

GLASGOW ROYAL INFIRMARY:  
THE BIRTHPLACE OF ANTISEPTIC  
SURGERY.

A KIRKYARD ECLOGUE.

By the Late WILLIAM FINDLAY, M.D.  
("GEORGE UMBER.")

Near by the auld Cathedral gray,  
'Tween ebon nicht and screigh o' day,  
I dreamt that I did lanely stray  
                  'Mang kirkyard stanes,  
Whilk everywhere aroun' me lay  
                  'Boon deid folks' banes.

An' as I sauntered up an' doun,  
About me glow'rin' idly roun'  
Whare Kentigern first laid the foun'  
                  O' 's mission station,  
That now's become the second town  
                  O' th' British nation,

I thought me on the aulden times,  
When monks to the rude steeple's chimes  
Awoke to chant their uncouth rhymes,  
                  An' tell their beads,  
An' lead the way to sp'ritual climes,  
                  By holy deeds;

When clear the Molendinar sang  
Its siller saughs an' birks amang,

An' trouts they lowpit a' day lang,  
    Wi' crimson spots;  
An' bush an' tree wi' music rang  
    Frae feathered throats;

When Scottish firs, frae tap to tae,  
O'erhung the stey Necrop'lis brae;  
An' heard was by ilk friar gray,  
    In 's midnight cell,  
The storm amid their branches play,  
    Baith fierce an' fell;

When owre fornent the house o' pray'r,  
Wi' stately an' med'æval air,  
There stood the Bishop's Castle fair,  
    An' garden fine,  
Whare lords an' leddies gossip'd rare,  
    An' walked langsyne.

Here something wav'rin' 'boon my heid,  
Its cloak-like wings did wide outspread,  
Syne zig-zag whuml't heels owre heid,  
    Richt owre my shouther,  
That turned my bluid as cauld as lead,  
    An' me a' through'ther.

I scratched my touzled tap o' tow,  
Dighted the cauld sweat aff my brow,  
An' leukin' roun' beheld, I trow,  
    The vera wraith  
O' whilom Maister Peter Lowe,  
    Clad in 's last claith.

“ Ye seem to ken me, frien', ” quo' he,  
“ Though how that sic a thing should be

Is rather mair than I can see,  
Since I hae lain  
Three hun'er years but twenty-three  
Aneath yon stane."

Says I, as soon's I fand my breath,  
An' 'tween my teeth had chacked an aith,  
" Despite your weeds o' dusky death,  
An' voice sae howe,  
Unless I'm drunk, or daft, or baith,  
Ye're Doctor Lowe,

" The founder o' our Surgeon's Ha',  
Within whilk still leuk frae the wa'  
Your Vandyke chafts, adown whilk fa'  
Rich wavy curls,  
Imper'l, an' moustache fu' braw  
Wi' wee French twirls.

" Whase life has been sae quaintly drawn  
By Finlayson,\* our chief *savan'*,  
An' whase famed warks auld-farrant stan'  
In honoured place  
O' th' library, in whilk are shawn  
Thy gloves in case."

" That ye're a son o' Æsculap.,  
I guess frae what ye've just let drap,  
How say you then to tak' a stap  
Behint some stane?  
The snell nicht air through this thin hap  
Cuts to the bane! "

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\* "Account of the Life and Works of Maister Peter Lowe, the  
Founder of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of  
Glasgow," by James Finlayson, M.D., LL.D., &c. Glasgow,  
1889.

When we had reached whare it was loun,  
An' on our hunkers couried down,  
The moon's white face, now waner grown,  
    Leuked o'er the scene;  
While out the lift the starnies shone,  
    Wi' fainter sheen.

“ Now that we're seated, gie's your crack,”  
The doctor op'd his mouth an' spak,  
“ Sae changed are things as I leuk back,  
    I'm maist aye fain  
Aboon my 'wilderer heid to tak'  
    The mools again!

