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## Contributors and Correspondents

### BURNS' ANNIVERSARIES.

Sixteen years ago the Scottish world especially, rung loudly and long in connection with the centennial celebrations of Scotland's peasant-poet, Robert Burns. And now, again preparations are being made not only to celebrate another anniversary of the poet's birth, but also along therewith the centenary of his first poetic production. These preparations will doubtless, as in the past, partake somewhat of the intellectual, largely of the social, and not less of the sensual, and may not infrequently in their issues exhibit practical if not painful evidences of the ideas held regarding the tastes, the habits, and the desires of the man whom they thus delight to honor, for it may be, that in honor of "strong drink," and of him who so sweetly sung its praises and manifested its influences, some may be found so far animated by the poet's spirit as to exemplify his sentiment that "the first that by his claim shall be, shall be the king among them all." Despite such things which are unfortunately more real than imaginary, "even ministers they have been known," not only to patronize such celebrations by their presence, but to impart to them their sanctity in introducing them with enthusiastic orations and false panegyrics oft in ill accord with the office they fill and the master whom they serve; yet in doing so, we suppose they "serve the Lord Christ, and are thereby doing God service."

Did we possess no other information regarding the life and productions of the poet, than what we can gather from the speeches of convivial orators, or from punning prolegations, and after-dinner orations, we would be led to suppose that the hero of the day was of the very highest type of manhood, a model of virtue, and a very paragon of moral excellence—that his failings, if such he had, ever lovingly "leaned to virtue's side," and that every stanza he wrote, and every sentiment he uttered under the inspiration of his muse, breathed such a lofty benignity and such a praiseworthy purity as to lay morality and religion alike, under obligations so immense as could only be repaid by the increasing and unbounded gratitude of the world.

At the risk, however, of being branded as libelous, and having a whole catalogue of cognate terms, either better or worse cast at our head, we would venture to assert that after carefully balancing the good and the evil which either Burns or his anniversaries have produced, we soberly think that the propriety of keeping up the letter, as custom and habit have hitherto sanctioned, is certainly much more than questionable, and as being in general such as the sober-minded part of the community cannot condemn. Still ministers are found so far forgetting, as we think, both their master and their mission, as to grace such celebrations with their presence and foster them with their aid, yet these same ministers would hold up their hands in holy horror and heap the most scathing anathemas upon the head of the poor bigoted, blinded Catholic, in offering adoration to saints, while they themselves without scruple and without weariness offer their adulations to the memory of one, in regard to whom it would require a more than questionable stretch of eulogy to place in the calendar of canonized saints.

That Burns possessed great talents—that he was distinguished for a fine fancy, a lively wit, and a noble genius; that he had all the fire and the fervour, the energy, and the sensibility necessary to constitute a great poet, we would never deny. He was a greatly, grandly gifted man. The powers with which God had gifted him fitted him to rise high above the occupation of the plough, or the rank of the peasant. That many of his poems are exceedingly beautiful, graceful, tender, and touching, and not only worthy of being read, but remembered, and admired, we most readily admit. That he who sang so much should occasionally have sung so well—that he who was so highly gifted and who was such a favorite with the masses, should have so glowingly delineated emotions, and given utterance to sentiments worthy alike of being praised and preserved, is nothing more than we might expect. In short, as a gifted poet we have no hesitation in ranking Burns high among the highest in his own sphere; but having said this much, how much more will either candour or our higher humanity approve? We have no wish to pry into the follies of his life, or portray the scenes of his death. He has gone to his account, and we have neither wish to gratify our purpose by drawing his frailties from their dread shade, and it might be well for the memory of the man, for themselves, and for our race, did his platform panegyrics not less frequently keep this principle in view.

