

THE FINAL TOAST

By Bro. Will Read

MANY TYLERS, when the proceedings at the festive board have ended, call upon the brethren to drink the last toast with the following words:

Dear brethren of the Mystic Tie, the night is waning fast.
Our duty's done, our feast is o'er; this song must be the last.
'Good Night, Good Night.' Once more, once more repeat the farewell strain:
'Happy to meet, sorry to part, happy to meet again!'

This stanza is the last of a six-verse poem entitled 'The Final Toast', written by an obviously enthusiastic mason in India in the middle of the nineteenth century. It is not generally known that there is more than one verse and it is unlikely that many brethren would be able to recite the whole poem. But the complete poem is in common use in parts of Australia. From time to time and in different countries the poem has appeared in print, but for many years the earliest record of it was in *The Masonic Vocal Manual* published at Hebdon Bridge, Yorkshire, in July 1852.

Every printing, however, differs in some respects from the original which reads:

- I. 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!"

Chorus: Happy to meet-Sorry to part—Happy to meet again, again,
Oh! happy to meet again.
2. The Masons' social brotherhood around the festive board,
Reveal 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!"
3. We work like Mason's 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!"
4. Amidst our mirth we drink "To all poor Masons o'er 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!"

5. 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"!
6. 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!"

The above must be the original wording. It is the version, set to the original music and entered by the publishers, Messrs Burkinyoung & Co., Tank Square, Calcutta, at Stationers' Hall, London. The earliest known version printed in this country (in *The Masonic Vocal Manual*) differs from it by only three words.

Many have attributed the poem to Kipling; some have attributed it—or at least the last verse—to Robert Burns; but it was not written by either. It was written by Bro. D. L. Richardson in Calcutta in the 1840s. The error of ascribing the poem to Burns is understandable because of the phrase 'Brethren of the Mystic tie' and because of the reference in the fifth verse to the 'Scottish peasant' which is so obviously drawn from the line 'The rank is but the guinea's stamp, The Man's the gowd for a' that' in Burns's song 'A man's a man for a' that'. Actually, Burns's similar phrase to 'Brethren of the Mystic tie' is 'Dear brothers of the mystic tie' which appears in the second line of Burns's 'The Farewell To the Brethren of St. James's Lodge, Tarbolton'. Burns makes other oblique references to Masonry, e.g.:

'When Masons' mystic word an' grip...'
('Address to the De'il')

'The Brethren of the mystic level .. .'
('Tam Samson's Elergy')

'Yet man to man, Sir, let us fairly meet
And like Masonic Level, equal greet.'
('The Brigs of Ayr...')

'Then fill us a bumper and make it o'erflow,
And honours masonic prepare for to throw;
May ev'ry true Brother of th' Compass and Square
Have a big-belly'd bottle when harass'd with care.'
('No Churchman am I...')

Kipling is ruled out as an antecedent because he was only six months old when the author of our poem died, but the latter obviously knew his Burns. The suggestion that Richardson had plagiarized Burns's work might be fair comment if the whole theme of *The Final Toast* had been the 'Mystic tie', but it really has no substance because he uses the two words only once and those words were in frequent use in other lyrics of the period — and all without acknowledgment to Burns.

The theme of Richardson's poem is "Happy to meet, Sorry to part, Happy to meet again!" The thoughts expressed in those three phrases were no doubt well known prior to the 1840s, and it is Richardson, apparently, who should have the credit for putting the 'thoughts' into the pithy form so easily remembered and now used by masons all over the world.

An early version of the theme is to be found in the minutes of 1765 of the Druids' Lodge of Love and Liberality, then No. 176, Redruth, Cornwall, (1754, erased 1838), when the triplet was used as 'Ready to meet; unwilling to part; joyful to meet again' for the first time as the closing words of the Ancient Charge in the first degree.

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Bro. David Lester Richardson, the author of 'The Final Toast' was born in London on 22 January 1801. He was the son of Lieutenant Colonel David Thomas Richardson who in 1802 became the first Commandant of the then newly-established Barasat C.C., and who perished at sea on 22 November 1808 in the *Lord Nelson* which was lost in a storm off Mauritius.

David Lester Richardson, the son, also made the Army his career but he managed somehow, within that Service, to devote a great deal of time to other interests. He became a Cadet in the Bengal Army; on 22 April 1820 he was admitted Ensign, became a Lieutenant on 11 July 1823 and was promoted Captain on 29 October 1832. (The *Dictionary of National Biography* credits him with the rank of Major, but Hodgson's *Officers of the Bengal Army* does not confirm this.) While a Lieutenant he spent five years in England on sick leave (19 January 1824 - 28 June 1829) and on his return to Calcutta was re-admitted to the Service. On 25 February 1835 he was appointed Aide-de-Camp to the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck. Richardson retired from the Service on 12 July 1858 but did not return to England until 1861 when he took up residence at 1 Lambourne Road, near the Grange, Clapham, and where he lived until his death on 17 November 1865.

Poetry and literature must have been a hereditary trait for his father, David Thomas Richardson, was a member of the Asiatic Society and published in the seventh volume of the Society's *Researches* an account of the Bazeegurs who were certain tribes of Indian gypsies.

While his contributions to literature were small, those of the son were prolific. During the five years' sick leave in England he founded the *London Weekly Review* (afterwards *Colburn's Court Journal*).

There is no record of David Lester Richardson's having had any *active* military service; he was happier no doubt, while serving with the Governor General, to be in charge of the Army Educational Department at Calcutta. This particular appointment must have afforded him much time and scope for the exercise of his literary ability for, while holding it, he became Editor of the *Bengal Annual* and, later, of the *Calcutta Monthly Journal*, and he wrote and published many works of poetry and prose, mostly historical, e.g.:

Literary Leaves. Calcutta, 1836, 2 vols. 8vo; 2nd ed. enlarged, London 1840; favourably reviewed by Carlyle and Lord Lytton.

