

IN THE GIPSY HAUNTS.

GOOD POINTS IN THE CHARACTER OF A SINGULAR PEOPLE.

The Wanderers, with All Their Faults Have Strong Virtues—They are the Peers of Others in Things Tender and True—Some of Their Odd Habits.

LONDON, Oct. 31.—To me there is something inexpressibly pathetic in the unvarying good humor and kind heartedness of English Gypsies when their hard and bitter, though self-chosen, mode of life is considered. And this is nowhere on earth made so plain and emphatic as when you find them in and about London, all the brightness of the summer roads and lanes but a memory, and the cruel deprivations of winter—generally a winter's battle for existence with a million other lowly—staring them squarely in their stoical faces.

Crafty, wary, hard, unworthy vagabond though you deem him, as he confronts you and mankind in this battle for life and those he loves, he truly has another side, a cherry, good and manly one, too, that, without one iota of the prompting to which all modern society stands indebted, often glows with kindness, generosity, helpfulness, good cheer, and a spirit of positive loveliness.

An ugly word is never heard in a Gypsy camp or band. A selfish act is never seen. The eternal goading of a mean woman, the brutal obscenity of a bad man, the hateful jealousies of neighbors, the contemptible rivalries of pretended friends, each and all are as unknown as poison in the pure air of heaven they breathe in tent or upon the road.

There is a quality of sincerity and tenderness in their doings with each other that is ever simple, childlike and beautiful. Their mirth, merriment and jollity are all considerate. Railery is tolerant; wit never a murderous weapon. With them good cheer is seldom license; merry-making leaves little sting; liberty never knows leanness.

Ignorant as they may be of your books; obstinately as they refuse the "civilization" of which we boast; secretly proud as they are of the ostracism which brands them as an outlaw race; heathenish as you must consistently call them because they hold your creeds in contempt; they are yet more than the peers of any living people in everything tender and true and loyal growing into and out of the domestic relation and in all that which yields, without law or force, and as it unconsciously, the helpful goodness which ever prompts and always exceeds exact justice to one's fellows.

There are undoubtedly hundreds of localities which may be termed "Gipsy ground" in London and its far-reaching suburbs. I have visited nearly three score of these places within the past few years. In some instances they are in the most densely and forlornly populated sections of the metropolis. Here in perhaps the stable yard of some ancient historic inn, among the sheds and outbuildings of an abandoned warehouse or manufactory, in the mouldy, cobwebbed precincts of some habitation which has got into chancery and inevitable decay, and even in Whitechapel purlieus, and upon the roofs of houses at the edge of the huge masonry sustaining some of the railways, many of which pass out of the city above instead of through or beneath it, will be found single families or little communities of the Romany folk. All are working in their way as if for dear life to sustain life until the springtime exodus shall free them from their hateful imprisonment; and contrary to general belief, or what any one may say none of them are idle.

Following up the trail and traits of Gypsies while in their London winter quarters, brought me originally among the almost as curious costermonger folk; and I found that there were hundreds of Gipsy families owning kindred ties to costers who sought quarters among this class and at once fell into their manner of work and ways. Acquaintance and confidence soon brought me to many of these almost unknown Gipsy and coster communities in the very heart of London.

Most of the Gypsies live from a halt a dozen to a score in a room. They possess the scantiest array of household utensils. Their native ability to make the most of little enables them to patch up a few seats and they sleep comfortably and cheerily packed together like herrings. Some of their abodes are wretched beyond description to one who is unable to comprehend their own gladness at getting on at all. They work hard and long, being first at the great markets and last to leave the streets. Handbarrows are used by most of these. The mother, father and grown sons and daughters all share in the severe work of pushing the barrow or cart. Many will cover twenty and thirty miles a day in their rounds.

The little folks left at home work on baskets, color leaves and wild grasses of which they have brought in a supply of material from their summer wanderings, and which are sold to the lowly for mantel ornaments, or whittle out skewers for meat stalls. All do something and earn something. If there is a loss in one day's trade they work the harder the next. All thus keep from starvation, which is more than many who are not heathens can do in London; and some even get through the hard, wet, foggy, sleety, bone-wringing winter with their lives and a few shillings to the good.

