

## RAVENNA AND ITS MOSAICS.

BY SIDNEY LAWRENCE.

THE road from Bologna to the east coast of northern Italy branches off at Castel Bolognese, and then drags slowly onward to the old city of Ravenna, whose name three hundred years ago ceased to be familiar, and is now almost as mythic as the Pelasgi, who, sailing along the Adriatic, stopped and made a home on its marshy shores. Just when or from whence these wanderers came we know not; but this we know, that Ravenna was old when Venice was born. She demanded her privileges in the days of Marius and Sylla, and was stubborn in her loyalty to Julius Cæsar. Augustus not only feasted with her patricians, and found the air good for his gladiators, but he erected a capacious harbor for ships, and built the flourishing naval station of Cæsarea, whose strange fate forms one of the most interesting episodes in the history of Italy. But the remote physical forces which had made the foundations of Ravenna and Cæsarea were still at work. The Po and its tributaries deposited the wearings of the Alps and the Apennines, the low lands grew broader, the sea receded, the ships were driven outward; Ravenna and Cæsarea grew together, and the naval station of Classis was built on the new-made land.

Vines and orchards soon covered the intermediate space, and in the days of the Antonines the entrance to Ravenna was through groves as beautiful as those of Illyria. But still the sea receded, and what was once the renowned harbor of Classis is now a huge belt of pine forests skirting the shores of the Adriatic, and only one lonely basilica is left to mark the site of the once flourishing naval station of Rome.

Thus divorced from the sea, Ravenna lies stranded in melancholy desolation, and like Venice woos the waters to her

future destruction; for, strange as it may seem, as the sea recedes, the water forces itself through the marsh, and encroaches so steadily upon the buildings that all the efforts of the inhabitants cannot save the foundations.

To this old city, protected by shallow sands and Roman walls, Honorius, son of the great Theodosius, transferred the



PORTRAIT IN MOSAIC OF JUSTINIAN.

capital of the Western Empire, and found his life more secure than on the banks of the Tiber. It did not matter, so long as Alaric allowed him to sleep secure, that the blood of his faithful Vandal stained the marble floor of his magnificent palace; the whole of the dark deed never came to the light, and he died, leaving the government to his sister, the renowned Galla Placidia, whose long reign was spent in beautifying her favorite city. When The-



MOSAIC OF THE THREE KINGS.

odoric, the Ostrogoth and Arian, after murdering Odoacer, became master of the Western world, he found Ravenna rich in the arts of Rome and Byzantium. Forty years of unexampled peace and munificent prosperity were favorable for the magnificence with which the luxurious barbarian surrounded himself. The world supplied him with treasures, and the artists of Rome and Constantinople were brought to enshrine a faith that in the form and ornament of its temples was not different from that of orthodox Rome. So that when the exarchs of Constantinople and the magnificent Justinian, who one by one followed Theodoric, came in possession of the Western Empire, the Archbishop Aguellus had only to consecrate them anew, with the name of the martyr whose blood had dyed the soil on which they stood. Soon the exarchate died; the Lombards left no trace of their possession; and Pepin, the Carolingian, who received it at their hands, found it a convenient exchange for the remission of his sins, and presented it, with all its rich

temporalities, to the see of St. Peter, and the world for the first time saw the shadows of a temporal power, to which a little later the whole of Italy surrendered itself. But the mitre of the Church was less powerful than the sceptre of Constantinople, and the Eastern exarchate and the glory of the Christian city, that had been in turn Greek, Roman, and Gothic, had been ruled by Sylla, Augustus, and Theodoric, melted away in the weak hands of the successors of St. Peter.

Out of all these changes and vicissitudes the monuments that remain come within a period of less than two hundred years, and are wedged in between heathen and mediæval times, when Ravenna was Empress of the West.

