

CHAPTER 23.

Refutation of the calumnies by which this doctrine is always unjustly assailed.

This chapter consists of four parts, which refute the principal objections to this doctrine, and the various pleas and exceptions founded on these objections. These are preceded by a refutation of those who hold election but deny reprobation, sec. 1. Then follows,

1. A refutation of the first objection to the doctrine of reprobation and election, sec. 2-5.
2. An answer to the second objection, sec. 6-9.
3. A refutation of the third objection.
4. A refutation of the fourth objection; to which is added a useful and necessary caution, sec. 12-14.

Sections.

1. Error of those who deny reprobation.
 - a. Election opposed to reprobation.
 - b. Those who deny reprobation presumptuously plead with God, whose counsels even angels adore.
 - c. They murmur against God when disclosing his counsels by the Apostle. Exception and answer. Passage of Augustine.
2. First objection—viz. that God is unjustly offended with those whom he dooms to destruction without their own desert. First answer, from the consideration of the divine will. The nature of this will, and how to be considered.
3. Second answer. God owes nothing to man. His hatred against those who are corrupted by sin is most just. The reprobate convinced in their own consciences of the just judgment of God.
4. Exception—viz. that the reprobate seem to have been preordained to sin. Answer. Passage of the Apostle vindicated from calumny.
5. Answer, confirmed by the authority of Augustine. Illustration. Passage of Augustine.
6. Objection, that God ought not to impute the sins rendered necessary by his predestination. First answer, by ancient writers. This not valid. Second answer also defective. Third answer, proposed by Valla, well founded.
7. Objection, that God did not decree that Adam should perish by his fall, refuted by a variety of reasons. A noble passage of Augustine.
8. Objection, that the wicked perish by the permission, not by the will of God. Answer. A pious exhortation.
9. Objection and answer.
10. Objection, that, according to the doctrine of predestination, God is a respecter of persons. Answer.
11. Objection, that sinners are to be punished equally, or the justice of God is unequal. Answer. Confirmed by passages of Augustine.

12. Objection, that the doctrine of predestination produces overweening confidence and impiety. Different answers.
13. Another objection, depending on the former. Answer. The doctrine of predestination to be preached, not passed over in silence.
14. How it is to be preached and delivered to the people. Summary of the orthodox doctrine of predestination, from Augustine.

1. The human mind, when it hears this doctrine, cannot restrain its petulance, but boils and rages as if aroused by the sound of a trumpet. Many professing a desire to defend the Deity from an invidious charge admit the doctrine of election, but deny that any one is reprobated (Bernard. in Die Ascensionis, Serm. 2). This they do ignorantly and childishly since there could be no election without its opposite reprobation. God is said to set apart those whom he adopts for salvation. It were most absurd to say, that he admits others fortuitously, or that they by their industry acquire what election alone confers on a few. Those, therefore, whom God passes by he reprobates, and that for no other cause but because he is pleased to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines to his children. Nor is it possible to tolerate the petulance of men, in refusing to be restrained by the word of God, in regard to his incomprehensible counsel, which even angels adore. We have already been told that hardening is not less under the immediate hand of God than mercy. Paul does not, after the example of those whom I have mentioned, labour anxiously to defend God, by calling in the aid of falsehood; he only reminds us that it is unlawful for the creature to quarrel with its Creator. Then how will those who refuse to admit that any are reprobated by God explain the following words of Christ? "Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted shall be rooted up," (Mt. 15:13). They are plainly told that all whom the heavenly Father has not been pleased to plant as sacred trees in his garden, are doomed and devoted to destruction. If they deny that this is a sign of reprobation, there is nothing, however clear, that, can be proved to them. But if they will still murmur, let us in the soberness of faith rest contented with the admonition of Paul, that it can be no ground of complaint that God, "willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had store prepared unto glory," (Rom. 9:22, 23). Let my readers observe that Paul, to cut off all handle for murmuring and detraction, attributes supreme sovereignty to the wrath and power of God; for it were unjust that those profound judgments, which transcend all our powers of discernment, should be subjected to our calculation. It is frivolous in our opponents to reply, that God does not altogether reject those whom in levity he tolerates, but remains in suspense with regard to them, if peradventure they may repent; as if Paul were representing God as patiently waiting for the conversion of those whom he describes as fitted for destruction. For Augustine, rightly expounding this passage, says that where power is united to endurance, God does not permit, but rules (August. Cont. Julian., Lib. 5, c. 5). They add also, that it is not without cause the vessels of wrath are said to be fitted for destruction, and that God is said to have prepared the vessels of mercy, because in this way the praise of salvation is claimed for God, whereas the blame of perdition is thrown upon those who of their own accord bring it upon themselves. But were I to concede that by the different forms of expression Paul softens the harsh-

