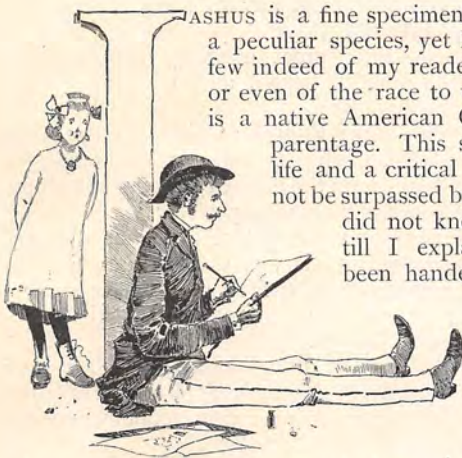


## VISITING THE GYPSIES.



LASHUS is a fine specimen of a native American, of a peculiar species, yet I venture to say that very few indeed of my readers know much about him, or even of the race to which he belongs,—for he is a native American Gypsy, of English Gypsy parentage. This stock, for vigorous faith in life and a critical knowledge of horses, cannot be surpassed by any in the world. Lashus did not know what his name meant till I explained to him that it had been handed down with many other

words in Romany from a Slavonian origin. It means Louis, which in Eastern Europe is called Lajos. When the Gypsies came, in the fifteenth century, to England, they brought with them no French words, but a number borrowed from Slavonic sources, such as *shuba*, a cloak or flowing skirt; *mass*, meat;

*adosta*, enough; and from Greek the words for a kettle, a bone, and a chair.

Not long ago, when Lashus was bidding me good-bye, just before folding his tents like the Arabs and silently stealing away, he said:

“There is a large camp of Romanies just now over in Oakdale Park, near Broad street. They are Lovels—Kamlos—you know?”

“It’s a mistake,” I confidently asserted. “There wasn’t a Romany there three days ago. I should have heard of their arrival as soon as you.”

“Will you bet *panj lil* [five dollars] on it?” said Lashus. “No,—well, that’s five dollars saved to you, *rye* [sir]. For they *are* there, and very nice, deep, old-fashioned Romanies they are. Only be careful when you call, for I heard that the old grandmother, who is full a hundred years old, is dying. She’s the Queen of the Gypsies, and knows a lot about old times. But—I say, *rye*—don’t let on to them at first that you can *rokker* [talk Romany].”



A HUNGARIAN ROMANY.



AN OUT-DOOR KITCHEN.

*Play 'em*—have some fun out of 'em. They've never so much as heard of you, nor of the *tāni rāni*. It'll be a new sensation for 'em."

The *tāni rāni*, or young lady referred to, was Miss Elizabeth Robins, who is well known to most of the Gypsies who visit Philadelphia. It was only on Sunday that we could make our visit to the newly arrived, since on week-days the women, at least, are rarely at home in a Gypsy camp. So, on Sunday morning, we found ourselves at the Park.



A GYPSY DIANA.

"Why, it's quite a little Gypsy town of tents and vans," said L., as she looked at the camp. "I never saw so many here before. *Jasa tu sig-án* [go on before, quickly!]"

I went on and found myself among the tents, where we were politely welcomed by a very striking-looking, middle-aged, and thorough Gypsy woman. We sat down on some wood, and I began:

"Why, what singular-looking persons you are? Are you foreigners?"

"We are Gypsies, sir," replied the woman.

"Gypsies—*Gypsies!*" I answered, reflectively. "I think I've read about Gypsies in books. Ah, yes—I remember! How strange, though, that I should really meet with one. Did you ever see a Gypsy before?" I said, turning to L., who looked innocent ignorance. "And is it true," I continued, to the woman, "that you can tell fortunes?"

"Yes, sir."

"How wonderful! But I am afraid that is very wrong. And can you tell a Gypsy when-ever you see one?"

"Always, sir."

"And have you a language of your own?"

"We have a broken one, sir, called Romany."

"Romany—Roman—why it must be like Latin. I know Latin. I will give you some words first in English, and then in Latin, and if you know what any of them means you must tell me."

