

THE BROTHERHOOD O' MAN

SOME time ago I heard a grand Lecture on the Brotherhood o' Man, and I was so much impressed with what I heard that I felt it was my duty to join right away some Society which would have that for its motto.

The "Freemasons" would be the very thing, I was tell'd, but says I to mysel'—I'm no' just sure o' the Masons' creed ; mind you, I wish to tramp on nae taes, for I've heard that one Mason will do anything he can for another, will help him in a' his difficulties, gie him the verra. hair off his heid—if he has it to spare—and do mair for him than ony o' his natural brothers would do. Still, someone had whispered in my ear that the first night you join the Masons, you must come before the members exactly as Adam appeared in the garden o' Eden! Now, as I'm no' just a Venus de Milo, I didna like this bit o' the business at all, and I decided to take the matter to Alexandrum—as the lawyer bodies say.

The other Society I was advised to join was the Burns Club o' the toon in which I live. Its motto was, " It's comin' yet for a' that "—meanin', of course, the Brotherhood o' Man, no' the Woman's Suffrage—although, in my opinion, you ladies would get all you want and more, if you would take Mr Lloyd George round the neck (no' to choke him, of course),

instead of throwing epitaphs and other things at him.

Well, the Burns Club and the Burns Dinner being, so to speak, one and the same thing, and my faither, gude man, having aye been a great admirer o' the poet, I thocht I wad grace the Dinner with my presence. I'm no' a great Burns scholar mysel', but I ken the names o' some o' his poems—therefore I was qualified for membership o' the Club, and, as I'm telling you, I went to the Dinner.

The first thing that impressed me was the grand printed programme, which was decked wi' thistles o' gold, and streamin' wi' tartan like a hieland chief. The bill o' fare, needless to say, was a gude one. At the top o' it was printed in big letters—

“I will be blithe and licht,
My heart is bent upon sae gude a nicht ;
Like brithers a' we'll do our part—
May friendship's torch be lit in every heart.”

For mysel'—I was starvin' wi' hunger, for, wi' an eye to the price o' my ticket, I had ta'en nae solids since breakfast ; and it wasna my *heart* that cried oot wi' joyful anticipation, but a bit o' me nearer the foot o' my waistcoat. I was fair starvin' and my puir stomach was beginning to think I had lockjaw.

Oh! there must hae been a mighty slaughter for this occasion, all the bullocks, soos, and auld roosters in the countryside had been transformed into cockie-leekie, beef, ham, roast turkey, and potted-heid. Then there was a great, big steamin' haggis, for, of course, nae haggis, nae Burns Dinner—that's the rule, and the chieftain o' the puddin' race was there a' richt, but there wasna much left o' his sonsie face when we were done wi' him, I can tell you.

Everything has an end, and a puddin' has twa—as Shakespeare says in his *Paradise Lost*—and so

we warstled through to the end o' the bill o' fare at last. At this stage, the programme announced :

“Happy we'll be a' thegither,
Happy we'll be, ane and a',
Time will see us a' the blyther
Ere we rise to gang awa'.”

The last twa lines hit it neat; but some o' the braw chieles found it not quite so easy to rise to the occasion when the time came for them to depart.

Well, the toasts were maist wonderfu'. First, we were reminded o' the King, the Queen, and the Royal Family by the chairman, who said they grand folks wad nae doot be partakin' o' haggis and cockie-leekie at that verra meenit—perhaps! After this came the Imperial Forces (washed doon wi' imperial stout), and then—the chairman rose to propose the toast o' the evenin'.

“Friends and brithers,” said he, and a hush fell on the company, while every lug was turned to catch his words—“Friends and brithers,” he repeated, and his voice trembled at the thought o' sae mony near relations, “I rise to propose the immortal memory o' *Tommy Burns!*”

There was an uncanny silence for a wee, then some o' his hearers gied a bit laugh, and a chiel at his elbow whispered, “Robbie, man; *Robbie Burns.*” And then the maist awfu' argument got up I ever heard in my life. Some were for Robbie, some for Tommy, and others for Rob, or Robbin—but a' were agreed that the hin'most bit o' the name was Burns. As for me, what wi' sae mony different opeenions, the richts o' it were fair driven oot o' my heid.

“Ah, weel!” said the chairman, when this bit blast had blawn ower, “Tommy, or Robbie, hae it as it suits ye best, lads, it's a' the same now, for he's deid and buried 500 years syne; and so we'll drink a fu' measure to his memory.”

There was nae counter-motion to that at anyrate. Then there were mighty cheers—the company sat doon again, and some o’ them had verra little memory left o’ their ain.

Mair toasts, as weel as sangs, followed, till I thocht it was time I was goin’ home to the wife (she’s a grand hand wi’ the poker, ye ken), and so I didna stay to see the finish.

The next morning I had a sair heid, somehow; but when I was lookin’ at the papers I found the pages were crammed fu’ o’ speeches and poetry. Here’s one I learned off by heart:—

“ Hail, Scotia’s Bard ! thy touch hath waked
A harmony sublime,
The thrill and passion of whose chords
Shall vibrate through all time.

“ Thy poet’s heart responsive beat
To Nature’s varying moods ;
Full rich thou wert in gifts o’ mind,
Though poor in worldly goods.

“ The sorrows of thy brother-man
Were thine, his hopes, his fears ;
And thine the power to move to mirth,
Or dim the eyes with tears.”

Them’s my sentiments, richt enough! Oh, aye; you were a grand hand wi’ the pen, Robbie, my man, but for a’ that—it’s a gude thing that you’ve only one birthday in the year.

JAMES DEY.

By kind permission of the Author.