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INCIDENTS IN A GIPSY'S LIFE

BY
GEORGE SMITH.

THE ROYAL
EPPING FOREST GIPSIES

THE GROUNDS,
INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION
LIVERPOOL.

WILLSONS',
NEW WALK PRINTING WORKS,
LEICESTER.

THE FOLLOWING NOTABLE PERSONS HAVE PAID A VISIT TO MY PEOPLE.

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H.M. QUEEN VICTORIA.

PRINCE VICTOR.

SON OF THE KHEDIVE OF EGYPT.

LORD LATHOM, High Chamberlain.

LORD POLTIMORE.

LORD CAMPBELL.

LORD MONKS.

LORD MAYO.

LORD CLONMELL.

LORD FARNHAM.

LATE DUKE OF MACLIN.

MARQUIS & MARCHIONESS OF TWEEDALE.

SIR DAVID (Mayor of Liverpool) and LADY RADCLIFFE.

SIR A. B. WALKER, Bart.

SIR JOHN MAXWELL STIRLING.

ALSO

SON OF THE BISHOP OF WORCESTER.

BISHOP OF THE ISLE OF MAN.

LETTER FROM GOVERNOR WALPOLE of I.O.M.

10 LETTERS FROM THE HOUSE OF COMMONS.

And at the GREAT CARNIVAL of 1894, principal Citizens of Glasgow.

PREFACE.

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My idea in writing this little pamphlet is to enlighten the minds of people as to the mode of living, and the customs of our tribe; and I think the reader will be convinced that we are not the desperadoes that some people think, but, on the other hand, honest living and a christian race; always ready to do good. To young men especially, if they follow my career they will find that my success in life is due to being straight-forward and honest in all my dealings; firm purpose of mind; and an object to gain; the result is success, and I hope it may prove a benefit to the rising generation.

Shortly, I shall produce a full Biography of my life.

Yours faithfully,
GEORGE SMITH.

THE LIFE OF A GIPSY.

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Many writers have spent months and years of *their* lives in studying the language, character, and customs of the Romany Rye. Many able pens have written volumes on the subject.

For my part I simply give an unvarnished statement of facts, as they occur to me, so that my readers may glean some little information as to the general life and incidents in the career of a gipsy.

With regard to the language of the Romany, whether heard in the most distant parts of the globe or in the Liverpool Exhibition (as spoken by my family), it is the same as in different counties in the United Kingdom and in different provinces of continental countries; a slight *patois* may be observable, but in the main the initiated know that the Romany holds its own with the nomadic people the world over.

For character, climate, and circumstances, may in many instances vary the Gitano, Romany, or Bohemian, as we are called, but custom (go where the traveller may) remains the same, the nature and habit of the true Romany prompting him, or her, to a wandering life, and to revel as it were in nature's solitude. To begin with, I was born on the 3rd of May, 1830, my birth place being on the common called Mousehold Heath, Norwich, Norfolk, my parents having but a few months previously left their old camping ground in Epping Forest, near London.

For many, many years, my ancestors recognised the Forest of Epping as their head quarters, and to this day at intervals we visit the spot, a sort of pilgrimage to Mecca as it were; but alas, how different a form it presents to that which it did in my boyhood's days.

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House dwellers often have remarked as to the life we lead: many have suggested it to be unhealthy. Now to prove to the contrary, my dear mother died at the age of 75, and my father at the age of 81.

I think, speaking of one family only, this will be a sufficient answer as to whether the life of a gipsy, breathing nature's own atmosphere, is as good as a dweller in houses or not. My family consists of eight children—four boys and four girls—the eldest whom is now 28, the youngest reaching 16.

As a boy, I travelled the greater part of the United Kingdom, when reaching twelve, my aptitude