There was great curiosity expressed to hear Latin. I began, and exclaimed with great solemnity:

"This is the English: 'Tiglath-Pileser said unto Nebuchadnezzar, Thou art the man,—for he played upon the harp of a thousand strings, spirits of the just made perfect.'"

There was no doubt of it. I was a moral missionary, and it was with a manifestation of great respect that the Latin was now solicited. Changing my expression, I said in Romany, or Gypsy:

"*Tutes a bori dinneli that dont jin tiri noki foki vanka tu diks a lende* [You are a great fool not to know your own people when you see them]."

There was a general spasm of amazement, and then a roar of laughter. No one enjoyed the joke more than a very venerable and picturesque woman in whom I at once recognized the hundred-year-old queen. But instead of lying at death's door, as I had been led to expect, she was now sitting up all alive, and enjoying a pipe, as I sincerely hope that all my readers may when they, too, achieve their centuries.

The sheep had proved to be a wolf, but there was a forlorn hope left in L. Turning to her, the Gypsy said:

"Shall I tell your fortune?"

"Tell *my* fortune, indeed!" returned L., in fluent Romany. "Hold up your hand and let me tell yours, or let us tell them one against another for a dollar——"

"And see who can tell the most lies in ten minutes," I added.

The Gypsy shook her head and said, seriously:

"Between such as we are there can be no lying. *Patserus.*"

"And do *you* tell fortunes?" said the Queen to L., in amazement.

When Arbaces, the arch sorcerer, wished to reveal himself to the Witch of Vesuvius as belonging to her order, he exhibited the burning girdle. When my niece was thus questioned, she drew from her pocket a small book bound in old red morocco, and opening it, said:

"Here's my *dukkerin-lil.*"

The reader must understand that, among the women Gypsies, there is no treasure so coveted as a so-called *dukkerin-lil*, or fortune-telling book. By this is not meant a dime

dream-book or a cheap fortune-teller, such as are generally to be found associated with cent-broadside ballads, but some quaint and ancient little work on chiromancy or magic, garnished with pictures of hands and strange cabalistic devices, such as abound in Agrippa and Trithemius. Such a book is to a fortune-teller what a wand was to a sorcerer or a broom to a witch. The possession of a really remarkable specimen of such literature in Gypsy circles confers a species of renown. One hears that a certain family owns it as one hears of another's owning a famous horse or a superior wagon. This which my niece had was a curiosity in its way, being filled with marvelous illuminated hands, dragons, and other monsters, in vermilion, gold, or silver, and looked as well able to raise Mephistopheles as any specimen of occult philosophy which eyes ever beheld. It was gazed at by a deeply appreciative audience with intense admiration, but by none so much as the Queen, who knew by nearly a century of experience what an aid such a work could be in all manner of secrecy. I need not say that she expressed a fervid desire to become the possessor of the volume, which was to her all that the book of gramarye of Michael Scott was to the Lady in "The Lay of the Last Minstrel"; but when I was asked its value, and I replied in rhymes,

"Miri dye,  
Mukela grai,  
Or a chai"—

that is, "It is worth a horse or a girl"—there was no further question of buying it.



A TYPE.

Then we talked of Gypsies known to us in England long ago, of the living and the dead, of races run lang syne, and of all the affairs of Egypt; how they had traveled far and wide in America, and of all the band of Gypsies from Providence, who had visited Philadelphia the week before, and bought many horses,—yes—two-hundred-and-fifty-dollar horses. There was much similar gossip, and many quaint confidences.

There is nothing in Gypsy life which is remarkable to an indifferent person, but there is certainly much in it which is very different from household ways to a keen perceiver. I could amuse myself all day in a Romany camp by watching the animals. They live



A HARD CASE.

on such familiar terms with such singular people of odd ways, that anybody can understand why the Hindoos, the ancestors of the Gypsies, believed as a matter of course that animals had souls. What duck, except a duck brought up in a family, would ever put its head in through a hole in the tent, quack to those in there in all but human fashion, and then retire shaking that head with such a meaning air? And the poultry! Why, Gypsy cocks and hens are as different in their demeanor from the ordinary denizens of the barn-yard as are their mistresses from the Gentile farm-wives. Just watch them, and mark their superior familiarity with man.

