

19th November 2021

Check

**“Teach me to feel that thou art always nigh;
Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,
To check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh;
Teach me the patience of unanswered prayer.”**
George Croly, Spirit of God, descend upon my heart

During September and October, I visited a dentist, an optician and an audiologist. They were all relatively “routine” appointments, so I’m *not* falling apart. But there were a couple of small things to be seen to, some issues “which we’ll just keep an eye on, I think”, and others that were “just fine”. It’s my age! Regular checks matter. There are many of you who will have more health-checks than teeth, eyes and ears to see to regularly. And we’re told that we can do “self-examination” checks to make sure anything untoward is noticed in good time. Yes! It’s worth checking things out ...

George Croly, a nineteenth century Irish poet, novelist and historian, was rector of St Stephen Walbrook in London for twenty-five years. While he was there, he wrote the hymn, *Spirit of God*, a verse of which is quoted above. It’s an honest hymn, in which Croly identifies the weaknesses of the human character, the struggles of Christian service and, as a consequence, our need to be fully Spirit-led. “Teach me the struggles of the soul to bear,” he writes, “to check the rising doubt, the rebel sigh.”

I suspect Croly was using the word “check” in the sense of stopping something, looking for ways for doubt to be banished, for the “rebel sigh” to cease. But for me, that’s a forlorn hope, for we’ll never be able to free ourselves from our human constraints. Doubts will always be with us. Sighs – be they rebel or otherwise – are part of who and what we are. Instead, I see Croly’s use of the word “check” in a more constructive way. We still need to stop to check-*out* our faith regularly, to be honest about our doubts, to see where our sighs are coming from. We need to pause and take stock, not to assume all is well or even that everything is awful, but to take time to check things out with God, in an honest and self-aware fashion.

It’s worth checking things out ... If my teeth and sight and hearing need regular checks, shouldn’t my spirituality be checked regularly too?

A prayer for today

A routine stop to visit with you, Lord, or might there be some work that needs to be done? It’s worth checking, don’t you think? Amen