“ The burn, the wood, the fiel's, the flowers;  
The Palace\* an' the West Kirk† towers;  
The manse,‡ within whase garden bowers,  
    My love an' I  
Ance felt the happy gloamin' hours  
    Like minutes fly;

“ They a' are mony a year since gane,  
Their place built up wi' lime an' stane;  
The gray Cathedral stan's alane,  
    Still to the fore,

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\* The remains of the Bishop's Palace were removed in 1789, to make room for the Royal Infirmary, which was erected on its site.

† The western tower, together with the consistory house or library, which stood on the north and south-west corners of the Cathedral, were pulled down in the middle of the nineteenth century.

‡ Dr. Lowe, who practised in Glasgow in the early years of the seventeenth century, and was the Founder of the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow, was married to Helen, daughter of the Rev. David Weems, who was the first Presbyterian minister in Glasgow after the Reformation. His residence was in the Rottenrow, and in the lodging formerly occupied by the Prebendary of Carstairs.

By whilk I trace the past again,  
An' th' lost restore."

" But, doctor, losh! that's just the fate  
O' everything that's antique,  
E'en your ain beuks are out o' date  
Ye wrote langsyne;  
Sae changed are a' our views o' late  
Bout medicine,

" That if in practice ye were back,  
An' just heard how the doctors crack,  
'Bout microbes that diseases mak'  
In human bodies,  
The Faculty ye'd think, alack!  
Daft, ridin' hobbies."

" Ye're maybe no sae far astray,  
I didna think the Faculty  
Partic'lar wise e'en in my day,  
Or extra blate;  
But what the deil are microbes, pray,  
'Bout whilk they prate? "

" Microbes are germs that thrive an' breed,  
An' 'mang folks' tissues browse and feed;  
In number mair than Abra'm's seed,  
Or sands on shore;  
An' through the worl' diseases spread,  
In mony a score.

" D'ye see that biggin', straught owre there  
Frae whare we're sittin', 'cross the square,  
A stane-throw wast the house o' pray'r;  
An', 'boon clock-face,  
A dome that rises in the air  
Wi' meikle grace? "

“ My een are like the mole’s a wee,  
That in the mirk ay best can see;  
But owre there surely used to be  
    The palace house,  
Frae whilk the Bishop ruled his see,  
    Canty an’ crouse? ”

“ Ye’re richt eneugh, it’s as ye say,  
Though that’s now our Infirmary,  
Whare first was taught the theory  
    That germs in air  
The ruin were o’ surgery,  
    An’ chief bugbear.

“ Joe Lister was the surgeon’s name,  
Wha’s now a peer o’ worl’-wide fame;  
He said the germs they were to blame  
    For ’s wounds no healin’,  
An’ fand a plan to kill the same,  
    An’ stop them beilin’.

“ Ye needna glow’r, it’s true eneugh  
His plan at first was crude and rough;  
For germs, like cats, are mortal tough,  
    Their thread to nick;  
But Joe he mixed the rare druschoch,  
    Soon did the trick.

“ Carbolic acid, fine an’ nippy,  
Made down to ane or less in twenty  
O’ aqua, oil, an’ spray, an’ putty  
    Rub’d up wi’ chalk,  
Them smoor’d as in a brunstane cootie,  
    As deid’s a mauk.

“ The spray to sterilise the air,  
Lotion to clean an’ guard the sair,  
An’ putty, wi’ tinfoil, a square,  
Were a’ his tools;  
While for details, a patience rare,  
Ne’er gien to fools.

“ Protected by this germicide,  
His knife in abscess safe did glide;  
An’ compound fractures, gapin’ wide,  
He rinsed out clean,  
The breach wi’ ’s putty then did hide,  
Snug an’ serene.

“ When twa-three days had syne come roun’,  
An’ he had lows’d the dressin’s doun,  
What pus there was about the woun’  
Your e’e wad held;  
Nor fient a haet that wasna soun’  
Was to be smell’d.

“ Sic were the rough an’ ready ways  
He practised in those early days;  
His blunders, failures, and delays—  
The finin’ pot,  
That error frae the truth displays,  
When humbly sought.

