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Auld Lang Syne

Should auld acquaintance be forgot And never brought to mind?

Should auld acquaintance be forgot, And auld lang syne?

Chorus

For auld lang syne, my jo,

For auld lang syne.

We'll tak' a cup o'kindness yet,

For auld lang syne.

And surely ye'll be your pint-stoup And surely I'll be mine;

And we'll tak' a cup of kindness yet, For auld lang syne.

For auld, etc.

We twa hae run about the braes,

And pou'd the gowans fine;

But we've wander'd mony a weary fit, Sin' auld lang syne.

For auld, etc.

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn

Frae morning sun till dine;

But seas between us braid hae roared', Sin' auld lang syne, For auld, etc.

And there's a hand, my trusty frier!

And gie's a hand o'thine!

And we'll tak' a right guide-willie waught, For auld lang syne.

For auld, etc.

Glossary

about about

braes hillsides

braid broad

burn stream

fit foot

fner fneid

gie's give me

gowans red berries

gude good

ha'e (hay) have

mony (moany) many

paid'd paddled

pint-stoup tankard

pou'd pulled

sin' since

The following verses are a translation of Auld Lang Syne into modern English:

The Days of Yore

Should we forget our former friends By whom we set great store?

Should we forget the friends we've met And the brave days of yore?

The days of yore. My dear

The days of yore,

We'll tilt the jug and drain the mug to the brave days of yore.

I fancy you could sink a pint

And I'll take rather more

And we'll both get tight with all our might For the brave days of yore.

We two have wandered on the hills And daisies pulled galore But we've tired our feet on many a street Since the brave days of yore.

We two have paddled in the brook

From noon to half-past four

But seas have lain betwixt us twain Since the brave days of yore.

So let us grasp each other's hand And, as I said before Our hearts we'll cheer with honest beer For the brave days of yore.

THE STORY OF AULD LANG SYNE

Undoubtedly, millions of people throughout the world will sing Auld Lang Syne to see out 1995. Few will know all the words and fewer still what they mean.

They are attributed to Robert Burns who apparently picked up the tune and some of the words from an old man singing in the dialect of south-west Scotland. Auld Lang Syne has become the international song of departure, and is sung by more people than any other.

The possibility is that Burns only wrote two of the five verses. But, as he did with numerous other Scottish songs, he modified them and, in some cases, purified them.

It seems likely that the song was first sung either in Poesie Nancy's Tavern in Mauchline, or the Bachelors Club in Tarbolton located a few miles away.

The song was initially centred on two young men who drifted apart after their early schooling, and who, after re-uniting, reminisced about their earlier times together, the happy experiences they had together and the kindly folk they met.

When Burns became a Freemason at the age of 23 he quickly absorbed the superb symbolism of the Craft.

Conviviality was, for Burns, one of the most important virtues. For him, Auld Lang Syne is a concrete expression of his love of mankind and his ideal of International Brotherhood.

The Masonic routine is to form a circle in which everyone is equidistant from the centre, demonstrating they are all equal. In this regard, the practice adopted in some lodges by placing the masters or other distinguished brethren in the centre defeats the purpose of the ceremony associated with the song.

At the beginning of the song the brethren stand with hands by their sides, symbolising they are relative strangers.

The early verses should be sung (or hummed) very softly as brethren reflect both on cherished memories of earlier times together and on those brethren who have since passed to the Grand Lodge Above.

When they come to the last verse, "And there's a hand, my trusty frier (friend)...", each brother then extends his right hand of fellowship to the brother on his left, then the left hand to the brother on his right.

This symbolises two things: firstly, that they are crossing their hearts; secondly, that they automatically form a smaller and more intimate circle of friendship. Now they have an unbroken chain of brethren who are close friends.

The tempo should then rise and, to the tapping of feet, all enthusiastically sing the final chorus.

At non-Masonic functions the foregoing routine should be followed as far as is practicable. If necessary, small circles can be formed around tables.

At Scottish functions they usually wind up by singing “O we’re no’ awa’ tae bide awa’,” form a “snake” and move round the hall in increasingly smaller circles. Then the leader reverses the move-ment and all participants revert to a large circle.

Bro. Robert Burns

Prophet of International Brotherhood

Robert Burns, poet, song writer, Freemason and patriot died in poverty of endocarditis in Dumfries, Scotland at the age of 37 on 21 July 1796. Some 12,000 people from all walks of life attended his funeral.

Almost two hundred years later, his death is mourned by thousands of devotees throughout the world, who honour him, not only for his outstanding cultural talents, but as a doyen of democracy and a prophet of international brotherhood.

Burns’ timeless verses and songs of tenderness, wit and beauty have been translated into thirty-seven languages, while his Scottish birthplace in Alloway, near Ayr, has become a “Mecca,” visited by over 250,000 people each year.

