

THE GYPSIES.*

We have been wandering awhile over the pleasant hills and valleys of Spain, in company with an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society; and yet in rather strange company, too, for such a perage to keep, viz.: professional thieves and vagabonds;—and that not officially, with the view of bringing them to justice, but as pure amateurs of humanity, or rather of rascality, in one of its most questionable shapes, and with the design of rendering to these vagabonds no other justice than that of the critic and historian.

Mr. Borrow has devoted much of his time and attention to the study of the Gypsy race, as it exists at the present day in Europe. He has collected many curious facts concerning it, and his work contains much that is interesting in respect of its past and present condition. Although devoted principally to an account of the Spanish branch of this great family, it gives us a good deal of information touching the other scions of the same stock, and demonstrates beyond a doubt the fact that this people, though now divided into various tribes, having little intercourse with each other, are yet one in their origin and in their language. The facts which Mr. Borrow has laid before us are drawn, not so much from the writings of others, as from his own observation and experience of the Gypsies, during a long and familiar acquaintance with them; facilitated by a knowledge of their peculiar tongue, which few Europeans have had either the opportunity or the patience to acquire. His work has a practical and genuine character belonging only to that information which comes thus, as it were, from the fountain head; and the light which he has thrown upon the habits of this mysterious people, enables us to trace out the rusty and

decaying links that bind them to ages long past, and to far distant lands.

The origin of the Gypsy race has puzzled many an antiquarian, and has given rise to various speculations in the different countries inhabited by them. They have been called by some Moors or Arabs; by others, Tartars; and by others, again, Bohemians,—with a great variety of other designations derived by accident and adopted by ignorance. They represent themselves as Egyptians, bound to do penance by their wanderings for the sin of having refused hospitality and protection to the Virgin Mary and her son, when they fled from the wrath of Herod—a solution, doubtless, framed for the problem of their existence by the pious imagination of Oriental Christians, who, glad to demonstrate in every way the stern vengeance of God, laid this sin upon them, and read its punishment in their restless and precarious mode of life. The more extensive learning of the present day teaches us that they came from the heart of India,—which position the shreds and patches that now remain of their original language serve not a little to demonstrate. This language, with the additions it has derived from those of the various countries through which they have passed, would seem to be as curious an organic remain as now exists in the world, a shadowy image of the confusion of Babel. It is perhaps in itself the most authentic history both of the origin and progress of those who have so long spoken it. At first it was assuredly Sanscrit, but a multitude of Greek, Persian, and Slavonic words have become mingled with it; while in the present day it has yielded somewhat to the influences of the modern languages of Europe, and the Gypsy dialects of Spain, of Germany, and of England, vary slightly from each other,

* *The Zincolli; or an Account of the Gypsies of Spain.* With an original collection of their songs and poetry. By George Borrow, late Agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society in Spain. Two vols. in one. New York: Wiley & Putnam, 161 Broadway. 1842.