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Crumbling Creeds

Ross Winn

1903

Orthodox Christianity today is a waning power. Its influence upon the intellectual world is rapidly approaching zero. As a world force, the church is a moral and mental bankrupt. Its vitality is gone. The thunder of its pulpit, once so potent, has lost its power. Its crumbling creeds no longer appeal to the world's heart and brain. The church is no longer a progressive force—it is merely a drag attached to the rear of the car of progress. It has a certain fashion—its wealth and magnificence, gilded trappings and ostentatious display gives it a certain prestige; but as a real influence upon the world's intellect it is nil. In a little while what is called orthodox Christianity will take its place in that vast cemetery where sleep the dead and forgotten religions of the past.

As the power and influence of the church decline, the dawning light of Reason shines forth with increasing splendor, banishing the dark shadows which thru the long and dismal night of supernaturalism, have so long obscured the path of human progress. The face of humanity is turned towards the purpling east; and the prophets from the signal towers of progress are proclaiming the glad tidings of a new day. The human mind is breaking the chains with which priestcraft sought to bind and enslave; and a new con-

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science is mounting the throne of the world's brain. The night of superstition and supernaturalism, of ghostly rule and priestly authority, is fading, and the day of human freedom is dawning. The religion of ghosts and gods is dying; the new religion of humanity is taking its seat, and has grasped the fallen scepter.

No king ever relinquished his crown without a struggle; and today the church, realizing its declining influence, and finding itself powerless to stay the resistless tide of advance thought, seeks to bulwark its crumbling prestige with the power of wealth and fashion; and is stretching out its hand to grasp the gilded scepter of worldly power. Thus we see everywhere the church allied with wealth and political power: priest clasping hands with the politician, and both bowing at the gilded throne of Mammon.

Human progress is no longer a theory; it is a demonstrated fact. For centuries Orthodoxy has stood in refutation of this elemental proposition, but at last its followers have yielded to the irresistible influence of civilization. They are revising their creeds. Even the Presbyterians have made some intellectual advance since Calvin; they cannot longer subscribe to the doctrine of total depravity. Infant damnation is a proposition that is a trifle too tough for the Presbyterian conscience of today, and so it is to be banished from the creed. In fact the entire declaration of Presbyterian faith is being overhauled and critically scrutinized thru twentieth century spectacles. The Presbyterian church is thus going to make a rather tardy effort to overtake civilization—to shake off some of the moss and mold of the barbaric past, and to get in touch with the living present.

In taking this step Presbyterianism makes a confession that its champions would gladly have avoided. By this action they are compelled to admit that they have been mistaken, that the church was founded upon doctrinal blunders, and that they have in the past, imposed and fostered fraud and falsehood as divine truth. By this act of revision they proclaim that every Presbyterian from John Calvin to the present day who subscribed to these false doctrines

were heretics, who, according to the church doctrine, have as their punishment, the endless torture of quenchless flame. This is certainly an unenviable position in which the church is placed, but from it there is no logical escape.

As a matter of fact, the Presbyterian church, in seeking to escape from one blunder has unwittingly tumbled into a greater one. By this admission of past mistakes, they prove their present fallibility. They can no longer say that they have an unshakable grasp upon divine truth. If the past contains a doubt, they must face the future with uncertainty. If time has proven one part of their creed false, future time may expose still greater errors in their articles of faith. The orthodox church has cut the anchor rope of religious certainty and is drifting out upon the great ocean of theological speculation, where many a frail bark floating the Christian banner has gone to the bottom upon Rationalism's rugged reef.