

CHAPTER III.

OF THE MYSTICISM OF THE MIDDLE AGES.

IT has been already several times hinted, that a new and peculiar element was introduced into the Greek philosophy which occupied the attention of the Alexandrian school; and that this element tinged a large portion of the speculations of succeeding ages. We may speak of this peculiar element as *Mysticism*; for, from the notion usually conveyed by this term, the reader will easily apprehend the general character of the tendency now spoken of; and especially when he sees its effect pointed out in various subjects. Thus, instead of referring the events of the external world to space and time, to sensible connection and causation, men attempted to reduce such occurrences under spiritual and supersensual relations and dependencies; they referred them to superior intelligences, to theological conditions, to past and future events in the moral world, to states of mind and feelings, to the creatures of an imaginary mythology or demonology. And thus their physical Science became Magic, their Astronomy became Astrology, the study of the Composition of bodies became Alchemy, Mathematics became the contemplation of the Spiritual Relations of number and figure, and Philosophy became Theosophy.

The examination of this feature in the history of the human mind is important for us, in consequence of its influence upon the employments and the thoughts of the times now under our notice. This tendency materially affected both men's speculations and their labors in the pursuit of knowledge. By its direct operation, it gave rise to the newer Platonic philosophy among the Greeks, and to corresponding doctrines among the Arabians; and by calling into a prominent place astrology, alchemy, and magic, it long occupied most of the real observers of the material world. In this manner it delayed and impeded the progress of true science; for we shall see reason to believe that human knowledge lost more by the perversion of men's minds and the misdirection of their efforts, than it gained by any increase of zeal arising from the peculiar hopes and objects of the mystics.

It is not our purpose to attempt any general view of the progress and fortunes of the various forms of Mystical Philosophy; but only to exhibit some of its characters, in so far as they illustrate those