

LECTURES AND ESSAYS.

THE GREATNESS OF THE ROMANS.

ROME was great in arms, in government, in law. This combination was the talisman of her august fortunes. But the three things, though blended in her, are distinct from each other, and the political analyst is called upon to give a separate account of each. By what agency was this State, out of all the States of Italy, out of all the States of the world, elected to a triple pre-eminence, and to the imperial supremacy of which it was the foundation? By what agency was Rome chosen as the foundress of an empire which we regard almost as a necessary step in human development, and which formed the material, and to no small extent the political matrix of modern Europe, though the spiritual life of our civilization is derived from another source? We are not aware that this question has ever been distinctly answered, or even distinctly propounded. The writer once put it to a very eminent Roman antiquarian, and the answer was a quotation from Virgil—

*“Hoc nemus, hunc, inquit, frondoso vertice clivum
Quis deus incertum est, habitat Deus; Arcades ipsum
Credunt se vidisse Jovem cum sæpe nigrantem
Ægida concuteret dextra nimbosque cieret.”*

This perhaps was the best answer that Roman patriotism, ancient or modern, could give; and it certainly was given in the best form. The political passages of Virgil, like some in Lucan and Juvenal, had a grandeur entirely Roman with which neither Homer nor any other Greek has anything to do. But historical criticism, without doing injustice to the poetical aspect of the mystery, is bound to seek a rational solution. Perhaps in seeking the solution we may in some measure supply, or at least suggest the mode of supplying, a deficiency which we venture to think is generally found in the first chapters of histories. A national history, as it seems to us, ought to commence with a