

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

the millions of fine pictures of saints, of profoundly conceived representations of Christ and the madonna—all are proofs of the development of a noble art in the Middle Ages, which is unique of its kind. All these splendid monuments of mediæval art are untouched in their high æsthetic value, whatever we say of their mixture of truth and fancy. Yes; but what has all that to do with the pure teaching of Christianity—with that religion of sacrifice that turned scornfully away from all earthly parade and glamour, from all material beauty and art; that made light of the life of the family and the love of woman; that urged an exclusive concern as to the immaterial goods of eternal life? The idea of a Christian art is a contradiction in terms—a *contradictio in adjecto*. The wealthy princes of the Church who fostered it were candidly aiming at very different ideals, and they completely attained them. In directing the whole interest and activity of the human mind in the Middle Ages to the Christian Church and its distinctive art they were diverting it *from nature* and from the knowledge of the treasures that were hidden in it, and would have conducted to independent science. Moreover, the daily sight of the huge images of the saints and of the scenes of "sacred history" continually reminded the faithful of the vast collection of myths that the Church had made. The legends themselves were taught and believed to be true narratives, and the stories of miracles to be records of actual events. It cannot be doubted that in this respect Christian art has exercised an immense influence on general culture, and especially in the strengthening of Christian belief—an influence which still endures throughout the entire civilized world.

The diametrical opposite of this dominant Christian