

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

What is known as the "immaculate oath"—that is, the confirmation of faith by an oath taken on the immaculate conception of Mary—is still regarded by millions of Christians as a sacred obligation. Many believers take the dogma in a twofold application; they think that the mother of Mary was impregnated by the Holy Ghost as well as Mary herself. Comparative and critical theology has recently shown that this myth has no greater claim to originality than most of the other stories in the Christian mythology; it has been borrowed from older religions, especially Buddhism. Similar myths were widely circulated in India, Persia, Asia Minor, and Greece several centuries before the birth of Christ. Whenever a king's unwedded daughter, or some other maid of high degree, gave birth to a child, the father was always pronounced to be a god, or a demi-god; in the Christian case it was the Holy Ghost.

The special endowments of *mind or body* which often distinguished these "children of love" above ordinary offspring were thus partly explained by "heredity." Distinguished "sons of God" of this kind were held in high esteem both in antiquity and during the Middle Ages, while the moral code of modern civilization reproaches them with their want of honorable parentage. This applies even more forcibly to "daughters of God," though the poor maidens are just as little to blame for their want of a father. For the rest, every one who is familiar with the beautiful mythology of classical antiquity knows that these sons and daughters of the Greek and Roman gods often approach nearest to the highest ideal of humanity. Recollect the large legitimate family, and the still more numerous illegitimate offspring, of Zeus.