

1. That stability is the ground of fruitfulness: Psalm i. 3, "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away." A tree, after being lifted, and planted sometimes here, sometimes there, cannot be fruitful: "The rolling stone gathers no fog." Unstable as water, can never prevail. Doubts, fears, and dryness in the soul's case, is a necessary consequence of unsettledness.—Consider,

2. That stability is the beginning of comfortable experiences in religion. We cannot think to thrive in a trade, till we settle to it. A fool is always beginning, leaves off, begins again, and so on; he never brings any thing to perfection.—Consider,

3. That stability is a fence against temptations. The wavering professor is a hopeful prey to temptation. The town that begins to parley, is next door to surrendering. The Jews saw Pilate begin to waver, and then they plied him to condemn Christ, till they carried him off his feet.—Consider,

*Lastly*, That stability is the foundation of serviceableness for God. The vessels of the temple were of gold, silver, brass, &c. but none of glass, no crystal ones; these were too brittle for temple-service. So wavering professors will never be honoured of God to be serviceable for him, but they will do much harm to the way of the Lord.

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CREATION'S GROANS CONSIDERED AND IMPROVED.\*

SERMON XXVI.

ROM. viii. 22,

*For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travelleth in pain together until now.*

IF we look abroad into the world, we cannot miss to perceive it in a feverish condition; the whole head sick, the whole heart faint; good men and God's good creatures also groaning under a weight of misery. If we look above us into heaven, we cannot but see that it is an holy God who has cast them into, and keeps them in this miserable condition. But withal we may conclude, that it shall not

\* Delivered January, 1716.

be always so; this fever of the creation will have a cool. A gracious God will not suffer it always to be ill with good men and his good creatures. Therefore the apostle, ver. 18 of the chapter before us, taking a view of the suffering lot of the saints, of which himself had a large share, by faith looks through the cloud of miseries into which the saints are now wrapt up, and beholds a glory that is to be revealed in them, a lightsome day that shall succeed this dark night, when all the clouds shall be scattered, never more to gather. He confirms the revelation of that glory from two considerations. 1. The creatures, ver. 19, with earnest expectation wait for it. 2. The saints, ver. 23, anxiously look and long for it. And neither of these can be in vain, for they are of God's implanting; and justice stands not against the satisfying of these appetites raised by the sanctifying Spirit in the saints, and by the creating hand in the creatures.

As to the first of these, the apostle, 1. Asserts that longing of the creatures for the revelation of that glory in the saints, ver. 19. 2. He shews the misery they are under, from which they are so anxious to be delivered, vanity, ver. 20; corruption, ver. 21. 3. That their deliverance is connected with, and must be suspended till the revelation of that glory in the saints, ver. 21. 4. He shews how uneasy they are in the meantime, ver. 22.—Thus much for the connection.

In the words of the text, we have,

1. The party whose uneasiness is here taken notice of: "The whole creation," or every creature in heaven and on earth, is uneasy. Yet this phrase is not so universal, but that it admits of some exceptions, as Mark xvi. 15, "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature;" yet not to the angels, glorified saints, devils, &c. The limitation is every creature made for the use of man, in heaven or on earth, which, because of their relation to him, were made subject to vanity on occasion of his sin. This shews a good reason for that phrase, Mark xvi. 15, "Preach the gospel to *every creature*;" that is, the gospel, which is gospel or good tidings to every creature; for not only man, but the creatures that were sunk in misery with him, shall have the advantage of it. As they smarted by the first Adam's sinning, they shall be restored by virtue of the second Adam's suffering. Acts iii. 21, "Whom the heavens must receive, until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." So here are to be excepted,

(1.) The angels, for as they were not made for man, so they are already perfectly happy, as the courtiers of the great King, who stand before the throne continually, as is signified by that phrase, Matth. xviii. 10, "That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven."

(2.) The devils. For though they be most uneasy, and carry their hell about with them, 2 Pet. ii. 4, "For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;" yet as they were not made for man, so man did not make them miserable, but they made man so. Besides, the creature here was subjected in hope, ver. 20; but the case of devils is absolutely hopeless; for them there is no Saviour, and to them there is no promise.

(3.) Men themselves. For as, 1 Cor. xv. 27, "But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest, that He is excepted who did put all things under him;" so when it is said, "the whole creation groaneth," &c. it is manifest he is excepted, who was the cause of the groaning of them all. The reprobate, some of them are in hell already, others are posting on, both groaning, but in vastly different degrees. Yet they are not meant here, for their groans shall never have an end. But all the effects of the curse that are to be found in the universe this day, shall with them be swept out of the world into the lake at the great day, there to be settled on them as their proper base: Rev. xx. 14, "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

(4.) The elect. Some of them are in heaven, and groan no more. The unconverted elect groan under outward miseries; but they are not meant here, for, being immersed in wickedness with the rest of the world, they are far from the earnest expectation which the creatures here have, ver. 19. Believers groan most sensibly, but they must also be excepted here, as being opposed to this creation or creature. Ver. 23, "And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."