for trading in horses (thanks to my father's tuition) began to exhibit itself. My first business transaction consisted of receiving a present of a pony. One day, shortly after the Epping Fair of 1842, I was sent by my parents to the Manor House at Loughton, with some basket-ware. Being some distance from our camp, one of the upper servants very kindly attended to my inward wants, and having packed the silver for the ware, for safety, in a piece of brown paper, in my breeches pocket, I started off for the forest. After leaving the lodge, to my astonishment, I found the lady of the manor which I had just left, coming to grief down the road. Without the slightest idea of fear, young as I was, I stopped the pony—both of us being down. On rising, I found myself unhurt, the only damage done being the fright of the lady and her friend, and one of the shafts of the little carriage broken. My pockets were, as a rule, a general receptacle for everything, so, in a few minutes, by the aid of a piece of string, a couple of nails, and a stone as a hammer, I had repaired the damage, and improvised a curb for the pony, and saw things straight. Prior to the lady leaving me, she desired me to drive the pony home, after doing which she presented me with a crown piece, and seeing me so pleased, she told the stud groom might have the pony, as she would never trust it again—to my great astonishment—and with my new possession, and the addition of many thanks, I rode off again for home, as proud and as happy as any king. The precise spot being, as I remember, the famous old oak, wherein King Charles hid in the Forest of Epping—the tree has long since been a thing of the past. Many a time have I, in my boyhood, heard my great-great-grandmother tell our visitors of the time when the shadow of its branches covered an acre of ground. A chartered fair has for many years been held on the spot, taking place on the first Friday in July, and, even now, Londoners may be seen, on the Sunday after the first Friday, wending their way, thousands in number, some in conveyances of every sort and style, some footing it to Epping from the Mile End Road, Whitechapel, and environs. The Cockneys well attend the one remaining link of the past, "Fairlop Fair." Some few years since, splendidly built full rigged boats were taken on trollies by the Limehouse block makers to the fair at Fairlop, the boats being drawn by splendid teams of grey horses, beautifully caparisoned, and well decorated with oak leaves, the drivers and artisans wearing the old-fashioned blue coat, white hat, and top boots. Even now, in my ears, I remember the old-fashioned doggrel chorus, sung by them on the spot of the old oak's resting place—

"The Charter we have got,
We claim this grand old spot,
Old Fairlop, Fairlop Fair,
This be our refrain,
Shall flourish and flourish again and again."

I need not say Fairlop Fair was a little gold mine to the members of our tribe. The Cockneys to the present day consider the Gipsies to be part and parcel of the festival and annual gathering, none being so happy as the favoured ones who could boast of having had tea in a gipsy's tent.

My horsedealing propensities grew with me as I grew.

When I arrived at the age of 26, I then took to myself a wife. Long may we both live to be in the future, as in the past, a comfort to each other. Corinda Lee, daughter of the then recognised heads of the Lee tribe of Epping Gipsies, mother of my children and joy of my life, long may we yet travel this journey of life up hill and down hill together. Our marriage in the old village of Waltham Abbey brought together over fifty families of Gipsies for the junketings and sports, so freely indulged in in the old times, lasting as they did over the three days.

I had been married but three months when the first offer of settling down took place. A gentleman named Hewitt, of the firm of Huggins' Brewery Co., for whom I had purchased many valuable horses, offered to place me in a livery stable then for sale in Clerkenwell parish, the price for the same being £1700. I suggested the acceptance, having the chance on very good terms to pay out of the profits. My wife, however, flatly declined the, to me, favourable opportunity, her objection to living amongst chimneys being too great to combat, like the sailor in the storm pitying the poor landsmen. Unlike many of her sex, to this day *she has not changed her mind*.

Shortly after this I was appointed the head of ten gipsy families, and I started a tour of the United Kingdom. After a few days a more orderly company could, I think, be scarcely organised. Our tents, caravans, horses, and harness, were greatly admired; trading in our usual form, with baskets of our own make, and selling horses, we caused at times almost too much attention, so much so, even at our meals we could not keep people out of our tents, although located at some distance from the towns and villages, so I determined to rent or hire fields for our camping grounds. Even then it was impossible to keep intruders out; at length a happy idea struck me, viz., to charge a fee for admission to those wishing to gratify their oftentimes intrusive curiosity, in doing which I am pleased to say we were more than successful in a monetary point of view.

Many offers of engagements were made to me; but never liking the idea of being a servant, I refused them, and as I started so have I lived—making a bargain for my requirements, and being satisfied with my returns. The Romany, doubtless, are superstitious—they like to be free. That old customs still adhere to us, I must admit; our language is our own, and a true Gitano is as jealous of its possession as his honour. Nothing can lower one of us more than learning the house-dweller our Romanis. Strange though it is, whilst listening, as I have done lately, to the many words I have heard spoken by the Tamill, Hindoo, and Ceylonese Indians in the Exhibition, we find numerous words similar to our own, and bearing, as I understand, the same meaning.

