fortune kick the ba',
Has aye some cause to smile."

Amidst the petty rivalries or jealousies that afflict the votaries of caste and fashion, he listens to the voice of a teacher who has instilled into his mind the great fact that "a man's a man for a' that." The reputation of the poet is now safe under the affectionate guardianship of his fellow-countrymen, and sage critics may give themselves no further trouble in connection with the subject. The

whole case has been submitted to the judgment of those to whom the bard specially appealed, the verdict in his favour has long since been brought in, and the justice of that verdict is being emphasised as the years glide past.

One is amused on glancing over the dissertations of the modern critics of Burns —who no doubt expect to get credit for great perspicacity, in being able to discover wherein his strength, but especially his weakness, lay. We can tell them they may safely leave the matter in the hands of those who, in the world-wide admiration of the songs of Burns, find clear proof that posterity has been willing to forgive and forget his weakness. We will not, on this occasion, refer to the moral frailties of the bard. Those who have made themselves fully conversant with his life and labours, and the times in which he lived his short—too short—day, will be the first to judge him charitably. A certain class, small in our days, may, from ignorance or prejudice, still affect to shun his acquaintance. They are

unable to discern the beauties of the poet for much the same reason that we cannot discern Saturn's rings looking through the narrow aperture of a twopenny telescope. But surely we do well to keep in grateful remembrance the memory of one to whom Scotland owes so much. She is believed to possess the richest collection of song literature of any country in the world, and she owes it mainly to Burns. When the song of the laverock jars on the ear, when the wimplin' burnie pours around discordant music—then, and not till then, will the songs of Burns cease to touch the hearts of Scotsmen!

We are not as those that have lost a benefactor who has left them lone, poor, and forsaken in the world, but rather as those who rejoice in the fact that Burns has bequeathed to Scotland a noble legacy. At a meeting of the brethren of St James' Lodge, Tarbolton, the poet sang a farewell song which he himself then believed to be the last he would measure in Caledonia. The closing stanza is very touching, and is said,

as he rendered it, to have affected the whole Lodge. It was as follows :—

"A last request permit me here,
When yearly ye assemble a',
One round—I ask it with a tear,
To him, the Bard that's far awa!"

Gentlemen, I now give you—"The immortal memory of Burns!"

COTTAGE
CORNCERES, KILRENNY

NOTES FOR SPEECH

As CHAIRMAN at BURNS ANNIVERSARY MEETING, ANSTRUTHER, *January* 1888

I have the pleasure of proposing the toast of the evening, "The immortal memory of Burns," our country's national bard. Burns now stands recognised as the poet of humanity, a poet who did not merely secure the evanescent applause of his own time, but has earned, and merits, the love of his countrymen for all time; and not of his countrymen alone, but of all who are able to appreciate the glowing productions of his genius. Within a short distance of the town of Ayr there stands a humble thatched cottage, which has become a veritable Scottish Mecca. As the birthplace of the brilliant genius whose memory we have met to

celebrate, this lowly cot possesses for all Scotsmen a higher, deeper, and more sympathetic interest than the most palatial mansion in the land. Year by year it is visited by thousands of pilgrims, who hail from many countries. They gather when the sweet summer clothes and gilds the "banks and braes o' bonnie Doon," and all the lovely scenery of Coila. The contemplation of this scenery moved the bard so deeply that he could only find relief in song, such song as had never been approached until he himself struck the lyre of Caledonia. Ere that lyre dropped from his hands, he had woven an evergreen garland of song and twined it round the brow of Scotia, a wreath that to-day continues fresh and sweet in its perennial bloom, fresh and sweet as when the flowers that compose it were culled by the master's hand from the rich garden of poesy.

"Auld Coila, now, may fidge fu' fain,
She's gotten poets o' her ain,
Chiels wha their chanters winna hain,
But tune their lays,
Till echoes a' resound again
Her weel-sung praise."

