

Lewis Miller

Eternal Punishment



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Eternal Punishment

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Eternal Punishment

By Lewis G. M. Miller

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Contents

[Also Available from LutheranLibrary.org](#)

[About The Lutheran Library](#)

[Contents](#)

[Eternal Punishment.](#)

[Is the Bible the Word of God?](#)

[The Scientific Method](#)

[Nature and the Bible Two Volumes of The Same Book](#)

[Facts first, then Theory](#)

[Mr. Beecher's Sermon](#)

[The Mystery of Iniquity](#)

[Canon Farrar's Statements](#)

["Damnation", "Hell", and "Everlasting"](#)

[More Denials of Eternal Punishment by Canon Farrar](#)

[Is Future Punishment "Purifying" and "Corrective"?](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[About Rev. Lewis G. M. Miller](#)

[Copyright Notice](#)

[How Can You Find Peace With God?](#)

[Benediction](#)

[More Than 100 Good Christian Books For You To Download And Enjoy](#)

Eternal Punishment.

By Rev. Lewis G. M. Miller, Salem, Va

AS THIS DOCTRINE has been most bitterly attacked, not only by those who glory in their rejection of the Bible, as a Revelation from God, but also by some of the foremost who claim to preach it as the word of God, it may be well to consider, in all candor, some of the objections which have been most strongly urged against it. And this we regard as the more proper, inasmuch as these objections, loudly proclaimed in the pulpit in our own land and beyond the sea, have been scattered broadcast among the people, and aroused in many a spirit of earnest inquiry. The sermons, which have principally occasioned the late and still continuing heated debate preached by Canon Farrar in London, and one preached by concerning the doctrine of eternal punishment, are a series, Mr. Beecher, headed "*The Background of Mystery.*" These sermons we take as representative, that is, summing up in themselves the fundamental positions which are at any time and at all times urged against the doctrine, so that, in dealing with them, we deal with the grand principles which would underlie any discussion of the general subject. We have had access to only three of Canon Farrar's sermons, viz., "*Eternal Punishment,*" "*Is Life worth Living?*" "*Are there few that be saved?*"

Is the Bible the Word of God?

Let us lay down some general principles, which should pervade all examination of Christian doctrine — the antecedent question, underlying and going before all others, is this, Is the Bible the word of God, as it claims to be? If it is not, then it has no authority whatever, and should be rejected in toto. If it is God's own word, then it, and it alone, has all authority. Its decisions are final. As God is supposed to know His own will better than

man could know it, that revealed will itself is to decide in all questions which may arise concerning it, nor in deciding them is it ever allowable to put aside God's word, and ransack human reason and experience instead. Theologians may well learn, concerning the application of this principle, from men of science, though it seems that those who laud science most, are slowest to learn this very lesson.

The Scientific Method

The scientific method bases itself, not on speculations and a priori reasonings, but on *observed facts*, it does not ransack the subjective world to arrive at conclusions concerning objective phenomena, but goes into the objective world of nature to learn. Moreover the scientist is told that he must come humbly to nature herself always, that he must lay aside all preconceived notions, and implicitly accept what nature reveals to observation, however much her teachings, thus rendered, may be opposed to all those notions. The final question never is, How *ought* nature to act under certain conditions? but only and always, How does she act under those conditions? The observation of nature herself is the only safe guide.

Nature and the Bible Two Volumes of The Same Book

But nature and the Bible are two complementary volumes of the same great book, written, both of them, by the finger of God. Nature reveals His hand, the Bible His heart, nature reveals His power, the Bible His grace, nature is His workmanship, the Bible His will. They mutually illumine each other, neither is complete without the other, and together they constitute the inseparable and mutually explanatory revelation of God to man. They are the two differentials, whose integration is found in God alone, two convergent rays, centering in the same great luminary.

This being the case, the same principles which underlie the study of the one, underlie also the study of the other. Humility, docility, freedom from bias, are prime requisites in the study of either, a willingness to submit every question in their sphere to their supreme arbitrament. Let theologians

then bring the scientific method to bear in the study of the Bible, in the decision of all questions pertaining to the spiritual universe.

Yet, as we said before, those who praise that method most in the study of nature, often violate it most in dealing with its twin volume, the Bible. The plunge into metaphysical speculations, they tell us what God ought to do, and consequently what He will do, and satisfied by their own reasonings in the matter, fail to recur to the only authoritative arbiter, the written word itself.

This method of studying nature according to the Aristotelian plan, was the bane of science as long as pursued, and led to innumerable blunders. But now we know that it is utterly vicious to study nature thus — equally is it so in deciding spiritual questions. Now the scientist must come to the book of nature alone, *observe facts*, and unconditionally accept facts as they develop themselves in nature — exactly so must the sacred scientist proceed. Having accepted the Bible as God's revealed will, then careful, humble, docile observation of the written word is to decide all questions treated of in that word, not man's speculations.

Facts first, then Theory

The man of science must not lay down a theory, however beautiful, and then try to force facts into conformity with it, whether they are willing or not — but he must observe his facts *first*, and then make his theory conform to them. So the theologian must not spin out his fine theory first, and lay down for God what He of necessity ought to do, and must do, if He would be loving and just, and then force scripture into agreement with his theory — but he must first consult *God's Statements*, and form his theory accordingly. Had theologians acted upon this plain and simple principle, it would have saved them from many sad blunders, and an observation of the same principle would wonderfully diminish the present supposed (for it is only supposed) conflict between science and the Bible. Men read theories into nature, and they read theories into the Bible, and when these theories clash, they say that nature and the Bible clash. It is one thing, however, for man's *interpretation* of nature, and man's *interpretation* of the Bible to conflict, and quite another thing for nature itself and the Bible itself to conflict.