ness of the former clause, it by no means follows, that he transfers the preparation for destruction to any other cause than the secret counsel of God. This, indeed, is asserted in the preceding context, where God is said to have raised up Pharaoh, and to harden whom he will. Hence it follows, that the hidden counsel of God is the cause of hardening. I at least hold with Augustine that when God makes sheep out of wolves, he forms them again by the powerful influence of grace, that their hardness may thus be subdued, and that he does not convert the obstinate, because he does not exert that more powerful grace, a grace which he has at command, if he were disposed to use it (August. de Praedest. Sanct., Lib. 1, c. 2).

2. These observations would be amply sufficient for the pious and modest, and such as remember that they are men. But because many are the species of blasphemy which these virulent dogs utter against God, we shall, as far as the case admits, give an answer to each. Foolish men raise many grounds of quarrel with God, as if they held him subject to their accusations. First, they ask why God is offended with his creatures who have not provoked him by any previous offense; for to devote to destruction whomsoever he pleases, more resembles the caprice of a tyrant than the legal sentence of a judge; and, therefore, there is reason to expostulate with God, if at his mere pleasure men are, without any desert of their own, predestinated to eternal death. If at any time thoughts of this kind come into the minds of the pious, they will be sufficiently armed to repress them, by considering how sinful it is to insist on knowing the causes of the divine will, since it is itself, and justly ought to be, the cause of all that exists. For if his will has any cause, there must be something antecedent to it, and to which it is annexed; this it were impious to imagine. The will of God is the supreme rule of righteousness,¹ so that everything which he wills must be held to be righteous by the mere fact of his willing it. Therefore, when it is asked why the Lord did so, we must answer, Because he pleased. But if you proceed farther to ask why he pleased, you ask for something greater and more sublime than the will of God, and nothing such can be found. Let human temerity then be quiet, and cease to inquire after what exists not, lest perhaps it fails to find what does exist. This, I say, will be sufficient to restrain any one who would reverently contemplate the secret things of God. Against the audacity of the wicked, who hesitate not openly to blaspheme, God will sufficiently defend himself by his own righteousness, without our assistance, when depriving their consciences of all means of evasion, he shall hold them under conviction, and make them feel their guilt. We, however, give no countenance to the fiction of absolute power,² which, as it is heathenish, so it ought justly to be held in detestation by us. We do not imagine God to be lawless. He is a law to himself; because, as Plato says, men laboring under the influence of concupiscence need law; but the will of God is not only free from all vice, but is the supreme standard of perfection, the law of all laws. But we deny that he is bound to give an account of his procedure; and we moreover deny that we are fit of our own ability to give judgment in such a case. Wherefore, when we are tempted to go farther than we ought, let this consideration deter us, Thou shalt be “justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judges,” (Ps. 51:4).

1 This is taken from Auguste Dein Gen. cont. Manich., Lib. 1 c. 3.

2 French. “Toutesfois en parlant ainsi, nous n’approuvons pas la reverie des theologiens Papistes touchant la puissance absolue de Dieu;”—still in speaking thus, we approve not of the reverie of the Popish theologians touching the absolute power of God.

