

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

21. Farrar—Westminster Sermon Precipitates Crisis

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1. Dean Farrar—Dramatically Repudiates "Dogma of Eternal Torment"

We now turn to a noted Anglican cleric who was neither a Conditionalist [1] nor yet a Universalist, [2] but who turned completely away from the Eternal Torment postulate, and whose epochal repudiation of that age-old dogma was dramatically declared in the impressive environs of historic Westminster Abbey, on November 11, 1877. It was in a sermon entitled "Hell—What It Is Not." It resulted in a tremendous restudy of the entire question. And, as a by-product, it stimulated a resurgence and extension of the Conditionalist position. That is why the story is given considerable space here.

No such sermon had ever been heard in the venerable Abbey in its six long centuries. Moreover, it contravened a popular belief of fifteen centuries' standing. It created a tremendous stir on both sides of the Atlantic. I refer, of course, to the epochal sermon of the then Canon F. W. Farrar, of Westminster, later Dean of Canterbury, and one of the most highly esteemed of British clerics. Let us first note the man.

1 Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (1878), pp. xxiv, 176, 179.

2 Farrar, "Present-Day Beliefs on Future Retribution," in *That Unknown Country or What Living Men Believe Concerning Punishment After Death*, p. 275. ("I have never been a Universalist.")

FREDERIC WILLIAM FARRAR, D.D., F.R.S. (1831-1903), celebrated Dean of Canterbury, was trained at the University of London and then at Cambridge. First headmaster of Marlborough, then Canon of Westminster (1876) and rector of St. Margaret's, as well as chaplain of the House of Commons (1890-1895) and to the queen, he was finally made Dean of Canterbury (1895). Dr. Farrar was author of numerous scholarly works, and was Hulsean lecturer at Cambridge and Bampton lecturer at Oxford. He admittedly exerted a profound influence on the thinking of the religious world. Hence his public questioning of the dogma of eternal punishing for the wicked provoked intense and prolonged controversy.

His chief books in this field were his *Eternal Hope* (1878) and *Mercy and Judgment* (1881)—both of them the outgrowth of his celebrated sermon. They will be noted later. He was also a contributor to the well-known 960-page American symposium—*That Unknown Country* (1889).

1. REPUDIATION VOICED IN ABBEY, ON NOVEMBER 11, 1877. —His own story of the epochal episode is detailed in chapter thirteen of *That Unknown Country*, from which I draft. He had been "stirred" to the "inmost depths" by "contemplating the brutal and unmitigated horrors of the doctrine of 'Eternal torments.'" He was acquainted with the views of Universalists and of leading Conditionalists, several of whom he names. And he knew that many who had expressed "doubts or hesitations" as to Eternal-Tormentism had been ostracized "from their brethren by their opinions on this subject." Some had been "stalwartly denounced" by Charles Spurgeon, and some had been ejected, as was the case with Prof. F. D. Maurice, who lost his professorship at King's College. [3]

At last Farrar felt it his duty to express his convictions "unmistakably," and publicly. The occasion was thuswise: On a dull, drizzling day—November 11, 1877—the dean "walked in the rain from his residence to the Abbey," perfectly well aware of the gravity of what he intended to do. Hear him:

"I had to repudiate a doctrine which had been more or less universally preached by the majority of Christians for fifteen hundred years. I knew that to do so was an act which would cost me dear. I knew that during six centuries of the history of the present Abbey it was probable that no sermon had been preached which even greatly modified, much less repudiated with indignation, that popular teaching about hell which seemed to me a ghastly amalgam of all that was worst in the combined errors of Augustinianism, Romanism, and Calvinism." [4]

And he adds, soberly:

"The teaching of Jonathan Edwards, of Father Furniss, of Mr. Spurgeon, seemed to me to represent God as a Moloch for all except an infinitesimal fraction of the human race." [5]

Such was the setting.

3 Ibid., p. 268, 269.

4 Ibid., p. 269.

5 Ibid.

2. EXPECTED CONDEMNATION, BUT RECEIVED WIDESPREAD APPROVAL.—It was a courageous act, and Dr. Farrar spoke "with something perhaps of passion, but certainly with no ambiguity, and no reservation." He was aware that such a sermon "could not escape the most savage animadversion" and that he could "hardly hope to escape paying the penalty of martyrdom in some form or other." He was therefore not prepared for "the sort of electric thrill which that sermon flashed through two worlds." [6] He had "smitten a chord of feeling, rarely touched at all, which vibrated sympathetically in a hundred thousand hearts." Within a week "letters began to pour in upon me from every part of the United Kingdom, as they soon did from every part of the world." [7]

3. WIDESPREAD PUBLICITY FOLLOWED BY CONCENTRATED ATTACK.—Without Farrar's knowledge or consent the sermon had been "taken down by reporters," and was published in the same way in the Christian Age. In that and other "unauthorized forms" it had a circulation in excess of "100,000copies." [8] As a result, "denunciations" began to descend upon him. Farrar was— "assailed in scores of pamphlets; annihilated in hundreds of reviews; lectured against by university professors; and anathematized by Anglicans, Baptists, and Methodists in (perhaps) a thousand sermons." [9]

