13th May 2026

Provisions

"The world is a raft sailing through space
with, potentially, plenty of provisions for everybody."

George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*

The funeral I conducted on a Hebridean Island has left me with many memories, mostly deriving from the advice, care and efficiency of the local Funeral Director. As I was leaving the cemetery after my "midgie-free" committal, the Funeral Director and his staff were unearthing several boxes from the boot of one of the limousines and assembling bits and pieces on the tailgate of the hearse. When I got closer, I saw several trays containing glasses of whisky, another tray with plates of oatcakes, and a further tray with plates laden with blocks of cheese.

As the mourners reassembled in the carpark, each one, including the midgie-free minister, was offered a dram, and an oatcake and cheese. "Provisions for everybody," it appeared. There were handshakes, hugs, laughter and reminiscing. The mourners were enjoying each other's company. No one was rushing to leave. Some partook of a second dram, or another oatcake and cheese. This was community at its best.

I remarked later to the Funeral Director how taken I was with this. "Aye, well, well now," he said, "there are some people who are getting very cosmopolitan and going to the local hotel. But this is the way we do things here." And he explained that, in past generations, when people would walk miles to attend a funeral, this was their sustenance for their journey home – a warming dram and some food, practical hospitality at its very best.

In the letter to the Hebrews, there is this advice:

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers;
for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

There were no strangers at that funeral, for the gathering in the carpark showed too much friendly familiarity for that. And I reckon no one would be walking the length of the Island after the funeral. Yet, here were folk following this injunction from Hebrews. Were angels in evidence? That's not for me to say, but, if there were, then they were enjoying a good dram and much needed sustenance for *their* journey home.

A prayer for today

Lord, thank you for your gracious providing. Help me to share provisions with others, so that they have sustenance for their journey of life and faith. Amen

An original reflection © Tom Gordon Also available at https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com