

28th August 2021

Accents

*“l’accent du pays où l’on est né demeure
dans l’esprit dans le coeur comme le langage.”*

**“The accent of one’s birthplace lingers in the mind
and in the heart as it does in one’s speech.”**

Duc de la Rochefoucauld, Maximes (1678)

Many of you will know that I was born and bred in Fort William, in the Lochaber area of Scotland. I’ve been living far from there for most of my adult life, and though I now have what’s called “A soft, West-Highland accent”, it’s nowhere near as pronounced as it was in my childhood. When I go back to Lochaber, however, and when my ear becomes attuned again to the lilt of the local dialect, I recognise once more where some of the cadencies and rhythms of my own speech come from. The accent of my birthplace does, indeed, linger in my speech.

But Duc de la Rochefoucauld is also right to say that such an accent also lingers in the mind and the heart. When I go stay with my sister in Fort William, I still say, “I’m going home”, though I’ve not lived there for over fifty years. You may be the same when you speak of your birthplace as “home”, even though you’ve been distant from that location for ages. That’s because the “accents” of your birthplace are much more than the lilt of your speech. They’re about memories, influences, rootedness, formation and belonging, that linger long in every mind and heart.

Whatever accent of your birthplace lingers in *your* mind and heart, even though it may no longer be recognisable in your speech, I hope you can pause for a moment and give thanks. Gather your good memories around you. Ditch the bad ones and value the positive ones. Be aware of your formation. Learn again from those who nurtured you. Linger awhile in your birthplace today. Only you will know where you really belong.

No spoken words, in whatever accent, will ever define these things completely to other people. So go back home, to your birthplace, in your mind and heart, and hear again the accents that always linger well for you.

A prayer for today

*“Lord, thy church on earth is seeking thy renewal from above;
Teach us all the art of speaking with the accent of thy love.”*

From a hymn by Hugh Sherlock (1905-1998)