

A GYPSY BEAUTY.*

CHARLOTTE COOPER.

FIFTY or sixty years ago the gypsies in England were a much more remarkable race than they are at present. The railway had not come to break up their habits, there were hundreds of lonely places in dell and dingle where they could *hatch the tan* or pitch the tent, their blood had been little mixed with that of the *Gorgio*, or Gentile; they spoke their language with greater purity than at present, and still kept their old characteristics unchanged. If they had the faults of Arabs, they had also many of their good qualities. If they stole horses and foraged on farmers, if their women told fortunes, lied, and sometimes cheated a man out of all his ready money by pretending to find a treasure in his cellar, on the other hand they were extremely grateful and honest to those who befriended them, and manifested in many ways a rough manliness which partially redeemed their petty vices. They were all, as are many of their sons at present, indomitable "rough riders," "of the horse horsey," and to a man boxers, so that many of them were distinguished in the prize-ring, the last of these being Jem Mace. At this time there prevailed among the English Romany a strong, mutual faith, a tribal honesty, which was limited, but all the stronger for that, even as the arms of a man grow stronger when he loses the use of his legs. They were a people of powerful frames, passions, and traditional principles. Their weak children soon died from the hardships of nomadic life, the remainder illustrated selection by suffering, and the survival of the fittest — to fight.

With such characteristics there could not fail among the gypsies many striking instances of warm friendship, intense love, and the fidelity which endures even till death. This was known of them when little else was known beyond their most apparent and repulsive traits. Walter Scott indulged in no romantic license when he depicted Hayraddin Mangrabin as devoted to Quentin Durward; even at present the incident of a thoughtful gift or any little act of kindness to them will be remembered with a gratitude out of all proportion to its value, and go the rounds of all the Romany in the United States. And therefore when men fell in love with women there often resulted those instances of intense passion

and steady faith, which at the present day are really becoming mythical. The gypsy in this, as in everything else, has been a continuation of the middle ages, or of the romance era.

Such a passion was inspired more than half a century ago by Jack Cooper, the *Kurumengro Rom*, or Fighting Gypsy, in a girl of his own tribe. Her name was Charlotte Lee, and it was about 1830 that Leslie, the Royal Academician, led by the fame of her beauty, painted the picture, now in New York in the possession of his sister Miss Emma Leslie, from which the engraving here given was taken. The fame of her charms still survives among her people, and when a few days ago as I write, I was talking of Charlotte to some gypsies of her kin, near Philadelphia, I was asked if I meant the *Rinken*; † that is, the Beautiful one.

I have known her very well in her old age; at one time I saw her very frequently, when she lived at Bow Common. Once in conversing with Mr. George Borrow, the author of "Lavengro," I mentioned Charlotte, when he informed me that he believed she was the only one of her people in Great Britain of pure Romany blood. I doubt this very much; in fact I think I know of two or three of her kin camped within half an hour of tramway from where I write, who are as unmixed in blood, as they are assuredly much darker, than the Beauty ever was. She is thus described as she was in Mr. Borrow's "Lavo Lil," in a page which gives her whole story:

"There is a very small tent about the middle of Wandsworth Common; it belongs to a lone female whom one frequently meets wandering, seeking an opportunity to *dukker* (tell fortunes to) some credulous servant girl. It is hard that she should have to do so, as she is more than seventy-five years of age, but if she did not she would probably starve. She is very short of stature, being little more than five feet and an inch high, but she is wonderfully strongly built. Her face is broad with a good-humored expression upon it, and in general with very little vivacity; at times, however, it lights up, and then all the gypsy beams forth. Old as she is, her hair, which is very long, is as black as the plumage of a crow, and she walks sturdily, and if requested would take up the heaviest man in Wandsworth and walk away with him. She is upon the whole the oddest gypsy woman ever seen; see her once and you will never forget her. Who is she? Why, Mrs. Cooper, the wife of Jack Cooper, the fighting gypsy, once the terror of all the light-weights of the English ring, who knocked West Country Dick

* See also "Visiting the Gypsies," by the same author, in this magazine for April, 1883.

