

SCOTLAND; In search of an identity (final)

My interpretations of historical notes and observations based on the book "*Scotland an Unwon Cause*" Paul Scott 1997 Canongate Books.

By the 1920's and 1930's it seemed to many people that the old Scotland, indeed any Scotland at all, was dying. Scotland's manhood was slaughtered in WW1. With one tenth of Britain's population, it suffered (147,000) one fifth of Britain's military fatalities, and more than double Australia's (60,000) yet comparable in population at the time at 5 million. Scotland was on its knees between two great depressions.

Edwin Muir' wrote despondently in *Scottish Journey*, 1935 "Scotland is a confusing conglomeration of people and anachronisms like Edinburgh,. What Scotland is, I am unable to say.. It has a human north, south, east, and west, as well as geographical; but though they have been clamped within a small space for a long time it is as though they have never met...There is the ridiculous rivalry between Edinburgh and Glasgow, of the various classes, the workless were the most admirable. Scotland has emptied its population and exported its enterprising spirits for 200 years."

Next, Muir makes an obtuse observation; but its merit is in recognising something at the core of Scottishness. "The effect of innovations such as the movies and wireless is to make the place that is called home, of less importance. The local environment doesn't have the shaping influence it once had. Inhabitants all over Britain are subject to the same influence and action from afar, and at the same time. It has its benefits, but the imaginative and formative freedom it offers is often illusionary, and in the "voice of everyman. It is groomed, scripted, the perfect distilled extract of everyman". It is not likely to encourage variety, individuality and originality of character, as the older state of things in the local region did."

He goes on to suggest that what uniqueness Scotland has, is its style of life, (not debating if it is any better than England's), but asks if it is worth conserving, and that, he says, the Scots will have to decide.

Then he underscores the dilemma of the 20th Century. What was once Scottish Political acquiescence is now a social and cultural demise.

"What is unsatisfactory is not that they are just subject to English influence, but that there is little Scottish influence left to direct them. It is in this characterless vacuum that societies and communities lose their way, and it is from them that the people migrate readily."

"The centralisation of vital energies to London, or anywhere but from their community, exacerbates the loss of identity",

"For all its centuries of history it comes down to the 20th C, with its character in crisis".

Sir Walter Scott said " if you un-scotch us, you will make us mischievous Englishmen."

John Buchan 1932, a Conservative MP, put fire into the belly of Scots saying " I believe every Scotsman should be a Scottish Nationalist, and that a separate Scottish parliament is desirable...WE do not want to be like the Greeks, worldly prosperous but with a (crumbling Parthenon) behind them. we do not want to be like the Jews of the dispersion, a potent force but with no Jerusalem."

The Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) was formed.

For the whole of the 20thC the aspiration for the restoration of the Scottish Parliament has been a major theme in Scottish Politics, fluctuating in intensity, neither satisfied or abandoned, but there was no real progress. Both Liberal and Labour Parties favoured Scottish Home Rule while in Opposition but lost interest when in Government. The SNP grew in post WW2 years as it attracted more of Scotland's politicians.

At this time the might of the British Empire was waning. Britain was losing self esteem and confidence in its international and internal powers. India, Israel, even Rhodesia, could do what Scotland could not. If being British lacked esteem then for many a return to Scottishness was a good alternative.

The British House of Commons adopted the Scotland Act 1978 for the establishment of a Scottish Assembly with limited powers, only to have it repealed by PM Thatcher's Govt. in '79.

Major's Conservative Government was elected in 1992, however Scotland returned only 11 Conservatives out of 72 seats. The rest of the elected representatives were from parties favouring a Scottish Parliament. A new found nationalism was expressing itself, distinct from the Social Nationalism of the SNP.

700 years ago, Edward 1 had seized the Stone of Destiny, now it has been returned. On the night before its installation in Edinburgh 30 Nov. 1996 The Scottish Centre for Economic and Social Research, adopted the following :-

BUILD ON THE STONE

We the undersigned.. welcome home the Stone of Destiny, the historic symbol of our Nationhood that for 700 years has been held at Westminster against treaty and law.

We are from all backgrounds and from many traditions. Some of us were born in countries furth of Scotland. We have different pasts, but we seek a common future - a future as citizens of a

prosperous, just and independent Scotland. We now pledge ourselves and exhort our fellow Scots to build on the Stone - to work together to restore the substance of nationhood to our country and to establish a free and independent Parliament that is founded firmly on the sovereignty of the Scottish people. We commit our untiring efforts and energies to such .. and to the rebirth of Scotland as an independent nation once again, a full partner in the counsels of Europe and the world.

The new Scottish Parliament with Legislative powers, opened July 1, 1999.

Now Scots have a greater say and involvement in policies which matter to them. They can rail against their own Politicians and not ride the anti-English bangwagon of the past. Taking responsibility challenges their maturity as a society and sense of nationhood. Will they be a clone of Westminster or find their unique character?

While the debate and search for identity and contemporary Scottish character continues (and will for a long time), the past remains the same. Its treasures, achievements and traditions proclaim an identity; but sadly, one with which many Scots do not associate, having been disconnected for so long. As Muir said of the diverse people, "It is as though they never met". It is time for Scots to celebrate big and often because that will bring out the local flavour, it will encourage the regional culture, it will make people dance and debate. To some who are opposed to the Scottish Kitsch, Scotland may seem like a tourist theme park, well so be it if it pays the bills until the children grow up and stretch their wings in new talents and enterprise.

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