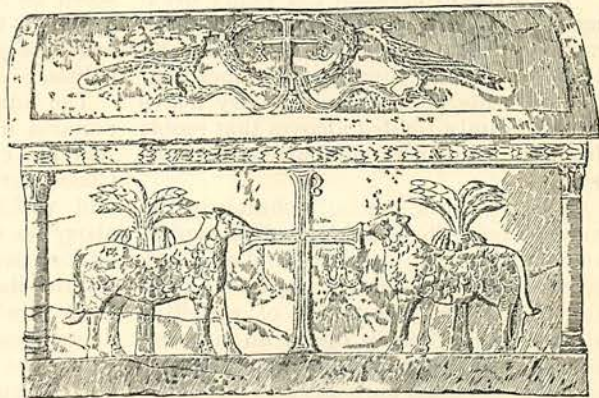
It is well, says Freeman, "that such a strange page of history should abide in one forsaken corner of Europe, where primitive Christianity overshadows all remembrance of earlier and later times, and lives still in the brilliancy and glory of its first beautiful symbolism." For the Church of San Apollinare, the tomb

of Theodoric, the Baptistery of Galla Placidia, the strangely interesting Church of San Vitale, and the humble tomb of Dante are found nowhere else in the world.

We did not see the interior of Polenta's palace, and only glanced at Guicciola's windows—belonging to a clean gray modern-looking palace of Byronic memories, which the atmosphere of Ravenna entirely unidealizes, notwithstanding the sentiment. In fact we did not find anything in the domestic architecture very characteristic, and which spoke even in the mildest way of Roman power or Gothic force. The Romanesque palace of Theodoric is but a fragment of its former magnificence, most of it having been carried away by Charlemagne to make up his palace of Aix-la-Chapelle. At any rate, to believe that it was the home of Gothic kings and Byzantine exarchs is a heavy tax upon the imagination (the style of its architecture being of much later date), and we could not feel any enthusiasm over it, and were much more drawn to the beautiful church of San Apollinare Nuovo, contiguous to the palace, and which is a characteristic monument of Theodoric's kindly reign, and one of the few remains of Gothic rule in the world.

It is a primitive basilica, suggesting an Oriental origin, leading the eyes backward to Thebes and Tyre, bringing the banks of the Euphrates to the low shores of the Adriatic. It was built by Theodoric for his Arians over the place where San Apollinare, the disciple of St. Peter, suffered martyrdom in 44 A.D. It consists of three aisles divided by noble Byzantine columns supporting a range of small circular arches that broaden out into a dead-wall, above which long narrow windows that pierce the wall throw their dim light upon a golden roof. There is neither triforium, clere-story, nor vault; and perhaps, educated to the perfection of Northern Gothic, we might at first have declared against this classic form of Christian church, were it not for an undefinable sense of solemnity produced by the glorious lines of mosaics that cover the entrance wall, range down the long parallels of the side, fill the

spaces above and between the windows, follow the arch of the tribune, and find their termination in the solemn roof of the apse. Everywhere a continual succession of imagery—"one picture," says Ruskin, "passing into another as in a dream." The frieze above the arches is made up of a continuous procession of saints and martyrs, led by the three kings of the Orient, and ending on one side by the enthroned Christ surrounded by angels and archangels. They are grave, stately forms, bearing the impress of Oriental tranquillity, and march along with solemn tread between lines of olive-trees covered with blossoms and scarlet fruit. It is the story of the Epiphany told in the gorgeous color of the East, the rude materials entirely overcome by the æsthetic sense of the Byzantine artists. Scarlet, green, azure, and white are wrought in



TOMB OF GALLA PLACIDIA.

among the gold, black, and purple, until they glow like jewels in a king's crown, and light up the dark aisles with the splendor of an Eastern sky. Between the windows are thirty full figures of apostles and saints, each in his golden niche. Everywhere are narrative stories from the Old and New Testaments, the artists apparently confining themselves to the gentler scenes and more glorious songs of Christmas and Easter, leaving the crown of thorns, the nail, and the spear for the less joyous atmosphere of mediævalism.

