

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA  
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY  
CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
LIBRARY

---

CLASS 12106

CALL No 397. B6

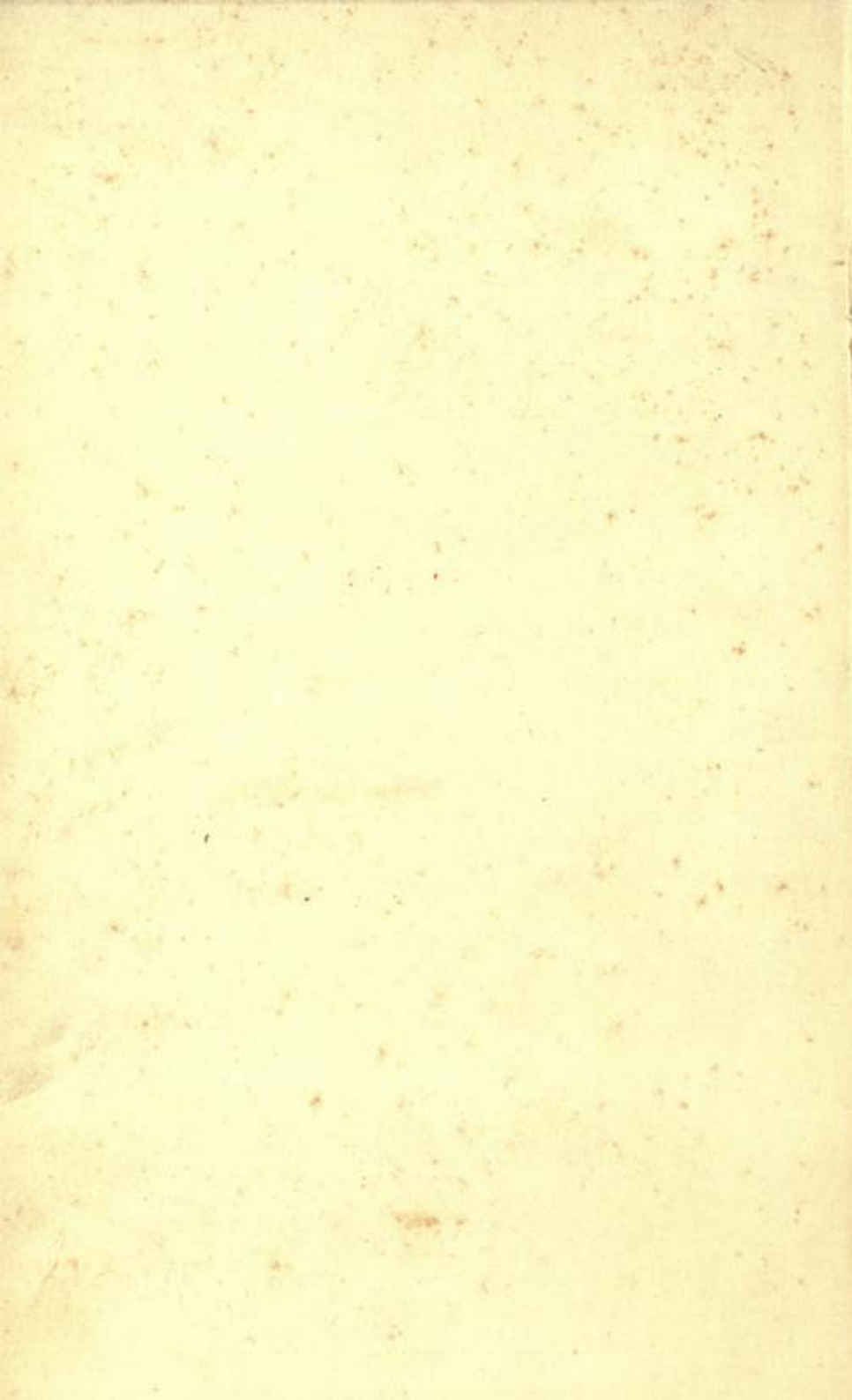
D.G.A. 79.





# GYPSIES





# GYPSIES

*Their Life and their Customs*

by

MARTIN BLOCK

*Translated by*

BARBARA KUCZYNSKI AND  
DUNCAN TAYLOR

*With 79 half-tone Illustrations*

12106



397

Blo



METHUEN & CO. LTD. LONDON

36 Essex Street, Strand, W.C.2

*First published in Germany under the title  
"Zigeuner"  
This Translation first published in 1938*

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
LIBRARY, NEW DELHI.

Acc. No.....12106.....  
Date.....28-11-61.....  
Call No.....397/Bla.....

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Amrit Books B-9/61- 21-11-35

## CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
I GYPSIES IN THE NEWS	I
II GYPSIES AT CLOSE QUARTERS	16
III THEIR ORIGIN	32
IV NAMES	48
V RECORDS	55
VI NUMBERS	70
VII GYPSY GESTURE	75
VIII GYPSY GREETING	84
IX RACE	89
X HOSPITALITY	100
XI FOOD	102
XII LIFE IN THE OPEN	115
XIII CLOTHES	128
XIV MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD	137
XV TRIBAL ORGANIZATION	164
XVI BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH	178
XVII MEDICINE	201
XVIII NEWS, AND THE LANGUAGE OF SIGNS	211
XIX MUSIC	219
XX DANCES	229
XXI RELIGION	234
XXII CONCLUSION	246





## ILLUSTRATIONS

*Between Pages 24 and 25*

1. Midday in a camp of Rumanian gypsies
2. A gypsy mother cracking lice
3. Derby Day
4. A stout gypsy woman causes her neighbours some amusement
5. The evening meal inside the tent
6. Young girls and engaged couples visit Mme. Zarechu
7. Spanish gypsies at their toilet
8. German gypsy returning with her son from a foraging expedition
9. A gypsy bear-leader from Rumania with his staff and leather pouch
10. Two male nomad gypsies encountered near Craiova in Rumania
11. Other members of the same group
12. A Jugoslavian gypsy
13. Gypsy children on a road in the Pyrenees
14. A typical German gypsy child
15. Gypsy children in Rumania
16. Children of Turkish gypsies from Turnu-Măgurele (Rumania)
17. Russian gypsies embroidering a piece of material which will be made into a dress
18. Serbian gypsies with their children
19. A typical young German gypsy

## *Gypsies*

20. Kalo Hâdâri with his son and daughter-in-law
21. Smaranda with her sisters and cousin
22. A gypsy camp in the Pyrenees
23. On the edge of a wood in East Prussia
24. Caravans on an odd building lot

### *Between Pages 136 and 137*

25. Even in America the tents retain their usual characteristics
26. Few European gypsies have taken to cars
27. The gypsy quarter in Constantinople
28. A louse-ridden group on the outskirts of Bucharest
29. Nomad gypsies often camp in clay pits
30. A Rumanian tinker and some of his family in front of the tent which houses them throughout the year
31. Turkish gypsies and their oven
32. The two types of tent used by Turkish gypsies
33. Tents and household chattels are packed first
34. Turkish gypsies about to move off from their camp
35. After its long journey this party has now to find a camping-ground
36. The gypsies of Transylvania meet every year at the horse-fair in Hermannstadt
37. Sieve-making gypsies near Grojdibod on the Danube
38. The 'Cositorari' (Rumanian Turkish-speaking tinkers) are the richest and cleanest of all gypsies
39. Quiet moment in a camp of German gypsies
40. The shape of these tents proclaims their owners as wandering blacksmiths, locksmiths or bear-leaders
41. Bear-leading gypsies near Filiași in Rumania
42. Repairing a tent
43. The gypsy who is wrapped in a rug recently gave birth to a child

## *Illustrations*

44. An old gypsy locksmith or bear-leader from Rumania
45. At the Hermannstadt horse-fair this chief would allow only himself to be photographed in company with his wife and his horse, and exacted triple payment on this ground
46. Wandering gypsy smiths at work in Hungary
47. A copper-smith whose pock-marked face makes him look more wicked than in fact he is
48. A half-settled gypsy smith at work
49. Two families of comb-makers on the outskirts of Ploesti in Rumania
50. Peddling hats on the bridge over the Guadalquivir

### *Between Pages 200 and 201*

51. In south-eastern Europe bear-leading gypsies form a special tribe, whose nearest relatives are the locksmiths
52. On the outskirts of Bucharest there is a whole settlement of Hungarian gypsies
53. Among other things Rumanian gypsies also make bricks
54. A horse-dealer recounts his experiences on returning from a fair
55. Among the settled gypsies of Rumania are some who manufacture mats, using rushes and a primitive type of frame
56. A still from the film *Melodie des Herzens* (Music of the Heart)
57. A dancing lesson in progress at Craiova (Rumania)
58. Berlin gypsies accompany a dance by one of their number
59. Among gypsies the ancient Paparuda or rain dance is still practised



## *Gypsies*

60. It is hoped that just as the water splashes over the dancers, so the heavens will open and pour down the longed-for rain to ripen the crops
61. Two gypsy-like figures
62. The primitive lathe on which the Rudari women of Rumania turn spindles, handles, and sticks
63. Bowls, plates, axles, &c. are still turned on this primitive machine
64. A strange position of rest adopted by an elderly Rumanian Rudar
65. A wooden bowl in the making
66. A Rudari woman carves spoons of various shapes and sizes
67. A gypsy woman returning to her camp from a village
68. Rudari women at the market in Bucharest
69. At Whitsun Rumanian gypsies dance the Rumanian Caluș, originally an ecstatic dance
70. Another scene from the Caluș
71. The school for gypsies at Uzhhorod in the Carpathians
72. The open-air music school in Bucharest
73. The younger members of a gypsy colony in Berlin set about their homework in a not very convenient environment
74. An open-air service for gypsy children in Berlin
75. The Waywode of all Rumanian gypsies, G. Niculescu, dedicates a flag at their congress
76. Tent-dwelling nomad gypsies preserve the traditional meeting of elders
77. A congress called at Bucharest in 1935 to further unity, patriotism, and the Orthodox Faith among gypsies
78. A gypsy funeral
79. Mourners at the funeral of the daughter of the gypsy chief Karpath at Mitcham

HAI MUKHLEOM LEN OTHE KAI AVILEOM  
THAI MOTHODEOM TUMARE RAIMASKE

*. . . and I have left them in the place,  
whence I have come, that I might tell you this.*





# I

## GYPSIES IN THE NEWS

Gypsies ! Every one has seen them at one time or another, with their ragged clothes, their fierce, blazing eyes, their pitch-black hair and bronzed skin. They have lived among us for centuries. Almost every civilized country knows them. Yet they have remained a primitive people. No form of civilization has been able to alter their habits. An impetuous longing for the nomad life possesses them. No one can stop their passage from one land to another, though according to some prophecies they ought to have died out long ago. A gypsy who does not keep on the move is not a gypsy.

Accounts of the first appearance of gypsies in Europe correspond almost exactly with the descriptions published to-day, when fresh bands appear from south-eastern Europe on the borders of Silesia. Their habits are the same whether they happen to be living in Spain, England, Germany, Hungary or Rumania. It is only in their outward appearance that they differ from one another, since they dress

## *Gypsies*

in the cast-off clothes of the people among whom they happen to be living. Their essential character has remained unaffected either by their surroundings or by the age in which they live.

Gypsies are different from us. One realizes this as soon as one meets them. The awe which former centuries felt for a people whom they considered to be in league with the devil may be a thing of the past ; but somehow all of us experience an involuntary feeling of distrust or repulsion in their presence. It is difficult to find a reason for this. Some think they possess supernatural powers ; others are afraid of their curse or their lice ; but most people avoid them owing to a dislike of being robbed by acknowledged masters of the art. In some places gates are bolted and doors locked whenever gypsies are sighted or reported to be in the neighbourhood. The peasant woman wisely puts the broom, which all gypsies fear, behind her door, so as to be effectively defended against the most importunate of beggars ; for owing to some superstition they will fly for their lives at the sight of a broom.

In conversation with individual gypsies this atmosphere of mystery soon disappears and one realizes that when certain moral failings have been overlooked, they are not an essentially evil people and can talk quite reasonably. It is surprising when one learns that their needs are the same as ours, and

## *Gypsies in the News*

that they approach life's problems with an entirely open mind. It is equally surprising when one discovers their extraordinarily active intellectual life. A conversation soon reveals the points which we have in common with them. One accepts the fact that they are rather noisy and, according to our standards, dirty, because one has never been accustomed to anything else when dealing with them. But the feeling of incompatibility persists. However intimate the contact has been, it is impossible to rid oneself of the impression that there is something which divides them from us.

A country whose culture is advancing farther and farther from the primitive stage, naturally regards as something foreign to itself a minority which persists in maintaining its primitive state in the face of all civilizing influences. Only where, as in eastern and south-eastern Europe, the life of the more civilized people still preserves its natural harmony, and where, owing to the close relationship of the individual with the soil, primitive ideas still persist, does the gypsy feel more at home. In such countries his relations with the native population are quite different. They allow him to grow and prosper according to his own ideas. He does not feel himself a foreigner. He is part of a minority, but it is a minority which 'belongs'. Nevertheless, in spite of this continuous association with the natives of his adopted country it is very seldom that he



## *Gypsies*

becomes completely assimilated. No one can explain this. The preservation of his independence is a gypsy instinct. It is this independence which gives gypsies their high 'curiosity value' among civilized people. Their peculiar movements, their odd-sounding language and their way of living all play a part in making them seem interesting. There is an atmosphere of mystery abroad when one approaches them to learn the future.

The strength of the impression made by the gypsy camp on the inhabitants of central and western Europe can be judged by the numerous paintings, lithographs, poems and pieces of music which have it as their subject. But these also show how much of our own culture we have read into that of the gypsies. Their apparently untrammelled primitive life made a special appeal to people of romantic temperament. Their happy-go-lucky existence, which, owing to a misconception about the original home of the gypsies, is now known as 'Bohemian', was the ideal of a generation of artists, who have since been frowned upon. The nineteenth century made this fundamentally inartistic people the favourite subject of its illustrated papers. To-day hardly a year passes without some magazine publishing an article on the extraordinary phenomenon of their survival in the midst of our modern civilization. It is noticeable too that these often hurriedly composed articles never get out of date, nor seem



## *Gypsies in the News*

to lose their hold upon the reading public, even though the same old stories keep appearing in a new form with the very rare addition of some original observation. It is the personal experiences of the author and the attitude of his particular generation towards gypsies which gives each work its peculiar appeal. It would be an interesting study to examine all the painting, writing and music of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries which has to do with gypsies, in order to find out how far our attitude towards them has altered during that period. Since the object of study has remained unchanged throughout, the comparison might lead to some interesting conclusions about fluctuations of taste in ourselves.

What did earlier generations think of gypsies? What do we think now of the observable aspects of their life?

Look at the papers and collect any announcements which have to do with gypsies. These concentrate almost exclusively on their less attractive side—the squalor in the midst of which they live or the atmosphere of secrecy which surrounds them, and appear in dozens towards the beginning of winter. Gypsies, who never lay in any winter stores, come up against the law more frequently than usual during a period of severe cold. Soon one is reading that gypsies have been making use of the opportunities afforded by fortune-telling,

## *Gypsies*

for stealing from their clients ; that gypsies have defrauded some simpleton with a tale of buried treasure ; that they have raided a lonely house. During spring and autumn, especially in the West German press, it will be announced that the authorities have succeeded in turning back a large group who wanted to move from Holland into Belgium or vice versa, or from Belgium into Germany. At another time their attempt to elude the frontier guard will have succeeded. There have been occasions when a group has had to spend some time on a frontier bridge before being able to proceed. It would be ordered to leave by the officials of one country and refused admittance by those of the other. Imprisoned between the rival companies of gendarmerie, the group of gypsies would have to remain in this desperate position until the dictates of reason or pity prevailed in the hearts of their tormentors, one of whom would unobtrusively close the door of his country upon the unwelcome guests while the other graciously consented to receive them.

In January 1934, sixty-eight gypsies who had moved from Spain across France, Belgium, and Germany got into the news through wanting to cross the Danish border by the last train at night via Padburg, in order to continue their journey to Norway. Most of them had Norwegian passports ; their tickets were made out for Göteborg and paid



## *Gypsies in the News*

for. But the unsympathetic Danish police refused admittance to the whole group, which was sent back under guard to Altona and detained there for some time. Their number was now reduced to sixty-four, four having made good their escape in the interval. Seventeen men, seventeen women and thirty children must somehow have reached their destination in the end. If they did not, they cannot have been real gypsies.

From Poland, Yugo-Slavia, and Rumania comes news that some tent-dwelling gypsies have been frozen to death. Survivors who managed to keep their own fire alight, or peasants living in the neighbourhood have found the bodies, some with children still pressed against their breasts in the effort to keep them warm. No inquiry is made. The corpses are buried without ceremony. A passing priest pronounces a blessing. But when a family fails to appear at the next gypsy gathering, the head of the tribe knows that something must have happened.

During 1929 at a village on the river Drau in Yugo-Slavia about fifty gypsies, who for some reason were compelled to move from their winter quarters in a body, at a time of year when they usually abandon their nomad habits, had to cross the river, which was frozen over. When they were half-way across, the ice gave way under their weight and the whole group with its carts and horses crashed through into the river.

## *Gypsies*

Unless one has seen gypsy life at close quarters it is impossible to realize how much this people endures without complaint on its endless wanderings. Gypsies accept their fate philosophically. They have complete confidence in nature and in their lucky star.

Disasters like these have been occurring for centuries in Europe without the gypsies' taking any steps to reduce either their number or their severity. The fact is typical of the gypsy attitude towards life.

In the middle of January 1936 it was announced in the press that gypsies had been responsible for currency smuggling on a large scale. Sixteen gypsies were arrested in Frankfurt. Their caravans were searched and a quantity of gold was found. They had pawned other valuables in the Rhineland. Their chief, Janos Korpatsch, who has 100 caravans under him, is considered a very rich man by his subjects, though this does not prevent his applying for relief from public funds. There are plenty of rich gypsies, but they hardly ever bank their money. It is mostly paper and they carry it with them.

Gypsies are easily excited ; one is always hearing of shooting and fighting amongst them. One of the combatants generally remains on the scene of the battle, while the wounded loser is removed by his relatives before the police arrives. A glance at a gypsy's face will immediately reveal traces of



## *Gypsies in the News*

knife or bullet wounds. Attacks on hostile camps or families resemble the cattle-raids of the Wild West in their suddenness and in the way they are kept secret. The police are never called and therefore never appear till the fight is over. They hardly ever succeed in learning the real cause of the quarrel ; when they do, it is generally owing to the presence of non-gypsy witnesses. These fights are private affairs which have nothing to do with outsiders.

In the past gypsies were often groundlessly accused of murder, arson, and black magic. It was not difficult to add cannibalism to the list of charges against them. The cry was raised again at the time of the Kaschauer case some years ago, and became general throughout Europe ; how much foundation there was for it remains to be seen. Kidnapping is generally attributed to gypsies, especially if there have been any in the neighbourhood of the crime. In most cases however the baselessness of the accusations both of kidnapping and of cannibalism finally becomes apparent.

The papers also try to provide us with a picture of the more pleasing characteristics of gypsy life. There is a tendency towards writing up the life of the gypsy family or the life of the gypsy tribe, the success of which is limited by the fact that the scenes depicted have generally been rigged for the benefit of the audience. The gypsy is sufficiently a child of the times to be able to tell quickly where



## *Gypsies*

the profit is to be made. Gypsy weddings are acted, with a young but already married couple in the principle parts. An announcement in the form of an invitation appears in the paper, sixpence entrance is charged and printed tickets are issued ; a reporter is sent who writes an article which he calls ' Romany Romance ' and which has little or nothing in common with a description of a real gypsy wedding.

A gypsy funeral, especially that of a chief, cannot happen so often, and is therefore more likely to be genuine when it does. No invitation is necessary. An event on that scale is its own announcement. A magnificently equipped procession passes through the town to the accompaniment of music and considerable noise. The most recent example was at Leipzig in 1920 at the funeral of a gypsy chief, whose tribe commissioned for him a tombstone with a horse carved in relief. It is noisy festivities like these, the important events in the external life of the gypsy, which the press takes up, while ignoring the quieter clan celebrations which take place every year. Such are the Spring Feasts and the Feast of Kettles which are generally celebrated in secret—that in spring to mark the parting of the various families from one another, that in autumn to celebrate their reunion after the summer's journeying.

It is then that gypsies appear again in the cities, behind high-built hoardings, through the cracks of

## *Gypsies in the News*

which the inquisitive peep in the hope of learning something of their private life. If one enters the enclosure one discovers between five and ten green or brown caravans on an odd building lot. Towards evening there is a good deal of activity. Women return with the profits of their rounds, part of which they have acquired honestly by the sale of lace, medical herbs and (strangely enough), sweet-smelling soap, part scrounged by begging. They may also have lightened the purses and assuaged the cares of a few inquisitive or jealous women by telling their fortunes. The men lead out their horses to water them or get them ready for the horse exchange ; others bring back a hedgehog for the pot. (The sudden disappearance of these animals must have puzzled many gardeners before now.) The children collect anything that will do for fuel from the streets. By the time darkness sets in the whole family has generally assembled. Gypsies are afraid of the night. The police order forbidding gypsies to leave their camping ground between twilight and dawn is really quite unnecessary where genuine gypsies are concerned, since the power of the 'mulos', the spirits of the dead, is greater than that of any police edict. The press, and in recent times the broadcasting of noises and descriptions direct from a gypsy camp, have provided us with a less romantic conception of gypsies than that to which the nineteenth century accustomed

## Gypsies

us. Rightly. For the romantic treatment fogs, instead of clarifying, our ideas. The gypsy remains the same smelly unwashed creature, despite the attempts of those who study him to make him appear dirtier or cleaner than in fact he is. Attempts to civilize or convert him are perennial, but the gypsy has remained exactly what he was at the time of his first appearance 500 years ago.

The fact that the subject catalogue of the British Museum contains over 6,000 references to gypsies, shows the extent to which both specialists and amateurs have been, and still are, interested in them. G. F. Black in his *Bibliography of the Gypsies* has collected all those works published up to about 1914, and A. German those published in Russian from 1780 to 1930. Probably no other race is so much written about. This is all the more astonishing when one considers that they contribute nothing to the advance of culture, have no history and take no measures for their own enlightenment. With a few unimportant exceptions all this literature is the work of non-gypsies. Quite apart from the fact that the average gypsy is illiterate, it is impossible to persuade him of the advantages which might result from his consenting to describe his way of living. He is quite clear in his own mind about what he is and can see no reason why any one else should enquire about him. Nor does he understand anybody making himself or his language



## *Gypsies in the News*

a subject of study. He creates for himself an atmosphere of suspicion, which, combined with his constant fear of the police, makes him dumb.

A much more important element in this closing of his inner self against the world is his fear of revealing secrets of his personal life to strangers. The supposed wishes of the spirits hold him back. Religion, morals, and customs are all taboo. Any one who speaks of them is no gypsy or ceases to be a gypsy when he does so. The avenging spirits deal with him. He believes that names, magic formulae, and ceremonies lose their effectiveness if he utters or describes them. It is not a question of legal penalties. Every gypsy carries in his heart the sanction which ensures reverence for morality and tradition. Even Engelbert Wittich, the one German gypsy who has taken to writing—and it is significant that he is only a half-gypsy—relates nothing that is not already known, in the book which he wrote at the request of the Mission and with their help. His statements are basically the same as those made by Liebich seventy years ago. The severity of gypsy law as regards these offences, is illustrated by the fact that at the beginning of the Great War a gypsy serving as a soldier was rewarded by the members of his tribe with a deep cut on the cheek for assisting an officer to compose a dictionary of the gypsy language. Incidentally, I have found this feeling for the close observance



## *Gypsies*

of the moral code less emphasized among the gypsies who have been settled for many years in Germany, than amongst those on the Balkan peninsula, and particularly in Rumania.

Every gypsy notices when someone approaches him sympathetically. He may even consider adopting such a person into his tribe, because he knows that the unwritten law of the gypsies is its own defence against violation. But anyone who does not approach him tactfully and does not respect his code, who laughs at him or abuses his confidence, is met with fists and clubs and is lucky if he escapes severer penalties.

It may seem paradoxical but should be obvious from the above, that a gypsy himself is not in a position to familiarize us with the peculiarities of his people. His business is living, not explaining life. His way of thinking and ours are worlds apart. He cannot understand our mentality, though this does not handicap his ability to profit by it, as anybody who has been cheated by a fortune-teller knows. He possesses instincts which our forefathers possessed, but which we have lost in the course of our development. He is never tormented by inability to make decisions, nor by doubts upon fundamental questions. For him things are so, simply because they are so. If you ask him why he does something in a particular way, or why a custom is as it is, he will only answer, 'well,

## *Gypsies in the News*

that's the way our fathers did it '. It is the answer of a child, and the gypsy is a child in such matters. His language is no more developed than his mental processes. Clearly he feels as deeply as we do, perhaps more deeply, but he possesses no adequate vehicle for the expression of his feelings. He cannot reveal and explain them to the outside world. For this reason, only a non-gypsy can interpret his life to the rest of the world, and even then the interpretation must necessarily be incomplete.