3. God may thus quell his enemies by silence. But lest we should allow them with impunity to hold his sacred name in derision, he supplies us with weapons against them from his word. Accordingly, when we are accosted in such terms as these, Why did God from the first predestine some to death, when, as they were not yet in existence, they could not have merited sentence of death? let us by way of reply ask in our turn, What do you imagine that God owes to man, if he is pleased to estimate him by his own nature? As we are all vitiated by sin, we cannot but be hateful to God, and that not from tyrannical cruelty, but the strictest justice. But if all whom the Lord predestines to death are naturally liable to sentence of death, of what injustice, pray, do they complain? Should all the sons of Adam come to dispute and contend with their Creator, because by his eternal providence they were before their birth doomed to perpetual destruction, when God comes to reckon with them, what will they be able to mutter against this defense? If all are taken from a corrupt mass, it is not strange that all are subject to condemnation. Let them not, therefore, charge God with injustice, if by his eternal judgment they are doomed to a death to which they themselves feel that whether they will or not they are drawn spontaneously by their own nature. Hence it appears how perverse is this affectation of murmuring, when of set purpose they suppress the cause of condemnation which they are compelled to recognize in themselves, that they may lay the blame upon God. But though I should confess a hundred times that God is the author (and it is most certain that he is), they do not, however, thereby efface their own guilt, which, engraven on their own consciences, is ever and anon presenting itself to their view.

4. They again object, Were not men predestinated by the ordination of God to that corruption which is now held forth as the cause of condemnation? If so, when they perish in their corruptions they do nothing else than suffer punishment for that calamity, into which, by the predestination of God, Adam fell, and dragged all his posterity headlong with him. Is not he, therefore, unjust in thus cruelly mocking his creatures? I admit that by the will of God all the sons of Adam fell into that state of wretchedness in which they are now involved; and this is just what I said at the first, that we must always return to the mere pleasure of the divine will, the cause of which is hidden in himself. But it does not forthwith follow that God lies open to this charge. For we will answer with Paul in these words, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that replies against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” (Rom. 9:20, 21). They will deny that the justice of God is thus truly defended, and will allege that we seek an evasion, such as those are wont to employ who have no good excuse. For what more seems to be said here than just that the power of God is such as cannot be hindered, so that he can do whatsoever he pleases? But it is far otherwise. For what stronger reason can be given than when we are ordered to reflect who God is? How could he who is the Judge of the world commit any unrighteousness? If it properly belongs to the nature of God to do judgment, he must naturally love justice and abhor injustice. Wherefore, the Apostle did not, as if he had been caught in a difficulty, have recourse to evasion; he only intimated that the procedure of divine justice is too high to be scanned by human measure, or comprehended by the feebleness of human intellect. The Apostle, indeed, confesses that in the divine judgments there is a depth in which all the minds of

men must be engulfed if they attempt to penetrate into it. But he also shows how unbecoming it is to reduce the works of God to such a law as that we can presume to condemn them the moment they accord not with our reason. There is a well-known saying of Solomon (which, however, few properly understand), “The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool and rewardeth transgressors,” (Prov. 26:10). For he is speaking of the greatness of God, whose pleasure it is to inflict punishment on fools and transgressors though he is not pleased to bestow his Spirit upon them. It is a monstrous infatuation in men to seek to subject that which has no bounds to the little measure of their reason. Paul gives the name of elect to the angels who maintained their integrity. If their steadfastness was owing to the good pleasure of God, the revolt of the others proves that they were abandoned.¹ Of this no other cause can be adduced than reprobation, which is hidden in the secret counsel of God.

5. Now, should some Manes or Coelestinus² come forward to arraign Divine Providence (see sec. 8), I say with Paul, that no account of it can be given, because by its magnitude it far surpasses our understanding. Is there any thing strange or absurd in this? Would we have the power of God so limited as to be unable to do more than our mind can comprehend? I say with Augustine, that the Lord has created those who, as he certainly foreknow, were to go to destruction, and he did so because he so willed. Why he willed it is not ours to ask, as we cannot comprehend, nor can it become us even to raise a controversy as to the justice of the divine will. Whenever we speak of it, we are speaking of the supreme standard of justice. (See August. Ep. 106). But when justice clearly appears, why should we raise any question of injustice? Let us not, therefore, be ashamed to stop their mouths after the example of Paul. Whenever they presume to carp, let us begin to repeat: Who are ye, miserable men, that bring an accusation against God, and bring it because he does not adapt the greatness of his works to your meagre capacity? As if every thing must be perverse that is hidden from the flesh. The immensity of the divine judgments is known to you by clear experience. You know that they are called “a great deep” (Ps. 36:6). Now, look at the narrowness of your own minds and say whether it can comprehend the decrees of God. Why then should you, by infatuated inquisitiveness, plunge yourselves into an abyss which reason itself tells you will prove your destruction? Why are you not deterred, in some degree at least, by what the Book of Job, as well as the Prophetical books declare concerning the incomprehensible wisdom and dreadful power of God? If your mind is troubled, decline not to embrace the counsel of Augustine, “You a man expect an answer from me: I also am a man. Wherefore, let us both listen to him who says, ‘O man, who art thou?’ Believing ignorance is better than presumptuous knowledge. Seek merits; you will find nought but punishment. O the height! Peter denies, a thief believes. O the height! Do you ask the reason? I will tremble at the height. Reason you, I will wonder; dispute you, I will believe. I see the height; I cannot sound the depth. Paul found rest, because he found wonder. He calls the judgments of God ‘unsearchable;’ and have you come to search them? He says that his ways are ‘past finding out;’ and do you seek to find them out?” (August. de Verb. Apost. Serm. 20). We shall gain nothing by proceeding farther. For

