

ALEXANDER HAMILTON (1757-1804)

THE CREATOR OF THE AMERICAN REVENUE

IN a noble speech by Daniel Webster we read the following passage: "How he fulfilled the duties of such a place, at such a time, the whole country perceived with delight and the whole world saw with admiration. He smote the rock of the national resources and abundant streams of revenue gushed forth. He touched the dead corpse of the public credit, and it sprang upon its feet. The fabled birth of Minerva, from the brain of Jove, was hardly more sudden and more perfect than the financial system of the United States, as it burst forth from the conceptions of Alexander Hamilton."

We can add little to this splendid outburst of poetic oratory. In 1789, when the Government of the United States under the Constitution was organized and Alexander Hamilton was made Secretary of the Treasury by President Washington, the finances of the new republic were in a deplorable state. The country was drowned in debt and practically bankrupt. The expenses of the Revolution had been mainly met with paper money, which had become more worthless than the paper on which it was printed. During the years after the war the government had been carried on almost without money. It was obliged to beg the states for every penny it needed, and it often begged in vain. The new government began with an empty purse and a ruined credit. All this was reversed by Hamilton's magic touch. Within a year's time the country's credit was restored, its purse was filled, and its great financial career had fairly begun. This is the work which Webster so highly eulogized. Its details may be found in the financial history of the United States.

Alexander Hamilton was a man bristling with talents, in his way as remarkable as Washington himself. Coming from his birthplace