## II

### GYPSIES AT CLOSE QUARTERS

One can travel round the world and observe its various inhabitants without in any way subordinating one's own personality. But one cannot go amongst the gypsies as an impartial observer. To learn anything one must forget one's civilized self and become one of them. Otherwise the picture of these people as we see them, or rather would like to see them, becomes an impossible mixture which has no real existence but is only to be found in the mind of Western Europeans. It is a caricature of the gypsies, who would consider it an insult if they were able to understand it. The purely imaginary picture of the untrammelled freedom of these vagabonds, which the unpractised observer calls up for himself, would disappear at once if he could obtain a real insight into gypsy life. He becomes excited over imaginary scenes of gypsy sex life, dreams of a romantic unsettled existence, and is prepared to attribute to the gypsy the soul of a modern nomad who, tired of civilization, wishes to refresh himself by a return to the vitality of



## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

nature. All these are creations of the imagination, of which anyone who spends a single day with the gypsies can soon rid himself. One must overcome one's natural feelings of disgust and prudery, and attune oneself to their rough but warm-hearted approach.

The most successful observer is one who can put himself in the position of a child listening to other children, unprejudiced and free from the critical attitude, which immediately destroys the freshness of the impression and clouds the understanding. You must be absorbed in gypsy life in order to understand it. You must become a gypsy yourself.

Obviously not everyone can move unrecognized amongst this uncleanly people, who must not know who you are or what intentions you have. Even if you had the nerve or were sufficiently naïve to tell them what you were really after, they would never understand you, and would think you mad for giving up your civilized life in order to visit and study them. That is more than they can understand. Of course, if you mention money, that is another matter. Money and barter are two motives which they have no difficulty in understanding.

Who is willing to eat off a dirty plate by the side of people who are themselves coated with dirt? Whom does the mere thought of gypsies not start scratching all over his body? Who likes living, packed tight in one tent or caravan, with



## *Gypsies*

a crowd of small children whose noses run continuously? In such surroundings, who is willing to fish pieces of meat out of the common plate and eat them with apparent relish, unless he is compelled to do so? Who can drink milk mixed with the blood of a calving cow first thing in the morning to avoid offending his host by declining this delicacy? When there is roast hedgehog one has to think less about the hedgehog than the meat, in order to overcome one's disgust. With the best will in the world a thoroughly civilized European can hardly join in the cracking of lice with his teeth. To put it shortly—any one who wants to form a clear idea of what gypsy life is like must be an accomplished actor.

The advantages of thus freeing oneself from civilization can only be judged by one who has thrown off the traditional prejudices of our society and himself returned, if only for a short time, to 'nature'. His reward for denying himself the advantages of our civilization is that he obtains a view of human life in the raw, and an insight into the roots of a culture which results from the unity of a people with nature (though this is not to say that the process would not be pleasanter if the gypsies were cleaner).

I established friendly relations much quicker with German gypsies than with the heavily lice-ridden hordes of Rumania which still exist there in a

## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

half-wild state, as well as throughout the whole of south-eastern Europe, side by side with the more settled type. In these regions it is much harder to destroy their instinctive suspicion, which has become second nature with them owing to their position as pariahs, than in Germany, where it is much easier to return to civilization, since the lice are less numerous. The gypsy caravan is cleaner, more spacious and generally more attractive than the dirt-impregnated tent of the south-east European nomads. Anyone who, becoming accustomed to the life of nature, fears that illness may result from his relations with the gypsies should keep clear of them. As a gypsy one must deny oneself baths, clean clothes, a comfortable bed and a quiet life.

For this reason the number of investigators who have disregarded the dangers and lived amongst them is extremely small. Dr. Heinrich von Wlislöcki, a German of Polish descent, is unique in this direction. His knowledge of the gypsy language enabled him to obtain admission as a half-gypsy to a Hungarian tribe. His passionate desire to know every detail of the life of these pariahs led him to live with a gypsy woman and spend half his life in studying them. It is to him that we owe those classics of gypsy lore, without which any further study would be impossible. He was the first person to give an accurate picture of gypsy life, based on his own observations and experience ;

## *Gypsies*

it was his work which confirmed or finally disproved all that Grellmann had written a century earlier in 1783 and better in 1787. Besides Wlislöcki the following have adopted this modern method of investigation : George Borrow visited gypsies in eastern Europe and in Spain during the years 1836-40. His work appeared in a new edition only a few years ago. Paspatis, a Greek doctor, won the confidence of the Turkish gypsies by his professional skill, but was only able to publish a part of his invaluable work (in French), since the greater part of it perished in a fire which broke out at his house. A Russian doctor, Kounavine, lived with gypsies for thirty-five years during his wanderings in eastern Europe, Asia and North Africa, but without publishing his observations, since he died while still arranging material he had collected. Finally the Italian Colocci lived in similar circumstances in Eastern Roumelia, Thrace and other countries in the southern part of the Balkan Peninsula. Apart from these there may be quite a number who have adopted the gypsy life but who do not dare to write about their activities, since they are subject to gypsy law. From time to time a journalist feels inclined to become a gypsy, either to win a bet or to publish a novel or a series of articles based on personal observation. Since the war the number of investigators, particularly British and American, who are said to be doing serious



## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

work among the gypsies has considerably increased. It is now generally accepted that one can only get fresh information about this people through close contact and a sympathetic attitude.

People who rely solely on answers to their questions as a basis for their information will find themselves consistently lied to. If the gypsies did not suspect treachery and *arrière-pensée* in the simplest question they would not be a primitive people. They give nothing away. They are masters in the art of lying and pretending innocence, when there is a question of misleading a 'gadžo' or non-gypsy. The police know this to their cost. Looks are exchanged and exactly understood in cases where the spoken word, even in their own language, would be dangerous. Every student of gypsies should remember Thessleff's warning that when they speak Romany they are speaking the truth, but when they use a foreign language they are deliberately misleading the inquirer.

For this reason, knowledge of Romany is indispensable for anyone who wishes to learn about them. Besides this, one must be exceptionally patient and have an immense amount of time at one's disposal, if one is not to be discouraged by the apparent lack of success with which the first efforts are met. It is often necessary to wait patiently for a long time until material and opportunity for observation are available ; at other times, however,



## *Gypsies*

important events in gypsy life succeed one another so quickly that it is difficult to remember every detail. One must never give a primitive man the impression that he is being watched ; for he immediately becomes artificial and untrustworthy. We ourselves become unnatural when we know we are being photographed ; there is thus ample excuse for the gypsy who no longer behaves naturally when under observation, and hopes to replace by imitation the naturalness of which he is ashamed, because it is different from the conduct of civilized people. Only by living patiently and inconspicuously among the gypsies can one obtain accurate information about such well-guarded secrets as bride-stealing, secret tribunals, and the punishment of unfaithfulness, or be an eye-witness of these customs. The greatest possible tact is necessary in order not to arouse the suspicion that one considers oneself a superior being. Primitive men have a much sharper sense for such things and observe them instinctively. A non-gypsy must have won the gypsies' heart by some particularly generous action, if he expects them to be as free with him as with someone who is bound by gypsy law through having been adopted into a tribe.

As a friend of the gypsies one has to be constantly on the look out for ways of deepening the relationship and establishing it on a firm basis. Alcohol and tobacco help one to make acquaintances. News

## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

of their relatives, whom I had visited or whose hospitality I had enjoyed, never failed of their effect. The evening, when the whole family is together, proved to be the best time for establishing friendly relations. We would sit together while they talked of the day's gains or of events in the village ; but the most popular topic of conversation was furnished by the family affairs of a related tribe, who lived about twenty miles away ; forthcoming marriages and reunions were discussed ; only once as they looked at the starry sky, did the conversation take on a more serious note. Usually the whole evening was spent in gossip and joking. I noticed at this time that the conversation never touched upon any topic connected with death or burial. Any investigation of the unknown worries a people who live in a natural state. They enjoy life too much to want to think about such things.

As gypsies speak two or more languages, I always tried, at my first meeting with them, to speak the language of the country in which we were. This gave me the advantage of being able to hear from their own mouths, in their own language, the impression which my arrival had made on them and what sort of suspicions I would have to overcome. One word from an old gypsy was sufficient to make every one of them dumb. I could hear them whispering to one another, 'Who knows what he wants from us ?' I could follow their

## *Gypsies*

conversation, though sometimes with difficulty. On these occasions I was sometimes caught listening and could not suppress a smile which gave away the fact that I understood.

At the first word of 'Romany' which I let fall they could not restrain their joy, and immediately loosed a storm of questions: 'You are one of us! Have you any brothers? Have you any sisters? Are your parents still alive? What's your job? Where have you come from? Where are you going to? Can we help you to go back to your brothers? Where are your brothers?' When I said to them that my brothers were far, far away and that it would take a journey of many months to reach them, tears came to their eyes and they repeated my words, 'Dur, dur! far!' with real sympathy. It was touching to see how anxious they were to save me from loneliness, which is the bitterest form of unhappiness a gypsy knows. At this stage the last traces of mistrust generally disappeared.

Friendship is thus established. If the relationship goes further and one is adopted into the tribe, the gypsy's heart is as open as nature herself, but the adopted person is henceforth obliged to accept everything which gypsy custom ordains, and that is not always easy.

The evening camp fire produces an atmosphere eminently suitable for story-telling. Once the stories





1. Midday in a camp of Rumanian gypsies. Maize pudding is being cooked, a child is sleeping in the rather draughty cradle and its father is still seated in front of his anvil



2. A gypsy mother cracking lice. Children are grateful for this service and eagerly await their turn





3. Derby day. A picture taken before gypsies were excluded from Epsom downs



4. A stout gypsy woman causes her neighbours some amusement on the way back from a horse-fair



5. *The evening meal inside a tent*

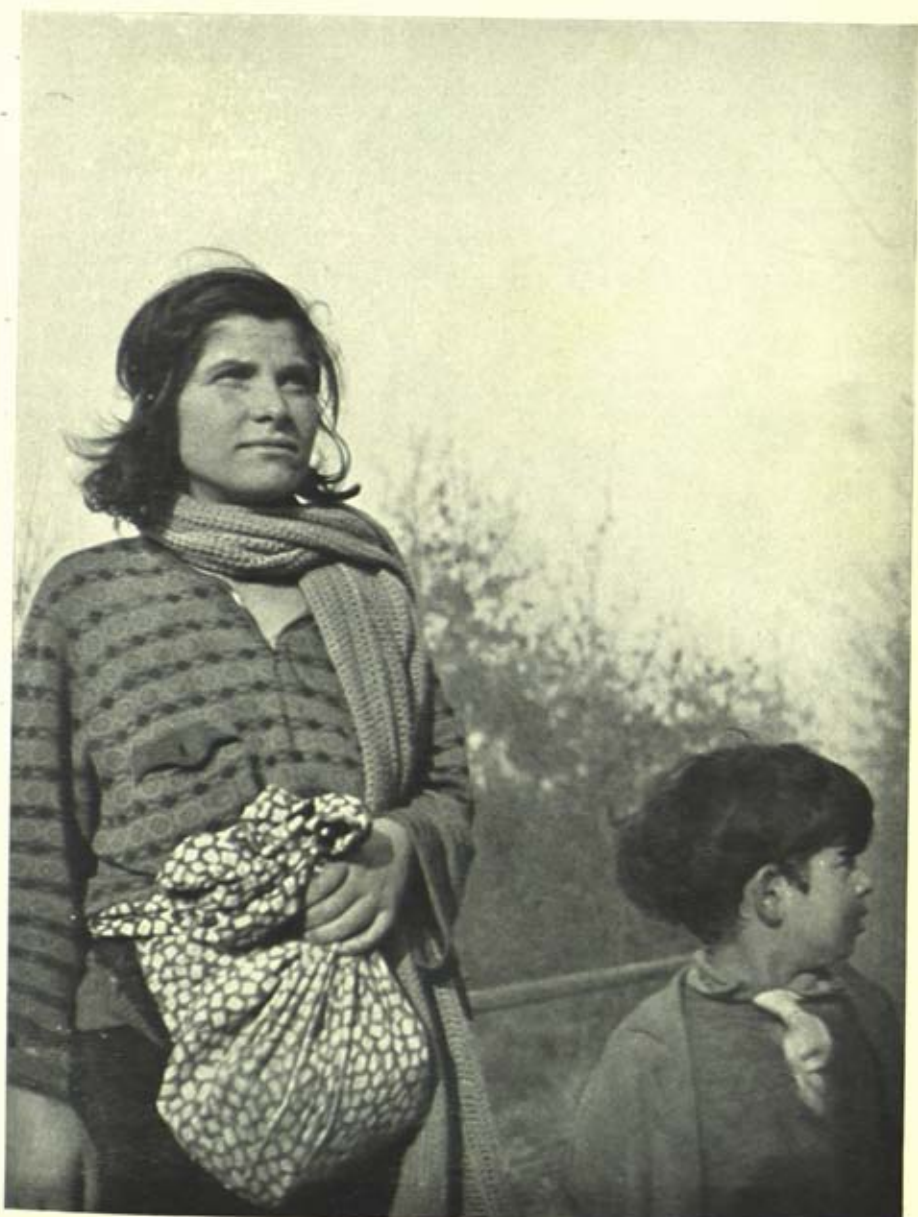


6. *Young girls and engaged couples visit Mme. Zarechi to have their fortunes told during the gypsy pilgrimage to Saintes-Maries de la Mer*



7. Spanish gypsies at their toilet. The elder sisters help the younger, and the mother attends to the smallest until they are old enough to do their hair themselves





8. German gypsy returning with her son from a foraging expedition. Her instinct has made her suspicious of something and she has stopped short



9. *A gypsy bear-leader from Rumania with his staff and leather pouch. The sieve-makers are similarly equipped*



10. Two male nomad gypsies encountered near Craiova in Rumania



11. Other members of the same group. It is as unthinkable for nomad gypsies to dress respectably as for their womenfolk not to plait gold pieces into their hair





12. A Yugoslavian gypsy. *The eyes retain their piercing quality even in old age*



13. Gypsy children on a road in the Pyrenees



14. *A typical German gypsy child*





15. Gypsy children in Rumania. Anyone who has no skirt goes naked



16. Children of Turkish gypsies from Turmu-Măgurele (Rumania). They are wearing clothes either bought from the local inhabitants or presented by them



17. *Russian gypsies embroidering a piece of material which will be made into a dress. Sewing and embroidery are not often practised by gypsies. They make clothes only for weddings or festivities and then the process involves some ceremonial*



18. *Serbian gypsies with their children*



19. A typical young German gypsy. The longer you look at him the better you understand the gypsy character. His life is spent in the open air and his sharp eyes miss nothing





20. Kalo Hâdâri with his son and daughter-in-law.  
All three are tinkers



21. Smaranda (first from left) with her sisters and cousin (second from right). She is a daughter of the Turkish gypsy chief in Turnu-Măgurele (Rumania)



22. *A gypsy camp in the Pyrenees. The climate demands a different type of caravan from that common in Northern Europe*



23. *On the edge of a wood in East Prussia*



24. *Caravans on an odd building lot. Rent is paid for a stance and the picture presented is the same in all large continental cities*



## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

have started, all have their turn and invention knows no limits. They sit on until dawn, their faces tense with excitement as they follow each event in imagination. At some witty remark or unexpected turn in the hero's story, the muscles of every face are suddenly relaxed and seek relief either in a burst of laughter or a smile. The gypsy lives the story himself, like a child. He cries or laughs with the hero and shares his fear or anxiety in moments of stress or danger. Perhaps he feels even more strongly in such cases than in real life, where sympathy is less easily aroused.

While collecting stories and songs I discovered many other delightful gypsy characteristics. For example, if a number of gypsy women were together and one began to sing in my presence, songs which we would consider obscene, each tried to go one better than the first, and I thus heard a large number of such songs. But if an unmarried girl was present and heard these songs, she tried to persuade her married sisters to sing me something else, because she felt ashamed. No one dreamed of making fun of her ; the request received consideration and the programme was revised. I made the most of all these occasions. I picked upon various people who seemed to be outstandingly proficient and next day announced that I could read and write and would like to take down the tales or songs of the previous evening. Some

## Gypsies

withdrew when I asked them, others declared themselves ready to tell the stories again or sing the songs. I persuaded the best one of them to come next day and dictate. He was pleased by my desire to bring these stories to my brothers in far-away lands. I realized, however, that the stories had sounded much better the evening before, since they lost much by being told to order. The directness, the spontaneity and the by-play all disappeared when my writing made it imperative to tell the story slowly. I have given some examples of this story-telling in the volume of gypsy stories which was included in *Märchen der Weltliteratur*, published in 1926.

Not all gypsies can be disarmed of their suspicion as easily as this. I have known it happen, when I was only spending a short time in a place, that the whole group, with which I had been in conversation until late on the previous evening, made off in the early hours of the morning, without my realizing anything of their intentions or seeing any sign of preparation. They had obviously become suspicious and chose this method of leave-taking in order to escape my observation.

During the early stages one's experience may be bought at the cost of some surprise and embarrassment. I once put what seemed to me quite a harmless question about their last camping-ground to a group of half-settled gypsies who were at that time



## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

in terror of the police. It was immediately clear that I had touched on a sore point. After a moment's gaping astonishment, during which any number of doubts must have crossed their minds, they assured me on oath, to my complete bewilderment, that their ancestors had possessed the right of camping on that ground for generations. I learned later that they had in fact only settled there four or five weeks previously and took me for an agent who wanted to rid the country of them. Some one had probably made the suggestion which was jumped at immediately by the others. Rumours spread as quickly among them as among us. They are not immune from mass-psychology. An alarm passes from mouth to mouth and from tribe to tribe like the fire along a chain of beacons. The quick tongues of the gypsy women see to that.

Among gypsies who realize the sort of world in which we live one sometimes comes across types which instead of allowing themselves to be studied, consider the student as a source of income and make him the object of the most impertinent business propositions. Word had gone round in a certain group that someone was collecting songs and stories, and when in my innocence I appeared amongst them I was surprised to be greeted as follows: 'We know why you have come, you want us to sing you songs and tell you stories; then you will put them in a book and make a lot



## *Gypsies*

of money. We know plenty, we could go on all day and all night and still not be finished ; you must give us money for every one, if you want to get anything out of us.' Their demands, however, were so exorbitant that I preferred to refuse their offer. Anyway, there is usually not much to be had from such 'civilized' types. I went elsewhere to try my luck in a less blasé environment.

Where a knowledge of Romany is common amongst the people of the country where they are living, it ceases to be an effective means of introduction, and inquirers may suffer the same fate as the man from Carinthia who was surprised by a storm on a walking-tour and took refuge in a barn which was already occupied by gypsies. Heedless of his protests two pretty gypsy women made for his rucksack without so much as a by-your-leave and removed his blanket. The objections of the unfortunate tourist were met by the leader of the band with threats and the following justification : 'You have one and we have not, you can get another one, we cannot ; so give it to us, we are so cold, have pity on us.' That is the line of argument generally adopted by gypsies to justify such actions. Might is right. This is another characteristic which the student of gypsies must be prepared to meet.

You must not put yourself on a different plane from theirs. The gypsy must recognize in you

## *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

one of his own sort, if you want him to reveal himself to you as he really is. A man who can read and write is naturally an object of suspicion amongst people who snap their fingers at the whole of European civilization. For this reason on occasions when I wanted to remain unrecognized I never took any notes in their presence. Remain as poor as they and you will be their best friend. Gifts of tobacco and brandy are another way of gaining their friendship, but when thus gained it only remains as long as you go on giving. If you have ever helped them in a time of great need, they remain thankful to you for the rest of their lives and will never forget your kindness. You can make any demand you like and they will comply with it as long as the compliance is in accordance with their code.

Unfortunately I could not always make use of the last of these methods. My task was to study the gypsies and the Balkan peoples in every branch of their life ; for this reason I had to take account of public opinion amongst the native population. This was always hotly opposed to my associating with what are considered by it to be the lowest of God's creatures. Besides this the police often forced me to alter my plans in the very moment of success, by forbidding me to live with gypsies because of the danger of infection or the carrying of illness by lice.



## *Gypsies*

It is not a good thing to remain too long among gypsies. Every one who has been in a foreign country—and the gypsy camp is a foreign country—realizes that during the first days of his stay he is particularly receptive to new impressions, but that as time goes on the keenness of his observation becomes blunted. He accustoms himself to the habits of the country and after a time fails to notice them. In the East, for example, the use of handkerchiefs is unknown. At first this appals the European, but he soon becomes reconciled to it, owing to the frequency of its occurrence and is astonished when a new-comer reminds him of his former disgust.

It is an established fact that the more one loves the people with whom one lives or whom one is studying, the easier it is to fall in with their ways ; but there is always a danger that one will see more in one's friends than in fact is there. Exactly this criticism was made by Anton Hermann, a Hungarian gypsy-lover, of Wlislöcki's work, though it does not at all detract from the value of what Wlislöcki wrote. After a time one should tear oneself away from those whom one loves, in order to see them in true perspective. Sympathy for this outlawed people should not blind one to their unpleasant characteristics, which on the other hand should not be allowed to bulk as large as they do in the mind of the average European. The gypsy-lover must see them objectively.



### *Gypsies at Close Quarters*

As a product of western civilization one must beware of becoming too completely absorbed by the free gypsy life and becoming a real gypsy instead of remaining an incognito research-worker. Imperceptibly the gypsy environment attracts one to itself. The universe persists and one drifts on as a part of it. One must leave the gypsy life before it is too late. Long and close association with this extraordinary people subjects a civilized person to influences which he cannot resist and which destroy him in the end. Can the gypsies be right after all in their warning that no one can escape their law?

### III

#### THEIR ORIGIN

If one questions gypsies about their origin, they answer characteristically : ' We cannot tell you that, sir, without lying ; for we do not know.' How could they ? They live in the present. History has not the least interest for them. It is no use looking for a priesthood which might have preserved their traditions. None exists. Nor is there a literary tradition. For them the world is a huge pasture ; in this pasture political boundaries are hindrances which only exist in order to be overcome. Gypsies look towards the future, never to the past. Contemporary society is the only society they know. They have no heroes whose memory is preserved in national sagas. The histories of the peoples among whom they have lived, or are still living, tell next to nothing of their past or origin, and what they do tell is so confusing that the only course open to investigators is, after carefully studying the gypsies themselves, their language, their way of living, their outward appearance and their moral code, to establish their

## *Their Origin*

position in the world by a comparison with other peoples.

In a Spanish and a Russian legend quoted by Borrow, we find the suggestion that the gypsies originated in Egypt. The Spanish legend describes their banishment from that country. In the Russian, an Egyptian Pharaoh was drowned with his army in the Black Sea, while pursuing the Jews ; only one youth and one girl escaped the disaster and the gypsies are their descendants. A gypsy who was convinced of the truth of his words once told me, in the presence of Rumanians who laughed at him, that their former ruler had come from the East over a great sea, that he had been drowned while crossing, but would some day return to found a mighty empire. Egypt also figures in two Biblical stories related by Gjorgjević, the outstanding authority on Serbian gypsies. However interesting such references may be for purposes of comparison with the Spanish and Russian legends, one must view such evidence with the greatest suspicion, since the gypsies must have adopted much material of this kind during their wanderings. It is almost impossible to tell whether such stories have not been heard by Spanish or Russian gypsies from the people of those countries among whom stories connected with Christianity are common. Does not the existence of Black Sarah, the gypsies' Saint, the servant of one of the three Maries who are



## *Gypsies*

worshipped in Saintes-Maries de la Mer in Provence, suggest a similar merging of legends ?

People have also tried to establish the origin of the gypsies by reference to prophecies in the Bible. Reinhold Urban, a recognized authority and for some time a missionary among the gypsies, tried to prove in 1912 that the gypsies were a people whom God had chosen, like the Jews, as an example to the world of his power and mercy ; he believed that the twice-repeated threat, 'I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations and will disperse them through the countries' (Ezekiel xxix. 12, and xxx. 23), could only refer to the gypsies. He cited as proof the fact that the gypsies had given themselves out to be Egyptians when they first arrived in Central Europe ; and it is a fact that they introduced themselves to the then highly religious population of those countries as repentant Christian pilgrims. They announced that they came from Egypt and that their ancestors had refused a lodging to the Virgin when she was seeking refuge with the child Jesus ; others proclaimed that they had stolen one of the four iron nails before the Crucifixion and had been compelled to undertake a journey of repentance lasting seven years. The gypsies, who are not slow-witted, made good use of their association with pilgrims and crusaders to obtain pity from the pious by means of this legend, and at the same time to take advantage of the gullibility of the masses, in

## *Their Origin*

order to introduce among them their unsettled and entirely different way of living. Weight is added to the belief in an Egyptian origin by the fact that the gypsy kings of the fifteenth century called themselves Dukes of Lesser Egypt. This name, which occurs in a Turkish title, is sometimes thought to refer to Gyppe or Modon, a place frequented by Greek Crusaders, where there is early mention of gypsy settlements, sometimes to a district in Epirus or even Asia Minor. It is however forgotten that at that time and earlier, there existed on the Balkan Peninsula many street performers of Egyptian origin, and that even to-day there are still foreign elements in the population of Albania which, though leading a gypsy life, do not speak Romany and have other points of difference. But they are always mentioned in the same breath with gypsies. Foreigners of uncertain origin who travelled round with monkeys, bears or camels and amused the provincial and peasant population, existed even in Germany, till the end of the nineteenth century. These foreign showmen, who are quite unconnected with gypsies, were often confused with them, and this must have been even more often the case in previous centuries. Travelling showmen obviously came from Egypt, the country which one knew from the Bible. The *fahrende Leute und Gaukler* who were already travelling about Germany in the time of Charlemagne can actually be identified as true Egyptians. They



## *Gypsies*

looked foreign and so did the gypsies, and because of this similarity in outward appearance Egypt was attributed to this fresh foreign element as a place of origin.

