

THE WEBMASTER'S BIT - 1

A SIDEWAYS LOOK AT ...



I guess it is us outsiders who are best placed to spot unlikely connections; those links which locals would regard as normality and thus never think to comment upon. It is therefore my duty as a mouthy newcomer to bring to your attention, in what I hope shall become a regular feature, my most solemn and earnest evaluation of matters Caledonian and Semitic. But first a little bit of background.

As more years passed than I cared to count, I came to realise how much of my life was linked to Scotland; indeed I may even owe it to the country since Dumfries General rebuilt me after a car wreck. Although virtually all my many other contacts were equally appreciated, since I never could decide which I found more welcoming, the people or the panoramas, (these last clauses are inserted to satisfy my Marchmont wife), never once did I think I might live north of the border. Quite the contrary in fact, as despite this fondness, I had often been heard to remark in my less charitable moments, as rain lashed my eyes, that Hadrian had been the wisest Roman of them all in proclaiming his empire would have a limit. Similarly, as a lover of Bach, I have vociferously complained that in my highly esteemed view, the bagpipes' sole virtue is to represent migraine musically.

And yet it came to pass that one day I found myself chewing on a considerable number of my own words whilst signing the cheques necessary to purchase a new abode amongst those I had hitherto thought of as charming, cross-dressing nonconformists with unfathomable accents who had settled in a climate that polar bears would deem bracing. If any readers are still on this page, I hasten to add that now that I have spent a full four seasons living amongst you Scots, I am forced

to admit that whilst my opinions may not have turned through a complete 180 degrees, my recent experiences amongst you have not been without effect. One is that I am seeing an ever growing number of parallels between Jew and Scot, so much so that it is no surprise I now feel completely at home here.

I bet few of you realised that both peoples are similarly cursed with the most woeful sense of direction. Let me elaborate. We all know that Old Moische led his extended family across a temporarily dried up sea-bed and upon reaching permanent dry land had the choice of turning left for regions with considerably more fresh water or continuing further east to lands blessed with vast quantities of fossil fuels. So what does he do? Nothing apart from saying, "Hey isn't it pretty round here? Look at that big lake! Have you ever tasted water so salty?" Next, realising that after yearlong perambulations his feet hurt, he added hastily, "Let's settle here." Foolishly, instead of telling him to repair the holes in his sandals, The Children of Israel all agreed to remain where they were. Furthermore, to compound this blunder further, the whole group discovered they had opted to colonise that part of the earth where the armies of 2 local superpowers enjoyed playing their games of machismo.

Now change a few trivial details of the history above and you pretty much have a summary of the arrival of the first Scot to these parts. This navigational whizz brought his followers over the marshes that are currently beneath The North Sea, and upon arrival at what is now the shore, had a similar choice of whether to turn left or right. Head south and his tribe could enjoy milder weather and the fertile gentle lands fecund with apples, pears, cherries, peaches and later even vines. Did he follow that path? No not our protoclansman! In his infinite wisdom he hot footed it for more inclement climes, only to find a rugged if spectacular terrain fit for no more than barley. He too remarked, "Och isn't it pretty round here?", before adding, "But let's move on a wee bit further. If this rain ever stops and the midges stop gnawing, I'm sure it'll be even better up north. Just the other side of that receding ice

sheet.” In addition, in between times spent trying to invent efficient waterproofs, they too discovered the reality that their picturesque if drenched piece of sod was also tramped over by all manner of invaders hell-bent upon filching what little the territory permitted them to produce for themselves. In moments of rare clarity, I have even harboured thoughts that this first disoriented nomad was called MacSamuels, the original wandering Jew who brought one of the lost tribes traipsing behind him.

Have you noticed this inability to navigate sensibly has brought about further similarities? The initial hasty choice of homeland has resulted in both Israeli and Scot being cursed with highly bothersome neighbours. Also is it any coincidence that following on from this is the reality that both nations are utterly dependant upon the considerable financial support of a wealthier sugar-daddy lest they suffer the economics of a bankrupt third-world state?

Never let it be said that I take my analogies too far. Heaven forefend!!! There are some minor differences within the basic parallels. Whereas Hadrian ventured into the construction business to keep bellicose Scots out of his Roman orchards, Bibi is now into major barrier building, but to keep outsiders off his Jewish orange groves. Another difference is whilst both nations have brought all driving around the lands they chose for themselves to almost a complete halt, the Scots, particularly in the east, did so by rendering their roads impassable to anything swifter than a mule with gout whereas the Israelis wrought similar damage to vehicular transport by making themselves the most aggressive drivers ever granted a license.

However perhaps the biggest difference between the 2 nations, and a lasting legacy to the manifest geographical failings of their founders, is that when a Scottish child is given his first reading primer, and sees within its pages the word ‘Sun’, the only reason why he may not enquire, “What’s that?” is because his father regularly leaves a copy lying round the house. Meanwhile his Israeli counterpart is capable of giving a full-blown lecture on Factor 50 Blocker but struggles to understand the concepts of murk and mizzle.

So there you have them – the random musings of a displaced Sassenach Sabra. Before the more argumentative amongst you leap to the defence of those of a Pictish persuasion I give fair warning that a future essay may very well be on another parallel, the subject of how the Jews and Scots, although the most congenial company I know, both react with similar irrational vigour to unsolicited criticism.

Jo Cular