Farrar himself published the offending sermon in authorized form as Sermon III in his book *Eternal Hope*, with more than twenty-six thousand copies in England, plus many thousands in America and Australia, and with translations in various languages. One leading London clergyman told the canon, "You have spoken out what nearly every one of us secretly thought." [10]

Then the equivalent of a whole "library" full of "sermons," "refutations," "replies," "examinations," "reviling," and "defense" soon piled up. But, he observes, "not a single voice of any real authority was raised in my condemnation in my own or any other branch of the church." [11] Despite the agitation, the sermon marked a turning point in toleration. And Farrar adds, "I left the attacks made upon me unnoticed, and the books written against me unanswered." He was conscious that he had both "time," and "the conscience and reason of mankind," on his side. [12]

6 Ibid., p. 270.

7 Ibid., p. 271.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid. (Parentheses his.)

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 272.

12 Ibid., p. 273.

2. Farrar's Written Record of His Tremendous Researches

1 . SCRIPTURES ABSOLUTELY SILENT ON "ETERNAL TORTURE."

—Dean Farrar's *Eternal Hope* (1878) comprises the five sermons preached in the Abbey in November and December, 1877, including the famous "Hell—What It Is Not." At their close is a "Brief Sketch of Eschatological Opinions of the Church." His opening sentence states significantly that "the Scriptures" are "absolutely silent as to 'endless torture.'" [13] Then he reviews the opinions of the early Fathers, many of whom taught the "total destruction of sinners," and that "all evil will ultimately disappear."

[14] Some, on the contrary, taught ultimate restoration. Also, he told how, under Augustine, "we find the first distinct outline of that doctrine of Purgatory which robs the opinion of endless torments of its most pressing horrors." [15] He further states that—

"none of the first four General Councils lay down any doctrine whatever concerning the everlasting misery of the wicked, or directly or indirectly give any interpretation of the Scriptural expressions which describe their condition." [16]

2. DARK SHADOW OF AUGUSTINE FALLS ON MEDIEVAL THEOLOGY.—But it was the " 'dark shadow of Augustine,' " wrote Farrar, that was " 'thrown so powerfully over the current theology that there was little question about the endlessness of the torment.' " From Gregory "the Great" (d. 605) till Anselm, "the theology of Western Christendom slept her winter sleep." But "the Reformers mostly held to the old Augustinian conceptions, except in so far as they rejected Purgatory." "Abandoning the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church, they took refuge in the infallibility of Scripture." Nevertheless there was a constant raising of the "voice of reason and conscience" in "revolt against a doctrine [Eternal Torments] which they found irreconcilable with the love of God."

13 Farrar, *Eternal Hope*, p. 155.

14 Ibid., p. 159.

15 Ibid., p. 164.

16 Ibid., p. 166.

But "the Reformers did not follow up their negation by an affirmative doctrine." [17]

3. DEPLORES SPECIOUS ARGUMENTS FOR ENDLESS TORMENT. —Then Farrar speaks of Conditionalists Archbishop Whately, Bishop Law, Dr. Watts, Isaac Taylor, and others. [18] And in a technical point in his Notes, at the close he declares that Greek and their Hebrew equivalents in all combinations, are repeatedly used of things which have come and shall come to an end." [19]

4. CONDEMNS MISUSE OF TEXTS OUT OF CONTEXT.—Farrar views with "sorrow" and "almost of indignation" the "constant perversion by the attempt to build up infinite systems out of the metaphorical expressions and isolated texts and by "texts torn from their context," rather than by the "whole scope and tenor of revelation." Texts have been "perverted" for "unworthy purposes." Such, he says, was the method used I against Columbus, Copernicus, Galileo, and against Wyclif and Luther. [20] Then Farrar observes:

"If the doctrine of endless torment, with all its Calvinistic and popular accretions, be true, it is incredible that there should be no trace of it in the entire Old Testament, except by putting on the Hebrew phrase 'for ever' a sense which it cannot and does not bear. Those who insist on doing this put themselves at once out of court as incompetent and biased [sic] critics." [21]

5. OLD TESTAMENT JEWS NEVER TAUGHT "ENDLESS TORMENT."—The dean asserts that the Old Testament Jews "never held or taught the doctrine of endless torment as any part of their religion." [22] And he cites such leading rabbis as Adler, Deutsch ("There is not a word in the Talmud that lends any support to that damnable dogma of endless torment"), Marks, Weill ("Nothing, therefore, seems more incompatible with the true Biblical tradition than an eternity of suffering and chastisement")."

17 Ibid, pp. 167-172.

18 Ibid. pp, 174-176.

19 Ibid. p. 197.

20 Ibid. p. 205.

21 Ibid. p. 206, 207.

22 Ibid. p. 207.

23 Ibid. pp. 207-209. (Italics his.)

That, Farrar adds, is generally admitted.

