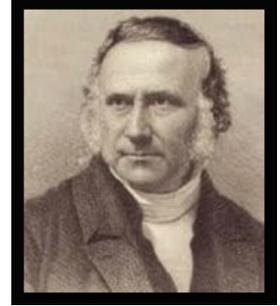


Election



At the close of the service on the Sabbath, I gave an invitation, as I have frequently done, in any persons not members of the church, who were seriously disposed to attend to religion, to call and see me at my own house, at an appointed hour. In giving the notice, I explained briefly the reasons for the invitation; and besought those who were yet without hope, to give their instant and earnest attention to this momentous subject. Among other things, I stated, as one of the reasons for this invitation, that difficulties which occur to some minds on the subjects embraced in religion, could often be more happily removed in conversation, than in any other way. At the time appointed, and on the evening to which I now allude, a young man, about twenty-three years of age, called upon me. Adverting to my invitation, he directly told me his design in coming. He said, that his mind had been occupied with the subject of religion for several months; that he had felt much dissatisfied with himself,—with his own course of worldliness; that he was fully convinced of the necessity of religion; that he had come to a determination to put off the duty no longer. But he had met with difficulties which he “could not get over.” The more he had tried, the more his thoughts had become perplexed; and though he had made up his mind on some points, yet on some others he was troubled and dissatisfied. “I thought,” said he, “I would accept the invitation you gave us today, though I have not much expectation of being satisfied about many things which come up.”—He seemed disposed to talk, and I did not think best to interrupt him. He went on to say, that some doctrines troubled him, and he could never agree with me in respect

to them. He must have his own way of thinking, and had a right to it. “Yes,” said I, “if you think right, but you have no business to think wrong. If a man thinks wrong, he is wrong; and no man can have a right to be wrong, if it is his own way. God calls on the unrighteous to forsake their thoughts. Their thoughts are wrong; and he tells them they are not like his.”

“I know that,” said he; “but I mean my way of thinking about predestination, and all those doctrines that are so hard to swallow, and that make a man unable to do anything,—nothing but a mere machine. I do not believe in election, and foreordination, as it is called. Such things have done me no good; and in my opinion, never will do me any. They only confuse me for nothing; and for my part, I do not believe them. I wish ministers never would preach them. I cannot see how anybody can attempt to do anything to try to be a Christian, if he believes in such things as election. Such a doctrine takes away a man’s power, and then condemns him for not using it.”

In this manner he continued to talk for some minutes, till he appeared to have no more to say. There was no appearance of any deep seriousness about him. He did not seem to me to have any very special concern about his condition, as a sinner needing forgiveness of God. Evidently he was annoyed and perplexed; but he had not said a word about his being a sinner against God, or in danger of his wrath, or unfit to meet him in judgment, or his need of any reconciliation to him. Some of his expressions reminded me of an anonymous letter which I had received a few weeks before, complaining of my having preached several times within a few months, on the doctrine of election; and containing some other erroneous statements. But I did not tell him so. I made no mention of the letter. But recollecting its contents, I felt more sure that I understood his state of mind, by reason of that epistle; and felt that I had an advantage of him, of which he was not conscious. After he had said all

that he seemed disposed to say, I inquired of him, “How long a time is it since you began to be attentive and prayerful on the subject of religion?”

“I have been thinking about it, for four or five months.”

“What was it, that first turned your attention to this subject?”

“It was a sermon, which you preached on predestination.”

“Then there may be some use in such preaching, after all, if it leads people to attend to their salvation.”

He appeared much confused at this answer, and remained silent for a moment, as if he knew not what to say. But seeming to recollect himself, he replied: “Did I say there was no use in preaching about predestination?”

“No; I believe you did not say exactly that; something near it however. But people often have said it, and written it; and you just said, you did not agree with me in some doctrines, and ‘did not believe in the hard doctrines, which make a man unable to do anything—nothing but a mere machine.’ And I wished to know what it was, that first turned your own attention to religion. I am glad to find, that the doctrine of predestination has aroused you, after all other kinds of preaching had been, for so many years, in vain. I shall be encouraged, by this example, to preach on the subject again.”

“But I don’t believe in it,” said he, (with much emphasis).

“Then certainly, it need not trouble you, if you do not believe in it; and we will drop the subject. Have you been praying to God to forgive you? Do you pray daily?”

“I can’t say, that I have prayed much. But I have read the Bible, and thought and studied about religion a great deal.”

“Have you prayed today?”

“No; not today.”

“Do you expect to be saved without prayer!”

“No. But I have no heart to pray.”