If we turn from the man to the products of his pen, none can tell how oft it has been repeated, and how emphatically declared, how much that the Scottish peasantry have been indebted to the poet's writings as

tending in no ordinary degree to refine their tastes—to ennoble their affections—to lighten the tone of their feelings—to dignify and adorn their humanity—and that by reason of their morality and religion have been invested with new and fascinating charms. Now if profane illusions to Scripture, impious parodies on some of its finest passages, and constant sneering at its peculiar doctrines, if ridicule of the most sacred ordinances of religion, if branding with slang terms, and open and unscrupulous abuse of its evangelical preachers and people, and if an ample profusion of amorous and bacchanalian songs have done so much to improve the literary taste, the moral tone, or the religious standing of the Scottish peasantry, then let the poet's writings as a whole, be extolled—his anniversaries kept—his memory revered—his bust crowned yearly with fresh laurels, and every city of our land adorned with monumental memorials to the great worth and lasting benefit of his writing. The man, however, who in God's house and service could compose such a poem as "The Calf," and who on leaving the sanctuary could repeat it, at once in mockery of the minister, and in derision of the inspired prophet, and who to display his unallowable wit could wickedly parody such a beautiful and affecting psalm as the 137th thus: "No more by Babel's streams we'll weep, To think upon our Zion, And hang our heads up to sleep, Like baby-clouds a-drying, &c."

The man who, to flatter a patron, could declare his willingness to be "saved or damned" with him; he who could write, print, and publish so much of that which we have only presented a mere specimen, may be an object of admiration to kindred natures with his own, and who may think that profanity and licentiousness are sufficiently condoned for, by the attractive attire of wit and humor in which they are dressed. But the lovers of Christianity are compelled rather to pity than admire the man, who while so highly gifted by God, so often prostituted his gifts to praise that which he should have censured, and who so recklessly, and even rejoicingly, made merit of holy things. And what are we to say of his religious opinions and beliefs as expressed in his prose writings. In one of his letters he says:—"All my fears and cares are of this world; if there is another an honest man has nothing to fear from it. I hate a man that wishes to be a deist, but I fear every unprejudiced inquirer must be in some degree a sceptic. It is not that there are any very staggering arguments against the immortality of man, but like electricity, phlogiston, &c., the subject is so involved in darkness, that we want data to go upon. One thing frightens me much, that we are to live forever, seems too good news to be true. That we are to enter into a new scene of existence where, exempt from want and pain, we shall enjoy ourselves and our friends without satiety or separation. How much would I be indebted to any one who could fully assure me that this was certain." Again he writes:—"Ye venerable sages and holy flames, is there probability in your conjectures, truth in your stories, of another world beyond death, or are they all like baseless visions and fabricated fables? If there be another life, it must be only for the just, the benevolent, the amiable and humane; what a flattering idea then, is the world to come! Would to God I as firmly believed it as I ardently wish it!" Sentiments such as these are to be found scattered throughout his letters. In short if we are to except Byron, there is perhaps no modern poet in whose writings, especially his poems, there are so many profane passages to be found; so many displays of wit upon sacred things; so much jesting with the religion of the Bible.

But we are pointed to the "Cottar's Saturday night," and some other of a kindred character, as proofs, not simply of his poetic gifts, but of the true and manly piety of his heart, and assured that none but a man of right feeling could so admirably describe such scenes. All this, however, goes upon the unwarrantable assumption that a man cannot describe in fiction what he has never realized in emotion, and even amid all, the question may be asked how much, and what, has Burns written? As a poet let him wear the laurels he has so worthily won; but except the admiration due to great, though perverted talents, he deserves nothing more. To celebrate anniversaries in his honor, as if he were the world's benefactor, the elevator of humanity, to ennoble his race, is to prostitute the honors due only to the good, and to hold up to public view unsanctified genius as deserving of honor and applause. If we must have anniversaries let them be held in honor of those who have been pre-eminently distinguished for their goodness as well as their gifts, men who have left behind them a lofty and a lovely memorial of a life and its labours, calculated not to gratify the lower propensities of our nature, but to enrich our literature, to ennoble our species, to remove its ills, to advance its interests, and, in short, to promote and perpetuate the moral and religious improvement of mankind.

