

Robert Burns

Read the text **The Poet of World Brotherhood** and say what made Burns a great national poet of Scotland.

The Poet of World Brotherhood

Robert Burns is the national poet of Scotland. Every year on his birthday, Scotsmen all over the world gather together for a traditional celebration in which his memory is glorified, his poems are recited and his songs are sung. Burns's poetry is loved and enjoyed by all his compatriots. They love Burns for the generosity and kindness of his nature, for his patriotism and truthfulness.

Himself a farmer, whose short life of thirty-seven was one of constant strain(1). Burns sang and described the common joys, sorrows, and life of the common people. In his poems he sang the pride and dignity of the Scottish peasantry and praised "Honest poverty". He was a poet of brotherhood who declared that a man is a man, must be treated as a man, have the freedom of a man. He looked to the time when class distinctions would come to an end, when only personal qualities, and not wealth and titles, would make "a man for a'that".

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a'that,
That Sense and Worth o'er² a'the earth
Shall bear the gree³ an'⁴ a' that
For a 'that, an a' that,
It's coming yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brothers be for a' that
(from **For A 'That and A That**)

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1. **strain** — напряжение
 2. **o'er** = over
 3. **bear the gree** = win the first place
 4. **an'** = and

Burns sang the beauty and the glory of his native land. He glorified true love and friendship. He was a remarkable lyrical poet, and he could also be humorous, ironical and satirical. He presented the truth with simplicity so that common people may also see and love it. That is why he has become the daily companion of hundreds of thousands of men and he holds the first place in the hearts of his fellow-countrymen.

Burns was born in Alloway, near Ayr, on the 25th of January, 1759. His father, a small farmer, was a hard-working man and he took great trouble to give his family all the education he could. Like so many Scottish peasants of his day he believed passionately in education, and

made every effort to see that his children received proper instruction. When Robert was six, he was sent to a school at Alloway Miln, about a mile away. But the teacher there soon got another job and left, and Burns's father joined with neighbouring farming families in hiring as a teacher for their children a young man called John Murdock. Robert and his brother Gilbert were given a good knowledge of English. They progressed rapidly in reading and writing. Murdock went on to make sure that his pupils read and understood Shakespeare, Milton, Pope and other most important writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

When Murdock left, the poet's father taught his children arithmetic and other subjects, and brought them books from Ayr.

Burns owed much to his father, a poor man as he had no land of his own, and a rich man if valued in character, independence, in thought and action. Burns, writing of his father, says, "I have met with few who have understood men, their manners and their ways equal to him."

(Autobiography.)

For some years Burns worked on the family farm, ploughing and reaping⁽¹⁾. Robert later recalled: "I was the eldest of seven children; and he (Father) worn out by early hardships, was unfit to labour... We lived very poorly; I was a dextrous² Ploughman for my years, and the next eldest to me was a brother who could drive the plough very well and help me to thrash³." Robert at early age did most of the ploughing, and it was the combination of hard physical labour and poor food in his youth that brought about the first symptoms of the heart disease which troubled him for much of his life and from which he died.

Burns wrote his first poem at the age of fourteen for a girl who worked with him in the fields. She sang a song she said was composed by a country boy. "I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he," Burns wrote, and thus he composed his first poem "Handsome ⁴ Nell". And from then till his death about twenty-three years later his poems and songs came out, giving delight and joy to the poet himself, his countrymen and all the world. It was as his father had once said: "Rob will one day become famous."

As Burns grew older, the farm took more and more of his time and energy. With the exception of a year spent in Irvine in order to learn flax-dressing⁵, Burns worked with his father and brothers. The death of his father in 1784 left Burns free to choose his own kind of life, but it also gave him new responsibilities as head of the family. Robert and his brother Gilbert moved to another farm a few miles away, and it was while working on his farm that Burns composed some of his best known verses⁶.

