

WORDS IN BURNS.

LITTLE-KNOWN MEANINGS.

THE Ninety Burns Club, Edinburgh, closed their present session last night with an "At Home" held in Ferguson & Forrester's Restaurant. Mr Daniel Grant, the president of the Club, presided over a company of over a hundred ladies and gentlemen, and among those present were Mr and Mrs King Gillies, Mr Thomas Henderson, secretary of the Educational Institute of Scotland, and Mrs Henderson; Mr and Mrs Anthony White, Mr and Mrs Macfarlane, Mr and Mrs R. D. Grant M'Laren, and Mr and Mrs Runcie. Mr Stewart A. Robertson, Director of Education in Dundee, gave an address on "Some Words in Burns."

Very few people, said Mr Robertson, gave careful study to the methods of Robert Burns, and least of all to his language. When he had been inspecting schools in England an English boy had said to him, "What did Burns mean by saying 'A man's a man for a *that*'?" No Scottish boy would make that mistake, but there were many Scottish boys and some Scotsmen who would go wrong in understanding the last line of the well-known stanza:—

A king can mak a belted knight,

A marquis, duke, and a' that;

But an honest man's abune his micht.

Gude faith! he maunna fa' that.

The casual reader took this word "fa'" to be the Scottish word for "fall" and was at once emeshed in confusion. Many commentators and even some editors were similarly ignorant. This word "fa'" meant "to claim" or "to possess." He had never heard the word on the lips of any Scotsman, and it was rather old-fashioned in Burns's day.

Words like these two "fa's" were called homonyms—words whose spelling was the same while their meanings were different. Another example were the two words "Ca'." One meant to name, as in the line "I think we'll ca' him Robin." The other meant to drive. One of the "ca's" had gone far beyond Scotland, for all the English-speaking world knew the phrase "Ca' canny." It meant "drive slowly," "work leisurely." This translation had not the force of the original, as no translation from Scots into English or another tongue could have. If he heard a Scots blacksmith, when holding a red-hot metal on the anvil, say to his assistant, "Ca' awa Jock," how should he translate the phrase into English? If he said, "Will you begin to hammer now, John?" it could not be called an accurate translation. Schoolgirls in Scotland when skipping called on each other to "ca' the ropes," and he was sorry to say that he had heard Scottish girls, thinking they were speaking English, say "call the ropes"—just as he knew a Scots girl who was asked the English for tattie-bogle, and translated it into "potato-ghost." (Laughter.)

Mr Robertson referred to various other words in Burns and at the conclusion, Mr C. S. Dougall proposed a vote of thanks, and the Rev. Dr Logan Ayre also spoke in appreciation of Mr Robertson's address.

A musical programme was contributed to by Miss Cathie Mawer, Mr Robert W. Cresswell, and Mrs Augustus Beddie. Mr Augustus Beddie, who arranged the programme, gave a number of recitations.

CLEVER PUPIL



Master Donald Calder, son of Mr and Mrs George Calder, Kyleview, Dornoch winner of the first prize in the primary department of Dornoch Academy for an essay on "A Man's a Man for a' That."

LORD GREY is now restored to health, and may be expected to take part on the platform in the Liberal General Election campaign.

John 21/3/29