Now, these being excepted, it remains, that by the whole creation we understand all the rest of the creatures made at first for the use of man. They are all uneasy. The visible heavens were made the roof of his house, the earth his floor; the sun, moon, and stars, were made to be his lights, the air to breathe in, the wind to refresh him; the various produce of the earth to afford him necessaries, conveniences, and delights. He was lord of sea and land. Fishes, fowls, and beasts of the earth, were all at his command. While he stood, they were all of them most easy in his service. But now that matters are reversed with him, their situation is also reversed; none of them failed to share in his misery. For though vanity, corruption, and misery, first sprang up in the man, they did not halt there, but spread over the face of the whole earth, diffused themselves over the

brinish waters of the sea, and ascended through the air to the very glorious lights in heaven.—In the words of the text we have,

2. The agony that the whole creation or creatures are in,—a great agony. It is expressed two ways, both metaphorical.

(1.) They groan. This is a metaphor, taken from a man, with a heavy burden on his back, which so straitens him, that he cannot freely draw his breath; and when he gets it, it is a groan. So there is a heavy weight lying on the whole creation, that makes it groan; or, in other words, creatures got their death-wounds that day Adam got his, and so they are groaning still with the groans of a deadly wounded man. His sin stung them to the heart, and so they groan. The weight they are lying under is the weight of the curse, which binds vanity and corruption on them by virtue of the sin of man: Gen. iii. 17, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake." A weight under which, though stupid impenitent man groans not to God, yet his very beasts, and the very earth on which he walks, do.

(2.) They "travail in pain." A metaphor taken from a woman bringing forth a child. The pains of child-birth are exquisite pains, and put the patient both to groans and strong cries. And into this condition is the whole creation brought by man's sin. They are in pangs, and they cry out of their pangs. But though birth-pains are sore pains, yet they are hopeful. There is thus some hope that the creature will be delivered. They are travailing in pain with the hinds, to cast out their sorrows, Job xxxix. 3. They have conceived vanity and misery, and they have gone long with it, and they are travailing in pain to be delivered of the unhappy birth. They groan and also they travail. One that has too heavy a burden on his back, groans continually while it is on. But blessed be the holy and wise God, that has made the pains of travail intermitting; now and then a shower. So the creatures have their ordinary pains that are never off them. But sometimes, as at this day, they have extraordinary, and as it were travailing-pains, which will off again, though they will return: Joel i. 18, "How do the beasts groan! the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture: yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate."—In our text we have,

3. The mournful concert they make: they groan together and travail together. Not together with us, ver. 23, but together among themselves. Before sin entered into the world, they all looked blythe, and as it were sung together: but now they have changed their tune, and groan together. The beasts and the fowls groan from the earth, and the very heavens echo back to them the same strain. So many creatures as there are, so many groaners, each of them with their mournful note.—We have,

4. How long they have sung to the melancholy tune: "Until now." They began at Adam's fall, and they have groaned ever since, and travailed on till the apostles' days, but they had not done with it then. Nay, they have groaned and travailed till now in our days, long five thousand seven hundred years, and yet their burden is not off their backs, nor have they yet got their sorrows cast out. And how long it may be to their delivery, we know not. But one thing we know, it will never be till the world end by the general conflagration, when the new heavens and the new earth may rise, like the phoenix, out of their own ashes.—We have,

*Lastly*, The auditory that listens to the mournful concert: *We*, "We know," &c. "We believers, we serious Christians, hear and certainly know the mournful ditty." Can the shepherd who is sent to notice the sheep, not observe when they make their moan for lack of their food, especially when the whole flock is crying together? Were all the men of a city groaning of their wounds, and all the women travailing in pains together, that person must be deaf that would not hear the sound, and he must have an heart of adamant that would not be affected. But the whole creation, above us and about us, are groaning and travailing together, and that for our sakes; yet a sinful generation has no ears to hear, no heart to be affected with it, and with sin which is the cause. But serious Christians, awake to it, cannot miss to hear, and their ears affect their hearts. You will observe, that they hear it distinctly, not confusedly, as we apprehend sometimes we hear a thing, which we are not sure whether it be a real voice, or only an illusion of the fancy. We know, says the apostle, we are sure, it is no fancy. Some creatures have a voice that every body can hear. But there is no creature so mute, but a serious Christian, whose senses are exercised, can discern its voice. David could hear the silent heavens, day and night, and also know their meaning, Psalm xix. 1, 2; and verse 3, "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." O that we could hear their voice this day! and that their groans and cries might pierce our hearts for sin.

This subject is highly important.—There is contained in it the three following doctrines, which in their order we propose to consider.

DOCT. I. That the whole creation, made for the use of man, groans under the sin of man.

DOCT. II. That the creatures' pains, under the sin of man, are travailing pains, sore indeed, but hopeful, they will in due season be delivered from them.

DOCT. III. That the whole creation makes a mournful concert in the ears of serious Christians, by their groans under man's sin.

We begin with

DOCT. I. That the whole creation made for the use of man, groaneth under the sin of man.

What is to be offered on this doctrine shall be comprehended under the three following heads of discourse.

I. In what respects the creation, or creatures are said to groan ; for many of them, as the earth, &c. are properly incapable of groaning.

II. What distresses the creatures so much, that they groan ? What has man's sin done to them, to make them groan under it ?

III. How, and by what right, can the harmless creatures be made to groan for our sake ? They have not sinned. True, these poor sheep what have they done ?

IV. I shall add a practical improvement of the subject.

I am, then, to shew in what respects the creation, or the creatures are said to groan, for many of them, as the earth, &c. are properly incapable of groaning.—Here I observe,

1. That the sensible part of the creation really groans, each after its kind : Joel i. 18, "How do the beasts groan ? the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture ; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate." The beasts, the birds, all that can groan, do groan. And these may be admitted as the mouth of the rest ; they groan out their own misery, and the misery of their mate-fellows, that are in the same condemnation with them, while they stand about, as it were, looking on, like a company of foreigners, one of whom only being capable of speaking our language, speaks for the rest.

2. The whole creation appears in a mournful mood and groaning posture. The sun, the eye of the world, has often a veil drawn over it for many days ; and he with the rest of the lights of heaven are covered with blackness, like mourners. The earth, trees and plants upon it, lay aside their ornaments, and every head among them is bald ; because man, whom they were appointed to serve, is slain by the great murderer, the devil ; therefore all his servants are gone into mourning.

