30th July 2023

Transportation

"Bus driver, we board you, a shivering queue,
We're safe and snug now, and forget about you;
But on through the darkness you rumble alone,
With no mate at your side and no eyes but your own."

A P Herbert, *Seeing It Through*, poster by Eric Kennington (1944)

Whatever Fort William is, it certainly isn't Venice. And yet I've recently had a trip in a Fort William gondola, just as I did in Venice some years ago. But there's a difference: the Italian gondolas are, of course, on the Venetian canals, while the Fort William gondolas take walkers, bikers and skiers to the higher slopes of Aonach Mòr on the Ben Nevis Mountain range, just off the road north to Spean Bridge. So *this* gondola transported us to viewing points that offer magnificent vistas over Loch Linnhe, Loch Eil, Loch Lochy, and far beyond to the west, south and north.

The Fort William gondolas, as with those provided by the ubiquitous gondoliers in Venice, are, of course, an unusual form of transportation. But I got to thinking of the other, more familiar, forms of transportation from which we benefit. My father was a bus-driver, on service runs, long-distance tours and school trips. When he was driving, like A P Herbert I felt "safe and snug" in his coach, as, I know, did many others, from school children to tourists. But I wonder if people in his bus were ever "forget-about-you" people?

I love it when people get off a bus and say, "Thank you, driver". It makes me think of my dad. Did *he* hear the odd "Thank you"? I hope so. Do we take our bus-drivers for granted? I hope not.

Those who make transportation available to us are worthy of our thanks. Bus-drivers, pilots, train-drivers, ferry captains, tube-drivers, cabbies – and gondola operatives – offer us an important service. For they take us to where we need to be, near or far, difficult or easy, high or long, alone or with others. So, spare a thought today for what they do for us. And remember to say "thank you" when you can.

Transportation matters to us all. Those who transport us "safe and snug" are a vital part of our society – just as my dad was, *and* the gondoliers, from Venice to Fort William.

A prayer for today

For those who carry us … thank you. For those who keep us safe … well done! Amen

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