1 French, “Si leur constance et fermeté a été fondée au bon plaisir de Dieu, la révolte des diables montre qu’ils n’ont pas été retenus, mais plutôt délaissés;”—if their constancy and firmness was founded on the good pleasure of God, the revolt of the devils shows that they were not restrained, but rather abandoned.

2 The French adds, “ou autre herétique;”—or other heretic.

neither will the Lord satisfy the petulance of these men, nor does he need any other defense than that which he used by his Spirit, who spoke by the mouth of Paul. We unlearn the art of speaking well when we cease to speak with God.

6. Impiety starts another objection, which, however, seeks not so much to criminate God as to excuse the sinner; though he who is condemned by God as a sinner cannot ultimately be acquitted without impugning the judge. This, then is the scoffing language which profane tongues employ. Why should God blame men for things the necessity of which he has imposed by his own predestination? What could they do? Could they struggle with his decrees? It were in vain for them to do it, since they could not possibly succeed. It is not just, therefore, to punish them for things the principal cause of which is in the predestination of God. Here I will abstain from a defense to which ecclesiastical writers usually recur, that there is nothing in the prescience of God to prevent him from regarding; man as a sinner, since the evils which he foresees are man’s, not his. This would not stop the cavalier, who would still insist that God might, if he had pleased, have prevented the evils which he foresaw, and not having done so, must with determinate counsel have created man for the very purpose of so acting on the earth. But if by the providence of God man was created on the condition of afterwards doing whatever he does, then that which he cannot escape, and which he is constrained by the will of God to do, cannot be charged upon him as a crime. Let us, therefore, see what is the proper method of solving the difficulty. First, all must admit what Solomon says, “The Lord has made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil,” (Prov. 16:4). Now, since the arrangement of all things is in the hand of God, since to him belongs the disposal of life and death, he arranges all things by his sovereign counsel, in such a way that individuals are born, who are doomed from the womb to certain death, and are to glorify him by their destruction. If any one alleges that no necessity is laid upon them by the providence of God, but rather that they are created by him in that condition, because he foresaw their future depravity, he says something, but does not say enough. Ancient writers, indeed, occasionally employ this solution, though with some degree of hesitation. The Schoolmen, again, rest in it as if it could not be gainsaid. I, for my part, am willing to admit, that mere prescience lays no necessity on the creatures; though some do not assent to this, but hold that it is itself the cause of things. But Valla, though otherwise not greatly skilled in sacred matters, seems to me to have taken a shrewder and more acute view, when he shows that the dispute is superfluous since life and death are acts of the divine will rather than of prescience. If God merely foresaw human events, and did not also arrange and dispose of them at his pleasure, there might be room for agitating the question, how far his foreknowledge amounts to necessity; but since he foresees the things which are to happen, simply because he has decreed that they are so to happen, it is vain to debate about prescience, while it is clear that all events take place by his sovereign appointment.