I had noticed lying at my feet a mysterious, large, fluffy ball, a thing of woolliness and mystery, which might have been photographed for an enormous tarantula, or octopus, or hedgehog, or hairy crab,—or as a mixture of them all. This thing growled as I at first sat down,—not angrily, but in tones which plainly said: "Um—m! What sort of folk be these here?" But when I spoke in Romany, it opened two awful eyes, fixed them steadily on me with a superhuman stare, and grunted with an expression distinct as words: "Well, *you're* all right—I shouldn't have thought it—*but you'll bear watching.*"

"That's a *fino jucko!* [a fine dog]" remarked a younger woman. This was Mrs. Lovel, junior. The *fino jucko* opened his eyes and winked affirmatively. There was a sound from within the tent like *Auwa*, or yes, uttered in a cawing tone. I looked up inquiringly, and Mrs. Lovel said:

"It's our *rakkerin chillico* [talking-bird or parrot]." She should have said *chirico*, which

is more correct. In the Thug slang of India, the word *chiricea* is applied to a small owl, whose cry formed a most significant omen which encouraged or deterred them from the most desperate enterprises.

"And the parrot talks Romany?"

"Yes."

I wondered if it had occurred to any people who had seen this bird on its constant

scarlet red, she seemed the very ideal of Gypsy and sorceress. There are not many left at the present day of the old *kālo-ratt*—the black, or unmixed blood; and the Gypsies of this generation are losing all their old ways so rapidly, that one like the Queen is becoming a curiosity. By strange chance I also knew very well, in England, old Charlotte Cooper of Bow Common, whom the reader may find



A GYPSY CAMP.

travels, that, though American-born, its native tongue, acquired in America, was a dialect of the old Hindi Persian Urdu or camp-language formed during the tremendous struggle which centered round the fierce Mahmoud of Ghazneh? But it did not seem strange to me when I looked at the half-Indian faces before me, at the old Queen, who, with her daughter, would have passed unobserved in Calcutta as a Northern native, or even the children, who evidently had more Gentile blood in them than there was in the mothers.

The parrot, by speaking Romany, had a right to be called a Gypsy-bird, or would have, were not the word already preëmpted by another. In England, the water-wagtail has this name, from a strange superstition that he who beholds one will soon after meet with Gypsies. There is some cause for the belief. The wagtail haunts solitary places, near water, and in such spots Gypsies love to camp. In folk-lore it is an unearthly, witch-like bird, owing to its eccentric ways and haunts, and therefore it is not an inapt symbol for such weird people as the Romany. But the greatest living curiosity in the *tan*—that is, the place or *tent*—was the old Queen. Dark as an Indian, with gold ear-rings, and many strings of well-worn coral beads around her neck, and all her head attire and neck-wraps of

described in George Borrow's "*Romano Lavo-Lil*." Charlotte is dark, and is supposed by the people to be also a hundred years old; but when I asked her if this was the case, she, with the natural instinct of her sex to appear as young as possible, replied, "Indeed I'm not; I'm only ninety-four." This was five or six years ago. Should any of the residents of London who read these lines take the pains to ascertain whether Charlotte be still alive, as I think she is, he may see not only a veritable centenarian, but also one whom George Borrow, as he told me, he believed to be the last Gypsy of absolutely pure blood in England. I think this is, however, very doubtful. From their habits of intermarrying there are, I think, still many who are, in all probability, perfectly *kālo-ratt*, and of these the Queen seems to be a good specimen. That she is an accomplished fortune-teller, not without faith in her own powers to ban or bless, I was subsequently well assured. As we sat in the tent by the smoldering fire, whose smoke gave a delicate chiaro-oscuro to the scene, and I looked at the old woman, so unlike anybody whom I meet in ordinary life, my mind wandered to the strange people and scenes which she must have lived among long, long ago. She had known the chiefs of her people in the

days when they were really fierce and law-defying men who died on the gallows-tree, or in some form of violent death,—the days when the Rom was a leader in the prize-ring, or noted as a highwayman, and wore hunting-boots, and green coats with spade-guineas for buttons, and always carried the tremendous *chuknee* or jockey-whip, characteristic of his people. She was a living link with all that was wildest in England before the days of railroads and gas, steamboats and telegraphs.

