

Letter from Scotland

This year's harvest has been gathered in without too much September rain, but as with all things involving mice and men, they "gang aft aghley." So far, the harvest has gone fairly well. Yields of wheat and barley have been above average. Oats and potatoes have done well. But the fruit farmers of Angus and Fife have again been complaining about a lack of seasonal pickers from Eastern Europe. And it's about to get worse.

The reason is the "B" word, Boris. The Prime Minister's Brexit plans have left farmers wondering what on earth their future holds? If Northern Ireland gets a special deal on agriculture, will Scotland get one too? Will beef and lamb farmers still be able to export to the rest of Europe? Will they be faced with cheap imports from America? Will the pound be up or down? Will their subsidies continue after the next two years?



“Thou saw the fields laid bare an’ waste, And weary winter comin’ fast.”

Scotland’s whisky industry

was given a taste of what might happen in a post Brexit future under rules set

by the World Trade Organisation. After

15 years of wrangling, it decided to let the USA impose a 25 per cent tariff on

malt whisky. That’s going to have a

serious impact on a trade worth over £300m a year.

I wonder if Britain, in retaliation, will impose a climate change tariff on the shale gas imported from America to the Ineos refinery at Grangemouth? It certainly would be in line with the government’s recently declared “climate change emergency.” This week the Scottish government confirmed its interim policy of no-fracking in Scotland.

And from fracking to

smacking, Scotland appears to be leading the way. On Thursday, MSPs voted in favour of a ban on the smacking of children, even when parents are exercising their traditional right of "reasonable chastisement." It's the 58th country in the world to do so but the first in the United Kingdom. The bill was opposed by the Conservatives who argued that it was wrong to "criminalise good parents."

The interim leader of the Scottish Conservatives Jackson Carlaw arrived back in Holyrood, from the UK Conservative conference, a convert to the Boris cause of leaving the EU, with or without a deal. His predecessor Ruth Davidson had been strongly against "no-deal". This provoked angry scenes at first minister's question time. Nicola Sturgeon said Mr Carlaw "was more interested in standing up for Boris Johnson than standing up for Scotland."

She went on to condemn the prime minister's plan to allow Northern Ireland to stay in the Single Market but leave the Customs Union. She said non-border checks would probably not be acceptable to the EU and would seem to break all the promises made to Ireland at the start of the Brexit process. At Westminster the SNP have been trying to get all the opposition parties to agree to a motion of no-confidence in the Johnson government and to replace it with an interim government, perhaps led by Jeremy Corbyn, which would ask the EU for an extension to the Brexit deadline of 31st October in order for a general election to be held.

For the lucky few who have been able to flee the country at this difficult time, the World Cup rugby in Japan has provided at least one moment of happiness for Scotland. We beat Samoa (population 190,000) 34-Nil. But things went "agley" a little earlier when we ran up against someone our own size – Ireland

27 Scotland 3. Next up is Russia on Wednesday and then the giant-killing Japanese on Sunday. Is it unpatriotic to say I fear our team will be flying home soon ?



Lady Amherst pheasant

One fellow who won't be flying home soon is this unusual pheasant, a fine example of which was spotted in St Andrews last weekend. He should really be living in China but in 1826 his forebears were introduced to Bedfordshire by Lady Amherst, wife of the Governor General of India. His like has not been seen anywhere in Britain since March 2015 and no one knows how he got to Scotland. I think we should welcome him as a "new Scot" under the EU's "freedom of movement" agenda.

It might be the last thing we do as a proper European country.