

FIRST

The Burns Supper.

When chilled winds blaw ower frosted snaw
An' gloaming nichts fair early draw
As winter clouds hang dreich an' dark
An' silver birks stand strained an' stark
In the midst o' Janwar's strains
To ease us o' our gripes an' grains
A nichts arrived you canna dang
Immortal tales an' auld Scot's sang
Fu' kindness cup we toast the Bard
Wae tippeneny an' usquabae

Wae joy unfeign'd the nicht begins
Wae wines an' malts an' hefty gins
Chattered voices strained an' jarred
Raise their glass to "slangevar"
Then at the hour, appointed time,
They mak' their way tae sit an' dine
For in the distance pipes are skirl'd
An' paired tae march high heid yins birl
A' roond the tables up the isles
They swing their kilts an' tartan styles

Wae order called the chairman stands
An' welcomes guests wae great command
But just as quick he sits his arse
He's up again near just as fast
For ance time mair the pipes are skirled
As on a hod the chieftan's hurled
Guarded by three single malts
He fills the trencher's groaning vaults

Fair fa' your honest, sonsie face
Is followed by the Selkirk Grace
The soup, a broth made by a queen,
Haggis by the man MacSween
Needs an' tatties mashed and fine
By such hamely fare we dine
Ye pow'rs, wha mak mankind your care
Fair dished us up fine bill o' fare

The tables cleared, the glasses filled,
Awe snuggle back an' keepit still
The first *artiste* has ta'en the flair
A sang o' love consumes the air
"Ae fond kiss" wae soften tones
Touches hearts wae warring groans
It brings us ilka joy and treasure
Peace, enjoyment, love and pleasure

A lad stands up, a weel kent name,
A politician of some fame
Was skillfu' talk an' clever turns
He gie's an insight into Burns
He speaks of man the world o'er
Of life an' love an' wondrous poems
Of contributions great an' bold
That so provides our nation's soul
Of Cotters Nights an' ghostly tales
Of Kirks an' dugs an' drunken males
Then, to a close, wae solemn phrase,
"Immortal Burns", the toast is raised

The Lassies toast this night is keen
Amang the best there's ever been
A loon who seldom gets the chance
Tae gie the lassies some romance
He taunts the jads an' pu's their hair,
The lauchtin' makes our sides a' sair
He patronises, condescends,
But with his close he makes amends
He tak's us through their contribution
Of life and love and admiration
Clarinda, Jean and highland lassies
Fondly kissed among the rashes

This nicht we have a chosen race
For only men frequent the place
An ancient rule lent by Tarboulton
That we have kept a sturdy hold on
So to "reply" we have a cronie,
An' just like Tam's pal Souter Johnnie
He's now weel fu' an' unco glorious
Ower a' the ills of life victorious

A second break, a little longer,
As whisky, gill an' beer get stronger
The swinging door is even paced
As ten goes oot ane gets replaced

Wae time the bodies re-assemble
Anticipation soothes the rabble
A treats in store for all whose there
Remember Tam o' Shanter's Mare
The finest tale in our Scot's tongue
Revered by baith the auld and young
Poetic gem o' storms and mirk
Of ghaists an' dancin' in the Kirk

Some artist's croon, some fiddles play,
Killicrankie, Duncan Grey,
Gentle voice in perfect tone
Sings John Anderson my Jo
Recitals, complex, hit yer lugs
Hornbook, Mouse, an' Twa braw Dugs
Satires darts, The Holy Fair
Epistles to his friends an' mair,
In his goon see Holy Willie
High pitched voiced hypocrisy
Poems filled wae love's tight knot
Humanity an' anguished thought

To an end the nicht has came
With claps an' cheers for every name
Artist, guests, committee team
Distillers, brewers, the kitchen queen
The piper's skirls, the bar staff too
Ten other names are on his queue
But then his breeks are gi'en a tug
A message whispered in his lug,
Just say goodnight an' wish them fine,
Let's sing the sang ... it's "Auld Lang Syne".

