

"To a Mouse" (standard English translation) by Robert Burns- 1785

Small, crafty, cowering, timorous little beast,  
O, what a panic is in your little breast!  
You need not start away so hasty  
With argumentative chatter!  
I would be loath to run and chase you,  
With murdering plough-staff.

I'm truly sorry man's dominion  
Has broken Nature's social union,  
And justifies that ill opinion  
Which makes you startle  
At me, your poor, earth born companion  
And fellow mortal!

I doubt not, sometimes, but you may steal;  
What then? Poor little beast, you must live!  
An odd ear in twenty-four sheaves  
Is a small request;  
I will get a blessing with what is left,  
And never miss it.

Your small house, too, in ruin!  
Its feeble walls the winds are scattering!  
And nothing now, to build a new one,  
Of coarse grass green!  
And bleak December's winds coming,  
Both bitter and keen!

You saw the fields laid bare and wasted,  
And weary winter coming fast,  
And cozy here, beneath the blast,  
You thought to dwell,

Till crash! the cruel plough passed  
Out through your cell.

That small bit heap of leaves and stubble,  
Has cost you many a weary nibble!  
Now you are turned out, for all your trouble,  
Without house or holding,  
To endure the winter's sleety dribble,  
And hoar-frost cold.

But little Mouse, you are not alone,  
In proving foresight may be vain:  
The best laid schemes of mice and men  
Go often awry,  
And leave us nothing but grief and pain,  
For promised joy!

Still you are blessed, compared with me!  
The present only touches you:  
But oh! I backward cast my eye,  
On prospects dreary!  
And forward, though I cannot see,  
I guess and fear!

Questions:

1. What is a possible theme of this poem?
2. Why does this poem remain relevant for today's readers?
3. How does the speaker show that he sympathizes with the mouse?

4. Based on the author's observations, how does it seem the mouse has reacted to what has happened?
  
5. What happens to "the best laid schemes of mice and men"?
  
6. What was the speaker doing that made the incident happen?