Travelling as I have in nearly every town of note in Great Britain, it is only natural I should know and be known, I am pleased to say, in all. I have met and left many friends whom it is not easy to forget. The Press of the several places have very kindly expressed an interest in us; so many, in fact, to repeat would take up too much space in a little book of this description. Suffice it to say the remarks of the Liverpool press alone, as attached to these lines will be readily taken by the reader as the expressions of all, and I here thank them for the kindly interest they have displayed in me and my family. Many articles have been written in papers by clever writers who have made our people a subject of thought as to our origin, yet it seems to me an unanswered question and a mystery.

During our travels in Scotland, I hired a field near Arthur's Seat, Newington, Edinburgh, wherein I gave a Gipsy's fete and gala. During my three weeks stay there the amount of admission money came to £700. Many of the *elite* of Edinburgh visited us, amongst others the Duke of Buccleugh and party. At Aberdeen a great success attended us. In fact in every Scottish town we visited we were the recipients of many favours, gratefully remembered. At Dunbar the highest honour ever accorded us was the visit of our most gracious Sovereign Queen Victoria to our tents.

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Whilst at Oxford, when giving our galas in the field in Binsey Lane, near the Perch, we were patronised by many of the Collegians, amongst whom we had a frequent visitor in the person of the son of the Khedive of Egypt, who evinced great curiosity as to our people and their habits. At Leeds our galas at the Cremorne Gardens in 1865, during the Whit Week, brought in over 70,000 persons; in the same year we exhibited at the Royal Oak Park, Manchester. Our procession of the entire tribes filled thirty conveyances, many thousands witnessing our procession lining the streets as they did from Newton Heath to Cheadle, both going and returning. In Manchester we remained one month, our tents being crowded day after day. In Dublin for some months we held levees in the famous Rotunda Gardens.

Dr. J. Guinness Beatty, of the Exhibition Staff, well remembers our success there, he being then Assistant Master of the Rotunda Hospital; so successful were we, that Mr. James Dillon, the Dublin Advertising Contractor, offered us £500 for the gate receipts during the latter portion of our stay, which offer I must add, as with others, was very respectfully declined. Whilst in Ireland my time was fully occupied by purchasing horses for the French and Belgian Armies, an occupation now followed by my eldest son and my brother, who visit every large fair held there. After travelling Ireland for over five years, so contented was my brother with the reception accorded us, that he decided to remain, and is now permanently settled in his encampment on the Circular Road, Dublin, carrying out his calling as a Horse Dealer. Among many of our patrons and visitors, I may mention Lady Butler, Lords Mayo and Clonmel, who always exhibited towards us a genial and kindly interest. During my stay in Ireland I must mention the pleasure I feel at the advancement in their education my children received by visiting the Marlboro' Street Schools in Dublin. Many times have I in England extended my stay in various towns for the sake of educating them, and it is with pleasure I feel in having done so, it will assuredly be to their interest and welfare. Knowing as I do that when a boy, all we of the Gipsy tribe read from and of was "Nature's own book."

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During the years I have travelled I have held conversations with many wishful of learning our language. Some have gained a slight knowledge of our lore, but, I am pleased to say, not from my family. In many instances when they (the would be learners) have spoken to me, I have heard them use terms clearly showing them to be the most gullible of the gulled.

Seeing the announcements of the International Exhibition of Liverpool, stating it was the intention of the Executive Council to present originals and models of the different means of travelling as used in past and present times, I ventured to address a letter, asking to become an exhibitor of my caravan and tent, within which I and my family have travelled the greater portion of the United Kingdom. Thanks to their consideration, permission was kindly given me to erect my encampment on the south east corner, through their General Superintendent, Samuel Lee Bapty, Esq.

Soon after our entry on the ground, we had the distinguished honour of a visit from the Mayor and Mayoress (Sir David and Lady Radcliffe), and several members of the Executive Council, all of whom expressed the warmest satisfaction with their reception.

During our stay at the Exhibition I was honoured by a visit from His Royal Highness Prince Victor of Hohenlohe, who, in company with Sir A. B. Walker, Bart., and a select party from Gateacre Grange, visited my tent, and had his fortune predicted by my wife. The Prince professed himself delighted with the glimpse afforded him of tent life, and on his return to St. James's Palace, was kind enough to write me an autograph letter, assuring me of the deep gratification which his reception had afforded him, and giving me a most pressing invitation to visit him at his estate of St. Brino, near Ascot, whenever I found myself in that neighbourhood.