“Indeed! Then your heart needs your attention, quite as much as the doctrine of election. The Bible makes prayer a duty; and we ought to esteem it, as a great privilege. As sinners, we do infinitely need God’s blessing; and without it, all our attempts in religion will be ineffectual. It is no matter of wonder, that you are not reconciled to God, if you have not even prayed for his grace to guide you. If sinners would be right, and would be saved, they must obey God. And his requirement is plain: ‘Seek ye the Lord while he may be found; call ye upon him while he is near. You must call upon him, you must pray, if you would have any ground at all for expecting his favor.’”

“But the prayers of the wicked are an abomination to the Lord,” said he.

“That,” said I, “is your own declaration. God has not said so. Such a declaration is not to be found in the Bible, as people often suppose; though there may be some expressions, which appear to resemble it. The ordinary complaint of the Bible against sinners, is not, that they pray with bad hearts, but that they do not pray at all, or seldom. They are said to ‘cast off fear and restrain prayer’. It may be a sin in you to pray, with such a heart as you have; but it is a worse sin, if you neglect prayer. The Bible commands you to pray; and if you try to obey it, manifestly you are not

quite so wicked, as if you do not try at all. The command stands in the Bible, and will stand there. Your want of a good heart does not repeal it, nor does it excuse your disobedience. Moreover, you need God's aid for attaining a better heart; and certainly you have more reason to expect that aid, if you ask for it, than if you do not ask at all. 'Ask and ye shall receive. Seek and ye shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you.' If sinners would be saved, they must consent to follow God's directions. You put your wisdom in the place of God's wisdom. His wisdom directs you to pray. Your wickedness refuses to pray. And then, your deceitful heart weaves an excuse for neglecting prayer, out of the badness of your heart, out of "the very thing, which constitutes the strongest of all possible reasons why you should pray. Your having a wicked heart, instead of being a reason for not praying, is the very reason why you should pray the more earnestly. Besides, your excuse is itself the off-spring of self-righteousness and pride. You wish to be heard, because of your praying so well—with such a good heart. You are too proud and self-righteous, to think of being heard, when there is nothing in you to deserve a hearing. You want to make a merit of your prayers. A sinner must be more obedient and humble than this. At least, you must try to obey God, as you are not trying now. I do not say, that you ought to pray with an impenitent heart; but I say, if you have an impenitent heart, you ought to pray, and the rather on that account. One sin must not be offered to excuse another. And I say farther, that you have no prospect at all, of having a better heart, if you will not pray. Besides, you are inverting the order of the Bible and of common sense. You wish to receive the gift of a good heart first, and then, you will consent to ask for it. The Bible expects you to ask first. You wait to have a good heart first, and then you intend to pray for a good heart! Strange inconsistency of a sinner's mind! A little more simplicity of obedience, and a little less of such proud and self-righteous and foolish speculation, would be far better!

“With respect to my preaching and my doctrines; no matter for your disagreeing with me. I am not your standard, and certainly you are not

mine. I ask nobody to think as I do. I only ask everybody to agree with the Bible. If I do not preach the gospel, I am wrong; and you ought to reject all that I say, which disagrees with the word of God. No matter what I think. Let all that go, stick to the Bible. It seems very strange, that a man in your state of mind should mention your disagreement with me, while at the same moment, your own practice so much disagrees with the word of God, that you do not even pray.”

He appeared scarcely to know what to say; but rallying a little, he replied with some composure, “I believe I ought to pray; but I want to know the truth about religion, before I begin in it.”

“You do know the truth about it, my dear sir; enough to know, that God commands you to pray, and to use all the appointed means of salvation. And you can have no excuse of ignorance on that matter. Moreover, you take the wrong way to learn what you do not know. The Bible way is, “if ye will do the works, ye shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” As fast and as far, as one knows the truth, he ought to obey it. That is the way to learn other truths. And that is just the way, in which every sinner on earth must practice, if he would ever gain anything in religion. What good could it do anyone to learn more truth, if he will not act upon the truth, which he knows already? Such acting is necessary, indispensable, in religion. Truth is to be learnt by it, which can be learnt in no other way. The lessons of experience are the best lessons; and many times, what is to be learnt in that way only, is a necessary prerequisite for learning even intellectually the things which lie beyond. You wish to ‘know all the truth about religion, before you begin in it.’ You wish for an impossibility. Religion concerns not your mind only, but your conscience, your heart, your habits, your worldliness, and pride, and vanity, and above all, your self-righteousness. If you will not aim to lend your conscience to it obediently, and your heart, and your habits; you might as well think to understand all about music without your ears, or all about beauty without your eyes, or all about sensibility without your

heart. You never will understand the full significance of the divine precepts, till you aim to obey them; nor the full meaning of divine promises, till you take them for your own. 'Taste,' and then you will 'see, that the Lord is gracious.' The practice will give you light; and such light as you cannot spare, when you are aiming to understand other lessons beyond. And because you have not been trying to practice the truth, which you do understand; it is no wonder, that your mind has become the more perplexed, as I said a little while ago. You perceive how it is. You have been disobedient: you have not renounced the world; you have not given your heart to God; you have not come to repentance; you have not fled to Christ, to save you from the condemnation of God's law. And therefore, God has not led you out of perplexity and. given you peace. You have studied religion, but you have stuck to sin. You know you are a sinner, and know you ought to repent and flee to an offered Christ."

