

27th January 2025

Lamps

**"Three men dwell on Flannan Isle
To keep the lamp alight."**

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, *Flannan Isle* (1912)

Burns' Night and all its celebrations is over for another year. But a friend who is reading this will be delighted that I'm putting *another* of Scotland's literary giants front and centre today ...

Before the days of electric light, town and city streets were illuminated by gas lamps, lit by a *Leerie*, as the lamplighter was called. The writer Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh 1850 and was a sickly child. His wonderful poem *The Lamplighter* depicts this *leerie* as a romantic wanderer who charms the imagination of the young watcher trapped behind the window of his home with his hopes and dreams.

*My tea is nearly ready and the sun has left the sky;
It's time to take the window to see Leerie going by;
For every night at teatime and before you take your seat,
With lantern and with ladder he comes posting up the street.
Now Tom would be a driver and Maria go to sea,
And my papa's a banker and as rich as he can be;
But I, when I am stronger and can choose what I'm to do,
O Leerie, I'll go round at night and light the lamps with you!
For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door,
And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many more;
And O! before you hurry by with ladder and with light,
O Leerie, see a little child and nod to him tonight!*

W. D. Cocker's later poem, *Dandie*, also focused on this Leerie's mystique:

*Carryin' his magic wand, like a sceptre beamin',
Up the street the leerie comes; a' the lamps are gleamin'.*

Lamplighters have long since disappeared, and the word *leerie* has fallen out of use. But might we resurrect it, or at least the concept? We can all be *Leeries*, can't we? We'll be carrying no "magic wand". But is a light of faith, peace, joy and love not *our* "sceptre beamin'"? Wherever we are, in Stevenson's Edinburgh streets or Gibson's Flannan Isle, we all have a responsibility "to keep the lamp alight", for those who look for lights to be lit in the darkened streets of their lives.

A prayer for today

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine" – and be a Leerie again!