

15th February 2022

Mists

“A land of meanness, sophistry, and mist.”

Lord Byron, The Curse of the Minerva (of Scotland)

Lord Byron appears to have fallen into the age-old trap of attributing meanness and sophistry to all Scots. Perhaps he had his own personal experiences of tight-fistedness and dishonesty, but to label the whole of Scotland's population with these unfortunate labels is nothing short of a nasty calumny. Lord Byron, you should be ashamed of yourself ...

Byron *was* right, however, in remarking on Scotland as a land of mist. Not everywhere, and not all the time, but there is no doubt about the truth of *this* part of his assertion. Mists are common in Scotland.

“Mull of Kintyre, oh mist rolling in from the sea ...” So sang *Wings* in the 1977 song written by Paul McCartney and Denny Laine. This could equally be written for the Firth of Forth where I live and The Sound of Jura which I've crossed several times recently. Some years ago, my wife and I travelled from Inverness to Orkney by public transport. We were looking forward to the spectacular scenery along the east coast of Sutherland and Caithness on the bus journey north. But we saw *nothing* because of the “mist rolling in from the sea”. Byron said it! Scotland is a land of mist.

But beware ... Beware of extrapolating from a single incident – or even one mist-covered shore – and attributing that to everyone and everywhere. When I worked in Easterhouse in Glasgow as a young minister, the place had such a poor reputation that young people, applying for jobs in the city, wouldn't put “Easterhouse” in their address. “Everyone gets labelled because o' the bad reputation o' a few,” the youngsters would tell me. “There's a stigma if you live here. We a' get tarred wi' the same brush.” How sad it is what that happens.

All Scots mean? All Scots dishonest? All Scotland mist-covered? Beware of labelling everyone and everywhere. Keep a sense of perspective. Recognise the bad, but praise the good too. Cope with the problem people, but look for the good in others. Don't tar everyone with the same brush. And Lord Byron? Clearly there's more of the wonder and beauty of Scotland and its people than he was ever able to discover.

A prayer for today

Mists? Bad. Sunshine? Good. Both together? Wow! Isn't that amazing? Amen