

WHO AND WHAT ARE THE GIPSIES.

The popular belief points to Egypt as the birth-land of this mysterious people. This tradition, which is proudly and persistently held by the Gypsies themselves, was in the first instance contrived by the mediæval theologians, to suit some theory of biblical interpretation. It has no credible basis. Nor can the theory of a Jewish origin hold good. There is no affinity between the Gipsy and the Jew. Their habits present a perfect contrast.—“The Jews seek towns, the centres of population, where they can trade; the Gypsies on the contrary, spread over the country and the heaths.” The Jew is naturalised, and readily falls in with the habits and peculiarities of the people among whom he settles; the Gipsy, all the world over, is a stranger. The one is borne on the tide of civilization, the other retains the primitive barbarism.

Buttner, the philologist, was the first to throw out the hint that India was the cradle of this vagrant people. His view was subsequently confirmed by Grellman and Prichard, who discovered in the language of the Gypsies—a language which, with slight variations, they everywhere speak—some elements of affinity to the Sanscrit. The cause of the dispersion of the original race is involved in obscurity. Grellman speculates on the probability of their having been driven from India by the great invasion of Tamerlane. As, however, they must have belonged to a low caste (Grellman says the *Sudras*), it is not likely that foreign invasion would lead to their dispersion. M. Esquiroz supposes that certain depredations and misunderstandings with justice were the true secret of the expulsion of the Gypsies from their native land. If national characteristics be permanent, there is

too much ground for assuming the truth of this suggestion.

More than three centuries ago, Gypsies made their first appearance in England. Their reception was far from flattering. In two decrees of Henry VIII., they are represented as rogues and vagabonds, and commanded to quit the kingdom forever. So anxious were the English to get rid of them, that they were shipped to France forthwith, at the cost of the State. They must have made their way back again very rapidly, for we hear of them in the reigns of Mary and Elizabeth. According to the statutes of the period, the Gipsy was regarded as a capital offender; and in the days of the second Charles, thirteen Gypsies were gibbeted at Norfolk, for no other crime than belonging to the prescribed race. The statutes against the Gypsies were not repealed until the reign of George III.

There are in England five principal Gipsy tribes. The Stanleys have their headquarters in the New Forest—The Lovells hang on the skirts of the metropolis—The Coopers infest the royal demesne at Windsor—The Hernes traverse the northern counties—and the Smiths pitch their tents in the east of the island. Anxious to know the inner life of this strange people, M. Esquiroz wandered over commons and deserted districts, with the hope of finding a Gipsy track. He was at last fortunate enough to light upon an olive-faced boy whose countenance and color betrayed his kindred. He induced the lad to lead him to the encampment. He describes his reception; it was certainly inferior to the hospitality which he encountered in Wales.

“I found myself in the middle of a wild and striking scene. A naked