

Letter from Scotland



Scotland's wheel of good fortune

Seen from here in safe old Scotland, the rest of the world looks like a giant roulette wheel. Anything could happen, probably disastrous. The year ahead out there looks mighty scary.

While we in Edinburgh were celebrating Hogmanay with fireworks, a three day winter festival attracting 150,000 guests from 80 countries, torchlight processions, candlelit concerts, ceilidhs and a "Loony Dook" in the chilly waters of the Firth of Forth, the rest of the world was heading for Armageddon.

Three merciless wars are going on in the Middle East. Huddled masses of refugees are sleeping rough on the doorstep of Europe. Two of the world leaders, Putin and Trump, are staring down the barrel of nuclear weapons at each other. The world economy has a cold because China has sneezed. And England and Wales are tearing Europe apart.

But we happy breed of men (and women) have been dancing in the New Year, glad to be on the side lines of this mad world. I was on Blackford Hill when the midnight hour struck, watching the fireworks from a mature distance. The various groups of revellers around me counted the last seconds of 2016 away and then there was a half-hearted cheer and several versions of "Auld Lang Syne" took to the night air.

It's not that we don't have our problems. It's just that they are not so serious as everyone else's. Our education system is sagging. Our health service is short of funds and being overwhelmed by older and older patients. One in every four children is living below the poverty line. We have 5 per cent unemployment and much more under-employment. Our roads need

mending. We should do more re-cycling, cut our carbon emissions, take more exercise. Our farmers need help. We need more homes. The list goes on.

But at least we are not at war. The terrorists seem to be leaving us alone. No one is starving. We have a stable and, usually, sensible government. We are the few, the happy few. All we have to do in 2017 is keep it that way and sympathise with the rest of the world. And, if possible, lend it a helping hand.