6. CONDITIONALIST CONTENTIONS CONFIRM PERSONAL VIEWS.—In his larger (485-page) work *Mercy and Judgment*, Farrar amplifies and traces "Past and Present Opinions." He cites Sir Isaac Newton, Dr. Isaac Watts ("There is not one place of Scripture where the word 'death,' as it was first threatened in the law of innocence, necessarily signifies a certain miserable immortality of the soul"). [24] And with this agree contemporaries Prebendary Henry Constable, Dr. R. W. Dale, and Dr. Edward White. [25] Farrar enlarges on the views of champions of Conditional Immortality and annihilationism, who hold that "the soul is not immortal," and that the "agonies of retribution will end for all, because extinction of being will be the fate of the finally impenitent. [26] Though not himself a Conditionalist, Farrar nevertheless says:

"Believing that much of the popular eschatology is founded on misinterpretation, I feel confirmed in that opinion by seeing how many devout, able, and earnest men [Conditionalists] have come to the same conclusion, and are unable to accept as Scriptural the 'hell' of the Revivalist." [27]

7. INVOKES WITNESS OF GERMAN SCHOLARS.—After citing the view of Isaac Watts (d. 1748)—"utter destruction of the . . . life of the soul, as well as that of the body" [28]—Farrar turns to modern German scholars. He cites such authorities as Ols-hausen ("The Bible knows nothing of the modern dogma of the immortality of the soul"); Nietzsche ("The soul, being dependent on the Creator, does not possess immortality. As sin increases the soul faces destruction in hell and its death"); and Rothe ("The sufferings endured in hell by the reprobate will in reality end, but that the end will consist in the destruction of the guilty. This idea is very ancient in the Church. This opinion alone seems capable of satisfying all the conditions") [29]—and gives references.

24 Farrar, *Mercy and Judgment: Last Words on Christian Eschatology* with reference to Dr. Pusey's "What Is of Faith?" p. 30.

25 Ibid. pp. 50, 51

26 Ibid., p. 54.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., p. 56.

29 Ibid., pp. 56, 57

8. ALEXANDRIAN FATHERS MOLDED BY PLATO AND PHILO.—Covering again the Jewish evidence in the Apocryphal books, Josephus, and the Targums, Farrar states that for the Jews Gehenna was "terminable; terminable, indeed, by annihilation." [30] This is the "very antithesis of endless torment." [31]

Farrar comes to the "uncertainty," the "fallibility," and "variance" of the Fathers. Chapter after chapter is devoted to a painstaking rehearsal of what the various Fathers thought and taught on the nature and destiny of man—many believing in "annihilation," others in Eternal Torment, or in restoration.

Farrar stresses the influence of the "Alexandrians" and their "accommodationism," and how "the doctrine came to them from Plato, who allows the use of falsehood as a kind of moral medicine. Philo borrowed from Plato the same notion." Again, "From Plato and Philo this unwholesome tendency . . . was inherited by the great Alexandrian Fathers." [32] And then Farrar delves definitively into the intent of the Greek terms involved—such as that *aionios* "by itself" "never means endless." [33]

9. LITERAL INTERPRETATION LEADS TO EXTINCTIONIST VIEW.—Finally, in commenting on the positions of the Conditionalists, such as White and Minton, Farrar says:

"The devout believers in conditional immortality are perfectly right in insisting that if we bind ourselves by the literal meaning of the greatest number of Biblical expressions there is ten times more in the Bible which points to extinction as the final doom of the wicked than there is which points to their future existence in everlasting agonies." [34] And he adds concerning the twenty six texts in which it is alleged that "eternal torments" are "indisputably taught" that— "they are not indisputably taught in so much as one. So far as I can see I say, with Dr. Isaac Watts, that I cannot find one single 'text' in all Scripture which, when fairly interpreted, teaches, as a matter of faith, or in a way even approaching to distinctness and decisiveness, the common views about 'endless torments.'" [35]

30 Ibid., p. 184.

31 Ibid., p. 187.

32 Ibid., p. 296.

33 Ibid. See pp. 379, 380.

34 Ibid., p. 374.

Then comes this parting word:

"I believe that among the punishments of the world to come there are 'few stripes' as well as 'many stripes,' and I do not see how any fair interpretation of the metaphor 'few stripes,' can be made to involve the conception of endlessness for all who incur future retribution." [36]

Farrar himself held to some sort of future probation. That was his "larger hope." But he was adamant against the dogma of Eternal Torment—and his voice carried far and wide. In his conclusion he admits that "the ultimate extinction of the being of sinners appears to be taught by the literal meaning of many passages of Scripture." But he again disavows the Universalist idea "that all men will attain to everlasting felicity." [37]

3. Missionary Impey—Resignation From Methodist Ministry

WILLIAM IMPEY (1818-1896), for forty years a Wesleyan minister and missionary to South Africa, was long chairman and general superintendent of the Grahamstown District. Impey was highly esteemed and able. In the fateful year 1878 he reached a crisis in his relationship to Methodism over the question of Eternal Torment, just when there was agitation and crisis in many lands and faiths. Because of matured convictions he was constrained to resign from the Wesleyan ministry in order to preserve his freedom of conviction and expression of view. The background was as follows. (Photo on page 416.)