There was a rather similar sequence of events in north-western Europe when people christened the gypsies 'Tartars' in memory of the Tartar hordes whose descendants they imagined the gypsies to be. The gypsies had no objection to being taken for harmless showmen ; they took advantage of the error and gave themselves out to be Egyptians. But they did not like to be confused with the dreaded Tartars and never adopted this name themselves. Right up to the end of the eighteenth century (and sometimes even to-day, as stated above) the Egyptian origin was generally believed in. Roberts's theory, published in 1842, went so far as to try to prove that the gypsies had already travelled round the world before the birth of Christ and even penetrated Mexico, where the gigantic buildings, whose dimensions were only equalled by those of the Egyptian pyramids, were supposed to have been the work of the Egyptian gypsies.

Another view held them to be Jews. Ghetto and gypsy camp, the life in a quarter separated from the rest of the population, where the misfits of society were glad to take refuge, and the general similarity of the fate of the two races, were obvious points of comparison. Besides this, a resemblance



## *Their Origin*

was claimed to exist between certain individual gypsies and the Jews. This view was made specially popular about 1700 by Wagenseil, a German Professor of Law and Oriental Languages. I thought it had died long ago, until recently, when to my astonishment I found well-educated people supporting it, although there is absolutely no connection between Jews and gypsies, except the fact that both are scattered races.

The riddle of their origin remained unsolved. Search was made for traces of an earlier culture, but the only indications were to be found in their intellectual achievements and their efficiency at handwork. Their musical talent and fortune-telling have become proverbial, and point to the East as the place of their origin. The names and shapes of their musical instruments (e.g. violin, lute, xylophone) and their method of playing them are all Eastern, and fortune-telling is nowhere more flourishing than in Asia. The problem of their metal-work is harder since it is still uncertain whether metal-work originated in Africa or Asia Minor. The shape of the gypsy bagpipe suggests Asia Minor, though it may later have been affected by contact with other races. It is, anyway, true that the gypsies have been famous for their unrivalled skill in iron hammering since their first appearance in Europe, and that metal-work has assumed a place of special importance in the cultural life of

## *Gypsies*

most peoples, being frequently practised by representatives of an almost extinct race who seemed to be endowed with a special magic propensity for it. These two facts presumably led the Frenchman Bataillard and in our own day Forbin, to hold the gypsies responsible for the spread of skill in bronze and later, iron work, and to assume that they had existed in Europe for 3,000 years. The gypsy smiths of the Bronze Age had had their headquarters at the foot of the Western Alps, and from there they supplied the Celts and other races by a system of organized peddling. They did in fact possess secret knowledge about metal as about a number of other things. Whatever the truth of the rest of this story, it is at least possible that some such organization, penetrating every people without belonging to any of them, and preserving its natural state, did hold in a peaceful manner a monopoly for the working of metal. Whether its members were the ancestors of the gypsies or of other peoples, it is impossible to prove. But though it is safe to say that the gypsies acquired their knowledge of metal-work in Asia Minor and must therefore have been settled for some time in that part of the world, the question whether they originated there still remains unanswered.

The gypsies have been so successful in eradicating all traces of their origin, that we have had to resort to comparisons between an odd collection of super-



## *Their Origin*

ficial traits in order to establish it. The marked distention of the women's breasts and the incorrect assertion that they eat no beans was supposed to prove them Egyptian ; they were Jewish, because of a similarity in their fate ; their general appearance proved them to be Tartars. We should be no nearer a solution to-day, if it were not for the fact that gypsies have their own language.

The first attempt to establish their origin through their language was made at the end of the seventeenth century. It was doomed to failure owing to the fact that its learned exponent imagined the German thieves' jargon to be identical with Romany. More than half a century later the extraordinary similarity between the vocabulary of Romany and that of some Indian languages was discovered quite by chance. In 1763 there appeared in the *Wiener Anzeigen* a notice to the effect that a protestant student of theology called Stefan Vályi had made the acquaintance in Leyden of three students from Malabar. In conversation with them he had established the fact that the language of the gypsies in the Komorn district of Hungary whence he came, had many points in common with that of the Indian students. He had drawn up a vocabulary of 1,000 words and put it before some gypsies at Raab, who were able to translate the major part of it. The problem of the origin of Romany was supposed to be solved. It was an Indian language



## Gypsies

of Aryan origin connected with the original Sanskrit.

Full reports of this discovery were given by Grellmann in his remarkable work on gypsies in 1783 and by Graffunder in 1835 in his essay 'Über die Sprache der Zigeuner, eine grammatische Skizze'. But the investigation of the Indian origin was only undertaken scientifically for the first time in 1844 when August Friedrich Pott published his two-volume work *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*. Unlike Finck, who made a study of the Romany spoken in Germany and Armenia, Pott himself never came into contact with gypsies.

The next problem was to establish the locality of the gypsies' home more exactly. Franz von Miklosich, in critical works of great erudition published between 1872 and 1880, had proved relationship with Darden and Kafir dialects. The Dutch scholar De Goeje believed the Džatt, Zutt and Dom to be connected with them. The Hindu Kush Mountains and the Punjab were both suggested. In recent times the problem has occupied scholars both in England and Germany—Turner, Woolner, Macalister, Macfie, Sampson, Ackerley and Gilliat-Smith in the former ; Pischel, Franz Nikolaus Finck, Ernst Kuhn and Enno Littman in the latter. But despite all these attempts to establish the original home of the gypsies by reference to their language, one is forced to admit that after being separated

## *Their Origin*

so long from Indian dialects, Romany can no longer be identified with any at present in existence. Such parts of it as are of Indian origin cannot all be attributed to one dialect and seem to have been collected from several. This leads one to suppose that the gypsies were already a nomad people at the time of their sojourn in India. Even the excellent linguistic *Survey of India* which includes Romany in its review, brings us no further, since we have no knowledge of the Indian dialects at the time when the gypsies first emigrated from their original home.

When did the gypsies leave India? Similarity between the declensions in their language and in those of Central India makes an emigration in the ninth, tenth, or eleventh century A.D. seem probable. But though this may be true of the European gypsies, it by no means disposes of the possibility that immense hordes had broken away from the Indian gypsies at an earlier date, as is suggested by the solitary historical document referring to such an emigration which we possess. The Persian poet Firdusi relates of his king Bahram (430-43) that this monarch had 10,000 Luri, i.e. musicians, brought to his country from India and gave them oxen, corn and asses with the intention of making them into peasants. But they ate the oxen and the corn and thereafter wandered homeless about the world (cp. Chapter XIX, Music). They are still wander-



## *Gypsies*

ing, in north-western India, the Near East, and Europe.

It was probably Asia Minor which underwent a large gypsy immigration from India in the tenth century. The two waves mixed with one another and finally settled in south-eastern Europe. There is no other explanation of the fact that the Syrian and Armenian gypsies (except for those of Boša) who lived nearest to India, their land of origin, differ so strongly from the main body of those in south-eastern Europe in accent, vocabulary, and grammar (e.g. in their treatment of the old Indian 'bh-', 'dh-', and 'gh-' terminal syllables).

We know more about the direction of the gypsy emigration from India than about the time when it occurred. Study of their language makes possible an almost exact reconstruction of the path they took, since they borrowed forms from the spoken (less frequently from the written) language of every people in whose land they stayed. Miklosich, who made a careful examination of Romany from this point of view, showed that in two countries, Persia and Greece, the gypsies must have remained longer than they did elsewhere. Armenian, Arabic, and Turkish elements in Romany show that they must also have visited these peoples before arriving in Europe. One branch seems to have left Syria very soon and reached Spain by way of Egypt and North Africa. The high percentage of borrowed



## *Their Origin*

Greek words which they use is a safe indication that Greek-speaking countries have harboured the gypsies at one time. Greek words are found in all European gypsy dialects (e.g. *drom*, a road ; *kokalo*, a leg ; *foro*, a town ; *ochto*, eight). The fact that a scholar, Lorenzo Palmiréno, in 1540 was only able to make himself understood among gypsies by the use of Greek (and there is a similar instance quoted from Utrecht in 1596) is either an indication of the degree to which foreign elements had invaded Romany or of the fact that the first gypsies who entered Spain from the north in the fifteenth century were still able to speak Greek.

The number of foreign words adopted into their language depends upon the amount of time spent by the gypsies in the country concerned. Thus the dialect of the gypsies who have long been settled in Germany contains numerous German words, and that of those settled in Spain a large number of Spanish words, very often in a Romany form, which make them sound like separate languages or obscure dialects of the countries in which they are spoken. Many of the Indian Romany words have been replaced by later borrowings from European languages. But the common element in all forms of Romany is sufficiently large for us to be able to tell, from details, what route any section of the gypsies must have taken to reach the country where it is at the moment. Thus the dialect of the North

## *Gypsies*

Russian gypsies includes in addition to the common basis, borrowings from Greek, Rumanian, Serbian, Hungarian, German, and Polish, which show that they must have visited the countries where those languages are spoken. On the other hand no French, Spanish, Italian, Swedish or Finnish words are found in this dialect. Finnish gypsies in their turn have no Russian elements in the language they speak, but much that is Swedish—sure sign that Finnish gypsies can only have reached Finland from the west, through Sweden.

The German words found in the Romany spoken in England, France, and the Scandinavian countries, show that the migration must have paused in Germany or the Netherlands before spreading further westwards or northwards. Knowledge of foreign languages is another indication of the direction of migration. I have often met gypsies in Germany who knew French, English, and Dutch, while a limited number also understood Spanish, though their Romany vocabulary contained very few words borrowed from these languages. The fact that some recent arrivals also talk Czech is explained by the proximity of Germany to Czechoslovakia.

In the last three decades the number of gypsies from south-eastern Europe, particularly Rumania, to be found in central and western Europe has very considerably increased. It may well be that even before this time some Rumanian words were to



### *Their Origin*

be found among German, English, and Spanish gypsies, but recently every horde which has appeared in Germany has not only had such borrowings in its language, but been able to speak Rumanian fluently. A comparison of the language of the gypsies already settled, with that of the immigrants, reveals obvious differences and the fact that Romany is to-day, as always, in a state of transition. This wave of Rumanian gypsies spreads further into France, Holland, England, Mexico, North and South America, and Australia. One wave overtakes another. Germany is only a temporary resting-place for most of the new arrivals; they make for the North Atlantic ports whence they embark on the journey across 'the great water' which they find so disagreeable.

The settlement in south-eastern Europe represents the third or fourth period in the history of gypsy migration. Naturally their language has also absorbed southern Slavonic characteristics. It seems to be only in the course of the last hundred years that the main body of gypsies has drifted more and more towards the north of the peninsula and especially to Rumania. All the grammatical forms of Romany have been excellently preserved here, while its vocabulary and idiom became so assimilated to those of the south-eastern European languages that it can be considered as one of them. Romany expressions are often literal translations of turns of



## *Gypsies*

phrase common to all the Balkan peoples. Only in pronunciation is the influence scarcely recognizable. The sound 'th' of Greek, Spanish, and English has not become part of any Romany dialect.

At the moment, therefore, south-eastern Europe is the European home of the gypsies. The great migration from India in the tenth century and that from the Near East in the fourteenth and fifteenth were followed by one from south-eastern Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But today no large groups come from Greece, at any rate by land; and the movement from the Near East to Europe seems to have ceased entirely. What movements are taking place on the other side of this European reservoir of gypsies cannot yet be foretold in spite of much good work which has been done on the tribes of Syria and Palestine by English students of the subject.

In cases where European gypsy dialects are without borrowings from the Balkan languages, one can assume that the groups which speak them have only wandered a short time, or have not wandered at all in south-eastern Europe. They will either have reached their land of settlement by sea from Greece, or else they belong to the small number who have crossed from Africa to the Greek, Italian or Iberian peninsula. These, however, are very few indeed. On the whole the gypsy is a landsman

### *Their Origin*

and a plainsman. He has no use for the sea. He only goes on board a ship in times of stress. It cramps his freedom of movement, and the lack of space oppresses him.

## IV

### NAMES

Gypsies call themselves in the plural 'rom' or 'roma', i.e. men. In this they resemble most primitive peoples, who all consider themselves 'men' *par excellence* and give foreigners a much less complimentary title. The term 'rom' is common to gypsies the world over. The gypsy woman also calls her husband 'rom'. 'Žanes romanes?' (Do you understand Romany?) or 'San tu rom?' (Are you a gypsy?) are questions which one hears wherever one comes across them, in Brazil, the U.S.A., Siberia or Europe. In Armenia, Persia and Syria they call themselves 'lom' or 'dom', the interchange of 'l' or 'd' for 'r' (ṛ) corresponding exactly to the usage of the language concerned. Dom is still to-day the name of an Indian tribe who live according to gypsy customs; it is connected with the Sanskrit word 'doma', an old Indian term for people who lived from music and singing. 'Dam' means 'to sound' and would appropriately refer to their musical talent.

There has been an attempt to derive the word



## *Names*

'rom' from the Turkish name for the Greeks, who still refer to themselves as 'Romäer' and call their language itself Romaica; there is a parallel to this in the word 'Franke' which Turks apply to all foreigners, whether or not they come from countries inhabited by Franks. The Greek 'rom' can be explained as a transference of the famous name of the Romans to the Greeks, and has in fact nothing to do with the Romany word; one might just as well suggest as an explanation its superficial and purely chance resemblance to the Coptic 'rom' which is also supposed to mean 'man'.

It is only in Germany that the gypsies have an alternative name for themselves. Here they use as well as 'rom' the word 'Sinte' which some connect with 'Hindu'. In the older records the word 'More' is also found, but in my opinion this is only a form of address for men or women which has been introduced from the former Greek colonies, from Albania or from Macedonia—countries where one can still hear it used. The first of the gypsies to arrive in Central Europe may have used this form of address, but it is possible that the word is simply 'rom' written backwards, thus creating a secret word to replace the one with which the natives of the country were familiar.

All inhabitants of a country who are not connected with their race, they refer to in the plural as 'gadžo'. This is the gypsy name for all peasants,

## *Gypsies*

German, French, English or Rumanian. 'Gadžo' means 'stupid fellow' or 'barbarian', if we remember that for primitive peoples anyone who is not one of themselves is a barbarian.

For the peoples which accord him hospitality the gypsy has a number of names. Since he has ample opportunity in the course of his wanderings for becoming personally acquainted with the peculiarities of almost all European peoples, these names are not always complimentary. The Albanians are called 'tšinde tšibengre' (people of the slit tongue), the Russians are 'Big Heads', the Bulgarians are called 'that' by the Rumelian gypsy, who refers to Russians and Rumanians by the same term. They call the Turk 'chorochano' (reader of the Koran). Besides these names which are almost universally understood, there are of course still more vigorous terms, the use of which is confined to a particular district. The various classes in a country are less forcefully named. The Indian gypsy calls the Rumanian Bojare 'balamó', which in Greek means roughly the same as 'merchant' but is the Egyptian gypsy word for Christ. The rich foreigner, to whatever country he belongs, is called 'barosan' in Romany, which means 'thou art great' and is also found in Greek.

The countries which harbour gypsies in their turn give to their unwelcome guests nicknames which effectively hit off their peculiar character-



## *Names*

istics. Since magpies, jackdaws, crows, and ravens are known for their kleptomaniac habits, south-eastern Europe frequently calls them after the gypsies or the gypsies after them. The fact that both men and birds are black in colour is thought to afford an additional point of similarity. When a gypsy is begging in his persistent, servile way, the sentence 'Seom tšoró' (I am poor, lonely), frequently recurs in his torrent of words; the Rumanians understood this as 'cioară', i.e. crow, and in Germany it was adopted as the name of a thieves' dialect. From the Romany word 'kalo' (black), a term of abuse for gypsies has been formed in addition to that which comes from the Greek 'melle', the sound of which they loathe, since they hate being considered black. They reject such names with indignation, since frequently these words have acquired additional uncomplimentary meanings calculated to bring them into disrepute—as for example, the above cited 'kalo', which in Hungarian and Rumanian also means hangman; gypsies are still (in 1923) employed as hangmen in Bulgaria. Such names offend the pride of an excessively self-conscious people. They dislike the name 'gypsy' just as much. They feel the contempt which the word implies and they consider its use by the people among whom they are living as an insult.

Among about fifty different names for gypsies



## *Gypsies*

only two have become extensively used : Tsigane and Egyptian. Tsigane is found with little alteration in Turkey (Tšinghiané), Bulgaria (Tsigani), Rumania (Țigani), Hungary (Cigányok), Italy (Zingani or Zingari), Germany (Zigeuner, Zigainer, or Ziginer), France (Tsiganes), Lithuania (Cigónas), Portugal (Ciganos), in all Slav countries (Tsiganj, etc.) ; and sometimes also in Spain (Zincali). The form has also penetrated more northerly countries where it exists side by side with others. Greece (Ejiftos, Giftoi,) Albania (Jevg, Evgit), Macedonia (Jiftu, a name which I rediscovered on the lips of a Leipzig gypsy), England (Gypsy), Spain (Gitano), to a certain extent Hungary and Rumania (where a gypsy is sometimes jokingly referred to as 'pharaoh'), and Holland (Egyptiers, Gyptenaers) call them after the Egyptians. The French sometimes call them Bohemians, since Bohemia was supposed to have been their original home.

Owing to the number of pedlars who came from Bohemia, one used often to hear the term 'Bohemians' used of gypsies on the eastern frontier of Germany. In the Scandinavian countries and in Germany, between Hamburg and the Harz mountains, they are called Tartars (as mentioned above), because they remind people of the Tartar invasions, in the middle ages. A parallel to this is furnished by the word 'Zutt' which is used to signify gypsies by the Arabs among others ; it is simply 'Džatt',

## *Names*

the name of a warlike Indian tribe which has been applied in an Arabic form to the gypsies, because they also came from the East.

The term 'Heiden' (heathens) occurs not only in Holland (Heidenen, Heider) but also in other Germanic countries.

The derivation of the word 'Tsigan' seems likely to remain a mystery. Miklosich and later de Goeje, connect it with 'Athinganoi', the name of a Phrygian sect; Georgian writers suggest 'Atsincani' (magicians); in some Persian dialects they are known as 'Asinga'; in the oldest Hungarian and Rumanian documents 'Acinganu' is found, while in Macedonia they still have the term 'Ats(n)gani' with the prefixed 'a' which is so common among them. Thus it is only in Europe that the form 'tsigan' is found. Leo Wiener in a most scholarly essay tries to derive the word from the noise which issues from the gypsy's forge. He points out that the use of such roots as 'tik, tink-, tšik, tšink' to represent hammer-blows can be traced from Asia as far as England, where the word 'tinker' (Scots 'tinkler') is found.

The extensive use of the word 'tsigan', the gypsies' strong dislike of it, and the direction of migration from East to West which has been acknowledged on historical and linguistic grounds, show that the word is not of gypsy origin but was probably produced by one of the peoples which

## *Gypsies*

harboured them. As the population of the Balkan peninsula was multi-lingual it was easier here than anywhere else for the word to pass from one people to another and lose the prefixed 'a'.



## V

## RECORDS

If we are to trust the uncertain accounts of the Middle Ages and assume that the so-called 'Atsincani', the 'magicians' and 'sorcerers' mentioned by a Georgian monk of Mt. Athos about the year 1100, were in fact gypsies, this would be the first record of them in Europe. By 1322 they are heard of in Crete, by 1346 in Corfu. About 1340 a Serbian prince gave gypsy families as slaves to the Tismana monastery at the foot of the Carpathians. In 1417 their presence is recorded in Moldavia, Hungary, Germany and Switzerland (at Zurich). E. O. Winstedt has established the fact that, according to some chronicles, there were already some groups at Hildesheim in 1407, at Hessen and Basle in 1414, and in 1416 at Meissen. These may have been the advance guard of the migration. On the North Sea and Baltic coasts they were earliest seen in the Hanseatic towns, from the first as a large group of about 300. The impression made by their wild appearance on the people of the time was profound. A nomad people had never before ap-

## *Gypsies*

peared on German soil in such numbers or with such a display. In the chronicles of most German towns the appearance of these extraordinary people is recorded as an important event of the years 1417-19.

In 1422 a similar band arrived at Basle with about fifty horses, under the leadership of one Michael. Thence they went on to Italy, Alsace, and France. In the same year a gypsy 'Duke' stayed at the *Albergo de Re* in Bologna, while his 100 companions camped before the gate of *Galeria* and barred the entrance to the town. In 1427 some appeared before Paris and told the fortunes of the populace. They went on southwards and northwards. By the middle of the fifteenth century this sudden invasion of gypsies had spread over every country in Europe, and their name had become a byword. The gypsies crossed the *Pyrénées* and in Spain doubtless met their fellows who had come from Syria and North Africa some centuries earlier.

Nearly all the accounts from that period read as though they had been written to-day. It is exactly the picture which I tried to paint in my first chapter, except for the fact that to-day the law does not allow them to sweep over a country like a plague of locusts, and that their dress has become less striking, as their hosts, who supply most of it, have become more conventional. At the time of their first appearance in central and western Europe,

## *Records*

gypsy chiefs used to be on horseback, dressed in a red and green costume, adorned with big, silver buttons. Behind these chiefs followed a whole row of carts drawn by a pitiable collection of old horses and donkeys ; women sometimes travelled on small carts drawn by oxen. Some brought bears and monkeys with them. Others had packed all their worldly goods including their tent on the backs of their donkeys. Naked children turned cart-wheels and practised belly dances or other unbecoming exercises.

The experiences of the people of Bologna when gypsies descended upon them and remained from June 18<sup>th</sup> to July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1422, are vividly described by a chronicler.

Many men [he writes] went with all respect to the wife of their leader, to learn the future ; but though in fact many learned the truth and that which had been prophesied came to pass, yet no one returned thence without being robbed of his purse or of some piece of his clothing. The women of this people passed through the town six or eight together ; they gave exhibitions of their skill in the houses of citizens, but stole everything upon which they could lay their hands. Others pushed their way into shops as if wanting to buy something, though in fact their only object was theft. A plague of theft descended upon Bologna, as a result of which a fine of fifty lire and excommunication were publicly proclaimed as the punishment for any one who had further dealings with these strangers. These vagabonds are, I should add, the finest thieves in the world.



## Gypsies

When there was nothing left to steal, they moved on to Rome. I must further remark that they are the rudest, most ill-tempered rogues one could find anywhere. They were lean and dark-skinned and they ate like pigs. The women went about in skirts with a blanket over their shoulders and wore ear-rings with numerous ornaments on them. One bore a child in the market-place, but was on the road again with other women three days later.

The justification offered for their conduct was as extraordinary as their appearance. On their arrival they proclaimed themselves to be pilgrims doing penance, who had for a time been apostates from Christianity. Such is the description in Kranz's *Saxon Chronicle* and in Münster's *Cosmography*. The King of Hungary, later Emperor of Austria, had, it appeared, taken their land away and compelled them to be baptized together with their 'Duke'. Any one who refused was to be put to death. The king had then imposed on them the penance of wandering over the earth for seven years and finally obtaining pardon from the Pope. He had promised them a universal safe-conduct throughout this pilgrimage, so that one could not bring them into court to answer for their behaviour. Others however, asserted (as I had occasion to mention in a previous chapter) that their ancestors had behaved improperly towards the Holy Family and that the pilgrimage had been imposed on them by God himself. The utter poverty and ragged clothes of

## Records

these people were accepted by the simple men of that time as signs of a penance which was self-imposed. They pitied the pilgrims, treated them gently, where they were able to do so, and made their journey easier for them in every possible way. In those days no one had an easier time than a penitent on pilgrimage to a holy shrine. It is therefore not surprising that the gypsies produced letters from an emperor or prince, according to which they had right of passage through town and country. Such free passes are often mentioned during this period, though not every group can have possessed a genuine one ; for it is also related that they committed many extravagances on this pretext, but when compelled to produce the documents in question, turned out to have either nothing at all, or else something written in a handwriting which bore little resemblance to any which emanated from the chancelleries of Europe. That they practised deception is undeniable ; but it is impossible to assert that their claims were never genuine. Münster in his *Cosmography* (1544) asserts not only that the gypsies had in their possession certain letters and seals presented to them by the Emperor Sigismund and other princes, but also that he had himself seen a witnessed copy of such a letter while among some gypsies at Eberbach. This safe-conduct is the only document of its kind which has come down to us. In it we learn that certain gypsies were not only



## *Gypsies*

accorded free passage and every possible protection, but that their own court of justice was officially recognized. They enjoyed in fact a sort of extra-territorial status.

In the first years after their appearance in central and western Europe, the gypsies existed in a paradise of Imperial protection. They could do as they pleased. They needed to fear no punishment for their actions, since they were only liable in their own courts, where justice was dispensed by their own chief. The nature of this justice can easily be imagined. They proved unworthy of the trust which had been reposed in them by the authorities and took advantage of it on every possible occasion.

For these reasons a number of people grew increasingly suspicious about the genuineness of their pilgrimages. Already five years after their seven-year pilgrimage was supposed to have begun they had been recognized in Bologna as 'rude and ill-tempered rogues', and in later centuries they became universally acknowledged as a menace. The Bavarian historian Aventinus (1477-1534) writes angrily of the thefts committed by gypsies, and complains that robbery, which was a capital crime in his country, went unpunished among them.

Complaints against gypsies increased in number and volume until the Imperial Government felt compelled to take strong measures against them. In 1498 the Reichstag held at Speyer ordered the



## *Records*

banishment of the gypsies as 'Traitors to all Christian countries'. At Augsburg in 1500 a general order was issued forbidding any one to allow the passage of gypsies through the country, while all safe-conducts issued by Princes were declared null and void.

