

3rd August 2022

Transportation

“Oor parents, wives and sweethearts, their hearts were brak in twa.”

Traditional, *Jamie Raeburn*

Jamie Raeburn is a traditional Scottish song about penal transportation. The Jamie of the title is reputed to have been a baker in Glasgow who, although protesting his innocence, was sentenced to transportation for petty theft. The poignancy of the lyrics expresses the devastation of being torn from your homeland for such a minor misdemeanour.

Oh my name is Jamie Raeburn; from Glasgow toon I came.

My place o' habitation I'm forced to leave wi' shame.

Frae my place o' habitation, I noo maun gang awa',

Far frae the bonnie hills and dales of Caledonia.

It was early in the morning, before the break o' day,

We were wakened by the turnkey who untae us did say:

'Arise you hapless convicts, arise you ane an' a',

This is the day you are to stray from Caledonia.'

“The Transportation Act” was passed by Parliament in 1717, and transportation to Australia began in 1787, 17 years after Captain Cook's discovery. The first 11 ships left in May from Portsmouth with 736 convicts on board. 40 people died during the eight-month journey to Botany Bay. 80 per cent of transported convicts were guilty of theft.

The current plight of refugees is well documented. Through no fault of their own, people are forced to find safety by being transported to another land. Indeed, tens of thousands of Jamie Raeburns (minus the “petty theft” label) have arrived on our own shores, and more arrive each day, seeking refuge and succour. I pray they will find welcome in our midst.

But take note of the line from *Jamie Raeburn* which is my opening quote today. Devastated as he was at his own transportation, Jamie is aware of this: his separation from his homeland will bring sorrow, fear and “a heart that's brak in twa” to those who are left behind. So, as we offer a welcome to those who've had to flee from Ukraine, for example, spare a thought for those who've been left behind: parents; siblings; sweethearts; husbands; friends. They too are refugees, torn from those they love as they see them depart their shores, even though they remain in their own land.

A prayer for today

Today I pray for refugees throughout the world, and for those they've left behind. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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