"But," said he; "if I am not predestinated to salvation, all my trying would do me no good."

"Indeed! That is a strange thing for you to say! You just told me, that you did not believe in predestination; and I have been trying to persuade you to let it alone. You said, you must have your own way of thinking; and you did not believe in the 'hard doctrines, which make a man unable—to do anything—nothing but a machine.' And now, when I am trying to persuade you to do something, (just what God bids you, and what your own way of thinking bids,) you very strangely bring up the doctrine of predestination, as an excuse for your disobedience! You say, if you are not predestinated, your trying will do you no good!"

He appeared very much confused and ashamed. He remained entirely silent; and I left him to his silence as long as I could with politeness. I then said to him very gently and kindly, "It is manifest, my dear friend, that you have fixed on no system of belief or practice. You do not know whether you believe in predestination or not. Your thoughts are

perplexed and contradictory; and I am very glad you have come here to-night. I am sorry for your perplexity; but you will come out of it. I advise you to let the doctrine of predestination alone for the present, if you can. You have more important duties than studying it now. If your mind will be satisfied to leave it entirely for the present, and make your peace with God, you will be far more wise. I hope you will dismiss it from your thoughts, and seek God with all your heart. It is one of the deep mysteries of God; and you will not be likely to find your ideas clear upon the subject, till you become a sincere penitent for sin.

“The Bible presents this doctrine of predestination, as I think, only for three purposes. First, to teach men the character of God, his grandeur, wisdom, and incomprehensibility; and thus lead them to render to him the homage which belongs to him. If the doctrine is deep and mysterious, so is God. Whoever believes in the existence of God at all, believes in an infinite mystery. And since he is himself such a mystery, we ought to expect mystery in his plans and providence, and not quarrel where we ought to worship and bow down before him, filled with awe at his amazing grandeur.—The second purpose is, to repress the audacity of the wicked. God would have the wicked know, that they cannot outreach him,—that with all their malignity, they cannot even sin but he will foil them. ‘He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of that wrath he will restrain.’ He lets them know, that his eternal counsels are deeper than their malignity. If they will sin, he leads their mind back behind the curtain which veils his eternal majesty, and lets them know, that his eternal plans are not to be thwarted by the wickedness of man, or malice of devils. He shows them, that God’s plans encompass them as with a net; that he has his hook in their nose, and his bridle in their mouth; and if they will sin, their malice will be foiled; they shall not sin an item but God will overrule it all for his glory; and all their disobedience and hardihood shall only defeat their own purposes, and bring just judgment on the heads of the willing perpetrators. You have an instance of this solemn and instinctive use of the doctrine, when an

apostle addresses the crucifiers of Christ: 'Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.' 'Their 'wicked hands'. could only carry out his 'determinate counsel.' The counsel was his,—the wickedness was theirs. This doctrine, shows the wicked that there is a plan which lies back of their wickedness,—that they cannot overreach God, that they are hemmed in on every side by the plan and the predestination of the Eternal One.—The third, and main purpose of this doctrine is, (as I suppose,) to comfort God's people. The grand trial of a life of religion is a trial of the heart. We have sins, we have weaknesses and temptations, which tend to a dreadful discouragement. Sin easily besets us. We easily wander from God. Holiness is an up-hill work. Our feet often stagger in the path of our pilgrimage, and tears of bitterness gush from our eyes, lest such weak, and tempted, and erring creatures should never reach heaven. Devils tempt us. The world presents its deceitful allurements, and more deceitful and dangerous claims. What shall cheer us when our heart sinks within us? Whither shall we fly for comfort, when our hearts are bleeding, when our sins are so many, when our gain in holiness is so little, when our light goes out, and the gloom of an impenetrable midnight settles down upon our poor and helpless soul? We cannot, indeed, mount up to the inner sanctuary of God, open the seven-sealed book, and read our names recorded in it by the pen of the Eternal. But we can know, that such a book is there; and that the pen of our Father has filled it with his eternal decrees, not one of which shall fail of accomplishment, as surely as his own throne shall stand. And when we find in ourselves, amid our tearful struggles, even the feeble beginnings of holiness, we know that God has commenced his work for us,—a work which he planned before the world was; and that he who has 'begun a good work in us, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ,' carrying into effect his eternal plan. Just as well as we know our likeness to God, we know our election of God. We know that our holiness is his work, a work which he purposed from the beginning. If he had purposed it but just as he begun it,—if it was a work undertaken from some recent impulse, then we should