A few who huddle in these congested districts have the regulation coster cart and the helpful donkey, and most curious quarters are often found for both Gypsies and donkey. Last winter, while hunting this bit of darkest London I got on very good terms with a Gipsy family who had lost their donkey cart, and nearly their donkey, through faithful collision with a Hammersmith bus. It was early in the winter and the loss pretty nearly meant starvation. There are scores of dealers in costers' carts and barrows in London where a cart or barrow can be hired, though at ruinous rates, or purchased on weekly payments. At one of these I made a first payment of ten shillings on a donkey cart in behalf of the Gipsy family, became surety for the remainder, and the incident furnished to me thereafter open sesame to the innermost recesses of Leather Lane.

It was in one of these innermost recesses that my Gipsy friends had their habitation, and it is certain that a no more

curious dwelling place and disposition of home belongings were ever seen. About half way from Fournival's Inn to Theobald's Row a narrow, dingy court, above which a strip of sky could barely be seen, wriggled an hundred feet or more to the east. To the right and left the ramshackle yet stout old house fronts seemed pitching at each other threateningly. From the noisome pavement to the strip of sky it seemed as though hundreds of humans were constantly in a state of existence on trembling balconies and tottering window-sills. The density of half fed life behind these raven like beings clinging to the outer walls must have been terrible.

The dark court narrowed at the end coming to a sudden stop against a black dead wall, which rose thirty or forty feet above the pavement as if to shut out the desperate poverty of Leather Lane from some better enclosure. Here at the end of this court against the dead wall my Gipsy friends had practically encamped by a system of more than partial suspension. Some twenty-five feet from the ground a mass of patched bits of sail cloth and blankets formed the only roof. Ingeniously braced bits of wood—flotsam and jetsam from the markets and the Thames—made three intervening stories, or floors, between the flapping roof and the pavement of the court, all of which were open to the weather and Leather Lane way, save where rags and other seive-like blankets and sail cloth answered the place of curtaining.

These stories or floors are about six feet square, except the lower or pavement story which was as long as the prowess of the Gypsies could make it against the hordes of the stifling court. An aperture had been made in the dead wall which, with a few bricks and a little mud mortar, provided a capital chimney piece. The draught was perfect. There was a good deal of comfort, too, about this extraordinary fireside. The cart was "whortled," that is, turned bottomside upwards for a table. A shell-like piece of timber had been fastened against one side wall for a lounging bunk and bench. A ladder ran from this along the wall to the second story where cooking utensils and food were kept.

But the most curious of all was the nightly disposition of donkey, what was left over from the day's hawking and the Gipsy family itself. Immediately on arrival, the donkey was hauled up by ropes and tackle into a little cage which constituted the third story under the sail cloth roof. Such vegetables as were left that the family did not use were stored on a shelf alongside the donkey; and on retiring for the night the family, comprising eleven grown people and children, ascended into the second story loft, and, in a manner, fished all movable belongings up after them.

"Yes," admiringly said old man Lovell, the head of this Gipsy house, after I had just witnessed the sprawling donkey hoisted into his cage for his rest and provenience. "Hus jess hall goes hup inter, hup 'ole by night, an' pulls the 'ole hup arter hus!"

The East end district locally called "The Mint," where London's ancient mint was located, is another favorite haunt of Gypsies in winter. From Lant street in the Borough to Blackfriars Road are more than 100 almost impenetrable lanes and closes. This region was the former haunt and home of Jack Shephard and Jonathan Wild, and from the same locality have sprung many of the noted prize fighters of our time. Billingsgate porters, the most jaunty and rollicking of all London costermongers, and a class of Gypsies who are noted for their stic prowess, are the sole inhabitants. Into this savory region one must come well introduced; but when once known as a true friend of any inhabitant, progress through the quarter is attended often with even embarrassing greetings and familiarities.

I found the Gypsies of this locality, who number perhaps 50 families, which means fully 500 souls, chiefly those who ply their various vocations at country fairs and all huge gatherings, such as the Derby, and London holiday "outings" at Epping Forest and the like. They are a portion of that vast horde of least winsome but most picturesque English Gypsies who, casually seen, nearest represent the fakirs of our American country fairs, our circus followers and the bawling nickel-winners of such summer and seaside resorts as Coney Island and Nantasket. The "Punch and Judy" shows are getting into their hands. They are beginning to exhibit freaks and control the merry-go-rounds. All the fruit and nut stands at fairs are now in their hands; and the cocoanut (here called "cokernut") ranges, where a nut can occasionally be knocked from a deceptively built tier at a penny "a shy," one of the most popular forms of initiatory gambling sports at all fairs and outing gatherings in England, are all owned by these cunning Gypsies. Their fists are as ready as their tongues, and their women folk are the most brazenly insistent and picturesquely attired fortune-tellers in all the world.