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., p. 484.

37 Ibid., p. 481.

1. ANNUAL DECLARATION OF CONFORMITY REQUIRED.—The constitution of the Wesleyan Church not only required "strict conformity" to its Doctrinal Standards (found principally in Wesley's Notes on the New Testament and the first four volumes of his Sermons, and the Disciplinary Regulations of the Wesleyan Catechism), but stipulated annual examination of every minister before the meeting of the district in which he resides, and before the General Conference. This examination involved four questions, No. 2 being, "Does he believe and preach our [the Wesleyan] doctrines?" and No. 3, "Does he 'observe and enforce' the Wesleyan Discipline?"

Among these declared doctrines is that of "eternal punishment as interpreted in Wesleyan theology." [38] Specifically, it involves eternal "punishment" as well as "reward"—punishment in "hell fire, which will not consume, but preserve him from a cessation of being," with "sin and its punishment running parallel throughout Eternity itself," [39] and "without intermission," so that when "millions of days, of years, of ages elapsed, still we are only on the threshold of eternity." Again, "neither the pain of body nor of soul is any nearer an end than it was millions of ages ago." [40]

2. RESIGNS OVER "ETERNAL TORMENT" STIPULATION.—Those are the Wesleyan Connexional Standards, along with those of the Wesleyan Catechism. So in personally repudiating such a dogma, Impey felt impelled to make this significant public statement:

"This Doctrine I do not 'believe,' and therefore cannot 'preach.' The Wesleyan Church applies no such test to its Members as it does to its Ministers, and because I cannot 'believe' and therefore do not 'preach' the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment as set forth in the Wesleyan system of Theology, the Conference declines to retain me as one of its Ministers, and that is the sole reason why I leave the Wesleyans." [41]

3. TAKES STAND IN NOBLE LINE OF DISSENTIENTS.—Impey had made thorough study of the question, as well as of the history of the noble line of dissentients. First, he found no mention of such dogma in either the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene. Second, it had been a debatable question through the ages. He was well acquainted with the line of scholars throughout the Christian Era who had rejected it. And he cites a succession of typical examples in this comprehensive paragraph:

38 William Impey, *Why I Leave the Wesleyan Methodist Church* (1878), p. 3.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

"The names of such men as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Arnobius, in the early ages of Christianity,—and in later times of Dr. Isaac Watts, Isaac Taylor, John Foster, Archbishop Whately, Bishop Hampden, the Rev. R. W. Dale, Rev. Edward White, Dr. Parker, Rev. S. Minton, Dr. Petavel of Geneva, Professor Stokes of Cambridge, Professor Hudson of Cambridge, U.S., Dr. Huntingdon of Worcester, Mass., U.S. and a host of others in both the Established and Nonconformist Churches who repudiate the unscriptural dogma of endless misery. are certainly sufficient evidence that it does not come into the category of those truths which have been taught and received 'at all times, everywhere and by everyone,' and also that those who reject it are not summarily to be dismissed amongst infidels and sceptics." [42]

4. RESTUDY TOUCHED OFF BY FARRAR REPUDIATION.—He was likewise aware of the seventeen articles, written on this question by men of note, that appeared in the *Contemporary Review* for April, May, and June, 1878. These had been touched off by Canon Farrar's treatise *Eternal Hope*, which simply repeated his crucial Westminster Abbey sermons of November, 1877, repudiating the dogma of Eternal Torment. Impey was also aware of Wesley's own denial of Calvinistic pre-destination because of its misrepresentation of the character of God, and because it could not be "found in Scripture." But the Wesleyan test on Eternal Torment was "rigid." It allowed no latitude. It was "this or nothing." That was the "Doctrinal Test!" And Impey said, understandingly: "It is not what I do believe, but what I do not believe that places me outside the Wesleyan Conference." [43]

5. PUNISHMENT "EVERLASTING" BECAUSE "FINAL AND IRREVERSIBLE."—Impey's resignation followed an exchange of letters with Dr. W. M. Punshon, of London, in September. In his first letter, dated September 7, Impey said:

"That the future 'punishment' of the wicked is 'everlasting' in the sense that in itself it is final and irreversible, but that such punishment consists in the conscious and Eternal agony or suffering of a living soul, I cannot believe. I do not believe that the general teaching of God's word warrants such a doctrine, nor do I believe that this doctrine is consistent with the revealed character of God." [44]

42 *Ibid.*

43 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

6. TAKES STAND, WITH "SO HELP ME GOD."—After referring to Wesley's own rejection of "predestination" because it contradicted Revelation itself and clearly impugned the character of God, Impey made this declaration of faith and statement of relationship to Methodism:

