

12th March 2025

Prejudice

“Prejudice is the child of ignorance.”

William Hazlitt, *Sketches and Essays* ('On Prejudice' – 1839)

Beware of the Scaldies! Let me explain ... I've been learning a new song. *Yellow on the Broom*, by Adam McNaughton, written after he'd read the autobiography of Betsy Whyte. Betsy, "a gifted storyteller, and a warm and wonderful lady", proudly belonged to the "travelling people".

For many years it was traditional for travelling people to harvest the acres of soft fruit in Perthshire. For the winter, many of these travellers moved to the town of Brechin in the County of Angus. But they couldn't wait to get back on the road in springtime. The townspeople called them tinkers, the tinkers calling the townspeople "scaldies" in return. "Scaldies" could be the equivalent of "muggles" in the Harry Potter books (though since I've never read any J K Rowling, perhaps someone will correct me.)

But it was a way of saying that the local "scaldies" didn't understand the lifestyle or traditions of the travelling people – and didn't want to. So at best, tinkers were looked on with suspicion, and at worse denigrated. Indeed, I can remember comments about "tinkers" in my village when I was a small boy – comments that were *never* complementary. I now know that this was true prejudice. So, in the tinkers' eyes, "beware of scaldies", people who appear to hold obvious prejudices – and in my eyes too.

A verse of *Yellow on the Broom* describes the prejudice like this:

*The scaldies call us 'tinker dirt',
And strike our bairns in school.
Who cares what a scaldy thinks –
A scaldy's just a fool.
He never hears the yorlin's song, [yorlin = a yellowhammer]
Nor sees the flax in bloom,
For they're a' cooped up in hooses
When the yellow's on the broom.*

But isn't there a bit of the scaldy in *all* of us, sometimes suspicious of minority groups, or even individuals, who don't fit our "norms"? How would we feel if *we* were a minority and the scaldies treated *us* like dirt? Jesus said: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Now, there's a challenge to my scaldy prejudices.

A prayer for today

All-embracing God, challenge my prejudices, and increase by acceptance of others. Amen

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