

# *Vancouver Burns Fellowship*

(No. 325 on Roll of Federated Clubs)



## *Unveiling of a Statue to Robert Burns*

*in*

STANLEY PARK, VANCOUVER, B. C.

*on*

*Saturday, August 25th, 1928*

at 2 o'clock p.m.



P. McA. CARRICK,  
*President.*

JAMES TAYLOR,  
*Hon. Secretary,  
Statue Fund.*

A. FRASER REID,  
*Hon. Secretary.*

THE RT. HON. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD: Mr. Carrick, Ladies and Gentlemen—When I received an invitation just before I left home to come and perform this ceremony, well, my friends, it was nothing but human nature to embrace an opportunity of having such an honor done to me. I know something about Western Canada; I know something about Vancouver, and I know in consequence what a large number of those who have pioneered in Western Canada, came from our auld Mither Scotland. I know how those men used to thumb their Burns, long after they had committed it almost completely to memory, because, somehow or other, explain it as we may, in Burns there was that magic that made every Scotsman alive; that made him thrill with the consciousness of his nationality, and made him strong and powerful to do his duty in the world.

Ah, my friends, in unveiling this statue we perform a proper act of worship; we fulfil an obligation which we owe to our Scottish birth. There was a lad was born in Kyle and the hansel that he got was a blast of Januar' wind. Through his life that wind blew, that wind cut him, that wind chilled him, and at last that life ended in that obscure house, in that obscure town of Dumfries. But, my friends, whilst the wind of adversity blew, and whilst experience after experience tended to crush the heart out of the man, somehow or other—who can tell how?—somehow or other he heard the music that has been humming for ages in the heart of our people; he caught up the folk-song, the folk-story, and he embodied Scotland as though it were a being to worship and to love, and he hummed that music and he gave out that music. He was like a harp that responded to the winds. The winds that played upon Burns' soul were the emotions and experiences of the lives of the common people of Scotland. He was never stilted. He never went outside our range and our ken and our vision and our personality. But what was common to our clay he glorified, he transfigured into song, into glorious thought, into inspiring emotions, and Burns, when he passed into the new life, from that mean and common street in Dumfries, passed also through the gateway where mortals go to be turned immortal, and at the moment of his death he experienced a new and immortal resurrection.

This is not the time, and this is not the place, in a large open-air meeting, to appreciate Burns and to explain his mysteries, but what we have got to remember is this: That the music of his song lasted, that it spread, that the world heard it, and it was not only Burns, the man, who attained—it was Scotland, his mither, Scotland, our nation, you and I, who attained with him. Every Scotsman shares in the honor of Burns. Burns cast a glamour and an interest round us all. He gave Scotland a lyrical muse to attend upon her and to

be in waiting with her. You and I are sometimes reticent, my fellow Scotsmen and Scotswomen; we do not wear our hearts upon our sleeves, and we do not always help others to understand us.

But Burns has made it clear to the whole world that Scotland's heart is the heart of the seer; that Scotland's romance is the romance of the lover; that Scotland's tenderness is the tenderness of him and of her who shares all life in common, life with the humblest creature with four legs on the face of the earth, life that belongs to the simplest and commonest flower; somehow, by the mystery of God, the essence of life shared in by them and by ourselves, a discovery made by Burns in a supreme discovery of knowledge.

Burns also told the world that in Scotland there is a sturdiness of heart that belongs to the man of independent mind, the man who can lift up his head in the eyes of the world, poor and down-trodden, but still remaining, "A man for a' that." In a peculiar way, Burns has become his own memorial. You and I, my friends, when we go, will be enshrouded in the mists of oblivion. When we leave, the mosses will grow and the name will be obliterated, but Burns, Burns the man, Burns, the magic name, will live and grow in his glory more and more unto the perfect day. He stands with the immortals and wears the crown and the wreath of the immortals. You to-day, in this far-away land, still seeing in your dreams the Hebrides; you of whom it can be said, when the flower is in the bud and the life is in the tree, the lark will sing me hame to my ain countrie; you, out of the offerings of your heart, and out of the appropriateness of things have erected in this public park of Vancouver this statue that you have done me the great honor of asking me to unveil. Every time you see it, every time you pass it, your heads will be lifted up; every time you behold it, that bond which unites us all together wherever we may be—that bond which makes us Scotsmen and Scotswomen possessors of a great inheritance, not of wealth, but of pride; possessors of a great inheritance, not of material things, but of qualities, an inheritance which we have to guard because we cannot allow it to deteriorate, an inheritance which will last only insofar as we follow the great examples, the democratic thinkers, the beautiful singers, the men and women who have kept fresh and green and alive the lyrical nature of our being, at the head of whom, the king of whom, the first of them all, is Robert Burns; only insofar as you honor them and keep their memories green will you be worthy children and safe guardians of the inheritance that they have handed over to your keeping.