† *Rinken*, pretty. In Hindostani *rangini*, gayly colored.



From a painting by C. R. Leslie.

Engraved by C. A. Powell.

CHARLOTTE COOPER.

[From the original in possession of Miss Emma Leslie.]

to pieces, and killed Paddy O'Leary the 'Pot-Boy'— Jack Randall's pet. Ah, it would have been well for Jack if he had always stuck to his true lawful Romany wife, whom at one time he was very fond of, and whom he used to dress in silks and satins and best scarlet cloth, purchased with the money gained in his fair, gallant battles in the ring."

But he did not stick to her. This was all in the early days of gypsydom, when fine scarlet cloth was sought by the Romany women, and much worn, and there was great faith in luck and the world wagged merrily on in its old way. Jack Cooper, like Samson, found a Delilah in a *Gorgio* or Gentile girl, who did not wear scarlet openly, yet was all the more openly a Scarlet woman, *de la plus pire espèce*. And then the un-luck began. To maintain her fine and gay "all that he got he valued not, but gave to her straightway." It was but little to the Painted Shame,—so he "sold his fights" for money, by doing which he lost his friends and backers, as the chronicle of the ring hath it, and even plundered his poor wife, the *Rinkeni Romani*, of all she had, even to her last blankets. And finally, out of sheer infatuation, when his mistress was accused of a theft, Jack assumed the guilt and declared himself to be the criminal.

All his friends left him, the Jezebel first of all; yet not quite all, for Charlotte remained true, supporting him while in prison and feeing a lawyer on the little money which she picked up by fortune-telling. All of this was long ago, when such devotion was a part of Romany life; yet even at the present day there is not a gypsy of the old tribes who cannot out of his own personal knowledge tell strange stories of the incredible efforts which wives have made to aid imprisoned husbands, who, however, treat them with great severity.

Jack was transported for a long time, and never returned. When her husband was *bitchardé pädél o kälö pani*, or sent across the ocean, Charlotte was young and beautiful as she was clever, but no one among the tribes ever said she had a lover since her *Rom* left her. She had a son Oliver, who was named after old Tom Oliver, who seconded Jack in all his winning battles, and was noted for having done so when his principal beat the famous Hardy Scroggins, whom Jack Randall himself never dared to fight. This son Oliver I have also known very well, a plump, old-fashioned gypsy, very good-natured and remarkably polite.

Mr. Borrow says that old Charlotte had very little vivacity, "save at times." It is, I trust, no disrespect to a great man to say that Mr. Borrow was not exactly the person to inspire vivacity or gayety in others. Those gypsies who have met him remember him chiefly as one who found fault with them for

neglecting the language and ways of their fathers, and who informed them that they were all mere *posh an posh*, or half-breeds. I always found old Charlotte remarkably vivacious, certainly the "brightest" woman of her years I ever met. She looked like a very old woman indeed, kept young by some incredible vitality—it always seemed to me that she was a witch without malice or mischief. It was very entertaining to talk with her in Romany about the "affairs of Egypt," of the great prize-fights and strange people, all long since passed away.

"Great people pass into poetry." Charlotte Cooper was great in her way among her people, as there is a song on her, which Mr. Borrow has preserved. It runs as follows in the original Romany :

"Charlotta se miro nav,
Shom a puro Purun;
My romado was Jack,
The kuring Vardomescro.

"Mukkede me for a lubbeny
Who chored a ränis kissi;
Yuv pende twas yuv so lelde
And so was bitchadé pädél."

ENGLISH.

"Charlotte Cooper is my name,
I am a real old Lee;
My husband was Jack Cooper,
The fighting Romany.

"He left me for a shameful girl
Who stole a purse; while he
Took all the blame and all the shame
And went beyond the sea."

Apropos of the gypsies, I observe that my assertion that the word *clim-kan*, Zingan or Zingari is not of Greek origin, as Miklasich asserts, but Indian, has been vigorously opposed. I have recently ascertained from "*Ramasee-ana*," that the Thugs of India, who were a branch of Hindoo gypsydom, designed themselves as Chingari and Chingani. I am indebted for this observation to Mrs. Elizabeth Robins Pennell.

