

THE TWO TABERNACLES.

A SERMON BY THE LATE REV. WILLIAM ARNOT.

"We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." 2 Corinthians v. 1.

IT is through the Gospel that life and immortality have been brought to light. Beyond the range of revelation these subjects lie in the deepest darkness. A feeble fluttering guess was all that unaided men could ever reach regarding a life beyond the grave. Some dim, indefinite consciousness of a higher destiny may tremble in the immortal spirit, but in the absence of a light from heaven, there is no distinct vision, no sustaining hope. A jar may be charged with electric fire, and capable, in certain circumstances, of giving forth light and heat; yet it remains isolated, all is dull and dark and silent. You cannot distinguish that charged, susceptible vessel from another of similar shape and size that is not so charged. When a certain sharp point is brought near the susceptible vessel, sparks of living light are emitted; whereas, though the same sharp point is brought near the other vessel, all will remain dark and dead as before. Thus there is in a human spirit a susceptibility and a capacity which lies dormant, indeed, as long as man is left to himself, but which leaps into life as soon as the Word of God is pointed to the heart. The love of Christ kindles in a human breast the blessed hope of immortality; but it is only in a human breast that even the love of Christ could generate such a flame. We are low; but even in our depths we possess a constitution that is capable of being elevated; and the Gospel of grace contains and exerts the power which prevails to quicken the dead, and reconcile the alienated. The fallen have no hope in themselves; but even to the fallen the Gospel brings glad tidings of great joy.

In the preaching of Christ and his apostles the world is represented as a wilderness, and human-kind as pilgrims passing through it. No other book than the Bible treats men thus. It has courage and faithfulness to tell us the truth. If you surrender yourself to its guidance, you must walk as a stranger and pilgrim on the earth; you must repeat over again Israel's wandering from the Egypt of this world to the rest that lies beyond the swellings of Jordan.

This is one reason why worldly minds dislike the Bible. It is like death and the grave to them, because it brings them alongside of eternity, and keeps them there. The Unseen converses with them through the pages of that book, and compels them to feel that the veil which separates them from

the judgment seat is as thin as the leaves on which the letter lies. This is not a pleasant position for one who is unforgiven, unreconciled. The fool says in his heart, "No God." Those who are not at peace with God are not at home in the Bible.

Let us examine the text word by word, that we may ascertain its meaning, and submit our hearts to its power.

"Tabernacle" is a frail, temporary dwelling, generally of cloth, which men make for shelter by night, when they expect to be so short a time in the place that it is not worth while to erect a more substantial edifice. The Hebrews in the wilderness dwelt in tents, shifting their encampment from day to day. Travellers and soldiers use them still. A few posts, a few cords, and a few pieces of cloth constitute the dwelling. It is easily set up, and easily taken down again.

The body is frequently compared to a tent. It is very beautiful, but very frail. Here we come abreast of an unfathomable mystery. Seeing it is made so perfect, why is it made so feeble? All the skill of all the world could not make even a tolerable imitation of its mechanism; and yet the prick of a pin will turn it into dust. It is as glorious as the starry sky, and yet as fading as a summer flower. Perhaps the power and providence of God are more vividly displayed in the human body as it has been constituted, than they would have been by structures less liable to injury and decay. An infant in a dark and dangerous path dare not stir from his father's side; whereas a robust youth may select his own route, and return at his own time. Our Father in heaven knows that it is difficult to keep His children close to Himself as matters stand. I suppose it would have been still more difficult if the child had been intrusted with greater power. The age of the antediluvians seems to have encouraged them in their rebellion. Humanity in its first stage, enjoy-

ing a larger liberty, showed itself a wild beast; in the second stage it was held more shortly by the head. In Him we live, and move, and have our being. The tendency to rebellion must be persistent and strong within a creature so feeble attempts to cast the Creator's cords away.

On the other hand, when the spirit of a dear child has through Christ been attained, the frailty of the trustor makes the trust more sweet. His strength is made perfect in our weakness.

Perhaps we may also throw out the suggestion, that though the mere frailty of one habitation would not prove to its inmate that a more solid mansion was prepared for his use, yet if we know that the abiding home is ready, the shaking of the temporary tabernacle under which we are getting shelter to-day will contribute to remind us of another rest, and quicken our desire for an abundant entrance on its blessedness.



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