But fortune was against Burns. As a farmer he was very unsuccessful and Robert was determined to emigrate to Jamaica. But if he left Scotland he wanted to leave behind something by which his country would remember him. His most creative years were probably 1785 and 1786. During this period he wrote his most brilliant poems. Burns published his poems in Kilmarnock in August 1786. Their success was great, and the publication changed the course of Burns's life. Burns was so encouraged by the kind and warm reception⁷ given to his poems that he determined to go to Edinburgh, the capital of Scotland. He was introduced to many famous people. All were impressed by Burns's modesty, his brilliant conversation and his behaviour.

Soon, in April, 1787, a second edition of his poems appeared in Edinburgh; 3,000 copies were printed - a very large number for those times.

Now Burns had the opportunity to see more of his native land that he so dearly loved. He made several tours which he enjoyed very much. He admired the lovely landscapes and lochs of the Highlands and all their splendid beauty. He visited some historic places that made a great impression on him. It all added to a very memorable and enjoyable experience for the poet which resulted in his writing of many of his fine poems.

In 1789 Burns, now 30, bought a farm of his own on the banks of the river Nith, 6 miles from Dumfries. But the farm again proved a disappointment and Burns became an exciseman⁸ for his district. He held this position until his death.

With all his literary work and other duties Burns found it difficult to give his farm the attention it needed. So in 1791 he gave up the lease⁹ and made his home in Dumfries.

During the last five years of his life, Burns wrote some of his best poems and songs. By this time he was a very sick man. After a short illness he died on 21st July, 1796.

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1. **to plough** [plau] **and to reap** [ri:p] — пахать и жать
 2. **dextrous** — ловкий, проворный, способный
 3. **to thrash** — молотить
 4. **handsome** — красивый
 5. **flax-dressing** — обработка льна
 6. **verse** — стих, стихи, поэзия
 7. **reception** — прием
 8. **exciseman** — акцизный чиновник (*взимающий налоги*)
 9. **lease** — аренда, сдача в наем, наем

Millions of people all over the world highly esteem(1) and love Burns's poems. They appeal to all, they find a way to every heart because Burns was sincere to the core(2) and every reader of his poems feels it. And the main things that make him memorable are his great love for people and his protest for the independence and dignity of humanity. "Only those who speak from the heart and to the heart employ a universal language. Burns was a past master³ in the use of this language; his words live because they glow⁴ with the love that makes all mankind kin⁵." (William Jennings Bryan)

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1. **to esteem** — ценить
 2. **core** — сердце, сердцевина
 3. **past master** — непревзойденный мастер
 4. **to glow** — светиться, сиять
 5. **to make kin** — роднить

Exercise 1. Answer the questions on the text:

1. What kind of family did Robert Burns come from?
2. What did Robert Burns's father do for the education of his son?
3. What hardships did Burns live through in his young years?

4. When did Burns begin to write poems?
5. Why was the poet determined to emigrate to Jamaica and why did he change his mind?
6. What tours of Scotland did Burns make and what were his impressions?
7. What did Burns write about in his poems? What were his subjects?
8. Why are Burns's poems loved by millions of people all over the world? What do readers appreciate his poems for?

Exercise 2. *Read the sentences and try to guess the meaning of the underlined words.*

Translate the sentences if necessary.

1. Burns looked to the time when only **personal** qualities, and not wealth and titles, would make "a man for a' that".
2. He was a remarkable **lyrical** poet, and he could also be humorous, **ironical and satirical**.
3. As Burns grew older the farm took more and more of his time and **energy**.
4. **It was a combination** of hard physical labour and poor food in youth that brought the first **symptoms** of the heart disease.
5. He visited some historic places which made a great impression on him. It all added to a very **memorable** and enjoyable experience for the poet.

Exercise 3. *Quote the lines of the text which build up a picture of Burns's working life. Give explanation of these facts:*

- Burns owed a lot to his father.
- Robert Burns had to work hard at an early age.
- Robert Burns was determined to emigrate to Jamaica.
- The publication of the poet's first book of poems changed the course of Burns's life.

Exercise 4. *Characterize Robert Burns as a poet and as a personality.*

Exercise 5. *Try and explain why Burns was able to express the common joys and sorrows of his people in a language which was clear and understandable to all. Say what made Robert a people's poet.*

Exercise 6. *Explain why the poetry of Robert Burns is valued highly in the whole world.*