A general persecution now began. Every possible method was tried in order to rid the country of them. At first friendly approaches were made and people tried to persuade them to alter their way of living, while an attempt was also made to get them to leave of their own accord by making life a hell for them if they remained in any part of the Empire. A calculation was made of the time likely to be taken for either process to prove effective. The authorities, however, were over-optimistic. When the estimated three months had elapsed there was no sign either of compliance with the command or of any change in their way of life. They were then ordered to leave the country. When this step in its turn proved unavailing, the most inhuman measures were taken against them. They were declared outlaws. By this time the church had also proclaimed itself in opposition to them, having realized that these 'pilgrims' were entirely devoid of serious intentions.

The laws against them were however not always strictly enforced. From time to time officials had to be reminded of their duty in this respect. If

## *Gypsies*

any gypsies were found still residing in the country in defiance of the ban, the men might be shot and the women ravished, without a proper trial being necessary. What little they possessed was taken from them. An edict of 1711 declares that if any gypsies are found in the country within eight days of its publication, they shall become the property of the state, together with all their possessions, that the men shall be immediately shot and the women and children confined in the nearest prison. In addition to being beaten the women might have a gallows branded on their foreheads, but in the case of children more humane methods prevailed. They were to be given a Christian education. At Dresden in the year 1556 two gypsies who had defied the ban were thrown into the Elbe. Frederick William I published an edict on October 5th, 1725, to the effect that all gypsies over eighteen should be hanged without respect of sex if found on Prussian soil. The councillors of Aachen took rather similar measures in 1728, but included in their proclamation the proviso that gypsies who did not offer resistance (in which case they were to be shot immediately) should be allowed half an hour to pray God on their knees for forgiveness of their sins, and to prepare themselves for death.

Prussian records from the time of Frederick I state that gallows had been erected at the frontiers and inscribed with the words 'For thieves and



## *Records*

gypsies', in order to frighten gypsies from crossing into Prussian territory. Their inability to read and write made such methods necessary. Sometimes warning placards were erected, which displayed clearly in bright colours the processes of whipping and hanging, so that gypsies might know what to expect if they crossed the borders of the state in question.

As late as the middle of the eighteenth century Austria too was fairly severe in her measures against them. On September 20th, 1701, the Emperor Leopold declared them outlaws; in 1726 Charles VI gave orders for all male gypsies to be put to death, while women and those of either sex under eighteen years were to have one ear cut off. (In Bohemia it was the right, in Silesia and Mähren the left.)

Spain was already engaged in persecuting gypsies at the end of the fifteenth century. In 1492 in the company of numerous Jews and Moors, many gypsies who had been settled for some time had to leave the country, either for North Africa or for more northerly parts of Europe. Gypsies, however, can deal with most situations, and the majority stayed on in out-of-the-way places, even hiding in caves when necessary, and thus avoiding the merciless persecutions of Ferdinand, Charles V, and Philip II. Since that time their descendants in Spain have fared well except for a few short periods (e.g. in 1745) and have become thoroughly settled in the country.



## *Gypsies*

In France the first ban was issued by Francis I. In 1561 the Orleans Parliament decided to exterminate them completely. The order had to be renewed in 1612 because they had multiplied in spite of it, and their large numbers had become a public nuisance. Under Louis XIII and XIV they were regularly massacred. Only in the Basque provinces, whither a few were able to flee in time, was their lot less hard. For this reason the majority of French gypsies are still to be found in the south of France. The state made no attempt to civilize them. In 1802 a number of groups were removed to North Africa.

In 1572 they were banished from the territory of Milan and Parma ; a little earlier from that of Venice.

In England Henry VIII published an edict to the effect that gypsies should only be tried according to English law, and should be forbidden to hold any courts of their own, even if these were partly composed of Englishmen. Queen Elizabeth tried to dispose of them by Act of Parliament and ordered the death penalty for any who showed themselves in England a month after it became law.

Sweden, Norway, and Denmark all took severe measures against gypsies and were still doing so until 1727.

There is no country in western and central Europe which has not tried to get rid of gypsies, by means

## *Records*

of cruelty and persecution. None, however, has succeeded. They are still at large to-day in every one of the countries named, whose peoples alone are to blame if they have not yet succeeded in civilizing them. Every educational method which has been found successful with difficult people has failed utterly when tried upon the obstinacy of the gypsy. Only in the eastern and south-eastern countries of Europe have such harsh measures not been necessary.

In time people began to realize that other methods must be tried. The period of persecution was succeeded in the rationalist age by a period of effort on humane lines. England and Spain had already taken steps in this direction. The former gave the gypsies back their independence during the seventeenth century and Spain became a sort of Promised Land for them about the same time. Then the missionary era began.

In the second half of the eighteenth century a tendency was observable in almost all the European countries which had previously tried hard to suppress the gypsies, towards overcoming their obstinate resistance to all forms of civilization and educating them to be good Europeans. The first attempt along these lines was made in 1761 by Maria Theresa, who thinking that the name gypsy had acquired too many invidious associations, renamed them New Peasants or Neo-Hungarians. Asserting that it was



## *Gypsies*

beneath the dignity of such a people to go on living in tents, she forbade them their open-air life and suppressed both their trade in horses, which had often led to disturbance, and the choice of their own Waywodes. To accustom them to European ideas of discipline the men were conscripted for military service. Five years later it occurred to some one that a quicker method of civilizing them would be to take the children from their parents and distribute them to be brought up singly by peasants, while permission to marry was forbidden to any gypsy who could not furnish evidence of his ability to keep a family properly fed. Though theoretically admirable, this method of civilizing had to be dropped, since it failed to create the mutual goodwill which was necessary on both sides if it were to be successful. Joseph II, who refuted the accusation of cannibalism which was being made against the gypsies, made a further attempt to suppress the nomad instinct in 1782—this time on the gypsies of Siebenbürgen. The uproar which ensued when the gypsies had their children taken from them and dragged, by ropes if necessary, to school, was terrific ; gypsies love their children too much to be able to endure separation from them. A more successful attempt at settling them was made by a Habsburg prince, the Archduke Joseph, in 1890, when he offered one of his estates as a sanctuary where they could live as they chose, and



## *Records*

hoped that they would thus be persuaded to adopt a more settled existence. After his death, however, his protégés scattered in every direction and the experiment was at an end. In 1914 there was a proposal to make a last attempt by interning the gypsies and compelling either them or their children to learn a craft, but the outbreak of the War left everything as it had been before.

Influenced by the efforts of Maria Theresa, Charles III of Spain tried to settle the gypsies in the year 1783. Like her, he renamed them, this time Neo-Castilians ; he forbade them to lead a nomad life, or to use their language, and gave orders for them to work at an honest trade. But what might have been possible in Austria was foredoomed to failure in Spain, though many did give up the nomad life and settled on the outskirts of towns as they had done in Rumania.

An attempt was also made in Prussia to achieve by the creation of gypsy settlements what others had attempted by compulsion. The Friedrichslöhra colony was built for this purpose near Nordhausen towards the end of the eighteenth century to hold about 100 gypsies. This too was a failure. The efforts of those in charge failed completely either to instruct or inspire the inmates. Friedrichslöhra was broken up in 1837 at the same time as Moordorf in Oldenburg, which is still empty to-day. Gypsy types are still supposed to be found near the sites

## *Gypsies*

of these settlements. Prince von Wittgenstein took a liking to gypsies and in 1820 wanted to settle thirteen families near Sassmannshausen in Siegerland. There are still some remnants of this voluntary settlement to be found to-day. The inhabitants of the crumbling houses try to make a living by begging or working in factories. Gypsy elements are also found settled in the Nassau district. They are descended from those who were once massacred at Medenach, and whose children were brought up by sympathizers in the neighbourhood.

In 1827 there was formed in this country a society whose intention was to admit the gypsies in a practical manner to the enjoyment of the advantages of European culture and, through its influence, interest in them and understanding for them have remained alive until to-day. It is to this early interest that the Gypsy Lore Society which has published its own journal since 1888, owes the recognition it has received amongst scientists. To-day the gypsy is a British subject and can move about almost as he pleases.

The eastern and south-eastern countries of Europe were more fortunate in their attempts at settlement. Poland made some regulations in 1791 which were less completely antagonistic to the gypsy habits than the revolutionary measures of Maria Theresa or Charles III. The greatest success was achieved by Catherine II of Russia, who settled the gypsies as

## *Records*

serfs on crown lands. In Bessarabia, where they were treated like ordinary inhabitants, the Russians wished to make two model settlements at Kair and Faraonoff, but irregularities in the departments which administered the funds intended for the purchase of building material, seeds, tools, etc., resulted in their failure. In Rumania they were slaves till 1848, but this position like that of the serf gypsies in Russia put them well on the road towards the settled life which their descendants enjoy to this day. Rumania has achieved what no other European country has been able to achieve ; she harbours both settled and half-settled gypsies, but they have of course surrendered their gypsy nationality and are no longer recognized by their former 'co-nationals.'



## VI

### NUMBERS

There are no exact statistics relating to gypsies. Their ceaseless migrations make accurate measurement of their numbers impossible. Even the countries with the most highly developed statistical services have abandoned the attempt. In records of rate- or taxpayers they are seldom listed as gypsies and where they are, the fact is unimportant since the proportion who are liable to inclusion in either of these categories is extremely small. The remainder are too poor to be worth the attention of the authorities concerned. It is true that west European countries have frequently regarded the gypsies as a distinct group for statistical purposes, but they do not distinguish between real gypsies and people who lead a gypsy life, such as street entertainers or beggars. It is almost impossible to make such a distinction since most gypsies deny the fact that they are gypsies when brought into court, and no one is qualified to contradict them, except a specialist who knows their language and has an eye for their predominant characteristics, particularly those which can be seen in the face.

## *Numbers*

If only those who admit the fact were counted as gypsies, their number would be extremely small. It approaches the million mark as soon as those are included who, though declaring the language of the country where they are living to be their mother-tongue, nevertheless reveal their true origin by their characteristic gypsy appearance, which persists even in the children of mixed marriages. According to this method the illegitimate offspring of gypsy mothers from non-gypsy fathers must also be counted, though, as I shall show later, they fortunately do not form even a hundredth part of the whole. Taking the word gypsy in its widest sense, that is to say counting personal appearance as adequate qualification for inclusion, and remembering that no accurate figures are available, 1-1½ millions is the highest estimate which one can safely make of the number of gypsies in Europe.

Quite unreliable estimates have been made of the number of gypsies in India. The figure 60,000 to 200,000 for the Near East must be regarded with a good deal of scepticism ; and any attempt to suggest one for North Africa would be useless. How can the rate of increase among gypsy immigrants in countries like Canada, the U.S.A., and Mexico be established ? How can the tiny groups of gypsies in Brazil, where they are numerous, in the Argentine, in Australia, and in South Africa, be subjected to any effective census ? In such coun-

## *Gypsies*

tries, especially where the winter is not severe, they disappear completely on the great plains. In winter it is much more difficult for them to remain hidden, since their movements are restricted by the weather or, as in northern Europe, they are forced to retire to winter quarters. Statisticians might take advantage of this situation to obtain some idea of their number and distribution, but what advantage would there be in undertaking a census whose cost would be so entirely out of proportion to the result achieved? The life of the gypsy would remain unaffected. The only purpose served would be the satisfaction of scientific curiosity, and even in these conditions some gypsies would find ways of evading the census.

Bearing in mind what has been said, we may reckon the number of gypsies in the world, including the gypsy tribes of India, at not more than 5 million.

The most recent attempts of which I know to estimate the number of gypsies in Europe have been made by Cora in 1890 and by Thessleff in 1900. They are of course out of date, and were only the roughest of approximations at the time when they were produced. They do, however, illustrate certain points which are still true. Gypsies, for instance, are still most numerous in the Balkans, and there are still more in the United Kingdom than in any of the more northerly European countries. Miss Yates, the secretary of the Gypsy Lore Society,



## *Numbers*

gave 18,000 as an estimate. Some of these are waiting to emigrate to America and Australia, but the numbers can also be partly accounted for by the freedom which they enjoy, particularly in Scotland.

Here are the figures :—

	Cora	Thessleff
Hungary and Transylvania	250,000	280,000
Rumania	200,000	300,000
Turkey	67,000	200,000*
Russia	58,000	50,000
Bulgaria	50,000	52,132
Poland	50,000	15,000
Spain	40,000	50,000
Serbia	34,000	46,212
Italy	32,000	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	18,000	15,000
Austria	16,000	
Galicia		16,000
England	12,000	20,000
Greece	10,000	
Latvia and Lithuania		10,000
Denmark	3,000	3,859
Norway		1,893
Holland	3,000	
Germany	2,000	
Finland		1,551
France	2,000	over 2,000
Other countries	15,000	

\* Including Greece.

In the U.S.A. gypsies feel more at home and find it easier to support life than in Europe, which has

## *Gypsies*

too many laws for their liking. Their number is estimated at about 100,000.

Even if they are not much influenced by the climate of a country, their happiness, and thus the numbers in which they are to be found anywhere, does depend on the severity, or lack of it, with which laws against them are interpreted, and especially on the extent to which they can be of service to the country whose guests they are, instead of depending simply upon what they pick up. These figures therefore may also be taken as an indication of the degree of tolerance which existed in the countries named at the time when the computation was made.

## VII

### GYPSY GESTURE

The best way to recognise a gypsy is by the way he looks at you. When every other anthropological test has failed, the gypsy's eye will always betray him. This look is something which cannot be described in words. Language is simply inadequate. Science, to her cost, has hitherto neglected such topics as immeasurable and therefore the province of painters and poets. Yet, if one has an eye for such things, a man's look, like his gait and his stance, is one of the surest guides for assigning him to any particular race.

There is a restless, unstable something in the eye of a gypsy which can acquire an uncannily piercing quality when it is concentrated on a definite object. He who looks upon it has the impression that there must be in its possessor some streak of eternity, some yearning for another world, of which in his primitive state he is unconscious. A gulf whose depths we cannot fathom seems to separate us from him. The fire in the eye of a gypsy is kindled with the fuel of stifled passion—passion, part hate,



## *Gypsies*

part love, now still, now fiercely flaming. This world of emotion is latent in the eyes of a gypsy as it is latent in the eyes of every people whom European culture has not yet affected. In looking at beautiful gypsy women one is often astonished to find in their eyes the same passionate almost ecstatic quality which is so common among the inhabitants of India. One need only compare photographs of Indian women with those of gypsies in this book to understand what I mean. A black or chestnut-brown pupil makes the white in the eye appear larger and much brighter. The sheen of the jet-black hair, and the flash of the gold or silver ornaments which adorn it and the ears, are rivalled in their brilliance by the white of eyes and teeth.

In the south-eastern corner of Europe there are so-called gypsies, who hardly ever see or are seen by the people of the country in which they live. They are mainly earth-dwelling spoon-carvers and bowl-makers. If a stranger approaches the wilds where they live, he is seen while still far away, since their settlement is a hill-side which offers a magnificent view. On arrival he finds the place deserted ; the inhabitants have gone to earth. Gradually, and with some diffidence, the children or the older people begin to show themselves and it is now that one enjoys an experience similar to that of the explorer Schebesta among the pygmies. They look at one like young animals. You will

## *Gypsy Gesture*

understand what I mean if you have ever looked into the inquiring eyes of a fawn. Breathlessly it stares at you, every muscle taut, every nerve strained, absorbing you through its eyes, its ears and its nose, with an intensity which makes the incident memorable. But this strange look disappears as soon as curiosity is satisfied and replaced by a feeling of confidence. Shyness is immediately transformed into the importunate beggar's whine which we know so well.

When such gypsies are not living in isolation, women and children immediately appear with the characteristic insolence from which the only escape is a gift of money and a speedy departure. At such times one can recognize the hunter's look which seems to be common to all primitive peoples whose standard of life is similar. The eyes are ceaselessly on the look-out for booty and are certain to find it. Sight is the most highly developed sense among such people and sharper than ours. A glance is sufficient to enable them instinctively to grasp a situation and take the steps necessary to prevent the escape of their prey. If a gypsy woman enters a strange room, you may be sure that she takes in very much more than we do. This ability to observe is the gypsy's best protection and his surest weapon in the hard struggle for existence. It is worth remarking here that a gypsy can never look another man straight in the face for long. His eyes wilt



## *Gypsies*

under the strain. But it would be unfair to assume, as civilized people are naturally inclined to do, that this is a sign of dishonesty. The gypsy never shows dishonesty through his eyes, however false his tongue may be.

The use of a head-shake for 'yes' and of a nod accompanied by a click of the tongue, after which the head is thrown backwards for 'no' are characteristic of the gypsies and only forgotten where they have received a few licks of the paint of civilization. In south-eastern Europe these habits are also found among the peasants, with others, such as that of beckoning by stretching out the hand towards whoever is approaching and moving the whole hand or the fingers alone up and down—much as we do when waving some one away. This seems to me another indication of their Oriental origin. When the gypsy wishes to express the word 'nothing' he draws his thumb nail down across his upper front teeth and accompanies this movement with the word 'Khantš', which means that he has nothing to eat and not a penny in the world.

The best way to understand this language of gesture is to imagine oneself a deaf-mute who is compelled to replace the sense of hearing with the sense of sight: the characteristic gestures will then make a much more definite impression and all sorts of details become visible which escape the superficial observer, but are essential to the gypsy type.



## *Gypsy Gesture*

The gypsy's gait is as lively as his gestures, his imagination, and his methods of expression. He will rush forward and then suddenly slow down, giving the impression that his thoughts are the motor on which the speed of his progress depends. One very seldom sees a gypsy walking heavily. His way of living, designed as it is to preserve the nimbleness necessary for successful theft, is responsible for this.

Gypsies take short steps. If one sees two or three walking together and gesticulating at the same time, one has the impression that they are making a supernatural progress in the course of which it is unnecessary for their feet to touch the ground. Their footsteps are quite inaudible. They look as if they were dancing, no part of their bodies is still for a moment, while their limbs appear to be endowed with a quite exceptional suppleness. I have never seen them flat-footed. In walking they always hold themselves erect—there is never a sign of bowed shoulders or hunched back—but they swing their arms very little.

The typical gypsy walk is most easily recognizable in the young women. They are more light of foot and supple than the men. They are always out to attract attention, but never lose their naturalness in the process. A European girl sways her hips, but her gypsy counterpart sways the whole of the upper part of her body, which has been made specially

## *Gypsies*

supple by the belly- and snake-dances that she practises. No movement that these girls make seems unbecoming, everything they do is natural and graceful, never precious or artificial. They are always sprightly ; their wide skirts which reach to their ankles in obedience to the dictates of fashion, dance—a gypsy dance—around their slim, muscular legs and feet. It is only among primitive peoples that this freshness and directness of gait still survive to delight the beholder.

The gypsy gait is less obvious among children. They adopt a posture peculiar to themselves which is due to the protuberance of their stomachs.

A gypsy seldom stands long on one spot, and whenever he stands still at all, an atmosphere of restlessness and, according to our ideas, 'nervous' haste surrounds him. His hands are never still, but they never get in anybody's way. His quicksilver bodily movements are an appropriate equivalent to the life of speedy transition from place to place which he leads. Just as the continual coming and going make it impossible for his camp ever to be a tedious spectacle, so the free, unceasing movements of the individual gypsy make him a perpetual delight to watch.

There is one position of rest which is quite peculiar. I was once visiting a camp of Turkish gypsies some hours away from the little Rumanian town of Alexandria. Suddenly I saw a gypsy stop about



## *Gypsy Gesture*

100 yards in front of me and standing on one leg like a stork proceed to stare at me and continue staring. I would have thought that he had made his foot sore with walking and wanted to cool it, had I not a few weeks before at the annual fair in Bucharest seen another gypsy adopt exactly the same position (Illustration 64). The sole of the right foot is laid on the left leg above or below the knee, while one hand may or may not be supported by a stick. They maintain this position for quite long periods.

Like Stone Age men and other primitive peoples, especially those of eastern and south-eastern Europe, gypsies are very fond of sitting on their heels. Wherever one goes in the Balkans, peasants are always to be found sitting on their heels talking or, if it is a Sunday, sitting in front of their houses doing nothing. Gypsies sit on their heels at meal times. Turkish gypsies hold their courts sitting on their heels. In a similar position tent-dwelling gypsies discuss the striking or pitching of their tents. The buttocks do not touch the ground at all ; they are lightly poised on the heels, while the whole weight of the body rests on the ball of the foot. The advantage of the position is that the hands remain free and the gypsy's supple body can leap into action at the slightest sign of danger. The knees retain their ease of movement until advanced old age. For us, this position has long ceased to be one of rest.



## *Gypsies*

The muscles of our legs cannot stand the strain.

The cross-legged Turkish position is almost as frequent as that of sitting on the heels, since chairs or stools are unknown in the tent of a genuine gypsy. Their transport would provide an unnecessary additional problem. An unadorned plank is all the seating accommodation which is required, though it is common simply to sit on the ground. A mat or cushion is sometimes offered, but as a rule only to persons for whom it is desired to show respect. When I first tried to imitate the Turkish position a good deal of amusement resulted, since it was obvious that I was not accustomed to it. The hands are held in front or in the lap, the trunk is bent slightly forward, and the same position serves not only for gossip or story-telling but also for their work as smiths or comb-makers. My own experience has been that this way of sitting never results in legs 'falling asleep' in the way they sometimes do from sitting in straight-backed chairs. Settled and half-settled gypsies like the musicians and smiths of the Balkan Peninsula, Rumania, and Hungary, often permit themselves the luxury of a chair in their tiny huts, but they use it little: I once saw a gypsy woman sitting on her heels on top of one. In Germany and farther west one only sees the squatting position practised by those who have recently entered the country. Caravan life has discouraged it.

## *Gypsy Gesture*

In towns gypsy women are often to be seen with their backs against a fence or the wall of a house and their hands in their laps resting on the clothes which are stretched tight over their knees. More frequently still one sees them in a circle on the ground, one leg doubled up in the Turkish fashion, the other stretched sideways with the knee slightly bent, so that the space between two of them thus seated makes a comfortable position for their children while asleep or being fed. They like sitting on the bare ground, always with the legs outstretched but slightly bent. They will lie like this for a whole day on the edge of a wood, looking up into the blue sky ; or in the shadow of a tent with a pillow under the neck while sultry heat broods over their camp. They never curl up. Little children and drunkards lie in the blazing sun while flies cluster round the moisture of their lips, and nose and eyes.

As gypsy women usually hold their children on the hip, their bodies develop a 'list' which can always be recognized in pictures. Even children use this way of carrying their young brothers and sisters.

## VIII

### GYPSY GREETING

There is no gesture of greeting peculiar to the gypsies. They borrow those in use in the country where they are living and it is only the manner of making them which is characteristic.

The tin-smiths of south-eastern Europe who are the most recent immigrants from what was formerly Turkey in Europe, use the Oriental greeting, touching breast and forehead with the flat palm of the right hand. This was still practised before the war among better class Rumanians, Bulgarians, and Albanians.

I once had the following experience when I was driving past a gypsy camp in Rumania. The group of men who were sitting or squatting together in front of the tents rose at my approach, and called back their barking dogs who were attacking me. Their conversation suddenly stopped, and some of those who had been engaged in it came towards me, removed their ragged fur caps or greasy hats and awaited with bowed head any instructions which I might have to give them. They remained



## *Gypsy Greeting*

in this cringing position to which their former slavery must have accustomed them until I satisfied their curiosity about my visit. The remainder of those in the camp stood like wax figures in a similar position and watched carefully from behind to see what would happen. 'Te traís ! Te traís !' (Long life to you !) I heard them murmur. But it is more usual in these cases for them to wait for the stranger to approach them.

In every gypsy camp there are certain spokesmen who come forward on the occasion of police raids or other visitations of authority and conduct the negotiations in a way calculated to prevent the police getting the information they want. A certain line is agreed upon and immediately announced to all concerned, who are compelled to stick to it. No divergence is permitted. Only when it appears necessary is every one allowed to talk, in order to put the police on a false scent by confronting them with conflicting evidence. Among German gypsies the men alone negotiate with the police ; the women only take part when their husbands are in trouble and need the assistance of lies and a false oath or two.

Originally the handshake was unknown to the gypsies. It is only after concluding a contract, buying a horse, or settling a debt that one sees two of them complete a dramatic swing of the arm by firmly clasping hands, in order to add weight

## *Gypsies*

to the negotiations which have taken place. Nowadays the clasping of hands indicates mutual confidence. If you, as an ordinary man, give the gypsy your hand, you must not mind his treating you without ceremony and never being let alone for a moment by his children.

I recommend a rather non-committal attitude to those who are trying to make friends with gypsies for the first time. Questions like 'What do you want, sir?', 'Are you looking for a wife?' which greeted me when I first mixed with German gypsies, show the sort of motives with which many people seek intimacy, but seldom find it. After the usual preliminaries 'Katar san tu?' (Where do you come from?), 'Si tu phral?' (Have you a brother?), 'Si tu phen?' (Have you a sister?) are over, they invite you, if your appearance is sufficiently distinguished, to sit down with them. As a guest you must have the best of everything; you will not be allowed to sit on the bare earth. At your next visit you will already be met with the gypsy greeting 'Mišto avilean!' (Welcome!), to which 'Mišto arakhleom tut!' (Happy to meet you!) is the approved rejoinder. This greeting has equivalents all over south-eastern Europe and even in Asia. Rumanians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Greeks, and Turks all use it; it reached Spain through the Arabs and by way of the Crusaders even penetrated as far as France. It is Oriental in origin.



## *Gypsy Greeting*

I heard Turkish gypsies greeting each other with the question : 'Zoraló san ?' (Are you strong ? or well) to which the reply was 'Zoraló (seom)' (I am strong or well). How far such formulas are from being peculiar to the gypsies may be seen from the fact that almost all the forms of greeting in use in a particular country are found translated into Romany and in frequent use. 'Good night' appears exactly reproduced as 'Latši ti reat !'

