

over the western church, is full of instruction. It demonstrates the continual tendency of the human race to drift away from beginnings of fervent zeal and piety in organizations to a condition replete with intense selfishness and thirst for power and influence. Again and again from the mass of the professing Christian world would arise men grieved with the prevailing vices. Stimulated by some word of truth they would begin a life of wonderful self-denial and earnest exhortation. It is related of St. Francis, who was born in affluence and satiated with indulgence in pleasures, that one day hearing the gospel read, which told of the sending forth of the twelve apostles without scrip or staff or shoes or purse, he exclaimed, "Here is what I want," and without delay he at once proceeded to fashion his life after the apostolic pattern. It was not long before the might of self-denying and self-offering love put all mockers and gainsayers to silence. One by one there gathered around him a little band whom he sent east and west, north and south to preach the gospel to the poor. "I am come to send fire on the earth"—even the fire as he understood it of divine love, a love that in its reach embraced all creation, animate and inanimate, for did not all proceed from the same Almighty power? Doves ate out of his hands and nestled in his bosom. Burning with such loving zeal he went forth and worked and in forty years the order of Franciscans numbered not less than 8,000 religious houses. But as their numbers increased the order departed from the spirituality of its founder, for they were not fed by the same spiritual food, "the sincere milk of the word." Though powerful as a body they soon manifested all the evils which proceed from unsanctified human nature. The history of this one monastic order is the history of them all. There was in the outset zeal and labor, and love and self denial, and these in so high a measure as to draw upon them the