have good reason to fear, that some other impulse would drive him to abandon it. But when we know it forms a part of his eternal counsels, and is no side-work, no episode, no interlude, or sudden interposition not before provided for; then we are assured that God is not going to forsake us;—but deep as is our home-bred depravity, and many and malignant as are our foes, we are cheered with the assurance, that God will bring us off victorious, and ‘the purpose according to election will stand.’ We love to see our salvation embraced in the eternal plan of God; and we know it is embraced there, if we are his children by faith in Christ Jesus. We cannot read his secret counsels; but we can read his spiritual workings within us. We know the counsels by the evidence of the workings: and then, we are cheered and encouraged amid our trials, by the idea, that God will no more abandon us, than he will abandon the eternal plan which his wisdom formed before the foundation of the world. ‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect?’ He had their names in his book before they had shed a tear, before a devil existed to tempt them.

“If you examine the order of the scriptures, you will find, that they never break ground with predestination. Predestination comes in afterwards. They do not present it to the mind of a sinner, at the outset. Indeed, they seem to avoid it. And in my opinion, a sinner should avoid it also; because he should follow the manner of the Bible; and because predestination contains nothing in itself, which can interfere with the plain and practical duties of Christianity; and because, if he will go out of the way of his duty, to meddle with what God intends about his destiny, he will be very apt to stumble in his first starting, and never take one safe or satisfying step, in the pathway of a true discipleship. See how the order of truth stands in the Epistle to the Romans, the most orderly, methodical and demonstrative, of all the sacred writings. Paul goes over the matters of sin, the fall, the law, the covenant, Christ, repentance, justification by faith, atonement, holiness, hope, the Holy Spirit, depravity, the resurrection; and after all these, and not till he gets into the eighth chapter, does he preach the doctrine of predestination. He then presents

it, to comfort and encourage believers, not to direct unbelievers. The comfort is simply this: if they have an item of holiness, they may know, that their names are in God's eternal book; that he has begun to do for them what he purposed to do from all eternity; and they are just as safe as he is unchangeable. 'For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son. Whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified.' Not a link is left out. The whole chain is finished, and lifts to glory 'If God be for us, who can be against us.' Thus the apostle comforts believers by leading them to know, that the whole matter of their salvation was a matter of plan, and purpose, and provision, before they were born;—that it is not an affair, which comes in amid any uncertainties and fluctuations of time; but stands above time, as it stood, before time was, in God's book; and all the agitations of worlds and all the sweep of centuries cannot touch it.—You may find the same thing in the other Epistles. I beg you to notice, how uniformly the doctrine of predestination is recorded just for the comfort and confirming of Christians—for the gladsome cheering of way-worn and struggling believers, trying to get the mastery over sin. It is not preached for the direction of impenitent sinners. I beg of you, therefore, not to meddle with God's eternal decrees."

My young friend listened to all this most attentively. He occasionally asked some question, not necessary to be recorded here; and I thought he appeared inclined to follow my advice. When I had finished all that I wished to say, he replied in a pensive and half musing manner: "Really I have got a strange heart! I do not know what to think. What shall I do, if I am to dismiss God's foreordination?"

Said I, "I have already told you. You ought to obey the gospel, 'deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Christ;' seek God, and serve him with all your heart. It is the call of the gospel, which is addressed to impenitent sinners. God sends to them a message of peace and pardon

from heaven—an offer of eternal life; and lays it down, sealed with his own signet, at the door of their hearts. The message assures them of the goodwill of God, of a propitiation for sinners, full in itself and freely offered; and bids them welcome to all they can want. You have only to take the message, and you will secure the favor—only to agree with God, on the Christ-conditions which he proposes; and he will agree with you. He calls you to this faith in the blood of atonement: and if you will but believe him, and venture your soul, where he has embarked his love and ventured his honor; you have the pledge of all the truthfulness there is in God, that you shall be helped on to heaven. The Holy Spirit will aid you. Divine wrath will never reach you. A child of God, adopted, loved, cherished; you shall have all the securities which the power of God can furnish, and enjoy the smiles which he bends upon his children. To this call of the gospel you ought to attend. This is your duty. You may mistake the decrees, but you cannot mistake the duty. If the counsel of God is dark, the call of God is clear. And I hope, therefore, you will attend to the call, and not meddle with the counsel, till you reach the fit time for considering it. If you can do so, you will be the happiest. If you cannot, if your foolish mind, through temptation, will keep running off into predestination; then, go into the subject to your sickening over it; and till you have found by experience, that you have mistaken your beginning-spot. And remember, after all your attempts you will have to come round to this at last. As long as you neglect the gospel call, and attempt to grapple with the gospel call, and counsels, you will only plunge deeper and deeper into intricacies you cannot unravel. Let God wield his own thunder. You have only to hear it, and tremble. You cannot employ it. It was not made for an arm like yours. Lay aside your captiousness, and employ your conscience. Leave the decrees, and take to the duties. The decrees are God's rules for his own action, not for yours. Let me hope, when I shall see you again, to find your heart fixed, to do as God bids you: and to let Him do the work, which he has decreed for himself. Just be wise enough, to mind your own business, and let God mind his.”

