

Those concluding two lines have been so often quoted and so variously applied that almost everybody knows them by heart. As an answer to those who in these days are so anxious to deride the purely intuitive character of our moral and emotional perceptions they have to be accepted as the result of experience. We can all testify that they are the declaration of a great and incontrovertible truth.

Truly if any man ever did so this man rose to the level of being the poet, the prophet and the seer of his people. Many a sermon has been preached upon both him and his poems. Listening to some of them we cannot get rid of the feeling that many people would never mention him at all except for the purpose of making him a peg to hang some of their senseless and superlative "illies upon."

It cannot be too often pointed out that, in order to write as he did, Burns had to be just the kind of man that he was. He lived the life that he wrote, and experienced the sentiment to which he gave expression. Had he been of the dour, decent, sober-minded type of his countrymen we never would have had those poems. On the other hand, if he had not written poems his vices would never have been heard of. He would have gone down to oblivion like so many others without having done anything even in the way of vice to call for special mention.

The Great Lesson His Life Has For Us

The great lesson that his life and writing ought to have for us is to teach us that in order to live happily we have to get into closer touch with Nature. Nature is the cosmic whole, and man is but a part of it. Our only hope or well-being is to live our life truly in harmony with the laws of our being. There are no little or common things in life. The things we touch and handle are really the sacred things. We have not got to go either to ancient legend or into the realms of prophetic vision for the basic principles of action in relation to our fellows. They lie all around us, and we are making for either good or ill in every action that we do and in every word that we utter. Instead of the self-centred and egotistic habits which unfortunately are the rule throughout our modern life, we ought to cultivate the finer feelings and give in our lives the expression of those hopes and sympathies that make man truly man. His songs live. They are immortal because every one is a bit of his soul. These are no feverish, hysterical jingles of clinking verse, dead save for the animating breath of music.

His Songs

Already we have quoted one of them which is exquisite and magnificent in its sweetness, but here is another which all critics agree is pleasing, first not only in his own collection, but also in any other collection of love songs, although Burns himself declares it to be one of his juvenile works—"Mary Morison."

O Mary, at thy window be,
It is the wished, the trysted hour!
Those smiles and glances let me see,
That make the miser's treasure poor:
How blithely wad I bide the stoure,
A weary slave frae sun to sun,
Could I the rich reward secure—
The lovely Mary Morison.

Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing—
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.