"If the Discipline of the Connexion allows me liberty of thought here, well and good! Most gladly will I continue, for the few possible remaining years of my life [he was then sixty], to serve to the best of my power a Church and cause that I have ever loved; but if I am required to 'believe and teach that the ever-and-all-loving God will consign to ceaseless conscious TORMENT, throughout all the countless ages of an incomprehensible Eternity, any soul that He has made, then, with Mr. Wesley, I must again say, 'Here I fix my foot.' I cannot do it; and with a greater than John Wesley. I must say, 'I can do no other, so help me God.'" [45]

He was "fully conscious of the gravity of the position." [46]

7. CATEGORICAL ANSWERS REQUIRED OF IMPEY.—Dr. Punshon pressed Impey to categorically answer four questions, which he did under date of December 13. In this Impey re-affirms his belief in a "just and final Retribution" "excepting always that of a literally ceaseless, conscious and eternal torment, which I cannot accept." [47]

But he reaffirmed his undeviating adherence to all the basic, saving doctrines stressed by Methodism, including the Fall of man and the Atonement, about which he was asked.

8. RESIGNS BECAUSE CANNOT PLEDGE "SILENCE."—But Impey refused to be "pledged to silence." [48] And furthermore, as a district chairman with responsibility for examining the "preachers of the district," and the "probationers for the ministry," he declared that inasmuch as his own views had "undergone an important change" on this disputed point of Eternal Torment, he would be unable to require their adherence to such a dogma. But without waiting for his reply, Dr. Punshon ordered Impey to proceed at once to England for consultation. [49] After going immediately to England, and consulting with the conference leaders, he states: "I found no course open but to resign my position as a Wesleyan Minister, for the reasons above stated." [50]

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

47 Ibid., p. 13.

48 Ibid.

9. FORTY YEARS OF UNBROKEN SERVICE ENDS.—This was his resignation, dated April 11, 1878:

"Having by the Grace of God (as I think), and under the guidance of His Blessed Spirit been led to entertain convictions on the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment which are at variance with the Standards of Wesleyan Theology, and as there appears to be no prospect of such liberty of thought being allowed as may enable me consistently to retain my position as a Minister in the Connexion, I beg very respectfully, through you, to tender to the President and Conference my resignation.

"I cannot but deeply regret that after forty years' unbroken service in the Wesleyan Church, the rigidity of Connexional rule renders such a step necessary. It is taken, however, in the fear of God, whose teachings, rather than those of any creed, or of any Church, demand my supreme allegiance." [51]

49 Ibid., pp. 14, 15.

50 Ibid., p. 15.

51 Ibid., pp. 15,

This resignation was then accepted by Dr. W. B. Pope, president of the conference. And this was but an example of similar resignations or expulsions in different lands and among different faiths.

After leaving the Wesleyan faith Impey became an Episcopalian clergyman, serving as rector of St. John's church, East London (South Africa), and as vicar of St. George's Cathedral, Grahamstown.

4. Strang—Virile Conditionalist Editor and Scottish Polemicist

M. W. STRANG (d. 1908), of Glasgow, for eight years editor of The Messenger, was competently trained for the ministry, and was an able preacher of the gospel. However, his refusal to accept the Platonic philosophy of the inherent immortality of the soul, which undergirds the creed of the Scottish Presbyterian Church, was an insuperable bar to his entering her ministry. So he founded The Messenger, which he published in Glasgow and edited from 1876 to 1884. This journal heralded the imminent Second Advent and advocated eternal Life Only in Christ. Strang was also author of numerous tracts and poems, and was a participant in the Symposium in The Life Everlasting, by J. H. Pettingell.

Convinced that immersion is the true form of baptism, he was thus baptized in 1870 and cast his lot with a small company of some fifty fellow believers from various churches who were united on (1) the doctrine of the premillennial Second Advent, (2) Conditional Immortality and the ultimate destruction of the wicked, and (3) baptism by immersion. On this basic platform they

had organized as a company in Dundee, in 1857. Special annual conferences of representatives of like-minded churches were part of the plan, collaborating with other Conditional Immortality groups that were now springing up in various cities in Britain.

The Messenger a Reflector of Turbulent Times

The vicissitudes of the cause of Conditionalism are reflected in the columns of Strang's *The Messenger*, which ever stressed the fact that "immortality is not a quality inherent in man, but the gift of God." Note a few of the newsworthy high lights from various issues.

MAY, 1878: AGITATION WIDESPREAD.—"Among all the burning questions exercising men's mind, none occupies so large a portion of public attention as the Doctrine of Destiny of the Wicked. The old theory of eternal suffering is not now unhesitatingly accepted and believed as a matter of course, but is being subjected to a searching analysis." Reference is made to increasing numbers of adherents to Conditional Immortality; to the ever-widening circulation of Conditionalist literature; to the opening of the pages of the *Christian World* to the discussion of the doom of the wicked; to Canon Farrar's famous discourses in Westminster Abbey, in "impassioned rhetoric," challenging the doctrine of eternal misery; to the American Christian Union opening its pages to clergymen in the New World to express their views; to the renowned Dr. R. W. Dale's espousal of Conditionalism.