He left me. I felt confident, that he would follow my advice. The next Sabbath evening, he called on me again. There were about ten other persons present. I conversed with each one for a few minutes, commencing with the one most distant from him, in order that he might be influenced by their thoughts, and the truths of God, which I should utter for their direction. I thought nothing could have been more happily adapted to do him good, than what was said by some of these persons. One of them spoke of the wonderful goodness of God towards him, during all his life; and mourned that he had himself done nothing but abuse it, ungratefully forgetting God. He wondered that God had spared him, such an unworthy sinner.—Another one said, that her heart would not feel. She could not make it feel. She had tried, but though she knew she was a sinner, truly condemned by the law and graciously invited to Christ; still, her base heart would neither break by God's awful terrors, nor melt under his amazing love.—Another said, that all his attempts in religion had been in vain—that his prayers and resolutions had all failed him—that the opposition of his heart to God had seemed to increase; until he had been led to see, there was only one hope for him, God had promised to save guilty sinners, who would trust to Christ. Now, he just rested on that promise; and was troubled and tormented no more. His heart was at peace. He looked to Jesus Christ to save him, and blessed God, that the Holy Spirit had led him to this rest. He would not go back to the world, for all it could offer.—Another said, that he feared the anger of God. He knew he deserved it. He feared there was no mercy for him. He would give all the world, if it were his, to be the meanest and most miserable Christian there is in it.

As the young man listened to these expressions and the replies which were made to them, he became very uneasy. He changed his position often. A cast of impatience spread over his countenance. His eye was restless. A cloud hung upon his brow. Before I spoke to him, I determined not to allow him to utter any cavils about election, in the ears of those who were present. As I asked him, whether he had accepted the

proposals, which God makes to sinners, to save them by grace through Jesus Christ; he answered, with an abruptness and in a tone, which surprised us all:—" If God foreordains everything, I can't see why we are to be condemned for sin."

"St. Paul," said I, (in a slow and solemn manner,) "has given an answer to that, and I have no other to give. When one said to him, 'why doth God yet find fault? who hath resisted his will?' Paul answered; 'nay, but, oh man, who art thou, that repliest against God?' "And without giving him time for another word, I addressed myself to the next individual. I said no more to him. And after prayer, I bade him good night at the door; taking care, that he should leave the house when the others left it, having no farther opportunity to speak to me.

The next evening save one, he came to see me again. He apologized for calling so soon, saying he could not wait till Sunday, and he wished to see me alone. He immediately began to speak of election. He said he had tried, but he could not expel the idea from his mind. It would come up. He believed the devil put it into his mind, for it would occur to him, in prayer, in reading, in all that he attempted to do, or think of. He said he could not make up any mind about it; but he wanted to tell me what would occur to his thoughts, and see if I could assist him. He then went on to say, that he believed in God's foreknowledge, but decrees troubled him. He could not reconcile predestination and free-will. Another time, he would think, if he was to be saved he would be; if not, he could not help himself. Sometimes he thought the doctrine discouraging, and felt opposed to God, as if he were a hard Master. At other times, he felt vexed with himself. So, he was tossed about, without peace, and often tormented with the fear, that he should never have any religion. And he wanted me to tell him what was the matter, and what he had to do, and what he should think, about this doctrine of election. After he had said all that he wished, I replied to him:—

“I am glad to see you. I thank you for coming to me. I am sorry you find yourself in so much unnecessary trouble; and I am perfectly willing to tell you all I know about the doctrine which troubles you. But before I enter upon the subject, I wish to tell you again, that probably I cannot satisfy your mind at all. I can drive you from some of your errors, but I cannot satisfy you.”

“Why not?” said he, anxiously.