Certain it is that Ravenna, above all others, is the place to study early mosaics; and the primitive Christian remains of Rome had less significance to us after seeing Ravenna; and no other church deco-

ration ever seemed half so glorious and precious as these brilliant illuminations done before the days of saint worship and Mariolatry, when Christ sat enthroned in the apse, and the glory of the jewelled cross symbolized the simple faith taught by the apostles and their converts on the shores of Galilee.

San Apollinare is but one among a circle of richly decorated churches built within two centuries. For scarcely less noble in its proportions is San Vitale, the domical-shaped church commemorating the martyr Vitale, the soldier or hero, buried alive in Ravenna as a wholesome lesson to the teachers of the new faith. The story of the saint, however, seems pushed out of sight to give place to the glorification of the Emperor Justinian, in whose reign it was built by the aspiring Bishop Maximian, who played an important part in that remarkable century.

We went in between the richly ornamented pillars, and found ourselves under a single central octagonal dome made by eight beautifully illuminated arches resting on wide piers, forming story above story of dimly lighted alcoves that recede from the eye with a dim uncertain mystery.

It is, we think, the only church in Ravenna where Christian symbolism is united with historical narrative, and although it may show an evident departure from the purity and simplicity of primitive church decoration, it opens an interesting page of history, and is especially valuable in personal portraits and costumes, and was undoubtedly intended to commemorate the magnificent ceremony of its consecration in the sixth century, when Justinian and his empress had time, in the midst of splendid conquests, to appease their consciences by rich donations to the churches of Ravenna.

The mosaics that light up the walls represent an imposing procession of courtiers and ladies attending the royal pair on the way from the palace to offer gifts at the rich shrine of San Vitale. The courtiers are the yellow-haired German body-guard whom Justinian had chosen from the numerous captives of Belisarius and Narses, and who seem strangely out of place in the effeminate court. The ladies who attend Theodora are tall, graceful Roman women, with classic faces and noble carriage.

The Mausoleum of Galla Placidia (the

Church of SS. Nazario e Celso), a low cruciform building, "erected while the hoofs of Attila were treading on the plains of Lombardy," furnishes perhaps the finest example of church decoration in Italy, being the last perfect expression of classical power in its dying moments, and the one connecting link between the art of the catacombs and the later mosaics of Rome.

The mosaics of the Baptistery (adjoining the Ecclesia Ursiana) are older, and the Baptistery itself, the oldest in Europe, is made up of pagan pillars and lined with ancient marbles. Even after seeing the brilliant walls of the Mausoleum and San Apollinare, the senses are captivated by the rich incrustations of the Baptistery.

The perfect preservation of these mosaics was always a subject of wonder. The little chapel of Peter Chrysologus in the episcopal palace is the same beautifully illuminated creation that it was when he left it in the year 400 A.D.; not a stone is touched or a color faded in the exquisite pictures of Christ and the evangelists.

