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## AN OPEN LETTER.

[The following by a subscriber, dated Feb. 3, 1885, was unavoidably delayed until now, in this office. – EDITOR.]

REV. R. HEBER NEWTON,

*Dear Sir:*

I have just been reading the abstract of your sermon in to-day's *Tribune* and cannot resist the temptation to traverse briefly your position on the doctrine of Election. It seems to be your effort, as of many who cannot accept the old standard and are yet unwilling to flee out from the technical borders of old affiliations, to give merely a different statement to old dogmas or to show how the old statement may be reconciled to the keener or the bolder insight into all things prevailing to-day. You appear to treat the doctrine of election as formulated by protestant fathers as an attempt to account for observed conditions of human life, rather than to be purely their conception of the teaching of the inspired Word. If it was mainly the former, it would deserve from us as much reverence as any other merely human philosophy and no more. If it was an attempt to epitomize, rather, the teaching of the Bible, it deserves consideration only so far as it is found to be a truthful abstract thereof. The present day has a perfect right to decide upon that point, for the present has two advantages over the past in any question of Biblical study. The first is, that scholarship is abler and is better provided with the means of accurate historical and exegetical research. The second is, that no part or section of revelation is comprehended until the time when its vital work is to be done in the world. The later the era the more probably correct its judgment as to the real import of the divine message.

You recognize the repulsive character of the old statement by which it appears that the "ninety and nine" are not in the fold, but doomed to the mountain side and the bottomless pit forever while only the *one* is chosen to be saved. So do I. No philosophy, no terrors that can be denounced, no pleading, nothing short of a demonstration hereafter can convince me that a being of love planned such a scheme as that. How do you proceed? You would convince men by ocular evidence that in the world such a condition of things obtains, that some, a few indeed, survive and prosper while many, the mass, go under the wheels of a Juggernaut, and that what is, is right, though in a way mysterious and beyond the purview of mortal vision though aided by all the light shed by the "Lamp" of God. You would say, "Be reconciled, for such is God's way, and out of it good will come though at present his way and the world's way seem alike hopeless for the weaker of the earth and heartless for all."

My conception of your position may be all wrong, for newspaper abstracts are apt to be misleading, and I both read and write in great haste. If so, pardon me.

Now for another view. Election is true. If any reliance is to be placed on Biblical statements of plain matter of fact, God chose his prophets, and Christ his disciples and not they him. From Abraham to Simon Peter, the servants of the Sovereign of Heaven have bowed only as the scepter was laid down upon their shoulders. They could speak and act divinely only as the Spirit wrought upon their hearts and tongues. The words of Christ incite us to believe that he continues to select his followers in this as in every other age. He giveth repentance to whom he will. The only reason why objection can be felt to the doctrine, is that he appears to have selected so small a proportion of the race, and that with the doctrine of election is conjoined that of condemnation to endless doom for all not chosen. All mankind stand related to Christ, and he is declared all powerful in heaven and on earth. Our highest sense of justice requires liberty of choice and power of action, as grounds of responsibility, which circumstances have surely

denied to many who seem to fall under condemnation. Men admire striking statement, and the framers of the catechism seem to have yielded to the attractions of antithesis. If some men were chosen, elected, those not so favored must surely be doomed, they argued. The elevation of one class must be equaled by the degradation of the rest. Height must be equaled by the depth and happiness by misery. The crude and childish conception of purgatory was to be escaped from and counteracted, and the frivolousness and irreligion developed under the pomp and show of Romanism were to be frightened out of men by a stern theology. No one can say the attempt did not succeed. God's servants are his, though their words may not embody the first truth, or their acts reflect the divine will to perfection. What is the reverse to the truth of election, its other side I mean? Our version says, "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated," but we all know that "hated" should read "loved less." The election of Abraham does not argue the destruction of Lot. In fact Ezekiel, in chapter 16 says, that even Sodom shall be restored to her former estate and be a sister to Jerusalem. Abraham was told repeatedly why he was chosen; that through him or his seed all the nations, kindreds, families of the earth should be blessed. There was no antithesis in that. All the prophets were chosen to do good to other people. The disciples also were selected only as the foundation stones of an edifice whose proportions should be measureless grandeur and beauty. Who shall say what are means and what are ends? Is not the saving of the ninety and nine a grandeur and a better consummation than the salvation of the one? It is the weakness of every age, as of every nation and of every individual, to magnify itself and to imagine the final greatness of the earth to be near its culmination in itself. The Jew supposed Judaism to be the final truth. We know it was not. May not our sixteenth century theologians have been similarly self deluded. A new Bible is not to be given. Judaism and Christianity have their root in the same primal revelation. Suppose this Christian age in which election has merely taken a wider scope, to be but preparatory to a nobler era yet, when the converts of the present shall become the apostles mighty for the regeneration of "all the families of the earth." Do you call this a fanciful speculation? Were it no more, it would give

men a better conception of the character of their Heavenly Father than the antithetical [R756 : page 6] one. The aspirations of noble souls eager for the good of all would find in it the mirror of their loftiest dreams. Instead of having to explain away inconsistencies of doctrine almost to the verge of apology, they would point to the glory of a consummation worthy of the eternal Father and of the self-sacrificing Saviour. Is it only a speculation? Go back to the Word and see whether it does not yield a footing broad and solid, for this conception of God's plan of grace. Do you ask the location and the method of the millennial regeneration? The earth, and not some distant or unknown purgatory, is to be the theatre and the resurrection as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, the way, by which the myriads who have perished in ignorance and blindness shall be brought into the enlightening presence of the new day. "Every in his own order," says Paul.

Death will have purged away the taint of evil heredity, and the new life will be fuller, freer, more favorable to the acceptance of Christ.

We know well enough that certain predictions of the Scriptures do not apply to our day. But when the laborers no longer are few, when the knowledge of God shall cover the earth, when Christ shall possess the uttermost parts of the earth and the heathen, when the way of life shall be so plain that the way-faring man, though a fool, *shall* not err therein, when the wells of water now springing up in Christian hearts here and there shall have become the "*river* of the water of life," of which "whosoever will" may partake freely, then the doctrine of election will have its justification.

Christ and his Bride will not be childless, though the children may not attain equal honor with their parents. There are the hundred and forty and four thousand, as well as the multitude whom no man can number.

If we explain the very limited salvation of this and preceding ages on the basis of the survival of the fittest we must assume that the ninety and nine are not worth saving, a proposition at variance with all

Christian professions as to the value of souls and presumptuous in the last degree, since none but God can know whether any of his creatures are not worth saving. That being whose visible creations are so marvellously complete and perfect has surely a plan for the restoring and perfecting of his chief creation – man.

It is natural to think that God's plan will develop in stages, and when apprehended will not require apology or defense. The fact that the old and partial views are no longer believed, proves that the revelation of a fuller truth is due, and only awaits apprehension and expression, for it is embodied in the recorded word of God. Are our windows open toward Jerusalem?

Very truly yours,  
J. ALBERT STOWE.

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