

TOAST TO THE LADDIES
by Vickie Gottlob, 2023

In preparin' my toast, I thought of our laddies here present and what they might have in common with our immortal bard....

All of our laddies here present are beneficiaries of a fine education, and I'm sure that all, from youngest to auldest, are still studyin' and learnin, including languages and subjects that Robert had barely heard of. Rabbie himself wrote great poetry and songs in three different languages or dialects: Scots, Scots English, and the King's English, in addition to studying Latin and French. Rabbie Burns' daddy was a poor tenant farmer, but he valued education and made sure to give his son the best education available to him, including literature and mathematics. Like our laddies, Robert was a great reader. The neighbors were shocked to see him reading a book on horseback as he rode around the neighborhood. In his poetry, Rabbie shows a knowledge of Greek mythology and European literature and also of his great predecessors, among them: Gray, Milton, Pope, Fielding, and Shakespeare. Here's a reminiscence he wrote about his early experience as a reader:

“The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read again, were the life of Hannibal and the history of Sir William Wallace—Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the

recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice in my veins which will boil along there till the flood-gates of life shut in eternal rest.”

A couple of our laddies here present love music and can even play an instrument, be it piano, guitar, drums, or saxophone. Any others? I know of several whose voices are “sweetly strung in tune.” Robert Burns made song central to his life. Many think of him primarily as a songwriter, the author of Auld Lang Syne, My Love is like a Red, Red Rose, and Coming through the Rye. He collected and adapted a huge number of traditional Scottish folksongs and composed new words to many of the tunes.

Robert Burns grew up in the country and at different times tried to support his family with farming, and his poetry shows a keen observation of nature and sympathy for animals, just like our youngest and auldest laddies here this evening.

These lines are from *On Scaring Some Water Fowl in Loch Tur*
Why, ye tenants of the lake,
For me your wat'ry haunt forsake?
Tell me, fellow-creatures, why
At my presence thus you fly?
Why disturb your social joys,
Parent, filial, kindred ties?
Common friend to you and me,
Nature's gifts to all are free:
Peaceful keep your dimpling wave,
Busy feed, or wanton lave;
Or, beneath the sheltering rock,
Bide the surging billow's shock.

I was delighted to hear in Conrad's Toast to the Lassies the observation that Burns' poems are sometimes from the point of view of the lassies, as in *Whistle and I'll Come to You, My Lad*. I'd like to give another example: the appreciation for a bonnie laddie in *The Ploughman*:

I hae been east, I hae been west,
I hae been at Saint Johnston,
The bonniest sight that e'er I saw
Was th' Ploughman laddie dancin.

*Snaw-white stocking on his legs,
And siller buckles glancin;
A gude blue bannet on his head,
And O but he was handsome!*

O' course, the handsome laddie we're all thinkin' of this evening is
Rabbie Burns, but I'd like to toast the laddies here this evening with a
recognition of the gifts they have in common immortal poet, along with
his bonnie guid looks!

TO THE LADDIES!