

first half of the 20th century.⁴

Early Fundamentalism in America

The term "fundamentalism" did not come into use until about 1920, but millenarian dispensationalism (out of which fundamentalism developed) became strongly established in America during the late 19th century. This form of doctrine took shape in England in the mid-19th century under the leadership of the Plymouth Brethren minister J. N. Darby. Darby's influence was very strong in both England and the United States. The type of millenarian doctrine which he taught was dominant at the well-known Bible conferences which were held at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, from 1883 to 1897. Many very capable Bible scholars were speakers at these conferences, and mutual cooperation was good. In addition to the various phases of dispensationalism and prophecy which were discussed, there was great concern over the then-current, rapid spread of theological liberalism in the major denominations.⁵ This trend toward liberalism was such a threat to evangelicalism at that time that numerous outstanding conservative theologians who were not millenarians joined forces with the latter in an effort to stop the spread of liberalism. Among these conservative theologians were the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, and many other leading members of the Presbyterian denomination.⁶

The most prominent issues being emphasized by this "millenarian-conservative alliance" were the inspiration and authority of Scripture, the deity of Christ and his virgin birth, supernatural miracles, the atoning death of Christ, and the physical resurrection and personal return of Jesus Christ.⁷ In 1910 the General Assembly of the Northern Presbyterian denomination adopted a five-point statement of essentially these same five doctrines, and reaffirmed the same in 1916 and in 1923.⁸ From 1910 to 1915 the millenarian-conservative alliance published a well known 12-volume series of small books entitled The Fundamentals, with A. C. Dixon as general editor. There were 64 authors in all. The above named doctrines, plus several others, were discussed at length in this work.⁹

Practically all of the millenarians completely rejected the doctrine of evolution, but for a time did not press this issue. The magnitude of the liberal opposition to what were recognized as "the fundamentals" of Scripture brought about such a concentration on the defense of these that the evolution problem did not really enter the foreground until late in the second decade of the century.¹⁰ At no time in these decades of fundamentalist activity did the question of the age of the earth become a prominent issue. Even when the great evolution controversy of the 1920's was raging, the fundamentalist leaders did not consider age to be the important issue. The recognition of the validity of geologic observations which Christian leaders had gained during the 19th century was still an effective leveling influence among them during the early 20th century.¹¹

One of the most important influences in maintaining order among fundamentalists, with respect to recognition of geologic data, was the publication of the Scotfield Reference Bible, in 1909, with a