

Abraham, and again for Jacob ; was the scene of Joseph's romantic career and of the early life of Moses, as well as for generations the abode and training-place of the chosen people. All through Hebrew history a near neighbor, its influence was profoundly felt, sometimes as an ally and sometimes as a foe. In later times Alexandria, the capital city, was a sort of second Jerusalem as a rendezvous for wealthy and learned Jews, and supplied a birthplace for the Septuagint. Then, as standing for its connection with New Testament events, when the infant Jesus was in mortal peril from the jealousy of Herod, it was hither that He was hurried ; among the polyglot multitude, certain Egyptians shared in the marvels and ecstasies of Pentecost ; and a few years later Apollos, an Alexandrian Christian Jew, so eloquent and mighty in the Scriptures, appears upon the scene. In a word, so much had the Pharaohs and the civilization of the Nile Valley to do with patriarchs, prophets, and kings, and with the momentous unfolding of truth and righteousness under the old covenant, that next to Palestine Egypt takes rank as a holy land.

When or by whom the Gospel was introduced into Egypt we cannot say, nor do we know aught of its early history there ; only it is certain that large conquests were made before the end of the first century, and steady gains followed until Constantine's day, when the mastery over heathenism was achieved. It is evident, also, that the ruling type of Christianity contained from the first and all along serious admixtures of idolatry and superstition. For centuries theological strifes were almost constant and exceedingly bitter, and vast numbers of the best fled to monasteries and the deserts to escape from the general corruption and chaos. Some names from that period will ever live as notable, and others as notorious ; such as Origen and Clement, Athanasius, Arius and Cyril made a profound impression upon their own time not only, but ever since have moulded the opinions and character of multitudes. In those days of acrimonious debate, through the influence of certain leaders the Egyptian Church was led to accept certain doctrines then and ever since accounted heretical ; and so furious and uncompromising had their contention with the orthodox Greek Church long been that when the Persians entered the land as invaders they were met by the Christians with open arms, as were also the Arabs, when in 640 A.D. they came to conquer Egypt for the prophet. By this time the Church had taken the name Coptic, which ever since it has borne. For a season the Christians fared well enough, but later set in a long period of oppression and pitiless persecution, especially from the Turks ; and as a result the millions gradually dwindled, until at the beginning of this century but a few thousands remained. And these, like their brethren in the other corrupt Oriental churches, had scarcely more than a name to live, their profession of godliness amounting to little more than a prejudice, a form, a superstition. And it is in behalf of this same ancient but apostate Coptic Church that the American Mission bestows the bulk of its labors.