Besides numbering among her sons one who gloried in thus adorning his "auld respected mither," Scotland was blessed with an intensely earnest teacher in this gifted son of song. He taught his countrymen to respect themselves because they were men, and especially because they were Scotsmen. In fact, the primary article in Burns' social creed was man, man himself, not the institutions that he had founded, hoary although these might be with the mould of centuries, or enriched with the vernal freshness of latest thought. These institutions, old or new, were only to be valued or maintained so far as they promoted the true elevation of man. The poet felt within his own manly breast the throbbings of a divinely implanted sense of right, and launched his most withering invectives against all who would dare try to suppress or extinguish those sacred monitions—that light which lighteth every man. Living at a time when freedom of speech was dangerous—especially to the poet, whom necessity had forced into a position in which silent submission would

best have promoted his advancement—at no time did his nobility of soul assert itself more positively than in defence of his rights as a freeborn Briton. Neither tyranny, poverty, nor neglect could obliterate from the mind of Burns those aspirations which he reckoned as lying at the very foundation of true manhood. This nobility of soul shines clearly through his refutation of the charges brought against him by the Commissioners of Excise. Burns was a poor man from birth and an exciseman by necessity; but I will say it—the sterling of his honest worth no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue. Listen to the following paragraph taken from his eloquent vindication :—

"Have not I, to me, a more precious stake in my country's welfare than the richest dukedom in it? I have a large family of children, I have three sons who I see already have brought into the world souls ill qualified to inhabit the bodies of slaves. Does any man tell me that my full efforts can be of no service, and that it does not belong to my

humble station to meddle with the concerns of a nation? I can tell him that it is on such individuals as I that a nation has to rest, both for the hand of support and the eye of intelligence. The uninformed mob may swell a nation's bulk, and the titled, tinselled, courtly throng may be its feathered ornament; but the number of those who are elevated enough in life to reason and to reflect, yet low enough to keep clear of the venal contagion of a court—these are a nation's strength."

Hence we are able to catch a glimpse of the spirit that prompted the lines—

"If I'm design'd yon lordling's slave—
By Nature's law design'd—
Why was an independent wish
E'er planted in my mind?"

Again, such a volume of warm fraternal feeling is concentrated in the lines—

"And here's a hand, my trusty fiere,
And gie's a hand o' thine;
And we'll tak a right guid willie-waught,
For auld lang syne."

Here we have not the fashionable finger-tip salute that indicates a sickly development

of the social instincts, but the warm grasp in which both hand and heart are engaged. The bard has struck the keynote of the music of humanity. His harp was that thousand-stringed instrument, the human heart. It was his to waken to thrilling vibration the feelings that are ever welling up there, seeking outlet, longing for that sympathetic touch which it is the poet's high privilege to impart.

> "All hail, ye tender feelings dear!
> The smile of love, the friendly tear,
> The sympathetic glow!
> Long since, this world's thorny ways
> Had number'd out my weary days,
> Had it not been for you!"

All honour to those who may be said to conduct the deep-sea soundings in the great ocean of inquiry that spreads around us, beneath us, and above us; but honour also will we award to those who have consecrated their lives and their genius to the shedding of a ray of softer light on the lot of those who are born to toil and bear in obscurity the trials and struggles that frequently beset the life of honest

poverty. Burns encourages all to whom a humble lot has fallen to be of good cheer, for they have, within their reach, many sources of the most exalted pleasure.

"What tho', like commoners of air,
We wander out we know not where,
But either house or hall?
Yet Nature's charms, the hills and woods,
The sweeping vales, and foaming floods,
Are free alike to all.
In days when daisies deck the ground,
And blackbirds whistle clear,
With honest joy our hearts will bound,
To see the coming year:
On braes, when we please, then,
We'll sit and sowth a tune;
Syne rhyme till't, we'll time till't,
And sing't when we hae done."

In these lines the bard intimates to kindred spirits in life's lonely vale the possession of a common heritage, surpassing in value that held by the mere men of the world, a class from whom his warm social heart recoiled.

"Awa, ye selfish, war'ly race,
Wha think that havins, sense, an' grace,
Ev'n love an' friendship, should give place
To catch-the-plack!
I dinna like to see your face,
Nor hear your crack."

The friendship of Burns was ever reliable, while anything of the nature of treachery towards those who trusted him was abhorred from his inmost soul. He was no cynic, but was always anxious to think the best of every man. He has told us that he could often discover some of the best traits of our common nature even among those who were shunned by the stricter part of society. He deeply lamented his own wayward conduct, and his unfailing sense of truth compelled him to confess that

> "Thoughtless follies laid him low,
> And stained his name."

As he judged others charitably, so let him be judged. We care not to dwell on the errata that may be found in the small volume of life that was granted him, preferring to enjoy the beauties that beam and sparkle throughout the body of the work. We have met to celebrate the memory of a man and a poet; a man who has spoken to us in no dead language, but in the ever-living language of humanity that touches our hearts and awakens within

us a feeling of universal brotherhood; a man who possessed a mind of rare independence, and who sympathised with all human suffering; and a poet whose humanity lives in and permeates the effusions of his genius, and who has extended, purified, and exalted our national minstrelsy. And on this the anniversary of his natal day, we call on you "brither Scots" once more to honour the immortal memory of one whom Scotsmen the world over, with ever-increasing fervour, esteem the most brilliant exponent of their historic patriotism, of their inherent independence of national spirit, and of the brightest and warmest phases of the national, social, and domestic life of their native land!