3. The whole creation, if they could, would groan, for they have good reason, as we will see afterwards. As our Lord says, Luke x. 40, "If these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out." The pressure they are under would make them groan, if they had sense or reason to understand it. It is God's goodness to man that his sense of hearing is not more quick than it is, otherwise he could never have rest, there being always some noise

in the world. And it is well for man that the creatures cannot represent their misery as it deserves, otherwise they would deafen him with their complaints, and make him continually uneasy with their groans.

4. The Spirit of God is grieved, and groaneth (so to speak) in the creatures. God is every where present, quickening, influencing, preserving, and governing all the creatures, according to their several natures: Acts xvii. 25, "Seeing he giveth to all, life, and breath, and all things:" Heb. i. 3, "Upholding all things by the word of his power." The sun cannot shine without him; nor the earth produce its fruits, nor its fruits be serviceable to man, without him. Whatever is profitable or pleasant in the creatures, is but some drops of the divine goodness distilled into them, for his glory and man's good, Hence it is evident, that the abuse done to the creatures riseth to God himself. As if a mother having suitably sweetened the meat to a child, he should, after all, throw it away, his doing so is a wrong to her as well as the abused creature. Therefore, the abusing of God's works is forbidden in the third commandment, under the notion of taking God's name in vain. For the creature's goodness is in effect God's goodness: "For there is none good but one, that is, God," Matth. xix. 17. And therefore (with reverence be it spoken) God groans from the creatures against sinners: Amos ii. 13, "Behold, (says God), I am pressed under you, as a cart is pressed that is full of sheaves." And as the Lord from heaven cried to Saul, Acts ix. 4, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" so, if men had ears, to hear, the drunkard, for instance, might hear God, from the creature, saying, "Man, why abusest thou me?" &c.

*Lastly*, Serious Christians groan in behalf of the creatures. Man was made to be the mouth of the creatures, to speak out what they could not: for which cause God gave him a tongue and speech, therefore called his glory. When sin entered, man's mouth was closed in that respect. When grace comes into the soul, the Lord says, "Ephphatha," that is, "be opened," Mark vii. 34. So man becomes the mouth of the creation again, Psalm xix. 1. Thus believers, seeing the reason the creatures have to groan, groan out their case for them, acknowledging, before God and the world, the misery and hard case they are brought into by man's sin.

II. We come now to inquire, what distresses the creatures so much, that they groan? What has man's sin done to them, to make them groan under it?

Why, truly, they got a large share of the curse to bear for man's sake: Gen. iii. 17, "Cursed," said God to Adam, "is the ground

for thy sake." The curse coming upon man is also felt upon the earth. Wherefore, but because of its relation to man? It bears him, and feeds him. And if so, that curse would spread to the visible heavens that cover him, and afford him light, and that nourish the earth which nourishes him. If this be not enough, remember they are all to go to the fire together at length; and surely that makes it. So thus man's sin, as brimstone, is scattered on his habitation: 2 Pet. iii. 10, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat: the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." Verse 11, "Seeing then, all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be, in all holy conversation and godliness?"

This curse has subjected the creature to vanity. It has squeezed much of the fat out of it that was put into it at the creation; and from a full ear has brought it to an empty husk. And it is thereby also in bondage to corruption. It is made a stage of sin, a scene of misery, and liable to destruction as such. But to come to particulars.

1. The whole creation, by man's sin, has fallen far short of its beneficial and nutritive quality, in comparison of what it originally was at its creation. Man has not that benefit of the creatures for which they were appointed at first. While he stood, such sap and nourishment was in them, that could have afforded him all things for necessity, convenience, and delight, without toil. But sin gave them such a shock, that much of that sap is shaken out of them, and so man must now wring hard to get but a very little nourishment from them. This makes so much barrenness in the earth, which so meanly rewards all the toil of the husbandman. It brings forth thorns and thistles plentifully, under the influence of that curse, while it makes a very sober increase otherwise. And what is the procuring cause of all this but sin? Psalm cvii. 34, "He turneth a fruitful land into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." We see how it is bound up, that the beasts of the field cannot get their food. And if the influences of the heavens were not restrained, it would not be so; the earth would not be iron, if the heavens were not brass. Under this vanity the whole creation groaneth.

2. The whole creation, by man's sin, has come far short of its ultimate end, the honour and glory of God. God's revenue of glory from the creature is mightily diminished by the sin of man. The whole creation was made to be a book, wherein men might read the

name of God; a stringed instrument, by which men were to praise him; a looking-glass, in which to behold his glory. But, alas! sin has drawn a veil over our eyes. Men may say they are unlearned, and cannot read more than what may make them inexcusable: "For the invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse," Rom. i. 20. The book is as it were sealed. They have lost the art of praising; hence the instrument is hung by, being to little purpose in the possession of such persons. They care not for beholding his glory, therefore the looking-glass is overlooked, and very little use is made of it. Under this vanity they groan also.

3. The nature of the whole creation is in some sort altered. When God looked on his creatures, he saw that they were very good, Gen. i. 31. And that is a sad alteration that makes them groan. Sin has cast the whole creation into a feverish disorder. There is an evil which accompanies them now, that they long to be rid of. Man complains and groans under the evil of the creatures, and they complain and groan under him. The transgression of man is heavy on the earth, and the case of the earth bound up from his service is heavy upon him. Where is the creature that has no evil about it now? The sun sometimes scorches man, and burns up the fruits of the ground; at other times his absence makes the earth as iron, that he cannot stand before the cold. The air often sickens and kills him. The distempered winds often sink him in the sea, out of the earth, where he is to get his meat, sometimes he meets with poisonous herbs. What is the cause of all this? Impute it not to the creatures as they came from the creating hand of God, but to the fall of man, whom nothing could have hurt, had he stood in his integrity.

