

28th July 2020

Shielding

**“Still from the sire the son shall bear
Of stern strife, and carnage drear,
Of Flodden’s fatal field,
Where shivered was fair Scotland’s spear,
And broken was her shield!”**
Sir Walter Scott, Marmion

Today there are many people in Scotland who, unlike the warriors at the battle of Flodden, are mightily pleased that their shields are broken. For, after four months of lockdown, it seems shielding is being lifted.

A friend wrote to me last week with his reflections on shielding: *[My wife and I] are saying thank you ... Texts, videos, calls, messages, cards – we have felt surrounded by caring. We have also felt safe. Thank you to the NHS and the Scottish Government for the care shown to shielding people ... Our friend ... wrote a piece [for the media] today in which she [said she] felt "terrified" at the prospect of her shielding coming to an end. That is not our word, but we are both a little anxious about re-entry. So we will be cautious to begin with. But the spirit of adventure will certainly grow as the days pass. Two good things about the last few months: one is "Talking Heads", Alan Bennett's television masterpieces ... The other is flowers. Our lockdown has been so much easier because there are two of us and we have a garden.*

Relief and anxiety; adventure and caution; terror and gratitude ... They're all there, and I expect my friend's "talking head" echoes what many people are experiencing right now. I can add little to that. Unlike them, I've not been subjected to shielding. But, with them – and, I'm sure, many of you – I *can* offer thanks for support in the midst of what has sometimes felt like Walter Scott's "stern strife" in the past few months, and the flowers of love that have offered hope when "carnage drear" seemed to be overwhelming. Our shields may indeed be broken as shielding comes to an end, but, unlike Flodden, the victory of love will yet be ours.

A prayer for today

*Lord, as I face the world again, with the battles I have to deal with,
I lay down the shield I've been carrying and place myself in your loving care. Amen.*

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