\* \* \* It is a curious coincidence that, as I write, and since I wrote that last line, I have received a note from Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, in which he says: "I remember, by the way, that Cooper, the Gypsy, was one of the heroes and portraits of Boxiana. You may have known the very fellow in his old age." This was Jack Cooper, the husband of Charlotte, to whom I alluded. I did not know him, because he was sent lang syne as a convict to Australia. If still existing, he must be as old as his wife, but it is a strange thing that the Gypsies are all certain that he is yet alive. He abandoned his wife when young, and went off with another girl. But to the very last, old Charlotte always believed, as she still believes, if alive, that Jack will yet return to England and to her. I shall never forget how truly touched I was when this old woman, well-nigh at the end of her century, spoke with trembling, loving tones of her long-lost husband, and said that she knew he was not dead—she had dreamed it so often—and that he would yet return. Even among the Lovels, when I visited the Gypsy Queen, I found that they believed that Jack was yet of this world. I well remember my last visit to old Charlotte. I was accompanied by a lady who spoke Romany perfectly, and who took to the old woman a warm winter jacket for a present. After duly admiring it and uttering *paraco tute*, or "thank you," many times, the ancient Gypsy remarked to me roughlyly:

"It's a beautiful coat, *rye* [master],—but—how perfect it would be—if the pocket wasn't *quite* empty." As she said this her attention was diverted, and by a dexterous exertion of *hanki panki*, or *legerdemain*, I slipped a shilling into the empty *putsi* [pocket], and bade her search again. I think that she was as much pleased with the gypsy way in which the money was given as with the coin itself.

After a most entertaining call, we took our



THE QUEEN OF THE GYPSIES.

departure. A few days after, I determined to pay the Queen another visit, in company with Mr. Pennell, the artist. Miss Robins did not accompany us, but, with great generosity, sent her magic book as a present to her majesty. "The dear old soul," she said, "was really dying to get it. Did you ever see anybody gaze at anything with such longing eyes? You will astonish her with it!" So I took the volume with me. We found all the family at home, the parrot preaching away in Romany or the unknown tongues, the children charmed to see us. I need not say that her majesty was also charmed to receive her present. But when she was told that the *tāni rāni*, or young lady, wished, in return, to have her picture and that of the others taken by Mr. Pennell, there was great reluctance, it being well known that it is a very unlucky thing to have one's picture taken, unless, indeed, it be done by the sun. I had in Egypt a friend named Mahomet, who was a strict Mussulman. He even considered it to be a great sin to have one's likeness painted. "How is it, then, that you have your daughter's photograph?" I asked. To which Mahomet gravely replied: "Him man no takee; Sun takee that portraits." Fortunately I had, foreseeing this reluctance, provided myself with a red string, it being well known that anybody's portrait may be taken with full exemption from harm if the siter be presented with a shoe-string or a red cord. This being duly given, the sittings commenced. It was a good picture of itself to see the artist seated almost on the ground in the darkened tent near the fire, over which leaned the *sarshita*, or kettle-iron, with its pendent kettle, grimed with smoke. Everything seemed so gypsy and witchlike, as if one were living in one of Hoffmann's "*Phantasie-stücke*." The spout of the kettle looked to me like a long nose; I fancied I saw a goblin face in the soot-marks on it. I began to think that the



A GYPSY WOMAN.

Queen-Witch had lost no time with the red book of gramarye, but had already begun to raise something *bengalo* or diabolical. There was a forked radish lying on the ground, and I at once recalled the Mandrake and the Queen of the Gypsies, who form part of the unearthly company in the carriage, in "Isabella of Egypt." As for Pennell, what with visiting Voodoo queens in New Orleans, and consorting with Gypsies, he, too, is becoming over-familiar with uncanny folk, and would, I fear, sit down to paint the Father of Lies himself as coolly as ever did the Spanish artist famed in Southey's song.