4. The creature has fallen into the hands of God's enemies, and is forced to serve them. When man stood, all the creatures were at his beck, and were ready to come to him at his call. But when he left God, all the creatures would have left him, the sun would have shined no more on him, the air would have refused his breathing in it, the earth would not have fed nor carried him more, if God had not subjected them anew to him; Rom. viii. 20, "For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope." We see how far some of them have gone in renouncing their service to him, Job xxxix. 7, 8. And ver. 9, "Will the unicorn be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib?" And they would all have left their service, as a faithful servant will leave his master, when he goes out in rebellion against

his sovereign, but that they were forced to go along ; and therefore they groan.

5. They are used by sinners to ends for which God never made them. They suffer violence, they are abused, and therefore they groan. God made them for his honour, men abuse them to his dishonour. Never did a beast speak but once, Balaam's ass, Num. xxii. 28, 30, and that was a complaint on man for abusing it to an end for which God never made it. The dumb ass rebuked the madness of the prophet, that would have it to carry him in a way God forbade him to go, and where the angel stood to oppose him. And, could the creature speak to us, we would hear many complaints that way. God gave the creatures to be servants to man, but man has sold them for slaves to his lusts ; and who would not groan to be so maltreated ? There are two things which make hard service :—

(1.) Labour in vain, continual toil, and yet no profit by it. The creatures have no intermission in their service: Eccl. i. 5, 8, "All things are full of labour." But O, where is the profit of it all ? The sun riseth, and runs his race every day, and never resteth. But what is the issue ? If it were to let men see to read God's word, to behold and admire his works, to perform acts of piety, to accomplish substantial good, all the toil would never be grudged by the creatures. But, alas ! here is the case, for the most part men see to sin more by it, the worldling, the drunkard, &c. to pursue their lusts by it. The night waits on in its turn, and the thief, the adulterer, and the like, get their lusts fulfilled with it. The air waits about us continually, and the swearer gets sworn by it, the liar lied by it, and the like. The earth and sea wait on us with their produce ; and people get their sensuality, their vanity, pride, and the like, nourished by it. What wonder they groan, to be brought to this pass ? Sun, moon, air, earth, and sea, are groaning for this as they can. If our very meat and drink could groan, they would groan in the dish, cup, throat, and belly of the drunkard, glutton, sensualist, yea, of every one with whom they are not employed to nourish the body for the Lord and his service, but for the world, &c.—There is,

(2.) Hard labour, and much loss by it. We have both these : Hab. ii. 13, "Behold, is it not of the Lord of hosts, that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity ?" The creatures not only toil for vanity, but as it were in the fire, where they smart for their pains. The covetous oppressor's money kept from the labourer, groans in the corner of your chest, and cries, "Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth,

and the cries of them that have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth," James v. 4. "Why do ye lock me up here, where a heavy curse lies upon me? why wilt thou not let me away to the labourer?" The oppressor builds his house by blood and oppression, and the very stones and timber cry out, "Why have ye laid me here, where the curse of God will not let me rest?" Hab. ii. 11. If a master should force his servant into the king's throne, and force the crown on his head, and the sceptre into his hand, how would he groan to think that he is abused, and that his life must go for it too. Ah! is it any wonder that the beasts, the pastures of the wilderness, groan this day, who have so often been set in God's throne, the heart; have had room with him, yea, more room than him, nay, many times the only room there? O! would they not cry, if they could speak, "Why get we the first thoughts in the morning, and the last at night? Why set you that love, joy, delight, and trust in us, that you ought to place in God? O let us out of this dangerous place, let us out of your hearts, that is a dangerous place to us," Ezek. xxiv. 25, 26.—I only add as a

6. And last reason of their groaning, that the creatures partake with man in his miseries.—Though they do not sin with him, yet they suffer with him. They that have life, live groaning with him. They are liable to sickness, pains, and sores, as well as he; for not a few of the troops of diseases billeted on man, were quartered also on them. Sinful man's neighbourhood infected them; they die groaning with him. In the deluge they perished with him, except a few preserved in the ark, as living in the same element with him. The beasts in Sodom were destroyed with fire and brimstone, with the men. In the plagues of Egypt, the cattle smarted together with the owners, also their fields, sycamores, &c. The inanimate creatures suffer with him also. He sins, and the very earth is laid in bonds for him; but groan as it will in that case, he cannot loose them: Job xxxviii. 31, "Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?" Their iron bands he cannot break: Deut. xxviii. 23, "And the heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron." The very waters are straitly bound up on his account: Job xxxvii. 10, "By the breath of God frost is given; and the breadth of the waters is straitened." Nay, they are muffled up with a weight above them, like a stone under ground; for as swift as they rise to go, and as nimble as they run, they are caught and held fast, like a wild beast, in God's trap. This is the true sense of Job, in the Hebrew, chap. xxxviii. 30, "The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen." Nay, the very heavens are in bonds too,

Deut. xxviii. 23. And they cry out in their bands, Hos. ii. 21, "I will hear, saith the Lord, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth."

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.\*

SERMON XXVII.

