

ROBERT BURNS (1759-1796)

At the close of the 18th century a young Scotsman became the national poet of both Scotland and England. His name was Robert Burns and he is considered one of the greatest poets in English literature; his songs are known and loved far beyond the limits of his country. January 25th, his birthday is celebrated annually by the lovers of poetry in many countries of the world.

One of his first biographers wrote: "His genius was universal. In satire, in humour, in description, in sentiment, he was equally great."

Robert Burns was born on January 25 1759 in a clay built cottage. His father was a gardener in a small estate. When Robert was seven he decided to give his children the best education he could afford and engaged a teacher for them. The teacher was very enthusiastic; he taught Robert who was his favourite many subjects, French and literature among them.

Robert's mother was fond of old popular songs and ballads. She knew many of them and often sang them. From her Robert inherited the love for folklore. Robert wrote his first verses when he was 15. He met a girl who became the great love of all his life and the inspirer of his numerous lyrical verses. In 1786 he published his first book. The book was a great success and soon another edition appeared.

Burns' fame spread far and wide. He was invited to Edinburgh. While in Edinburgh he got acquainted with some enthusiasts of Scottish songs and ballads and became engaged in collecting the treasures of the Scottish folklore. Burns considered his work his patriotic duty. Being already a poet he did not give up farming and worked hard to earn his living. The last years of his life were very hard. The hard daily work on the farm, the constant starvation and privations finally undermined Burns' health. On July 21, 1796, at the age of 37 Burns died. *

Robert Burns' poetry was inspired by his deep love for his motherland for its history and folklore. His beautiful poem "MY HEART'S IN THE HIGHLANDS" is full of vivid colour descriptions and is a hymn to the beauty of Scotland's nature and its glorious past.

Burns' poetry is closely connected with the national struggle of the Scottish people for their liberation from English oppression, the struggle that had been going on in Scotland for many centuries.

Burns expressed the most sacred thoughts and hopes of the Scottish people, who, even in poverty, are full of proud love of freedom, hatred for all oppressors, contempt for the rich, human dignity and an optimistic belief in their beautiful future.

Burns' lyrical poems are known for their beauty, truthfulness, freshness, depth of feelings and their lovely melody. Among his best lyrics is "OH, MY LOVE IS LIKE A RED, RED ROSE". Many of Burns' lyrical poems have been put to music and are sung by all English-speaking people.

The name of Burns is very dear to all English-speaking nations because the source of his poetry was the folklore and the songs of his people whose true son he was.