

A PERSISTENT NATIONALITY.

BY GRANT ALLEN.

STANDING to-day before the dim outline of Orcagna's "Hell" in the Church of Santa Maria Novella, at Florence, and mentally comparing those mediæval demons and monsters and torturers on the frescoed wall in front of me with the more antique Etruscan devils and tormentors pictured centuries earlier on the ancient tombs of Etrurian princes, the thought, which had often occurred to me before, how essentially similar were the Tuscan intellect and Tuscan art in all ages, forced itself upon me once more at a flash with an irresistible burst of internal conviction. The identity of old and new seemed to stand confessed. Etruria throughout has been one and the same; and it is almost impossible for any one to over-estimate the influence of the powerful, but gloomy, Etruscan character upon the whole tone, not only of popular Christianity, but of that modern civilization which is its offspring and outcome.

I suppose it is hardly necessary, "in this age of enlightenment" (as people used to say in the last century), to insist any longer upon the obvious fact that conquest and absorption do not in any way mean extermination. Most people still vaguely fancy to themselves, to be sure, that, when Rome conquered and absorbed Etruria, the ancient Etruscan ceased at once to exist—was swallowed, as it were, and became forthwith, in some mysterious way, first a Roman, and then a modern Italian. And, in a certain sense, this is, no doubt, more or less true; but that sense is decidedly not the genealogical one. Manners change, but blood persists. The Tuscan people went on living and marrying under consul and emperor just as they had done under *lar* and *lucumo*; Latin and Gaul, Lombard and Goth, mingled with them in time, but did not efface them; and I do not doubt that the vast mass of the population of Tuscany at the present day is

still of preponderatingly Etruscan blood, though qualified, of course (and perhaps improved), by many Italic, Celtic, and Teutonic elements.

Again, when we remember that Florence, Pisa, Siena, Perugia are all practically in Tuscany, and that Florence alone has really given to the world Dante, and Boccaccio, Galileo and Savonarola, Cimabue and Giotto, Botticelli and Fra Angelico, Donatello and Ghiberti, Michael Angelo and Raffael, Leonardo da Vinci and Macchiavelli and Alfieri, and a host of other almost equally great names, it will be obvious to every one that the problem of the origin of this Tuscan nationality must be one that profoundly interests the whole world. Nay, more, we must remember, too, that Etruria had other and earlier claims than these; that it spread up to the very walls of Rome; that the Etruscan element in Rome itself was immensely strong; that the Roman religion owed, confessedly, much to Tuscan ideas; that Latin Christianity, the Christianity of all the western world, took its shape in semi-Tuscan Rome; that the Roman Empire was largely modelled by the Etruscan Mæcenas; that the Italian renaissance was largely influenced by the Florentine Medici; that Leo the Tenth was himself a member of that great house; and that the artists whom he summoned to the metropolis to erect St. Peter's and to beautify the Vatican were, almost all of them, Florentines by birth, training, or domicile. I think, when we have run over mentally these and ten thousand other like facts, we will readily admit to ourselves the magnitude of the world's debt to Tuscany—social, artistic, intellectual, religious—both in ancient, mediæval, and modern times.

And what, now, was this strong Tuscan nationality, which persists so thoroughly through all external historical changes, and which has contributed so large and so marvellous a part to the world's thought and the world's culture? It is a curious consideration for those who talk so glibly about the enormous natural superiority of the Aryan race, that the ancient Etruscans were the one people of the antique European world, who, by common consent, did *not* belong to the Aryan family. They were strangers in the land, or, rather, perhaps they were its oldest possessors. Their language, their physique, their creed, their art, all point to a wholly different origin from the Aryans. I am not going, in a brief essay like this, to settle dogmatically, off-hand, the vexed

question of the origin and affinities of the Etruscan type: more nonsense, I suppose, has been talked and written upon that occult subject by learned men than even learned men have ever poured forth upon any other sublunary topic; but one thing at least, I take it, is absolutely certain amid the conflicting theories of ingenious theorists about the Etruscan race, and that one thing is that the Rasennæ stand in Europe absolutely alone, the sole representatives of some ancient and elsewhere exterminated stock, surviving only in Tuscany itself, and in the Rætian Alps of the Canton Grisons.

