

THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY.

VOL. VII.

MARCH, 1927.

No. 3.

Do Modernists Play Fair?

The above caption is suggested by the title of a book which appeared last year and created somewhat of a stir, namely, "Do Fundamentalists Play Fair?" by Wm. Mentzel Forrest, Professor of Biblical History and Literature, University of Virginia. The work is a vehement onslaught on the Fundamentalists, and the author's aim is to rebuke them for not playing fair in their battle with the Modernists. Although not endorsing some of the views advocated by prominent Fundamentalists, the Lutheran Church in its conservative section is in hearty accord with these people when they defend the inerrancy of the Scriptures, the deity of Christ, and the vicarious atonement. The attack of the book mentioned on the positions held by Fundamentalists is directed against all who believe that the Bible is an infallible guide; the arguments the writer advances to undermine the authority of the Scriptures are the ones the Lutheran pastor has to meet in the performance of his work. We here are challenged to reexamine and to defend our faith. It will help us in our battle for the truth when we see what methods one of the champions of the Modernists resorts to in his attempt to deliver fatal blows. Since the book is professedly written in the interest of justice and fairness in the present controversy, its writer ought not to fail to exhibit these qualities; but, strange to say, they are the very things which are conspicuously absent. Let me present proof as I go from chapter to chapter.

Mr. Forrest's first chapter has the heading: "No Fair Evolution Only." The point he wishes to make is that the person who adheres strictly to the Bible teaching has no right to brand evolution as false and at the same time to retain the great body of science, such as geology, astronomy, and biology, inasmuch as these sciences, he says, clash with the Bible as completely as the theory of evolution does. We ask, Is it fair to make such sweeping statements? Geology does not itself conflict with the Scriptures. As long as it is descriptive, it does not deny a single statement of the Bible. When it gets to be speculative and presents hypoth-

eses about the age of the earth and the various strata, it usually contradicts the Scripture account. But then it no longer is geology, strictly speaking, but a philosophy based on geology. The same applies to what the author says about the conflict between the Bible and astronomy and biology. To carry his point, he gives this sketch of the Biblical conception of the universe: "The earth was made as a flat body, whose four corners were supported by pillars going down through the waters that were around it and under it. Then the canopy or firmament overarched it with waters pent above it for rain and floods. Four days after this, all vegetable life having meanwhile appeared, various lights were placed in the firmament, the sun to rule the day, the moon and stars to rule the night. Thereafter the lights revolved around the earth or appeared below the firmament when in use and were at other times behind the scenes, above the firmament, ready for their next entrance. They were all very beautiful, but quite insignificant compared with the great, flat earth, which extended an equal distance in every direction from Jerusalem, which was at the center. The firmament was only a little way up and might have been reached from the top of the tower of Babel, if Jehovah had not prevented the completion of that ambitious building. To stop the movements of the sun and moon across the firmament was as simple as for a man to stop moving a lamp," etc. The extreme unfairness of the author is evident in almost every sentence quoted. Does he deny the Biblical writers the right to use figurative, picturesque language such as we employ? Does he really think that Luke in Acts 27, 27, when saying that "land was drawing near" (cp. the original Greek) meant to state that the land was moving and not the ship which carried him and the great apostle? How will he, to mention but one more detail, prove that the holy Book teaches the firmament could have been reached from the top of the tower of Babel if the undertaking had not been interfered with by Jehovah?

The second chapter deals with chronology and bears the superscription, "No Fair Repudiating Usher." If you consider the Bible as infallible, you have to accept Usher's chronology; you may not hide behind a system of chronology which, for instance, makes the Flood occur much earlier than it does according to Usher's figures, since these are simply the figures of the Bible — this is the gist of the argument. When Mr. Forrest insists that he who wishes to accept the Bible should accept it fully, he is unquestionably right. But does acceptance of the Scriptures tie us down to the exegesis

of a fallible scholar? We are pledged to the Bible, not to Usher. Is it fair for the author simply to say that acceptance of the Bible means acceptance of the dates of Usher?

Mr. Forrest then continues his assault by writing a chapter with the heading, "No Fair Denouncing Assumptions." He reasons thus: Modernists are criticized for adopting theories which are mere assumptions, as, for instance, the evolutionary hypothesis; the defenders of the old faith, however, are guilty of the same thing, for their doctrines admit of no proof either, but have to be accepted by faith. Hence it is unfair for Fundamentalists to inveigh against the holding of assumptions on the part of the Liberals. The author here misrepresents the position of those who contend for the Christianity taught in the Bible. They are saying it every day that they walk by faith and not by sight. But there is this difference between the position of the Bible and that of the Modernists—the former bases his belief on the Book which has convinced him that it is divine; the latter admittedly has nothing but human authority on which to rest his beliefs. The one professes to stand on the Word of Almighty God, the other on the word of Darwin or Haeckel. What the Fundamentalist opposes with respect to assumptions is the proclamation that the assumptions are established truths. It is to expressions like the following that Bible Christians take exception: "The evolution theory has been proved"; "Geology has demonstrated that the world is millions of years old," etc.