ROM. viii. 22,

*For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together until now.*

HAVING considered in what respects the creation, or creatures, are said to groan, and what distresses the creatures so much that they groan, we now proceed to inquire,

III. How, and by what right, can the harmless creatures be made to groan for our sakes? They have not sinned. True, these poor sheep, what have they done?—Here I observe,

1. That there is sovereignty in this groaning. The creatures are all his own, and it is lawful for him to do with his own what he will, Matth. xx. 15. Solomon tells us, Eccl. viii. 4, "Where the word of a king is, there is power, (Heb. dominion), and who may say unto him, What doest thou?" God is the great store-master, to whom all the flocks and herds in the world belong: "The cattle upon a thousand hills are his," Psalm l. 10. He has given you the use of them, but has reserved the absolute property to himself. You have them in kain, and that is ill paid; therefore no wonder he take them out of your hand, and dispose of them in another way whereby he may get the use of them, that is, glory to himself.—I observe,

2. That the creatures are liable to this groaning, because of their relation to sinful man, who has a subordinate, limited, providential interest in them; and that by the same justice that the whole which a malefactor has, smarts with him; as it was in the case of Achan, and all that he had, Josh. vii. 24. The sun is a light to him, therefore it is overlouded; it nourishes his ground, therefore its in-

\* This sermon was delivered on a fast-day, appointed by the presbytery of which the author was a member, on occasion of a severe threatening storm which then prevailed.—In this discourse, and through the whole of this subject, the author has evidently a reference to the unnatural rebellion which was then raging, and appears deeply affected with the state of the church and nation at that period.

fluences are restrained. The ground feeds his flocks and berds, therefore it is inhabited. They furnish him with necessaries, conveniencies, and profits, therefore they suffer. They stand in a nearer relation to him than other creatures; they were made the same day, and of the same earth, and live in the same element with him, and therefore they smart sorest, because they are nearest to him. They are nearer, and therefore it is harder with them than with fishes and fowls, which were of the water, and live, the one in the water, the other in the air.—I observe,

3. That the creatures groan because of their usefulness to him, by the same right that, in war, one takes from his enemy whatever may be of use to that enemy in the war. None scruple to take every thing from an enemy, that so he may be disabled, and yield. Now, God is angry, and carrying on a war with us, which we began; and to oblige us to yield, he falls on the creatures that are useful to us. Pharaoh will not let Israel go, and the cattle, and the very trees and water of Egypt, smart. They kill, swear, lie, steal, commit adultery: Hos. iv. 3, "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." Men are very indifferent about the interest of God, and if they get their own interest seen to, are little concerned as to any thing else; and therefore God blasts their prospects; as you may see, by consulting Haggai i. 4—11.—I observe,

4. That the creatures groan, by the same right one takes a sword from a man wherewith he is running at him. The creatures are idols of jealousy often to provoke God, and therefore he strikes them down. Often, and most justly, does God punish sinners in that wherein they have sinned, so as they may read their sin in their punishment, as in Eli's case, and in Isaac's, Gen. xxv. 28, and xxvi. 35. The farm, and the care about it, often keeps people from the marriage-supper of the King's Son, Matth. xxii. 5. The Gadarenes, for their liking of swine better than a Saviour, had their wretched idols drowned in the sea.—I observe,

5. That the creatures groan by the same right one takes back his loan, when he gets no thanks for it, but, on the contrary, it is improved against himself: Hos. ii. 8, 9, "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal. Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness." Alas! though we are always in God's common, for every

thing we have, we are not thankful, we do not remember our holding, but sacrifice to our own net. And God's favours with respect to the creatures, though they make people more wealthy, they make them not more holy.

*Lastly*, I observe, that the creatures groan by the same right a prince levies a fine on a man, when he might take his life. It is a mercy God deals not with ourselves, as with the creatures for our sake: Lam. iii. 22, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." True, men feel the stroke; and good reason, for God makes the creatures groan for that very end, that we may feel it. But we feel only at the second hand, though it is we only that are guilty. The bands lying on the earth might have lain on us, and we pinched as sore for our food as the beasts of the field for theirs; that as our flocks are forced to go to another part of the country, leaving our own hills desolate, so our houses might have been desolate, families scattered, and sent through the country begging bread. They have had more than any of us, who yet have been brought to such trying circumstances.—It only remains,

IV. That we make some improvement of this doctrine.

1. In an use of information. Let us notice this scripture fulfilled in our days, in this day, and that in a remarkable manner. There is a mournful concert which the creatures have been making in our ears now for many weeks together, for which we are this day called to fast and humble ourselves.—Hear the groans of the creatures:

(1.) The earth is groaning under us, Dent. xxviii. 23, "And thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron." God has laid a weight on it, and bound it so strait, that it can get no breathing, there is no perspiration; it can get up nothing. It is run together as lead does after it is melted; Job xxxviii. 38, "When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together." Hebrew, "God has pitched it up, or pitched it all over with frost, as one would do a vessel to keep in the liquor, when they have in view to prevent others drawing from it."

(2.) The waters groan, for there is a weight on them: Job xxxviii. 30, "The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen." Men's sins have taken hold of them, and turned them into dry land: Psalm cvii. 33, "He turneth rivers into a wilderness, and the water-springs into dry ground." Ver. 34, "A fruitful field into barrenness, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein." We have bridges of God's making, but these are no more signs of God's favour, than the turning of sea into dry land was to Pharaoh, for it proved his destruction.

(3.) The wild beasts of the field groan for lack of food. They that take the range of the mountains for pasture, are forced into the valleys, and this strait brings them near the dwellings of men, which otherwise they would shun, Hos. iv. 3.

(4.) The fowls of the air groan, and are hard put to it, to make shift for their lives, and they mourn after their kind, for the hand of God is heavy upon them: Hos. iv. 3, "Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish; with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea shall be taken away."

(5.) The flocks groan, for God has locked up their pasture: Joel i. 18, "How do the beasts groan? the herds of cattle are perplexed, because they have no pasture; yea, the flocks of sheep are made desolate." They are—fruitful creatures, but God threatens to pluck up the tree with its fruit;—harmless, yet they sadly suffer for the sins of men, their owners;—useful creatures, and because of their singular usefulness, a singular weight of the stroke lies on them. They cannot help themselves, and men cannot help them; so they groan and cry unto the Lord: Joel i. 20, "The beasts of the field cry also unto thee: for the rivers of water are dried up, and the fire hath devoured the pastures of the wilderness."