So universally accepted has “Auld Lang Syne” become as a song of parting, that a major Japanese department store in Tokyo now plays it over its public address system as a diplomatic way of advising shoppers to conclude their purchases and depart the premises. A further example of the song’s universality can be found in Lodge Norad (Nation) in The Czech Republic, which I had the pleasure of visiting in 1992. Re-established in 1990 after the fall of Communism, Norad operates under the Scottish Constitution and closes its fortnightly meetings with “Auld Lang Syne,” sung in Czech! The lodge meets in what was once the cellar of the Convent of St. Agnes of Bohemia, built by French stonemasons in 1234.

Robert Burns was initiated on 4 July 1781 in St.

David’s Lodge (now No. 133 Scottish

Constitution), Tarbolton, after paying an entry fee of twelve shillings and six pence. As to his three degree ceremonies, there has been some disagreement where these took place. The consensus is that they were held in a local public house (also used by the Bachelors Club), run by John Richards, a steward of the Lodge.

His wit, high intelligence, zeal and consummate oratory, made Burns an admirable choice for promotion and, on 27 June 1784, he was elected Depute Master (the local Squire being the nominal Master).

“Oft, honoured with supreme command, Presided o’er the sons of light.”

With his warm and abiding love for the whole brotherhood of mankind, Burns found in Freemasonry a splendid vehicle for the development of his philosophy.

In many ways the eighteenth century was strangely adapted to enable the roots of Freemasonry to be nurtured and developed. The need to meet in fraternal fellowship was met by the foundation of lodges.

It is well known that Burns was about to depart for Jamaica just before his poems were published on 31 July 1786 (the famous "Kilmarnock Edition"). It is less well known that he came perilously close to joining the stream of Scottish martyrs being deported as political prisoners to Australia.

Burns lived in troublesome times, typified by the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 the French Revolution in 1792 and the fervent "Reform Movement" in Britain striving to correct an iniquitous electoral system.

As might be expected, giving expression to calls for liberty, equality and fraternity met with stern opposition from the deeply entrenched "establishment" classes, with their vested interest in property, politics and religion.

What is the secret of the everlasting popularity of this remarkable man of humble birth, who had only three years of formal schooling? Why is he remembered when the two monarchs and eleven prime ministers who dominated the scene during his short life have been virtually forgotten? Why is it that others of his ilk in the literary world are respected, but Burns is loved? The answer is that he wrote from the heart and was the voice of the common man and woman. He was their advocate, publicist, philosopher and friend.

Burns had not only the vision of a better world, but the capacity to articulate that message. He was a revolutionary reformer, a vigorous and tireless opponent of oppression, privilege, hypocrisy and racism.

"Then let us pray that come it may
As come it will for a' that
That sense and worth, o'er a' the
earth,
May bear the gree, and a' that!

(Have the superiority)

For a' that, and a' that,

It's coming yet for a' that,

That man to man, the world o'er,

Shall brothers be for a' that!"

Nancy McDonald encapsulated the Bumsian phi-losophy in three verses. She wrote of Scotland, but the sentiments which she expressed apply equally to other countries having an affinity with Bums.

Oh Rabbie Burns we need ye noo (now)

When shades of discord dim each broo (brow)

And o'er this tired bewildered world, the flags of hatred are unfurled.

We crave your wisdom and your pen,

to cleanse the pride-soiled hearts of

men

And gae o'er the nation back its proof of steadfastness and lasting truth.

In every land, in every tongue, Your name is loved, your songs are sung.

You raised the common things of earth, to gems of priceless grace and worth.

You traced the Great Almighty plan of love and brotherhood of man.

And jaundiced now though things may be, they canna dim your prophecy.

Oh Rabbie, gifted poet, seer, to whom your native land was dear.

Hard times you knew and failing health, prevented you from acquiring wealth.

But never did you tum away from w~rks that still enthrall today.

And now the soul of Scotland tums. to bow to you, immortal Bums.

Robert Bums is not only for Scotland, but for all the world; he was one of that small band who wrote for all time and for all people.

Burns left to the world teachings which must be regarded as subtle religion—the teaching of brotherhood, honesty, pride, and independence of love and friendship. He voiced the spirit of equality and was unswerving in his devotion to liberty.

No wonder that on the anniversary of his birth-day, 25 January, more than half a million people assemble at Burns Suppers under the banners of the Union Jack, the Stars and Stripes, the Maple Leaf, and a plethora of others, to pay tribute to “The Immortal Memory of Robert Burns.”

If only political parties, commercial organisations and individuals would adopt his credo:

“Whatever mitigates the woes, or increases the happiness of others, this is my criterion of goodness, and whatever injures society at large, or any individual in it, this is my measure of iniquity!”

Further information

For brethren desirous of further pursuing the fascinating story of Robert Burns and his works, it is recommended they contact The Robert Burns Collection, Department of Language and Literature, Mitchell Library, North Street, Glasgow, G2 7DN, Scotland. It houses the finest collection of Burns material in the world.

For a condensed version of Burnsianism, one of the best is “Brithers—A Minute a Day with Burns” by Peter Egglemont. First published by J. Avery & Co. Ltd., Aberdeen, Scotland in May 1933.