

31st October 2022

Treat

"Treat them greatly, and they will show themselves great."

Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays on Prudence*

Halloween is a contraction of "All Hallows' Evening", celebrated in a number of countries on 31st October, the eve of the Western Christian Feast of All Hallows (or All Saints' Day). The traditions of this time of year are legion and differ from country to country, but they all largely focus on humour or ridicule, and are designed to confront the power of death.

In Scotland, the tradition was that of "guising", where the children would dress up in funny clothes. The tradition of "dressing up" on Halloween originated from the belief that the world was inhabited by vengeful ghosts, restless spirits of the dead, that had to be scared off – and pronto! The scarier your costume was, the more spirits were likely to flee from your presence. So, when I was young, I dressed up. Not that I knew about evil spirits, but I loved going round the local houses to perform a party-piece, in order to convince the householder that I worthy of a small reward – nuts and fruit in my younger day.

In the United States, this is defined as "Trick or Treat", presumably designed to scare the householder into playing ball by giving the juvenile caller a treat in case the threat of playing a trick was *actually* put into practice. Who would want to run the risk of having a trick played on them when you could get rid of the dressed-up kids on your doorstep with the smallest of treats? I'd be happy to respond to the "treat" part myself, as I wouldn't be keen on risking the "trick", whatever it might be.

Call me cynical if you like, but the American "trick or treat" model smacks of intimidation and bribery to me. I prefer the feel of "guising", I have to say, where a reward, a treat, is given to a deserving child, without fear of the "trick" as retribution – however mild that threat might be. With no condition on either side, a silly song, a stupid poem, a fancy costume might be worth a small reward. So, let the treat be both ways. And let's not bother with the "trick" part at all. "Treat them greatly", Emerson suggests. And even though that might not enhance anyone greatness on Halloween, it looks like it could be better than the alternative.

A prayer for today

*Can I treat someone well today, and show myself to be great,
just as I feel great when I am treated well?*