(6.) The heavens groan, Deut. xxviii. 23, quoted already, for God has laid them under arrest. They have been long crying that their influences are bound up, but God has not yet heard them: Hos. ii. 21, "And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth." The machine of the world, in some sort, has long stood; because God has holden still the heavens, the main spring; but the heavens cannot help the earth, nor the earth the grass, nor the grass the beasts of the field, till God see meet.

2. We may learn, that when the whole creation groans for man's sake, it is no wonder God make man himself to groan heavily. It has been a groaning time through Scotland now for a long time, and these groans are not over yet. God grant they be not but beginning!

(1.) The nation is groaning under the weight of two armies, which, whether friends or foes, must needs be heavy to a poor land, that has enough ado to maintain itself. Besides, that as the world is now distempered by the corruptions of men, it is morally impossible but that violence, rapines, and other disorders, will fall out in such a case, which some heavily feel, however easy others may live, and that whether the armies be for or against us. It is groaning under a most causeless rebellion, raised by men of a perverse, malignant, Antichristian spirit, who, to get a limb of Antichrist on the throne,

and to ruin religion, have made all this disagreeable work. Hence the nation groans under a drawn sword, deeply bathed in blood, and thirsting for more. The blood of many has been shed in the field like water, many precious souls sent to eternity in a moment, in the hurry of war, and the carcases of men laid like dung in the open field; parents left childless, children fatherless, and their mothers widows, while the lives of many others are made to them more bitter than death. Into what a wretched case have many of the nobility and gentry of Scotland brought themselves! which, though it be the just judgment of God upon them, for which we are to praise him, yet it makes the nation groan, as the cutting off a gangrened member is painful to the whole body. Thus David lamented over Saul, 2 Sam. i. 17. The northern parts of the nation have been long groaning, who have had many months of that oppression, of which the southern parts have had but a few days, and yet made so great an outcry. Some groaning there, because their houses are made unpleasant to them; some, because they and their families are scattered; some groaning because they are harassed: others because they are solitary, &c.

(2.) The church is groaning for the weight of the Lord's anger gone out against her. Our mother is in mourning, and the gates of Zion lament. She greans under the weight of these mischievous decrees laid on in the latter end of the last reign, not yet removed, by which she is greatly oppressed,—under our own unchristian divisions, by which she is rent into many pieces;—under the just withdrawing of her Lord, by which she is become heartless. Many congregations of the land are groaning under the want of gospel-ordinances, the weight of silent Sabbaths. Her serious ministers and members are groaning, while they behold, on every hand, matter of lamentation and woe. Nay, she is groaning this day, to see the great red dragon standing before her to swallow her up. A limb of Antichrist set up for a king, to be a captain, to lead back the nation to Egypt, and to give the kingdom, if he had it at his will, to the Romish beast that supports the whore. Her members are in no good case to give a draught of their blood to the scarlet-coloured where, and therefore in hazard to drink the cup of the wine of her fornication, if she had once access to put it to them.

Thus the church and nation are groaning together. No sort of persons, from the throne to the dunghill, are exempted. Our only rightful and lawful Sovereign, our Protestant King, whom God, by an admirable step of favourable providence, brought seasonably to the throne, groans for the unnatural rebellion raised against him. The nobles and gentry, who used to escape other strokes, smart un-

der the confusions in the land by that means. Ministers have a load of many weights to groan under this day; and to all the rest, not a few of them are threatened with suffering for a cause which their souls abhor as much as any in the nation. People of all sorts groan; the husbandman, because the earth, being as iron, will not allow his labouring; and the store masters, because of the particular distress of the beasts of the field.

3. This lets us see what is the cause of all this groaning. Is there not a cause? Yes; men's sins are the cause of all the distress on the creatures, and on themselves. We have procured all our miseries with our own hands. All ranks in the land have gone out of course, and therefore the very creation is put out of its course: Isa. xxiv. 20, "The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage, and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall, and not rise again."—The Lord is contending with us,

(1.) Because that the sins of our fathers have not been sufficiently mourned over by the generation. National perjury and bloodshed are crying sins that are making the land to mourn this day. Without controversy, God is fulfilling that scripture in our eyes this day, Lev. xxvi. 25, "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant; and when you are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you, and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy." God is making inquisition for the blood of the slain witnesses of Jesus; and it will be a wonder if, before the quarrel be ended, God make not the lives of hundreds of others go for one of theirs. I have sometimes thought, "O! why has God made choice of poor Scotland to be the field of blood? Are there not sins against God in the neighbouring land, as well as amongst us?" But I have been silenced by this consideration, Scotland was the place where the witnesses were slain, in a special manner, in the late times: "True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord!"—The Lord is contending with us,

(2.) Because of the atheism and contempt of God in the land. Matters were come to that pass under the light of the gospel, that all religion was laughed at by many; so that there was a necessity that God, by some new argument, should prove the truth of his being, which he has already done, to the cost of many that were deeply engaged in these atheistical ways. May God bear it home on their consciences, that at least they may get their precious souls for a prey!—The Lord is contending,

(3.) Because of the horrid profanity of the generation: Hos. iv. i. —3, "Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel; for the

Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God, in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away." How many are there up and down the land, that glory in their shame, and take a pleasure to affront the God that made them by their profane courses. Can these things escape a mark of God's displeasure? It has broken in like a flood, and gone through the land; so that they are indeed but rare persons who have not entertained one branch or another of it; either they are swearers, or liars, or such like, and there is no reforming of them. The word cannot do it.—The Lord is contending,

(4.) Because of our abuse of mercies, and God's good creatures. We have had long peace, and God has wrought wonders for our deliverance. But we were surfeited with peace ere the war came. The good creatures of God prospering and thriving were but fuel to our lusts, and so snares to lead us away from God, that it is no wonder they get a stroke, like idols of jealousy, wherewith God has been provoked.—The Lord is contending,

