

Friends

My family and I are happy people this week as Sunday the 25th of January is Burns night and so there is haggis in the supermarkets. For those who don't know, Robert (Rabbie) Burns is to Scotland what William Shakespeare is to England and every year to mark his birthday on the 25th of January 1759, we celebrate with a supper of Haggis, neeps and tatties and the singing and recitation of Burn's songs and poetry.

Although he is not very well known "south of the border" two lines from separate poems have entered daily conversation: "Would to God the gift were gi'e us to see ourselves as others see us" and "The best laid plans of mice and men gang (go) oft apley (awry)." It is a sign of the truth of both that they are so well-known.

Burns did not get on with the establishment Church, writing satirical poetry about it including "Holy Willie's Prayer" and "The Holy Fair" and this was reflective of a deeper issue within the Scottish Kirk at the time. He got into trouble with the Kirk on many occasions, not least because he "liked the lassies", but his primary concern was the oppressive control the Scottish Presbyterian Church held over the nation. The Kirk was in the habit of shaming people for "getting out of line" by making them sit on a stool in front of the congregation to be publicly told off and it was this sort of thing that Burns was against. During the time that he began to write, a split appeared in the Kirk between what were called the "Auld Lights" and the "New Lights". The Auld Lights were for Calvinism, fire and brimstone sermons and predestination whereas the New Lights put an emphasis on morality and personal aspects of faith, rather than just being blindly faithful. This was an approach that Burns could support and understand. Burns recognised that in order for reform to happen, the Kirk would need to take moral weakness and human frailty into account (as it continues to need to do today). Or as Jesus said, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"

However you spend it, have a happy Burn's Night.

God bless, Vicci