But the genuine *drom rajahs* or Gypsies of the road whose vocations of today are really honorable, thrifty and distinguished by hard work and fair dealing, though still full of genuine Gipsy traits and bearing in a mild form the Gipsy taint of dicker and dukking (fortune-telling), are the Gypsies who, in their enforced winter London tarrying, retain most the manner of the summer road life. I should think there could be found from 10,000 to 20,000 of these in the suburbs of London, from November until March. These are entirely exclusive of several thousand more who never leave London, but travel in endless circles about the outer edges of the great city, interminable Bedouins at all outing gatherings; peas and strawberry pickers and lavender gatherers in the summer, hoppers in the autumn, and scavengers in general the remainder of the year. They camp where they work, and though often reduced to abject wretchedness, are a kindly and cheery set of men and women.

The road Gypsies generally retain and occupy their vans, carts and tents. Out Southwark way, over in Surry are large communities. Many may be found roundabout Esher and Woking. The Chelsea marshes are another winter haunt; while Epping forest, depths and edges, are full of them. With these summer thrift is never exchanged for winter idleness. Many of the stout gipsy lads get employment in gentlemen's and public markets. The men haunt the horse markets and weekly suburban markets and buy, sell and trade horses and donkeys. Many of the women rove about the poorer districts of the city telling fortunes for whatever

they can get. Those too old for these jaunts mind the pots, kettles and little ones against the wanderers' nightly return. Old men and lads and lasses remaining at home are never idle. Rude mats, market baskets, stable and street brushes, by the hundreds of thousands, are their annual handiwork, and the millions of skewers in use at the London meat-stalls are every one whittled out by busy Gipsy hands.

EDGAR L. WAKEMAN.

TO REAT THE EIFFEL TOWER.

An English Structure That Is to be Twelve Hundred Feet in Height.

The foundations of Sir Edward Watkin's new Tower of London have been completed. They occupy four acres in a pleasure park of 120 acres between Willesden and Harrow. They consist of immense blocks of concrete. The nature of the ground where the tower is to be constructed is so sloping and uneven, that while one set of footings appears about five feet above the surface, another is seven feet below, a third five feet below, and the fourth at least twenty feet below the surface. These foundations go down nearly twenty feet and should be capable of bearing any weight that could be placed upon them. They have cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

Some idea of the magnitude of the whole undertaking may be gathered from the statement that the Eiffel Tower, which is to be so far surpassed in size by the English tower, was made of 7,500 tons of steel and iron, consisting of 12,000 specially designed pieces, fastened together with 2,500,000 rivets. The English tower is to be 150 feet higher than the French wonder, and the latter can be seen at a distance of seventy-five miles. The English structure will also be on higher ground. On the top of the English tower there will be an observatory and rooms for scientific experiment, which are likely to be of great value.

The plan provides for a large landing stage that will accommodate 20,000 people. This landing stage will contain a large dancing room and several shops, and will have refreshment bars all round. Underneath will be rooms for stores and other purposes, while at the top there will be a number of small rooms, which might be used as private dining rooms. Half way up will be another landing stage, and arrangements have been made in the plans for lifting to the top of the tower double the number of people that M. Eiffel can carry up his structure. It is estimated that the tower can be constructed in twelve months up to the first floor, and that the whole can be completed in eighteen months.

Persons who have seen other tall buildings of the world may gain some conception of the height of Sir Edward's 1,200-foot tower by bearing in mind that Notre Dame in Paris is but 217 feet high; St. Peter's, Rome, 433 feet; the Washington Monument, 554 feet, the Great Pyramid of Egypt, 479 feet, Rouen Cathedral, 492 feet; Strasburg Cathedral, 467 feet; Invalides, in Paris, 345 feet; Cologne Cathedral, 521 feet, and the Pantheon, in Paris, 279 feet.

The pleasure grounds round the tower will be the most extensive place of amusement in the world. Advantage has been taken of the River Brent, running through the estate, to make an ornamental lake, covering an area of five acres. This is near the main entrance. In the summer it will be used for boating, and in the winter for curling and rinking. At one end of the lake is a picturesque waterfall, by means of which the Brent, after circling several islands, releases itself, and pursues a winding course through the park and onward till it joins the water from the Welsh Harp, Hendon, afterwards falling into the Thames at Brentford.

