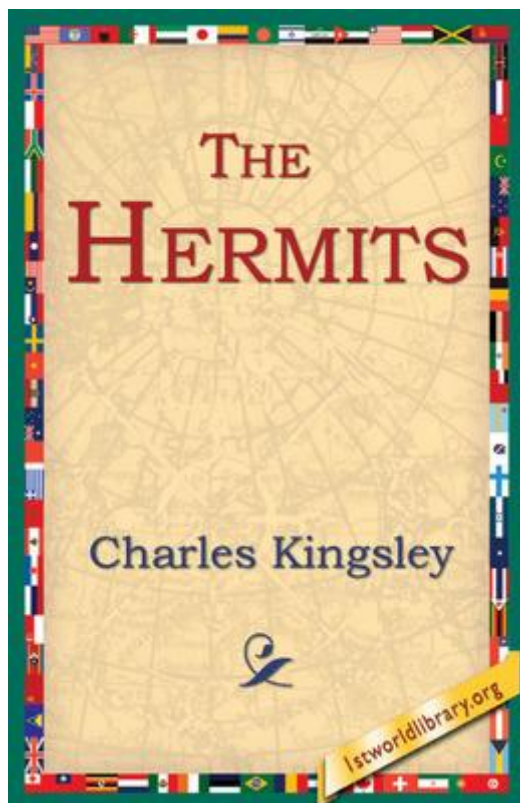


The Hermits - Charles Kingsley



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St. Paphnutius used to tell a story which may serve as a fit introduction to this book. It contains a miniature sketch, not only of the social state of Egypt, but of the whole Roman Empire, and of the causes which led to the famous monastic movement in the beginning of the fifth century after Christ. Now Paphnutius was a wise and holy hermit, the Father, Abba, or Abbot of many monks; and after he had trained himself in the desert with all severity for many years, he besought God to show him which of His saints he was like. And it was said to him, "Thou art like a certain flute-player in the city." Then Paphnutius took his staff, and went into the city, and found that flute-player. But he confessed that he was a drunkard and a profligate, and had till lately got his living by robbery, and recollected not having ever done one good deed. Nevertheless, when Paphnutius questioned him more closely, he said that he recollected once having found a holy maiden beset by robbers, and having delivered her, and brought her safe to town. And when Paphnutius questioned him more closely still, he said he recollected having done another deed.

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