NOTES FOR LECTURE

ON ROBERT BURNS FOR CHALMERS CHURCH LITERARY SOCIETY, ANSTRUTHER, *January* 1896

WERE we called upon to furnish a reply to the interrogation that forms the heading of the popular song, "Where has Scotland found her fame?" memory would carry us back to the time, happily now gone by, when our forefathers—those heroes whose names and deeds in the camp, in the senate, in the valley, or on the mountain sides of our native land, are enshrined in the annals of Scotia—held aloft the banner of civil and religious liberty, suffering unto the death that they might secure to themselves and bequeath to posterity the glorious inheritance of freedom. As Scotsmen, the patriotic tide may well stream within our breasts

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when we recall to our minds the heroism of our ancestors, who sealed with their blood the independence of our much-loved native isle. In the historical records of these struggles, Scotland has asserted before the world her claim to fame as a nation; but she can urge other claims, not the least significant of which arises from the fact that she gave birth to the brilliant genius whose memory we are met this night to celebrate. Many long years have been added to the past since William Burness, a Kincardineshire gardener, wending his way south, ultimately resolved to settle in the district of Coil, in Ayrshire. He arranged to lease a piece of ground near the banks of Doon, and in course of time, having wooed and won a fair maiden, he set about building a cottage to shelter his gudewife and himself from the "cauld nor'-wast." Life had hitherto been a rather hard struggle, and, as the subsequent story relates, it continued to be of the same character to the close. Little did the worthy Scotsman think, when he erected the lowly cot with his own hands, that it would stand to this day guarded sacredly

as a centre from which was destined to radiate an influence that, duly considered, would do much to amplify the reply to the query, "Where has Scotland found her fame?"

Thousands pass every year through the restless turnstile that leads into that humble shieling in which, one hundred and thirty-seven years ago, was born Robert Burns, the national bard of Scotland, who has been truly designated the poet of humanity. In the words of David Vedder, one of our minor poets—

> "The Muses round his cradle hung,
> The Graces wat his infant tongue,
> And Independence wi' a rung
> Cried, 'Redd the gate for Robin.'"

Ay, redd the gate for Robin, for Robin had a message to deliver to his fellow-countrymen. He had come to teach them to respect themselves because they were men, especially because they were Scotsmen. He had come to encourage every good and true man to come out into the open and stand erect, and to be thankful that he belonged, not to any sect or coterie, but to the great human family. In the full maturity of his

powers, Burns, as the prophet of a brighter day for the race, could well discern the outline of the campaign that lay before the champions of freedom in every direction; and it may be whispered that we are only yet learning to spell out the full meaning of his deeper thoughts and the conclusions to which they point. He was only permitted to see as in vision the realisation of the liberties of which we are in full enjoyment. In accord with the usual fate of those who have forecast the future, the poet-seer, too, seems ever destined to disappear long ere the seed that he has scattered has germinated and decked as with new verdure the path of man's earthly pilgrimage. Generations come and go ere the full bloom and fruition are witnessed and enjoyed by a posterity that can only reward with loving remembrance a benefactor who had in all likelihood sacrificed his own immediate interests while clearing the way that has led up to their happier environment.

Prominent among the mental features of the bard was his deep human sympathy. This is finely expressed in a letter to his correspon-

dent Thomson, written when he was busily engaged composing new and furbishing up old songs for Thomson's collection. In this letter he makes a declaration and announces a resolution in these words: "Song-making is now so completely my hobby-horse that I shall e'en canter it away until I come to the limit of my race. God grant that I may take the right side of the winning-post, and then, cheerfully looking back on the honest folks with whom I have been happy, I shall say or sing, 'Sae merry as we a' hae been,' and raising my last looks to the whole human race, the last words of the voice of 'Coila' shall be, 'Good night, and joy be wi' you a'!'"