It is possible, by the above remarks, we may subject ourselves to the anathemas of some, and be accused of meekly attempting to blot the fair fame of departed genius. We indignantly spurn the charge as unwarranted and unjust; we yield to no one in our sincere admiration of great talents, or who offers a more willing homage at the shrine of well-directed genius. We value and venerate worth wherever we find it, and from high intellectual attainment, whether found in the present, or the philosopher, we never withhold the tribute of our admiration; but wherever great gifts are perverted and prostituted to ignoble purposes, we no less emphatically pity the possessor and condemn his productions.

Glennorris, D.

## OUR MISSIONS.

### III. THE WANTS OF MANITOBA.

The generous attention to the North-west which our General Assembly is always willing to give is an omen of the success of Presbyterian missions in that quarter. Whatever may have been true of Presbyterianism in other lands and at other times in this land, it is plain to all that at the present time she is peculiarly aggressive and active in Canada. This may arise from several causes, such as the energy and evangelical spirit of the fathers of our church, the vigour of the Canadian mind, the union of 1861, and we would fain trust from the special energizing power of the Holy Spirit. At any rate that the church has much more zeal than in some former periods is manifest, and one especial manner of showing this is in her desire to fill the waste places of our land with the knowledge of Christ. Our national inheritance now embraces half a continent, and our religious sympathies cannot fall far short of the limits of our rising nationality. Growth of our people are pressing westward, hundreds of Canadians who have been for a few years domiciled in the Western States are leaving there and speeding to a land healthier, freer, and better, and we cannot see our relatives, friends, and fellow-countrymen left without the means of grace; for every thousand of our citizens that go westward ought to send at least one minister, making all due allowance for what other denominations may do. There too the beginning of a stream of European emigration is commencing to flow north-westward; we must do what we can to lighten, influence, and mould that great European mass into British subjects and active Protestant Christians. The British churches are beginning to appreciate this, and £100 and £50 and the like are no uncommon contributions from across the seas to our work in Manitoba. It is true our Home Mission work does not always have to us the romance that foreign work has, and it is a common complaint that money flows in freely for the Chinese and Formosans, while for our work among our poor and desolate fellow-countrymen it is slow and scanty. This however, should discourage no one. Let us rejoice that so much interest is taken in the heathen; and let us urge and press and sue for more and more for our Home Mission Work. We shall do this best by keeping the grand object in view, "The Dominion for Christ," and subordinate to this a living and real Presbyterianism in the Dominion. There is a great danger in adding dollar to dollar, and working on the basis that large aggregates are made up of many littles; of becoming petty, and censorious, and sometimes unjust. When funds are low, and our honour involved, and our management open to question, our committees are apt, unless broad and generous in their views, to lose sight of the end, so noble and deserving. For our North-western work we must have men and means. It is a wide country; its prospects are good; it is strongly Presbyterian in sentiment; and nothing hinders in want of zeal and want of interest from going in and possessing the land to a large extent. The growth of some of our congregations there is wonderful. The Winnipeg congregation in less I think than three years from its organization become self-supporting, and is ready to help others; three or four preaching stations are now found in localities where three years ago there was not a settler. We understand that there has been since the setting in of winter a reduction on our staff of a very serious kind; one missionary sent further west, another resigned, and a catechist laid aside; this calls for earnest attention on our part. Our sister church and ourselves are called on to send two at least at once. The men we need for that new land should be of our best, energetic, fair preachers, off-handed, with small families, loving adventure, and full of love for perishing fellow-sinners; for the character of the men we send has much to do with the success of our cause and the character of Presbyterianism in the North-west. It is to be hoped the Home Mission Committee will choose wisely and promptly. Farewell in the meantime to Manitoba.

Those who manage affairs for the Pope have not forgot the cunning and duplicity for which the Jesuits have ever been proverbial; as is seen in their recent conduct respecting the remarks of the Pope upon Mr. Gladstone's pamphlet, which we published a few weeks since. Some one at Rome telegraphed to the French papers that the version of the speech published was not authentic, and to the English papers that it had not been delivered at all. That the speech was delivered is proved conclusively by its publication in a semi-official clerical paper at Rome.

## Psalms vs. Hymns.

Editor BRITISH AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN.