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Among other interesting mementoes which I preserve, not so much for their intrinsic value as for their pleasing associations, is a half-crown presented to me by the Earl of Lathom, on visiting my tent. It bears the following inscription:

"Earl of Lathom,
Lord High Chamberlain,
September 25, 1886."

Nor is the least gratifying token of my connection with the Liverpool Exhibition, a memorial

presented to me by the Hindoo and Cingalese Indians, on their departure to their own shores. Poor exiles from their native land! They assured me in the touching document above alluded to that were it not for my constant kindness to them, they would not have been able to endure their existence in this country, but when in the company of myself and family, they fancied themselves once more in their own far-off home.

I shall ever look back upon my stay at the Liverpool Exhibition as one of the brightest and happiest pages in my life.

I could go on, but the printer's boy says he thinks I have said enough for the few pages this little emanation from yours obediently should occupy, but I cannot say "good bye" without expressing a few sentiments on this, the past subject of my life, by adding that as the sere and yellow leaf creeps over me, I think and often dream of the many well loved spots on this beautiful land I have visited in my boyhood's days when all was health, glee and happiness. Now, alas! where are they? Gone! The busy work of the builders has covered those places once so dear to me. After even a short absence I seek a place once so well known and loved, to find what? a block of houses thereon, and the fairy-like home I have travelled far to see, vanished in the past. For the future, what bodes; fresh fields and pastures new! is an old and true saying, with me, as with others, so must it be, but where can I find those scenes I cannot forget; scenes and times where one fiftieth of the world's goods now obtainable was all that was necessary to exist in peace and plenty. Smoky chimneys, the roaring of machinery and noise of mills, never dreamed of in days gone by, now meet my sight and ears; oh! how different. Perhaps my readers may think I am getting sentimental; perhaps so; if so, kindly forgive,

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Your very obedient servant, GEORGE SMITH.

Gipsy Encampment, International Exhibition, Liverpool, 1886.

Extract from the "Liverpool Courier," June 16th, 1886.

The King and Queen (Mr. George Smith and Mrs. Smith) were "at home," and they and their four comely daughters were the cynosure of all eyes. A distinguishing feature of these "Epping Forest" Gipsies is their extreme cleanliness. Their tent is scrupulously neat and tidy, its appointments are comfortable not to say luxurious, and the caravan reveals the snug sleeping chamber of the daughters of their majesties. Fortune-telling is not the stock-in-trade of the tribe, but the dark-skinned "Gitanos" do not absolutely refuse to have their palms crossed if credulous ladies will insist in peering into the future. We understand that these descendants of Romany Ri have had the honour of appearing before the Queen in Dunbar, Scotland, and although the King does not impress one by his tawny skin he is a genuine ruler and speaks Romany.

Extract from the "Liverpool Review," June 19th, 1886.

The poor Laplanders have now to play second fiddle to another wandering tribe whose origin is lost in the mists of antiquity. Ever since their celebrated moonlight flit the little northerners had been under a cloud, but their social extinction has been completed by the advent of the "Epping Forest Gipsies." The King and Queen of these nomads bear the prosaic name of Smith. Nevertheless they claim to be in the line of descent of "Romany Ri." It is an open question whether the Gitano complexion—the tawny complexion, the vellum of the pedigree they claim—cannot be whitened by partaking of gin and water in unfair proportions. This result is sometimes brought about among certain vagabond followers of Isis, but it would be the height of injustice to suggest that such retributive facial pallor can be laid to the account of Mr. George Smith, the ruler of the Exhibition gipsy encampment. The absence of swarthiness in his Majesty's case must be attributed to other causes, for if rumour is correct we believe the monarch is a staunch teetotaler. Like the great majority of Bohemians, he is addicted to trafficking in horses, while his Royal consort and her young princesses do a good business in basket selling and fortune telling. The Queen is well known in the neighbourhood of Everton, hers being one of the most familiar figures to those who are in the habit of travelling to town in trams. For some time past she has chosen Liverpool as her winter residence, pitching her camp on the waste ground near Walton Breck, and during the absence of her lord and master in Ireland her caravan has been the resort of credulous nursemaids and naïve servant girls. A more respectable tribe than that of the Smiths never trod the open heath. They might be objected to as being a little too genteel. The interior of their camp is more like a Turkish divan than the good old smoke-begrimed vagrant habitation. Indeed they are so highly civilised as to boast of the patronage of Queen Victoria, who it appears paid them a special visit in Scotland. Another instance of the process of modern refinement on these Pharaohites is that they occupy exactly the same position as the other hirers of stands—they have paid for the privilege of showing their peculiar method of travelling and mode of life. Unlike the Laps, they have not been engaged as one of the attractions of the

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Exhibition, and on coming forward on their own account they display a business enterprise which does credit to their commercial instincts. On Whit Monday they did a roaring trade, many ladies of social standing persisting in having their fortunes told—"just for the fun of the thing, you know." The female gipsies were attired in gaudy garments and quite captivated crowds of young "mashers," who had come to see what they were like. For the moment the new comers are all the rage, and have snuffed out the blighted Laplanders.

