

Perennial Bobby Burns

IN 1919, will fall the one hundred and sixtieth anniversary of the greatest songwriter that ever yet came to birth, suffered, made merry, loved, labored and died. Not the one hundredth anniversary, nor the one hundred and fiftieth, nor the two hundredth, no centennial nor semi-centennial numbers, merely the one hundred and *sixtieth* anniversary of a singing ploughman's birth. Just the same, it ought to be celebrated! Burns's latest critic, without putting such sentiments into his reader's head sledge-hammer fashion leaves him with some such impression. William Allan Neilson, to judge just from his *Burns, How to Know Him*, is, first of all, a man of breadth, and only secondly a digger in booklore. Born in Scotland and a graduate of Edinburgh University, Professor Neilson is steeped in Scotland's (and Burns's) lore and loveliness and humor and humanness and rough-and-readiness. Here is a "prof," shaken with love and laughter and an understanding deeper than dust logic; shaken in the true companionship of a loved and very loving ploughman, song-tinkerer, and flattered society favorite; shaken out of any rule-made mobilization of facts and "unities" into big-hearted understanding by (we may guess) his own recurrent visions of real cotters, real "braw" and "bonnie" lads and lassies, and "jolly beggars," real highlands and real "banks and braes," real "teats o' hay and rippis o' corn," real "rashes O!"

He is not afraid of Burns's democracy,

humanity, broad humor, whole-souled sanity. Recognizing that in the great Scotch poet's verses is purged away all suggestiveness, all lewdness barnacled inevitably around jig-songs centuries old, he refuses to omit such sterling humor as "The Duke's Dang o'er My Daddie," "Wha Is That at My Bower Door?" "Willie's Wife," "Whistle, and I'll Come to Ye, Lad," whether they are as "poetic" or as acceptable to the hypercritical as they might be or not. He is equally appreciative of "The Cotter's Saturday Night" and "A Man's a Man for a' That," of the joy, the color, the youthful singing romance in such old favorites as "Comin' Through the Rye," "Green Grow the Rashes," and of the same qualities, sometimes even more innately poetically, in such exquisite things as "My Wife's a Winsome Wee Thing," "For the Sake o' Somebody," and "Bessy and Her Spinnin'-Wheel." He is not blind to the marvelous maidenly psychology in the simple "O for Ane an' Twenty, Tam," "Ye Banks and Braes," and in "What Can a Young Lassie." Humor of word, as well as humor in a critical sense and understanding of the poet's and the man's heart, pervades these well-printed pages. A first class practical idea is that of the glossary. Properly limited to just the really troublesome Scottish dialect words it runs along the margins, instead of being tucked away off somewhere in the back of the book.

Burns, How to Know Him, by William Allan Neilson. The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis. \$1.50.