When Mr. Forrest says in the next chapter, "No Fair Blaming Every Evil Attending a System on Its Advocates," he is right in the basal principle. We cannot place the blame for all the ills found in the world at present at the door of Modernism, even though we may believe that it has a tremendous share in creating the lamentable conditions from which we are suffering. It must be admitted that there is a vital difference between *post hoc* and *propter hoc*. But does the author himself play fair? If he protests against the tendency noticed in certain people to be overgenerous in charging Modernists and their theories with responsibility for present-day evils, why does he not refrain from imputing to the whole body of Fundamentalists what some of their representatives have said or done? Fairness, common fairness, we should like to see.

Chapter 5 has the heading, "No Fair Promoting Sectionalism and Racial Hate in the Name of Christ." Certainly such a procedure is not right. But is Mr. Forrest fair in the charges found in this chapter? Here is one sentence: "A publication is at hand

wherein a leading bishop seeks to arouse resistance to the proposal to unite the northern and southern divisions of his Church by stressing the claim that southern purity of faith will be tainted and destroyed if it merges with its northern counterpart." Now, we maintain that it is manifestly unfair to charge the said bishop with the promotion of sectional strife. He is not contending for the South, but for soundness in doctrine. To call this an attempt to foster sectionalism is about as fair as if one said that Luther refused to fellowship Zwingli for nationalistic reasons.

With the heading of chapter 6 we find ourselves much in sympathy: "No Fair the Law in the Religion of the Spirit." The author says some fine things in behalf of religious liberty. But he disregards a very vital point. To teach the Bible account of creation in the public schools of the land is one thing, to prohibit the teaching of the evolution theory is quite another thing. They must not be confounded. It would be wrong for anybody to try to have a law passed compelling the public schools to teach Gen. 1. But it is not wrong for a parent to insist that his child must not be taught an anti-Biblical philosophy. Whether it is wise to invoke the strong arm of the government in such a case and to seek redress through legislation is doubtful to me. But it seems very clear that just as little as the public schools must be used for the propagation of the Christian doctrine, so little should they be made an agency to spread antichristian beliefs, be they labeled Moham-medan, Buddhist, or evolution. What is fair for the one is fair for the other.

The author's next blow is decidedly of the unfair kind. It is described thus: "No Fair Deserting Our Bible for Infallible Autographs." His position will be gleaned from this paragraph: "The first line of defense of Biblical infallibility is thus seen to be the common English Bible. The people are taught that every word in it is inspired. It is the volume usually thumped by the preacher when he declares he believes every word in it just as it is written. He seizes that very book and shakes it in the face of his congregation when he defies scientists or others to point out one single error in it, from cover to cover. But when not in the pulpit, where it would be irreverent for any one to answer them, or in the denominational press, where it is seldom possible to answer them, such defenders of inerrancy soon abandon their first-line trenches. Bad grammar, erroneous translations, occasional verses that even the most hardened Conservative cannot longer deny to be late interpolations, are easily shown to any English reader who can be

induced to look at any modern edition. Yesterday learned books were written to prove that the clearest Trinitarian text in the New Testament was written there by the Holy Spirit, and any one questioning it was shouted down as a Unitarian. To-day it is admitted that Erasmus, in 1527, put in 1 John 5, 7 with its reference to the three heavenly Witnesses, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost, because he lost a bet and had not the courage to stand by his scholarship. Yesterday religious fanaticism was denouncing the Revised Version and its departure from the Received Text as worse for faith in the Bible than all the assaults of infidels. To-day they have given up that battle and are denouncing other things with as little reason or effect." Now, we say this is not fair. Protestants always have held that not the translations of our Holy Scriptures are inspired, but merely the original autographs. It is true enough that the preacher will, as a rule, when quoting the Scriptures, not dwell on this point, because it is unnecessary and would be confusing. But when occasion arises for a full discussion of this subject, he will not hesitate to make the distinction between the inspired original and the fallible translation. The charge that preachers of the old faith are wilfully deceiving their parishioners is unwarranted. Other examples of unfairness, in the paragraph quoted, the reader himself will easily discover.