7. They deny that it is ever said in distinct terms, God decreed that Adam should perish by his revolt.³ As if the same God, who is declared in Scripture to do whatsoever he pleases, could have made the noblest of his creatures without any special purpose. They say that, in accordance with free-will, he was to be the architect of his own fortune, that God had decreed nothing but to treat him ac-

3 See Calvin, *De Praedestinatione*.

ording to his desert. If this frigid fiction is received, where will be the omnipotence of God, by which, according to his secret counsel on which every thing depends, he rules over all? But whether they will allow it or not, predestination is manifest in Adam's posterity. It was not owing to nature that they all lost salvation by the fault of one parent. Why should they refuse to admit with regard to one man that which against their will they admit with regard to the whole human race? Why should they in caviling lose their labour? Scripture proclaims that all were, in the person of one, made liable to eternal death. As this cannot be ascribed to nature, it is plain that it is owing to the wonderful counsel of God. It is very absurd in these worthy defenders of the justice of God to strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. I again ask how it is that the fall of Adam involves so many nations with their infant children in eternal death without remedy unless that it so seemed meet to God? Here the most loquacious tongues must be dumb. The decree, I admit, is, dreadful; and yet it is impossible to deny that God foreknew what the end of man was to be before he made him, and foreknew, because he had so ordained by his decree. Should any one here inveigh against the prescience of God, he does it rashly and unadvisedly. For why, pray, should it be made a charge against the heavenly Judge, that he was not ignorant of what was to happen? Thus, if there is any just or plausible complaint, it must be directed against predestination. Nor ought it to seem absurd when I say, that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his posterity; but also at his own pleasure arranged it. For as it belongs to his wisdom to foreknow all future events, so it belongs to his power to rule and govern them by his hand. This question, like others, is skillfully explained by Augustine: "Let us confess with the greatest benefit, what we believe with the greatest truth, that the God and Lord of all things who made all things very good, both foreknew that evil was to arise out of good, and knew that it belonged to his most omnipotent goodness to bring good out of evil, rather than not permit evil to be, and so ordained the life of angels and men as to show in it, first, what free-will could do; and, secondly, what the benefit of his grace and his righteous judgment could do," (August. Enchir. ad Laurent).

8. Here they recur to the distinction between will and permission, the object being to prove that the wicked perish only by the permission, but not by the will of God. But why do we say that he permits, but just because he wills? Nor, indeed, is there any probability in the thing itself—viz. that man brought death upon himself merely by the permission, and not by the ordination of God; as if God had not determined what he wished the condition of the chief of his creatures to be. I will not hesitate, therefore, simply to confess with Augustine that the will of God is necessity, and that every thing is necessary which he has willed; just as those things will certainly happen which he has foreseen (August. de Gen. ad Lit., Lib. 6, cap. 15). Now, if in excuse of themselves and the ungodly, either the Pelagians, or Manichees, or Anabaptists, or Epicureans (for it is with these four sects we have to discuss this matter), should object the necessity by which they are constrained, in consequence of the divine predestination, they do nothing that is relevant to the cause. For if predestination is nothing else than a dispensation of divine justice, secret indeed, but unblamable, because it is certain that those predestinated to that condition were not unworthy of it, it is equally certain, that the destruction consequent upon predestination is also most just. Moreover, though their perdition depends on the predestination of God, the cause and matter of it is in themselves. The first man fell because the Lord deemed it meet that he

should: why he deemed it meet, we know not. It is certain, however, that it was just, because he saw that his own glory would thereby be displayed. When you hear the glory of God mentioned, understand that his justice is included. For that which deserves praise must be just. Man therefore falls, divine providence so ordaining, but he falls by his own fault. The Lord had a little before declared that all the things which he had made were very good (Gen. 1:31). Whence then the depravity of man, which made him revolt from God? Lest it should be supposed that it was from his creation, God had expressly approved what proceeded from himself. Therefore man's own wickedness corrupted the pure nature which he had received from God, and his ruin brought with it the destruction of all his posterity. Wherefore, let us in the corruption of human nature contemplate the evident cause of condemnation (a cause which comes more closely home to us), rather than inquire into a cause hidden and almost incomprehensible in the predestination of God. Nor let us decline to submit our judgment to the boundless wisdom of God, so far as to confess its insufficiency to comprehend many of his secrets. Ignorance of things which we are not able, or which it is not lawful to know, is learning, while the desire to know them is a species of madness.

