

## Speak Bonnie Noo

Does anyone remember his or her early attempts at speech? These might not have been my very first words, but I remember this incident very clearly. I might have been about two years old. Granny and I were “oot the back,” admiring daffodils which had just come into bloom. “Fit colour are they?” She asked me. “Awa!” I lisped. “Speak Bonnie Noo!” Granny instructed. “Ewo!” I announced. And so it was that I became bilingual and have been fluent in “Catbow” and English ever since. These days, of course, I describe daffodils as either “yalla” or “yellow,” depending on the appropriate language for the situation.

But I still mind one Catbow wifie asking me “Fit wye div they ken fit yer saying, in California?” Well, actually, I’ve added Spanish to the languages I speak in California. It’s not that far removed from Catbow, either. “AY CARAMBA!” or “Aye, Aye, Fit like?”

I see now that competitions are held and prizes are awarded for poetry and essays composed in “The Doric.” This is of great interest to me because in the 1950s and 1960s, speaking in local dialect was strongly discouraged. Some people even believed it showed an “ignorance and inferiority” and told their children not to associate with classmates who “spoke like that!”

Of course, dialect was forbidden in school. I remember a Nature Study test we had in Primary School. Name six insects. I kent my insects, I thought, and expected to get a gold star in my jotter. But I included “horny golach” in my list and the teacher marked me wrong! I got 5 out of 6 and no gold star.

She might have written “earwig” in the margin with a note that that was the English version, and I would have learned something. In those days you didn’t argue back, but I’m claiming my point and my gold star now. A horny golach is indeed an insect. Maybe somebody will write a prize-winning poem, in dialect, “Ode To The Horny Golach.”

Mind you, I think the teachers did indeed speak in dialect in privacy of the staff room. Mr. Smith, Jeemsie Smith, certainly taught High School math in the accent of the Sloch.

Although I was admonished to “Speak Bonnie!” it didna come naturally to Catbow folk, who had a penchant for “piittin’ their fit doon throo’t.” I still mind Great Auntie Jeankie, of New Street, asking visiting New Zealand cousins, “Did you flee over?” and then correcting herself. “Did you fly ower?”

Speaking “Catbow” has advantages when you’re in a situation where you don’t want anyone to know what you’re talking about. But you must exercise caution. An example of this is a story of Great Aunt Maggie who emigrated to New Zealand. A travelling salesman paid her a visit one day. She was irritated and sent him on his way, saying, “The back o’ yer heid’s a trate!” “Say that again wifie!” he retorted!

To those who read and write “Buckie,” we all miss Spike of the Buckie Paper, and his cast of Seatown characters. My favourite was Q. Coull, the sensitive poet of the Catbow, the Wordsworth of the Doric, who frequently had to spend caul nights on the Yardie Beach when Buckie Thistle lost. His brother-in-law, Silas Jappy, the Jags’ Number One Supporter chased poor Q. out of the house with threats of a beating wi’ the widden drifter. Spike’s column was the first time I had seen “written” Catbow.

I recently joined the Scottish Language Society, bit I’m nae richt sure if they speak “Catbow.” In fact I’m nae at a’ sure, fa it is that dis speak they wye they div. Bit it disna maitter ower muckle, because it’s a step in the richt direction.

Onywe, I can speak fitiver wye is notten for the partteecular occasion, and can “fair pit it on,” if I hiv till.

Nae only div I Speak Bonnie, I speak positively “Pan Loaf.” If only you could hear me say, “Richard, would you please pass me the Thingmert?”

OorMargit

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