So, my friends, I have the greatest pleasure and the greatest honor in unveiling this statue, so that it may become the public possession of the citizens of Vancouver.



*The Burns Statue, Stanley Park  
Unveiled August 25, 1928*

# Vancouver Burns Fellowship

(No. 325 on the Roll of Federated Clubs.)

1759



1796

"Then let us pray that come it may  
As come it will for a' that,  
That Sense and Worth o'er a' the earth  
Shall bear the gree an' a' that.  
For a' that, an' a' that,  
It's comin' yet for a' that,  
That man to man the world o'er,  
Shall brithers be for a' that."

## Dinner

Commemorating Unveiling of a Statue to  
Robert Burns

SATURDAY, AUGUST 25<sup>TH</sup>, 1928

at 7.30 o'clock p. m.

AZTEC ROOM, HOTEL GEORGIA,  
Vancouver, British Columbia

P. McA. CARRICK  
President

JAMES TAYLOR  
Hon. Secretary  
Statue Fund

A. FRASER REID  
Hon. Secretary



## Toast List and Musical Programme



"There was a Lad"

SELKIRK GRACE..... Mr. Alexander McRae  
"ADDRESS TO A HAGGIS"..... The Chairman  
"THE KING"..... The Chairman

"GOD SAVE THE KING"

### *The Immortal Memory*

RT. HON. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD

VIOLIN SOLO—*Burns Melodies*..... Mr. J. Stuart Tait  
SONG—"My Heart's in the Highlands"..... Mr. E. J. Colton  
"CANADA"..... The Chairman  
RESPONSE..... Hon. J. D. MacLean  
"O CANADA"..... The Company

O Canada! Our heritage, our love,  
Thy worth we praise all other lands above,  
From sea to sea, throughout thy length,  
From pole to border land,  
At Britain's side, whate'er betide,  
Unflinchingly we'll stand.  
With heart we sing,  
"God Save the King,"  
Guide thou the Empire wide, do we implore,  
And prosper Canada from shore to shore.

## Menu

*"Some ha'e meat and canna eat,  
And some wad eat that want it;  
But we ha'e meat and we can eat,  
And sae the Lord be thankit."*

—SELKIRK GRACE.



Celery

Olives

Potage "Lord o' the Isles."

Fillet Sole "Glencoe"

Haggis wi' a' the Honours

Roast Leg Lamb

Mint Sauce

Garden Peas

Mashed Potatoes

Strawberry Melba

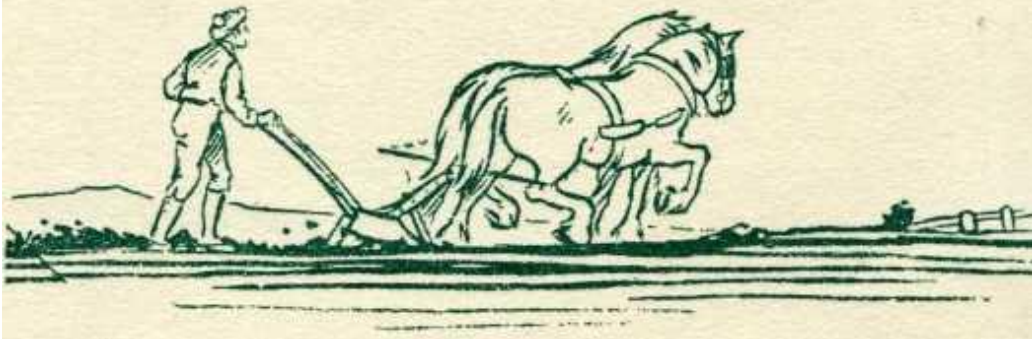
Oat Cakes

Scones

Rolls

Pudding

Demi Tasse



THE CHAIRMAN: Ladies and Gentlemen—It is not often that such an honor falls to me as to introduce twice in one day such a distinguished personage as our guest of honor to-night. We have just toasted the head of our Empire, "The King," and now we are going to listen with great pleasure and interest to one, possibly, of the greatest servants our king has ever had. I do not wish to waste the time of the gathering any further, but just to call upon our honored guest to-night, the Rt. Hon. James Ramsay Macdonald, to propose the toast of the evening, "The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns."

