

5th August 2023

Disappointments

"Sed ut acerbum est, pro benefactis quom malis messem metas!"

"It is a bitter disappointment when you have sown benefits, to reap injuries."

Plautus *Epidicus*

In 1785, Scotland's National Poet, Robert Burns, while working as a ploughman, accidentally turned over the nest of a harvest mouse, destroying the safe abode of one of nature's gentlest creatures. Burns thoughts turned to the plight of the "Wee, sleeket, cowrin', tim'rous beastie," in effect apologising to the little mouse for the disruption he'd caused. He then uses this event as a metaphor for the misfortunes which, from time to time, affect us all, one of the stanzas giving us this:

*But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!*

"The best laid schemes" can go awry, which is even harder to bear when, as the Roman playwright, Plautus, reminds us, we have "sown benefits" and "reap injuries". It doesn't seem fair. Yet, disappointments are a given. For no reason at all (and please excuse the vernacular), shit happens.

The issue, therefore, is how to handle such things. I wouldn't presume to offer advice to all the wise people who're out there. You'll have your own methodologies for coping with disappointments as much as I have mine. Such ways are informed by our own psyche, experiences, life-lessons, and the like. But this I will say: if disappointments are a given, they have to be dealt with, and only when they are dealt with, can we go on with life. Another of my favourite poets, Rudyard Kipling, offers this couplet in his wonderful poem, *If*:

*If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same ...*

Life *will* bring us both triumphs and disasters, wins and losses, successes and disappointments. That's for sure. But *both* are imposters. *Neither* can, or should, define our lives.

A prayer for today

When disappointments come my way, help me to get over them and keep going. Amen