Extract from the "Liverpool Review," June 19th, 1886.

Her Majesty is not the only Royal visitor who has honoured the Exhibition with her presence. Another has made his appearance lately and set up what I suppose must be styled his "Palace" near Cross's Indian Pavillion, and in the middle of what may be called a quagmire. The "palace" of course is not a very imposing erection, the only difference between it and an ordinary gipsy tent being that it is a little larger and that the stuff with which it is covered is red in colour, the accommodation being supplemented by a travelling caravan which is decidedly more gaily painted than such vehicles usually are. His Majesty is not likely to suggest to any one the phrase "every inch a king," his appearance being more like that of a gamekeeper, though it was sufficient to attract a large crowd of starers, who, however, showed no disposition to have their fortunes told, probably fancying that they knew them well enough already. This was the more remarkable as King Smith had been called upon by the Queen while in Scotland, and he might therefore claim to be a Royal fortune teller, "by appointment" with more accuracy than is generally observed by those using the phrase.

Extract from the "Liverpool Courier," June 19th, 1886.

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Whence came those guests who, unknown and uninvited, migrated into Europe in the fifteenth century? This question, which has puzzled the fertile minds of many historians, was the one that naturally presented itself to me as I wended my way to the gipsy encampment in the grounds of the great International Exhibition. I confess I had no poetic or sentimental ideas in regard to the tribes who own Bohemia as their birthplace. On the contrary, I was afflicted with the common prejudice that these nomadic individuals were nothing more nor less than itinerant thieves and natural vagabonds, whose existence is a social anomaly, and who constitute a standing protest against the rigour of our game laws. The entrance to the red cloth-covered tent was surrounded by a crowd whose curiosity appeared to be as insatiable as their credulity; and it was with no small difficulty that I succeeded in breaking through the serried ranks of the gaping throng. The whole aspect of the place was totally different from the conventional notion of a gipsy camp. The public picture to themselves a few dilapidated and ragged shanties, begrimed by smoke, and worn by long service; a like number of painted and bedizened carts, shaggy, unkempt, and ill-tended horses, and an indefinite number of dark-eyed, dark-skinned children. But here the conditions are entirely reversed. The interior presented an air of oriental luxury. A rich carpet covered the floor; cushioned seats invited to repose; and there was not wanting other accessories to remind one of the sybaritic elegance of a Turkish divan. The squalid children were not there, but in their stead appeared a bevy of handsome damsels, with Gitano complexions. The comely girls were attired in robes of the brightest hues, scarlet, pink, and yellow, and from their ears depended large silver rings, which imparted to them a dashing Bohemian mien. But it is on beholding the King and Queen of these Pharoahites that one's preconceived ideas sustain the rudest shock. I must confess to a feeling of disappointment on being ushered into the presence of the King. Instead of being confronted with a picturesque old gentleman of dirty and forbidding look, I saw before me a perfectly respectable middle-aged man with a quiet self-possessed air, and wearing the very unimposing garments prescribed by nineteenth century civilisation. There was nothing striking about his bearing, and I searched in vain for any indications of royal characteristics. His Majesty may be a true descendant of "Romany Ri"; he may boast of the blood of the genuine Zingari, but he certainly does not show it in the "tawny skin, the vellum of the pedigree they claim." His countenance strikes one as being more English than Egyptian, and were it not for a slight swarthinness observable about the eyes no one would suspect that he had the remotest connection with the "vagabond followers of Isis." His Royal Consort, who at the time I entered was engaged at the homely occupation of peeling potatoes. The Queen is much darker. Indeed her visage has assumed a saffron hue, and amongst her own people she must have been regarded as a very prepossessing specimen twenty years ago. The King received me with the utmost courtesy, and on being informed of the object of my visit insisted on me taking a chair while he squatted on the carpet. His Majesty was not only ready but eager to supply the information which I required.

