

24th July 2020

Gathering

**“The rain, it raineth on the just and also on the unjust fella:
But chiefly on the just, because the unjust steals the just’s umbrella.”**

Lord Bowen, as quoted by Walter Sichel in ‘Sands of Time’

The *Hielandman’s Umbrella* (“The Umbrella which belongs to a person who originates from the Highlands of Scotland”) is a landmark in the centre of Glasgow which has carried this nickname for generations. It’s the underside of a glass-walled railway bridge carrying some of the platforms of Glasgow’s Central Station across Argyle Street, one of the city’s main thoroughfares. During the latter phase of the 19th century Highland Clearances, 30,000 Gaelic-speaking highlanders gravitated to Glasgow to find work. Those with jobs to offer knew there was a ready supply of willing and able men in the one place at the one time, right in the city centre.

Over many years, as more and more arrived – and its use peaked in the 1920s and 30s – the highlanders kept in touch with each other by meeting under the bridge, a convenient and well-known location. Gaelic was often the language of choice, as news of home and city gossip was exchanged. Courting could be done too – usually with “your ain folk”. And it was a convenient place, on a dreich Scottish night, to shelter from the rain! It was the *Hielandman’s Umbrella* in more ways than one!

Gathering with people of like mind for common purpose is always important. That’s been one of the heartbreaks of the Covid-19 restrictions, affecting weddings and funerals, church services and children’s events, family celebrations and sporting crowds, spontaneous meetings and long-anticipated entertainments. One day – soon, we hope – we will be able to gather again, without restrictions, under our umbrellas of shared pleasures, traditions, values and practices. But till then, let’s be grateful for past gatherings; let’s anticipate with excitement the ones that will surely come; and let’s never take for granted one of our most precious freedoms – to meet with each other; to share time and purpose with the people who matter to us; and to value what these gatherings do for all we hold dear.

A prayer for today

*Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered, I will be there.”
Goodness! That’ll be a gathering that’s extremely worthwhile! Amen*

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>