It is dangerous to generalize too rapidly —to build a theory upon an insufficient number of facts in nature — or to build a theory upon a few dark and fragmentary sayings of the word of God, to the exclusion of its plainer declarations. There are seeming contradictions in nature, as the *expansion* rather than *contraction* of freezing water, which are yet *facts*, though they sometimes *seem* to us to be utterly opposed to the general analogy of nature. So exactly is it in the spiritual world which God's word reveals. There are facts in that mysterious world which far transcend the analysis of the keenest human intellect, which seem contradictory to all our notions, and yet, like the expansion of freezing water, there they stand. What are we to do with them? The scientist would laugh at the idea of abolishing an observed fact of nature, whether we can explain it or not. So the true student of the Bible should laugh at the idea of abolishing a plain statement of God's word, a spiritual fact, whether he can reconcile and explain it or not. Nor should we, either in nature or the Bible, throw away naked facts, or plain, simple statements, to make way for that which is confessedly more uncertain, less plainly revealed. And again, one solitary, plain, evident *fact* in nature would invalidate any theory whatsoever, which could not, in any possible way, be brought into agreement with it. So, any one plain, evident statement of God's word will invalidate any theory which is opposed to it.

These general principles we revert to, because they are constantly and flagrantly violated by all those who seek to overthrow the fact of eternal punishment, as it stands revealed in the word of God.

Let it be remembered that Beecher and Canon Farrar both profess to accept the Bible as the revealed word of God. They both admit that nature and the Bible emanate from the same source, hence we are not inconsistent in holding them to the same principles in the investigation of each of these great, complementary volumes. They must be as careful not to project the subjective into the objective in the one case as in the other. Imagination, speculation, must always be held in subordination to fact in the study of the one volume, and to explicit statement in the other.

Mr. Beecher's Sermon

Let us look then at Mr. Beecher's sermon. The first general circumstance which strikes us, is the very large proportion of space which is devoted to reasonings and speculations, and the almost entire absence of direct appeals to the written word. Again, we are struck with the strong antagonism running all through it — the beauty and scriptural correctness of the fundamental premise, the utter incongruity of the conclusion therewith. "*The Background of Mystery*," the title under which it is printed, is expressive of the fundamental premise laid down as the basis of the discourse. We, as finite beings are encompassed on every hand by the infinite — as the Scriptures say, "In Him (the infinite One) we live, and move, and have our being." It follows then that, pursue what line of investigation we may, sooner or later we come to the end of our capacity, and still beyond us stretches the unfathomable infinite. As Mr. Beecher expresses it:

"The background of all theology, as treating of the nature of God, and of the divine moral government, is mystery. The abyss which lies back of human knowledge is simply infinite — an abyss of mystery."

Again,

"That while we have elementary faculties and feelings which define for us the divine nature, those same feelings and faculties exist in God in such rarity, in such scope, in such combinations, and they act after methods that so transcend their action when limited to an organization of flesh, that there is always a vast background of mystery beyond them."

Again,—

"Human conditions; but God is free from such conditions; He stands above them and beyond them; and in Him those qualities (love, mercy, gentleness, etc.) take on forms so large and intense, that, after all, the background of every one of our thoughts in respect to the nature of God and the divine moral government is simply untraceable by human imagination or thought;"

And again:

"In the sphere of the eternities religious truth is nebulous and mystical; it has a deep background of mystery."

These quotations then express the fundamental premise running through the sermon, and beautifully set forth the utter incapacity of the finite, human intellect to decide for itself questions involving the infinite. Now what would have been the logical conclusion from such a premise? Would it not have been this that follows? Inasmuch as the abyss lying back of human knowledge is infinite, and, in the very nature of the case, far transcending all my powers — and inasmuch as He who filleth eternity, to whom there is no abyss of mystery, in whose sight *all things* are naked and open, has graciously revealed in His word, to some extent, what lies in that great unknown (to me) abyss — therefore I will yield unquestioning assent to what that word declares, though it may be dark and incomprehensible to me now. He is love — He is true — and what I know not now, I shall know hereafter. Such, it seems to us, would be the only reasonable conclusion to one who believes in the God of the Bible, and that the Bible is His revelation, all of which we understand Mr. Beecher to believe.

But does he draw this conclusion? does he submit unconditionally to the decision of God's word as to what lies in the abyss which transcends human knowledge? Let him answer for himself:

“If now you tell me that this great mass of men, because they had not the knowledge of God, went to heaven, I say that the inroad of such a vast amount of mud, swept into heaven, would be destructive of its purity, and I cannot accept that view. If, on the other hand, you say that they went to hell, then you make an infidel of me.”

Now what is involved in that statement? Why Mr. Beecher here assumes to decide on one of the profoundest problems of God's moral government, involving the infinite in its every element. He shuts the class of which he speaks out of heaven, he also shuts them out of hell. Rather than accept the latter conclusion, whatever the Bible may say upon the subject, he would reject the Bible altogether, become an infidel. He is determined that there must be a third state beyond the grave, which is neither heaven nor hell, as the result of his own cogitations on the subject. Again, in the same connection, he says:

“But I *will not* worship the devil, though he should come dressed in royal robes and sit on the throne of Jehovah. I *will not* worship cruelty. I *will* worship Love — that sacrifices itself for the good of those that err, and that is as patient with them as a mother is with a sick child. With every power of my being will I worship a God such as that.”

Or in other words, Mr. Beecher is stubbornly set in his demands as to what the God must be who claims any recognition from him. If Jehovah were to deal in a certain way with those classes of men, whether the Bible teaches it or not, He would be devilish, He would be cruel, and Mr. Beecher would set himself in determined opposition to Him. There is only one possible way for even God to act so as to merit his approval and allegiance in these matters, which involve at every turn infinite issues, far transcending the powers of the human mind properly to grapple with, and that is, to deal with them as a mother deals with a sick child. Only a God who thus conducts Himself according to his notions will he consent to adore. Again,

“Take away the doctrine of the finality of things at death . . . and the trouble ceases”—

or in other words, some parts of the Bible seem to contain a troublesome doctrine which painfully fails to fit into the character of the beautiful ideal God, whom Mr. Beecher has excogitated, and all you have to do in order to preserve the ideal in all its beauty, will be to cut that doctrine out. The ideal must stand, for Mr. Beecher could not worship any other one, and if even Jehovah Himself should intimate that He might possibly act otherwise in the premises than Mr. Beecher prescribes He should do, it would only convince Mr. Beecher that He was the devil dressed up in Jehovah’s garb.

