

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

penetration of the two sexes, or the mutual complement which they bring to each other in the practical wants of daily life as well as in the highest ideal functions of the soul. For man and woman are two different organisms, equal in worth, each having its characteristic virtues and defects. As civilization advanced, this ideal value of sexual love was more appreciated, and woman held in higher honor, especially among the Teutonic races; she is the inspiring source of the highest achievements of art and poetry. But Christ was as far from this view as nearly the whole of antiquity; he shared the idea that prevailed everywhere in the East—that woman is subordinate to man, and intercourse with her is “unclean.” Long-suffering nature has taken a fearful revenge for this blunder; its sad consequences are written in letters of blood in the history of the papal Middle Ages.

The marvellous hierarchy of the Roman Church, that never disdained any means of strengthening its spiritual despotism, found an exceptionally powerful instrument in the manipulation of this “unclean” idea, and in the promotion of the ascetic notion that abstinence from intercourse with women is a virtue of itself. In the first few centuries after Christ a number of priests voluntarily abstained from marriage, and the supposed value of this celibacy soon rose to such a degree that it was made obligatory. In the Middle Ages the seduction of women of good repute and of their daughters by Catholic priests (the confessional was an active agency in the business) was a public scandal; many communities, in order to prevent such things, pressed for a license of concubinage to be given to the clergy. And it was done in many, and sometimes very romantic, ways. Thus, for instance, the canon law that