

*II. This cramping Idolatry of the Past was the natural mother of that slavish dependence upon tradition against which our Saviour spoke so sternly as freeing up the living energies of the Divine word.*

In their idolatrous veneration of the past, they clung in timid helplessness to the opinions and decisions of the old expositors of the word; afraid to trust themselves to venture a single step beyond the interpretations of the rabbis. Those old explanations came practically to gain an authority superior to Scripture itself, because they were understood as determining its sense. Thus the Pharisees were charged by Christ with "making the Word of God of none effect through their traditions." (Mk. 7. 15.) We too are familiar with a similar process. Catholics reason from the decisions of Councils; Protestants, sometimes, from the definitions of creeds and confessions, till the teaching of Scripture is largely distorted. Not to instance the constantly extending deviation from Scripture of the former, we need only specify the remarkable change observable by every student of Protestant theology in the vigour, boldness and independence with which the Reformation leaders grappled at first hand with Scripture, as compared with the uncertainty of tread, and the timidity of mental grasp shown by the post-Reformation theologians.

But in addition to this sterility, necessarily resulting from a slavish regard for old opinions, we find that the errors and ~~effects~~ *defects* pertaining to them, become accentuated and magnified with the process of the ages, till some great convulsion shatters the traditional creed, and forces men to fresh and independent consideration of the inspired sources. Calvinism, for example, is sometimes presented in a way that would startle Calvin himself, by men who adopt his views as sound, and thinking it is proof of orthodoxy to stretch them to the utmost, distort those sublime principles of Divine sovereignty to a degree that over-rides the freedom of the human will, destroys responsibility, and narrows the full presentation of a free Gospel.

More than this. A creed that has been crystalized in traditional formulæ tends with inferior minds to become fossilized and petrified. Adopted without earnest identifying thought, and followed with subservient docility, the statements which originally embodied conceptions of truth throbbing with vital practical meaning, become mere dead terms, barren verbal propositions, which manacle the living, life-giving principles of the Divine word in fetters of iron. Men fall into a routine of religious conceptions which have not been verified by a vigorous process of personal investigation, experimental application, and individual appropriation. It often requires a wave of heretical opinion to sweep over the Church to awaken men's minds to the