

**ROBERT BURNS AND  
THE MEDICAL  
PROFESSION**

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Robert Burns and the medical profession by William Findlay

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**WILLIAM FINDLAY**

**ROBERT BURNS AND  
THE MEDICAL  
PROFESSION**





Robert Burns  
and  
The Medical Profession

BY

WILLIAM FINDLAY, M.D.

("GEORGE UMBER")

AUTHOR OF "IN MY CITY GARDEN" AND "AVERSHIRE IDYLLS"

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WITH THIRTEEN FULL-PAGE PORTRAITS

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ALEXANDER GARDNER

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## P R E F A C E .

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I WAS asked, some time ago, at a Burns Anniversary Celebration, to reply to the toast of the Medical Profession; and in casting about in my mind what to say in justification of the honour, it occurred to me that the name of the Bard was associated with the medical faculty in a much more intimate manner than at first sight appeared, or was even generally understood; and that it was, therefore, a not inappropriate toast to be proposed at a gathering of Burns admirers.

Afterwards, pursuing the same train of thought, and going deeper into the subject, I soon became convinced of the accuracy of my conjecture—that, indeed, the field, if somewhat circumscribed, was so rich in materials and interest, that justice could not be done to it within the prescribed limits assigned either to an after-dinner toast or in a reply to the same. A lecture, or even a book, as the matter grew under my hand, seemed the likelier and the truer destination to which its dimensions should reach. This solution of the business, I may say, became still more apparent as I proceeded on my way, and came to tackle those controversial points which have, more particularly of late years, gathered around Dr. Currie's biographical achievement; and which have so long, and, I venture to think, so harmfully, in-

volved the good name of the Poet. Such an unfortunate effect, moreover, has been mainly brought about by virtue of the biographer's very conscientiousness (over-righteousness) in discharging the duty which he considered he owed to the memory of his subject, to the public, and to himself; conferring, thereby, a sort of classicism on his pronouncement of Burns's errors and characterisation, which, from the warmth of approval with which the doctor's judgment had been quoted by so many distinguished authorities and from so many different quarters, came to be looked upon as possessing the stamp of finality, and, therefore, endowed with a correspondingly long lease of life.

In the execution of my task, the materials for which are, in many instances, difficult to find, and not always accessible, I have tried to state the case temperately and fairly for all concerned. How far I have succeeded, the reader must be the judge.

That these pages are a perfect or complete statement of the inquiry, *Robert Burns and the Medical Profession*, I do not for a moment contend. In my researches amid Burns bibliographies, library catalogues, and other dry-as-dust out-of-the-way nooks and corners of book-shelves, it is probable that I have missed out some contribution; but the statement is as complete as, with care and labour, I have been able to make it.

I have to acknowledge my indebtedness to Dr. Alexander Patterson, Glasgow, for his kindness in allowing me free

access to his extensive and most valuable Burnsiana library ; and to Dr. James Finlayson, Hon. Librarian to the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons, Glasgow, for many important bibliographical notes bearing on the subject of my inquiry. I have also to thank Mr. F. T. Barrett and his assistants, of the Mitchell Library, Glasgow, Mr. D. M'Naught, the distinguished editor of the *Annual Burns Chronicle*, Dr. H. Vevers of Hereford, Mr. James Smith, Raemoir, Ayr, Mr. Alexander Anderson of the Edinburgh University Library, Messrs. Thomas Rennie and William Reid, Glasgow, Mr. James Carment, Dumfries, and others, for their obliging help and assistance in furnishing me with numerous hints and points of information, or otherwise aiding me towards the successful completion of my task. I have likewise to express my acknowledgments to Col. J. Maxwell Witham, Kirkconnell, Newabbey, Dumfriesshire, for kindly permitting me to photograph the oil painting, in his possession, of his celebrated relative, the late Dr. William Maxwell, Dumfries ; and to John Mackenzie, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh, for furnishing me with a photograph of his grandfather, the late Dr. John Mackenzie of Mauchline, from which the drawing for the present work was made.

WILLIAM FINDLAY.

FERN VILLA,  
DENNISTOUN,  
GLASGOW,  
OCTOBER, 1898.





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