In this comprehensive sympathy none are left out. The bard has struck the keynote of the music of humanity. That music, unlike much that passes under the name, has a soul in it, impregnating every movement that has for its object the amelioration of the condition of the race. Burns runs up and down the whole gamut of human susceptibility with the ease, felicity, and dexterity of a master. He reaches the very apex of simile and illustra-

tion, giving a force and point to many of his effusions which we think it impossible to surpass. His beautiful illustrations of the evanescent nature of all earthly pleasures, furnished in "Tam o' Shanter," may be quoted as an instance of his supreme capabilities in that direction :—

> "But pleasures are like poppies spread,
> You seize the flow'r, its bloom is shed ;
> Or like the snow-fall in the river,
> A moment white—then melts for ever ;
> Or like the Borealis race,
> That flit ere you can point their place ;
> Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
> Evanishing amid the storm."

The bard portrayed with a vividness and fidelity that have never been excelled the life and manners of those by whom he was in his day surrounded. The beauties of nature as exhibited in the scenes of his own loved native land, the commonest incidents of life, the objects that meet the eye of the most superficial observer, all these had charms for Burns, who, with the magic touch of genius, clothed them with a new life and interest, a life and interest that are unfading. Like all true

poets, he deeply felt the charms of Nature, and longed to be able to set forth her beauties in rhyme. As he himself puts it—

> "To paint auld Nature to the nines
> In his sweet Caledonian lines."

This desire he expressed in an epistle to a rhyming correspondent in the following lines :—

> "The war'ly race may drudge an' drive,
> Hog-shouther, jundie, stretch, an' strive,
> Let me fair Nature's face descrive,
> And I, wi' pleasure,
> Shall let the busy, grumbling hive
> Bum ower their treasure."

In one of the earliest productions of his muse, "Winter: a Dirge," we have the following graphic description of a cheerless winter day :—

> "The wintry west extends his blast,
> And hail and rain does blaw;
> Or the stormy north sends driving forth
> The blinding sleet and snaw:
> While, tumbling brown, the burn comes down,
> And roars frae bank to brae;
> And bird and beast in covert rest,
> And pass the heartless day."

Then listen to the ripple of the burnie in "Hallowe'en"—

"Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays,
As thro' the glen it wimpl't;
Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays;
Whyles in a wiel it dimpl't;
Whyles glitter'd to the nightly rays,
Wi' bickering, dancing dazzle;
Whyles cookit underneath the braes,
Below the spreading hazel,
Unseen that night."

Or his beautiful grouping of the seasons in his elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson, in which he invites all Nature to join him in his wail for his departed friend—

"Mourn, Spring, thou darling of the year!
Ilk cowslip cup shall kep a tear:
Thou, Simmer, while each corny spear
Shoots up its head,
Thy gay, green, flow'ry tresses shear,
For him that's dead!

Thou, Autumn, wi' thy yellow hair,
In grief thy sallow mantle tear!
Thou, Winter, hurling thro' the air
The roaring blast,
Wide o'er the naked world declare
The worth we've lost!

Mourn him, thou Sun, great source of light!
Mourn, Empress of the silent night!
And you, ye twinkling Starnies bright,
My Matthew mourn!
For through your orbs he's ta'en his flight,
Ne'er to return."

This sweet singer has declared emphatically for the brotherhood of the race, and throughout that glorious effusion, "A man's a man for a' that," there runs a sentiment worthy of being interwoven in the anthem that shall be sung when that brotherhood is no longer merely the theme of the poet or the dream of the philanthropist, but an accomplished fact :—

"Then let us pray that come it may—
As come it will for a' that—
That sense and worth o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, and a' that!
For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man the warld o'er,
Shall brothers be for a' that."

These are noble sentiments, to which the closing stanza of that beautiful hymn might supply a fit counterpart—

"For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing."

We are aware that there are those to whose minds the failings and weaknesses of the poet are ever recurring, and we seek not to deny that some dark shadows do fall across the story of his life-struggle; but where do we find perfection? Spots are seen even on the bright orb of day; what then—shall we refuse his blessed influences? Again, gold is often found encrusted with grosser material; still, it is none the less highly prized and eagerly sought for—and shall we refuse to explore the mine where the precious metal so largely predominates, this mine of rich humour, patriotic sentiment, strong common-sense, independent thought, deep human sympathy and love, expressed by one who prayed for the dawn of that day? Explain it as we may, the power of Burns over the popular mind of Scotland is a great fact which cannot be ignored; and I take it that, by our presence here this night to celebrate his natal day, we give evidence that, while we may lament his weaknesses, we cannot stifle our admiration of his transcendent genius, while we have a grateful

recollection of the bard who has bequeathed to us and to Scotland those rich and exquisite effusions that will ever tend to knit together the hearts of our fellow-countrymen in every quarter of the world where Scotsmen meet.