

26th November 2021

Troubled

"The tricks o' knaves, or fash o' fools, thou bear'st the gree!"

Robert Burns, Address to the Toothache

In *Address to the Toothache*, Robert Burns paints an evocative picture of someone brought low by a toothache, and gives thought, in metaphysical fashion, to the nature of toothache itself. It is, he affirms, amongst the ills that befall us, the worst of all. Besides all the tricks that knaves can come up with, in the midst of all that troubles us unnecessarily – the *fash o' fools* – it is The Toothache that *bear'st the gree* – has the first place above all else. Anyone who's had a raging toothache will know the truth of that.

But I want to take a different tack today and look at the Scot's word *fash*. It's a 16th century word meaning to trouble or vex, from the Old French *fascher* (Modern French *fâcher*), "to anger or displease", and is derived from the same Latin root that gives us "fastidious". In another of Burns' epic poems, *Holy Willie's Prayer*, he has the hypocritical Willie seeking forgiveness for his sexual proclivities, and confessing, *At times I'm fash'd wi' fleshly lust*. Willie is troubled by his urges!

We are all troubled, of course, by the pain we suffer in our lives – physical, emotional, mental or spiritual. And we should be rightly vexed by our failures, our sins, and the ways our human failings draw us away from a godly life. Being "fash'd" in such ways is normal and natural. But it's when we are "fashed" by the things of the world, troubled or vexed by unimportant things, when we give our energies and concerns to fruitless worries, that we become unstuck. In John 14, Jesus says to his anxious friends, "Let not your hearts be troubled". And in Matthew's 6 he says:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ... Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? ... Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

You want to worry? Then go ahead and worry, but only about the things that are worth being troubled and vexed about. My granny would say, "Dinnae fash yersel', son." Today I hear Jesus saying the same.

A prayer for today

I'm vexed, Lord. But please forgive me for being fashed about the wrong things. Amen

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