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20th Feb 2016

SECOND

THE LAST WORD

*The spirit of Robert Burns returns as guest of honor to
give an address at a Burns supper*

My name is Burns, once of your race,
Returned to speak and put my case,
But if from Heav'n, or t'other place,
I'll let you guess;
'Tis true I sometimes fell from grace,
I do confess.

By some I've been right sair maligned;
Detractors still ye'll aiblins find, *maybe*
Sae pure themsel's in soul and mind,
And oh sae guid!
Their holy potions serve tae bind
Their poison bluid.

In silence o'er twa hunder years,
I've borne the flails and canting sneers,
An' tongues that cut like snapping sheers -
What mangie Deils!
But yet whyles warmed by heartfelt cheers *sometimes*
Frae friendly chields.

Now, weel it's kend I loved the lasses;
Ae flutter o' their bonnie lashes
My heart wad strike like lightnin' flashes,
By love inspired;
But made the kirk-folk sairly fashious *very upset*

Can ony man deny the passion,
Tho' righteousness be a' the fashion?
The very anes wha served the lashin'
Were hypocrites,
Lang since gelded o' compassion,
As well befits.

They ruled in their high holy state,
Puir souls like me to castigate,
Wha sometimes stoitered through the gate
The leftmost way.
Dour priests and black-gowns there await
Their wayward prey.

But ance at least I wasna fashed,
As wi' my Jean we were tongue-lashed,
Afore the congregation snashed
 For wanton lust.
Wi' lowered gaze the time soon passed
 Keekin' her bust.

The ill-timed bairns I had wi' Jean,
And every other bastard wean,
Tho' others cried "unclean, unclean!",
 Or "houghmagandie!",
They were a joy tae my proud een,
 Ilk lad and lassie.

fornication

I'll ne'er deny them in my shame,
Or like a coward shirk the blame,
Tho' reputation, gear and fame
 Upon it turns;
Their birthright vested in the name
 Of Robert Burns.

But what of them that made me dool,
And perch upon the Cutty-stool,
To be berated like a fool
 And mortal sinner;
Those masters o' the scandal school,
 Each pious won'er.

feel miserable

wonder

Which one the first stane dared to thraw,
In conscience pure as driven snaw,
Wha ne'er like Adam once did fa'
 From heavenly grace?
There's mony a wean wad never know
 It's faither's face.

Tho' oft I've roos'd in rantin' glee,
Wi' reamin' swats o' barley bree,
John Barleycorn I'd rarely see
 To wet my lips;
Yet sland'rous tongues wad hae us be
 Joined at the hips.

cavorted

Like Aiken wi' his snakin' lip,
I set to work, my pen to dip,
An' bid my muse tae gie them jip
 In clinkin' rail'ry;
As from the crack o' Satan's whip,
 They smarted sairly.

rhyming banter

Swift retribution ay I took,
In rhyming satire and rebuke,
Then published boldly in a book
 For a' tae read.
Like ony carp I swall'd the hook,
 A fault indeed.

swallowed

These bitter words are half in jest,
For Deil-ma-care, I will attest,
Though greatly worn and much distressed
 By wicked prattle,
The honest man when sorely pressed
 Will prove his mettle.

When nature chose my form to fashion,
She gave me insight, mirth and gumption,
And charm to win in ample ration
 Mair hearts than Jean's;
The price of a' that careless passion
 Was thirteen weans.

But Jean forgave me in her way,
Each time the Deil made me to stray,
That Angel who beside me lay
 Smoothed baith our lives;
So graciously she once did say,
 "Rab needs twa wives".

A man is but a man at best,
A work of nature, cursed or blessed,
And while this night I have confessed
 To failings deep,
You'll judge me not that I may rest
 In Poet's sleep.

THIRD

By Bannock's Burn: The Rout of Tyranny

Today, dear friends, we gather here, in a land that's strong and free,
Where all of us may live and love in peace and harmony;
Unthreatened by invasion or a tyrant's cruel embrace,
Untroubled by the dangers that so many others face.