It is the same with the forms of leave-taking which the Balkan gypsies seem to have borrowed from the Balkan languages, albeit with a little more originality than in those mentioned above. As one leaves they will say : 'Te del o del Bachta !' (God give you luck !), or 'Bachta te del o del !' Bear-leading gypsies used to say to me as I left them : 'San sastevesto !' (May you remain in good health !) or 'Atš devlesa !' (Be thou with God), or 'Dža devlesa !' (God go with you !). By 'God' they do not of course mean what Christians understand by the word. It is simply a synonym for what they refer to at other times as the Great Spirit.

The use of 'thou' provides the only indication of the degree of familiarity enjoyed by the gypsy with the person to whom he is talking. He calls every one 'phral', i.e. brother, whether he knows him or not ; and strangely enough the term is also applicable to women, like the Rumanian 'frate'. To an older person a boy or a girl will call 'Kako !



## *Gypsies*

Kako !' (Uncle ! Uncle !). The word 'Ki-oraimós' is reserved for distinguished strangers and is almost the equivalent of 'Your Highness'. Since similar terms are found in other Balkan languages including Albanian this word too may be a translation.

When a gypsy experiences feelings of gratitude he says 'Long life !' never, however, forgetting to include one's family in the wish. 'Te traís ! Te traís !' (Long life to you !), 'Te traíl ! Te traíl !' (Long life to the child !). He is always prepared to be optimistic even though things may not be going too well with him. I once had the answer 'Nais tuki !' (Thank you very much !) from a bear-leading gypsy to whom I had wished good luck. This expression is modelled on a Greek one which means 'may you remain in health'. The wish 'But berš !', 'Bute beršenge !', i.e. 'May your years be many !' which is common throughout south-eastern Europe, may also be used as an expression of thanks.

## IX

### RACE

THEIR ethnological type, like their language, suggests relationship with the original inhabitants of India, either Dravidians or even the still earlier Mon-Khmer peoples. It is impossible to tell exactly, since racial types in India have become so widely differentiated. Every attempt to identify the gypsies with a definite people or tribe of southern India has hitherto come to nothing owing to lack of anthropological data both about Asiatic gypsies and about gypsy-like peoples in India. No one has yet done the work on Indian gypsies which Pittard did on those of Europe. But their outward appearance—the eyes and the dark-brown colour of the skin—leave no doubt that these strangers in Europe must have had relations of some sort with the dark inhabitants of India. How much Aryan blood flows in their veins can only be established when the relations between the former Dravidian peoples and the Aryan invaders has been more carefully investigated. But that some intermingling took place cannot be doubted.

## *Gypsies*

The purest European gypsy types are found to-day in the Balkan Peninsula. Here valuable anthropological research has been done. Thanks to the above-named Professor Eugène Pittard of the University of Geneva we are able to establish some definite conclusions, and Lebzelter in Vienna has taken the measurements of some Serbian gypsies. Such measurements, combined with the impression made by their appearance on any careful observer, lead one to distinguish two different types in this as in almost every other people. The purer, and higher type (i.e. that in which most of the gypsy characteristics are united), is the gypsy with regular features, oval face, fine, well-proportioned chin, arched eyebrows and thin, beaked nose : the other is distinguished by a scrub nose, heavy, protruding cheek-bones, a powerful chin and spongy features. It is often to be found among their women or musicians.

The colour of their skin varies from dark tan to white. Their hair is black, shiny and thick ; it becomes grey much less easily than that of other races. Their shiny, white teeth are the envy of every dentist's client, though the only cleaning they ever give them is an occasional rub with a slightly burnt wooden spoon. Children are born white-skinned with black hair an inch long, but the colour of the skin soon changes to olive, without the least tint of red. They never blush. Little children often



## *Race*

develop an ugly protruding stomach. The gypsies are not the only primitive people among whom this is found as a result of irregular and bad nutrition. In spite of the fact that infectious diseases rarely occur among them nowadays, infant mortality is very high, and of the ten to fourteen children who are born of one marriage only from four to six survive. The rough and tumble of the wandering life is too much for the remainder. They are buried by the roadside and the company moves on. The mother is already expecting another one. Once the children have survived the first ten years they seem to have become immune from the usual illnesses. Obviously they are not troubled by draughts, and open-air life keeps their lungs healthy. Children at the gypsy school in Cologne were examined by X-ray and their lungs were declared to be in perfect condition ; minor complaints like coughs, colds, etc., to which they were subject in winter, were attributed by the doctor to their undernourished condition. When gypsies have to give up their open-air life for any reason (e.g. imprisonment), they suffer constantly from influenza and lung trouble. But as soon as they return to life in a tent or caravan their health improves immediately.

Gypsies are terrified of sexual diseases. Any one who suffers from them is avoided, especially among nomad gypsies. Syphilis is prevalent among the settled and half-settled, who contract it by constant

## *Gypsies*

association with the scum of humanity. Yet it seems to assume a less virulent form among them than among other primitive peoples. The cure generally approved by their 'wise women' who act as doctors, used to be as follows: 'Cover yourself in manure up to the chest; while still in this position partake liberally of alcohol; you will then find that the sores on your body have begun to heal.'

Corpulence is uncommon. Where it occurs it is usually among the women. But as though to compensate for this one sees a large number of thin, bony figures, equally unpleasing to look at. The most repulsive sights are provided by the old women, who claim to be a hundred. The famous beauty of the gypsy girl does not last long. Frequent child-bearing and hard work soon ruin it.

In view of their great affection for children and their desire to have them—'many children, much luck' is a gypsy proverb—it is easy to understand why they never practise abortion. They have not even a word for it—those at least who have remained faithful to the traditions of their race. Accidents, however, make miscarriages fairly frequent.

The gypsy hates water. He seldom washes. His dirty skin is always coated with a thin layer of grease. If asked why he does not wash, he will reply that not to do so is the best defence against lice, bugs, and fleas. He never uses soap, it affects the skin; a splash or two of water does as well.



## *Race*

Scented soap he likes simply because of the smell, and his wife enjoys selling it for the same reason. He smears his hair with oil.

Long hair is a mark of dignity which fades if the hair is lost. The governor of a Rumanian prison once told me that every gypsy burst into a torrent of wailing and lamentation at the suggestion that he should have his hair shaved like the other prisoners for hygienic reasons. They begged him incessantly (and they are specialists in the art) to spare them this disgrace ; they promised to do anything he wanted if only he would leave their hair long ; and an understanding prison governor will always be on good terms with them if he leaves their hair alone. Their gratitude is easily apparent, and they have to try to rid their hair of parasites by industrious combing.

Although cleanliness is so little considered it is noticeable that at any rate the half-settled gypsies attach great importance to being shaved. One of them, who possesses a knife, undertakes the operation. It is blunt and cuts result, but nobody minds about that. A wandering gypsy as a rule only grows a beard if he owns a horse or caravan and possesses his full rights in the gypsy council.

They seem to be as little affected by intense heat as by severe cold. Many of them sleep in the blazing sun with no protection but something over the head, without a trace of headache or other disability



## *Gypsies*

resulting, and in winter I have seen children rolling about naked on the ground with the thermometer well below freezing point.

Sexual maturity is attained comparatively early, especially in Hungary and the Balkans. In Târgoviște I once met a girl of seventeen with her two-year-old child. Prostitution is uncommon and confined to the settled or semi-settled types whom their fellows despise just because of their 'un-gypsy' way of living. A properly arranged marriage with members of the native population is seldom countenanced by either side. Peasants and gypsies cannot endure one another. Although they live side by side a peasant youth never forgets himself so far as to fall in love with a gypsy girl. Whenever I asked the reason, the answer was always the same: 'Gypsies stink', and I have actually both realized this smell and been forced to inhale it in the course of my association with them. To gypsies it is a sign that the purveyor of it is one of themselves. Non-gypsies can only be disgusted by it.

In spite of this, the beauty of a chaste gypsy girl has overcome all the scruples, if not of peasants, certainly of numerous Boyars. In times past the Boyars had the choice of all the gypsy slave-girls on their estates, to do as they pleased with. It was as much as his life was worth for a father to raise any opposition. In Rumania there are still a number of laws designed to regulate the status of the off-

## *Race*

spring of such unions ; and many gypsy women have used their intelligence and charm to secure for themselves a recognized position at the side of their husbands. Such a mixed marriage is recorded as early as the fifteenth century. A high state official, Pârvu Caliman, married a gypsy at the risk of losing his position and himself becoming a gypsy slave. He was excused this penalty owing to special circumstances, but was forbidden to bring his wife to court. In such cases the gypsy girl always gains, whereas a native girl stands to lose by marrying a gypsy. All the same a gypsy girl will not marry outside her race except under compulsion. Gypsy law forbids it. Among tribes which have remained independent of the country which harbours them, neglect of this law still results in expulsion. They have never had to endure wholesale rape at the hands of an invading army. In the wandering gypsy we have therefore an exceptional example of racial purity which is no longer available as soon as they become settled.

Sometimes it looks as if gypsies ill-treated their children ; but this is not really the case. They very rarely strike a child ; words, which sound harsh to the ear of one who does not understand Romany, are generally sufficient to obtain the desired obedience, without exciting fury or desire for vengeance in those to whom they are addressed. They accept the fact that father and mother have a



## *Gypsies*

right to punish them. Parents cling to their children as closely as the children cling to them. The gypsy takes good care of what he values and he values children highly.

This great love of children goes so far as to induce gypsies to adopt non-gypsy children; even, in very occasional cases, to take them without asking. Children, and plenty of them, bring movement, variety, and some sort of purpose into their lives.

This adoption of children can be explained by the instinctive urge of the gypsy to preserve his race. His instinct tells him that marriage within a narrow tribal circle must in time produce signs of in-breeding which cannot be disregarded. It is not sufficient to revive the stock with a mixture of gypsy blood from neighbouring countries. The new blood must be genuinely foreign. Thus unconsciously the gypsies prevent the decline of their race, which lacks our advantage of inheriting a heterogeneous ancestry.

In the few cases where so-called kidnapping occurs, the children are in fact brought to the gypsies by unmarried mothers, who know that their offspring will be well cared for by the gypsies, and perhaps obtain a better chance in life than if they kept them themselves. Such children never learn their real origin. They grow up among the gypsies, are spoilt and adored by the whole tribe and, when the time comes, they marry a genuine member of



## *Race*

their adopted race. For this reason girls are preferred to boys. When such 'foundlings' begin to grow up, their features, light skin and blue eyes distinguish them from their darker companions, but strangely enough there is nothing in their gait, their habits or their talents which betrays their non-gypsy origin. It is an interesting example of the success of environment unaided by hereditary factors. The offspring of the foundlings and gypsy women—the only mixed marriages allowed by the chief—have markedly gypsy features.

Gypsies always concentrate on healthy offspring. Ailing children are simply allowed to die. Criminals are given equally short shrift. Murderers are instantly banished from the tribe. Unmoral or anti-social persons are punished by suspension, or if they fail to reform, by lifelong expulsion. These measures are partly responsible for the continued health and vitality of the race.

When gypsies marry the sole desire of both partners is to have a large and healthy family. Unfaithfulness is as rare as misconduct between near relations or in-laws. Both are severely punishable by gypsy law. A gypsy woman will never show herself naked to her husband. Gypsy tradition in this case is in accordance with her natural refinement and sense of shame. Sexual relations are natural and passionate. They are never allowed to degenerate into a game. Gypsies live as a part of nature, and

## *Gypsies*

it would go ill with any woman who tried to check her fertility, which is considerable. Fifty offspring have been proved from one father.

Their cannibalism is clearly a myth. The Emperor Joseph II, as I have said, abolished all trials of gypsies for cannibalism in 1782. Forty-five had already been condemned for it in Hungary. A hundred and fifty more would have had to suffer the same death on this false charge, had it not been for the Emperor's edict. An official inquiry established beyond dispute that not one of the supposedly murdered persons was missing, yet the accused gypsies, who had for some time been a cause of complaint in the neighbourhood, had to be proclaimed the murderers. There was a case of this sort as recently as 1927. Time and again men have allowed themselves to fabricate such accusations, because they were willing to believe anything of an uncivilized people whose ways they could not understand. There is perhaps just an atom of justification for these suspicions, owing to the fact that it is said to be the custom of some gypsies in south-eastern Europe to return after some time to the burial-place of one of their number and bury the head in another place. But all this is extremely uncertain.

Few male gypsies die a natural death. Somewhere or other they fall victims to feud or persecution. Pleurisy and diseases of the stomach are, except for

## *Race*

the epidemics of pestilence which occur so frequently in the East, almost the only natural causes of death ; an unhealthy body is generally the legacy of a sojourn in prison, where the indoor life has an unfortunate effect upon their vitality. One sees them lying silent on the ground or in a caravan, wrapped in blankets. They make no complaints. Extracts of herbs are supposed to bring relief. ' He did not have any more days ' they say, when death intervenes in spite of potions and incantations.

Death for them is only one incident. There are so many others.



## X

### HOSPITALITY

Anyone who comes to the gypsy in search of help, or hungry, is always hospitably received. The whole tribe, indeed the whole gypsy community, is an immense family in the truest sense of the word, where every gypsy will always find himself at home. The powerful sense of loyalty to family and tribe have kept the traditions of hospitality continually alive. A gypsy does not object if the natives of his country of sojourn refuse to receive him, but he takes it as an honour when a native acquaintance condescends to visit him contrary to the usual practice. He accords him every respect, offers him the best that he has at the moment in the way of food or sitting accommodation and cannot do enough for his visitors. He will give away his last crust, however miserable the condition of his own family. A guest must never leave hungry. I myself was never allowed to depart without accepting a boiled corn-cob or, among German gypsies, coffee and a sandwich. Hospitality is the gypsy tradition and tradition is sacred. To offer any sort of payment would be the worst of insults.

## *Hospitality*

One can make one's host a present, but to pay would be unthinkable. 'Te traís !' (Good luck !) one says, and takes one's leave. This is sufficient indication to the host that his hospitality has been appreciated.

No gypsy will ever ask a guest to leave. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries criminals took advantage of this tradition to seek a refuge which was never refused. Once established in the encampment the guests began to terrorize their hosts, and organized them into bands which provided a useful cloak for the performance of fresh outrages, but gave the gypsies an even worse reputation than they had already. With the improvement of the police it gradually became more difficult for criminals to remain undiscovered, so that in the nineteenth century gypsies endured fewer and fewer of their visitations. The problem, however, recurred during the Great War, when numerous deserters who were not very particular about their living conditions sought refuge among the gypsies. It would be wrong to attribute this offer of sanctuary to interested motives. It is genuinely the result of their traditional hospitality.

The period when this hospitality made the gypsy the slave of his guest is now happily over. To-day his only guests are members of his own tribe, and a few intellectuals whom he counts as such if they speak his language. Real gypsy hospitality has once more become possible.

## XI

### FOOD

There are no gypsy restaurants, but there is a quite distinctive gypsy cuisine. The menu has naturally to be the work of an opportunist. If there has been a good catch or 'find', the meal is plentiful and the speed and skill with which it is prepared remarkable. Equally remarkable is the indifference with which they return on the following day to a diet of dry bread or maize pudding. They have few requirements, and never demand the impossible nor dream of caviare. They are glad to take and enjoy what opportunity offers them ; but never complain of their fate when times are hard. They worry much less about their stomachs than civilized people do. The gypsy is independent of changes of fortune. Plenty and scarcity alternate at irregular intervals throughout his life ; he can never tell what to-morrow will bring ; but he remains unperturbed and healthy in the face of every eventuality.

To appreciate gypsy cooking one must forget all one's usual ideas about diet and service. There is



## *Food*

no laying of the table. Tables do not exist in this environment, except inside the caravan. Instead the gypsies generally have a circular construction of wood, raised about ten inches off the ground, or simply a circular board. On this a single dish is usually placed from which the whole family helps itself. Forks are replaced by skilful if not particularly clean fingers ; knives usually made in the family forge, and wooden spoons are the only implements provided. Plates are a luxury. Visiting insects are allowed to have their meal and only flicked off a moment before one intends to take one's own bite. Chance additions to the bill of fare such as flies in the soup must be ignored ; once they are forgotten it can be quite a tasty concoction.

Roast chicken is a favourite item on the menu. It tastes good and the process of catching its owner off his guard is amusing. Such 'finds' are lucky. As the police tend to take a different view of the rights of property the meal has sometimes to be eaten in a half-cooked state, in order to anticipate their arrival. The gypsy is then able to face the authorities and affirm his innocence with entire conviction and a full stomach. A hen-roost robbed ? He has never been near the place. Feathers and anything else likely to provide a clue have been carefully hidden ; even the dog knows how to keep a secret and disposes of any parts of the bird which his masters cannot eat. The whole incident

## *Gypsies*

appeals immensely to the gypsy sense of humour and his digestion functions all the better for it.

A gypsy will eat anything. He eats vegetables as readily as meat, when he happens to have them. He is not particular. In winter his fare is pretty meagre and his children cannot look for food themselves as they do in summer. It is at such times that one sees them combing the rubbish dumps on the outskirts of towns, for fish heads, potato peelings or rotten food, from which they remove the thick of the dirt, and either satisfy their hunger on the spot or make a collection to take home. It makes no difference to their appetite if they see flies swarming about such places in hot weather. Naturally such sources of supply are only utilized in times of severe distress. During the summer there is abundance of fruit, especially in the rich, cultivated districts of south-eastern Europe, where stealing for immediate consumption is still tolerated. Melons, pumpkins or cucumbers can be taken from a field without any penalty being incurred.

Young nettles are the first vegetable to appear on the menu in early spring, and the gypsy woman is an adept at preparing them. But she does not only collect them for home consumption, and her cry of 'Nettles ! Young Nettles !' is a common one in the streets of Bucharest. She starts out at dawn to look for the young shoots of this venerable plant which was already taking a prominent position



## *Food*

on the menu during the stone age. In summer and autumn the woods swarm with gypsy women and children who collect wild strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, crab-apples, and wild pears, all of which are the property of the first comer. Mushrooms are eagerly sought for. They are placed on the roast with a little salt, or cooked in their own juice. And there are a number of other contributions to the larder which may be had from these expeditions.

The gypsies' remarkable knowledge of medicinal herbs often enables them to do good business with the inhabitants of the locality. Among the half-settled gypsies of Rumania the collecting of herbs and berries is so generally pursued, that during the day a gypsy camp looks completely deserted and there is no one to be seen but the few old people who are left to look after it, the men being all out 'at work.'

The gypsy woman has no use for any methods of keeping food for long periods. She never preserves or dries fruit. Such activities are left to the local people. Gypsies neither sow nor reap ; they let others do such things for them. But though they may beg, take or buy raw food and ingredients, gypsy women never allow others to do their cooking for them ; they never steal cooked food.

At almost any time of the day in south-eastern Europe they may be found cooking maize pudding



## Gypsies

in the copper pot which hangs over the fire. The maize is flung into the boiling water with a huge wooden spoon and stirred continuously. In a few minutes the thick pudding which they like so much is ready. It is eaten unseasoned and by itself except occasionally, when an onion or some garlic may be taken at the same time. This 'mamaliga' or 'polenta' can be enjoyed at any hour of the day. As it goes sour easily it has to be eaten soon and, owing to the inexhaustible supply of hungry mouths, always is. There are rarely any leavings and when there are the dog looks after them. Taking thought for the morrow is as uncommon among gypsies as among all peoples in south-eastern Europe who eat 'mamaliga' instead of bread. Young corn-cobs, which are easily obtained, are plunged for a moment into boiling water and sprinkled with salt. They either enjoy them themselves in this state or hawk them on the streets. Corn is also roasted in frying-pans on a primitive kind of oven until it bursts, when it is ready to be sold for a very moderate price to passers-by; these enjoy it as much as the gypsy children themselves. In the suburbs of Bucharest the vendors sit by their ovens at street corners from dawn till late at night.

Gypsy women are rarely able to bake. In countries where they can, they have learned from the natives, as is the case with the Turkish gypsies in Rumania. They keep some yeast from their last

## *Food*

baking and with it leaven the new dough which is put out in round flat pieces from 8 to 12 in. in diameter. The sunk fire in front of the tent or the primitive oven has been made up in readiness with the usual fuel of dried horse or cow-dung. The dough is then pushed into the glowing ashes and the fire is covered with a bell-shaped device specially designed for the purpose ; where an oven is used it is closed with a stone. The bread is left to bake for about half an hour. When it is ready the ash is dusted off and the steaming fresh bread is eaten with great relish. The Turkish gypsies enjoy drinking a bowl of creamy buffalo-milk at the same time. The bread tastes delicious in spite of having been baked under a layer of manure ash (Illustration 31).

Among the other gypsy tribes one occasionally finds a ring-shaped cake ('ankrusto' or 'manro'), rather like the 'Dead Man's Biscuit' which Rumanians, Bulgarians, and Serbians provide at a funeral feast.

On the whole the gypsies find themselves compelled to adapt their meat dishes, which they like better than vegetable ones, to the country in which they are living. But they are not without a culinary tradition, which reflects their ancient origin and survives in certain particulars, whatever the climate in which they are living. Like nettles, hedgehogs are an essentially gypsy dish. It almost seems as if the gypsies had followed the hedgehog's lead in



## *Gypsies*

their migrations, since strangely enough its appearances and theirs in different countries are almost contemporaneous. Roast hedgehog is a gypsy speciality. The catching of one is an important event. Father or brother relates the story of it in detail to a fascinated audience. They know the hedgehog's habits better than most zoologists. When brought in it is stunned by a blow with a stick and set on its four feet. Then its prickles are removed by burning or by throwing it into boiling water. The skin is not affected by either process. As a rule the intestines are removed and it is then wrapped in leaves and either stewed among the glowing cinders in an earthenware pot or roasted on a spit or steamed in vinegar with some onions. These and garlic are normally the only seasoning used. Salt is hardly ever added. A method which was frequently used in the past, was to curl the hedgehog up and cover it with a layer of red earth ; in this state it was put into the glowing cinders and carefully watched ; after a time some one gently tapped the earthen crust which fell away with the prickles in it leaving the meat juicy and ready for eating. A hedgehog feast is one of the high points in gypsy life. A good hedgehog year is long remembered. Hedgehog is preferred by them to every other sort of meat.

The gypsy is very fond of fat, especially fat pork, which he often enjoys in a state which would cause



## *Food*

serious trouble to those of us whose digestions are not of iron. He has no objection to slightly rotten meat. It is recorded that in time past gypsies have eaten asses' flesh. According to the gypsy view, which still persists, the flesh of animals which have died a natural death tastes better than that of those which have been killed.

The semi-settled gypsy keeps no animals for slaughter except an occasional pig, which he buys young and fattens himself. The value he attaches to pig can be estimated from the name which his language gives it—'the bird of the good god'.

Horses are treated with affection and may in no circumstances be used as food. Any one who eats horse-flesh is expelled from the tribe, and no one is allowed to associate with him.

Dogs and bears who are constantly with them and are treated as pets may never be taken for food. The gypsy protects these animals as far as possible when they are in need, but this does not prevent his ill-treating them in a disgusting manner from time to time.

I was once horrified to see a gypsy pluck a living sparrow with every intention of eating it raw.

They seldom eat eggs. Sour soups are very popular. The mother hangs a copper pot over the fire on a hook driven slantways into the ground, or a long chain hung from the top of a tent, or on a home-forged tripod. At weddings huge

## *Gypsies*

earthenware vessels or the family cauldron, which is as big as a washing boiler, are used.

The usual drink is water, from stream, spring or fountain. In Europe gypsies can seldom obtain milk. The children are provided for by their mother's inexhaustible breasts, which sometimes feed them until their third year. Where they have a cow or a buffalo cow, as often happens in Rumania and on the Balkan Peninsula, they drink its milk. Mare's milk is never drunk. The more prosperous bear-leaders and tinkers permit themselves the luxury of Turkish coffee, which they offer to a guest during conversation. A brass Turkish coffee-mill is therefore a necessary piece of kitchen equipment in such families.

As a rule their bodies require little fluid. On a hot summer day, when I was nearly dying of thirst and gulped down water from a stream, my companions drank nothing at all, only cooling their palates with a few sips. As a result I was soon dripping with sweat, while they hardly seemed to notice the heat at all. Their nomad life has hardened their bodies and effectively adjusted them to their natural environment.

The gypsies have one weakness which they cannot overcome—alcohol. Both men and women drink it. A celebration without alcohol is unthinkable. At weddings, at horse markets, at the Spring Feast or the Feast of Kettles, or when an expelled member



## *Food*

is readmitted to the tribe, wine and Kümmel used to be handed round in buckets, but to-day some considerations of economy have prevailed and drink is bought by the litre. All the same the host does not like to appear ungenerous. Even when his money has long been exhausted he orders more drinks if the supply threatens to run out. Where he has credit, which is in most places where he is known, he makes use of it. The landlord knows that he will get his money, and the postponement of payment enables him to keep a good customer. A gypsy who is known in a district hardly ever leaves debts for drink behind him. It is astonishing what quantities of strong drink they can consume, but equally astonishing that the enjoyment of alcohol has not injured their race, since other primitive peoples have been ruined by their introduction to it. Except on festive occasions one never finds a gypsy drunk, and they never become drink addicts.

Celebrations send them into ecstasies, and provide an occasion for drinking more than ever. The feast, which has always been held privately and generally in the open air—either in camp or not far from a public house—on almost every occasion ends in the fight which is a characteristic form of gypsy self-expression. At such times the landlord is pleased that the company is not celebrating in his inn, where their right of entry is restricted by law. The only pleasant memories left by the feast are of complete re-



## *Gypsies*

laxation and devotion to the joy of the moment. On these they exist during their long and lonely wanderings, already looking forward to the next celebration.

