

The Early Days of American Fundamentalism

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The war between the states was over and thousands of war-weary and wounded soldiers of both sides returned to shattered homes and farms. But another war was soon to break out, one which has not yet ended, a war over the Bible, one destined to do more damage, wreck more churches, erode more theological centers, and mislead more people than all our wars. The first chapter in this conflict might be dated accurately as the twenty-five years from 1875 to 1900. A massive attack was raised against the verbal, plenary, and infallible authority of the Word of God. Scholars, teachers, denominational executives, and educators joined to reject the essential truths of historic Christianity. It was a war begun without a formal resolution of hostilities, without the marching of armies and the firing of the guns; it was even more than deadly for it sliced away the spiritual foundations of our nation and our heritage. It was in the midst of such a vast deterioration that a valiant few arose to preserve the doctrines of the Word, the faith of our fathers, at any and all cost. These were the pioneer fundamentalists and, like early believers at Antioch, they existed for a while before the tag of *Christian* was applied. So complete was the attack of the enemies of the Word that, in the words of a careful student of this period, the faith which had dominated the country for 150 years "perished from the earth in a night."¹

Here it would be helpful to list those great forces which started this theological war: humanism, critical theology, and

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new studies in philosophy, science, and comparative religions—all dominated by evolutionary thinking and a widespread craving to accommodate all truth to the modern world. Christianity was told to be "progressive," "forward-looking," "tolerant," and "open-minded."

Fundamentalist Fathers

God raised up able men who would not accommodate, men highly trained and deeply and irrevocably dedicated to the Word of God. Their names deserve reverent mention often for they were God's giants against a black sky. Outstanding were A. J. Gordon of Boston, I. M. Haldeman of New York City, James H. Brookes of St. Louis, A. J. Frost of Sacramento, California, R. A. Torrey of Los Angeles, W. J. Erdman of Princeton, N.J., D. L. Moody of Chicago, George W. Needham of Boston, Charles A. Blanchard of Wheaton, Illinois, and Evangelist L. W. Marshall. These and many others belonged to early fundamentalism's hall of fame although their rewards on earth hav...

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