RT. HON. J. RAMSAY MACDONALD: Mr. Chairman—This dinner is held as a sequel to the very interesting ceremony of the unveiling of the statue in your public park this afternoon. I said there that Scotsmen, in erecting statues to Burns, were performing something akin to an act of worship. We have Burns in our hearts. Burns' songs, the subjects of Burns' songs, Burns' demeanour, somehow or other appeal to us as expressions of that which is finest and most permanent in the Scottish character.

None of us to-night, and this is not the occasion even if we tried it, none of us to-night are going to attempt to appraise Burns' character. Burns was not an example. Burns was not a sermon. Burns was not a morality. Burns was a person. Burns was one of those instruments created by God to catch up in his sensitiveness, in his tenderness, in his contact with all life, that strange harmony, that strange beauty that most men and women have but a haunting remoteness of. We take Burns for what he has done. His very weakness is an indication of the divinity that was in him, enshrined in a thrilling beauty. It is this extraordinary custodianship in the frail human body, of that which is permanent, eternal, and characteristically divine; that is the purpose, the embodiment, and the mystery of Burns' life.

To-day there is not a dead man who lives with more vitality than Robert Burns. Robert Burns presents to us this very interesting problem of why and wherefore. We have had other Scotsmen who have lived. We have Scotsmen whose memories we honor. We have had other Scotsmen to whose graves we go with reverent feet and with grateful hearts, but yet none of them all thrill so much in our hearts, none of them enter into that living relationship with ours that Burns has done, and the question is, why? They lie in repose in their marble and their alabaster. Burns lives, and the very statues that we put up to him are perhaps dead embodiments of an image in bronze, but there is something in them that makes Burns live in our hearts. As I said, he is the dead man who is most alive in the hearts of the people.

Now, the question is, why is this so? I think the answer is a very simple one. Burns lives on account of his simplicity. Burns lives because it was common clay that he transmuted



and transfigured into something that was far above and far more precious than any clay. Burns lives because, through him, and in him, the common man with the ordinary virtues has found a permanent expression and a beautiful expression. Burns never exalted himself; Burns never put on fine robes, never chose fine language to sing; the Burns who sang was a ploughman. The language in which he sang was the language of the ploughman. The sentiments that stirred him to music and to song and to beauty were precisely the things that stir in the common man, but the common man has not the faculty, the common man has not been endowed with power to bring that music, latent in his soul, into harmony, to enshrine it in words, and to enable it to warble itself so that he and other people might hear it.

The secret of Burns is that he has taught us to express ourselves through him, and when he did it he did it in certain forms of our own. There is nothing strange and nothing foreign in him. He took no classical subject, no remote people. The subjects that he dealt with, the subjects that he enshrined and enrobed, whichever word you choose to select, the subject which he enshrined and enrobed in music was nature, such as you and I see it; life, such as you and I have lived it; the emotions, such as you and I have felt them.

He did not only return to nature, but he returned to human nature at the same time. Now, Burns' treatment of nature has got no great, resounding measures that echo and re-echo. He chose the calm, happy, couthy sharing of moods. We just cuddle to them, and in the cuddling we feel the heart of nature beating in our own, amplifying the beating of our own hearts, and making us feel at one with all the great pulsing creation that expresses the emotion of the Creator Himself. His method of unfolding nature was not grand description, but you and I, my friends, when our minds go back upon our experiences in our lives, find that if somebody just suggests to us a bush or a corner of a burn, or a nook in the wood—that one thing seems to touch us as by magic, and the whole of our youth, the whole of our past happiness, the whole of our joy and our romance at once comes into life. It is the magic, the genius of insight that has been at work, and that is precisely Burns' method of

describing nature to us. The magic was the selection of things that the great majority of people have already selected as those things that recall past experience to them. Look at this verse:

“Now blooms the lily by the bank,  
The primrose doon the brae,  
The hawthorn’s budding in the glen,  
And milk white is the slae.”

My friends, I ask you in your leisure to examine that verse and to find how many of the things mentioned in that verse are already enshrined in your hearts as something—the very thought of something recalling precious years and dead memories to your recollections. And when he touches the deeps in the most haunting of notes, he always brings nature into touch with our own moods, just as we ourselves do:

“Ye banks and braes o’ bonnie Doon,  
How can ye bloom sae fresh and fair—  
How can ye chant, ye little birds,  
And I sae weary fu’ o’ care.”

The artlessness of that; artlessness, if you ever had it, but art, pure and undiluted, eternal; art when it is the instantaneous emotion of a man like Burns, who did it without thinking about it, or designing or planning it at all.

