

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

ity, it introduced a fanatical hatred of the followers of all other religions; with fire and sword it has pursued, not only the heathen, but every Christian sect that dared resist the imposition of ultramontane dogma. Tribunals for heretics were erected all over Europe, yielding unnumbered victims, whose torments seemed only to fill their persecutors, with all their Christian charity, with a peculiar satisfaction. The power of Rome was directed mercilessly for centuries against everything that stood in its way. Under the notorious Torquemada (1481-98), in Spain alone eight thousand heretics were burned alive and ninety thousand punished with the confiscation of their goods and the most grievous ecclesiastical fines; in the Netherlands, under the rule of Charles V., at least fifty thousand men fell victims to the clerical bloodthirst. And while the heavens resounded with the cry of the martyrs, the wealth of half the world was pouring into Rome, to which the whole of Christianity paid tribute, and the self-styled representatives of God on earth and their accomplices (not infrequently Atheists themselves) wallowed in pleasure and vice of every description. "And all these privileges," said the frivolous, syphilitic Pope, Leo X., "have been secured to us by the fable of Jesus Christ."

Yet, with all the discipline of the Church and the fear of God, the condition of European society was pitiable. Feudalism, serfdom, the grace of God, and the favor of the monks ruled the land; the poor helots were only too glad to be permitted to raise their miserable huts under the shadow of the castle or the cloister, their secular and spiritual oppressors and exploiters. Even to-day we suffer from the aftermath of these awful ages and conditions, in which there was no ques-