“Simply because you are not satisfied with God. You are opposed to him. There lies your whole difficulty. The idea of his eternal sovereignty brings him clearly to your mind; and you dislike the doctrine, just because your heart dislikes God. Your head may be wrong in many things, but your heart is wrong in everything. You need a new heart. If you were truly reconciled to God, you would be reconciled to predestination,—not as you have mis-stated it, but as it is in truth. And I wish you to remember this; and remember what I told you before, that after all your studying, and questioning, and battling, about the divine decrees, you will be obliged, at last, to come round to the divine call to begin with,—a call which bids you to repent, and bids you welcome to all that full and free salvation which God has provided for you.—Let me tell you a fact. Not long since a clergyman of your acquaintance came down from the pulpit in the city of New York, after he had been preaching on the sovereignty of God, when a woman of excellent mind and education came up to him at the foot of the pulpit-stairs, and thanked him very warmly for that sermon. ‘Oh, sir,’ said she, ‘it has done me good. All my life I have been troubled with the doctrine of election. I have studied it for more than twenty years in vain. But now I know what has been the matter, I have never been entirely willing, that God should be God.’—And when you are entirely willing, that ‘God should be God,’ election will trouble you no longer. .

“I desire you to remember also, that I do not preach predestination to you to-night, (as I am about to do,) by any choice of my own, but

because you will have it so,—because you cannot be persuaded by all I have said to you, not to meddle with dark and inscrutable counsels, but attend to God’s plain and practical call. I can correct some of your errors, but I cannot make a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, satisfied with God’s eternal foreordination, and with God himself.”

“I assure you,” said he, “I tried to dismiss the subject, but I could not. And I am very anxious to have you settle my difficulties, if you can. At least, tell me what you think about such things as I mentioned when I came in.”

“Then hear me,” said I, “and I will be as brief as I can.

“First, let me say, the doctrine of predestination is not mine. It is God’s. He has put it in his sacred book, and neither you nor I can put it out. He put it there because he wanted it there; and whatever men may think of its uselessness, God does not need their instructions. He will not receive their criticisms. He will frown upon their contentions. Such words ‘election, purpose, predestination,’ are in the Bible. They mean something. We are bound to know what they mean, and to love the meaning. The doctrine is in the Bible. Predestination and the word of God will stand or fall together.

“Predestination is God’s eternal purpose to rule his universe, Just as he does rule it. If any man is satisfied with God’s ruling, as he does; I cannot understand why he should have any dissatisfaction, with his pre-determination to role just so. His pre-determination is only the eternal plan of his government,—only his eternal decree.

“The decrees of God are rules for his own action,—not for ours. They are nothing more than his own wise plans, eternal and unchangeable, according to which he chooses to act. If he had no such plans he could not; be wise; he would be acting at mere hap-hazard, not

knowing why he made the world,—or what was going to be the result! If he has formed his plans or changed them since time began, then he is a changeable Being, his dignity is sunk, and all security to the universe is sunk with it. For he may change again; and what will come yet, or what he will become, no mind can conjecture! So far as government is concerned, it is nothing to you whether he forms the plan for his day's work every morning, or formed it from eternity. Plan he must have before he acts, or else he is the least wise of all intelligent beings in the universe! Until he acts, you know nothing of his plans, his predestination; and therefore, so far as plan or execution of it is concerned, it matters not to you whether he is now foreordaining moment by moment, or from all eternity foreordained whatsoever comes to pass. His decrees are not laws for his creatures, but rules for himself. They are not statutes, addressed to will, and demanding obedience, or compelling it. They are only his wise, holy, and eternal purposes, wherein he has determined beforehand what he will do, and how he will do it. You may not like the method by which he makes the sun burn, the ocean heave, or the lost Pleiad go out,—by which he directs the earthquake, the storm, the death-wing of the pestilence, or manages his angels, men, and devils. But he has a way of his own, he has considered it well, he has not asked your advice; and you would do well to pause a little, before you venture any more criticisms upon 'that high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity!' Just consent to let God be God."

"Do you say," said he, "that the decrees of God affect only his acts? do they not affect ours also?"

"I say, that they are rules for only his own acts, and do not affect ours directly. How can they affect ours? They are even unknown to us. They are his secret purposes, locked up in his own mind, and never known to an angel in heaven, till he chooses to make them known. A secret purpose in my mind cannot affect you. You do not see it, feel it, hear it, or know anything about it. It cannot affect you. You may think I have it, and the thought of it may affect you; and that is all. Just so it is

with God's foreordination. It touches nobody. No one feels it. It does not hit a man's head, or feet, or fingers, or heart—it absolutely affects nothing at all; until God pleases to proceed to act upon it, and carry it into execution. It is this execution only, which affects anything. It is God's government, and nothing but his government, which is felt, or which influences anybody.—If therefore, you must complain, shift your ground of complaining. Complain of God's government, of his providence; and not of those secret decrees, which you know nothing about, and which never touch you.”

“Well,” said he, “this is new to me. I never thought of it before.—But, if I understand you, we have nothing to do with the decrees of God.”

“Nobody ever told you we had anything to do with them;—except to consent, that God should have them, and execute them. I am sure I tried, with all my might, to persuade you not to meddle with them; but to obey the gospel call, and let God take care of his decrees.”