A sufficient quantity of water is forced up hill from the lake by a powerful ram to form a reservoir, which supplies a very large ornamental fountain, similar to that at the Crystal Palace. This fountain has been completed. Close by is a cricket ground of seven acres. The whole area has been levelled, well turfed, and efficiently drained. On higher ground workmen are now laying out winter gardens, in the large pavilion of which entertainments are to be given. A band stand is also to be provided.

The whole 120 acres will be opened to the public early next spring, although the tower will not be completed until ten or twelve months later.—N. Y. Sun.

Victor Hugo at Work.

Victor Hugo always wrote standing at a high desk, especially constructed for him, throwing off sheet after sheet as fast as he filled it, till he would be quite snowed up in leaves of foolscap. He often rose in the middle of the night to note down an idea or a verse. He got up for the day usually at six o'clock, and would devote from six to eight hours per diem to his work. He made but few corrections, his poems being thought out complete in his brain before he put pen to paper. It is a well-known fact that he indulged in the arduous task of composition while traversing the streets of Paris on the top of an omnibus. When working out some great conception he would spend hours in this way.

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The Happy Little Cripple.

I'm thist a little crippled boy, an' never goin' to grow An' git a great big man at all—'cause Aunt told me so. When I was thist a buby onct, I falled out of the bed An' got "The Curvature of the Spine"—'at's what the Doctor said. I never had no Mother nen—fer my Pa runned away An' dassn't come back here no more—'cause he was drunk one day. An' stabbed a man in tish-ere town, an' couldn't pay his fine! An' my Ma he died—an' I got "Curvature of the Spine!"

I'm nine years old! An' you can't guess how much I weigh, I bet! Last birthday I weighed thirty-three!—An' I weigh thirty yet! I'm awful little for my size—I'm purt' nigh littler 'an Some babies is!—an' abhors all caus me "The Little Man!" An' Doc he laughed one time an' said: "I spect, first thing you know, You'll have a little spike-tail coat an' travel with a show!" An' nen I laughed—till I looked round an' Aunt was a cryin'—'cause I got "Curvature of the Spine!"

I set—while Aunt's washin'—on my little long leg stool, An' watch the little boys an' girls a skippin' by to school; An' I peck on the winder, an' holler out an' say: "Who wants to fight The Little Man 'at dares you all today?" An' nen the boys climb on the fence, an' little girls peeks through, An' they all says: "Cause you're so big, you think we're 'leard o' you!" An' nen they yell, an' shake their fists at me, like I shake mine— They're thist in fun, you know, 'cause it got "Curvature of the Spine!"

At evenin', when the Ironin's done, an' Aunt's fixed the fire, An' filled an' lit the lamp, an' trimmed the wick an' turned it higher, An' fetched the wood all in fer night, an' locked the kitchen door, An' stuffed the ole crack where the wind blows in up through the floor— She sets the kittle on the coals, an' biles an' makes the tea, An' fries the liver an' the mush, an' cooks a egg fer me; An' sometimes—when I ough so hard—her elder-berry wine Don't go so bad fer little boys with "Curvature of the Spine!"

But Aunt's all so childish-like on my account, you see, I'm 'fraid she'll be took down—an' 'at's what bothers me! 'Cause ef my good ole Aunt ever would git sick an' die, I don't know what she'd do in Heaven—till I come, by an' by; Fer she's so used to all my an' ever'thing, you know, An' no one there like me, to nurse an' worry over so! 'Cause all the little children there's so straight an' strong, They's nary angel 'bout the place with "Curvature of the Spine!"

—Jas. Whitcomb Riley.

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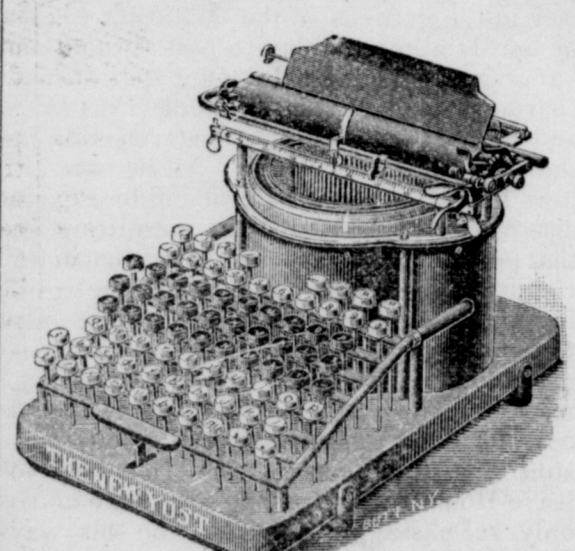
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