JUNE, 1879: MACRAE DEPOSED.—The trial of the Reverend David Macrae, of Gourrock, Scotland, by the United Presbyterian Synod, for challenging the Westminster dogma of Everlasting Torment, the questions put to him by the interrogating committee, his deposition, and his farewell speech with its imposing array of Scripture evidence. [52] The synod declared him "cut off" from the denomination.

52 "The whole story is told in two books in the Dundee reference library. One is *The Macrae Case* (1879). It was also widely discussed in the *Glasgow North British Daily Mail*, particularly of July 19, 1879.

JANUARY, 1883: Two MINISTERS EXPELLED.—There is recital of the excommunication of Pastor Charles Byse, of Brussels, by the Belgian Evangelical Church Synod for preaching Conditionalism—the first church on the Continent to take such a step. The activity of Dr. Petavel in his behalf is detailed. Also noted is the expulsion by the Church Missionary Society of one of its ablest missionaries in Japan, the Reverend W. Denning, for his denial of inherent immortality; and the formation of a committee of Conditionalists (including Dean Perowne, Professor Stokes, and Canon Swanson of Cambridge) to enable him to carry on his work.

JANUARY, 1884: H. H. DOBNEY LAUDED.—The death of H. H. Dobney is noted, his book being one of the early volumes (in the forties) to advocate Conditionalism. It was condemned by Dr. Morrison in the *Evangelical Magazine*, but lauded by Dr. Pye Smith and Dr. Vaughan in the *British Quarterly*. Also is noted the work of the Italian Baptist evangelist, Oscar Cocorda, in Torre Pellice, Italy (of Waldensian fame), who was asked to resign for preaching the doctrine of Conditional Immortality and Life Only in Christ in the chief towns of Italy.

JUNE, 1884: REMOVAL OF DUBLIN MINISTER.—The removal, by the Evangelical Alliance, of the Reverend J. S. Whitmed, of York Street Chapel, for holding the doctrine of Life Only in Christ.

MAY, 1884: LAUDATION OF GEORGE STORRS.—The death of the noted American Conditionalist George Storrs, editor of the *Bible Examiner*, is noted, who in 1842 was ostracized for preaching that destruction will be the doom of the finally impenitent.

The many editions and the influence of his famous Six Sermons are rehearsed.

Then follow reports of the various branches of the parent Conditional Immortality Association [53]—established in Glasgow, Auckland, Brisbane, Dundee, Edinburgh, Halifax, Liverpool, London, Manchester, Montreal, New York, et cetera, many of them with annual conferences and reports, such as the Glasgow Conference. There is also a list of thirteen prominent Conditionalists scattered over Britain.

53 Founded in 1878.

AUGUST, 1884: TYPICAL CONFERENCE REPORTED.—This is the conference in the Hamilton Street Congregational Chapel. Chairman, Henry J. Ward, president of the Association; speakers, Signor Oscar Cocorda, of the Vaudois Valleys; George

Mackay, of the Lincoln Baptist church; Charles Underhill, of Oxford, and others. Alfred Watson, of Salisbury, speaking on "The Great Theological Stumbling Block," declared:

"Belief in man's natural and inherent immortality and the necessary sequence, the eternal suffering of the wicked, has turned the fair Gospel garden like a withering blight and fruitfulness into sterility. Belief in man's natural immortality and in eternal suffering is a stumbling block because it gives a false view of the atonement and robs the work of Christ of its chief glory." And that was but one of a half-dozen influential Conditionalist journals.

5. Thorough Investigation Leads to Strong Personal Convictions

Strang likewise gives us an insight into the habit of thorough investigation, and the resultant strong convictions of these Conditionalist spokesmen. Going back to the apostolic warning to "beware of the leaven of false teaching" seeking to corrupt the young church, and especially Paul's warning that the time would come when they would "not endure sound doctrine," but be turned to "fables" and the "tradition of men," he speaks of those germs of error that came to fullness in the Dark Ages, when gospel truth was buried "under the accumulative corruptions of the Greek and Roman Churches." [54]

1. IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL THE PARENT ERROR.—Then he declares:

"We believe, indeed, that one gross parent error, which serves as a foundation for nearly all the abominations of the Papal teaching, requires still to be banished, with all its progeny, from the creeds of Protestantism, where it holds a place of almost equal honour as the accredited basis of all true religion.