"No Fair Verbal Inspiration" is Mr. Forrest's next shot. We rejoin, No fair calling something unfair which is perfectly fair. Why, in the name of justice and right, should it be unfair to teach the doctrine of verbal inspiration if one is convinced that it is true? Mr. Forrest builds his arguments on two assumptions, both of which are wrong. The one is that the theory of verbal inspiration arose late, being a product of the Protestant Reformation; the other that there are no evidences supporting this doctrine. As to the first one of these claims, it can easily be proved that the early Church looked upon the Scriptures as verbally inspired, though now and then a rationalist arose who discounted some of the Biblical statements. It is in full keeping with historical truth when we assert that the Church of all ages has, generally speaking, held the doctrine of verbal inspiration and that the opponents of this doctrine were the few, not the many. The second assumption of Mr. Forrest is just as idle as the first. The Bible itself teaches the doctrine of verbal inspiration. When Paul says: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," 2 Tim. 3, 15, he inculcates this view, because "Scripture" designates not merely the

general contents, but the very words of the sacred writings. When Jesus says, John 10, 35: "The Scripture cannot be broken," making this statement with reference to one single word, he teaches verbal inspiration. When Paul, Gal. 3, 16, argues from the use of the singular instead of the plural with reference to the word *seed* in a prophecy of Genesis, he indicates that the Old Testament is verbally inspired. How, then, can Mr. Forrest simply say: "Looking for the evidences in support of such a theory, we find none"? To what lengths he will go in his attempt to discredit the doctrine of verbal inspiration may be seen from this paragraph: "Take some allusion to Old Testament events, as that of Jesus to Jonah. The original account says a great fish swallowed Jonah; Jesus says he was in the belly of a whale. If one is right, the other is wrong. The words differ to the confusion of verbal inspiration, and the statements are irreconcilable. If it was a whale, it was not a fish." Marvelous fairness, is it not? The Scripture is said to be contradicting itself because it calls a certain animal in one place a fish, in another a whale. In addition, he ignores the fact that the word translated "whale" (*κῆτος*) is frequently used to designate any sea-monster. Are we wrong in saying that Mr. Forrest is hopelessly prejudiced?

When the author, continuing his attack, says: "No Fair Restricting Christianity to the Ignorant," he is, of course, begging the question. Who is restricting Christianity to the ignorant? To give the reader an idea of the high degree of fair play to which Mr. Forrest has risen in this chapter, I shall quote a few sentences: "The present Fundamentalist attitude is essentially a refusal to allow modern scholarship to do for this generation what was done for earlier generations. It is an effort to make Christianity and ignorance synonymous terms. Not that every Fundamentalist is ignorant, but many of them are. A survey of American Christianity would undoubtedly show that Fundamentalism is strongest in the denominations where standards of education for admission to the ministry are lowest. . . . The leaders of Fundamentalism not thus far accounted for may be very learned men. Being few in number among the apostles of ignorance, they are the more conspicuous. Whatever their erudition, they elect to keep their Christianity insulated from all else they know. . . . The existence of knowledge is not unknown to them. They can speak of it and quote its words. But they will not assimilate it. Only as a serum to inoculate themselves and others against the admission of living ideas have they any use for present-day thought." This is plainly

a case of displacing argument by vilification. And who, by the way, has made Mr. Forrest such a searcher of hearts that he knows that those champions of the old faith who are learned men — and many of them are learned men — fail to correlate their knowledge in different spheres? Just because they refuse to endorse his philosophy, he accuses them of being either ignoramuses or of being unwilling properly to evaluate such information as they possess. No fair measuring all men with your own little yardstick, Mr. Forrest!

Continuing his attacks, Mr. Forrest lapses into what we cannot but term blasphemy. "No Fair Substituting a Heathen God for the Christian God," says he. He calls the God who is revealed in the Old Testament and believed in by Bible Christians, who accept the Old Testament as well as the New, cruel and vindictive. The doctrine of the vicarious atonement he labels a heathen concept. Where is his proof? He has nothing but his *ipse dixit* to present. Surely he cannot expect us to regard his mere insinuation that these ideas have been borrowed from other religions as evidence. It is unfair, is it not, if you wish to discredit an opponent in a theological debate simply to say his theology has come from heathen sources and to create the impression that you have bushels of proof to offer while in reality you haven't any?

