

**THE BURNS CALENDAR: A MANUAL OF  
BURNSIANA; RELATING EVENTS IN THE  
POET'S HISTORY, NAMES  
ASSOCIATED WITH HIS LIFE AND  
WRITINGS, A CONCISE BIBLIOGRAPHY,  
AND A RECORD OF BURNS RELICS**

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The Burns calendar: A manual of Burnsiana; relating events in the poet's history, names associated with his life and writings, a concise bibliography, and a record of Burns relics by James M'kie

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**JAMES M'KIE**

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THE  
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ROBERT BURNS

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"All hail! *my own* inspired Bard!  
In me thy native muse regard!  
Nor longer mourn thy fate is hard,  
Thus poorly low!  
I come to give thee such *reward*,  
As *we* bestow.

"*And swear thou this,*" she solemn said,  
And bound the *Holly* round my head;  
The polished leaves and berries red,  
Did rustling play;  
And, like a passing thought, she fled  
In light away." THE VISION.



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*James McKie*



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"The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men gang aft agley."—*To a Mouse.*

## P R E F A C E.

OUR original intention was to publish the BURNS CALENDAR without any prefatory remarks; for one reason, the title page so distinctly indicates its purpose, that no introduction seemed to be needed; and again, our vocation in compiling it was to produce—rather than describe, to collect the materials as best we could in the haze of a receding century, combine these in a graceful garniture, "bringing nothing of our own but the hand that gathered them;" this was all we sought to accomplish, and our labour of love will fulfil its mission if this contribution to Burns Literature find acceptance as a work of reference, and meet with a friendly welcome in that wider circle of kindred spirits who manifest a national interest in whatever concerns the name and fame of Scotland's greatest Poet. Should our effort avail for this end, it will sufficiently justify its appearance, if not, it will speedily disappear, and this outburst of fervour will be classed among the buried hopes of a pardonable enthusiasm.

Some of our readers will understand how difficult it is to verify many of the dates recorded, knowing how greatly received authorities differ; but, in order to ensure accuracy in names, dates, and other particulars, every care has been taken to consult various sources of information in all doubtful or disputed cases. Having further gleanings to chronicle, which could not be transferred to their proper place in the CALENDAR for want of sufficient data, these must either be passed over in silence, or a niche found for them out of the cycle, and, as the Record would be unsatisfactory without the mention of certain familiar names, this seems the only eligible place to connect them in a brief review, so as not to interfere with the plan of classification. With this additional chapter to the REGISTER, there is still the confession to make of offering an unfinished Memorial, for, after all our endeavours for comprehension, many an enquiry has been fruitless; homes are broken up and pass into oblivion as soon as the lights are out, having no eventful annals to preserve the simple story of their lives; households migrate and leave no memento in the local history; others bequeath uncertain traditions which require cautious sifting;

"Nae man can tether time or tide."—*Tam o' Shanter.*

"Ay free, aff-han', your story tell, when wi' a bosom crony."—*Epistle to a Young Friend.*

and, there is no disguising the fact, that nearly all the Burns celebrities owe their renown to the magic touch of the Poet's inspiration, and but for this consecration must have succumbed to the common lot of humanity, and been swept out of memory by the tide of a succeeding generation. While the gloaming lingers let us impress the shadow on the dial.

"Is Fortune's sickle *Luna* waning?  
E'en let her gang!  
Beneath what light she has remaining,  
Let's sing our sang."

Among the Poet's early friends and associates to be specially noticed is William Simpson, schoolmaster, Ochiltree—"Winsome Willie," of the *Rhyming Epistle*, supposed to be the real author of the *Poetical Epistle to a Tailor*, usually ascribed to Burns, and printed in most editions of his Poems since 1801. Simpson was a man of superior ability, and quite capable of writing it. Burns returned the compliment of addressing him as "My rhyme composing brither," a designation he seems to have merited.

"But Willie set your fit to mine,  
An' cock your crest,  
We'll gar our streams an burnies shine  
Up wi' the best."

Simpson removed from Ochiltree to take charge of the Parish School at Cumnock, where he died in 1815. It is curious to note the singular partiality Burns had for schoolmasters; wherever he became located they were sure to be sought after as companions, doubtless as being among the best educated men in the district, and above the intelligence of those in his own sphere of life. A more memorable schoolmaster upon whom the Poet conferred a strange immortality was John Wilson, Tarbolton, the hero of that world-famous satire, *Death and Dr. Hornbook*, the true story of which has only recently been made known on the reputed authority of Thomas Borland, a member of the Bachelors' Club, who was present on the occasion which gave it birth; it was a Mutual Improvement Society, founded by Burns—its first chairman and ruling spirit—meeting monthly for reading essays and debating thereon. The young schoolmaster was one of its members; it has been erroneously stated of him that he sold "drugs," which was not the case; most probably he contemplated preparing for the medical profession if circumstances proved favourable, at any rate his thoughts were turned in that direction, "He's grown sae weel acquaint wi' Buchan, and ither chaps," was quite true, and when his turn came to

"Speak out an' never fash your thumb."—*Earnest Cry and Prayer.*

announce an essay he proposed "Medicine" a subject for discussion, which caused much amusement, and so excited the Poet's fancy on his way home, that the following morning saw the poem finished in the eerie form we know so well. "The clachan yill had made me canty," was simply a poet's license, as it was a temperance meeting so far as drinking was concerned. There was no bad feeling or evil intention on the part of Burns towards Wilson, the popularity and annoyance that resulted were neither foreseen nor desired, but the poem conferred an unenviable notoriety upon its victim, and was carried beyond a joke when some neighbour in a wicked humour wrote and posted on his door "Advice Gratis," a climax the schoolmaster little relished, but was helpless under its infliction. Fortunately for his comfort and well-being in life he left Tarbolton in consequence of some dispute with the heritors, settled in Glasgow, became a successful teacher, and afterwards attained the position of Session Clerk of Gorbals Parish, where he died in 1839. He was an enthusiastic admirer of Burns to the last, sung his songs, recited his poetry with hearty appreciation, and was wont to say, "he wondered why the Poet set on him, as they were aye the best of friends."

The obscure village of Tarbolton is remarkable for being the birthplace of many of the most valued friendships in the social life of Burns—names for ever associated with his name and writings—these sprung into acquaintance in 1781, when he became initiated into the Masonic body at the Lodge of St. David's, which was then in high repute in the county, and numbered among its brethren, Gavin Hamilton and Dr. McKenzie, of Mauchline; John Ballantyne, Dean of Guild, and subsequently Provost of Ayr; William Wallace, Esq., Sheriff of the County; James Dalrymple, of Orangefield; William Campbell of Fairfield; John Rankine, of Adamhill, and others; and was highly distinguished at its formation in having for its Worshipful Grand Master, Major-General Montgomery, a scion of the noble house of Eglinton. This Masonic atmosphere strongly influenced his after life, as nearly all his patrons, associates, correspondents, and companions were linked together in the mystic chain, a bond of union cemented at Tarbolton, followed him to Mauchline, Kilmarnock, Edinburgh, and Dumfries, at home, or on his tours, till the light was quenched in death. Another warm friend and social companion of Burns was James Smith, Mauchline—"My Smith, my bosom frien'." To him the Poet addressed one of the very best of all his rhyming epistles:—