

22nd May 2021

Hobgoblins

"A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds ..."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Essays, 'Self-Reliance'

To be a Pilgrim is the best-known hymn using the words of John Bunyan. It first appeared 1684 in "The Pilgrim's Progress", in a section relating to Mr Valiant-for-Truth. Bunyan's words were modified extensively by Percy Dreamer, one of the editors of the *English Hymnal* of 1906.

A friend recently asked whether there were "modern" words to Bunyan's hymn, some of the 17th century language now being obscure. Percy Dreamer had the same issue. This is how he gave us the final verse:

*Since, Lord, Thou dost defend us with Thy Spirit,
We know we at the end shall life inherit.
Then fancies flee away! I'll fear not what men say,
I'll labour night and day to be a pilgrim.*

while Bunyan's opening couplet for this verse was:

*Hobgoblin nor foul fiend can daunt his spirit;
He knows he at the end shall life inherit.*

Yes, I can see the point of the changes – and my friend's desire for modernisation. But I *do* like the word "hobgoblin", a name from centuries of folklore. And I like Bunyan's language because it personalises and doesn't generalise the issue. It's about *me* as the pilgrim, not "we" as a body of people. So I can put any construct I choose on the "hobgoblin" idea – a person who's doing me down; an injustice that's causing oppression; a structure that's affecting me badly; a personal struggle that's threatening my stability. It may even be the "hobgoblin of little minds" that produces distress. But the truth is that for *this* pilgrim, *none* of these hobgoblins, in whatever shape or form, will have an ultimate victory.

However they appear, whatever they seek to do to me, hobgoblins will come and go, often joined by this or that "foul field" in their attempt to do me damage. But my spirit remains undaunted. Inheriting fullness of life will always be possible. "Come wind, come weather", I'll still "labour night and day" to be the best pilgrim I can be.

A prayer for today

"When fancies flee away", the constancy of God's love will remain. Amen.