

A Man's A Man For A' That

By Robert Burns

Part 1 - The Poem Explained



ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL



Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot





A Man's A Man is one of Burns' most famous songs. It was written in 1795, when less than 3 percent of people in Scotland had the right to vote. Power lay in the hands of a tiny, land owning minority.

Burns was part of a growing movement for reform and this song expresses his deeply held belief that all of humankind should be equal, regardless of their wealth or social status.

The song is still very popular today and was sung at the opening of the new Scottish Parliament in 1999.

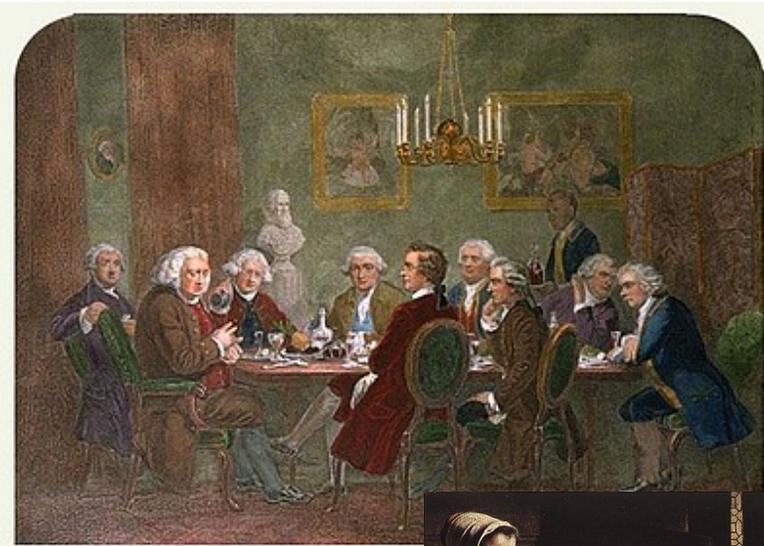
*Is there for honest Poverty
That tings his heid, an' a' that;
The coward slave we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, an' a' that,
Our toils obscure an' a' that,
The rank is but the guinea's stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that.*

In the first verse Burns is saying that a person's true value is his character, not his wealth or social class. Honesty is more important than status.

He compare's a man to a coin – the stamp on the coin represents the social status or rank, but the true character of the person is the gold itself.



What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, an' a that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine;
A Man's a Man for a' that:
For a' that, and a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that;
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that..



In the second verse Burns contrasts the hamely fare (simple food) and hoddin grey (coarse cloth) of a poor man with the silks and wines of wealthy 'fools'. He describes the glamour of the rich as a frivolous 'tinsel show', while the poor man's honesty makes him 'king o' men'.





*Ye see yon birkie, ca'd a lord,
Wha struts, an' stares, an' a' that;
Tho' hundreds worship at his word,
He's but a coof for a' that:
For a' that, an' a' that,
His ribband, star, an' a' that:
The man o' independent mind
He looks an' laughs at a' that.*



Burns uses the third verse to mock the self-importance of the powerful land-owning classes. A man who can think for himself is worth more than the idiot ('coof') who has the title of Lord.

*Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That Sense and Worth, o'er a' the earth,
Shall bear the gree, an' 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.*



*The final verse expresses Burns' belief that people across the globe would one day come together to create a better world, where all people were treated equally .
Burns wrote A Man's A Man over 200 years ago, but it's message still resonates today as we work together to build hope for the future.*



 youth music initiative

 CREATIVE SCOTLAND

 Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

ALBA | CHRUTHACHAIL