Selections from the British Poets from the Time of Chaucer to the Present Day. Calcutta, 1840. Compiled at the request of Macaulay.

The Anglo-Indian Passage. London 1845.

Literary Chit-Chat, with Miscellaneous Poems. Calcutta, 1848.

Flowers and Flower Gardens, with an Appendix ... respecting the Anglo-Indian Flower Garden. Calcutta, 1855.

Earlier works were: *Miscellaneous Poems*. Calcutta, 1822.

Sonnets and other Poems. London, 1825.

In 1836 Richardson became Professor of English Literature at the Hindoo College at Calcutta and in 1839 he was promoted to the newly-created post of Principal of the College while retaining the Professorship. In 1845 he became Principal of the then new Krishnagar College and from 1848 to 1850 was Principal of the Hooghly College.

The *Bengal Annual*, to which reference has already been made, was published quarterly but bound annually. It did not carry local news but consisted of contributed poems and articles by residents, principally British, in Calcutta and the Province. The articles were usually literary essays on visits to interesting places or the recounting of actual events in the form of stories - all of high literary merit. Many of the poems were by Richardson himself and many of the articles which he contributed were accounts of his personal experiences.

One series of such articles, which he called 'Scraps from the Journal of a Voyage to India in the year 1819', consists of tales of incidents in which he was involved on his first voyage to the Indian continent. One such is of Tristan da Cunha and he ends the delightful account with '...we bade farewell to this romantic little island and its two interesting inhabitants.' The two 'interesting inhabitants' were a man and his wife from Yorkshire, England. The most intriguing 'story', however, is his account of 'A Mutiny' which he experienced. Had the 'mutiny' resulted differently 'The Final Toast' would never have been written.

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It is not known if Richardson was a musician, but 'The Final Toast' was set to music by William Henry Hamerton who was born in Nottingham, England, in 1795.

Hamerton was of Irish parentage and at ten years of age was placed as a chorister at Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin. He was taken to London in 1812 and there studied singing under Thomas Vaughan. Returning to Dublin in 1814, he set himself up as a 'teacher of music and singing'; one year later he was appointed Master of the Choristers of the Cathedral, and in 1823 he became a 'Gentleman of the Chapel Royal', Dublin. In 1829 he resigned all his appointments in Dublin and went to Calcutta where he lived until his death - presumed to have been in 1853.

In Dublin he certainly had some success for he wrote an opera — *St. Alban* — which was performed in 1827, and he composed and published a number of songs and

duets. In 1824 he wrote and published a work which he entitled *Vocal Instruction combined with the Theory and Practice of Pianoforte Accompaniment*.

On arriving in Calcutta he branched out in different directions; he took a lease of the Chowringee Theatre, and also secured the appointment of Master of the Choir of Calcutta Cathedral. Perhaps the theatre venture was not a success, or the choir appointment not very remunerative, for he later took a post as assistant in the Civil Auditor's Office while retaining the Cathedral appointment.

And what of these two gentlemen as masons? Unfortunately, little is known of them in this connection.

David Lester Richardson was initiated in the Lodge of Industry and Perseverance No. 126, Calcutta (now No. 109 and meeting in London) on 25 September 1840. In the whole of that most interesting book entitled *Record of the Lodge of Industry and Perseverance*, covering 193 years of that lodge, his name appears only once and that is in the list of members as having been initiated in 1840. The officers for every year (except the eight years 1804-12, for which records were not available) are scheduled at the end of the book. Apparently Richardson never took office but one must credit him with having been a regular attender, and hence having imbibed much of the spirit of masonry, to have written such an ode; it is unlikely that infrequent attendance could have inspired such writing.

William Henry Hamerton was initiated in Aurora Lodge Candour and Cordiality No. 816, Calcutta, on 25 July 1829, his occupation being given as 'Professor of Music'. On 17 August 1830 he became a joining member of the Lodge of True Friendship No. 265 (now No. 218) as a result of the union of his mother lodge with that lodge. Ten years later, on 29 August 1840, he joined St. John's Lodge No. 715 (now No. 486) and it was not until 22 June 1841 that he joined the Lodge of Industry and Perseverance No. 126 (now No. 109).

Hamerton's name does not appear in the list of members at the end of the history of Lodge 109, but it is recorded that, shortly after he joined, the lodge '... had a whip round towards the cost of the piano purchased by Bro. W. H. Hamerton for the use of the Hall' — presumably the Freemasons' Hall, Calcutta. It is also recorded that he held the office of Organist for the years 1841, 1842 and 1843.

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It would appear to have been the presence of Richardson and Hamerton in the same lodge for a little more than a decade that led to their joint labours on 'The Final Toast'. This also narrows the date of its writing and composition, viz., between 1841 (when Hamerton joined Industry and Perseverance) and 1851, for it appeared in print in Hebdon Bridge in Yorkshire in 1852. They were both artists and had complementary abilities.

Whenever the words and music of 'The Final Toast' were written and by whatever it was inspired, masons all over the world owe a debt of gratitude to these

two brethren for having given us a pleasing medium by which we can — and do — perpetuate a masonic sentiment which epitomises the first of our Three Grand Principles - brotherly love, and can say to-day, just as sincerely as our brethren of Calcutta said in the middle of the last century: “Happy to meet, Sorry to part, Happy to meet again!”

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[Editorial Note: If this toast is given at the Social Board it *must* be before the actual Tyler’s toast, which must always be the last item. It must *never* be given instead of the Tyler’s toast.]

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58. pp. 198-201