“ Still visions perfect, did this seer  
O’ antiseptics fondly rear,  
When operations without fear  
Performed wad be,  
That ance were deemed ayont the sphere  
O’ surgery.

“ O’ lives an’ limbs still to the fore,  
That ance were lopp’d aff by the score,  
He fondly dreamt; an’ e’en before  
    To th’ east\* gaed he,  
For healthiness his ain wards bore  
    Awa’ the gree.

“ Whilk made his colleagues him deride,  
An’ mak’ bo-keek o’ ’s germicide;  
But he his time did wisely bide,  
    An’ wrought awa’;  
An’ now his doctrines, far an’ wide,  
    Are praised by a’.

“ For ’mang his gen’rous student youth,  
When he gaed east, an’ later south,†  
He left disciples o’ his truth,  
    Wha didna shame,  
By practice an’ by word o’ mouth,  
    To spread its fame.

“ Sir Hector C——, his then house-man,  
Wha’ mav be said his ’prentice-han’  
To hae got tried on Joe’s new plan  
    At ’s vera birth,  
Is now a cunnin’ journeyman  
    O’ meikle worth.

“ An’ there’s Sir Will. Macewen, too,  
Wha ably fills his chair e’now,  
To th’ microbe doctrine’s stuck like glue;  
    An’ mony mae

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\* Professor Lister was appointed in 1869 to the Chair of Clinical Surgery in Edinburgh, vacated by his father-in-law, the celebrated Mr. Syme.

† Professor Lister left Edinburgh in 1877 to become Professor of Clinical Surgery in King’s College Hospital, London.

Hae held the torch aloft to view,  
E'en to this day.

“ Mair antiseptic e'en than he,  
The maister's crude germ theory  
They've brought to sic efficiency,  
That, safe 's the bank,  
Feats are performed in surgery  
O' the first rank.

“ Sic like as straught'nin' bow't leg banes,  
Removing tumours frae folks' brains,  
Whippin' out ga' an' kidney stanes,  
An' far waur lesions,  
Or fumblin' inside human wames,  
To lowse adhesions.

“ That's just a swatch of what's been done  
Sin' antiseptics hae come in ;  
The surgeon now thinks 't nae mair sin  
To plunge a whittle  
In thorax, brain, or abdomen,  
Than eat his vittle.”

“ Sic ferlies, guidsake ! fair cow a'  
That e'er before I heard or saw ;  
It har'ly soun's, this windy blaw,  
Like barber skill,  
Whilk in my day kent nought ava,  
But how to kill.

“ But, gracious me ! your story, frien',  
Has my auld pate bambaz'd as clean  
As I'd been mortal fou yestreen ;  
This Lister chiel

Mun surely hae colleaguin' been  
Wi' the black deil.

“ Yet if the half ye tell be true  
About this germicidal brew,  
Then after a' there's something new  
Aneath the sun ;  
An' Solomon's despairin' view  
Was just his fun.”

“ But mair's to tell—this theory,  
First born in the Infirmary,  
Has e'en had the monopoly  
O' medicine  
As meikle 's darin' surgery,  
Amaist sin' syne.

“ The wee germs' modes o' life an' ways—  
Microbes they're a' ca'd nowadays—  
Ance wrapp'd in a mysterious haze,  
An' vague surmise,  
Hae been shawn up in every phase,  
An' queerest guise.

“ Partic'larly their fell relation  
To ilk disease's curs'd causation,  
Has wrought a perfect transformation  
In theory,  
An' practice baith, o' the physician  
O' th' present day.

“ Observers swear they're far mair plenty  
Than bugs, an' fleas, an' sic like gentry ;  
O' every shape they can content ye,  
Be 't rod or crank,

Drum-stick, or dot, or tirlie-wirlie,  
Or link or shank.

“ There’s ane they say to ilk disease,  
That in the bluid sets up a bleeze—  
Consumption, typhoid, what ye please,  
Diphtheria,  
An’ influenza, man’s new tease,  
An’ cholera.