(5.) Because of that woeful security and unconcernedness for the public cause of God and of religion which prevails. God is a jealous God, and when he is going out against a land, he calls all the inhabitants thereof to fear and to tremble; and he cannot endure indifference when his cause is at stake. This provokes him to blast people's private concerns: Haggai ii. 14—17, "Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation, before me, saith the Lord; and so is every work of their hands, and that which they offer there is unclean. And now, I pray you, consider from this day and upward, from before a stone was laid upon a stone in the temple of the Lord. Since those days were, when one came to an heap of twenty measures, there were but ten: when one came to the press-fat, for to draw out fifty vessels out of the press, there were but twenty. I smote you with blasting, and with mildew and hail, in all the labours of your hands, yet ye turned not to me, saith the Lord." This woeful selfishness has prevailed in an amazing manner among us. Little were we concerned with the distresses which many others of the nation were under; very indifferent were we as to what way public matters should go, as if we had been set here to be idle spectators of the reelings of the nation. But we see God has many arrows in his quiver, and will even have us to groan with the rest. And if people go lightly under the burden of the public,

he will give them a burden of their own to bear. God knows, your distress by this storm has lain near my heart, as I bear a part in all your afflictions; but seeing, with grief of heart, your prevailing temper to be such, that I could not call you together to wrestle for the public cause, I could not have confidence before the Lord to do it upon an inferior cause, though in itself a very weighty one.—The Lord is contending with us,

(6.) Because of the contempt of the gospel, and unfruitfulness under the means of grace. This makes a land to groan, and the creatures in it to bear a share.

4. Let the groans of the creatures stir us up to repenting groans before the Lord. Shall we be groaning under trouble, and the creatures groaning for our sakes, and yet not groan for sin, which is the cause of all? For the Lord's sake, sirs, be pliable to the word, and do not think yourselves above warnings, but receive convictions from the word, and be humbled under the hand of God, and take a look of your ways, and repent, and reform yourselves and your families. Wrath is gone out from the Lord against the land and us. Let us try to quench it ere it go farther, lest it break out like fire, that none can quench it. Let us be concerned for the public cause, and take a lift of Zion's burden this day. Be not indifferent in the cause of a Protestant king, and a Popish pretender. Ye have had fair warning to prepare to meet the Lord, and God followed the closing of our sermons on that subject hard at the heels with the stroke. And if this do us no good, take heed it come not next from the stall to the hall, and men and women be as sore straitened as the poor dumb creatures are this day.

5. Let us come here, and learn various other lessons. We know the book of the creation is an instructive book; every day we may have a lesson from them, from the highest, Psalm viii. 3, 4, to the lowest, Prov. vi. 6, 7, 8, namely, from the heavens to the ant. But in such a day as this we may learn more from them than ordinary; now they speak much and loud to us. God makes them groan thus for our instruction, as he cursed the fig-tree, for a lesson of faith to his disciples; and slew the cattle of Egypt, to make the owners see what they might expect. The creatures groan out these lessons to us:

(1.) That God is angry with us. He is angry with the land, has a controversy with our mother, and he is angry with the creatures, for they smart under it. We may say, as in Hab. iii. 8, "Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea? that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation." Sure if it is so, it is for

our sakes, and therefore he is angry much more with us. Look now through the whole creation, above, under, and about us, and we will see the characters of the Lord's anger. It is true, these things have natural causes, but God guides these. And this lesson we may take for a certain evidence of our sin; see sermon on Joel i. 18.—Another lesson is,

(2.) That it is not easy to get the flame of wrath quenched when once it is kindled. We may say this day, as in Psalm lxxv. 5, "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation." Men's sins may bring that on the creatures which they will not soon get removed. Learn here to beware of kindling the fire by provoking God! It is easier to keep the sword of vengeance in the sheath, than to get it sheathed again when once drawn. It is dangerous to depend on the praying for mercy on a death-bed, delaying all till then, for then wrath may be gone out, not to be quenched.

(3.) It is dangerous to be concerned with those with whom God hath a controversy: thus, all that belonged to Achan perished with him: Josh. vii. 24, 25, "And Joshua, and all Israel with him, took Achan, the son of Zerah, and the silver, and the garment, and the wedge of gold, and his sons, and his daughters, and his oxen, and his asses, and his sheep, and his tent, and all that he had; and they brought them unto the valley of Achor. And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? the Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burned them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones." Had these oxen and asses been another's than Achan's, they had not perished in the manner they did. Thus the poor creatures lament their relation to sinful men; and many smart sore upon the occasion of the controversy God has with them with whom they are nearly connected. A companion of fools shall be destroyed. Even those God has a kindness for may smart full sorely for the sake of others; see 1 Kings xiv. 10—13. Another lesson is,

(4.) That sin is a heavy burden, which none are able to bear up under. O sirs! What think ye of sin, that makes the very earth to groan under it this day? Isa. xxiv. 20, "The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage, and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it, and it shall fall, and not rise again." Ye walk for the present full lightly under it, but the weight of it ere long, will be felt by the most stupid sinner; a dreadful weight! that makes the whole creation groan. Are not the bands of guilt strong and strait, that thus gird up the heaven and earth, and bind down the creatures, that they

cannot get up their head? It is an offence to an infinite God, no wonder it doth lay an infinite weight on the offender.—We are instructed,

(5.) That God is a jealous and just God, who will not suffer sin to go unpunished. Deceive not yourselves with misapprehensions of God, like the wicked, who, as in Psalm l. 21, think him altogether such an one as themselves; for as sweet as sin may be in the mouth, it will be bitter in the belly: Job xx. 12—14, “Though wickedness be sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue; though he spare it, and forsake it not, but keep it still within his mouth:—Yet his meat in his bowels is turned, it is the gall of asps within him.” Therefore, Exod. xxiii. 21, “Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions.” He is true to his word, and it cannot fail. He will reverse the order of nature, turn the heavens to brass, and the earth to iron, rather than one word of his fall to the ground.—We may also learn,

