

28th October 2023

Plans

"Malum est consilium, quod mutari non potest."

"It is a bad plan that cannot be changed."

Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae* (c. 43BC)

My wife and I have been doing some planning: financial decisions, events, holidays, repairs, choice of furnishings, time-management, and the like. We make plans all the time, of course, but the current flurry of decisions means plans have been a regular topic of conversation. Some plans can be "set in stone". Some are dependent on other people: coordinating diaries; getting folk to commit themselves. And for some plans, there are factors beyond our control and plans can be scuppered. The lines Robert Burns penned in *To a Mouse* – when he turns over a mouse's nest with his plough and alters the course of a little creature's future – sums it up:

*But Mousie, thou are 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.*

You're not on your own, little fella, Burns is saying. *We* don't have 20-20 foresight either. Our best of plans can go awry. We may have to deal with sorrow and disappointment too, instead of the joys we planned for.

Unlike Burns' "mousie", we can insure ourselves against unplanned contingencies, of course, and get financial compensation for some things that go wrong. (Witness the recent floods around the country.) But not all! Sometimes when plans are thwarted, nothing can compensate for the loss, and the sentimental value of what's gone is immeasurable.

What then do we do? I'm not the best at accepting changes to plans. But in my current round of planning, I look to Publilius Syrus for advice. This Syrian slave who became a talented Latin writer, reminds us that "It is a bad plan that cannot be changed". So today, I'll try to see that I can only make decisions as best I can and be ready to cope with changes that might come my way. Because *my* plans might go "aft agley" too ...

A prayer for today

***** "My times are in Thy hand," Lord.***

Can my plans be there too? Amen

***** William Freeman Lloyd***