

# Letter from Scotland

In the dark days of January it's easy to become depressed. Try living through this: a tightening Lockdown, hospitals overflowing with more Covid patients than ever, a shocking death toll of 5,102 or 7,074 (depending on how it's measured), a struggling "test and protect" system, schools closed, businesses going bust, and the economy bleeding from a self-inflicted wound called Brexit.

Not much wonder the man in charge of our mental health, Dr Alistair Cook, was asked to take the stand alongside Nicola Sturgeon at the First Minister's coronavirus briefing on Thursday.

In a very calm voice he told us; "It's OK not to feel OK." We know that during the spring lockdown, 25 per cent of people in a random survey reported feeling depressed, 19 per cent felt anxious and 35 per cent said they were distressed. It must surely be worse this time.



Into the woods...where demons dwell.

The official government advice is to seek help if symptoms become extreme. But everyone should spend time outdoors each

day. In the evenings, settle down with a book by the fire and keep a tray of fallen leaves by your side. (or chocolate Ed.)

It helps of course to have a little cheering news. The roll-out of the vaccines is under way. 200,000 Scots have already received their first dose – including half of all residents in nursing homes. There are signs that the post-Christmas surge in Covid cases is stabilising. And there's finally a recognition that "testing and protecting" has to get better.

The Scottish Government now has a £500 payment to help poor families self-isolate if they come in contact with Covid-19. And employers are required in law to allow people to work from home if at all possible. The tightening of lockdown has included a ban on "click and collect" services. Takeaway food shops are only allowed to serve at the door of the shop, or a hatch. And this comes after weeks of closure for pubs, restaurants and much of the tourism industry.

The Scottish Government has allocated £715 million for business support since October, but the opposition parties say little of it has got through the bureaucratic system and into company accounts. "The government is great at making announcements," the Conservative leader at Holyrood, Ruth Davidson MSP, told Nicola Sturgeon at First Minister's Questions, "but not at getting the money delivered into people's pockets."



9th December 2019 – Scottish Labour Leader, Richard Leonard, at the Sick Kids in Edinburgh to highlight the risks to the NHS and outline Labour's plans to invest and revive the health service. PHOTO Live Edinburgh News

For Richard Leonard, that was his last appearance as leader of the Scottish Labour Party. He resigned the next day, after months of mumblings in the party that he was not leading Labour out of its doldrums. It's currently at less than 20 per cent in the opinion polls with just four months to go before

the Scottish Parliamentary elections.

Another figure who will be missed on the national scene is Philip Tartaglia, the Catholic archbishop of Glasgow. He died at home on Wednesday, the feast day of the patron saint of Glasgow, St Mungo. He was 70 and had been self-isolating after testing positive for Covid-19. He was the son of an Italian family in Glasgow, a clever academic but also a parish priest and the former Bishop of Paisley. He held firmly to traditional Catholic teachings and recently joined the Scottish Catholic Bishops in opposing the closure of churches during the Lockdown.

I might say in passing that it's the only example I can think of when any of the churches commented on the government's Covid policies. They've been curiously stunned into silence, only addressing their own congregations and allowing the secular authorities to do all the heavy moral lifting. What ideas, for instance, are the religious communities putting forward for the brave New World that is supposed to emerge after Covid?

The Archbishop was also a keen supporter of Celtic Football Club and I wonder what he made of the team's training visit to Dubai, when the rest of us were being told to stay at home? The club has finally apologised and it was punished when one player went down with Covid and the rest had to isolate. Their second team could then only manage a draw against Hibernian on Monday night.

Finally, what do we do with a leader who turns out to be a disaster? In the 19<sup>th</sup> century we exiled him on an island in the middle of the Atlantic.

We learned this week that the key that locked Napoleon in his room on St Helena has been put up for auction after being unearthed in a house in Scotland. Nowadays, tinpot dictators are sometimes allowed to live out their lives quietly in

French suburbs or Arab kingdoms.

But where will Donald Trump end up after Wednesday? At one of his golf resorts in Scotland? And who will take charge of the key?