"This error is the belief in the IMMORTALITY OF THE soul, and the inalienable destiny of every man to live forever in some condition or other. This doctrine we solemnly declare to be no part of the doctrine of Christ, but, on the contrary, to be opposed thereto, and to be derived directly from that very 'philosophy' against whose encroachments Paul raised a voice of warning." [55]

54 M. W. Strang, "Despoiled Through Philosophy," in J. H. Pettingell, *The Life Everlasting*, pp. 719, 720.

2. PLATONISM ADOPTED BECAUSE OF IMMORTAL-SOULISM. —Invoking historians like Dr. Mosheim, he quotes:

"Towards the close of this [third] century a new sect of philosophers arose of a sudden, spread with amazing rapidity throughout the greatest part of the Roman Empire, swallowed up almost all the other sects, and was extremely detrimental to the cause of Christianity. Alexandria, in Egypt, . . . gave birth to this new philosophy. Its votaries chose to be called Platonics,' because 'though attached to no particular sect, yet they preferred the sublime Plato to all other sages, and approved of the most of his opinions concerning the Deity, the universe, and the human soul.'" [56]

He calls attention to the fact that the Christian eclectics —Athenagoras, Clement, Alexander, et cetera—preferred Platonism to the other schools of Greek philosophy—Epicurean, Academic, Aristotelian, Stoic—which either openly scorned or flatly denied the notion of the immortality of the soul, whereas Plato made it the basis of his teaching. And from Plato it was incorporated into Christianity. [57]

3. PHILOSOPHY TRIUMPHS OVER PURE DOCTRINE.—This was the origin of the teaching that began in the third century concerning "the state of the soul after the dissolution of the body." [58] Thus philosophy triumphed over the pure original Christian teachings. And then Origen, with his Neo-Platonism, added to the departures, releasing a "torrent of allegory" which overwhelmed the church, [59] and then depreciated the literality of Scripture. And by the fourth century other embellishments began to be added, such as prayers to dead saints, worship of relics, and other papal dogmas and practices.

55 Ibid., p. 721.

56 Ibid., p. 722.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid p. 723.

59 Ibid., p. 727.

Plato taught that death was only apparent—that there really was no death, only a transition, and "that immortality was inherent in the deathless indivisible soul." Then mysticism was added to extenuate the "sluggish body" which "restrains the liberty of the immortal spirit." [60]

4. DEVELOPMENT OF CONFLICTING BUT PARALLELING SCHOOLS.—Then came the division of the Immortal-Soulists into two schools—the Eternal-Torments, holding that "sinners are destined to be preserved forever in hopeless misery," and the Restorationists, or followers of Origen, holding that all purified sinners will ultimately be saved and find an eternal "dwelling-place among the ransomed." [61]

The church was "engulfed and borne away in that torrent of allegory which philosophy let loose upon the Church." Thus it was, Strang declared, that the church was "deprived" of the "pole star of the Church's destiny," and left "adrift without due guide," headed toward the "rocks and quicksands of the perilous latter days." [62] Then he admonishes:

"Restore the true doctrine of immortality, and you have the most potent weapon ever forged for the defeat of that Rationalism and its twin Agnosticism which are eating the vitals out of our modern Christianity." [63]

And he closes by appealing for "liberation from the chains of centuries."

6. Laing—Effective Scottish Advocate of Conditionalism

In Scotland, WILLIAM LAING (1826-1900) was born in Edinburgh, and became a member of the Secession Church. Throughout his youth God was to him an object of terror, for he had been taught that Eternal Torment is to be the lot of the main portion of the human race. Nevertheless, he had a strong desire to become a preacher of the gospel.

60 Ibid. pp. 724, 725.

61 Ibid. p. 729.

62 Ibid. pp. 730.

63 Ibid.

But he was puzzled over the differences between various Christian bodies, particularly their appeal to a Confession of Faith rather than the Bible.

Laing became especially troubled over chapter 3, section 3 of the Westminster Confession—that, irrespective of their conduct, God had, for His own glory, predestined some men and angels to everlasting misery. He felt that he could not subscribe to such a concept. He was then given a book to read on Predestination, but it only drove him further from Calvinism.

Laing became persuaded that God wants all men to be saved, and that Jesus died for all. Only personal rejection of God's provisions and entreaties causes the loss of the soul. Just then, in Musselburgh, he saw an announcement of a sermon on the "Extent of the Atonement," at Victoria Place Chapel, by Conditionalist William Glen Moncrieff. He attended, and was deeply impressed with what was to him a new and satisfying view of God and His salvation as relates to man. So in 1845 he left the Secession Church and joined Moncrieff's congregation.

1. STEPS IN BECOMING A CONDITIONALIST.—He soon felt a strong desire to become a preacher of that fuller salvation, and entered the Theological Academy at Kilmarnock. Being of a logical turn of mind and an omnivorous reader, he had the ability to penetrate to the heart of an issue. With an insatiable thirst for knowledge he read widely in the Church Fathers. As a result he became suspicious of their authority and reliability. Many of their minds, he was persuaded, had been steeped in heathen philosophy, and this had moulded their later Christian theological concepts. The view of many of the Fathers on the immortality of the soul and its attendant notions had clearly been derived from Platonic philosophy.

He soon gave up completely all belief in the natural immortality of the soul, coming to hold that immortality begins at the resurrection—clearly the hope of the Early Church—when this mortal shall put on immortality and this corruption shall put on incorruption. This, he found, was likewise Moncrieff's belief.