While speaking of Gypsies and unearthly things, I may interest the reader by remarking that their language is full of strange hints, which they themselves do not now understand. The Romany word for a bone, borrowed from the modern Greek, is *kokalos* or *kuklos*. But it also means a dwarf, a puppet, a doll, a fairy, a goblin, and unquestionably refers us to many old Greek and Indian stories in which a bone is renewed by a sorcerer into humanity, or in which it changes to a diminutive being. So, too, the word *mullo* (*moolo*), or "dead," is applied not only to corpses and ghosts, but also to the shadow of a man, to bubbles which dance and break on rapid rivulets, and to rings of smoke. The



"LIKE AN INDIAN."

on his breast. So it is in talking with very old people, who being, of course, by reason of their age, much nearer heaven than we, are continually rising beyond us in memory. So when I spoke with the Queen of Plato Buckland, she at once remembered him, but we soon discovered that my Plato is the grandson of the one whom her majesty knew in her youth, and who was a famous Romany in his day. Witness the following song, or its incident, for the truth of which nobody vouches:

"Two Romany fellows were banished afar,  
Far away over the dark rolling sea,  
Lasho for robbing,  
And Plato for fobbing,  
The purse of a lady as great as could be.

"And when they came to the far-away land,  
The land that is over the dark rolling sea,  
One came to the halter,  
But one at the altar  
Soon married a lady as fair as could be.

"Would you like to know who the lady was?  
'Twas the lady whose purse he had stolen, d'ye  
see;  
For the chap had an eye,  
Black, witch-like, and sly,  
And she'd followed him over the dark rolling sea."

While I was singing this in the original Romany, it was not to an attentive audience, since I was accompanied by the parrot with a hymn in the unknown tongues, into which a Gypsy word now and then peeped like a dark heathen through a window upon a white congregation, and the three Mrs. Lovel, three children, and three dogs maintained, each in their way, a running conversation as Pennell sketched, and exclaimed at regular intervals: "Turn your head that way!"—"Look to one side!"—"Look up!"—"Keep still!" Even



THE BELLE OF THE CAMP.

connection between these is obvious, but their connection by a single word is poetical.

I once said of an interview with the giant Chang that I was continually startled when turning my head toward him, as we were seated in conversation, and expecting to meet his eyes, to find myself looking at the buttons

the fire seemed to be sociable, for it emitted its volumes like an author who, unable to talk in society, inflicts his opinions on it in puffs, and in fact with much the same result, since the smoke soon obliged me to look out-of-doors and get fresh air. Reëntering, I distributed Havanas,—for as fire may be used to fight fire, smoke also neutralizes smoke, as I found,—a good cigar being specially appreciated among the Gypsies, who are all right valiant smokers. Of which I may, by the way, remark that the Latin writer, who made *fumum vendere* or selling smoke a synonym for that which is without value, never foresaw cigars nor their present price.

One of the children was a pretty, sturdy little miss, named Madonna. It is a part of the quaint picturesque life and nature of the Gypsies that they generally take strange names, particularly for women. One of those present was called Shéva—in my book, “The Gypsies,” the reader may find such appellations as Alabina, Marbelenni, Starlina, Otchamé, and Catseye. Madonna was occupied with a spitz, holding it at one minute and pulling it by the tail the next.

It is a curious fact that no people put more faith in quaint observances and magical practices than those who live by them, though one would think that, like the augurs of old, there would be no great exchange of magic between them out of business hours. But when I showed the Queen a very large pocket-knife, which I have had for many years, and as I mentioned to her, had carried even in Egypt, and when I told her I esteemed it highly, she bade me hold it in my right hand. Then, having uttered the appropriate words in Romany, I was told to make a wish. I asked if I might not have three wishes, for it was a very strong *dukk*, and three being allowed I made them. This is a charm which never fails when granted by a very old woman, and it was a great favor to bestow it on me. The secret of this spell is beautifully set forth by Heine in the “Pictures of Travel,” where he declares that objects long worn or carried become as it were inspired with our life, or magical, and give to us again, in another form, the life we gave them. This, he thinks, is the origin of the German tales in which spoons and staves and chairs think and talk, and the bean and straw go forth on their travels. Who is there that has not felt the nameless charm attached to some old coin or gem which he has got into the habit of carrying, he hardly knows how? I read recently in the newspapers of a gentleman in the West, who believes there is a spirit in his cane; still more recently, I read of a large tribe in the East—I think it

