

INTRODUCTION.

WE have now to consider more especially a long and barren period, which intervened between the scientific activity of ancient Greece and that of modern Europe; and which we may, therefore, call the Stationary Period of Science. It would be to no purpose to enumerate the various forms in which, during these times, men reproduced the discoveries of the inventive ages; or to trace in them the small successes of Art, void of any principle of genuine Philosophy. Our object requires rather that we should point out the general and distinguishing features of the intellect and habits of those times. We must endeavor to delineate the character of the Stationary Period, and, as far as possible, to analyze its defects and errors; and thus obtain some knowledge of the causes of its barrenness and darkness.

We have already stated, that real scientific progress requires distinct general Ideas, applied to many special and certain Facts. In the period of which we now have to speak, men's Ideas were obscured; their disposition to bring their general views into accordance with Facts was enfeebled. They were thus led to employ themselves unprofitably, among indistinct and unreal notions. And the evil of these tendencies was further inflamed by moral peculiarities in the character of those times;—by an abjectness of thought on the one hand, which could not help looking towards some intellectual superior, and by an impatience of dissent on the other. To this must be added an enthusiastic temper, which, when introduced into speculation, tends to subject the mind's operations to ideas altogether distorted and delusive.

These characteristics of the stationary period, its obscurity of thought, its servility, its intolerant disposition, and its enthusiastic temper, will be treated of in the four following chapters, on the Indistinctness of Ideas, the Commentatorial Spirit, the Dogmatism, and the Mysticism of the Middle Ages.