How again we ask, what do all such statements imply, to which might be added others from this same sermon of similar import? They are final judgments, without appeal, shutting God down to a certain general course, and only one, in dealing with these classes of men in the future. And what do such judgments, in order that they may be just, involve? They involve an absolute, all-comprehending knowledge of sin, its causes, character and results. Has Mr. Beecher that knowledge? The Bible speaks of “the mystery of iniquity.” God must deal with the sinner, as the mother with the sick child — any other course would show lack of love, cruelty. But is sin in the sinner altogether analogous to sickness in the child? There is no guilt in the child toward the mother because it is sick. Is there then no guilt in the sinner toward God? Rom. 8:19 says, “That *all the world* may become *guilty* before God.” If then the relation which the sinner, as a sinner, stands in toward God is entirely different from that which the sick child stands in toward its mother, why must God deal with the sinner just as the mother with the child?

Again, these judgments imply in Mr. Beecher a knowledge of what infinite love and infinite justice demand in God in dealing with the infinite evil called sin, and of what would constitute cruelty therein. Has he that knowledge? Let him answer for himself.

“So our conception of finite love is not to interpret God’s conception of infinite love. Why, what is love? What do we know about it? . . . With us at best it is restricted and imperfect. But what is the love of the infinite?”

This is one answer, and now another.

“But God is free from such conditions (human conditions); He stands above them and beyond them; and in Him those qualities (love, mercy, etc.) take on forms so large and intense that, after all, the background of *every one of our thoughts* in respect to the nature of God, and *the divine moral government* is simply *untraceable* by human imagination or thought.”

If then our conception of finite love is not to interpret God’s conception of infinite love, if we do not know what the love of the infinite is, if the background of every one of our thoughts in respect to the nature of God and the divine moral government is simply untraceable by human imagination or thought, why then does Mr. Beecher pass judgments implying absolute knowledge concerning all these things! If “in the sphere of the eternities religious truth is nebulous and mystical,” why does he insist on stretching the line of human reason over into the eternities, and say that there, as here, there must be probation and not finality? That God must move back the limits of His longsuffering and forbearance into the eternities? Here then we see the antagonism referred to — in his premise he admits human limitation, ignorance, utter incapacity to deal with the infinite, yet at the same time draws conclusions, which, to be just, presuppose the absence of all human limitation, ignorance, etc.

The Mystery of Iniquity

The fact is, God’s disposition of sinners in the future involves the whole question of “the mystery of iniquity,” from beginning to end, and this in turn involves omniscience. Sin stands related to the eternity past and the

eternity to come. Its ramifications stretch into the infinite in every direction. This world of ours, and that which can be contained in the utmost stretch of human thought, is but one little link in the great chain of cause and effect which reaches from the everlasting to the everlasting. Every line of sequences which passes through the point on which we stand comes out of the infinite, and goes into the infinite beyond. Look which way we will, there is an inexorable horizon which bounds our mental sight, and beyond that horizon lies still the infinite. Our globe is a transition point for infinities. If this be true, then no created intelligence has, or can have, the data requisite in order to pass sentence upon sin, involving, as it does, the entire moral government of God. The absolute, the omniscient only can have that. The child who had only known his father in the endearing surroundings of home, and heard his voice in the tender accents of love, would not understand it, were he to see him in all the dread horror of the battlefield, his sword dripping with human gore, his aspect terrible — yet the very love which showed itself so tenderly at home might be the motive that sent that father to the field, and nerved his arm for every stroke it struck.

The child might not understand how love could have such contrary manifestations, nor could the father explain it to its infant mind, yet the two are easily reconcilable when knowledge has grown sufficiently. Consequently, “let us judge nothing before the time,” but let us rather say, “I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because *thou* didst it.” All depends upon the *character* of God as wisdom, truth and love, and that character can only be known by faith. That the Infinite One is perfect, is the axiom which underlies all conceivable knowledge whatsoever. We should not presume to say what God must do in order to be just and loving, but humbly judge that to be just and loving which God does, and because He does it. The proper inference from the background of mystery is, that as finite beings, surrounded by mystery on every hand, we must humbly consult the light which the Infinite One has been pleased to give us, and unhesitatingly accept His statements, relying upon His perfect wisdom, truth and love, though we may not yet understand how those statements are to be reconciled with that wisdom, truth and love. This Mr. Beecher has not done, but insists on God’s allowing certain opportunities to certain classes of men in the world to come, on pain of his becoming an infidel. How he brings this stubborn assertion of his right of final judgment in the matter, into

harmony with his previous admission of human incapacity to grasp much that is necessarily involved in any intelligent decision of it, we do not see.

We fear he does not view the terrible *guilt* and sinfulness of sin as God views it, or he would more humbly receive what God says about its infinite consequences.

Canon Farrar's Statements

Now let us look at some of Canon Farrar's statements. We discover in them intense aversion to the fact of eternal punishment, and the stubborn determination not to admit it, the assumption of ability to say what God ought to and must do, a resolute effort to force scripture into agreement with this foregone conclusion, prominence given to reasonings and speculations, the covert error that we are to bring all the facts of the word of God to the supreme test of human understanding, and although God so far transcends our utmost conceptions, that still He must submit to be measured, and even controlled, in all the infinite problems which present themselves in His moral government, by the feeble standard of human sensibilities and impulses. He does not, as Mr. Beecher, elaborate a premise first, whose legitimate application altogether undermines the conclusions which he draws — but the same ultra rationalizing tendency appears in both, the fixed purpose to stake out for God the limits which are necessarily to bound Him in the exercise of His infinite justice, love, etc.