May I be favoured with your name? Oh, certainly—George Smith.

"It strikes me I have heard that name before," was the comment which instinctively came to the

lips, but I refrained.

"Ah, you may say that is a common name for a Bohemian like me to bear, but I can tell you that the Smith's are as old a tribe as the Stanleys, the Lovells, the Hernes, and the Coopers."

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"What is the extent of your family here?" "Well, the occupants of this tent and that covered cart which you see outside are myself and my wife, four daughters, and their two female cousins, and four sons there"—and he pointed with his finger to a group of strapping young fellows who had just entered the camp.

"Can you trace your descent far back?" "Oh, yes." At this point his Royal Consort exclaimed with evident pride, "I can remember my great grandmother. She and her tribe never lived out of tents."

The King: "You see, sir, its a kind of a mystery where we came from. Some say we are from the Rekkybites (Rechabites), and others say as how we are the lost tribes. It has been a great puzzle as to where we have originated."

"Do you speak the gipsy language?" "Yes, to be sure. We talk Romany." And as if to convince me of the truth of his assertion he addressed a few words to the Queen in that mysterious lingo which I regret not to have been able to follow.

"It is said that, like the Red men, you gipsies are being civilised out of being." "Its this way, sir. There's good and bad among us. Some wander about the country, and by their depredations get a character that's not very nice; but now we are more prosperous than the generality of our class."

"May I enquire what is your principal source of income?" "Oh, bless you, I and my sons do a great deal in the way of horse dealing; and we don't employ our idle time, like some of the strollers, in tinkering. We go to Ireland very often and buy horses for the French Army, and the English Government as well."

"Will you allow me to ask whether you practice fortune-telling at all?" "Well, the fact is we don't go in for that. But if ladies insist, we don't object to do it. My wife and the girls tell fortunes when they are asked."

"Given the mysteries of gipsy life, and the curiosity of the public, I suppose your camp is crowded every day since your arrival?" "Why, sir, on Whit-Monday we were so full as almost to be suffocated. The people came in droves, and the entrance was blocked up with them all the time."

"It strikes me that I have seen her Majesty in the neighbourhood of Everton for some time past?" "Well, you see, we have been camped there, but we come from Epping Forest. The Queen visited us when we were in Dunbar, Scotland. And if we weren't real gipsies Her Majesty would not have come to see us."

The King at this juncture said he should be exceedingly obliged if I would put in the papers the fact that their habitation was scrupulously neat and clean, and that the sanitary arrangements were of an unexceptional character—which I told him I should have much pleasure in doing.

"There is another thing which you might mention too," he added in a whisper. "We don't herd together, higgledy-piggledy, like some wanderers. My wife and I pass the night in that end of the tent, and at the opposite end, which is curtained off, my boys sleep. And as for the girls, they occupy the caravan." His Majesty then conducted me to the caravan outside, and showed me a veritable boudoir for comfort and elegance. He was careful to point out every detail of the well-appointed vehicle, and to exhibit the gee-gaws and showy dresses which the ladies wore on gala days.

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"Look here, sir, some people think that we gipsies are a little loose in our morals. But I can tell you it's nothing of the sort. We are very particular people. Our daughters' virtue is very dear to us, and rather than see them injured we would sooner see them die." And by the powerfully self-restrained manner of Mr. Smith, I could see that he meant what he said.

In reply to the question as to whether he really preferred gipsying to the ordinary mode of life, he said, "It's our regular way of living, and if you gave me the grandest house, I would not give up my camp for it."

And the Queen chimed in, "Our ancestors always lived in tents, and so shall we. I am happier as I am than if I was in a palace. Indeed, I would not live in one, and no more would my daughters."

Observing an ancient-looking parrot in a gaudy cage, I ventured to ask if it belonged to the family. "Bless your life," replied the Queen, "we have had that 'ere bird for more than fifteen years. It knows our ways, and can talk Romany. But it only speaks when the spirit moves it." Just at that moment Poll was in one of her most taciturn moods, and could not be induced to open her beak, but no doubt, like the traditional bird of that ilk, she thought the more.

"Have you any history of your tribe or biographical records of yourself?" I inquired; to which his Majesty pathetically answered: "Unfortunately I have not. Ah, if I had only got one-half the accounts that the Scotch reporters put in about us, they would be worth any money to me just now. However, I have given some particulars to a gentleman who is going to put it in a little book for me."

