

The late Chris Reekie — an appreciation

A NUMBER of years ago Chris Reekie published a booklet of his own poems. It was titled "Sunlight Through Leaves" and it was dedicated "To those who have crossed and recrossed life's pathway and in so doing have enriched life's experience."

It is curious that he should pen these words, for such was his zest for what is good in life that the dedication fits himself perfectly.

The son and namesake of Selkirk's celebrated bandmaster, Chris was involved in music from a very early age; he could recall playing with the band at a contest in the old Waverley Market when he needed a box on his chair in order to see over his music stand.

But it was his singing that made him a household word in Selkirk, as a boy treble and later as a tenor. His renderings of such songs as "Roses of Picardy" and "The End of a Perfect Day" were legendary, and remained so after his departure for Australia.

Throughout his life Chris was a deeply religious man, and while serving as a soldier in the Great War he became an early member of the Toc H and made a life-long friendship with its founder, the Rev. Tubby Clayton.

Back in Selkirk after the war he re-established himself as an outstanding musician singing and playing the piano at local concerts. He was also in demand as a church organist, and composed numerous sacred songs which he loved to sing.

In setting out for a new life in Australia in 1922, Chris carried with him to his fresh pastures the rich attributes which had endeared him to the folk in Selkirk, and was soon to win the same recognition there.

In his heart, however, he never forsook his native town and he became one of the pillars of



the Colonial Society. His annual donation was handsome and always the first to arrive, and at the Common Riding he held a Selkirk Night in Melbourne for all who were able to attend. His greetings telegram, "Hands Across the Seas" was always sure of a warm reception at the bussin' concerts on the Nicht 'Afore the Morn.

Never to become "well off," Chris nevertheless gave a helping hand to many a Borderer arriving as an immigrant—no one will ever know the number who owe a debt of gratitude to Chris Reekie or to what extent.

In 1966 and at 73 years of age he was able to make the long-dreamed-of trip home to Selkirk for the Common Riding. On his arrival the speed with which he managed to look out his old friends was remarkable, but even more so was the great number of new friends he quickly made among the younger generation.

A memorable visit ended with a public farewell concert in which he sang the songs with which the name of Chris Reekie will always be linked.

On the occasion of his 90th birthday his friends organised a great party for him, and there were greetings by card and by audio cassette from many friends and organisations in Selkirk.

Returning to Chris' book of poems, I would like to quote one, title simply "Exile." In it he seems to connect the hereafter with Selkirk, suggestive of the ancient Scottish belief that at death the spirit returns by "the low road" to the birthplace:

EXILE

Yestreen I wandered down the
years—
A rugged path, called "Memory
Lane,"
Where joys and sorrows, hopes
and fears
In fancy, led me Home again.

The passing years, both sad and
gay,
And memories that bless and
burn
Surged through my soul. They
seemed to say
"This is the day of your
return."

I pondered, and beheld the
smile
Of friends I knew in days of
yore.
While others—loved and lost
awhile
Had safely reached the farther
shore.

My eyes beheld the heath-
clad hills:
The bonnie burn, and winding
road:
The streets and lanes: The
busy mills—
A breath of Home!
A glimpse of God!

There remains only to say,
"Welcome Home, Chris."

JACK HARPER

(Chairman,
Selkirk Colonial Society).