We do not see how Canon Farrar can justly inveigh against “those who pretend to dignify with the name of scriptural argument the ever widening spirals of dim and attenuated inference out of the narrow aperture of single texts.” when he himself builds up an argument against eternal punishment on the text in 1 Pet. 4:6, which is confessedly one of the darkest and most mysterious statements in the Gospel, the interpretation of which is by no means agreed on, and which stands almost alone, without any large amount of light thrown on it by other scripture, whilst many clear and explicit declarations of God's word utterly preclude the application which he gives to it. He says on this point —

“St. Peter tells you in so many words, in the passage which I have chosen for my text (1 Pet. 4:6), that the Gospel *was* preached to those that are dead; and if, as the Church in every age has held, the fate of those dead sinners was not irrevocably fixed by death, then it must be clear and obvious to the very meanest understanding that neither of necessity is ours.”

Let us see whether this is so plain that “it must be clear and obvious to the very meanest understanding?” St. Peter tells us that the Gospel “*was* preached”— it was in the past, to those who had, in the distant past, and under peculiar circumstances of disadvantage, been swept away from earth. He does not say that it *shall be* preached again to the dead in any circumstances, nor does any other passage of the word of God say so. Canon Farrar says that since *their* fate was not irrevocably fixed at death, *therefore ours* is not of necessity so. And then, leaping to the conclusion that it is *not* fixed, he goes on to say to his hearers —

“There is hope *for you* — hope for you, *even if death overtake* you before the final victory is won . . . though *you too*, if you should *continue in sin*, may have to be purified in that gehenna of αἰωνίου fire beyond the grave.”

How does he know, that since *their* fate was not fixed, *therefore ours* is not? Were *their* privileges as great as *ours*? Is there no difference between the case of one who lives in the full blaze of gospel light, and one who lived in the darkness of that antediluvian day? No difference between those, and them who sat in front of Canon Farrar, who have listened again and again to the offers of redemption through a crucified and risen Saviour, and who again and again, turning a deaf ear to the warnings of God, have trampled under foot the blood of His dear Son? And if in every way, *their* case, of whom the text speaks, is so different in privilege and opportunity from *ours*, how does he dare to say that *their* judgment and *ours* must be the same, and on the authority of God speak hope to those to whom God has not spoken hope? Has he never read, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required?” What right has he then to assume and declare that because the Gospel was preached *to them*, therefore it *will be* to those who die impenitent in the midst of gospel light?

Surely this is “dim and attenuated inference out of the narrow aperture of single texts.” The Scripture says, “He that, being *often reprov*ed, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that *without remedy*.” How then

can Canon Farrar say to those who have been often reprov'd, and often hardened their necks, that their destruction *shall not* be “without remedy?”

And again God says, “Because I *have called*, and *ye refused*; but ye have *set at naught* all my counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at *your calamity*; I will mock when *your fear* cometh; for that they *hated* knowledge, and *did not choose* the fear of the Lord — they *despised* all my reproof — *therefore* shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices.” Canon Farrar would have done better to utter this solemn warning in the ears of that great congregation, many of whom were doubtless hardened rejectors of the Lord Jesus, than to feed them on inference not legitimately based on God’s word.

We are surprised that one “claiming the fullest right to speak with the authority of knowledge,” should evince the ignorance which seems to be evinced by the following —

“Now I ask you, my brethren, very solemnly, where would be the popular teachings about hell, if we calmly and deliberately erased from our English Bible the three words “damnation,” “hell,” and “everlasting?”

“Damnation”, “Hell”, and “Everlasting”

We presume he means by “the popular teachings about hell” the doctrine of the eternal punishment of the finally impenitent. Now he ought certainly to know that some of the most powerful and irrefutable passages of God’s word, which teach this doctrine, contain not one of those three words — so that if every passage containing them were stricken out of the Bible, the doctrine would still stand on a stable foundation. Some of the passages containing none of the above words, yet clearly containing “the popular teachings about hell,” we adduce here. In Mat. 3:12 we have this statement: “But He will burn up (consume utterly) the chaff with *unquenchable* live.” Mat. 12:32: “Shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.”

Now there can be no entrance into heaven without forgiveness, consequently, as we have here an explicit statement that this sin has never forgiveness, it unavoidable follows that there is a state of eternal banishment from God. In Luke 16:26. Abraham says to the rich man, both of them no longer on earth, but in the world to come, “between us and you

there is a great gulf *fixed* (set fast): so that they which would pass from hence to you *cannot*: neither *can* they pass to us, that would come from thence." If that gulf were ever to be closed, it would not be *fixed, set fast*. The parties in this conversation were in the world to come, and hence were using, not the language of this world, but of that one. When Jesus spoke this parable. He knew full well all the inferences flowing therefrom, nor would He, when He introduces us into the future world, and allows us to hear the conversation of parties there, give us an utterly false and misleading view of circumstances there.

In John 3:36, we have this declaration, "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God *abideth* on him." Now what is the meaning of *abideth*?" It means to remain, to stand firm, to continue. If that wrath then were ever to be removed, however far in the future, it would not be "abiding." We must remember that this is *God's word*, spoken from *God's standpoint*.

Again, the parable in Luke 14:15—24 is most solemnly instructive on this point. And mark you, Jesus was speaking expressly of the kingdom of God, of the invitation given by God here, of the excuses which men make for not accepting that invitation here and now. The servant reports the manner in which they slighted the invitation, and the sentence of the lord of the feast is, "That *none* of those men which were bidden *shall taste* of my supper." Now would that be a true statement of the case, if those men were again in the distant future (and it would not alter the case, however far in the future it might be) to be invited again, and really be admitted to blessed participation in that supper? Then they *would taste* of his supper, and our Lord's representation would be untrue. In Eph. 5:5, it is written, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath *any inheritance* in the kingdom of Christ and of God." The point of the passage is, that those who willfully persevere in these vices have no portion or reversion in God's kingdom, whatever. Now if they were to have a place among the saints, even after ages of suffering hereafter, they would have an inheritance then, which would simply be held in reversion, until they were prepared for it, and it would not be true at all that no such have "*any inheritance*." 1 John 5:16 states, "He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death There is a sin unto death; I do not say that he shall pray for it." Here there is a sin which excludes the hope, or even the prayer for life. Life is not to be given to those who commit that sin.

