

commence their work. The ages are marked by the gravestones of dead philosophers—dead churches or vain schemes of man's desire to combat the evils which abound in the world. The Jews to whom were committed the oracles of God and who made them of no effect by their traditions—where are they? dispersed to the four quarters of the earth and their heritage passed to the Christian church. Where are the seven churches of Asia, which were so prominent in the first century that they had special messengers sent to each of them? They were planted by apostolic hands, for a time had apostolic oversight, taught by apostolic lips and were rich in the forms and ordinances of the apostolic church. But gradually neglecting the written word, they were seduced by the corruptions and errors which surrounded them. They left the truth in its essence, sought out devices of their own, left their first love and in spite of the outward forms of a visible church were swept from the face of the earth. They disappeared, for the waves of a corrupt human element drowned the living truth. On the northern coast of Africa the early church flourished, but error and formalism usurped the place of the truth, and that country, at one time rich in spiritual things, became as barren as the sands of her deserts. The living principle was famished and even the dry forms withered away. The Abyssinian church is dead in doctrine and practice. In spite of an outward semblance, spiritual paralysis rests upon her, and the evident source of her weakness is ignorance of the word which giveth light. In the three first centuries Christianity had an enormous influence. It stimulated men to lofty desires and noble actions. Yet upon those high aspirations were engrafted the errors of the Eremites who isolated themselves from their fellow-men, that they might attain to higher regions of holiness. The history of asceticism, beginning in Egypt, spreading to Asia, then