The souls of their ancestors are also invited to participate. No dead person is mentioned by name but his memory is honoured in silence while the first mouthful is dedicated to him. A few drops are thrown on the ground from the glass, mug or bottle out of which the drink is being taken, and all are silent. It is a silence for that other world about which nobody troubles, but which every one realizes he must some day visit as a spirit, dependent on these few drops of wine for every return, however short, to the joys which it has left.

I have not noticed any food taboos which are peculiar to the gypsies. On the whole they conform to the customs of the country where they are living. If the local inhabitants fast, the gypsy must perforce do the same, since on that day there is no food to be had. It is perhaps worth noting that the gypsy of south-eastern Europe breaks bread, tears meat and divides up his favourite maize pudding with a wooden scoop. No food which has come into contact with a corpse is ever eaten, even if it is his favourite dish and has only been standing in the tent where a gypsy has died. In addition, any food or crockery which has been touched by a woman's skirt is no longer used and must even be destroyed if the wearer of the skirt has recently given birth.

## *Food*

No gypsy can live without tobacco. If a stranger enters the camp or even if he is only visible in the distance, the children fall upon him in a body as though they were starving; the unfortunate visitor is not left in peace until he has given them some money for themselves and tobacco for their parents. Tobacco has healing properties and assuages hunger—'Si tut drab?' (Got any fags?). They have a pathetic, self-pitying manner which they adopt while begging and in the cultivation of which old women who point sadly at their seldom toothless mouths are particularly successful. The heart-rending exhibition continues until the traveller loses patience and tobacco and cigars change hands.

Male gypsies and the older gypsy women are never without a pipe. It is part of the traditional dress, like metal jewellery or the brass buttons on the skirt of the women and the leather bag of the men. Usually they make the pipes for themselves out of wood and cover them with brass or copper, which makes them look as though they were made entirely of these metals. Here and there one finds them decorated. The gold or copper sheen lights up the brown of their faces, through which their bright black eyes sparkle. Smoking is a passion with them; it is more important than their daily bread. If one offers bread and tobacco at the same time to a gypsy he will take the tobacco first, however hungry he may be. If he has to choose,



## *Gypsies*

he will take the tobacco and leave the bread. I was able to prove this several times during the war, in the prison camp at Zwickau, where there were some gypsies among the Rumanian soldiers. The gypsy is quite incorrigible, since he has been accustomed to smoking since childhood. A gypsy mother giving suck to her one- or two-year-old child, offers it by way of a change her pipe or the cigarette she has rolled and is delighted when it succeeds in producing some smoke. Gypsies, as their own language puts it, 'drink tobacco'. Its quality is unimportant. They smoke almost anything which is withered—dried leaves, dried stalks, or even charcoal—when no tobacco is available. The mother of the tribe gets the cigar and it seems very strange to see a wrinkled face with a thick cigar in its mouth and to observe the enjoyment with which she inhales the smoke.

Tobacco juice often seems to provide the gypsy with a welcome substitute for tobacco. He even enjoys what can be obtained by sucking at the stem of his pipe. For this reason he is also a keen collector of cigarette stubs and cigar ends. There is hardly any sort of rubbish for which he cannot find a use.

The gypsy indulges in no luxuries other than those I have described.



## XII

### LIFE IN THE OPEN

The gypsy is generally a tent dweller—always, in cases where he has remained a true nomad and not exchanged his tent for a caravan. Even the half-settled gypsy who lives in a house during the winter leaves it as soon as the season permits, to return to the life to which he is accustomed. Rain and snow are his worst enemies. Sun and the air of woods and fields are necessities of life. He hates wind. He calls it ‘the devil’s sneeze’. Time and again it has tried to tear down his tent or upset his caravan.

The whole drama of life is played for the gypsy in front of his tent. His eyes must always have something to occupy them ; his spirit thirsts for the enjoyment of a moving scene. He sleeps in the open air whenever possible ; he is born in the open air and, if he is a proper gypsy, he dies there. To be free is the wish nearest his heart. His life progresses like a prolonged summer holiday. Constant change of air and scene, one week on the edge of a wood, the next on a hill-top or by the side of

## *Gypsies*

the stream which flows through a valley, keep his mind lively and his body in health.

Wherever possible the gypsy avoids living within four walls ; they are like a prison to him. He only goes under cover to rest or during a storm. When the Austrian and Prussian governments, appalled by the conditions in which gypsies were living, and completely failing to understand their nomad temperament, built houses for them and expected them to feel at home there, they discovered to their severe disillusionment that these freedom-loving people made almost no use of the accommodation provided, but pitched a tent near the house and camped in the open air. Occasionally they put into the house the cattle which had been presented with the piece of land.

Every sort of shelter from a simple construction of branches or rushes with a mat thrown over them to a proper canvas tent can be met with among gypsies. The former is common among the poor and destitute.

I once met a mother with four children in this condition. She had been suspended from her tribe for a time on account of loose 'un-gypsy' conduct and this pitiable existence was her punishment. Another time I found the unfortunate woman in a ruin, and the third time we met she had camped against the side of a wooden shack. Her case is typical of the lonely wanderings endured by a gypsy

## *Life in the Open*

who has been subjected to punishment by the community.

A real gypsy who carefully observes the customs of his people will always take care to have his own tent, horse and cart, or, as is usual in this country, a good caravan. When some misfortune has resulted in his losing his possessions he is not discouraged, but takes steps to secure a new horse and a new cart. He is not ashamed to begin with one drawn by a dog, since his children and his shelter for the night must be carried somehow. How he collects enough money to reinstate himself in the carriage-owning class remains a mystery, but he has always done so before long.

He seldom seeks help from others. He disdains the acceptance of alms from members of his tribe. He only understands pity when it is shown to children or orphans. The proceeds of begging, fortune-telling, and what we would call stealing, are saved up and soon help him to regain the standard of living which custom dictates. No decent gypsy can be without a tent and cart. In Europe and Turkey wherever the donkey is used as a beast of burden, it is pressed into the service of gypsies. In Italy, in Spain, and on the Balkan Peninsula, they are constantly found together. In Rumania I have seen a whole tribe, that of the sieve-makers, traveling with no other transport. The tents, poles, tools, and utensils are divided and expertly packed against



## *Gypsies*

the animal's two sides, the heads of tiny children peep over the tops of buckets and cooking pots, hardly distinguishable from the rest of the rubbish (Illustration 33). The horse is considered too noble an animal to be piled high with household goods. I have never seen a horse among gypsies carrying a load. His position does not allow him to do anything but draw a cart. Among Turkish gypsies, who are found all over south-eastern Europe, ox-drawn transport is used.

The shape of the tent is not always the same. Three kinds are found, one with a high, pointed top, one unpointed and low, and a third semi-circular. The first is confined exclusively to real wandering gypsies and tinkers; the two last are used only by wandering smiths and bear-leaders. The last is the most common type among Turkish gypsies, though they sometimes use the others as well.

There are three sorts of material used for tents. Turkish gypsies use rush-matting or canvas; the very temporary shelters used by spoon-carvers and bowl-makers in Hungary and south-eastern Europe are of bark, while the other wandering gypsies all use canvas. Canvas, in fact, is the usual material among nomad tribes, and other coverings are only preferred where they are cheaper, more easily obtainable, and provide an equally satisfactory shelter.

## *Life in the Open*

On the plains, for instance, where there are marshes, rush-matting is more generally used than anything else.

The spoon-carvers and bowl-makers whose right to be called gypsies is not always granted, if staying for long in one place, build themselves half-subterranean dwellings which have no windows and from a distance resemble small mounds or large tree-stumps lacking any obvious connection with their environment. The only sign of human habitation is provided by the chimneys, which spring unexpectedly out of the earth. Round each hut, if it can be so called, runs a low hurdle fence about 8 in. high, designed to prevent the earth which has been piled on the roof from being easily washed away by rain. Inside there is only one room, the walls of which are lined with untrimmed wood and a coating of clay. It is just high enough for a man to stand up in and has an area of roughly  $3\frac{1}{2}$  by 2 yds. It is sunk between 1 and 2 ft. into the earth. A wood fire smoulders on the hearth, which is placed on the right-hand wall; about a yard and a half above it the frayed ends of the chimney, which is constructed of canes, stray down into the hut. The pot hangs from a wooden stake driven slantwise into the clay floor or on a chain suspended from the chimney. There is a low plank bedstead covered with a rush mat. A few hens have made themselves at home beside the



## *Gypsies*

continually smouldering fire, and pick up odd grains of maize within a few inches of it. The family supply of maize, obtained from peasants by exchange, is stored in a large wooden receptacle made of the bark of cherry or plum trees.

When they leave such an encampment, which happens whenever the supply of wood for their work is exhausted, they raze every hut to the ground. The cane chimneys projecting from the ground are the only trace of the former settlement, whose inhabitants move slowly away shouting encouragement to their few span of oxen, to build new houses somewhere else.

But these, as I have said, cannot with any certainty be regarded as real gypsies, and it is to those that we must now return. They are not driven into closed-in dwellings even by the bitterest cold. In the middle of winter with the temperature well below freezing-point, I have seen Bucharest gypsies camping in a large clay pit of the sort from which tiles are made. They had thrown together a sort of shack, the walls of which consisted of old tins flattened out against a lath frame, and providing a very imperfect shelter from the bitterly cold wind. Innumerable children, each dressed in half an old skirt, sat cowering close to one another round the spasmodic glow of a smoky fire. Since bricks were available in plenty close at hand in addition to a ruined house, which might with very little difficulty



## *Life in the Open*

have been converted into some sort of emergency dwelling, it is impossible to understand why the gypsies did not make use of this heaven-sent opportunity to protect themselves better against the cold. It almost seems as if they lacked the deductive faculty necessary for dealing with such a situation.

Wherever one goes one finds gypsies in equally uncomfortable quarters—a gutted tenement, a cave, a deserted building or a sheltered clay pit. The entrance to such places must always be open, unless perhaps in really bad weather it is protected by a blanket or some boards. At Godella, Valencia, and Granada in southern Spain the cave dwellings of the gypsies have become a recognized attraction for visitors, and their inhabitants have been clever enough to develop a thriving tourist industry, similar to that encouraged by Red Indians in Canada and the Maoris in New Zealand. As a general rule a gypsy despises closed-in quarters of human construction, and only accepts them where Nature has failed to make adequate provision. He never builds a house for himself.

In western and central Europe it has become customary in the winter months for gypsies to rent accommodation in some disreputable and therefore cheap quarter on the outskirts of a big town, in order to have their caravan repaired after the summer's journeying or to save the cost of acquiring one which could be heated. They do not, however,

## *Gypsies*

stay long during the day-time in these bare rooms, which are empty except for the equipment of the caravan. They are always out in search of food, or looking for a chance to do business. Only gypsies belonging to large towns own houses. They invest their money in land and pay a lawyer to take charge of it. But they very seldom live in such houses themselves.

Except for the settled and half-settled gypsies who work as smiths or musicians, the Turkish gypsies are the only ones in south-eastern Europe whom I have found owning houses. They inhabited, though only in winter, the half-subterranean dwellings which used to be common on the Danubean plains and consist of two rooms with a passage between them. One of the latter is for human habitation, the other for the oxen. There are streets of such houses still occupied by gypsies to-day in Turnu-Măgurele, Zimnicea, Roşiori de Vede, Dobreni and other places in the Danube valley. Here again one finds the gypsy preserving a custom which has long been abandoned by the local peasantry. During the summer one member of the tribe is left in charge. There are many Rumanian country towns where the separated gypsy quarter stands empty in summer, with houses and huts bolted and windows nailed up or covered over with clay, while the inhabitants travel the country as smiths, locksmiths or bear-leaders, or else take service as agricultural labourers



## *Life in the Open*

on one of the big estates. By the beginning of winter these semi-nomad gypsies are back again in their old quarters. Only the farriers and musicians live in a house all the year round and the close association of these gypsies with the townspeople leads them to adopt their habits in other respects as well.

In western and central Europe the tent was early abandoned in favour of the caravan which has now become inseparable from gypsies in the minds of their romantic admirers. To the gypsy himself it is an advertisement of his means to the outer world. All can tell by looking at it the measure of success which he has enjoyed at the last horse market. In front trot one or two fine gypsy horses, while one or two dogs accompany them or run with remarkable agility between the wheels. The driver sits inside and controls the horses through the front window or walks beside them and leads them by the bridle. His wife, who can drive or harness as well as he, relieves him from time to time. Inside the caravan travel the rest of the family, which often includes relatives who have lost their own through some misfortune and not yet been able to buy a new one. The interior looks extremely comfortable. The bedstead is usually at the back behind a curtain. A small wood-burning stove soon warms the small room and a cupboard contains the necessary forks, spoons, knives, and crockery. A table stands against the long wall,



## *Gypsies*

usually opposite the door. On the walls are brightly coloured pictures, photographs both of relations and of people whom the inmates admire but are never likely to see, and the inevitable mirror. There are windows on all sides, that in the rear providing a useful observation-post from which the wife can warn her husband of danger in the event of pursuit by police.

Caravans are not cheap. Prices, which may be between £50 and £150, vary according to the wood used and the fitting out of the interior. A cheap variety may be had for £30, but the gypsy is seldom satisfied with one like that. Generally he places his order as much as one, or even two years before he will be able to pay. During this period he earns sufficient money to be able to enter into possession at the end of it.

When the price is settled an agreement is made and conscientiously kept by both parties. Honorable behaviour on both sides is the basis of all agreements between contractor and gypsy. A handshake is much more important than a carefully drawn-up contract, since the gypsy would usually have to have the latter read to him. Reading and writing are not his strong points. One payment is made when the order is placed, and further contributions follow at irregular intervals. Unexpected visits are paid by the gypsy from time to time to insure that the work has progressed proportionately to the

## *Life in the Open*

amount of money so far paid. At the same time the buyer can suggest any alterations which have occurred to him since the original plan was made. When the payments are nearly completed the gypsy is very anxious to obtain credit for the remainder. If the caravan-builder allows himself to weaken before his customer's piteous appeals, he can write the amount off as a dead loss immediately. Doing business with gypsies requires a very special technique. If the contractor remains firm he is certain of keeping his customer ; but if he at first allows some latitude and then takes legal measures to retrieve his money, he can be quite sure that he will not receive any orders from that quarter for some time to come.

When the caravan is ready and approved, the owner's first act is to break one of its windows with a stone or stick to bring luck.

For generations certain groups of gypsies have ordered their caravans from the same maker, so that in the course of the last few centuries the building of them has developed into a skilled trade, and those who pursue it have gained such experience in dealing with their customers that a feeling of complete confidence now exists between the two.

A new caravan is ordered, when the old one has been broken in a fight or during a flight from the police, when a gypsy has become more prosperous, or when he marries. On these latter occasions he



## *Gypsies*

can always sell his old caravan to another member of his tribe, except in the one case where a member of his family has died or a child been born in it. The caravan is then considered impure, and must be either burned or passed on to a non-gypsy.

Gypsies have a remarkable gift for placing their caravans in a suitable position during their travels. They know exactly how to utilize every depression in the landscape and so to camouflage their home that while it remains invisible from the road, its owner can see the road himself or receive information of approaching danger in good time from a scout at the top of a piece of rising ground.

Caravans are common among gypsies in western, northern, and central Europe. In England they are shorter and higher than on the Continent, while their shape and interior decoration accord with the traditions of the country. In France the climate makes possible short caravans with one pair of wheels unequal to the other, where the driver sits in the open ; their covering resembles a peaked cap. If a gypsy intends to move to another country he generally sells his caravan first, and after he has crossed the border, buys either one of the pattern common in his newly adopted country or a different one, according to the necessity, means, and mood of the moment.

It is impossible to say when he first exchanged his tent for a caravan. The first gypsies came to



### *Life in the Open*

central Europe in light carts, and it was only when they came into contact with the tumblers and tight-rope dancers from whom the public found it so hard to distinguish them, that they were introduced to the circus caravan and adopted it for their own use. This at least is certain, that the exchange must have involved a complete reorientation of the tradition-bound gypsy's mind, before he could reconcile it with the gypsy law.

### XIII

#### CLOTHES

Gypsies have no national costume. Their women neither spin nor weave. All their clothes are derived from their adopted country. Only the way in which they are woven, the colours and the combination of materials are peculiarly gypsy.

Where the climate is warm the children go about naked or with nothing on but a ragged skirt until they are ten or twelve years old, but in countries where there are laws about decency they are not allowed to be seen in this state on the street. They make up for this by taking more sun or dust baths in the seclusion of their camp. When puberty is reached instinct urges them to cover their bodies and they obey it.

Adults dress, but are not particular how they look. Carelessness is the rule. Rags are the national costume, even in the cold climates, where the gypsy still remains a child of the south.

Sympathetic neighbours generally present them with cast-off clothes. In south-eastern Europe there is sometimes a fight among gypsy children for

## *Clothes*

possession of some of the clothes which are distributed at the grave of a non-gypsy who has died. Each wants something to take home. No matter whether the clothes of the dead person fit or not, they are worn, and worn until they fall from the body of their own accord and end in the camp rubbish dump. The appearance of their wearers excites no comment. They are gypsies. That explains everything. Only young girls dress carefully and display innate gypsy charm in the arrangement of their clothes, their choice of colours and the width of their skirts.

Second-hand clothes shops and pawnbrokers do good business with gypsies. They do not mind in the least who has worn the clothes before ; they know that it cannot have been one of their own people, since they burn anything which has been in contact with a dead person and wear everything else until it falls to pieces. For a gypsy to wear the clothes of another gypsy who has died is unthinkable. He would not dream of doing it even in jest. Superstition and his law have so much influence over him that he would perish simply from the pangs of conscience resulting from such an action.

In their outward appearance gypsies resemble the people of the country in which they are living. The Hungarian gypsy wears boots, the Rumanian gypsy is frequently bare-footed or in sandals, while



## *Gypsies*

the Spanish gypsy is dressed like a Spaniard. Since the peoples of south-eastern Europe have preserved their peasant costumes down to the present day and gypsies are only given what is old, torn or out of fashion, it is often among them that one finds examples of embroidery which has been worn a hundred or more years ago. Some aged Rumanian woman digs up from the bottom of her chest a piece of clothing which she may have worn as a girl or inherited from her mother and for which she has long had no further use, and gives it to the begging gypsy woman. A student of costume in such districts should therefore not leave the gypsy out of account. He would find among them many pieces worthy of a place in a museum, of a sort which the people of the country have abandoned years ago. When the gypsies first appeared in central and western Europe the impression they made was accentuated by the fact that they were wearing the cast-off clothes of the Hungarian and Rumanian nobility.

Gypsies still have a weakness for bright, vividly contrasted colours. The settled or half-settled gypsy who dons a white skirt does so for the sake of colour rather than cleanliness. Its brightness catches his eye. Green, yellow, and red are his favourite colours ; they look particularly well against the dark eyes and jet-black hair of his womenfolk. Even the tinker who would be appalled at the

## *Clothes*

thought of a clean shirt and is content to cover himself with the filthiest rags, enlivens them with a coloured scarf or a piece of jewellery. Formerly, this love of colour brought even nomad gypsies in crowds to the mansions of the Boyars, where they hoped to obtain enrolment among the numerous servants, who wore splendid liveries ordered in Paris or Vienna.

The men used also to like picturesque military uniforms with plenty of brass buttons. However much it tears the material they sew these or metal discs all over their clothes and their leather satchels or decorate their sticks with pieces of metal.

Their headgear again, follows the fashion of the country where they are living. In Rumania they wear a fur cap, in Hungary the hat which is peculiar to that country ; in England a trilby or cloth cap is commonest. But the way in which it is worn is always characteristically gypsy. Green or brown it perches impudently on top of the head whatever the weather, and soon loses its original colour under a coating of dirt. But one never sees a gypsy woman with a hat on her head. The most she ever does is to wear a scarf which serves the dual purpose of adorning her head and discouraging its lice from emigration.

All gypsies have only one garment for their children. In this, when they wear anything at all, their loved ones run about, sleep, get soaked and



## *Gypsies*

dry again. Nothing is ever laundered. Trousers or skirt serve the adult gypsy for cleaning a knife or spoon ; his sleeve is useful as a handkerchief. Shoes are worn among poorer gypsies until they literally fall to pieces. In Hungary and Transylvania where the gypsies care rather more for appearances, both men and women sometimes wear high boots like the peasants.

The women's skirts are long and pleated, of ankle length, and tied round the hips with a cord. In Mohammedan countries the women conform to the usual custom and wear wide trousers. There is no danger of their trying to adapt their skirts to the length dictated by fashion. This contempt for imitation is another indication of the independence of their taste. Their tradition is stronger than the dictates of Paris. It may be asked what happens when a gypsy woman finds herself unable to get a long skirt from those of whom she usually begs one. Will she turn tailor and lengthen one herself? German gypsies already go to seamstresses to have clothes altered or made, but never in the latest fashion. Their skirts have remained long and wide.

The men in the nomadic tribes wear their hair in rings which fall to the shoulder. Neither men nor women ever plait it. There is one group of bowl-making gypsies in Hungary whose custom is to plait the hair in the middle of the forehead or



## *Clothes*

just at the side of it and lay it backwards on top of the head or knot it in front. Women comb their hair straight back, often parting it in the middle. It curls of its own accord. There is never any need of singeing. When it seems to be getting too long they cut it themselves, but really short hair is unknown among proper gypsies. So are barbers.

Spots and repairs of various colours improve the appearance of gypsy clothing. The women consider such repairs as part of the embroidery of a dress. This is only to be expected in view of the love of adornment which distinguishes every gypsy woman. When a bridegroom escorts his adored through the streets of a town, he finds it hard to resist the rapid succession of wishes which she expresses as soon as they arise. In every shop window there is scarf or skirt which takes her fancy, and her choice always displays originality. Clothes which we would consider beautiful make no impression upon her. Only materials with clearly defined colour schemes, which, however, are not nearly so dazzling as for instance those worn by Polish peasants, appeal to her. Love of certain colours seems to be instinctive in her. Her way of making the colours used in her dress combine harmoniously is typical of gypsy women. Any eye which is sensitive to colour and not spoiled by our conventional standards will prove this for itself. And one should not allow one's judgement to be misled by the dirtiness of the clothes. Under-

## *Gypsies*

neath there will always be embroidery and a pattern.

Jewellery is seldom bought. In England and south-eastern Europe every nomad gypsy has a store of ancestral gold and silver treasures, however small. Those of Transylvania used to be and perhaps still are in possession of centuries-old silverwork, which would be better in a museum than being buried every time there is fear of confiscation by the police. In times of stress they give it to people whose honesty they have proved. It is from these treasures that they create their jewellery, or have it made for them by a gypsy silversmith. The gold- or silversmith melts down the precious metal and proceeds to work it with the most delicate of tools. Rings, buckles, ear-rings and necklaces are produced in this way by these skilful and now steadily disappearing craftsmen.

One can often tell from which country gypsies have come by examining the coins which they wear strung together in their hair. Austrian thalers from the time of Maria Theresa and Turkish gold pieces are quite often found. Even nickel coins which have been begged are bored, if the holes are not there already (as they used to be in pre-war Rumania). They are then strung and worn as a necklace. In this way quite a large sum of money is withdrawn from circulation every year. Armlets of silver coins are not uncommon. Sometimes a



## *Clothes*

plain brass or copper bangle has to suffice. Filigree work, particularly in the shape of buckles for belts, was a legacy from their wanderings in Macedonia and is still preserved to-day. Similar objects are found among the native population throughout the Balkan Peninsula.

A gypsy woman must make herself attractive, even if the most she can do is to pick a flower and put it behind her ear or in her hair. She always chooses the colour which is most becoming to her. Neck and fingers receive most attention. One hardly ever sees a hand without rings on it. No gypsy woman is ever seen without ear-rings, and her hair is interwoven with red and blue beads. Even children have beads (but never yellow, black or green ones) attached to their foreheads as a protection against the evil eye. A quite worthless piece of zinc or other cheap metal is hung on the chain as an amulet. But the most frequent ornaments which I saw used for this purpose in south-eastern Europe were a mole's or marten's paw, or the claw of a bear on a red band decorated with blue beads. Coral, fish-bones, or small mussels were almost as common. All of them defend the child from the evil eye. Necklaces of melon seeds, beans, acorns, chestnuts, and other fruits are worn by women of all ages. Every little piece of ribbon or brass wire, or even of broken glass or root, has a definite significance in the eyes of the gypsy. It is difficult



## *Gypsies*

to understand this language of ornamentation and to penetrate its obscurities. The little red cap or the fez which children wear displays a whole collection of these ugly decorations and charms, which only possess magic power if they are put on the child by its mother. The personal contact and the wishes which accompany the gift combine with it to produce magic power.

The hundred and one trifles which a gypsy woman will buy at a fair and use to adorn her neck, her arms or her fingers serve no purpose but that of display. But you can tell something about the wearer from their colours. Yellow, for instance, is the colour of suffering.