“ Sic meikle names, too, as they’ve a’,  
Soun’s laughable for folks sae sma’,  
’T wad nearly tak’ your breath awa’  
Them to get roun’,  
Or else to gie ye a lock-jaw  
They wad be boun’.

“ But, big or wee, they fin’ their way  
To folks’ insides, intent to stay,  
An’ there sic deev’lish cantraips play  
Wi’ flesh an’ bluid,  
That patients aften frae that day  
Do nae mair guid.”

“ The worl’ it mun be altered sair  
Sin’ in ’t I doctor’d my bit share.  
Auld Egypt’s plagues are little mair  
Than a fleabite  
To this new-fangl’d microbe scare,  
That’s come to light.

“ But if mankin’s sae at the mercy  
O’ sic wee d——d impudent gentry,  
Is there nae way to stop their entry?  
Your clever chiels

Micht at the threshold place a sentry  
To kill the deils."

" Ou, aye, but that's anither crack,  
Whilk to explain some time would tak' ;  
Auld Nature's neither lame nor slack,  
Ye needna fear,  
An' sae's provided a bit chack  
To their career."

" Come, hurry then, wi' your new tale,  
For moon an' stars begin to fail ;  
The east there's growin' ashy pale,  
An' soon mun I  
Back to my lowly hammock hail,  
An' lanely lie."

" Aweel, I'll be as gleg's I can,  
But, first and foremost, un'erstan'  
That ilk white cell in bluid o' man  
'S a phagocyte,  
Whase trade it is, by Nature's plan,  
Microbes to fight.

" The phagocytes, as soon's they spy  
The blasted microbes sailin' by,  
Rush aff to smite them hip an' thigh  
Withouten quarter,  
Till heids and thraws their corpses lie,  
A mighty slaughter.

" But 'fore the battle's weel in view,  
The microbes, to their tactics true,  
Frae out their rod-like droddums spew  
A fell toxine,

Their enemies to mak 's blin' fou  
As they'd drunk wine.

“ The phagocytes still valiantly  
Advance in a' their battle 'ray,  
The bigger cells—the cavalry—  
Gallop right in;  
The wee-er chaps—the infantry—  
Come on ahin'.

“ The fight now rages hot an' sair,  
In front, to right, to left, an' rear;  
In heaps are lyin' everywhere  
The dead and wounded;  
Nae flag o' truce is hoisted here  
Or retreat sounded;

“ Till fatted are the hungry kytes  
O' the victorious phagocytes  
Wi' the defeated microbe wights,  
Wounded an' slain,  
That they'll nae mair in mortal fights  
Engage again.

“ But should the microbes wi' their brew,  
Whilk they out o' their droddums spew,  
Succeed in makin' mortal fou  
The phagocytes,  
That they gang stoit'rin', stach'rin' through,  
In ithers' gaits,

“ They dose them deeper wi' toxine,  
Till they do clean their senses tyne,  
Then owre their bodies, prancing fine,  
In swarms they flow;

In patient's bluid the storm bursts syne,  
Soon lays him low.

“ Though whare he weathers the attack,  
It's part o' Nature's cunnin' wark,  
In 's purple stream secret to mak'  
A substance wise,  
Whilk does the murd'rous toxine dark  
Antagonise.

“ An' sae he's rendered quite immune,  
Syne out his fever safe does soom,  
His wonted health back to resume,  
An' daily wark;  
At th' toxine he can snap his thoum,  
As blithe 's a lark.

“ The upshot then o' a' this din  
'S that drugs are cassen to the win',  
An' serum-therapy brought in;  
A wee injection  
O' antitoxin 'neath the skin  
'S the gran' protection.

But just as I 'gan to explain  
How serum frae horse-bluid was ta'en,  
A blasted cock, down some by-lane,  
Let out a crow,  
An' 'fore I kent the ghaist was gane,  
Clean stown awa'.