9. Someone, perhaps, will say, that I have not yet stated enough to refute this blasphemous excuse. I confess that it is impossible to prevent impiety from murmuring and objecting; but I think I have said enough not only to remove the ground, but also the pretext for throwing blame upon God. The reprobate would excuse their sins by alleging that they are unable to escape the necessity of sinning, especially because a necessity of this nature is laid upon them by the ordination of God. We deny that they can thus be validly excused, since the ordination of God, by which they complain that they are doomed to destruction, is consistent with equity,—an equity, indeed, unknown to us, but most certain. Hence we conclude, that every evil which they bear is inflicted by the most just judgment of God. Next we have shown that they act preposterously when, in seeking the origin of their condemnation, they turn their view to the hidden recesses of the divine counsel, and wink at the corruption of nature, which is the true source. They cannot impute this corruption to God, because he bears testimony to the goodness of his creation. For though, by the eternal providence of God, man was formed for the calamity under which he lies, he took the matter of it from himself, not from God, since the only cause of his destruction was his degenerating from the purity of his creation into a state of vice and impurity.

10. There is a third absurdity by which the adversaries of predestination defame it. As we ascribe it entirely to the counsel of the divine will, that those whom God adopts as the heirs of his kingdom are exempted from universal destruction, they infer that he is an acceptor of persons; but this Scripture uniformly denies: and, therefore Scripture is either at variance with itself, or respect is had to merit in election. First, the sense in which Scripture declares that God is not an acceptor of persons, is different from that which they suppose: since the term person means not man, but those things which when conspicuous in a man, either procure favor, grace, and dignity, or, on the contrary, produce hatred, contempt, and disgrace. Among, these are, on the one hand, riches, wealth, power, rank, office, country, beauty, etc.; and, on the other hand, poverty, want, mean birth, sordidness, contempt, and the like. Thus Peter and Paul say, that the Lord is no acceptor of persons, because he

makes no distinction between the Jew and the Greek; does not make the mere circumstance of country the ground for rejecting, one or embracing the other (Acts 10:34; Rom. 2:10, Gal. 3:28). Thus James also uses the same words, when he would declare that God has no respect to riches in his judgment (James 2:5). Paul also says in another passage, that in judging God has no respect to slavery or freedom (Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25). There is nothing inconsistent with this when we say, that God, according to the good pleasure of his will, without any regard to merit, elects those whom he chooses for sons, while he rejects and reprobates others. For fuller satisfaction the matter may be thus explained (see August. Epist. 115, et ad Bonif., Lib. 2, cap. 7). It is asked, how it happens that of two, between whom there is no difference of merit, God in his election adopts the one, and passes by the other? I, in my turn, ask, Is there any thing in him who is adopted to incline God towards him? If it must be confessed that there is nothing, it will follow, that God looks not to the man, but is influenced entirely by his own goodness to do him good. Therefore, when God elects one and rejects another, it is owing not to any respect to the individual, but entirely to his own mercy which is free to display and exert itself when and where he pleases. For we have elsewhere seen, that in order to humble the pride of the flesh, “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called,” (1 Cor. 1:26); so far is God in the exercise of his favor from showing any respect to persons.

11. Wherefore, it is false and most wicked to charge God with dispensing justice unequally, because in this predestination he does not observe the same course towards all. If (say they) he finds all guilty, let him punish all alike: if he finds them innocent, let him relieve all from the severity of judgment. But they plead with God as if he were either interdicted from showing mercy, or were obliged, if he show mercy, entirely to renounce judgment. What is it that they demand? That if all are guilty all shall receive the same punishment. We admit that the guilt is common, but we say, that God in mercy succors some. Let him (they say) succor all. We object, that it is right for him to show by punishing that he is a just judge. When they cannot tolerate this, what else are they attempting than to deprive God of the power of showing mercy; or, at least, to allow it to him only on the condition of altogether renouncing judgment? Here the words of Augustine most admirably apply: “Since in the first man the whole human race fell under condemnation, those vessels which are made of it unto honor, are not vessels of self-righteousness, but of divine mercy. When other vessels are made unto dishonor, it must be imputed not to injustice, but to judgment,” (August. Epist. 106, De Praedest. et Gratia; De Bone Persever., cap. 12). Since God inflicts due punishment on those whom he reprobates, and bestows unmerited favor on those whom he calls, he is free from every accusation; just as it belongs to the creditor to forgive the debt to one, and exact it of another. The Lord therefore may show favor to whom he will, because he is merciful; not show it to all, because he is a just judge. In giving to some what they do not merit, he shows his free favor; in not giving to all, he declares what all deserve. For when Paul says, “God has concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all,” it ought also to be added, that he is debtor to none; for “who has first given to him and it shall be recompensed unto him again?” (Rom. 11:32, 33).

