

8<sup>th</sup> May 2021

## Rank

**“Is there for honest poverty  
That hings his head, 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.”**

*Robert Burns, A Man's A Man for A' That*

*The Guardian* newspaper has just celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> birthday. Originally *The Manchester Guardian*, the first edition of 5<sup>th</sup> May 1821 has a front page filled with small ads, the norm for the time. This one caught my eye:

### **PANTOION**

#### ***CHINA AND GLASS WAREHOUSE***

The Nobility, Gentry, and Public are most respectfully informed, that THE PANTOION CHINA and GLASS WAREHOUSE, and CUT-GLASS MANUFACTORY ... is now open for business, and displays a splendid assortment of ELEGANT PORCELAIN, of French, Worcester, and other manufacture ...

*The Nobility, Gentry and Public!* It was the way of things back then. Nobility first, Gentry second, and the Public taking up the rear.

Less than thirty years before, Robert Burns had railed against such distinctions in his magnificent anthem to the worth of every individual, *A Man's A Man For A' That*. Sent to publisher, George Thomson, in 1795, the year before Burns died, this intense contempt of rank and status has made Burns' poem what the writer James A Mackay describes as a “revolutionary song with a central place in the psalmody of radicalism.”

The publishers of *The Manchester Guardian* could have declined to print the small ad or insisted it be changed. Perhaps they just needed the advertising revenue. And if the good people of *Pantoion's China and Glass Warehouse* had simply advertised their wares to “the public”, everyone would have benefited. But maybe that was too radical for *Pantoion* and perhaps even for *The Manchester Guardian* of 1821.

#### **A prayer for today**

*My rank? I'm a unique child of the universe, with the ability to bend history.  
That's a high enough rank for me, thank you. Amen*

*An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>*