At the moment when the Etruscans first appear in history, however, they appear as a race capable of acquiring and assimilating culture with great ease, rapidity, and certainty. No sooner do they come into contact with the Greek world than they absorb and reproduce all that was best and truest in Greek civilization. "Merely receptive—European Chinese," says, in effect, Mommsen, the great Roman historian: to me, that judgment, though true in some small degree, seems harsh indeed on a wider view, when applied to a people who begot at last the "*Divina Commedia*," the Campanile of Florence, the dome of St. Peter's, and the glories of the Uffizi and the Pitti Palace. It is quite true that the Etruscans themselves, like the Japanese in our own time, did at first accept most imitatively the Hellenic culture; but they gradually remolded it by their own effort into something new, growing and changing from age to age, until at last, in the Italian renaissance, they burst out with a wonderful and novel message to all the rest of dormant Europe.

One of the most persistent key-notes of this underlying Etruscan character is the solemn, weird, and gloomy nature of so much of the true Etruscan workmanship. From the very beginning they are strong, but sullen. Solidity and power, rather than beauty and grace, are what they aim at; and in this, Michael Angelo was a true Tuscan. If we look at the massive old Etruscan buildings, the Cyclopean walls of Fæsulæ and Volterræ, with their gigantic unhewn blocks, or the gloomy tombs of Clusium, with their heavy portals, and then at the frowning façade of the Strozzi or the Pitti Palace, we shall see in these, their earliest and latest terms, the special marks of Tuscan architecture. "Piled by the hands of giants for mighty kings of old," says Macaulay, well, of the Cyclopean walls. "It somewhat resembles

a prison or castle, and is remarkable for its bold simplicity of style, the unadorned huge blocks of stone being hewn smooth at the joints only," says a modern writer, of Brunelleschi's palatial masterpiece. Every visitor to Florence must have noticed on every side the marks of this sullen and rugged Etruscan character. Compare for a moment the dark bosses of the Palazzo Strozzi, the "*âpre énergie*" of the Palazzo Vecchio, the "*beauté sombre et sévère*" of the mediæval Bargello, with the open, airy brightness of the Doge's Palace, or the glorious Byzantine gold-and-blue of St. Mark's at Venice, and you get at once an admirable measure of this persistent trait in the Etruscan idiosyncrasy. Tuscan architecture is massive and morose where Venetian architecture is sunny and smiling.

Now, Tuscan religion has in all times been specially influenced by the peculiarly gloomy tinge of the Tuscan character. It has always been a religion of fear rather than of love ; a religion that strove harder to terrorize than to attract ; a religion full of devils, flames, tortures, and horrors ; in short, a sort of horrible Chinese religion of dragons and monstrosities, and flames and goblins. In the painted tombs of ancient Etruria, you may see the familiar devil with his three-pronged fork thrusting souls back into the seething flood of a heathen hell, as Orcagna's here thrust them back similarly into that of its more modern Christian successor. All Etruscan art is full throughout of such horrors. You find their traces abundantly in the antique Etruscan museum at Florence ; you find them on the mediæval Campo Santo at Pisa ; you find them with greater skill, but equal repulsiveness, in the work of the great renaissance artists. The "ghastly glories of saints" the Tuscan revels in. The most famous portion of the most famous Tuscan poem is the "Inferno"—the part that gloats with minute and truly Tuscan realism over the torments of the damned in every department of the mediæval hell. And, as if still further to mark the continuity of thought, here in Orcagna's frescoes at Santa Maria Novella you have every horror of the heathen religion incongruously mingled with every horror of the Christian—gorgons and harpies and chimæras dire are tormenting the wicked under the eyes of the Madonna ; centaurs are shooting and prodding them before the God of Love from the torrid banks of fiery lakes ; furies with snaky heads are directing their punishments ; Minos and Æacus are superintending their tasks ; and, in

the centre of all, a huge Moloch demon is devouring them bodily in his fiery jaws, with hideous tusks as of a Japanese monster.

