

FOSSIL THEOLOGY.

A lump of coal showing on its surface, in delicate tracery, the form of a fern or fish, is prized by the geologist as a specimen of the vegetation or fauna of a very remote period in the day of creation. Such a fossil is valuable as a connecting link between the dead past and living present, possessing no other value except to be burned.

In the world of theology we find many such relics of bygone ages fossilized in the form of liturgies, creeds, confessions of faith, etc., many of them originating in the Carboniferous period of religious knowledge, the "dark ages," which, apart from their value as antiquities, representing the mind and practice of the religious systems of their day, are of no use whatever, except as fuel.

"For what so fiercely burns
As a dry creed that nothing ever learns?"

It is remarkable that in this age of progress and development, men of education and intelligence should shape their thoughts and teachings after the pattern of these Theological Fossils, which are as devoid of life as the petrifications that we find in the museum duly classified and labeled.

In the advanced light of medical science of to-day, the physician who would follow the old system of bleeding, pilling and blistering, and confine his patient in a dark, illy-ventilated room, would be denounced not only as an "old fogey," but as a fool, since medical colleges are continually experimenting and opening up new avenues of knowledge as to the causes and cure of disease. In strong contrast with this, sectarian theology has learned nothing, neither can it learn anything so long as the minds of its teachers are moulded and shaped by the petrified dogmas of their ancestors. He who receives his credentials as a denominational teacher is not a free man. He is bound to accept as the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, the complications of doctrines as handed down to him from the "fathers" of his denomination. What those men, hundreds of years ago, with minds perhaps befogged with superstition, declared to be truth is truth, to which nothing can be added, and from which nothing can be taken away. No matter what light advanced scholarship may have thrown upon the inspired Word; no matter what science may have revealed; no matter what new truths the servants of God may have brought forth from the store-house: the religious instructor of to-day must shut his eyes to the light, and stop his ears from hearing strange or new sounds, and submissively bow to the teachings of antiquated theologians, priests, prelates and parsons, as though their voice were the voice of God. There is no idolatry that has more submissive devotees than has this worship of the stocks and stones of Fossil Theology; there is no tyranny more oppressive than is the tyranny of creed.

How is this accounted for? Very easily. Denominations are formed about the teachings of some man or set of men. These teachings are accepted as the quintessence of truth; preachers are instructed in these doctrines, and ordained to teach them; [R1027 : page 6] colleges are endowed to perpetuate them, and the graduates from these schools, before being authorized to preach, must subscribe to the system of practice and doctrine taught, and agree to teach the same. He is not a free man. He dare not turn either to the right or to the left under penalty of losing his commission, and with it the means of gaining a livelihood. Instead of building upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner-stone, the foundation is human; and the divine injunction applies with terrific force: "In vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."

Witness the recent trial of the professors of Andover College as an illustration of the despotic power of creed. It was not a question, Did these men teach truth? The only question considered by the judges was, did they

teach contrary to the Confession of Faith, and established traditions of the denomination. And in a score of instances that might be cited of ministers brought before ecclesiastical tribunals, they are always tried by the same antiquated law, and required to pronounce the sectarian Shibboleth.

There is little wonder that spiritual deadness is characteristic of the churches everywhere, with fussy Uzzas reaching out their hands to steady the ark of the Lord; with inquisitorial ecclesiastics snuffing out the light of truth as soon as it shows its first feeble rays, and then compelling those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and truth to accept their dead forms and creeds, or else look elsewhere to have their cravings satisfied. Thank God that His truth is not committed to such hands, but is free as the water of life to all who will go to the fountain and drink. Divine truth is not in dead forms and compiled dogmas, but it is liberty and life in Christ Jesus.--*Words of Truth.*