“But how,” said he, “do you reconcile foreordination and free agency?”

“I never try: for the best of all reasons; they need no reconciling. They are not at war with each other. If you will get them quarreling, I will soon put them at peace. Things need reconciling, only when they conflict.—Here are but two propositions. First, God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass. Second, Man is a free agent. One of these propositions does not contradict the other. If it did, one or both would be false, and we would abandon the falsehood. But there is no conflict or inconsistency between them. I defy you to show any. I know, indeed, men have often said it, and sung it,

‘God can’t decree
And man be free:’—

but they have never proved it, and never will. They have never shown any inconsistency between Election and Free-will. In our church standards, (which explain how we understand the Bible,) we have one Chapter, 'on God's eternal decree;' another 'on Free-will.' One affirms; 'God, from all eternity, did unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.' The other affirms: 'God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature, determined to good or evil.' God foreordained that man should be a free agent,—and he is one. The eternal decree has secured his free agency. God predestinated the freedom of the human will.—Hence, man is free when he sins, and free when he repents of sin: he is free when he hates God, and free when he loves him: he is free when he neglects the great salvation, and free when he seeks God with all his heart. His bondage in sin is a willing bondage. And yet, it is true, that he cannot save himself; but infinitely needs the direct power of the Holy Spirit, to renew his obstinate will, and 'persuade and enable him to embrace Jesus Christ' for salvation. Aside from this Holy Spirit, there is not an item of hope for him, as there is not an item of ability in him. 'He hath wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation.'—But, he is free. If he sins, he sins freely—he chooses to sin.

“But take another view of this matter. Truths are always consistent, and must be so. Here is one truth; God predestinates. The Bible says so; and aside from the Bible, I know it by my own reason, just as well as I know, that God is wise enough to have some plan for his actions. That, then, is a truth; God predestinates.

“Here is another truth; man is free. He knows this by his own consciousness. He knows, that he acts of his own free choice, just as well as he knows his own existence. He feels accountable for his actions. The laws of both man and God hold him accountable. All his neighbors deal with him, as a free and accountable being. He has not himself a doubt on the subject. If he believes he is not free, he is not an ordinary man—he is

either a fool or a madman, and I would as soon reason with a rock. If a man tells you he is not free, that he does not act of his own free-will: give him a blistering cap and a strait-jacket, and send him to the mad-house. The man is a maniac. He is unfit to be at large.

“Here then are two truths. God decrees. Man is a free agent. Each of them is fully proved. Each of them is just as certain to every sane and intelligent man, as any truth in the universe. Therefore, they must be consistent. They need no reconciling.”

“I know I am free,” said he.

“And you know God foreordains,” said I.

“Yes,” said he; “it must be so. The Bible says so; and he could not be a wise God without it.”

“That, then, is enough,” said I. “What more do you want?”

He sat a long time in silence, manifestly in deep thought. At length he asked very modestly; “But if God foreordains to eternal life, why have men got anything to do, in order to be saved!”

“Just because God foreordained they shall have something to do, in order to be saved. God has no more foreordained the end, than he has foreordained the means. He decrees no end, without decreeing the means to reach it. After St. Paul, as instructed by God, had promised those on the ship, that no man’s life should be lost; he afterwards said, when the sailors were about to flee out of the ship; ‘except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.’ The promise and the predestination could not save them, if the predestinated means failed. And you will notice how the Bible, whenever it enters into any explanation of this matter, never leaves out the means. ‘God hath chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of

the world, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.' He 'hath not merely chosen us to heaven; but, 'that we should be holy, without blame, in love.' The means for heaven, and qualifications for heaven are as much decreed, as the heaven itself. Just so it stands in that passage in Romans, which I named to you once before: 'for whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate,' (not merely to heaven, but) 'to be conformed to the image of his Son.' And more;—'whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called them he also justified; and whom he justified them he also glorified.' Not a link is left out. The whole chain is perfect. Predestination reaches both means and ends together;—never the one, without the other. If your salvation is foreordained; your repentance, your faith, and holiness, and willing obedience to God are foreordained also. And so is your willing and prayerful use of all the means of eternal life. And this brings to mind one of your expressions, 'if I am to be saved I shall be saved, do what I will; according to this doctrine.' That is utterly false! This doctrine says no such thing. It says directly the contrary. It unites means and ends,—repentance, faith, prayer, humility, love, goodness, holiness, as means; and heaven, as the end. 'If I am to be saved I shall be, do what I may?' that is not our doctrine! You never heard it preached so! No man ever preached it so! No man ever believed that! Election does not "dispense with the means of salvation, and you cannot dispense with them. You will repent willingly, 'in the day of God's power;' you will pray, you will flee to Christ, you will 'strive to enter in at the strait gate,' if you are going to be saved.—I cannot see for you the end. I cannot lift the curtain that hides eternity, and show you your place in the world of spirits; but I can see your duty here, the means of salvation, which ought to engage all your efforts. And, by the promise of the God of truth, I can know, that if you employ the means as he bids you, you cannot fail of the end, eternal life. 'He that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting,' because God hath foreordained it shall be so.

