The Final Toast: An Examination

An Address by R. Ex. Companion Andrew Allan

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The following talk on the classic Masonic poem, "The Final Toast" was given to the companions and visitors of Quinte Friendship Moira Chapter RAM #7 GRC on the occasion of R. Ex. Companion Allan's final visitation.

The presentation we know of in Lodge as the Junior Warden's toast, or in Chapter as the Third Principal's toast, is actually the last line of each verse of a six verse poem called 'The Final Toast' which comes to us from the middle of the nineteenth century. The full poem is as follows:

Are your glasses charged in the West and South, the Worshipful Master cries; They're charged in the West, They're charged in the South, are the Wardens' prompt replies; Then to our final toast to-night your glasses fairly drain "Happy to meet - Sorry to part - Happy to meet again again Oh! Happy to meet again!"

The Masons' social brotherhood around the festive board, Reveals a wealth more precious far than selfish miser's hoard They freely share the priceless stores that generous hearts contain "Happy to meet, sorry to part' happy to meet again!"

We work like masons free and true, and when our task is done, A merry song and cheering glass are not unduly won; And only at our farewell pledge is pleasure touched with pain "Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to meet again!"

Amidst our mirth we drink "To all poor Masons o'er all the world" - On every shore our flag of love is gloriously unfurled, We prize each brother, fair or dark, who bears no moral stain "Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to meet again!"

The Mason feels the noble truth the Scottish peasant told That rank is but the guinea's stamp, the man himself s the gold With us the rich and poor unite and equal rights maintain "Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to meet again!"

Dear Brethren of the mystic tie, the night is waning fast Our duty's done - our feast is o'er - this song must be our last:- "Good night". "Good night - once more, once more repeat the farewell strain -
"Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to meet again!"

These verses have, from time to time, been attributed to either Rudyard Kipling or to Robert Burns, both of them dedicated masons. Perhaps it is because I am Scottish that I always felt (wrongly it seems) that the verses were by the Scottish bard. Probably because of the reference to "the Scottish peasant" and the direct quote from Burns' poem "A man's a man for a' that" in the fifth verse. There is also a reference to "brethren of the mystic tie" contained in the sixth verse which is another quote from Burns, this time from his "Farewell to the Brethren of St. James' Lodge, Tarbolton". Burns' Masonic references are many but one of my favorites is a stanza, which was added to his poem "No churchman am I". This stanza was added for presentation in a Masonic Lodge and goes:-

Then fill up a bumper and make it o'erflow,  
And honours Masonic prepare for to throw:  
May ev'ry true Brother of the Compass and Square  
Have a big-bell'~ A bottle. when barrasA with care! ~

What a marvelous sentiment!

Rudyard Kipling's Masonic references are many, but probably nowadays the best known is contained in the movie "The Man Who Would Be King" which was based on a story by Kipling. However 'The Final Toast' doesn't seem to me to be typical of Kiplings' verses. But those who attributed it to him did get one thing right, because 'The Final Toast' came to us from India where Kipling spent many years.

In a paper presented to Quatuor Coronati Lodge No.2076 in 1978, Bro. Will Read advises us that the verses were actually written by Bro. David Lester Richardson who was born in London in January 1801. He served in India with the army and was at one time Aide-de-Camp to the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck. Bro. Richardson was initiated into Freemasonry in the Lodge of Industry and Perseverance (what a wonderful name) No.126 in Calcutta but it appears he never held any office. However one does not need to hold office to make a significant contribution to the Craft, and Bro. Richardson's contribution is priceless.

So to all of you, my Companions, it is time to say, Happy we have met, I'm sorry we must part, but happily we shall meet again. Until then may The Great Jehovah walk with us and be our constant Companion. May He bless us and all who belong to our Gentle Craft, now and for evermore.

So Mote It Be.