But let me speak of other times, of war and liberty,
Of freedom of the spirit, ay, and deeds of bravery;
Of men defying despots and the yoke of slavery,
Of Scots who drained their dearest veins to set their nation free.

Though William Wallace and his men took bravely to the fight,
Their valour proved unequal in the face of Edward's might.
Proud Wallace then fell victim to a traitorous attack,
Dragged off in chains to London to be slaughtered on the rack.

Seven hundred years ago this month, poor Scotland was enchained,
A puppet master on her throne at Edward's pleasure reigned;
But from the ranks of loyal Scots, a leader strong and douce
Stepped forth to claim his destiny - that man was Robert Bruce.

Despite fierce opposition from the English overlord,
The Bruce was crowned as King of Scots by popular accord.
And while he suffered some defeats, he proved his worth indeed,
Inspired by a spider so determined to succeed.

He vowed to rid the country of the English scourge and then
Laid siege to Stirling Castle which was held by Edward's men.
Surrender seemed their only choice should Edward's army fail
To make its promised rescue and against the Scots prevail.

The year was 1314 when the English grasped the sword
And marched with righteous purpose to confront the rebel horde;
They came in force with vengeful hearts to crush forevermore
This challenge to their sovereignty by spear and broad claymore.

In the summer of that fateful year the battle lines arraigned;
With Edward Longshanks dead at last, his heir and namesake reigned.
Bruce chose the field of battle well, and where to make his stand,
Encamped on dry and level ground, concealed by woods around

'Twas well he held this vantage, for the English king could boast
Of 20,000 well-armed men to Bruce's seven at most.
And Edward's knights in mounted pride and metallated armour plate,
Beheld a motley rabble, ill-equipped to meet their fate.
On June the 23rd the foes assembled for the fray,
While Bruce surveyed the massive force which now before him lay;
But yet he held the open ground, the better to confront
The English lines confined within a narrow treacherous front.

This tactic was deliberate, a plan that Bruce devised
Of excavated ditches covered over and disguised –

The attackers forced to navigate through narrow pitted swaths
Saw hundreds fall from injuries and many to their deaths.

Robert Bruce commenced the fight with one blow of his axe,
Halting the charge of a reckless knight, slaying him in his tracks.
This feat of strength and martial skill inspired his loyal Corp
To rush the feckless English lines with murderous uproar.

King Edward's men fell back in fear, a portent of a battle
That soon would prove the Scots' resolve and fearless fighting mettle.
Next day was June the 24th - a date well to remember,
The start of Scotland's nationhood, her pride restored forever.

And so upon that second day the battle was resumed,
The outcome now we know full well - the invaders all were doomed!
Most were slain in bloody rout, in vain they tried to run;
They perished in their thousands on the banks of Bannock Burn.

Though many other battles with the English would be fought,
None compared with Bannockburn and the freedom that it brought.
But let us not forget the role that William Wallace played,
At Stirling Bridge and Falkirk, and his sacrifices made –
'Twas he inspired the Scots to rise and stem the foul abuse,
The glory of the coup de grace he left to Robert Bruce.

© Jim McLaughlin - Calgary Burns Club, Calgary, June 29, 2014
On the occasion of the rededication of the statue of Robert the Bruce in Calgary

FOURTH

The Holy Grail

Each January we assembled, filled with fear
Burns Schools Competition day was here
Held in the august Town Hall of Ayr
By the Auld Brig.
School blazers and ties we had to wear
We looked sae trig!

Ayr was splendid in maroon
Purple with yellow was favored by Troon
Ardrossan and Irvine both took a blue tone
Attendance required for every lad and lassie
Wi' peely-wally face and eyes cast doon
No quite ready to lift the Tassie!

The judges sat close to despair
The beauty of the songs just wasn't there.
The poems were of expression bare
Placing would be hard
Whilst still trying to be fair
Few had grasped the Bard.

We spoke like Burns; had we just been told
Just use your own voice in this poetry, and be bold.
A day off school had become our lowly goal
A loss indeed!
On Begg's bus home at last we heard Ayrshire voices from the soul.
That was the need!