It would be a curious question to inquire how far these old and ingrained Etruscan ideas may have helped to modify and color the gentler conceptions of primitive Christianity. Certainly, one must never for a moment forget that Rome was at bottom nearly one-half Etruscan in character; that during the imperial period it became, in fact, the capital of Etruria; that myriads of Etruscans flocked to Rome; and that many of them, like Sejanus, had much to do with moulding and building up the imperial system. I do not doubt, myself, that Etruscan notions largely interwove themselves, from the very outset, with Roman Christianity; and whenever in the churches or galleries of Italy I see St. Lawrence frying on his gridiron, or St. Sebastian pierced through with many arrows, or the Innocents being massacred in unpleasant detail, or hell being represented with Dantesque minuteness and particularity of delineation, I say to myself, with an internal smile, "Etruscan influence."

How interesting it is, too, to observe the constant outcrop, under all forms and faiths, of this strange, underlying, non-Aryan type! The Etruscans are and always were remarkable for their intellect, their ingenuity, their artistic faculty; and even to this day, after so many vicissitudes, they stand out as a wholly superior people to the rough Genoese and the indolent Neapolitans. They have had many crosses of blood meanwhile, of course; and it seems probable that the crosses have done them good: for in ancient times it was Rome, the Etrurianized border city of the Latins, that rose to greatness, not Etruria itself; and at a later date, it was after the Germans had mingled their race with Italy that Florence almost took the place of Rome. Nay, it is known as a fact that under Otto the Great, a large Teutonic colony settled in Florence, thus adding to the native Etrurian race (especially to the nobility) that other element which the Tuscan seems to need in order that he may be spurred to the realization of his best characteristics. But allow as we may for foreign admixture, two points are abundantly clear to the impartial observer of Tuscan history: one, that this non-Aryan race has always been one of the finest and strongest in Italy; and the other, that from the very dawn of history its main characteristics, for good or for evil, have persisted most uninterruptedly till the present day.

GRANT ALLEN.

USE AND ABUSE OF CIVIL-SERVICE REFORM.

BY RICHARD RANDOLPH M'MAHON, DEPUTY COMPTROLLER OF
THE TREASURY.

"Let none presume

To wear an undeserved dignity.

O, that estates, degrees, and offices

Were not deriv'd corruptly ! and that clear honor

Were purchas'd by the merit of the wearer !"—*Merchant of Venice.*

WHEN the Act for the Promotion of Civil Service was passed, the political spoilsmen felt as if highway robbery had been perpetrated upon them. To conceal the real motives of their hostility to the measure, they attacked its "constitutionality," as if they cared more for the Constitution than for patronage and plunder. Their new-born zeal for the "welfare" of that sacred instrument was of such sudden growth that it did not fail of being understood. The Pharisee of to-day is no better than the hypocrite of yesterday.

Honest men, bent upon purifying the public offices and liberating them from the slavery of political influences, laid bare the shameful and shameless methods which had governed appointments in every branch of the Government. Facts and figures were mustered. Pledges in party platforms were quoted. But the politicians would not be convinced. It was like witnessing a serio-comedy to see how many of them came up, all at once, like mushrooms, to arrest this "violation of the Constitution," and defend it from "outrage"—a work for which they were about as well qualified as they were to explore the unsurveyed land in the moon.

Politicians are pompous in their self-importance. The mercury stands high in them. They are like Pau-Puk-Keewis in "Hiawatha"—larger than the other beavers. No wonder, then, they assumed to "defend" the Constitution against Civil-Service Reform, which they are pleased to designate as foreign to the genius of our political institutions and as conducive to permanent office-holding.

The law is neither unconstitutional nor foreign to the genius of our institutions, nor does it foster permanent office-holding.