(6.) That creatures are ever weak pillars to lean to. You have need of something else to bear your weight, the weight of your comfort, much more of your happiness, for they are not able. There is a vanity that they are under, by reason of which they cannot reach that end: Eccl. i. 2, “All is vanity.” They that have not something else to lean to, may soon have nothing to look to at all. O what a pitiful idol is the clay god of this world!—We may farther learn,

(7.) That God is a sovereign King, against whom there is no rising up. How can sinners think to escape with their sins, when the whole creation smart for their sakes? Can we think that the innocent creatures should suffer, and we go free? Can there be an out-braving him, who makes the earth and heavens groan under his hand? or a fleeing from him, from whom the whole creation cannot make their escape?—We are instructed farther,

(8.) That the service of the creatures to sinful man is an imposition on them: Rom. viii. 20, “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly.” Man falling from God, lost the right he had to them. But yet they are kept in his service, which they grudge, and therefore they groan.—Hence it comes to pass, that these servants sometimes becoming masters, hurt him, and dispatch him. The least creature, having a commission for such a service, proves too hard for him, such as a stone in fruit, or a hair in milk.—I only add,

(9.) That the creatures are wearied of the world lying in wickedness, and would fain have it brought to an end: Rom. viii. 19, “For

the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God." There is a happy day for the restitution of all things; they are longing for that day, when this world, that sink of sin, that stage of vanity, and scene of misery, shall be taken down; and the wicked shall have poured out upon them the deserved curse, with all its effects, centreing in themselves, without burdening others with it in any measure.—I come now,

2. To an use of exhortation. The groans of the creatures are exciting, stirring up groans. So many of them as are about us this day, so many preachers have we to provoke us to the duty we profess to be engaged in.—They cry to us,

(1.) Humble yourselves under the hand of God. He has laid them low, and shall not we lie low before him, since for our sake they are cast down. The noisy waters are now silent as a stone under his hand, the lofty mountains have laid aside their ornaments, and every thing mourns after its kind. Come down, then, from your pride and obstinacy; yield yourselves to the God that made you, lie low in the dust, and join issue with the rest of the creation.—They cry,

(2.) Repent, repent; for he is a God that will not be mocked, and though he long forbear, he will be avenged on impenitent sinners at last. He has been long pleading with us to let our sins go, and he is saying now, as to Pharaoh, Exod. ix. 2, 3, "For if you refuse to let them go, and wilt hold them still; behold the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep; there shall be a very grievous murrain." Harden not your hearts to keep fast the bane of strife betwixt God and you, lest it fare with you as it did with Pharaoh, on whose person God's hand fell heavy at last.—They cry,

(3.) Pray, pray. When the heathen mariners were at their prayers in a storm at sea, it was a shame for Jonah to be sleeping; Jon. i. 4. The creatures, as they can, are crying to the Lord; shall we be more brutish than they, and be silent at such a time? We have been praying in the congregation; it would be a promising thing, and no more but duty, if families and particular persons were fasting and praying: Zech. xii. 12, "And the land shall mourn, every family apart." There is much work in families otherwise, to take care of them. O! then, will you not do that which is so needful for yourselves and them?—I exhort you,

(4.) To reform, for the sake of these you would not involve in ruin with yourselves. For, Eccl. ix. 18, "Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroyeth much good." We see

how the poor creatures are ruined in this way. But it is not them only: Achan troubled the camp of Israel. God has threatened to pursue his quarrel to the third and fourth generations. If one in the family be seized with the plague, it is enough to carry away the whole.—Be exhorted,

(5.) To endeavour to reform others, for your own sakes. The fire in your neighbour's house may come to burn down yours, if you do not help to quench it. It is thought that Achan's sons perished with him, because they concealed and laboured not to put away their father's sin.

(6.) Seek to find your comfort and happiness only in the enjoyment of God and Christ. Then in the time of famine you may rejoice in the God of salvation, like the prophet Habakkuk, chap. iii. 17. It is a sad matter we should again be so ready to trust the deceiving world, and to lean again to that broken reed that hath so often failed us, and pierced through our hand. Seek it in God, where it can never fail, in the everlasting covenant, that will be a portion of which ye may always be sure.

(7.) Fear God, and stand in awe of him. As the sight of the drawn sword makes him in some measure afraid that wields it, so the sight of God's judgments should fill us with the dread of his majesty: Psalm cxix. 120, "My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgment." When the sea was raging, and Jonah awakened, he was impressed with fear and reverence of him that made it, Jonah i. 9. God would have the hearts of people awed with his works; and it is contempt of God not to be so.

(8.) Labour to get a renewed right to the creatures. Our first charter was lost by Adam at his fall: and as the estates of rebels fall of course to the crown, so our right to the creatures was forfeited, and they fell back into the hands of him that gave them. We must get a new right through Jesus Christ, by faith in him, if ever we would have true comfort in the creatures. I own a wicked man has a sort of right to the creatures: Psalm cxv. 16, "The earth hath the Lord given to the sons of men." By the same law that God hath said, Thou shalt not kill, he has made them over to us. This is a providential right, but it is not a covenant-right. It is but like the right the forfeited condemned man has to his meat till the hour of his execution.

*Lastly*, Ye that are godly, I would beseech you to long for that blessed day for which the creatures are groaning. You have good reason, as well as they. Long for the day this stage shall be taken down, whereon so much sin and misery are acted, when all that Adam put wrong shall be completely righted by Jesus Christ.