

"This tabernacle"—The house in which we now dwell is not our only dwelling-place. In the context a comparison is expressly instituted between two successive residences. The design of the Spirit in this word is to preserve us from bestowing all our regard on this tabernacle while another is more worthy. "We that are in this tabernacle do groan": the conception which answers to this intimation as an echo to a sound is, there are some not in this tabernacle, but in another, and groaning is not their occupation to-day. We occupy this tabernacle to-day; but to-morrow we may own a more princely mansion. Nor does the Scripture spread out before us an indefinite series of changes. To them that are in Christ Jesus, after one change all will be fixed for ever. Those who go in by the gate into the City of God shall go no more out. When the earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. "Blessed are the home-sick, for they shall get home." Sweet home!

"Burdened."—There may be some who, for a time, could scarcely recognise this as a description of their own condition. The young, healthy, and prosperous, are comparatively free from the pressure of a heavy load. Their hearts for a time are as light as their limbs. They trip along life as if they were chasing butterflies in a flowery meadow. To a certain extent, and for a certain period, this is not the creature's sin, but the Creator's kind appointment. The cares of age laid on the heart of a child would crush his spirit, and render him incapable of fulfilling his task when he should come of age. In mercy to men, a certain brightness is permitted to hover on the horizon during the early morning of life's day; for if the blossom did not open, the fruit would never swell: but even in childhood so no weights begin to press, and when youth has passed, they constitute a great and perpetual burden, which will not drop off till the burden and its bearer drop together into the grave. The cares of house and children, of business and company, of friendships and enmities, increase and multiply until the beams of the tabernacle are creaking prematurely under the accumulated weight.

These burdens are useful. They may be inventoried among the "all things" that work together for good. They are the weary who can truly long for rest, or truly enjoy it when it comes. The sorrows of earth will enhance the joys of heaven. Not that human sufferings in any measure or degree can purchase a right to reward in the great day; but if an abundant entrance is secured through faith in Christ, the rugged rocks and scorching sand of the desert will make the glassy, golden streets of the New Jerusalem feel more smooth beneath the pilgrim's feet.

In one sense the heaviest part of the burden which we bear in this tabernacle is our own sin. Here, however, the apostle, I think, is not speaking of guilt still defiling the conscience. Sin, as to its curse and doom, has for these pilgrims been wholly taken away. Indeed, while sin is not forgiven, the sinful, as a general rule, are not much burdened by its weight. It is when sin is forgiven that the sinner most bitterly complains of his sin. Strange, yet divinely true, it is when Christ has taken, or is taking sin away, that the Christian feels it lying heavy on his heart. The conscience, now tender, is greatly disturbed by its defiling presence, although its condemnation has been entirely removed. "The body of this death," even though its spirit is cast out, constitutes for Christ's redeemed the weightiest portion of the burden under which they groan.

"We groan."—A groan is nature's outlet for grief. In some kinds of disease, to forbid a groan would sensibly add to the patient's suffering. It indicates also a desire for relief. Its double meaning is, "I suffer, and would fain be free."

This desire does not by itself constitute a mark of grace. It belongs to nature, and is often experienced in great strength where there is no spiritual light or life. The discontented make many changes in order to escape from suffering; but the suffering follows them into every sphere. A master may dismiss his servant against whom his anger was stirred, but he has not thereby been delivered from the disturber of his peace. His own irritable temper remains, a tenant on a long lease, defying all his impotent processes of ejection. Mere groans are not sure marks of grace. Some are weary of this world who are by no means ready for the next.

"Not that we would be unclothed."—Mark this. To be unclothed means to put off this tabernacle. It means to die, and return to corruption in the grave. Even Paul, after he had attained triumphant faith and blessed hope, shrinks from the dissolution of the body. Even this man, who knew right

well that a crown of righteousness was ready for his head, starts at the cold image of Death, and distinctly intimates that the prospect is unpleasant: "But we have no wish for the unclothing." I like this; this is good for me. I learn here that positive love of closing with the King of Terrors is not a necessary mark of Christ's redeemed people. Some of them at some period may have been brought into such a state of mind, but this is not a characteristic which every believer must always possess.

I love this warm life. I shrink from death. And therein I think I do not sin. God is not displeased with me for loving that which he has bestowed. If by faith in His Son, and through the ministry of His Spirit, He make me willing to give it up when He recalls it, enough: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power." But this warm clothing which He has wrapped round my life—He does not expect that I should at this moment wish it away.

Christians love life for many reasons. They love it, first of all, not as Christians, but as sentient beings. They love it in common with those who know not Christ, but who see the sunlight, and feel the balmy air, and tread the flowery ground. They love it in common not only with their fellow-men, but in common with the brutes that perish. They love life in common with the cattle that browse on the meadows, and the birds that warble in the trees, and the insects that flutter in the sunbeam. But Christians love life with a deeper, more intelligent love than other creatures, because the gifts which are in their own nature sweet, are sweeter when they are received from a Father's hand.

It is a mistake to suppose that the worldly enjoy their portion here, and that the disciples of Christ permit their religion to embitter all the sweets of earth, postponing the prospect of enjoyment until they pass through the gates of the grave into a future and distant heaven. This is a mischievous error. Those who hope in Christ for the world to come, enjoy the world that now is better because of that hope. The society of friends, the shelter of home, the sleep of night, the dawn of morning, the daily bread, the draught of cool water in the noonday toil—all these good things are sweeter to the man who has a better portion behind them than they are to the man who has nothing else.

The disciples of Jesus enjoy this life, moreover, as a field of useful labour. Work may be done here which cannot be done beyond the boundary of the present life. They who are bought with a price delight to serve the Lord who bought them; and this is the place where the work of the kingdom must be done.

"But clothed upon."—This disciple fully comprehends and clearly expresses what he likes and what he does not like in connection with living and dying. He is well aware, indeed, that the "unclothing" comes between him and the blessed immortality. He is willing to meet the necessity of putting off "this mortal coil," for the sake of the glory that shall follow; but he frankly confesses that the act of putting off is not agreeable. He does not refuse that process of stripping, but he tells us plainly that he does not like it. He not only submits to it—he bounds forward to meet it joyfully; but the cause of this buoyancy is a love, not of the fire and water of the passage, but of the large place to which the passage leads.

"That mortality might be swallowed up of life."—The dead seem to be swallowed up when they are laid in the grave, or dropped over the ship's side into the sea. Earth and sea must yet give up their dead; but in the first instance, and for time, they swallow, they devour their victims.

Now, as the dead are swallowed up by the sea when they sink in it, Death itself will one day be swallowed up. Who or what will devour the devourer? LIFE.

Christ has said in express terms, "I am the resurrection, and the life." They who fall asleep in Jesus drop, in the very act of dying, into the life eternal. Mortality—the liability to death—even the capability of dying—will, to the redeemed, be lost, as the bodies of the dead who died at sea are lost in the abyss. Death is swallowed up—is lost in life. The dying day of a Christian is his birthday; the departure is the entrance. The passage may be dark and narrow, but it leads into life. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."—From "The Anchor of the Soul, and other Sermons." T. Nelson and Sons.

The table of life is abundantly supplied. If we don't eat so fast, it will taste the better; if we don't eat too much, we shall be better nourished; if we don't snatch, there will be enough for all.—C. G. Ames.