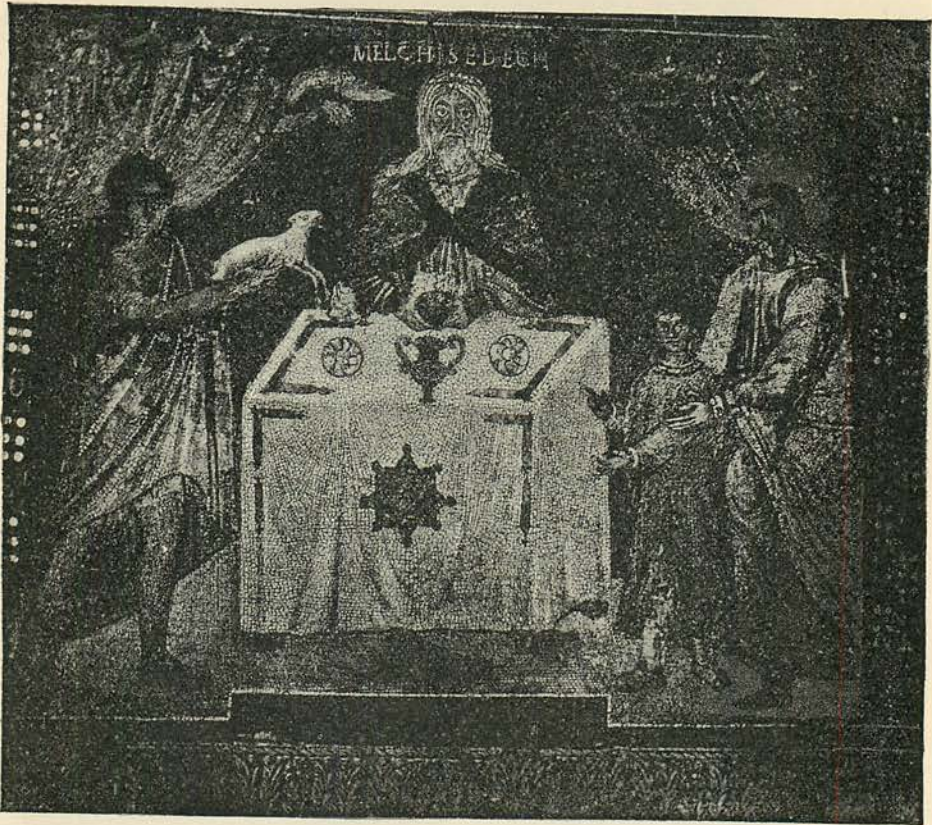
The interest aroused by the wonderful remains of Roman and Gothic rule in Ravenna culminates in San Apollinare in Classe, three miles from the present city, and which is reached by a road built above the surrounding marshes. The first outlook over the sunny plain, with its waving rice stalks and flowery fields, gives but little idea of the pestilential morass and dreary desolations, where no object is seen except the cross that marks the site of the once magnificent basilica of San Lorenzo, or the gray tower of Santa Maria in Porto, that in the days of Augustus watched the fleets of the Adriatic. Beneath the marsh magnificent marbles of the palaces and temples of Cæsarea lie buried, and which a stroke of the spade might uncover; above them ditches and dikes drain and enclose the small rice fields, as if the inhabitants were struggling against utter annihilation. The loneliness and desolation increase, the morass becomes too deadly for even the rice stalks, and the first objects that gladden the eye are the fringed tops of the umbrella-pines that farther on form the picturesque and romantic Pineta, on the edge of which stands the huge Church of San Apollinare in Classe, its round tower looking out upon the Apennines and the Adriatic.

The interior is more imposing than anything in Ravenna. Three majestic aisles



INTERIOR OF SAN APOLLINARE NUOVO.

Engraved by A. E. Wood.



MOSAIC OF MELCHISEDECH, IN SAN VITALE.

are separated by long rows of cipolin columns veined and colored with the delicacy of a sea-shell. The mosaic portraits of one hundred and fifty bishops and archbishops of Ravenna encrust the long surface above the finely wrought round arches, which terminate in a tribune that is entered through a royal arch, inlaid with precious colors that have defied moisture and damp, and are as brilliant as when the ancient workmen embedded them there in the days of the old Archbishop Agnellus.

It is worthy of remark that each ornamented church of Ravenna has its distinguishing characteristic. In San Apollinare we see for the first time the Transfiguration, and that ten centuries before Raphael was born. It is curious as being the earliest art treatment of the subject, and handled in that early manner when the presence of God the Father is symbolized by the Divine hand, and the sky from which it emerges indicated by streaks of

light, the time being too far off when the artist would represent the First Person of the Godhead in human form. Half-length figures of Moses and Elias float on the light clouds, and a jewelled cross in the centre symbolizes the transfigured Lord. Below the cross San Apollinare stands in prayer, and although he has this prominent place in the apse, he is not enthroned as an object of worship; and we may add, in the words of Tyrwhitt, "that throughout the mosaic work of Ravenna there is no image which could invite or even permit the worship of any creature in any degree."