25. Even in America, where this photograph was taken, the tents retain their usual characteristics, though that on the right has a low wall. Caravans have been replaced by motor-cars, but the nature of their inmates remains unchanged



26. Few European gypsies have taken to cars. The method of travel adopted by the Normandy gypsies in this photograph is that more usually preferred. Contact with human beings rather than frequent change of scene is their primary consideration



27. *The gypsy quarter in Constantinople. Comment superfluous*





28. *A louse-ridden group on the outskirts of Bucharest. Any barn or shed is used by those who have no tent*



29. *Nomad gypsies often camp in clay pits. Those in the photograph found their position sheltered and out of the way of passers-by. The proximity of a manure heap does not seem to worry them*



30. A Rumanian tinker and some of his family in front of the tent which houses them throughout the year. The children are waiting eagerly for the return of their mother, and regard the photographer with some diffidence. The grandmother is taking a rest after gathering the wood in the foreground



31. Turkish gypsies and their oven. The glowing ashes are being removed from the bread, which is just ready



32. The two types of tent used by Turkish gypsies. Cooking is done outside the tent, which is used only in bad weather for sleep and rest





33. Tents and household chattels are packed first. On top of them come the youngest members of the family in buckets or jars (their heads are only just visible in the photograph). Their parents are in the village, selling sieves and flax-combs



34. Turkish gypsies about to move off from their camp. When the line is formed the oxen will be in front and the horses behind. Tibere, the chief, has seen to it that everyone knows his position



35. After its long journey this party has now to find a camping-ground. The Rumanian peasantry are not likely to make it easy for them



36. *The gypsies of Transylvania meet every year at the horse-fair in Hermannstadt. Business is brisk, and a successful deal, a meeting, or a parting, are all thought good excuses for celebrations on a generous scale*





37. Sieve-making gypsies near Grojdibod on the Danube. They travel through Rumania in groups of two or three families, and have no caravans. The donkeys are as easily contented as their owners



38. The "Cositorari" (Rumanian Turkish-speaking tinkers) are the richest and cleanest of all gypsies. They use oxen to draw their carts. On top of one of those in the background is a hen-house



39. Quiet moment in a camp of German gypsies. All three generations are equally full of life. The old lady with the pipe spent her childhood in Rumania and can still speak a few words of broken Rumanian



40. *The shape of these tents proclaims their owners as wandering blacksmiths, locksmiths or bear-leaders. One side of each tent is open, but a change in the wind has made it necessary to improvise a protection. The scene is in Rumania*



41. *Bear-leading gypsies near Filiași in Rumania, looking as if they enjoyed life—which they do. The bear is chained up about a hundred yards from the tent*





42. *Repairing a tent. Bear-leading and blacksmith gypsies are not so rich as the tinkers. There is no question of buying a new tent when the old one is worn*



43. *The gypsy who is wrapped in a rug recently gave birth to a child*



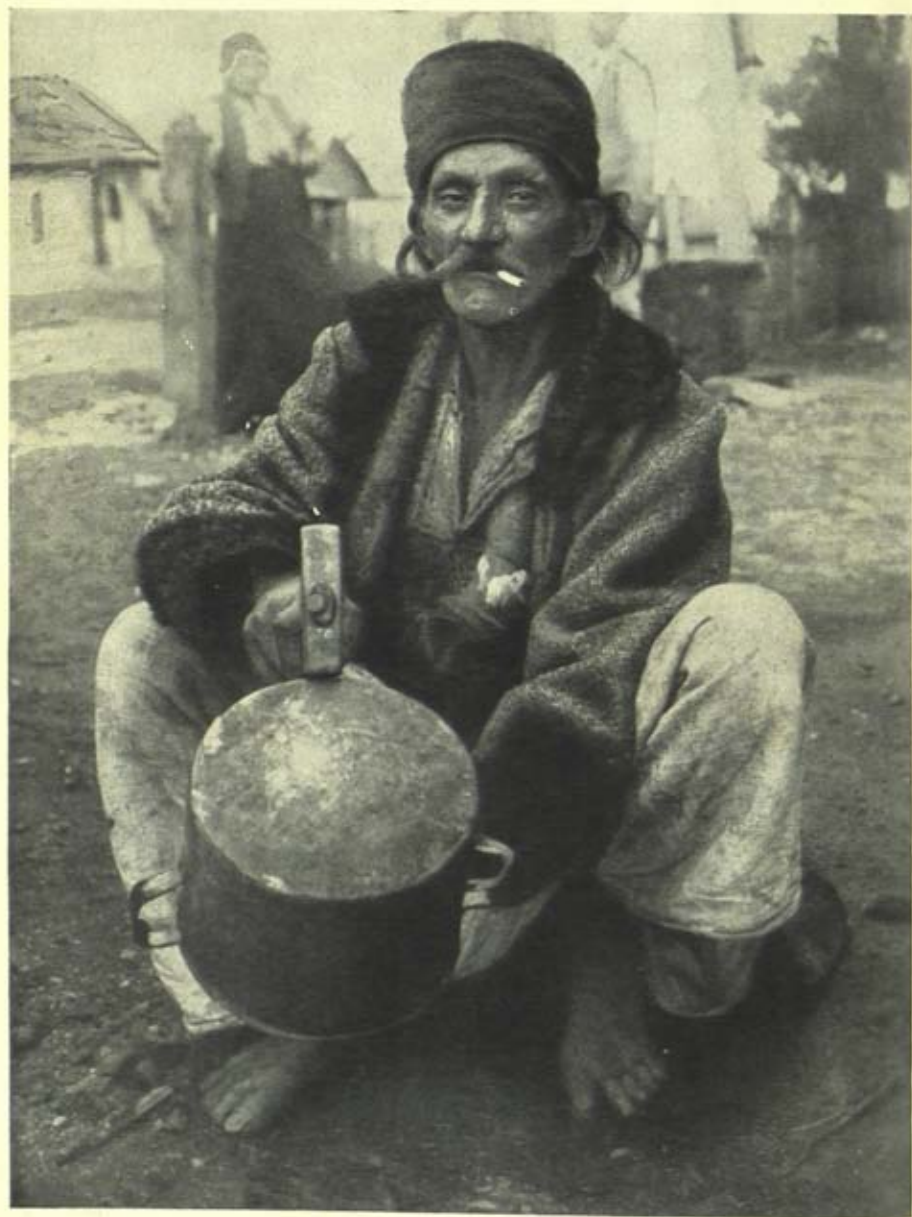
44. *An old gypsy locksmith or bear-leader from Rumania*



45. *At the Hermannstadt horse-fair this chief would allow only himself to be photographed in company with his wife and his horse, and exacted triple payment on this ground*



46. *Wandering gypsy smiths at work in Hungary. Note the two types of anvil, the hammers and the bellows*



47. A copper-smith whose pock-marked face makes him look more wicked than in fact he is, though his eyes reveal exceptional cunning. He gives a new lease of life to copper-ware. His long hair shows that he is a nomad





48. A half-settled gypsy smith at work. He makes horse-shoes, agricultural implements and household utensils, but in his own time. It is of no use trying to hurry him



49. Two families of comb-makers on the outskirts of Ploesti in Rumania. In raining weather they work on the clay floor of one of the huts. Their appearance is fairly respectable. They are descendants of the slaves freed in 1848



50. *Peddling hats on the bridge over the Guadalquivir, which leads from the Iriana gypsy quarter into Seville*

## XIV

### MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD

All over the world gypsies are famous as beggars. Their technique is calculated to melt the stoutest heart. Its infinite variety has to be seen to be believed. Hence their popularity among artists and psychologists. There is no trick in the whole trade of mendicancy with which they are not familiar. 'Give a drop of milk for the sick baby, give a little piece of bread, my children are starving, they haven't had a bite for three days, it'll bring you luck ! . . .' The story varies little wherever it is told. Their ancestors were beggars and the tribes related to them in India still are. But their beat is not subject to delimitation like that of other primitive peoples with similar habits, for their activity covers the whole of the civilized world. They are dependent upon human beings for their existence, and therefore avoid sparsely populated districts where every ounce of bread has to be wrung from the soil by gruelling labour. The more civilized the country in which they are living, the more parasitic does their existence become.



## *Gypsies*

Where, however, a people is still living in a nearly primitive state, as in India, Asia Minor, and the Balkans, there occurs the, to us, remarkable phenomenon of their absorption into the national economy ; they find some way of making themselves useful to the native population by the performance of services which would otherwise remain undone, or by supplying them with a variety of domestic articles which they do not make themselves. In short, they make themselves almost indispensable and thus purchase the right to exist, accompanied by a measure of good-hearted tolerance. As early as the period of their sojourn in India, they accepted the position of a despised and impure race, who earned their living by singing, dancing, circus acting, fortune-telling, leather work, and tinkering, all activities in which a respectable Indian might not engage. To-day in Hungary some of them empty latrines, in Rumania they are often found as undertakers, dog-catchers, and knackers, in Bulgaria gypsies were still employed in 1923 as hangmen. In the last of these occupations they developed a technique of cruelty which the authorities in earlier times found extremely useful, and their activities are commemorated by the word 'călău' for hangman in Rumanian and Hungarian, which is obviously connected with the gypsy word 'kale' (black). Their skill as smiths led to their becoming specialists in the manufacture of instruments of torture which

## *Means of Livelihood*

were much used in the Balkan Peninsula during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In Germany and western Europe they have never been popular owing to their begging. For this reason numerous attempts have been made to convert them into useful members of society, which they have already been for a long time in south-eastern Europe. They need to find a way of living honestly without altering their unquenchable wanderlust or anything else which is fundamental in their character. It would be futile to attempt, as has been done in the past, to force upon them our own ideas of how life should be lived. Such ideas can be introduced easily enough among peoples with a civilization and a historical tradition similar to our own, but are out of the question where the necessary background is lacking. What is necessary in such cases is simply to give a people the chance of adapting themselves to the civilization in the midst of which they find themselves, while their own national characteristics remain intact. The gypsy's ability to do this is proved by the numbers to which his people have grown in Rumania and the Balkans, and the variety of ways in which they earn their living.

Certain gypsy tribes attempted to adapt themselves in this way as early as the time of their sojourn in India. At the time of the Aryan invasion some 4,000 years ago large groups of Dravidians and



## *Gypsies*

others of the original inhabitants were uprooted and absorbed by the invaders. Some of these, who if not actually the ancestors of the gypsies we know, certainly lived a life similar to theirs, were introduced by the more advanced Aryans to agriculture and cattle-breeding ; the others became indistinguishable from the rest of the conquered population, or sank to the level of a pariah class which found means of livelihood in keeping with its status. The approach to another sort of economy is also observable in the Balkans, where the Turkish gypsies rear buffaloes ; and the fact that certain tribes camp for the whole summer on the big estates of the Rumanian Boyars to work as labourers is suggestive of an agricultural tradition somewhere in the background. But the great majority of their brothers have preserved their traditional economy. They drag out in isolated units the strange existence which we know so well and have remained the beggars which they always were.

Since he is at heart a beggar the gypsy's energies are always directed towards getting what he can, which generally means stealing. While primitive men collect roots, beetles, and seeds, the gypsy's attention is always concentrated on things which already have an owner ; as a rule he takes hens, ducks, geese or turkeys, but jewellery and clothing are not beneath his consideration, and anything which he can use in his own ménage he snatches



## *Means of Livelihood*

during the absence of its owner. He has a passion for horse-stealing, and since his knowledge of the habits of these animals is profound, he is generally successful. No detail in the preparations is overlooked ; days may pass before an opportunity occurs which is considered sufficiently favourable. This highly developed skill in the art of theft has made many people afraid of the gypsies.

Though a master thief, the gypsy is no burglar. Anyone who knows his superstitious fear of the evil spirits which wander about during the night, and the multitude of personally attested stories which are accepted as evidence of their activities, could not dream of attributing to him any act of housebreaking performed by night. Such a thing might just be believed of a gypsy who had succumbed to the influence of city life and severed all connections with his own people, but even this would be improbable. Anything locked, anything which has to be forced open, he avoids. No gypsy ever cracked a safe. He keeps clear of closed doors and windows ; behind them lurk the spirits who will not let him out again if he once passes within. But where he finds a house standing open he goes through with an apparent audacity which is in fact childlike *naïveté*, since he imagines that a good hiding is the worst he can suffer if caught. Game, which according to his ideas has no master, falls an easy prey to the gypsy's skill. His abnormally

## *Gypsies*

sharp eyes look in carefully wherever a window is left open, and if necessary he fishes with a hook on the end of a stick, or with a line, for anything which he cannot reach with his hands. Sometimes he employs tactics of peculiar subtlety on his begging-cum-stealing expeditions. His available forces are divided up through the village. While a large group takes advantage of the curiosity of the inhabitants to keep most of them occupied by some sort of display, women and children as quickly as possible collect what they can from the houses which have been left open. Begging, theft, and fortune-telling are the three sources of income which are open to the gypsy without his having to do any work, unless the arduous round of a beggar, his ceaseless monologue, and his continual search for an opportunity to steal, or the fortune-teller's conferences can be classed as such. Gypsies are compelled to support themselves by these means in countries which refuse to make use of their manual skill, and in which the development of industry has robbed them of the possibility of selling their handiwork. Where there was no handworker class for the practice of certain trades (e.g. in the Balkans and the countries which lie to the north of them) they used often to earn an honest living.

They brought with them to Europe from India or Asia Minor ability developed in three directions. They were smiths, they were musicians, and they



## *Means of Livelihood*

were horse-dealers. They have practised as such for generations, and the fact that they do so still is surely an indication that these were their original occupations. Horse-dealing is almost the only honest calling, except peddling, which remains to them in central and western Europe, and even that has received a severe setback owing to the advent of cars. Whether they will in time enter the motor trade remains to be seen.

As coppersmiths they are unrivalled throughout the world. With the most primitive portable anvil, a small hammer and the skill of their hands they work at the copper until every hole is hammered out. It almost seems as though they had some secret recipe for the working of this metal. Bataillard went so far as to suggest that they were originally responsible for the spread of skill in bronze work. When the men are at work they send their wives into the villages to deliver what they have repaired and ask the peasants for any other leaking pots which they would like attended to. The peasants are very ready to supply them, since they know that nobody but the tinker is able to make the necessary repairs. Pots often reach gypsies in a state which made me think that any attempt to improve them would be hopeless. But however many holes there were, or however thin the bottom might have worn, the gypsy was never beaten. The copper would be worked and hammered so evenly that the



## *Gypsies*

pot could be returned watertight to its owner. Coppersmiths, whether amateur or professional, confess themselves mystified by such work. Perhaps some day the secret will be made the subject of an inquiry. In the meantime it enables the tinkers to supply their modest requirements in the way of maize, clothes, and footgear.

Gypsies are equally skilful as blacksmiths, and are mentioned as such in some of the oldest records. In Persia, Asia Minor, the Balkans, Rumania, and Hungary smiths' work is to this day one of their commonest means of livelihood. A safe-conduct letter of 1496 mentions the fact that gypsies had supplied arms to the Bishop of Fünfkirchen. Even in Spain where they have in the main adopted other occupations, one finds a certain number of blacksmiths among them. In south-eastern Europe a large proportion of those thus employed has already become settled. There is hardly a village or small town in Rumania without its gypsy smith, who has settled somewhere on the outskirts by the side of one of the main roads. Whole blocks are named after these workmen. Here they may be found making ploughshares, locks, grills, spits, hooks, bolts, hatchets, shovels, knives, flax-combs, nails, and horseshoes. There are also a few who confine themselves exclusively to the shoeing of horses and oxen. Their outfit is the most primitive imaginable. Where they are still nomads they carry it with

## *Means of Livelihood*

them in a leather bag flung over the shoulder. They can set up their travelling workshop wherever they choose. The anvil, about 20 ins. long and 3 ins. square, which was frequently of stone as late as the nineteenth century, is driven half-way into the earth. The bellows consist of a goat-skin with the hair turned towards the inside and the legs stopped with wooden pegs. They are worked by opening and closing a slit on the upper side. The air escapes through a tube inserted in one of the wooden plugs. Formerly a hole in the earth was made for the fire and the nozzle of the bellows was dug into the ground ; nowadays the smith works at ground level and builds a clay mound about 6 ins. high, in which the nozzle is inserted. His few tools—a hammer, one or two pairs of tongs and a chisel—lie ready to his hand. He himself sits cross-legged on the ground ‘as the tailors do in our country’ (thus the records of 1496). He works the bellows with his left hand and holds in his right the tongs which grasp the iron at which he is working. Centuries have not changed the picture. We see what our ancestors saw 500 years ago. Neither the tools nor the methods of using them have changed. The bellows are the same as those used in Asia Minor, whence the gypsies perhaps introduced their virtues to Europe.

For decorative work the smith uses four simple iron tools in addition to those already named. He



## *Gypsies*

hammers out the ornamentation on the cold metal. 'Flowers' is his comprehensive term for it, but it generally consists of geometrical figures—semi-circles, circles, or combinations of lines.

Beside the articles mentioned above he also makes pack needles about 2 ins. long, using a still smaller anvil, which is driven into an iron-bound stake standing in the clay floor of his hut. On the flat of this, which is 6 ins. or more thick, the same length, and 2 ins. broad, there is a small hole which is used for hammering out the heads of horseshoe nails. For the pack needles the smith takes a piece of iron wire, hammers it out at one end, files it on both sides and makes the hole by driving an awl through it. Cobbler's awls, single teeth for flax combs, and knitting-needles, are also made on this small anvil. In the days before matches, the gypsy smith also provided the whole population with striking steel.

Since he knows nothing of smelting, he collects his raw material where he can. Old and broken roasting-spits, horseshoes or grills are continually being reforged into something new. Recently he has also taken to buying iron in bars.

The gypsy supplied the inhabitants of south-eastern Europe with iron goods, and knew no competitors until well into the twentieth century when mass production began to interfere with his success. In spite of this gypsies still produce a number of things



## *Means of Livelihood*

so cheaply that the south-eastern Europeans prefer them to mass-produced articles ; and in towns and villages one can still hear his cry : ' Any locks to mend ? Any locks to mend ? ' He carries in the bag beside his anvil charcoal which he has burned or collected himself, and is thus able to start work in the courtyard of a house or any vacant place, where orders are attended to ' while you wait '. In camp he often builds a special shelter for his smithy to protect him from the sun (Illustration 1).

Settled gypsies naturally have longer anvils and bellows since they attend to orders in their own huts and do not need to drag their equipment round with them. In such cases wife and child have to help by relieving the husband or father of the necessity of attending to the bellows. One continually hears him shouting ' Phurde ! Phurde ! ' (Blow up ! Blow up !).

The gold- and silversmiths among the gypsies work with an exceptionally fine tool. Many peasant bridegrooms or gypsy girls order finger and earrings from them. Their habit of using their skill in order to make two coins out of one or of forging them is almost common knowledge. Amongst the Rumanians of Oltenia they are renowned as forgers. People who are unaware of this bring them precious metal to be made into jewellery, and are surprised to find that a certain amount of it has been kept back by the craftsman for his personal use. Gold

## *Gypsies*

and silver are the only metals which these gypsies know how to smelt. They have a minute blast for the purpose.

In former centuries many gypsy slaves in Hungary and Rumania were employed in washing gold. There was not a single river in Transylvania where gypsies were not to be found washing the sand in search of particles of gold. Some idea of the amount yielded by these methods may be gathered from the fact that the River Aranyos (whose name means River of Gold) yielded half a ton of gold per year. To-day gypsies are no longer found thus employed. The washing process was given up during the nineteenth century since its yield had become insufficient ; but goldsmiths are still found in the districts which formerly supplied their material.

Another trade practised by Turkish gypsies is proclaimed throughout the towns and villages of south-eastern Europe by the cry : ' Tin-plating ! Tin-plating ! Any pans for tin-plating ! ' The wife generally accompanies her husband and their voices produce a penetrating harmony at an early hour of the morning. Orders are called for at every hotel and at the houses of the Boyars and are not difficult to obtain. Cooks of both sexes bring out their copper pots and pans to be tinned by these gypsies who are famous for their skill and can set to work on the spot. In south-eastern Europe they have a monopoly of this sort of business. There are no



## *Means of Livelihood*

tin-platers other than gypsies to be found. No one who is not a gypsy could do the work so cheaply, so well, and 'while you wait'. One can safely say that every copper pot and pan of the Rumanian plain-dwellers receives the attention of these Turkish gypsies. The wandering tin-platers in France may be of Turkish origin, but it is equally possible that a quite different section of the gypsies may have chosen this occupation.

Yet another nomad group serves the community by sieve-making. They travel through the country with their donkeys, as many as five families together, making and selling in the course of their journey. Wooden rims are firmly bound together by animal tendons and thin dressed hides stretched across them. Strips of the same hide are led through the edge of the hide or the rim and made fast. The result furnishes another group of gypsies with their means of livelihood. Townswomen in south-eastern Europe may nowadays prefer factory-made goods, but the peasants still remain faithful to the strong, finely pierced sieves of the gypsies. An additional inducement for them to purchase these is the fact that they can obtain them in return for farm produce of which they have an ample supply.

The comb-makers do not form a separate tribe; in Rumania they live side by side with bear-leaders, locksmiths, and blacksmiths. Their trade, however, is entirely separate, so that a comb-maker always



## *Gypsies*

remains a comb-maker and his son becomes one after him. One or two families are sufficient to supply the needs of a small town, especially now that lice are less regularly to be found among the local inhabitants than formerly.

The gypsies obtain the material for their combs by sawing the horns off oxen in an open pasture. Here, too, their skill is remarkable. The horns thus obtained are cut into pieces about 4 inches long and held over the fire by a pair of pincers. A lengthwise cut is then made and the piece of horn thus opened up which has become softened by the heat is pressed into a rough wooden block. Wedges are then used to stretch it. When the piece of horn is hard again it is smoothed with a knife and polished with wood ash. A rasp is then used to bring the two sides to a point. After this the half-finished comb is forced so firmly into a two-inch cut in a tall wooden post which projects from the clay floor, that fine teeth can be sawed in it. Sawing is done alternately from the left and the right ; the resulting unevenness is removed with a rasp. When the work is completed the gypsy takes down his 'Gono' or leather satchel from its hook and sets out. His sales talk is frank 'Buy a comb, buy combs for your lice !' He has no fixed prices and is prepared to bargain. There is still a market for his hand-made produce in spite of industrial competition.

A particular branch of nomad gypsies make paint

## *Means of Livelihood*

brushes for house decorating or painting furniture. Others of half-settled habits collect bees-wax for sale ; others bind brooms. Brickmaking dates from the period of their slavery and is still practised. They dig and knead the clay themselves and shape the bricks by hand. Large numbers of these are then dried in the open air, stacked and baked. There was a time when gypsies were almost the only people in south-eastern Europe engaged in this trade, but nowadays most of them have been superseded by private companies. Only rarely does one still find a gypsy whose family supplies a village with bricks. Some have transferred their activity to the making of rush mats which they offer for sale at markets (Illustrations 53, 55).

They are able, in short, to turn their hand to almost anything. They have found a place for themselves in the national economy. The long-established relationship to state, monastery or land-owner, the foundations of which were laid in the period of slavery, has helped considerably in Rumania towards enabling them to supply certain of the country's needs.

In the market-place of Bucharest long rows of gypsy women stand armed with paint-brushes on long poles, with which they are prepared to distemper your house for you. Next to them stand the chimney-sweeps whose colour contrasts vividly with the white of the house-decorators. They work



## *Gypsies*

as handymen in new buildings, where they live in summer with their families. As they are cheap and conscientious workmen no objection is made to this. The important Boyars employ them to work on their huge estates. Even if they are not over-energetic the Boyar is satisfied, provided they are engaged in something useful like weeding or chopping wood. He cannot however trust them with sowing or reaping.

There are to-day whole villages of gypsies in south-eastern and eastern Europe, most of them founded in the nineteenth century and owing their existence to the abolition of slavery in Europe, when many newly freed slaves were abandoned to their fate. In Rumania there are such agricultural settlements as Principele Ferdinand and in the U.S.S.R. about 1,000 gypsies work on fifty collective farms.

Nowadays the descendants of these freed slaves in Rumania have of course not an acre between them. It is impossible to turn them into good peasants. The nature of their work is decided for them by the nomad blood in their veins. Work in the fields is not their line. They only practise their various crafts when they are in the mood and necessity compels them. No gypsy has ever become wealthy through the work of his hands. When he does become wealthy in central or western Europe it is generally owing to a good business deal or the winning of a prize in a musical competition.



## *Means of Livelihood*

In the towns of south-eastern Europe gypsy women sell flowers, either from door to door or sitting in rows by the side of the more frequented streets. Bargaining is customary and the discussion often affords an opportunity for quite a number of other things, such as clothing, foodstuffs, and stolen goods to change hands as well. Gypsies of Hungarian origin living in Rumania are given the clothes of dead people or exchange glassware and crockery for them. They seem to do very well out of this. One sees women with two or three men's hats on their heads and clothes over their arms, walking through the quarter where second-hand clothes shops are to be found, and they are able to sell what they have collected. The Rumanian custom of 'pomană', which consists in honouring the memory of the dead by giving away their clothes at regular intervals, is made good use of by the gypsies who visit the bereaved families at the appropriate times in order to collect what remains of the wardrobe. Spain is another country in which they engage in the second-hand clothes trade (Illustrations 50, 52).

Cooking is the very last occupation in which one would expect to find people of their dirty habits employed, yet they once had a high reputation as cooks among the Rumanian Boyars, who kept large numbers of gypsy slaves at work in their kitchens. To-day there are no more gypsy cooks, though

## *Gypsies*

here and there one meets their descendants employed as coachmen or about the house. Such old retainers are well liked and sometimes even enjoy a privileged position. Gypsy women have often so devoted themselves to the upbringing of the sons and daughters of Boyar households that they become trusted friends of the family. Gypsy servants are loyal to the Boyar household to the point of death ; they will stand by their master, however bad he may be, and justify all his actions simply by the fact that he is their master. They also preserve many old Rumanian table customs and dishes, and they remember the history of the house much more faithfully than its younger scions, who forget their own national traditions while they are abroad.

