

creation," the infallible and indisputable records which fix the correct history of organisms upon an irrefragable foundation. All petrified or fossil remains and impressions tell us of the forms and structure of such animals and plants as are either the progenitors and ancestors of the present living organisms, or they are the representatives of extinct collateral lines, which, together with the present living organisms, branched off from a common stem.

These inestimable records of the history of creation throughout a long period played a subordinate part in science. Their true nature was indeed correctly understood, even more than five hundred years before Christ, by the great Greek philosopher, Xenophanes of Colophon, the same who founded the so-called Eleatic philosophy, and who was the first to demonstrate with convincing precision that all conceptions of personal gods result in more or less rude anthropomorphism.

Xenophanes for the first time asserted that the fossil impressions of animals and plants were real remains of formerly living creatures, and that the mountains in whose rocks they were found must at an earlier date have stood under water. But although other great philosophers of antiquity, and among them Aristotle, also possessed this true knowledge, yet throughout the illiterate Middle Ages, and even with some naturalists of the last century, the idea prevailed that petrifications were so-called freaks of nature (*lusus naturæ*), or products of an unknown formative power or instinct of nature (*nisus formativus, vis plastica*). Respecting the nature of this mysterious and mystic creative power, the strangest ideas were formed. Some believed that this constructive power—the same to which they also