Although this glorious apse is nowhere surpassed for historic and doctrinal importance, it shows evident marks of an artistic decline that presages coming degradation, when the ideal spirit of early Christianity disappeared beneath dogmatic fanaticism, and art, losing its constructive activity, was contented to produce what was handed down to it.

Following the spirit and treatment of the mosaics of the Baptistery to these last productions of the sixth century, and remarking the gradual loss of beauty and simplicity, we are forcibly reminded of what Mr. Ruskin says: "That Roman Christian art work is the exact expression of Christianity at the time, very fervid and beautiful, but imperfect, in many respects ignorant, yet radiant with a strong child-like light of imagination, which flames up under Constantine, illumines all the shores of the Bosphorus and Adriatic, and then gradually, as the people give themselves up to idolatry, sinks into a strange, gilded, and embalmed repose, with the religion it expressed."

The inexpressible brilliancy of the walls does not deaden the sense of desolation with which this damp interior inspires us, stained as it is with age and approaching ruin. For the ravaging marsh waters, like those beneath the tomb of Galla Placidia, have filled the crypt and forced themselves through the floor, moss and slimy vegetation fasten themselves to the

walls, and the odors of the noisome atmosphere are never destroyed by the aromatic smell of incense, nor does the bright sunlight that comes in through the open doors dissipate the gloom of the solemn aisles, which are tended by one lonely monk, who seems spectral enough to have risen from one of the ancient sarcophagi. Now and then a penitent comes to pray at the gloomy shrines, the peasants of Maremma, yellow and dwarfed with always breathing the poisonous air of the swamps, come and go, visitors hurry through, half afraid of the damp and the odors; but the old monk keeps the lights before the shrines, says matins and vespers, and lives on in the midst of death. Each year hastens its decay, and soon it must sink into the morass, taking with it all memories of the renowned city of Classis. Unimaginative must be the mind that sees no spectres in the forsaken aisles of this once beautiful shrine of the magnificent days of the Roman Empire, or who can remain altogether untouched by its present desolate condition.

## THE IRISH PARTY.

BY EDWARD BROWN, F. L. S.

THE year 1868 was the opening of a new era in modern Irish history. The last attempt at revolution had failed. Fenianism was baffled, and though it had roused the fears of the country and blown up the wall of a London prison, it had been hopelessly beaten. But an even greater change than this had taken place. The *régime* of *laissez-faire* had gone. Palmerston was dead, and his influence dying. Reform was in the air, and the settlement of the franchise question for the time being, with escape from official cares and demands, had left the master spirit of English political righteousness free, and he faced the great Irish problem. The following year the English Church in Ireland was disestablished, and in 1870 the first Irish land bill became law. The commencement of legislation for Ireland according to Irish ideas was met by the abandonment of revolutionary methods, and by the commencement of an agitation for home rule—an agitation essentially constitutional in its character. From time to time there may have

been periods when this agitation has been impelled toward stronger measures, but the home rule movement has kept as rigidly within the limits of the constitution as did the movement for the abolition of the corn laws, or for reform.

Isaac Butt was the parent of the present home rule movement, though he never aspired to the heights to which it has reached. It has gone altogether beyond his expectations. Still, it was he who formulated the movement, and was its first leader. The son of a Protestant clergyman in the north of Ireland, he began life as an Orangeman and Conservative, and in 1841 was the leading opponent of O'Connell, when that great agitator brought forward in the Dublin corporation a motion in favor of repeal. Gradually Butt's position changed to that of a moderate Nationalist. Meanwhile he had varying fortunes. He had been member for an Irish and also for an English constituency as a Conservative, and in the latter capacity was the eloquent advocate for protection, even when free trade was