By 1850 he had given up the idea of consciousness in the intermediate state. But for a time he still retained the idea that man was a compound being, that his body was inhabited by an immaterial principle called the "soul." And although it required an organism

through which to manifest itself, he thought the soul was independent of that organism for existence, and preserved its identity through all the changes of life and death, and that it was this immaterial principle which produced thought and volition in man.

2. DOES NOT POSSESS SEPARATE IMMORTAL SOUL.—In 1851, after carefully reviewing the whole question, which had agitated his mind for about six years, the matter became clear. He joined with John Milton in holding that—

"man is a being, intrinsically and properly one and individual, not compound or separable, not, according to the common opinion, made up and framed of two distinct and different natures, as of soul and body, but the whole man is soul, and the soul man; that is to say, a body or substance, individual, animated, sensitive, rational." [64]

In studying the Scripture account of the creation of man, he found no mention of the putting of a soul into the body of Adam in order for him to become a man. Rather, "God formed MAN," he read, "of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul"—that is, he became alive, a living being. Throughout the Bible he found no statement that man possesses a separate, independent soul. The arguments from reason in support of the immateriality of the soul are, he held, to be noted for their ingenuity rather than their soundness. Some of such arguments would prove that all animals, even animalculae, are endowed with this immortal, independent, thinking principle. That goes too far.

Such was the origin and development of Laing's Conditionalism, as he became one of its early advocates in Scotland. He was author of numerous articles and papers thereon, chiefly, "Life Only in Christ," "Immortality the Gift of God," "A History of the Corruption of the Scripture Doctrine of a Future Life," "The Thief on the Cross," "The Perverted Parable (the Rich Man and Lazarus)," and "Universalism Examined in the Light of Scripture." [65]

64 Quoted in William Laing, *Papers on Life and Advent Truth and Other Bible Themes* (1901), pp. 14, 15.

7. Ham—Bible Excludes Notion of Independent Immortality

Shortly before this came JAMES PANTON HAM (1819-1902), Congregationalist, who was trained at Cheshunt College, Cambridge, then ministered at Maidenhead and then Bristol. Beginning in 1847, he was for a time minister of the Lodge Street Congregational Chapel, Bristol. But his adoption of differing doctrinal views led him to accept the pastorate of the Cooper's Hall Congregational Free church, likewise of Bristol (1855-1859). Ham was author of *Life and Death; or, the Theology of the Bible, in Relation to Human Immortality* (1849); and *Generations Gathered and Gathering; or The Scripture Doctrine Concerning Man in Death* (1850). In this he "maintains that man has no conscious existence between death and resurrection. [67] Because he ran into heavy opposition, it is said that he finally became a Unitarian.

1. IMMORTALITY SOLELY FOR BELIEVER IN CHRIST.—Ham appeals to the Scriptures as the sole criteria in the matter of human immortality and future retribution. The following extract from *Life and Death* presents his position clearly:

"The doctrine which I have been endeavouring to inculcate in this lecture, and which appears to me to be the plain, unequivocal voice of the Bible, is, that life, eternal life, literally understood, is the privilege of NO MAN but the believer in Jesus Christ, through whom it is bestowed as the sovereign gift of God. Now, the popular view of the theory of redemption excludes this cardinal doctrine of immortality alone in Christ; it builds its theory upon a philosophic conceit, it erroneously assuming that we have eternal life as a proper attribute of our human nature." [68]

65 Later assembled in *Papers on Life and Advent Truth*.

66 This was the famous Dissenting Congregation established by Henry Newcomb, who had been ejected in 1662 from the Collegiate church under the Act of Uniformity.

67 Abbot, *The Literature of the Doctrine of a Future Life*, no. 2632, n. Also reprinted in Aaron Ellis, *Bible vs. Tradition* (New York. 1853) and *Bible Examiner*, May and June, 1852 (vol. 7, pp. 65-92).

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2. INNATE IMMORTALITY COUNTER TO INSPIRATION.—Striking at the popular philosophical concept of independent immortality, derived from Plato, Ham continues:

"He, then, who teaches that man is immortal, independently of Jesus Christ, introduces a distracting element into the system of the Christian religion. It is to render its plain and obvious teachings obscure and inappreciable, except upon a system of interpretation,

which affixes to words ideas which they have nowhere else in the writings and commerce of mankind. It is to flatter human pride, by unduly exalting human nature. It is to commingle with the teaching of God the doctrines and commandments of men, and eminently to deprive the Christian redemption of its chief lustre, and Christ himself of his mediatorial dignity as the Life-Giver. This is the record, that—Mid-lath given to us eternal life; and this life is in His San. He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.' The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” [69]

Ham's was but one voice of many speaking similarly in the mid-century period. (Photo on page 416.)

68 J. Panton Ham, *Life and Death; or, the Theology of the Bible, in Relation to Human Immortality*, pp. 85, 86.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 86.

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