



William Elbert Munsey

1833 - 1877

"Is eternal punishment a fact, and is it right? Our God is a consuming fire. The capacity and power to love show the capacity and the power to hate. Those who would say that anger and wrath are inconsistent with the character of God make God a cold and chilling abstraction, unable to love. If you want a God capable of love and infinite love, He must be capable of wrath and infinite wrath."

Methodism in early America was a great force for revival and righteousness. A roll call of some of its men is a roll call of giants for God—Asbury, Cartwright, Sam Jones being among them. Add to that list of Methodist worthies William Elbert Munsey.

Born in Bland County, Virginia, in 1833, young Munsey learned early to help his father eke out a living on the old farm. When he was only twelve his father died, and the youth assumed the responsibility of providing for his mother and five younger brothers.

Denied formal schooling except for one year, Munsey mastered books. Dr. John Rice wrote of his intellectual giant that, at age ten, "he had read the whole works of the Jewish historian Josephus several times" and that "he studied everywhere and always....While plowing he would prop a book up at the end of the furrow, read a section, then leave the book and fix in his mind what he had read while he plowed the next furrow."

Munsey was converted at an old-fashioned Methodist camp meeting at age seventeen, and soon after became a Methodist preacher. Throughout Tennessee and Virginia he was well known.

Though intellectual, his sermons were not dry as dust. He was a preacher of such power and such performance that the Knoxville Tribune tabbed him, "the most eloquent public orator of the South." Those sermons must have been something to hear. Often an entire congregation would stand up under the spell of his preaching—sermons that were often two hours long.

People thronged his churches, especially at Alexandria and Richmond, Virginia, where the church house would be filled two hours before meeting time. He was a genius in painting word pictures. His sermons on future and eternal punishment are not only classic, they are probably the finest of their kind. In these dark, desperate days we need preaching on: Death is sure, Hell is hot, eternity is forever, sin is the reason, Christ is the cure.

We need more men like Munsey! He died in 1877 in Jonesboro, Tennessee, burning himself out at age forty-four.



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