is in Borneo—who worship their walking-sticks. Thus amber beads long worn become each the shrine of a little guardian sprite, while in every cherished cross there dwells a little Christian fairy. Whether the Gypsy charm given to me is not some remote transmission of the Hindoo oath on the knife, esteemed so sacred by the Thugs, who were also a species of Gypsies, I do not know, but the Gypsies, even in America, have exactly the same word for knife—*chūri*—as that used in India; and taking all things into consideration, I am inclined to think that this “blessing of the poignards” is an extremely ancient and curious incantation. It was indeed the oath by the knife and the cord which was the great adjuration not only of the Indian sect, and of the Assassins of Syria, but also of the Vehmgericht of Germany; and the reader may remember how, only an hour before the spell of the knife, I had removed ill-luck from portrait taking or giving, by bestowing a string.

There was an outlying encampment of the Lovel family, a mile distant, by the rising sun, and there I went with “our artist,” after sketching the Queen and her court. Here, too, we were unknown, and there was only a little girl about, who evidently had never heard of us, since when I asked her where her mother was, she went up to a closed van, and said in a low voice in Romany: “*Dai, shan dai mushi akai* [Mother, here are two men],” and then ran aside. I began to ask her what the language was in which she had spoken, but of course she kept silence. “Was it French?” Great was her astonishment when the mother came forth and I spoke to her in the secret tongue. We were most cordially received, the *dai* being a lady-like woman of middle age, with fine features, much resembling those of a high-caste Hindoo. Her style was reflected by the neatness of her person, the cleanliness of her children, and the remarkable luxury of a carpet on the floor or earth of her tent, while there were coverings on the boxes or furniture on which to sit.

The family had just come from Florida, and had brought with them a black goat who looked as if he should have been the property of the Witch Queen. I never saw an animal so suggestive of the Brocken. He was very tame, however, and did not object to be ridden by the youngest child, a very pretty boy, who, when mounted, reminded me of many a picture of fairies or sylvan *amoretti* on similar steeds.

In conclusion, I may briefly answer a question which many persons have put—“Who and what are the Gypsies?” To this, I reply,

that they are of a mixed Aryan and non-Aryan stock from Northern India, where they have been known since prehistoric times. In their own language they call themselves Rom, meaning husband; but the word may also have some affinity with *ramna*, meaning to roam or wander. I believe that I have been the first to prove that there is at the present day in India, among the one hundred and fifty kinds of wandering castes of that country, which are all Gypsies, one in particular which is there regarded as specially Gypsy, and which calls itself *Rom*, and which uses words not collected in any other Indian dialect, but which are used by the Gypsies of Syria, Turkey, and Europe. This tribe is allied to, and is most probably, only a more widely wandering branch of the Dom, who are also known as outcasts and Gypsies. When I speak of so many kinds of wanderers as Gypsies, and yet not identical with our own, I may make my meaning clearer by saying, that as all the tramps, peddlers, etc., who roam in our roads, are still not Romany, so of all the Indian nomads, there is but one which in every partic-



"AULD MON LOVEL."

ular, especially that of language, exactly corresponds to those whom I have described.

*Charles G. Leland.*



### LOVE.

If thou would'st truly love—love when the stars  
 Look down upon thee from their crystal homes;  
 When o'er the caverned night their swelling domes  
 Rise up the purple ether with their spars  
 Of burning beauty; when the trivial jars  
 Of earth and all its "must be" vanish dim  
 In hushed serenity, and, save the hymn  
 Of night and loneliness, naught earthly mars  
 Thy soul's deep gratitude: 'tis then unbars  
 The shrine of thy religion; the strong heart  
 Of thy stirred aspirations, worn apart  
 Like missals from the world—the spell that wars  
 With aught inconsonant to heart or eye;  
 The midnight's challenge and thy soul's deep-breathed reply!

*William M. Briggs.*