"Are you permitted to do any trafficking here?" "Well, yes, a little. Mr. Bapty allows us to sell a few fancy baskets, if we like."

"And then perhaps the ladies do not offer insuperable objections to have their palms crossed?" To this soft impeachment the gipsy monarch only returned a knowing wink, as much as to say, "Why should we not humour the whims of our fair visitors."

Extract from the "Liverpool Review," June 26th, 1886.

The gipsies are still the rage at the Exhibition, and each day King Smith and his Royal consort receive the homage of well-dressed crowds of lady admirers. With the prestige gained by the patronage of Queen Victoria, they come with confidence before a credulous public, and so far their *levees* have been pecuniarily successful. Their cleanly and well ordered encampment was visited this week by the Mayor and Mayoress, who were much interested, if not edified, by their interviews with these ultra respectable Bohemians. Selling little fancy baskets is ostensibly the only traffic carried on by the olive complexioned family; but this is not their only stock-in-trade. It is surprising to witness the large number of *graudes dames* who enter the tent for the sole object of having their fortunes told. This strange curiosity was supposed to exist only amongst domestic servants, but Mary Jane's mistress seems quite as anxious to dive into the mysteries of the future. Many ladies feel ashamed to patronise chiromancy in the Exhibition, but have asked for private appointments with her Majesty Mrs. Smith. Not a few in their eagerness to penetrate into futurity conquer their natural timidity, and boldly enter. In such cases it is an amusing spectacle to observe the furtive manner in which the operation is conducted, and how the fair ones make a hurried exit as if conscious of having done something very foolish and ridiculous. As a rule it is the Queen whose palm is crossed, but some young mashers prefer having their fortunes told by one of the princesses.

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Extract from the "Glasgow Weekly Mail," Saturday, May 21, 1892.

GIPSY KING IN GLASGOW.

IN A TENT OF ISHMAEL.

Lord Rosebery's statement last Friday, in the St. Andrew's Halls, that there were 138,000 vagrants in Scotland, persons who did nothing but roam the country and admire the scenery, induced me to pay the Gipsy King, Mr. George, a visit. His Majesty, with family, are presently located in Glasgow, in Great Western road. I found Mr. Smith in his tent, a large and commodious structure, some eight feet in height, the frame of strong ash girders covered with a dark purple cloth. The place answering to the kitchen is near the entrance, and the family had just finished breakfast a few minutes before I put in an appearance. They do not sit on chairs at meals, but squat in tailor-like fashion on the floor, and in the same attitude that I have seen American Indians do in their wigwams. The members of the Smith family are dark-eyed and dark-haired. The women have the true Zingara beauty of face, olive-tinted forehead, sharp glittering eyes, and their black hair, that peculiar metallic hue which one sees on the wings of the dusky raven. The women are fond of jewellery, heavy earrings fall on their necks, and their small copper-coloured hands sparkle with rings. A collie bitch, a cat, and a canary were the only animals about the hut. No part of the show ground is kept so scrupulously clean as that allocated to the Gipsies.

Mr. Smith is a general type of the race—gentlemanly, intelligent, and courteous. In years he must be over sixty, but he is still as straight as a poplar, and wiry and muscular as a man of thirty. He has in his time been an extensive horse dealer, and for years made regular visits to Ireland. He has purchased hundreds of Irish horses and disposed of them in France and Germany.

"No, sir," he said, with an imperial toss of the head, "I'm not one of Lord Rosebery's 138,000 vagrants. I belong to a race whose history began in the twilight of the world, back in a time when lords and dukes were not dreamt of. I pay a regular license for my caravan, and when I am moving about over the country I pay, like other gypsies, for permission to pitch my tent, the same as I do here. There is no vagrancy in that. I am unable to say how many gypsies may be in Scotland and England. Scotch Tinklers—men and women who wander about making spoons, soldering pails, and skellets—are not gypsies. They are simply pariahs. There is not a drop of gypsy blood in their veins. The scotch tinker lived originally in a house, but abandoned it from various causes. They are a drunken, useless class of people, these tinkers, but persons will have them related somehow to us true gypsies. I claim to be the