These are only a few of the passages, containing not one of the three words on which the doctrine of eternal punishment is said by Canon Farrar to hang, and which teach it quite as strongly notwithstanding. Other passages which we shall hereafter cite, are quite as applicable here.

More Denials of Eternal Punishment by Canon Farrar

Notice the following statements made by Canon Farrar:

“They (among whom he counts himself) will declare their trust that, even *after death*, through the infinite mercy of the loving Father, the dead shall be alive again, and multitudes, at any rate, of the lost be found.”

And remember, he is not like Beecher, speaking mainly of those who die and have died without the knowledge of God, but of those who die in the midst of gospel light, including those who sat before him when delivering these discourses. His statements in the most general and absolute way attack the doctrine of eternal punishment, with reference as well to those who hear and reject the Gospel, as to those who do not. Again,

“— not of final and hopeless, but of that *purifying* and *corrective* punishment, which, as we all believe, does await impenitent sin, both here and *beyond the grave*.”

Again,

“— though you too (“you” refers to those who were sitting before him), if you continue in sin, may have to be purified in that gehenna of *αἰώνιος* fire beyond the grave.”

Now, we ask, upon what does he base the trust he so confidently declares? Where does he get the authority for preaching that the punishment which awaits the impenitent, those who continue and die in sin, and that too in the midst of gospel light, is *purifying and corrective, not final*? We know of no power able to cleanse from sin, save the blood of Jesus — “the blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin” — but it seems that Canon Farrar has discovered that hell fire has that virtue also. Again:

“He will indeed condemn us . . . if we *die* in *willful sin*, to His *αἰώνιος* fire: but *it is* (positive assertion) the fire of love. It is to purify, not to torture: it is *to melt*, not *to burn*.”

In connection with the foregoing, notice the following —

“I *cannot* preach the *certainty* of what is called universalism — that is, the view that *all* will finally be saved.” “And if you ask me whether I must not believe in endless torments for these reprobates of earth, I answer, ‘Ay, for them, and for thee, and for me too, *until* we have learned with all our hearts to love good, and not evil; but whether God, for Christ’s sake, may not enable as to do this, even beyond the grave, if we have failed to do so this side the grave, *I cannot say*.”

But above he does say *positively*, even to those living and who would die “in willful sin,” to those who long had trampled under foot the blood of Jesus, and would continue to do so to the end, that the future punishment which they should endure, would be purifying and corrective; that the fire which they should feel, would be “to melt, not to burn.” If he “cannot preach the certainty of universalism,” why *does* he preach the certainty of it, and through that very universalism lull into carnal security those who are not only out of Christ, but who willfully remain so? Again:

“Think noble things of God. Be sure that . . . Christ’s infinite atonement *must*, in *some way*, though we *know not how*, mean — or at any rate, *we may suppose* it to mean . . . that earth’s sinners, far off, it may be, shall be transformed, far off, yet at last, into God’s saints.”

This is one of the most remarkable statements which we ever read. It seems to have come from a mind in painful doubt and fear concerning the sweeping statements which it was giving utterance to. Are we to think those things “noble” which God tells us about Himself in His word — are we to submit our judgment to His revealed will — or are we to insist on erecting a standard of “nobility” for Him of our own, and attribute to Him such “noble things” as seem to darkened human reason most in keeping with His character, but which He positively denies of Himself in His word? We are to “be sure” that Christ’s atonement “*must* in some way,” though we cannot know how, mean a certain thing, then “*we may suppose* it to mean” it. Well now, if a thing is so certainly so that it *must* be so, and that we can “be sure” of it, what is the sense in saying after that, that we “may suppose” it to be? To talk about being permitted “to suppose” a thing to exist, whilst at the

same time we are “sure” that it does and “must” exist, is absurd. That is surely an uncertain sort of certainty.

Canon Farrar says that God’s character absolutely demands that He should do a certain thing; He “must” do it, His justice, His love, His mercy, compel it, any other course would be loathsome, utterly abhorrent to every human sensibility and impulse, is contrary to Scripture and everything else, etc., and yet he “cannot say” whether, after all, God will do that thing or not: we “may suppose” it to be, and that is all. The difficulty is, that he sets up a standard of truth and justice and love for himself, and then tries to make God conform to that; he predetermines what the result “must” be, and then “flings from him with abhorrence” any other possible result. He will even twist and wrest all that God’s word may say about it, and compel it to his conclusion, however unwilling it may be — and after all he lands square down upon the *terra firma* of “we may suppose,” “I cannot say,” and “I cannot preach the certainty.” Ah!

Canon Farrar accepts the Bible as the word of God, and then erects his own reason and sensibilities as the supreme tribunal before which its statements are to be tried. If the Bible is the word of God, but still must be supremely judged by Canon Farrar, what then? Then he must be higher authority than God Himself, and neither less nor more than this high prerogative does he assume, when he holds out to “willful” sinners, continuing and dying in their sins, the delusive hope of a chance beyond the grave. He proclaims “Christ’s universal and absolute redemption,” “arraigns” anything “as mercilessly ignorant” and “impeaches” it “as a falsehood”, which intimates the possibility that Christ’s redemption may not be, as regards individuals, “universal and absolute” on account of their own willful rejection, and yet he “cannot preach himself the certainty of what is called universalism — that is, the view that all will finally be saved.” If to preach anything else is “mercilessly ignorant” and “a falsehood,” yet if Canon Farrar cannot yet see his way clear “to preach the certainty of it,” had he not better stop preaching till he can, lest he too should be “mercilessly ignorant,” and convicted of “a falsehood?”

Sad indeed it is when a man is reduced to preaching uncertainties, yet according to Canon Farrar’s own mouth, the only way for him to avoid being “mercilessly ignorant” is to preach that of which he says “I cannot preach the certainty.” But worse than this, he at one time admits the uncertainty of final salvation to all, yet at another time with profound

earnestness tells us that the fire of hell is “the fire of love”— that “it is to purify, not to torture — to melt, not to burn,” and that even to those who “die in willful sin.”

