

# THE PRESBYTERIAN ATTACK ON DR. FOSDICK

**H**ERESY HUNTERS are on the war-path again, we are told, their latest attack being directed against Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Baptist minister preaching in a Presbyterian pulpit, who is charged with rejecting the four great doctrines of Christianity—the virgin birth, the inspiration of the Scriptures, the atonement of Jesus, and Christ's second coming. In the face of this "infamy," the Rev. Harold J. Hamilton, of Rochester, Mich., declares that "it is time for the Protestant churches to clean house and banish every modernist minister from his pulpit." Our churches, he says, as he is quoted in the *New York Tribune*, "have become hotbeds of infidelity, higher criticism and evolution. The monkey gospel is to-day predominant in the Protestant Church. The Bible has been reduced to a classic. The blood atonement is called a slaughter-house religion and a religion of gore."

The occasion of the onslaught on Dr. Fosdick is a sermon delivered by him in the First Presbyterian Church, New York, of which he is pastor. In this sermon he accuses the Fundamentalists of attempting to run out of the evangelical churches all who do not believe in the literal interpretation of the Bible and in the four cardinal doctrines of the Protestant creeds, and bespeaks a larger Church in which people of all beliefs may work and worship. But his real object, replies one traditionalist, is "to make Unitarians and rationalists of his generation." *The Continent* (Presbyterian), on the other hand, views the eminent preacher's attitude in a far different light, averring that any one who reads the sermon with an unclouded desire to be fair will see that he is attempting only "to propagate in the Church a spirit of tolerance and fellowship toward varying views of Christian fact and faith. He is laboring to establish friendly recognition of the equal right of all men to find a place in the Church who take Jesus for Lord and Master and desire to preach for him and live for him as the only Savior of a sinning world." But many other Presbyterian leaders and journals indignantly repudiate Dr. Fosdick, and the agitation was brought to a head when the Presbytery of Philadelphia recently sent a formal protest to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church against the kind of preaching in the First Presbyterian Church in New York. The General Assembly does not meet until next May, and in the meantime one of the trustees of Dr. Fosdick's church is quoted in the *New York press* as saying that he "has the undivided support of our church. His Philadelphia critics have not fully stated his principles." He was not pleading for the



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modern view or the more liberal view in the much discuss sermon on the Fundamentalists, we are told further, but for a church "big enough and comprehensive enough to hold both points of view." One of the immediate causes of the complaint is contained in the following excerpt from his sermon, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Commenting on the "bitter intolerance" of the Fundamentalists and insisting that "intolerance solves no problems," Dr. Fosdick goes on:



"I know people in the Christian churches, ministers, missionaries, laymen, devoted lovers of the Lord and servants of the Gospel, who, alike as they are in their personal devotion to the Master, hold quite different points of view about a matter like the virgin birth. Here, for example, is one point of view: that the virgin birth is to be accepted as historical fact; it actually happened; there was no other way for a personality like the Master to come into this world except by a special biological miracle. That is one point of view, and many are the gracious and beautiful souls who hold it. But, side by side with them in the evangelical churches is a group of equally loyal and reverent people who would say that the virgin birth is not to be accepted as an historic fact. To believe in virgin birth as an explanation of great personality is one of the familiar ways in which the ancient world was accustomed to account for unusual superiority. . . . So Pythagoras was called virgin born, and Plato, and Augustus Cæsar, and many more. Knowing this, there are within the evangelical churches large groups of people whose opinion about our Lord's coming would run as follows: those first disciples adored Jesus—as we do; when they thought about his coming they were sure that he came specially from God—as we are; this adoration and conviction they associated with God's special influence and intention in his birth—as we do; but they phrased it in terms of a biological miracle that our modern minds can not use. So far from thinking that they have given up anything vital in the New Testament's attitude toward Jesus, these Christians remember that the two men who contributed most to the Church's thought of the divine meaning of the Christ were

Paul and John, who never even distantly allude to the virgin birth.

"Here in the Christian churches are these two groups of people, and the question which the Fundamentalists raise is this: shall one of them throw the other out? Has intolerance any contribution to make to this situation? Will it persuade anybody of anything? Is not the Christian Church large enough to hold within her hospitable fellowship people who differ on points like this and agree to differ until the fuller truth be manifested? The Fundamentalists say not. They say that the liberals must go. Well, if the Fundamentalists should succeed, then out of the Christian Church would go some of the best Christian life and consecration of this generation—multitudes of men and women, devout and reverent Christians, who need the Church and whom the Church needs."