

# WITHIN TUSCAN WALLS

FRANCES GREGG

**I**T is these that make the rhythm of a Tuscan landscape, as they make the harmony of the Tuscan character, these massive walls about their little cities, about their castles, even about their gardens.

I think of San Gimignano, that little town of the towers set so high among the hills and bound so closely round by her great walls; of Siena looking out to Mont Amiata and the Appennines, Siena with her seven gates.

These charming people live within their walls, and it is as though an emanation from a past more gracious age did indeed envelop them. Certainly types survive. One meets the fair sensuous youths of Sodoma, and girls with thick black locks cropped about their ears, and the rich luxurious type of the Renaissance,—and, more rarely, certain subtly morbid and corrupt little girls with the pale banded hair and long Byzantine eyes of a Sano di Pietro Madonna.

These Madonnas of the oblique glance, of the withdrawn and troubled gaze! Strange, exquisite, debased type, this Sano di Pietro, greatest of Sienese painters. A distinguished mind, but rotted with religion. With what rare and delicate precision he worked: no other painter could so have handled the flowered and gold-wrought garment on the little round-eyed Jesus, nor the weight and richness of that robe of the Virgin; but how terrible the secret laudation of weakness, that sick pleasure in the physical cruelty of the crucifixion. Extraordinary paintings these are.

But whose was that single, so much more extraordinary, painting that I found in the Salon of the Museum, that picture in which the Christ about to be crucified is the central figure, a Christ like a figure out of Dostoevsky, lissom, beautiful, weak, his rounded limbs yielding themselves amorously to the too tender hands of his captors: to the left the three grieving women, conscious of their pathetic beauty, and not too pained

that the soft white flesh of their God is so soon to be scarred and bloodied. Who painted it? It was a monk, I think.

And how quaintly embarrassed those early Sienese painters are by St. Joseph! How often he is depicted asleep! I once asked an old contadina whom I found wandering about the Belle Arte why St. Joseph slept so much. "Poverino," she responded, "surely it was better that he should sleep." There is an enchanting literalness about the people of these walled towns.

Religion permeates everything. In Siena, at the time of the Palio, the horse himself is marched into the church of his own contrada to attend mass before he goes out to win them a banner. In San Gimignano, in the evening dusk, the bimbi form circles,

Maria Lavava,

they chorus, acting as they sing,

Giuseppe tendeva  
Suo figlio piangeva  
Che sonno non ha.  
Stai zitto, mio figlio,  
Che adesso ti piglio,  
Le pezze, le fasce  
Son' messe a scaldar.

("Mary, the mother of God, was washing: Joseph hung out the clothes: the baby Jesus cried: because he couldn't go to sleep: Be quiet then my little son: for at this moment I will take you: the little diapers and the swaddling clothes: are already put to boil.")

Under dim arches little girls hush their stiffly bound piccinini, singing,

Dove vai, Madre Maria,  
Sola, sola, per questa via?

Vo cercando del mio figliolo  
E tre giorni che non lo trovo.

Lo trovai da piedi al monte  
Colle mani legate e giunte.

Sangue rosso lo versava  
La Madonna gli asciugava

La Madonna ha fatto un figlio  
Che si chiamo Salvatore.

Salvatore gira per casa  
La Madonna lo piglia, lo bacia,

E lo mette in cullina  
Fa la nanna, Jesu bambino.

"Where goest thou, Mother Mary: alone——" but I give it up. There is no word in the English language that will give the tender solitude of that reiterated "sola, sola." How deliciously irrelevant comes that

La Madonna ha fatto un figlio,

that little son who runs about the house, to be caught up by the Madonna, kissed, and put into his cradle. What could be more exquisite than this homely, all-pervading religion? Every pretty baby is a "Jesu biondo," a little fair Jesus, every pretty mother a Madonnina.

And they are like Madonnas, like those straight and slender Madonnas of Fra Angelico, that tenderest and most spiritual of painters. Yesterday, from my balcony, I watched one of these "little Madonnas" who might have stepped down from the painted walls of that Monastery. Her eyes, as she glanced shyly at me, a forestiera, had the same look of dim and startled intelligence as have the eyes of that Virgin of the Fra Angelico "Annunciation." She too was just so sweetly a maiden of the people. Her little garden shut in by that fence of rough-hewn palings, is, as is any garden of to-day, shadowed by the bitter cypress, and there are tiny daisies showing very fine and clear against the age-dark green of the grass. It was given only to Fra Angelico to paint those tiny flowers as they are seen to-day by any contadino—not as Botticelli painted them, to whom they were a mystic symbol, nor as under the steel hand of Leonardo,

for whom they held philosophic secrets: it is Fra Angelico alone who, with poignant simplicity, felt their direct beauty.

"Poignant" is perhaps the word of all others that describes these Tuscan landscapes. It most nearly describes something that comes with a sweet sharp clearness to the senses. There is an acrid sweetness in the sensation that comes to me as I walk these Fiesole strade. Narrow little lanes lead endlessly nowhere between high walls: below, Florence lies in the sun like a great white coral reef, and always the hills unfold new vistas. The lime-trees are coming to flower, and the almond-trees are like great white plumes upon the hillsides. Old women creep out of dark doorways to sit in the sun. They mutter curses if you pass them without giving soldi, or call down blessings upon you for a few centesimi. I like them all, whether rheumy-eyed, fang-mouthed, with disease-blotched faces, or really beautiful. I like their wisps of hair, and their age-twisted bones. They seem to live in a world of their own: indeed, to have so endured time sets them apart. These old women are perhaps what I shall most wish to remember of Tuscany, these and high walls with the purple wistaria flung like a royal banner upon them, tangles of roses red and white, poppies in the new wheat, and the scent of the almond flower.

# THE BIRTH OF A NATION

C. TOWNLEY-FULLAM

## I

### NATURE IN LABOR

IT is not until the rough constituents of communities *in posse* discover certain affinities that the complexities of the social state become possible. And these must have become sharply defined before they stand in need of regulation. Order may be the first law of Heaven but amongst men it is one of the constructive arts.

As primitive man, wherever found, must have been pervious to like impressions and subject to like experiences, the earliest forms of organization of all must have conformed to similar ideals. Sooner or later they would arrive, in the sequence of necessity, at the tribal constitution. It is only when we come to differentiate the phases of tribal organization that we reach historic ground.

Of these phases there stand out, in classic guise, but three,—the Graeco-Indian, the Israelite and the Saxon-Magyar, each with its peculiar characteristic.

The salient quality of the Magyar was that in him were absorbed the salient qualities of the other two. Like the Graeco-Indian he had no concentric tendencies whatever: like the Hebrew he recognized the Federal link. Each Magyar tribe was a self-contained entity. Such ties as it chose, consistently with independence, to recognize, were ties of common danger. On the eve of battle the tribes foregathered: on the morrow of victory they drank and dispersed. This was the naked theory of the unwritten law but as, in practice, the tribes were incessantly engaged in defending themselves or, preferably, in attacking other peoples, a certain permanent but illegal cohesion may be presumed.

These were the pre-natal days when the embryo was still in