Now we ask, in the name of all that is of infinite import to sinful man, what can be gotten out of such a view of future punishment, but the most ultra and all-comprehensive doctrine of final salvation to all? If this is the character of the fire to which “willful sinners” are to be subjected, then final salvation to all is the most absolute of certainties, yet the very man who so solemnly proclaims that this is the character of that fire, says that “I cannot preach the certainty of the view that all will finally be saved.” “If St. Paul again and again flings from him the conclusions of an apparently irresistible logic,” surely Canon Farrar claims greater freedom even than Paul, since he scornfully rejects the conclusions of a logic more than apparently irresistible.

We charge Canon Farrar with ultra rationalism. Let him speak for himself. He classes himself among “those who believe that *reason*, and *conscience*, and *experience*, no less than *Scripture*, are also books of God, and that they too must have a *direct voice* in these great decisions,” that is, in those decisions which relate to the ultimate destinies of man. We maintain that reason is by no means in fallen man “a book of God” in the same sense as Scripture is. Reason is in no condition to have “a direct voice” in such decisions, since it cannot have the data upon which such decisions ought to be based, only the all-knowing God can have that. With Canon Farrar reason has an authority not only “no less than scripture,” but far greater, since reason assumes to judge and set aside scripture. Again: “Finds no warrant, either in the general tone of scripture, or in God’s *no less sacred* teachings through our *individual souls*.” Here again he expressly claims an independent and co-ordinate authority for human reason, the very claim which has led into the wildest excesses, and which is an entire setting aside of the supreme authority of God’s word. Again: “I would rather accept, as reflecting the *mind of God*, the *broad humanitarian charity*, the keen and tender *sensibilities*, than the hard systems of heartless theologians.”

Notice that the “heartless theologians” are those who uncompromisingly adhere to God’s plain word, however much its statements may seemingly conflict with our feelings — and the “hard systems” are those which admit the doctrine of eternal punishment. Now if a man would “rather accept broad, humanitarian charity,” and “the keen and tender sensibilities” as his

guide to ultimate decision upon the mysterious questions arising out of human life, than the clear and explicit word of God, we do not wonder at any conclusions whatever at which he may arrive — but we do protest that no such person should any longer claim God’s word as “the supreme rule of faith,” but should boldly repudiate anything claiming to be a revelation from God, and exalt in its place the surer light of “humanitarian charity,” and “the tender sensibilities.” If these are a sufficient guide to the solution of the profoundest problems which can present themselves to the human mind, involving infinite issues, then a revelation from God is altogether superfluous.

These are only a few of the statements in these sermons, involving the most ultra rationalism, and the spirit which these extracts breathe pervades them throughout. They are a labored effort to bring God’s word concerning the future of man to the supreme bar of “the tender sensibilities,” and “with abhorrence” the author “flings” from him anything which does not approve itself to that supreme tribunal.

Is Future Punishment “Purifying” and “Corrective”?

But we wish to review some of the foregoing statements from another point of view — we mean the statements that future punishment is altogether “purifying and corrective”— “remedial” in its nature and not final. Does God’s word teach us that such is its character? Let us see — Prov. 29:1, “He that being often reprov’d, hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that *without remedy*.”

It would be right hard to put a “remedial” construction upon that passage. God says that the destruction of the willful and obdurate sinner is “without remedy”—Canon Farrar says it isn’t — there then is a question of veracity between them.

In the conversation between Abraham and the rich man, before referred to, if the sufferings of the rich man were remedial and corrective, designed to lit him ultimately for the companionship of Abraham and the blessed in heaven, surely it would have been the most natural thing imaginable for Abraham to have encouraged him by telling him so — and had such been the fact, it would have been cruel indeed in Abraham not thus to cheer him.

But instead of saying “Be of of good cheer, Son, your dross only is being consumed by those flames, you are being made better, and after while that gulf will be bridged, and you will come over here among us,” he says not one word of deliverance, but reminds him instead of the “great gulf *fixed*,” over which there is, and can be, no passage. Instead of telling him that his brothers would have another chance beyond the grave, if they on earth rejected the truth, as he had done, he tells him that, if they hardened themselves against the agencies there employed, “Moses and the prophets,” supernatural agencies would also fail with them.

In Matt. 13, Jesus says “gather . . . the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat in ray barn,” and in explanation, He says, “As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of Man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire.” Here Jesus makes the burning of the tares represent the burning of the wicked at the end of time. But was the burning of the tares *remedial*? Were the tares burnt into wheat, and finally gathered into the barn? If our Lord intended here to employ a true analogy, and if sinners are to be transformed into saints in passing through the fires of hell, then Jesus ought to have said that the bundles of tares were thrown into the fire, not “to burn them,” but in order that they might come out of the fire sheaves of wheat, and as such finally to be gathered into the barn along with the rest of the wheat. Jesus explicitly says that the fire is “to burn” them, Canon Farrar says, “the fire . . . is to melt, not to burn”— which is right?

Again, the wicked are represented by chaff, which is to be burnt with “unquenchable fire.” The same reasoning holds with reference to this figure. It would be an utter absurdity to talk of producing wheat out of chaff by burning it. The fire into which chaff is thrown is in no sense remedial, that is, intended to make wheat out of it. But if the fire into which the wicked are cast is remedial, purifying, corrective, then Jesus could not possibly have chosen a figure more inexpressive of His meaning, more incongruous, more misleading, than that of burning chaff.

In John, 15, in the parable of the vine and the branches, Jesus says, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.” Are they burnt in order to restore them to their vital relationship to the vine? Far

from it. But Jesus makes that burning analogous to the burning of those who reject Him. Where then does the remedial feature come in?

