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## Documents Online

**Title:** "Robert Burns," by Alexander M. Hamilton

**Format:** Commencement Oration

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## Robert Burns,

There is a magic in the name of Burns. There is something connected with his history, which awakens the nobler feelings of the heart, and the higher thoughts of man. Born as he was without title and without fame, the son of a poor but honest peasant in a retired part of Scotland, we see by his own efforts, by the mighty genius with which nature had endowed, he raised himself so as to receive homage from men of rank, literature and taste. The first outbursting of those "words that breathe and thoughts that burn" appears to have taken place at the sweet and hopeful period of fifteen. Owing to the bewitching smiles, the auburn hair, and the rolling eyes of his companion in the field a bonnie lass of fourteen, we see that he could no longer restrain the feelings of his soul, his heart was affected by that all pervading principle Love. His production on this occasion as might be expected was full of pathos full of the burning sentiments of a loving heart, and although far inferior to the productions of his maturer years, it proves that it was the lot of this favoured one to be affected at the same time with the emotions of love and the stirrings of poetry twin sisters, twin sisters who have done

so much to alleviate the burdens of this life,  
to comfort the desponding, to give strength and  
vigor to the weak and infirm, to turn our  
sorrow into joy, our mourning into gladness,  
to cause the desolate heart to bloom and blossom  
as the rose, to raise our thoughts above the petty  
things of earth to the nobler things of Heaven.

The heart of the poet was well adapted to the  
cultivation of domestic virtues. Full of love and good  
nature, he was esteemed as a citizen - admired  
as a genius - liked as a husband and beloved as a  
father. His love for the land that gave him birth  
is clearly exhibited in the effusions of his muse; he  
delighted to employ his talents in singing the praises  
of her noble sons, and the glorious exploits of his  
ancestors. Burns was indeed a lover of nature.  
It was his greatest joy when the sun had run his  
daily race, and was setting in all his splendor  
and beauty to wander by the side of the soling  
Ayr, and there give vent to his feelings in the  
sweet music of his rhyme. He was a lover of  
virtue, the noblest trait in the character of man  
that principle which bears the mark of deity -  
that principle which,

"Warms in the sun refreshes in the breeze  
Glow in the stars, and blossoms in the trees."

It was the lot of this great man to be born poor,  
to live poor, and to die poor; to suffer many trials  
and hardships, but during his whole career he never

deserted the paths of virtue for those of vice. Like  
all mortals he had his faults, but in the language  
of Goldsmith "e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side"

Burns is no more. He needs no eulogy. His name will  
ever be ~~remembered~~ embalmed in the memory of  
the scholar, the philosopher, and the lover of literature.

His productions will be ~~remembered~~ admired as  
long as the bosom glows with a generous emotion, as  
long as the verdant hills and gurgling streams of his  
native land remain. To his fellow citizens he was  
truly dear, he loved them long, he loved them well, he  
turned his lyre to sing their praise - and by the  
inhabitants of old Scotland he will be remembered.

"Until the last throb shall lay their bosoms low  
And memory, and affection cease to glow"

Alexr Hamilton

Carlisle, June 27 1850.

This is the last of my college duties.

Hamilton

Commencement Oration of Alexander M. Hamilton, Class of 1850  
Transcribed by Sarah-Hazel Jennings, May 2008  
Edited by Chris Altieri, June 2008

Robert Burns

There is magic in the name of Burns. There is something connected with his history, which awakens the nobler feelings of the heart, and the higher thoughts of man. Born as he was without title and without fame the son of a poor but honest peasant in a retired part of Scotland, we see by his own efforts, by the mighty genius with which nature had endowed, he raised himself so as to receive homage from men of rank, literature and taste. The first outbursting of those “words that breathe and thoughts that burn” appears to have taken place at the sweet and hopeful period of fifteen. Owing to the bewitching smiles, the auburn hair, and the rolling eyes of his companion in the field a bonnie lass of fourteen, we see that he could no longer restrain the feelings of his soul, his heart was affected by that all pervading principle Love. His production on this occasion as might be expected was full of pathos full of the burning sentiments of a loving heart, and although far inferior to the productions of his maturer years, it proves that it was the lot of this favoured one to be affected at the same time with the emotions of love and the stirrings of poetry twin sisters, twin sisters who have done

so much to alleviate the burdens of this life, to comfort the desponding, to give strength and vigor to the weak and infirm, to turn our sorrow into joy, our mourning into gladness, to cause the desolate heart to bloom and blossom as the rose to raise our thoughts above the paltry things of earth to the nobler things of Heaven.

The heart of the poet was well adapted to the cultivation of domestic virtues. Full of love and good nature, he was esteemed as a citizen—admired as a genius—liked as a husband and beloved as a father. His love for the land that gave him birth is clearly exhibited in the effusions of his muse; he delighted to employ his talents in singing the praises of her noble sons, and the glorious exploits of his ancestors. Burns was indeed a lover of nature. It was his greatest joy when the sun had run his daily race, and was setting in all his splendor and beauty to wander by the side of the rolling Ayr, and there give vent to his feelings in the sweet music of his rhyme. He was a lover of virtue the noblest trait in the character of man that principle which bears the mark of [illegible word]—that principle which,

“Warmth in the sun refreshes in the breeze

Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees.”

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deserted the paths of virtue for those of vice. Like all mortals he had his faults, but in the language of Goldsmith “e’en his failings leaned to virtues side” Burns is no more. He needs no eulogy. His name will ever be ~~remembered~~ embalmed in the memory of the scholar, the philosopher, and the lover of literature. His productions will be ~~remembered~~ admired as long as the bosom glows with a generous emotion, as long as the verdant hills and gurgling streams of his native land remain. To his fellow citizens he was truly dear,

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