

30th April 2021

Long

**“Unlike my subject I will frame my song,
It shall be witty and it sha’n’t be long.”**

Lord Chesterfield, Epigram on ‘Long’ Sir Thomas Robinson

I know nothing of what caused Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield in the 18th century, to be so sarcastic towards ‘Long’ Sir Thomas Robinson. I can only assume his epigram was kept short in comparison with the verbosity of his protagonist. But ‘long’ isn’t always a bad thing. A well-known Scottish blessing is a good example.

I was attending a wedding in a Scottish castle. The couple being married were from California, the groom dressed in full Scottish regalia and the bride in a tasteful lace gown topped off with a tartan plaid. When the ceremony was over, the couple were to be led up the baronial staircase to their reception by a Piper. But, before he started playing, the Piper took time to wish the couple well, and concluded with this blessing:

Lang may your lum reek.

It was clear that the American couple had *no* idea what he was saying! It literally means, “Long may your chimney smoke”, and originates from the Hogmanay custom of the “First Foot” bringing luck to a home if they came carrying food and drink – and a lump of coal. It’s saying: May you have provisions to sustain you, *and* the wherewithal to light a fire to warm your home – and may you be able to do that for a long, long time.

Having a home, warmth and safety are considered basic human rights. And yet there are too many who have no such security. Indeed, I viewed with horror a TV programme recently of people living in housing provided by the UK state which was unhealthy, damp and dangerous. Living ‘long’ in such conditions? Goodness! I was working with these issues in an Edinburgh peripheral housing scheme nearly fifty years ago ...

So when we wish people a ‘long and healthy life’ or a chimney that smokes for a long time, spare a thought for those who yearn for such a thing. Maybe one day “Lang may your lum reek” will be enshrined in the UN Declaration on Human Rights. Now, *there’s* something to long for ...

A prayer for today

*Lord, help me not to take my home for granted –
and help me be thankful for it for a long, long time. Amen.*