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"KING OF THE ENGLISH GYPSIES,"

and act for our people all over Great Britain. Take, for instance, that question before Parliament recently of the education of gipsy children. I was in the House of Commons and examined. Here you see letters from Justin M'Carthy, the President of the Local Government Board, and from a number of Members of Parliament. What are my views, you ask, on the education of gipsy children? Well, I have embodied my opinions in a memorial to the Government. Briefly, this is what I say. Every gipsy child should be educated, just as I have educated these children there, now men and women. There is no reason why our children should not be sent to school. Here, for instance, I will be settled altogether some six months. If I had children of school age, do you think it would be a hardship for me to be compelled to keep them at school? Certainly not. My opinion is this, that if a gipsy is located in a place for two days, for a week, a month or a year, he should be compelled to send his children to school. There would be no hardship in that. There is where the gipsy settles always a school in the neighbourhood. It is only in centres of population that we can live now. The old romantic days of pitching your tent in the forest and living on the fruits of the chase are gone for ever. We can only live, I repeat, where there is population, and where you have population you must have schools. Out of six days in the week, no matter how much a gipsy may travel, his child, if he were anxious to give it merely the rudiments of education, would at least have two and three days at school in the week. That is my view, and it seems to meet with the approval of the Local Government Board.

"A man named George Smith—no friend of mine—of Coalville, has been slandering and defaming our people for years. He has been making money out of books he has written about us. I have challenged him scores of times to prove his statements, but he has never had the courage to meet me. Amongst other things he says that we

BURY OUR DEAD ANY WAY

and anywhere. I took the trouble to explode this lie, and went to London to do it. I obtained from the directors of cemeteries in England and Scotland certificates as to our mode of burial. These certificates in every instance disproved Smith's slanders, but he has not had the courage to withdraw them. Why, we have even here a burying ground, which has been procured from Sir Archibald Campbell. My sister is buried there, and she brought her son all the way from Galway, in Ireland, to be interred here. That does not look like neglecting our dead, does it? Then this man from Coalville says that we are filthier than the pigs. Does this little place of mine look like a pig-stye? The real gipsy, the dweller in tents, is cleaner than those who reside in houses. If a dog should lick any plate or vessel it is not afterwards used, but is destroyed or disposed of. Is that like the conduct of persons who, according to this man, are swinish in their habits?

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"We call ourselves Protestants of the Church of England, and are christened, married, and buried at the church nearest to us. We have not joined a church in Glasgow yet, but in Edinburgh we went to Dr. Rankin's.

"When a death takes place in the camp the corpse is laid out on the ground. The body is usually kept for a week, and during that time none of us go to sleep. A light is kept burning and we

EAT NO MEAT

until the grave closes over the departed. All that we take in the way of food is a cup of tea, or a bit of dry bread. We pay great reverence to our dead, more so than any other race on the face of the earth. There is a custom universal among our people, namely, of refraining from some usage or indulgence in honour of the departed. What I mean is this. Suppose the deceased was addicted to drink, it is common for the deceased's brother to never taste liquor during the remainder of his life. That will do for an example. At our wakes no whisky is drunk, and a silence deep as the grave pervades the tents.

"There is nothing peculiar about our marriages. We just go to the minister, or else get a license. I must say that

THE SHERIFF'S LICENSE

is the most popular and the least expensive.

"Fifty years ago it was deemed an unheard of thing for a royal gipsy to marry a person of another race. In fact it was treason. To-day, among the genuine gipsies, it is nothing short of a crime. I have myself experienced the effects of this inter-marrying, and I tell you that it has not been satisfactory. One of my children has gone outside of our people. I make the statement, fearless of contradiction, that our people, in the aggregate, are the most moral that you can find. Search the

CRIMINAL RECORDS OF THE CENTURY

and you will not find an instance where a gipsy has stained his hands with human blood. He may have been hung for stealing a sheep or a horse, but not for committing a murder.

"About this fortune-telling, we believe that God Almighty has endowed our people with the faculty for foretelling events, and looking into the future. Strangers, of course, will laugh at that statement, but nevertheless, we maintain that it is correct. But fortune-telling is only a small part of the gipsy equipment. We do not attach much importance to it. We are of the dusky race, whose history began "on the dawn of the world." John Bunyan was one of our people. Jesus Christ, the founder of Christianity, was a gipsy, and on Christmas Day we burn an ash tree in honour of Him, because He lived and died one of us.

“No sir, I’m not one of Lord Rosebery’s vagrants. If I am, then the Christ which Lord Rosebery professes to worship was also a vagrant. He too wandered wearily over the world, and was more homeless than the wild dove, which has a nest. Good morning.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK INCIDENTS IN A GIPSY'S LIFE ***

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