One other case — in Mark, 14:21, our Lord, in speaking of His betrayal by Judas, says of him, “Good were it for that man if he had never been born.” But would this have been a true statement, if Judas, even after countless ages of punishment, was finally to be numbered among the saved? If his punishment were *ever* to terminate, however far in the future, its duration would still be *finite*, whilst the glory and blessedness upon which he would then enter would be *infinite* in duration. Now mathematics teaches us that any finite quantity whatever, compared with an infinite one, reduces to zero, or nothing. Consequently the finite duration of Judas’s punishment, compared with the infinite duration of the blessedness to follow would be as zero to infinity, (0:∞). How then could Jesus say, that a zero of suffering would overbalance an infinitude of happiness? Yet this is just what He would be saying, if Judas were ever to be delivered and inherit glory. We would call a man foolish indeed, who would not be willing to purchase a long life on earth of comfort and happiness by a second of agony, or a man who would not suffer an instantaneous pang, however sharp, to secure a long and prosperous reign in royal splendor.

But how much more would this be true of the Lord Jesus, if He would allow the instantaneous pang of hell fire (and it would be instantaneous, even though it were innumerable cycles of ages, compared with absolutely *endless* duration of happiness thereafter) to outweigh, in His estimation, the eternal glory which would follow? Any supposition then which would reduce our Lord’s solemn declaration concerning Judas to utter absurdity and puerility (and it would be so reduced on the supposition that Judas is ever to be delivered), must be rejected.

And where does Canon Farrar get his authority for declaring, in refutation of the doctrine of eternal punishment, that Christ’s redemption is “universal and absolute?” In its power, capacity, availability for the human race, it is so. But its appropriation by the individuals of the race is not universal and absolute. “All things are ready” indeed, but alas! all *persons* are not ready. The table is set, the food is prepared, sufficient, far more than sufficient for every son and daughter of Adam, but every one will not sit down and eat. The Scripture every where asserts that the *appropriation* of salvation is *conditional*, but just in this Canon Farrar asserts it to be “universal and absolute.” Absolute means without condition, but the word

of God uniformly conditions my enjoyment of Christ's redemption on faith: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* might not perish." Nowhere are we told that men should be saved irrespective of their attitude to Christ in this life.

But whilst we claim that the fact of eternal punishment can be established in the word of God, as we have endeavored to show, without the aid of those passages in which the words "damnation," "hell," or "everlasting" occur, we by no means admit that they are not used in Scripture "in our present acceptance of them," nor that they are in our present sense "mistranslations," as Canon Farrar affirms, nor do we intend to leave them out in deciding the question in point. We do not admit that we "foist into the word *αἰώνιος* the *fiction* of endless time," but we boldly claim that it legitimately has that meaning, as its connections and uses clearly show. We do not deny that the word is used also of duration not eternal, but we do deny that this limited sense can be given to it in many of the passages in point, and affirm that the context often absolutely forbids the limited sense. To claim that the word *αἰώνιος* *always* means limited time because it sometimes is unquestionably so used, is unpardonable ignorance, or willful perversion, we do not know which: for that is really Canon Farrar's position. We all know that the meaning of words often greatly changes by time and usage. Of this we have many striking examples in our own tongue.

So it is well known that many classic Greek words had new ideas thrown into them by the New Testament writers, and necessarily so. Hence it happens that we would often make great mistakes, if we, in our interpretation of New Testament Greek, were to bind it to its strictly etymological sense, or its classic usage. Surely one claiming "the fullest right to speak with the authority of knowledge" should know this very simple fact. Our English word *forever* means, according to our usage of it, *endless* duration. Yet, if we were to consult its etymology simply, coming as it does through the Latin *aevum* from that very word *αἰών*, we might claim that it did not mean that at all, but meant simply age — long. And in the distant future, should our English ever become a dead language, the curious student of that day, digging down to the etymological root of the word, might claim, on the very same ground on which Canon Farrar proceeds in his determination of the meaning of *αἰώνιος*, that the word had only that meaning. But if he would be guided by the usage of the word in English, at

the time of the writer's using it, he would find that our word *forever* did mean endless duration, whatever its etymology. So then, proceeding on this rational and well-recognized principle in the study of all language, we must examine the usage of the word *αἰών* by the New Testament writers themselves, to ascertain its meaning in *their* writings.

We suppose that all will admit, that if they ever wished to express the idea of absolutely endless duration, they would do so in speaking of the duration of God Himself, and His unchanging attributes. What word then do they use in speaking of God's eternity? John 12:34: "Christ abideth forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα)." Rom. 1:25: "Creator, who is blessed forever (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας)." Rom. 9:5: "God blessed forever (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας) 2 Cor. 9:9: "His righteousness remaineth forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα)." Heb. 13:8: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας)." 1 Pet. 1:23: "Word of God, which liveth and abideth forever (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) These are only a few passages in which God's eternal existence and perfections are described by this idiom. Surely the proper meaning of the word is indisputable here. But in 2 Pet. 2:17 the same expression is used of the duration of the punishment of the wicked, also in Jude 13. In Gal. 1:5, Phil. 4:20, 1 Tim. 1:17, and 2 Tim. 4:18, God's glory is said to endure forever and ever (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων). In Rev. 4:9, 10; 5:14; 10:6; 15:7, and other places, the very same expression is used to denote the eternal existence and perfections of God. But in Rev. 20:10 the duration of the torment of the devil in the lake of fire is expressed by that identical idiom (εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων), and in the 15th verse of the same chapter, and in Rev. 21:8 we are told that the wicked have their part in the same lake of fire, the same second death. Now by what rule of interpretation can we say that this identical way of expressing duration means absolute eternity in the one case, and not in the other? The words and their arrangement are the same, and there is no hint that, they are not intended to mean the same in both cases. Every law and usage of language and of common sense would be against any such arbitrary discrimination. So in Heb. 9:14; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 John 1:2; the adjective αἰῶνιος is used to describe the eternity of God's existence and glory, and in too many passages to attempt to cite them, it is used to describe the duration of the life and blessedness of the saved. But this very word is used also to describe the duration of the punishment of the wicked, and in Mat. 25:46, the Lord Jesus Himself, in the same breath, uses it to describe both the duration of the life of the redeemed, and the

punishment of the lost. In Matt. 25:41, our Lord states that the wicked are to go into αἰῶνιος fire”prepared for the devil and his angels," and as we have seen in Rev. 20:10, the duration of that torment is described by the very same adjective expression which is used again and again to express the duration of God Himself.

