

VERSE BY CANADIAN WRITERS

TO
ROBERT BURNS.*

O, many love you, Robert Burns,
And many more they fear you still;
Even now your barbèd arrow turns
In writhing hearts with right good will.

And some they praise you for their love,
But more they praise you for their fear,
They set your image high above
And hymn you with a hidden tear.

Like rose upon a spiny stem
You warn the ignorant hands away,
And keep your priceless jewels for them
That know you night-born son of Day.

Rose too, now white, now shamestruck red,
Your head with changeful beauty crowned;
Rose too, your fragrant breath is fed
From foulness festering in the ground.

You were, 'tis true, the friend of man;
Men oft you slandered pitilessly,
And women jealously did scan
With bitter and envenomed eye.

Thus read we what we'd fain forget
What you perchance have long forgotten,
For oft you wished with eyelids wet
To bury deep what reeked so rotten.

But friends, who were not friends to thee,
Men who were blind with adoration,
Have lit your sins as shrines for me
And to your frailties pour oblation.

You were a prince and claimed your throne,
Yet frolicked gaily in the gutter,
Though oft the laughter masked the groan,
And hid the shame you dared not utter.

You were a lamp to fainting hearts
To lead them on to new endeavour,
But clouds obscured your nobler parts,
The satyrs danced around you ever.

Yet were you instant at the morn,
The dew not fresher than your spirit;
Betwixt two natures wildly torn,
Both hell and heaven you did inherit

Life gave you joy and bitter pain,
But never mixed them in the giving,
High laurels and a blasting stain,
But ne'er contentment to thee living.

So when the early darkness fell,
And Death's cold fingers touched your fever,
You scarcely feared his passing knell,
Or grieved for Love that you must leave her.

—Donald Graham.

* Read at a Burns' Night of Vancouver Scottish
Society, November, 1922.



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