In the last chapter but one Prof. Forrest, writing under the caption, "What if It Is No Fair?" gathers his forces for a final rush. To be fair to him, we shall quote what he himself probably would regard as his most effective attack: "Here, for instance, is the official organ of the Bible League of North America, just from the press, a month before the date it carries. What are the latest Fundamentalist assertions respecting the Bible? That it can be confidently asserted that not a single statement of Scripture has ever been proved erroneous — not a single demonstrated fact of natural science contradicts any statement of the Bible. If that language has any meaning, it clearly proclaims the learned editor who wrote it incapable of telling the truth. Does not the Bible state that the sun stood still at the command of Joshua? Is it not a demonstrated fact of natural science that the sun always stands still relative to the earth? Therefore the Bible contradicts science, and the editor knows that he was not telling the truth, no matter how much dust he may throw in the air about the language of Scripture being accommodated to the understanding of the people of Joshua's day. Do not the remains of the civilizations of the Nile and Tigris valleys antedate the time of Noah's flood, and the

creation of Adam? Hence the Bible is proved erroneous upon those facts of archeology. Is not the statement of Daniel that Babylon was conquered by Darius the Mede false in the face of the correct statement in Isaiah that Cyrus the Persian was the conqueror? Does not Daniel also unequivocally state that Belshazzar was the last king of Babylon? Whereas history shows he was never king, and Nabuniad was the last Babylonian king. Is it not demonstrable that the name of the Babylonian conqueror of Judah is commonly misspelled in the Bible? What chance have the Bible, truth, the Church at the hands of religionists who will not play fair?" There you are! Charges that have been refuted many a time are repeated with a *nonchalance* which it is safe to say has never been surpassed in the most militant section of the Fundamentalist camp. Speaking of the wonderful event related Josh. 10, 12 ff., Mr. Forrest overlooks that the heliocentric view of the solar system is a hypothesis, grant it as much plausibility as you please. And even if a person should assume, as many reverent scholars do, that this view is right, the Bible account could well be defended by an appeal to ordinary human speech. Mr. Forrest himself, we have no doubt, in spite of all his reverence for science, will speak of the glories of the typical "sunset" in the Virginian mountains. I wonder, does he give orders to the hotel clerk to wake him "when the earth has finished one-third of its spin about its own axis" or "at sunrise"? No fair calling a contradiction of science in the Bible what we do not call such a contradiction in our own case. With respect to the dates of the civilizations in the Nile and Tigris valleys, we say that the early dates which Mr. Forrest assumes are hypothetical and may any day be proved false. And then he points to the old and often-explained difficulty connected with the references to Belshazzar and Darius the Mede in the Book of Daniel. Has he not kept abreast of modern researches, which have shown quite convincingly that the former critical assumption, which declared the existence of Belshazzar a myth, must now be discarded and that Daniel's account stands vindicated? But — so we say, echoing the words of Professor Forrest — what chance has the Bible, truth, and the Church at the hands of religionists who will not play fair?

The author devotes his final chapter to a discussion of "what might result from fair play." Perhaps the dominating thought of this chapter is best expressed in its last sentence: "Our differences are nothing, our agreements are all-sufficient, if only we will play fair." Yes, there must be fair play, to that we agree. But

when the author insists that Fundamentalists and Modernists must tolerate each other in the church-bodies to which they belong, he is preaching an indifferentism which, if permitted to run its natural course, would soon kill and bury all true Christianity. Mr. Forrest points to the case of Luther and others in defense of his view that new conceptions and practises and doctrines are bound to appear as the years pass by and should be treated with leniency. However, his allusion to Luther is strikingly inappropriate. The great Reformer did not preach new doctrines, but simply rescued from the rubbish heap the old teachings of the apostles. If Mr. Forrest has read the works of modern writers on the history of dogma, he may have come across the statement that Luther was the greatest pupil and interpreter of the Apostle Paul that we know of, which corroborates that Luther did not proclaim a new system of doctrine or a philosophy, but merely called on men to return to the old paths marked out for us in the Bible. No fair, then, comparing Modernists, who are turning away from the Scripture, with Luther, who brought people back to the Scripture. Again, Luther would have vehemently spurned the policy here advocated by Mr. Forrest. Everybody has to admit that if indifferentism had been his watchword, there would have been no Reformation. We know that Erasmus did not bring about the needed upheaval in the Church, even though he felt convinced conditions were intolerable and did not hesitate to poke fun at monks and their many superstitions. He followed the policy of tolerance of error, and the Church did not excommunicate him. The result was that in spite of all his brilliancy and learning he did not effect that change which earnest souls were yearning for. Luther, on the other hand, was unwilling to compromise with error. While he was ever ready to bear with the weak and the ignorant, he refused to endorse or countenance departures from the faith once delivered to the saints, and through the grace of God this holy passion for the truth, nurtured by the sweet conviction that we sinners are saved by grace, through faith, demolished the fetters of Antichrist and enthroned the Gospel in its pristine purity.

We herewith conclude our discussion of Mr. Forrest's book. Of course, we have not dwelt on all his arguments; it would require a volume to do so. But enough has been said, we trust, to show the unbiased that if Modernists complain of unfair treatment in the present controversy, they by no means come into court with clean hands.