

OUR MONISTIC RELIGION

tive Christianity preached the worthlessness of earthly life, regarding it merely as a preparation for an eternal life beyond. Hence it immediately followed that all we find in the life of man here below, all that is beautiful in art and science, in public and in private life, is of no real value. The true Christian must avert his eyes from them; he must think only of a worthy preparation for the life beyond. Contempt of nature, aversion from all its inexhaustible charms, rejection of every kind of fine art, are Christian duties; and they are carried out to perfection when a man separates himself from his fellows, chastises his body, and spends all his time in prayer in the cloister or the hermit's cell.

History teaches us that this ascetical morality that would scorn the whole of nature had, as a natural consequence, the very opposite effect to that it intended. Monasteries, the homes of chastity and discipline, soon became dens of the wildest orgies; the sexual commerce of monks and nuns has inspired shoals of novels, as it is so faithfully depicted in the literature of the Renaissance. The cult of the "beautiful," which was then practised, was in flagrant contradiction with the vaunted "abandonment of the world"; and the same must be said of the pomp and luxury which soon developed in the immoral private lives of the higher ecclesiastics and in the artistic decoration of Christian churches and monasteries.

It may be objected that our view is refuted by the splendor of Christian art, which, especially in the best days of the Middle Ages, created works of undying beauty. The graceful Gothic cathedrals and Byzantine basilicas, the hundreds of magnificent chapels, the thousands of marble statues of saints and martyrs,