In connection with what I have said of Charlotte Cooper, something remains to be said of the artist who painted her portrait. I trust that the reader will here pardon a slight digression illustrating the saying that "the world is not as large as it seems to be." Miss Eliza Leslie, the elder sister of Charles, was one of the intimates of my youth, and I was accustomed to hear from her many anecdotes of her brother. Tom Taylor, who edited his "Life and Letters" (many of which were addressed to Eliza), was also a friend of mine. While a young man he, too, had been *afri-ondo*, or gypsy-struck, and had made a MS.

vocabulary of their language, which he permitted me to use, and from which I obtained several words new to me. I have not the least doubt that he too had known Charlotte, as it would be rather a wonder if he had not. Leslie belonged to a school, now growing rare in these days of impressionism, of men who were dramatic artists on canvas. The stage, with all its accessories of dress and attitude, influenced him from childhood, as it did many of his contemporaries, but none so much as himself. There are two ways of using the word "theatrical," and Leslie's was entirely of the best. We may admit that, as, for example, in "The Duchess" and "Sancho or the Rivals," there was much use of dress and "properties," but it was well chosen and finely adapted; in "The Girl with the Locket" — which I cite at random — there is a studied *pose*, but it is well studied. There are artists at the present day who blame this *pose*, yet who with all their naturalism produce nothing which will seem any more natural to the next

generation, while it is certain that they create nothing as beautiful or as deserving to be called *art*. Leslie appears to have been himself a little "affected unto" the Romany, as is shown by his "Sir Roger de Coverly among the Gypsies" and by the truthfulness with which he has caught their expression. There are many portraits of these people by great artists in which there is nothing to really distinguish them from Italians, and I have seen "A Gypsy Family" painted entirely after Jewish models. Morland, as might have been expected, was a man who could set forth the *kālo foki*, or dark people, to absolute perfection. I have seen a picture of his, entitled simply "A Cattle Dealer," in which the expression of the half-blood Romany was given with wonderful accuracy. A few years ago there was a "M'liss" in the annual exhibition of the Royal Academy which was apparently after a gypsy model, and in which, by chance or truth, the expression was to perfection Romany.

Charles G. Leland.

NOTE. Mr. Leland's very interesting article entitled "Visiting the Gypsies," in *THE CENTURY* for April, 1883, led me to make some inquiries respecting Charlotte Cooper. A few days ago business led me to Limehouse, not far from the scene of the opening chapters of "Our Mutual Friend," and to my surprise, in a most singular situation, I discovered some trace of Charlotte. In a yard, to which access is had by going through a public-house, the gate of the yard being bolted and barred, as if to withstand a siege, I found a gypsy van. It was occupied, at the time of my visit, by a woman and three children, neither of whom bore the slightest physical resemblance to the "tribe," but one could not

be long in their company without discovering true traits of the "wanderers." A happy thought occurred that I might find some clue to Charlotte, so I casually mentioned her name. The woman at once said: "We called her Clementina. Her husband was transported to Western Australia. After some time he wrote home to say that if she were yet single she was not to remain so, as he did not see any chance of ever coming home. She did not follow his advice, but remained single till her death, which took place a few years ago. There are some of her people now on Wandsworth Flats (one of the London suburbs), if you go there you are sure to find them."

SOUTH HACKNEY, LONDON, April 18, 1883.

T. E. KERRIGAN.



A LIGHTNING FLASH.

THAT brief, wild flash, it seems to me,
Was some unmeasurable power,
Some devastating force set free
In a sublime, chaotic hour —

A force beyond our groping thought,
Beyond our will and knowledge; yet
I know that fearless men have caught
The lightning of the heavens and set

Its fire within their eager hands,
Shaped it and used it to their need,
As, by their labor, in our lands
The flower takes beauty from the seed;

I know that every drop of dew
That hangs on purple lilac-bells,
Or on the ever-greening yew,
Holds locked in its transparent cells

A fire as fierce and strong and loud
As that which shoots in jagged lines
Out of a summer thunder-cloud
And scars the lofty trunks of pines.

George Edgar Montgomery.