12. Another argument which they employ to overthrow predestination is that if it stand, all care and study of well doing must cease. For what man can hear (say they) that life and death are fixed by an eternal and immutable decree of God, without immediately concluding that it is of no consequence how he acts, since no work of his can either hinder or further the predestination of God? Thus all will rush on, and like desperate men plunge headlong wherever lust inclines. And it is true that this is not altogether a fiction; for there are multitudes of a swinish nature who defile the doctrine of predestination by their profane blasphemies, and employ them as a cloak to evade all admonition and censure. “God knows what he has determined to do with regard to us: if he has decreed our salvation, he will bring us to it in his own time; if he has doomed us to death, it is vain for us to fight against it.” But Scripture, while it enjoins us to think of this high mystery with much greater reverence and religion, gives very different instruction to the pious, and justly condemns the accursed license of the ungodly. For it does not remind us of predestination to increase our audacity, and tempt us to pry with impious presumption into the inscrutable counsels of God, but rather to humble and abase us, that we may tremble at his judgment, and learn to look up to his mercy. This is the mark at which believers will aim. The grunt of these filthy swine is duly silenced by Paul. They say that they feel secure in vices because, if they are of the number of the elect, their vices will be no obstacle to the ultimate attainment of life. But Paul reminds us that the end for which we are elected is, “that we should be holy, and without blame before him,” (Eph. 1:4). If the end of election is holiness of life, it ought to arouse and stimulate us strenuously to aspire to it, instead of serving as a pretext for sloth. How wide the difference between the two things, between ceasing from well-doing because election is sufficient for salvation, and its being the very end of election, that we should devote ourselves to the study of good works. Have done, then, with blasphemies which wickedly invert the whole order of election. When they extend their blasphemies farther, and say that he who is reprobated by God will lose his pains if he studies to approve himself to him by innocence and probity of life, they are convicted of the most impudent falsehood. For whence can any such study arise but from election? As all who are of the number of the reprobate are vessels formed unto dishonor, so they cease not by their perpetual crimes to provoke the anger of God against them, and give evident signs of the judgment which God has already passed upon them; so far is it from being true that they vainly contend against it.

13. Another impudent and malicious calumny against this doctrine is, that it destroys all exhortations to a pious life. The great odium to which Augustine was at one time subjected on this head he wiped away in his treatise De Correptione et Gratia, to Valentinus, a perusal of which will easily satisfy the pious and docile. Here, however, I may touch on a few points, which will, I hope, be sufficient for those who are honest and not contentious. We have already seen how plainly and audibly Paul preaches the doctrine of free election: is he, therefore, cold in admonishing and exhorting? Let those good zealots compare his vehemence with theirs and they will find that they are ice, while he is all fervor. And surely every doubt on this subject should be removed by the principles which he lays down, that God has not called us to uncleanness; that every one should possess his vessel in honor; that we are the workmanship of God, “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them,” (1

Thess. 4:4, 7; Eph. 2:10). In one word, those who have any tolerable acquaintance with the writings of Paul will understand, without a long demonstration, how well he reconciles the two things which those men pretend to be contradictory to each other. Christ commands us to believe in him, and yet there is nothing false or contrary to this command in the statement which he afterwards makes: "No man can come unto me, except it were given him of my Father," (John 6:65). Let preaching then have its free course, that it may lead men to faith, and dispose them to persevere with uninterrupted progress. Nor, at the same time, let there be any obstacle to the knowledge of predestination, so that those who obey may not plume themselves on anything of their own, but glory only in the Lord. It is not without cause our Savior says, "Who has ears to hear, let him hear," (Mt. 13:9). Therefore, while we exhort and preach, those who have ears willingly obey: in those again, who have no ears is fulfilled what is written: "Hear ye indeed, but understand not," (Isaiah 6:9). "But why (says Augustine) have some ears, and others not? Who has known the mind of the Lord? Are we, therefore, to deny what is plain because we cannot comprehend what is hid?" This is a faithful quotation from Augustine; but because his words will perhaps have more authority than mine, let us adduce the following passage from his treatise, *De Bone Persever.*, cap. 15.