Sir,—In no department of religious worship or religious duty are we so far behind other Protestant communities as in our Psalms. With a Theology, which, in point of Scriptural correctness, is surpassed by none; with a ritual simple and appropriate; and with a prevailing faithfulness of preaching such as few others enjoy, it is a veritable too generally the case that bad singing and doggerel unmeaning versification, are characteristics of our public celebration of the Divine praise. Without stopping to inquire at any length into the causes which have co-operated to produce this anomalous state of things, I venture to attribute it in no small degree, to the prevalence of a taste for *metre versions of the Book of Psalms*. That such a taste is common in Scotland is well known, and it is only of late years, comparatively, that minister and others have been emancipated from its influence. By some good people this preference is carried so far, that they hesitate not to pronounce it sinful, to use in public worship any other songs of praise, than the Psalms of David in metre. Such appears to be the opinion of your correspondent whose communication appeared in your pages on the 8th inst., headed "Psalms vs. Hymns." He says: "I am led by a careful study of the following texts of Scripture, to believe that there is not only no authority for the introduction of hymns, but that such introduction is positively wrong; and also that the Psalms alone ought to be used in the service of song." To my mind many of the texts referred to have no bearing whatever upon the subject, and strange that among them should be found the following: Matt. xxvi. 5, "And when they had sung an hymn they went out into the Mount of Olives," Col. iii. 16, "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord," Eph. v. 19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing, and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

Let me seriously ask: Have we any inspired Canon upon the subject? Or, are not the doggerel rhymes which your correspondent so much admires, as much a human composition as any other poem that is founded upon Scripture?

Then, what of uninspired prayers and sermons? We have inspired portions of the *both in the Old and New Testament*. Why not bind us down to the exclusive use of these in our public worship? If we can have Scriptural prayers and sermons, though uninspired, why not Scriptural hymns? At a late meeting of our Synod, a delegate from the American Presbyterian Church was present. On the Sabbath he occupied a pulpit in a Church where nothing but the Psalms were permitted to be sung. In his prayer, he very aptly and beautifully introduced a quotation from the hymn, "Nearer my God to Thee, nearer to Thee." Was this wrong? If not wrong, in prayer, would it have been wrong in praise?

I admit that in the Book of Psalms, we have not only the finest models of sacred poetry that are extant, but some of the most appropriate and delightful expressions of devotional feeling and sentiment, that the purest taste and the most elevated piety can desire. At the same time, however, it is undeniable that the great mass of the Psalms are not suited, as they stand, for expressing the feelings and desires of those who live under the Christian dispensation. Many of them, for a *ance*, are purely *theoretical*, and consequently can never be appropriate in the mouths of those who live under the spiritual dispensation of the Messiah. Others are *prophetic of events that are now passed*, and consequently cannot be used without great impropriety in their present form by us, who look back to the fulfillment of what they were written to foretell. Others again, are appropriate only to persons who were *inspired*, and consequently cannot be used without a resumption by private Christians. Thus, can anything be more out of place than for an individual whose influence is confined, it may be, within the narrowest limits, to stand up and say, as expressive of his own determination:

"God's mercies I shall ever sing,  
And with my mouth I shall  
Thy faithfulness make to be known,  
To generations all!"

In the writings of an inspired man, which are to continue for ever, these words are becoming and correct; but as used by one whose name and memorial will die with himself, they are all too presumptuous and ridiculous. There are others of the psalms which are suitable only for Jesus, and why Christians should be called upon to sing like Jesus, has always appeared to me very unaccountable. What sense is there, for instance, in a *Christian* congregation singing,

"The wonders great, which Thou O Lord,  
Didst work in Egypt's land,  
Our fathers, though they saw," &c.

when our fathers saw no such thing? Or, why should we say, "By Babel's streams we sat and wept," when we never were in Babel in our lives? Or, what can be more absurd than to hear some strait-laced

opponent of instrumental music, Choruses, singing:

"Praise God with harp, and unto Him  
Sing with the psaltery  
Upon a ten-stringed instrument  
Make ye sweet melody?"

or  
"Praise Him with trumpet's sound,  
His praise with psaltery & lyre;  
With timbrel, harp, stringed instrument,  
And organs, & the dance  
Praise Him on cymbals loud;  
His praise on cymbals sounding high?"