Or take another verse from the poem which I have already quoted, showing the relationship between human emotion and nature’s mood.

“O, soon, to me, may summer suns  
Nae mair light up the morn!  
Nae mair, to me, the autumn winds  
Wave o’er the yellow corn!  
And in the narrow house o’ death  
Let winter round me rave;  
And the next flowers, that deck the spring,  
Bloom on my peaceful grave.”

True genius, consisting not in art, not in studied art, not in a pose, but in a way specially characteristic of Burns, in a way that no other poet has used with greater freedom and greater naturalness, consisting in selecting the most natural thoughts that come into a simple man’s mind and adorn him, elevate him to the highest expression of art,

beauty, music, reminiscence and aspiration. That is the genius of Burns, in the treatment of nature and of human nature.

Then love. Who has sung of it with the lyrical purity that Burns has, and what again is his genius there? Precisely the same:

“O gin my love were yon red rose—”

The other verse I was about to quote is not completely Burns, but this is:

“O were my love yon lilac fair,  
Wi’ purple blossoms to the spring;  
And I, a bird to shelter there,  
When wearied on my little wing!  
How I wad mourn, when it was torn  
By autumn wild, and winter rude!  
But I wad sing on wanton wing,  
When youthful May its bloom renew’d.”

Who can transcend that? That never can be transcended. That is the last bar of music that can be sung upon that note. Every time that love lifts up the heart of the young man and woman, if they stumble across this verse they will say, “That satisfies us; that is how we feel; that is exactly it!” And Burns lives in consequence.

Or if you take his deeper solemnities of life, because Burns, being a south-west Scotsman, never moved away from the shadows that overhang all existence. Again, what did he use? What was his technique? Simple measures, the bowed heart. He again made no great swelling organ music of grief, no ritual, no pageantry. You remember those gorgeous lines of Milton:

“Where the bright Seraphim in burning row,  
Their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow  
And the cherubic host in thousand choirs  
Touch their immortal harps on golden wires.”

That was Milton, magnificent of its kind; but Burns had a totally different method, a description of a humble supper table, a fireside, such as the firesides where you and I were brought up, our own firesides, the cotter and his family, the two sweethearts, and when he blows his pipes it is exactly the same sob as your sob, not the broader sweep of sorrow;

the tear, the regret, the way in which you turn for consolation; that is the Burns' material, and he has handled it almost as the Creator Himself would have handled it. Take the "Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson." There you find it. What does he appeal to? Flowers. He turns to the birds, he turns to the creatures in the fields and the woods, he turns to the seasons themselves, and he asks them all, "Mourn with me." That is exactly what the ploughman does, what the peasant does.

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

Your life, my life, the peasant's life, his friends, his elements, the blasts, flowers, the running stream, the coming and going of the seasons, what we think of in our grief; that is what Burns has woven into the wreath that he lays on Captain Matthew Henderson's tomb.

And now, my friends, as I said, this is not the time to appreciate Burns, nor is it the time to give any lengthy study or analysis of his method. I have only ventured to give you just two or three points, because I think they explain the reason why Burns lives with a greater vitality than any man who is dead, but whose statues and whose memories are revered by the living.

It is only when the dead can come and sit with us at our firesides, and speak to us in our own language, share with us our own thoughts, to be with us in our own image, that as the generations pass those dead will not pass. There are but few of them. Some of them have attained it by great studied art—Shakespeare, Milton. Burns has done it by making permanent and eternal in his work a spirit that will always characterize, that must always characterize the simple-minded, honest, God-fearing, upright-living, striving, buffeted yet faithful and singing man, such as he was himself. For this reason, as I say, his failings draw us closer to him. He who was so sensitive that the gentlest, the most imperceptible sighs—almost imperceptible sighs, were heard by him and

made in his nature; ah, my friends, that constitution is sensitive not only to the glories and to the beauties and to the attainments of humanity, it is also sensitive to its temptations, to its pitfalls, to its griefs.

And so, my friends, we, not being the Creator, can just take Burns as we find him, and bless the Creator that the Scottish nature, the Scottish mind and the Scottish character find in this ploughman, find in this common man, somebody whose mind was so attuned to the beauty, to the music that is in us, that he has put them in permanent record and allowed us to share with him his honor, his glory and his attainments. Burns' memory will always be immortal, not only so long as there are Scotsmen living, but so long as there are men and women of that simple, genuine human nature that sees visions, that dreams dreams, that enters into harmonious relations with God and with Nature, and that is striving, striving, striving to realize the beautiful and to bring about the perfect.