"Should some on hearing this turn to indolence and sloth, and leaving off all exertion, rush headlong into lust, are we, therefore to suppose that what has been said of the foreknowledge of God is not true? If God foreknew that they would be good, will they not be good, however great their present wickedness? and if God foreknew that they would be wicked, will they not be wicked, how great soever the goodness now seen in them? For reasons of this description, must the truth which has been stated on the subject of divine foreknowledge be denied or not mentioned? and more especially when, if it is not stated, other errors will arise?" In the sixteenth chapter he says, "The reason for not mentioning the truth is one thing, the necessity for telling the truth is another. It were tedious to inquire into all the reasons for silence. One, however, is, lest those who understand not become worse, while we are desirous to make those who understand better informed. Now such persons, when we say anything of this kind, do not indeed become better informed, but neither do they become worse. But when the truth is of such a nature, that he who cannot comprehend it becomes worse by our telling it, and he who can comprehend it becomes worse by our not telling it, what think ye ought we to do? Are we not to tell the truth, that he who can comprehend may comprehend, rather than not tell it, and thereby not only prevent both from comprehending, but also make the more intelligent of the two to become worse, whereas if he heard and comprehended others might learn through him? And we are unwilling to say what, on the testimony of Scripture, it is lawful to say. For we fear lest, when we speak, he who cannot comprehend may be offended; but we have no fear lest while we are silent, he who can comprehend the truth be involved in falsehood." In chapter twentieth, glancing again at the same view, he more clearly confirms it. "Wherefore, if the apostles and teachers of the Church who came after them did both; if they discoursed piously of the eternal election of God, and at the same time kept believers under the discipline of a pious life, how can those men of our day, when shut up by the invincible force of truth, think they are right in saying, that what is said of predestination, though it is true, must not be preached to the people? Nay, it ought indeed to be preached, that whoso has ears to hear may hear. And who has ears if he has not received them from him who has promised to give them? Certainly, let him who receives not, reject. Let him who receives, take and drink, drink and live. For as piety is to be

preached, that God may be duly worshipped; so predestination also is to be preached, that he who has ears to hear may, in regard to divine grace, glory not in himself, but in God."

14. And yet as that holy man had a singular desire to edify, he so regulates his method of teaching as carefully, and as far as in him lay, to avoid giving offense. For he reminds us, that those things which are truly should also be fitly spoken. Were any one to address the people thus: If you do not believe, the reason is, because God has already doomed you to destruction: he would not only encourage sloth, but also give countenance to wickedness. Were any one to give utterance to the sentiment in the future tense, and say, that those who hear will not believe because they are reprobates, it were imprecation rather than doctrine. Wherefore, Augustine not undeservedly orders such, as senseless teachers or minister and ill-omened prophets, to retire from the Church. He, indeed, elsewhere truly contends that "a man profits by correction only when He who causes those whom He pleases to profit without correction, pities and assists. But why is it thus with some, and differently with others? Far be it from us to say that it belongs to the clay and not to the potter to decide." He afterwards says, "When men by correction either come or return to the way of righteousness, who is it that works salvation in their hearts but he who gives the increase, whoever it be that plants and waters? When he is pleased to save, there is no free-will in man to resist. Wherefore, it cannot be doubted that the will of God (who has done whatever he has pleased in heaven and in earth, and who has even done things which are to be) cannot be resisted by the human will, or prevented from doing what he pleases, since with the very wills of men he does so." Again, "When he would bring men to himself, does he bind them with corporeal fetters? He acts inwardly, inwardly holds, inwardly moves their hearts, and draws them by the will, which he has wrought in them." What he immediately adds must not be omitted: "because we know not who belongs to the number of the predestinated, or does not belong, our desire ought to be that all may be saved; and hence every person we meet, we will desire to be with us a partaker of peace. But our peace will rest upon the sons of peace. Wherefore, on our part, let correction be used as a harsh yet salutary medicine for all, that they may neither perish, nor destroy others. To God it will belong to make it available to those whom he has foreknown and predestinated."