Surely then if we allow the New Testament writers themselves to explain by their own usage what they meant by a word, our word “everlasting” must stand in the word of God, after any and all versions whatever, and that too in its common acceptance, as expressing endless duration. If we want to shorten the duration of the punishment of the lost, then in accordance with every rule of consistency, we must also shorten the happiness of the saved, and the very existence of God Himself. If Canon Farrar is right, then the Lord Jesus and the Holy Ghost as well are open to the charge of inexplicable obscurity and confusion in the use of words. If he is right, that αἰῶνιος can only be made to express endless duration by “foisting a fiction” into it, why then does God so persistently use it in describing His own existence? And why does Jesus use the same word in the same breath to express the duration of the life of the redeemed, and also that of the punishment of the lost, without one word of explanation? If Canon Farrar be right, then the Bible could not have been written as a plain and simple guide to the wayfaring man, but rather to perplex and mystify by its strange laxness in the use of words. But no, this is not the case. The Bible is plain, but because Canon Farrar “cannot and will not believe” its plain and simple statements, because his own “tender sensibilities and reason” have already prejudged what God must and ought to do, he wrests and distorts it as he would no other writing, and reads into some words, and out of others, a meaning which would reduce the whole thing to absurdity.

Conclusion

The fact is, that a candid review of both Beecher and Farrar’s utterances upon this subject, (though in justice to Beecher, we say again, that in the sermon of his under consideration, he by no means takes the ultra and absolute stand against the fact of eternal punishment *in toto* which Farrar does, but confines himself mainly to the question concerning the heathen), leads to the conclusion that their whole view of the case too much ignores

the true guilt and character of sin, as well as too much exalts man's powers to deal, without the guidance of God's word, with infinite issues, implying infinite capacity of mind.

Sin kills God. This is its outcome, its aim, its unalterable tendency, as we see upon the cross, when "God, the mighty Maker, died." Sin is the universal murderer. It seeks to slay the fountain and source of all life, and if the fountain could be destroyed, where would the streams then be? Remember well, only on the cross can the ultimate aim of sin be seen. Sin caused the death of God manifest in the flesh, and no thanks to sin that He rose again. Conceive every sun around which a system revolves in all this universe to be stricken out of existence in an instant, what would be the result? Blackness of darkness, no ray of pure and healing light to relieve the awful gloom — the lost and lawless worlds rushing madly through the darkness, crashing and shattering upon each other into a thousand fragments, and these fragments plunging wildly on and shattering on other fragments, a hell of terrific, seething, roaring sound, lit up occasionally by the lurid Hare of the dissolving elements, till all creation returned, out of this dreadful chaos, into the nothingness from which, by the fiat of God, it came, and eternal night would fill eternal inanity — faint picture this of what would be in the spiritual as well as material universe, could sin accomplish that which it sought to do on Calvary, to strike out of being the Sun of Righteousness, around whom all things revolve, and in whom they live and move and have their being. And if this be the terrible nature of Sin, who but God can know what Sin deserves? How fearful the mistake to make too light of it! Sin hardens — "lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." Might it not then grow harder and harder, until its obduracy becomes utterly hopeless?

Man himself is a mystery, his constitution mysterious, he is in every sense "fearfully and wonderfully made." God only knows absolutely man's being and nature, God only knows sin ultimately, God only knows the modifications in man's nature which sin brings about, and God only knows how man thus modified, and who continues so, ought to and must be dealt with. If God sends man to hell, it is only because God sees that is the most merciful thing which He could in the nature of the case, in all its infinite bearings, do with him. They would have us believe that all hearts will finally be moved and melted by the love of God. The tender love of Jesus to poor, fallen man, did not move and melt the hearts of all with whom he

came into contact here. The proud, hard heart of Scribe and Pharisee grew all the harder when the light and warmth of His presence fell upon them — no melting there. Hereafter they go on sinning, and go on hardening, as we see in that very passage in Luke 13, in which Canon Farrar takes one of his texts. The Lord there says: “Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity.” They were still working iniquity, though earth was now passed with them, for this the Lord’s address implies. Shut out from God, and still obdurately working evil, what hope can there be for them? Let us not question God, let us not “limit” Him, as did His people of old — “Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” — let us not attempt for ourselves to solve the vast problem which God’s moral government involves, every factor in which has a “deep background of mystery.” But let us accept His solution of it as given in His word, without being able now to see all the whys and wherefores, for “shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

About Rev. Lewis G. M. Miller

The following biographical sketch is from Jens Jensson's "American Lutheran Biographies", 1890.

"REV. LEWIS G. M. MILLER was born in Strasburg, Shenandoah Co., Va., April 15, 1848. His parents were John Samuel Miller, of Winchester, Va., and Jane F. Schmidt, of York, Pa. His ancestry were for the most part on both sides German Lutherans. He received his collegiate education at Washington College (now Washington and Lee University), Lexington, Va., where he was from 1866 to 1870. He entered the Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, Pa., in 1871, from which he graduated in 1874, at which time he was ordained by the old Pennsylvania Ministerium. He immediately took charge of St. Peter's church, North Wales, Montgomery Co., Pa., where he was a little more than one year. In August, 1875, he took charge of College church, Salem, Va., where he remained until March, 1888, at which time he became pastor of Grace church, Winchester, Va., where he still is at the time of this writing. Having been pastor of the college church during a period of thirteen years, while the Theological Seminary was at Salem, his influence was exerted to a marked degree over the lives of our younger ministers. His devotion, earnestness, and efficiency as a pastor and preacher commanded the love and respect of all who knew him. Mr. Miller is pastor of one of the most historic and influential churches in the united synod.

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