



# The Magic of the Middle Ages

*Viktor Rydberg*

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From the INTRODUCTORY.

It was the belief of Europe during the Middle Ages, that our globe was the centre of the universe.

The earth, itself fixed and immovable, was encompassed by ten heavens successively encircling one another, and all of these except the highest in constant rotation about their centre.

This highest and immovable heaven, enveloping all the others and constituting the boundary between created things and the void, infinite space beyond, is the Empyrean, the heaven of fire, named also by the Platonizing philosophers the world of archetypes. Here "in a light which no one can enter," God in triune majesty is sitting on his throne, while the tones of harmony from the nine revolving heavens beneath ascend to him, like a hymn of glory from the universe to its Creator.

Next in order below the Empyrean is the heaven of crystal, or the sphere of the *first movable* (*primum mobile*). Beneath this revolves the heaven of fixed stars, which, formed from the most subtile elements in the universe, are devoid of weight. If now an angel were imagined to descend from this heaven straight to earth, — the centre, where the coarsest particles of creation are collected, — he would still sink through seven vaulted spaces, which form the planetary world. In the first of these remaining heavens is found the planet Saturn, in the second Jupiter, in the third Mars; to the fourth and middle heaven belongs the Sun, queen of the planets, while in the remaining three are the paths of Venus, Mercury, and finally the moon, measuring time with its waning and increasing disk. Beneath this heaven of the moon is the enveloping atmosphere of the earth, and earth itself with its lands and seas.

There are four prime elements in the structure of the universe: fire, air, water and earth. Everything existing in the material world is a peculiar compound of these elements, and possesses as such an energy of its own; but matter in itself is devoid of quality and force. All power is spiritual, and flows from a spiritual source, — from God, and is communicated to the earth and the heavens above the earth and all things in them, by spiritual agents, personal but bodiless. These beings fill the universe. Even the prime elements derive their energy from them. They are called intelligences or angels; and the *primum mobile* as well as the heaven of fixed stars is held in motion by them. The planets are guided in their orbits by angels. "All the energies of plants, metals, stones and all other objects, are derived from those intelligences whom God has ordained to be the guardians and leaders of his works." "God, as the source and end of all power, lends the seal of ideas to his ministering spirits, who, faithfully executing his divine will, stamp with a vital energy all things committed to their care."

No inevitable causation is admitted. Everything is produced by the will of God, and upheld by it. The laws of nature are nothing but the precepts in accordance with which the angels execute their charge. They obey from love and fear; but should they in a refractory spirit transgress the given commandments, or cease their activity, which they have the power to do, then the order of nature would be changed, and the great mechanism of the universe fall asunder, unless God saw fit to interpose. "Sometimes God suspends their agency, and is himself the immediate actor everywhere; or he gives unusual commandments to his angels, and then their operations are called miracles."

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