Such songs of praise cannot surely be uttered either with the understanding or from the heart.

Two of the fathers of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland, lately departed this life. Their praise was in all the churches. I refer to Dr. Guthrie and Dr. Candlish. When lying upon their death-bed they were cheered and comforted by the singing of hymns which your correspondent would regard as sinful to be sung in the great congregation. Dr. Guthrie, when on the very borders of the good land requested his friends to sing "some of the bairn's hymns." "There is a fountain filled with blood," "Rock of ages cleft for me," "Just as I am without one plea, but that thy blood was shed for me." With these and such like hymns sounding in their ears these two men of God passed away to sing the "song of Moses and the Lamb" in glory. Did they as your correspondent would insinuate in singing such hymns "add to or take from the Word of God?" Rather was it not a blessed "remplication" of their receiving the kingdom of God as a little child?

In addition to the graver evils connected with the promiscuous use of the *Metre Psalms*, is the grievous injury which has been done to the general and devotional taste of the community, by the miserably executed versions which are in common use. Of these it is enough to say, that in the opinion of the most competent judges, our Scottish version with all its manifold offences against grammar, taste, and poetry, is decidedly the best as a whole; and if so, what must the others be? The more fact however, that existing versions are bad, would be no satisfactory argument against the use of versified translations of the psalms, were there any hope of ever getting a better. But the thing is impracticable. Rhymed versions of compositions such as the *Psalms*, taken as a whole, are unattractive from the very nature of the case; to doggerel. The pure poetry of them, indeed, may be transferred into poetical forms in another language without any serious loss of its force or beauty, provided the same licence be allowed to the translators in this case, which is extended to translators of poetry in general. But to translate right through the book, proper names and all, without alteration or paraphrase, is a task by which the most powerful genius would be oppressed, and in attempting to execute which even a Milton himself would fail.

If then, we are to use the whole book of Psalms in metre, we must content ourselves with what we have; for though a few verbal alterations might with advantage be introduced into our Scottish version, it is, upon the whole, as good as we can expect to get.

I come then to ask, how can the habitual use of a version which is confessedly full of the most miserable doggerel, fail to be otherwise than injurious to public taste, and deprecatory of the standard of devotional feeling among our worshippers? How is it possible that a man can sing with pleasure such lines as:

"At evening they go too and fro,  
They make great noise and sound,  
Like to a do, and often walk  
About the city round

or  
"Mad's my washing pot, my shoe,  
I'll over Edom throw;  
And over Palestine's land,  
I will in triumph go."

or  
"Do to them as to Midian,  
Jubin at Kion stand;  
And Sir's which at Endor fell,  
As dang to fat the land."

or  
"Her riggs thou wast's plentifully,  
Her furrows supplies,  
W. i. showers thou dost her mollify,  
Her spring by thee is blest."

And yet retain any love for genuine poetry, or be made to improve in a capacity for spontaneous devotion? By your correspondent and others of a like mind, considerations of this sort may be despised, but I cannot but regard the retention and admiration of a low standard of sacred poetry as associated with narrowness of conception and feebleness of devotions.

With the most unqualified reverence then for the Scriptural Psalms as a portion of the divine word, I cannot but think that the attempt to subject them to the fetters of metre, and to introduce them indiscriminately as they stand, without any accommodation to the altered circumstances of modern times, as vehicles for expressing the devotional feelings of a Christian congregation; has been attended with a deleterious effect upon the intelligence, the piety, and the devotional taste of the community. I am happy to know that in Scotland and in our own Dominion, progress towards a reformation on this subject has commenced. At this I unfeignedly rejoice. Selections of hymns and of Christian versions of the Old Testament poetry, are now multiplied among us, and the time, we hope is come when those who still hold by the Westminster version of the Psalms, will do themselves the least to lay aside their prejudices, and adopt those rich materials for devotion which sanctified taste and genius have at length laid on the altar of praise.

St. Stephen, N. B.

R. W.