“This predestinating of God is the most comfortable truth in the Bible. Strange that men should quarrel with it. There is no other truth, which carries with it a single gleam of comfort to shine on the wide world of futurity, and make man die in peace. Everybody wants God to predestinate; for everybody wants him to promise. Every promise of his is a predestination of his—it is only a determination and a commitment of himself to carry it out. God cannot promise without predestinating; and it is predestination therefore, which alone lights up a single gleam of gladness beyond the shores of time, to shine on that ocean eternity, where the immortal spirit shall soon be launched. In utter darkness must it launch there, if God does not predestinate. All the promises are blanks, if predestination is gone!

“You spoke to me once, about being troubled, that this doctrine makes man a mere machine. What a superficial, what a silly idea! If you are not a crazy man, you know you are free. You came here to-night freely. You will depart freely. You never acted and cannot act, but by the choice of your own mind. God decreed from all eternity, that you should be a free, moral agent, and you always have been so in all your sin. God has appointed the means of salvation, and solemnly, sincerely, and affectionately calls on you, to employ them voluntarily; while, as you are doing so, his predestinating promise throws the cheering of its light, over all the eternity before you. The doctrine of the divine decrees does not represent man as a mere machine. It is predestination, which secures him his freedom of will; and secures to him, by predestinating promise, the eternal rewards of evangelical obedience—‘sow to the spirit—reap life everlasting.’”

After some few minutes of thoughtful silence again, he said to me, more in the accent of serious inquiry, than of captiousness:—

“What is the use of praying?”

Said I, “What is the use of breathing? Breathing is the means to an end. Praying is the means to an end. Predestination does not secure life without breath, and does not secure eternal life without prayer.”

After another pause, he replied:—“If sin is foreordained, how can men be blamed for sinning?”

“Because they choose to sin,” said I. “They sin willingly. They know it. And they know they are blamable, as well as they know anything. God foreordained they should be blamable if they sinned.”

Another pause ensued. Finally, he said to me: “I cannot understand this thing?—Is it not more correct to say, that God foreknows everything, than to say he foreordains everything?”

“No; not so much so; if you intend by this, to make foreknowledge mean anything less than foreordination. What is knowledge? It is the ascertainment or recognition of some certainty, some reality. All knowledge is founded on certainty. It cannot be foreknown, that anything shall take place, unless it is certain, that the thing shall take place. What has made that certainty? If it is God, who has made it; then he is a foreordaining God. If it is not God, who has made it, then there is something above him, (fate, or something else,) and he is God and Governor no longer! Then, he has no right to promise—he can, at most, only predict. And then, we have nothing to thank him for, in time or eternity; and all gratitude, love and prayer become supreme foolishness! How can you utter a syllable of prayer, if God does not govern, if he does not control all the certainties which can be foreknown? But he does control. His decree has made the certainties, which his foreknowledge recognizes. It could not recognize, could not foreknow, if God had not foreordained.”

After a few moments, he rose from his seat with the declaration, “I have no more to say. I am glad I came here. I understand some things now, which I never did before. But this is still a dark subject. I know I am a sinner, and yet I cannot see how I am to be blamed, if God foreordained it. You say he foreordained my free agency and accountability, and that I have sinned of my own choice. I suppose it is so. I know I act freely, for I feel it. But I am perplexed, and know not what to do.”

“Do what God bids you,” said I. “Obey the invitations of his grace. Flee to Christ and be saved.”

He left me. I did not see him again, till about a month afterwards, when he called on me and told me he hoped, that he had been led to choose Christ, as the portion of his soul. He did not mention the subject of election, at all; till I asked him, how he had extricated himself from his troubles of mind in respect to it. His answer was memorable. Said he: “I dismissed it from my mind entirely. I found that my wicked, worldly heart was resorting to the doctrine of election, as an excuse for my not turning to God. It was nothing but an excuse to me, for my prayerlessness, my love of the world and all sin. But since I have had a hope in the mercy of God, I am glad that God reigns, as he pleases. Election troubles me no more. In my opinion, if a man is reconciled to God, he will be satisfied with predestination.”

He afterwards made a public profession of his religion. He still lives, a communicant in the church. More than once, he has said to me; “your explanation settles everything, ‘predestination is God’s eternal purpose to rule his universe just as he does rule it.’”