In the big towns of Hungary, Rumania, and the Balkan Peninsula gypsy urchins compete keenly with the professional shoe-blacks. A box of brushes and polish slung over their shoulder, they stop every passer-by whose shoes they think would be the better of a polish. With gypsy adroitness they apply the remedy on the spot, propping themselves against the wall of a house and demanding very small remuneration. They always have a large variety of creams and brushes in their boxes, which are home-carpentered, and an eagle eye for the police, who will move them on if they get the chance.

Gypsy youths rush bawling through the streets



## *Means of Livelihood*

with the latest edition of the papers, which are eagerly awaited in the cafés. Handsome gypsy boys or ugly old gypsy women with pipes in their mouths sell cooked corn-cobs to the hungry. A stroll through the market provides an interesting and picturesque display in the shape of cobblers who are mentioned as working in the Greek town of Modon as early as the end of the fifteenth century. Old shoes which have been thrown out as useless are given a new lease of life by them. In Spain gypsies are magnificent workers in tobacco factories ; many of them even qualify for government pensions.

Spoon-carving and bowl-making are seldom mentioned as gypsy occupations except in Hungary and south-eastern Europe, where they have been practised for centuries. Their products do not change any more than the purposes they are designed to serve. All are severely practical in design. All could as well have been manufactured two thousand years ago as to-day (Illustrations 62, 66). Soft woods, such as maple, poplar, willow or lime are preferred, since they are more easy to work on the simple apparatus available. During the winter the Rudari, as these gypsies are called, work in their earth huts at the store of wood which they have collected throughout the summer. The whole family are busy, and industry is rewarded by generous portions of maize pudding.

The home-made lathe (Illustration 62) is remark-



## *Gypsies*

able, in that it involves whoever works it in simultaneous unautomatic activities with both hands. This is in fact more difficult than one would think, since in most handwork, attention need only be directed to one hand while the other is used as a grip, or to supply motive power. The strain involved in the double movement led to the invention of a treadle machine in which the work previously done by the left hand was transferred to the foot (Illustration 63).

Besides spoons and bowls a number of other things are made by the Rudari, sometimes partly on the treadle machine, sometimes with the knife alone. These include whorls, distaffs, shuttles, parts of looms ordered by customers, wooden shovels for baking, scrubbing boards, occasional trunks and chests, children's toys (particularly small carts with heavy wooden wheels), and small wooden crocks for salt and butter, which are offered for sale in the market. They do not, however, as a rule make anything which involves the bending of bark under water, nor any agricultural implements. All work is undecorated except for ladles, which often have two notches, and spindles, which the women decorate with coloured rings. The colour is obtained from leaves, where green is wanted ; bilberries are used for blue, soot for black, a fungus found on plum trees for red, and one found on pear or apple trees for yellow and brown.

## *Means of Livelihood*

Basket-making is another typical gypsy industry, which is still very generally practised. In Rumania there are whole settlements (Vulcana Pandele for example) which do nothing else. Men and women alike work at baskets of willow-bush or wood shavings which they sell by hawking. Their technique is similar to that of most other basket-makers.

In Germany and western Europe they have had to give up all the above occupations, since natives of the various countries have already captured the market. Only here and there does one find a gypsy making tools, baskets or horn spoons, and he has generally copied the craft from some chance acquaintance on the road. Some recent immigrants have made attempts at tin-plating and iron-work. In France they still seem to be successful in this line.

The gypsy is an excellent judge of a horse and a redoubtable horse-dealer, whose tricks continue to deceive the native populations of various countries in spite of their precautions.

Once they have set their heart on a certain mare or stallion nothing is allowed to stand in their way, even if they have to steal at the risk of their lives. If such a theft proves successful they 'black' the horse with all possible speed, that is to say, they rub it with concoctions known only to themselves, as a result of which it turns a peculiar colour and only regains its glossy coat some time later. By



## *Gypsies*

administering a certain powder, or mixing it in the horse's food, they can change it into an unrecognizable old nag. However strong the suspicion against them may be, the transformation makes all investigations unavailing. Once the danger of discovery is past, the gypsy applies remedies which soon put the horse right again and give it as silky a skin as it had before. Arsenic puts life into its eyes. As a result of further doses its tail takes shape again and its paces return to normal. Cruel measures are also taken, especially in shoeing, to conceal lameness in the horse. Filling the teeth is a favourite gypsy method for making horses seem young. They bore holes in the teeth with a cobbler's awl, and fill them with birchwood which goes the same colour as the teeth. In most cases they succeed in curing the beast temporarily of restiveness, obstinacy while being harnessed, biting and kicking, jumping its harness-rope and biting the cribs, at least for as long as is necessary to satisfy prospective purchasers at the next horse-market. Gypsies are always ready to buy a horse with some sort of defect, and peasants are equally glad to get rid of one. Since gypsy horse-dealers are decently dressed and sometimes have a friend or two among the peasants, they are able to take their place in the village inn and hear what the company have to say to one another about their horses ; they listen while experiences are exchanged and some beast is mentioned as useless



### *Means of Livelihood*

whose ailments they know they can cure. After a time the gypsy joins in the conversation, if it sounds likely to lead to a profitable deal, now and again throwing a piece of advice about handling the horse in certain circumstances. Since what he says is known to be worth listening to, the peasant often invites him to come and see the horse for himself. One thing leads to another, and the peasant is finally convinced that as he cannot manage the beast himself he may as well sell it. The gypsy thus obtains it cheap and the peasant receives a sum which, with a small addition, will enable him to buy another horse at the next market ; for the gypsy pays cash. At some distant horse-fair where neither horse nor salesman is known and no gossip filters through from the village where the animal is known, it appears freshly groomed, its teeth 'fixed' to give a false impression of its age. It is put through its paces without mishap. The art of equine make-up has justified itself once again. The gypsy has got the horse off his hands and received two or three times the price he paid for it.

A gypsy understands men and knows exactly how to deal with a prospective buyer. He can feel the prospect of success instinctively. He is quite ready to let the peasant go with no more than a jerk of his eyebrows if he is not immediately inclined to buy. He only becomes excited when he sees the peasant is in earnest. A look into his eyes is sufficient

## *Gypsies*

to judge by. If there is any sign of appreciation, if the peasant lets fall an admiring word, all the arts of persuasion are immediately let loose. If, however, the 'fixing' is too obvious, so that the peasant says 'I don't like the look of that', he is assured that what he has noticed is only a trick; the attempted deception is cheerfully admitted, and the peasant told that he must not let his judgement be affected by a little thing like that. The gypsy gives the horse a dig in the stomach between the fore-legs, sometimes only a word is enough to make it raise its head; if necessary the word is repeated. The gypsy's object is soon attained. His whip touches the most sensitive spots with unerring aim and the horse knows what is wanted. He has been well prepared and does his trainer credit.

If business is brisk, celebrations follow. If it were not for the fact that on these occasions there is nearly always a fight, the local publicans would always be pleased to welcome gypsies. They pay on the nail. If they happen to have used their money for something else, such as the purchase of a new caravan, the landlord is quite ready to allow them credit until the next horse-fair, which all who roam within a certain area are sure to attend, with every prospect of doing a good deal. Horse-dealers are rich men. Many of them used to own house property. Nowadays they complain bitterly about the decline of their business. 'Nothing doing with



## *Means of Livelihood*

horses now ; the motor people are ruining us ' is a lament which I have heard more than once.

No one can blame gypsies for making their gift of second sight a source of income. Every one is anxious to learn his future from the mouths of gypsy women who are famous as fortune-tellers. Rich and poor alike are ready to part with their money for this purpose, and some gypsy women have, in fact, an exceptional gift which they may have inherited from their ancestors in India, a country in which the supernatural is viewed with less suspicion than in the West. The same unerring instinct which guides them through new countries, comes to their aid in the exploration of the future. The prophecies which they venture are not always frauds. I have been able to establish this personally, and have found other sceptics who share my view. Certain gypsy women seem actually to possess some kind of second sight. They do not of course tell fortunes among themselves, but with a non-gypsy before them and the aid of an intimate acquaintance with human beings, they make a good attempt at revealing such of fate's secrets as are written in the eyes, the features or the hands of their clients. The telling of fortunes from the noise in a sea-shell, from coffee grounds or from cards is practised in places where people are more ready to attribute secret powers to things than to persons.

Gypsy women often delude their clients deliber-



## *Gypsies*

ately. They know how to conceal their actions with an elaborate hocus-pocus, and during the fortune-telling perform a variety of tricks dependant on sleight of-hand, in order to distract the attention of clients from their real aims. Sometimes the fortune-teller uses particular objects—an unusual piece of cloth or a small figure of red clay or dung which she places in her victim's hand with the order to clutch them tight, shut eyes and remain in this position until her return. As a rule, however, it is the peasant woman's husband who returns first, and has to awake his wife from her trance. Later, the pair discover that they have been robbed. The gypsies are miles away by this time playing the same trick on some one else. Gullible subjects are not hard to find.

The buried treasure ruse is worked on the same type of people. It is a line of business to which the gypsy only resorts when all other sources of income have failed him. It is almost incredible that people still exist in the twentieth century who hope to make a fortune through the agency of gypsies, but apparently they do. The ancient belief that a gypsy can perform miracles dies hard. After some persuasion the peasant finally entrusts him with some treasure or a sum of money and buries it in accordance with his instructions. The gypsy extracts from him a promise to tell no one of the treasure on pain of the most frightful consequences. The un-

### *Means of Livelihood*

fortunate peasant is simpleton enough to believe that the gypsy is in contact with beneficent spirits who will insure his discovering that the treasure has doubled when he digs it up again at the appointed time. His hopes, however, are disappointed. The gypsy has forestalled any attempts that the spirits may be making by removing the treasure entire.

## XV

### TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

An international organization embracing all the gypsies in the world does not exist, has never existed and will never exist, in spite of the efforts on the one hand of settled gypsies and on the other of non-gypsy idealists. Political boundaries alone are sufficient to prevent such an organization, quite apart from the fact that the gypsy nature revolts against any body which issues instructions at variance with those to which he is accustomed.

The gypsy recognizes the various branches of his family and his tribe and receives hospitality as a 'phral' (brother) among gypsies wherever he meets them. That is the limit of his affinities. The gypsy law lives in the heart of every individual gypsy.

In every state they form one group or several, and each group is independent of the others. Certain families within these groups may leave the country, return again or form new groups in other countries. In such cases the begging and wandering rights of the earliest comers are respected by the



## *Tribal Organization*

new arrivals. Where attention is not paid to these rights fierce struggles ensue, after which the new family has to give way or else make peace with that of longer standing and forget their differences for ever.

Owing to the creation of new states and the alteration of frontiers after the World War, some changes and regrouping also took place among the gypsies. The Hungarian gypsies could no longer pass through Transylvania with the freedom to which they had been accustomed ; the Rumanian had to come to some sort of understanding with those living on what had formerly been Hungarian territory ; but no change of chiefs or disorganization of families resulted. In countries where gypsies are numerous there exist, over and above the family, groups divided from one another by dialect, origin or date of immigration, each of which inhabit quite separate areas. In central and western Europe there exist side by side with the old-established geographically divided groups, younger companies which have originated in Hungary, Rumania, or other south-eastern European countries, which live as close neighbours of the older groups and interchange visits with them, but are perpetually trying to move on to some place where they can support themselves without doing harm to gypsies already settled there. In south-eastern Europe and Hungary about five different tribes are distinct in speech as

## *Gypsies*

well as occupation. They have no mutual association and studiously avoid one another. All live in one country, but have their own chiefs, their own areas and their own distinct occupations. This alone makes any sort of unity or Pan-European gypsy gathering impossible.

In 1930 a misleading report was published in the press to the effect that the gypsies of Europe had chosen a new king. The coronation of Michael II was said to have taken place near Warsaw ; numerous deputations from gypsy families in Poland and outside had been present ; Marshal Pilsudski had even been represented. The Warsaw police had guaranteed the genuineness of the election.

Any one who knows something of gypsies will realize that such a report only applies to a part of their number. The significance of electing a king is liable to be exaggerated. No such thing as a gypsy kingdom exists, in the first place because no organization can claim loyalty superior to that enjoyed by the tribe, and, secondly, because the waves of immigration in various countries have given rise to a kind of social scale which makes unity under one chief impossible. The fact that the year after the event mentioned a second ' king ' was proclaimed in Poland and the first election declared null and void, provides some justification for the scepticism with which talk of a gypsy kingdom is received. There is in fact no such thing,



## *Tribal Organization*

and attempts to form one are only made by settled or half-settled gypsies who are no longer gypsies in the true sense of the word. Some ambitious spirits aware of the tendency of their age have made great play with the national ideal. Congresses have been held in Munich, Moscow, Bucharest, and Sofia, from which resolutions were sent to the various governments with the object of improving the economic position of the gypsies. Political fanatics, frequently not themselves gypsies, are generally at the bottom of such movements. The so-called gypsy king of Europe once even went so far as to address a note to his 'colleague' King George V in support of an attempt being made by some of his subjects to found a gypsy colony in North Africa.

Every group which is conscious of its identity as a tribe has a chief at the head of it, whose birth is equal to that of many other gypsies in the country concerned, and who mixes quite freely with his fellows. No chief ever has authority over another chief. All are of equal status. The name 'king' would be a complete misnomer among a people who recognize no hierarchy. The identity of the gypsy king is never revealed ; questions only result in a denial of his existence. Only when there is a dispute with the police, or officials have to be dealt with, does it occur to one that their spokesman may also be their chief. But there is no way of confirming the conjecture.



## *Gypsies*

At the time of their first appearance in Europe near the beginning of the fifteenth century, their chiefs were known as 'dukes' or 'counts', perhaps at their own instigation. However this may be, the titles have resulted in some uncertainty about the identity of those who bore them. They may have been gypsies; on the other hand they may equally well have been officials appointed to escort the dangerous horde out of Rumania or Hungary as the case might be and squeeze the desired tribute from them. These 'Waywodes' represented the inhabitants of from five to twenty-five tents; they were responsible for the preservation of order and had to answer for any thefts which were committed. It was one such who on a May Day in the fourteenth century, to the accompaniment of pipe and drum, conducted a demonstration of semi-settled gypsies in Corfu before the house of persons who claimed them as their slaves. Duke Andreas, who one night in 1422 lodged at an hotel in Bologna while his horde camped before the gates of the town, may equally well have been either a gypsy or a non-gypsy official appointed in Hungary. Quite a small company, only seventy strong, which came to Augsburg in 1419, is recorded as having two 'dukes' and several 'counts' in its number.

Whatever the explanation of this, it is at any rate certain that the head of a gypsy tribe was, and is, a gypsy chieftain who may have anything from

## *Tribal Organization*

twenty-five tents to several hundred families under his jurisdiction. Such a chieftain must have travelled widely in his particular country, be irreproachable on all moral grounds and enjoy the complete confidence of his 'subjects'. He is chosen by election. Where there is no outside interference and the police avert their gaze a little, this can involve a good deal of noise. There is no organized voting, but, whoever is chosen for the chieftainship generally possesses a large share of the best gypsy qualities. In the majority of cases he is a man in the prime of life. He must possess the type of personality which finds unquestioning respect among the people whom he has been chosen to lead.

The chieftainship is not heritable. If a chief dies or falls into disgrace, another is chosen without non-gypsies learning anything of the matter.

Every country is divided under a number of gypsy chieftains whose domains form so many invisible states within the country of sojourn. Any gypsy can move from one such domain to another. He will always find fellow-tribesmen to offer him hospitality and advice about further possibilities. In south-eastern Europe not only the nomad tinker gypsies, but also the bear-leaders and locksmiths, particularly those of Turkish extraction, are strictly organized under chiefs in groups of twenty-five to thirty tents. The tinkers who travel annually from



## *Gypsies*

there through central Europe are subject to the severest gypsy discipline.

The gypsies who were formerly slaves and have disconnected themselves from the gypsy community by becoming musicians, smiths, or cooks in the service of the native population, no longer acknowledge any chiefs. They submit to the laws of their adopted country and their way of living now resembles that of its inhabitants. The process, however, has resulted in the loss of many of their most attractive characteristics.

In addition to the chieftain, each autonomous group of gypsies has a 'Tribal Mother' ('phuri dai'), who acts as the guardian of its moral code. She never appears in public like the chief of the clan, but her influence is as powerful as his, perhaps more so. There is no human problem upon which she does not tender advice. If a camp is to be broken up or a move is being considered, the 'mother' must first be consulted. With her parched, wrinkled face, in which the years have driven deep furrows and the storms and stresses of life have inscribed their tale, she is a splendid representative of the gypsy type. Her age is awe-inspiring. Her cry 'Seom phuri, seom phuri!' (I am old, I am old), arouses not only the respect of her fellow tribesmen but also the pity and terror of the non-gypsy population. No one dares to laugh at her shrunk figure or her ugly face. Her pierc-



## *Tribal Organization*

ing gaze strikes any one in her immediate neighbourhood dumb. They are afraid of her ; there is a feeling that a wish from her might bring ill luck.

The tribe is ruled by the chief in co-operation with this ' phuri dai '. The chief is judge, leader, and priest in one person. He exercises supreme power, against which there is no appeal. He decides on every journey made and gives advice about the route to the various families under him. He officiates at weddings, which are invalid if not contracted in his presence, though the actual consecration ceremony is performed by the mother of the tribe. Her decision, too, is accepted as final if the chief is not available for consultation in any dispute.

As already mentioned the gypsies have their own law. The courts sit during the great gypsy rallies which take place after the big fairs and horse-markets. The proceedings are secret, only the oldest gypsies being permitted to take part. A fine is imposed in proportion to the gravity of the offence. The greatest punishment is banishment from the tribe for a longer or shorter period. Solitary existence for a gypsy is worse than death. He must have company ; home-sickness for his own folk weighs terribly on him.

Anyone who steals from a gypsy, misuses a woman while she is washing herself, eats from a dish which has been in contact with a woman's skirt, is guilty of marital infidelity, visits a woman

## *Gypsies*

within a week of childbirth (even with the most innocent motives), eats dogs' or horses' flesh or swears and lies in the presence of the dead, is declared unclean ('baledšido' or 'melalo'). No gypsy may travel or drink with him. Any who does so falls under the same ban. If a gypsy fails to appear when summoned before one of his own tribunals, he is outlawed and pursued in the following manner. On every path frequented by gypsies and at all important crossings, bits of rag, branches or wisps of straw, are arranged in a certain way which indicates that search is being made for a transgressor against gypsy law. His identity can be read from the signs; anyone who sees them is obliged to help in the pursuit or to state when and where he last saw the person for whom search is being made. If this person resists when finally caught he may be shot immediately. If he is surprised and thus has no time to defend himself, he is bound, covered up with blankets and brought along in one of the carts. It is not a good plan to try and help such a criminal to escape. Pity and love do not constitute extenuating circumstances in the eyes of the gypsy law. Judgement is passed by the assembly of elders and quickly executed. Inquirers will find that the outlaw has 'died from the results of an accident'. The clear conception of the fundamentals of morality indicated by their system is remarkable. The 'accident' in fact takes the form of a disease,



## *Tribal Organization*

which creates less stir and troubles the gypsy conscience less than murder outright. These past-masters in the art of herbal poisoning administer to the criminal a potion which starts a growth in the stomach or intestines. This gradually increases in size and slowly but surely causes the death of the patient by extremely painful stages. The tissue which becomes inflamed as a result of the growth is said to return to normal after death, making the cause extremely difficult to determine.

The chief has no authority to punish cases of vengeance. These still occur wherever gypsies are found. The cause is generally a woman or slighted honour. The husband must always requite an insult with blood. Women are quite accustomed to these encounters and add to their noise by shrill cries of encouragement. Here, as elsewhere, an audience makes the show more of a success.

If the blood vengeance is not successful the guilty man must reckon with the whole group of which he has insulted one member. There is no refuge for him. He is a gypsy. He knows that however carefully he may avoid the hostile group he cannot for ever escape the knife or revolver bullet which are his due. Even if he has been caught by the police and punished he is no less liable to the fate in store for him.

It does, however, sometimes happen that the two parties become reconciled without one of their



## *Gypsies*

representatives actually having been killed. In such cases the two combatants drink together out of each other's glasses as a mark of reconciliation. After that no angry word against the other may pass the lips of either. The whole business is over and done with.

Marital infidelity is severely punished among genuine nomad gypsies. In south-eastern Europe, according to Wlislöcki, special secret tribunals are set up to deal with such cases. A flat block of wood left in the transgressor's tent is the token which summons him, or her, to appear at once before a number of masked gypsies whom he cannot recognize and who announce the decree of banishment. The guilty person is only received back into the tribe after a long period of repentance and good behaviour. Elsewhere an unfaithful wife used to be, and still is sometimes, made to appear naked in public, which is sufficient by itself to disgrace her for her life. But not satisfied with this the chief proceeds to whip her across her naked back. Every other gypsy has the right to do the same and to spit upon her. After the period of punishment is over transgressors may be readmitted to the tribe if their record is good, and particularly if it can be shown that they have not consorted with a 'gadži' or 'gadžo', as the case may be, during the period. Such readmissions to the tribe are occasions for celebrations on a grand scale, which

## *Tribal Organization*

the food and drink liberally consumed at the expense of the returned exile make it difficult for any of the participants to forget.

The basis of gypsy society formerly consisted of families tracing their descent through the mother. This is partially true of south-eastern European gypsies even to-day. A man who marries becomes a member of his wife's family and all children of the marriage remain in it. If the wife dies the man returns to his own family. Since marriages are only made within the tribe, the matriarchal order of things is not always clearly discernible ; traces of it are, however, to be found in the institution of Tribal Mother (' phuri dai '), the extent of whose powers we have seen, and in the numerous names by which the mother's relations are known. The family is still the basis of gypsy society but in most groups matriarchy has been superseded by descent through the father, a development which was foreshadowed as soon as the chieftainship came into existence.

Family loyalty is a prominent characteristic of gypsies. Combined with their love of procreation, this devotion to a small group is probably the reason why they have survived so long, with all their peculiar characteristics, among nations which were strange to them. Gypsies need not, however, be of the same family in order to travel together.

It is useless to search for an organization more



## *Gypsies*

comprehensive than the family and the tribe. The gypsies are apparently a people without a single leader, who have separated into a number of independent groups which seldom quarrel among themselves. The only bonds of unity are language and gypsy characteristics. Each group functions like clockwork. The striking or pitching of a camp is accomplished without the slightest disagreement. Every one knows that a place will be found for him. There is no chance of his losing what is to him the most important of all privileges, that of pitching his tent in the company of his fellows. The Turkish gypsies have developed a highly efficient technique for striking camp. They either break up into small groups which will join together again elsewhere, or all sections of the camp are struck simultaneously inside of an hour. When everything is packed away each cart joins the line of those ready to start. In front are those drawn by oxen ; behind come the lighter horse-drawn vehicles. The leader sets the pace and the whole caravan moves slowly off behind it. There is no competition between drivers to pass each other. Nobody gives orders. None are needed. The instinct towards orderliness prevails in spite of the happy-go-lucky streak in the gypsy character.

Gypsy law only ceases to be effective where family loyalty is on the wane, where gypsies have become a part of the nation in which they are living, or



## *Tribal Organization*

where they combine for business reasons and travel about in motor-cars, like certain Hungarian gypsies, who may be met with on the road selling carpets in Germany and other countries. Such persons are disowned by the more traditional gypsies on the ground that they have given up gypsy habits and despise gypsy morality. The German gypsy chiefs have no authority over them and no love for them. A gypsy anxious to convince me of their depravity once said : ' They eat horseflesh, which is the greatest sin a gypsy can commit. We ate with them, without knowing, and afterwards we were disgusted and ashamed. But we did not become "balešide", because we did not know what we were doing.' These 'Hungarian gypsies', as they are generally called, take 'wise' women round with them, an offence which results in banishment from the tribe among proper gypsies. In certain cases it happens that a prodigal wishes to return within the province of gypsy law, but he must then pass a regular examination to show that he knows what the law involves.

## XVI

### BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH

A gypsy girl watches animals give birth without human assistance and expects her own fate to be similar. She remembers her mother's advice and certain maxims which must be observed during pregnancy and delivery. She knows that she must not give birth in a tent or caravan ; so much is gypsy law. Some weeks before her time she finds a quiet, well-protected corner to which she can retire as soon as her pains begin. Her relatives are as anxious as she that she should be out of the way in good time. Her child first sees the light in a barn, in the open air or even under the family cart. If the birth is sudden and the mother has no time to leave the tent or caravan, all objects which she has touched must be destroyed or not used again. A mother at the time of delivery is unclean and defiles anything she touches. No man may approach her. The only person allowed near her is an elderly midwife who provides any assistance which is necessary and is not usually a gypsy herself. An old gypsy woman endowed with second sight puts out

## *Birth, Life, and Death*

food for the fate-deciding fairies who, according to gypsy superstition, visit the child some days after the birth and have to be offered hospitality. Once born the child is wiped down, plunged into cold water, or dealt with as described to me by a doctor who once happened to be present at a gypsy childbed. The woman was lying under a cart by the roadside and he had been able to help her. As soon as the child was born she proceeded to press it against her breast and, since no water was available, to lick it all over—a solution as effective as it was economical.

Not many hours after the birth the mother returns with the child to her tent or caravan. She is happy, for she has performed the duty which her tribe expects of her. The gypsy woman must be as strong as a horse if she is to survive. With the exception of certain peasants who begin the usual day's work as soon as delivery is complete, no European woman compares with her in power of endurance.

When the fate-deciding fairies have paid their visit, female relatives may visit the young mother, who is no longer unclean as far as they are concerned. The husband, however, is still not allowed to enter the tent or caravan, which must stand apart from the others. I remember a case in Rumania where about thirty gypsy tents had been pitched in a broad field beside a stream. Suddenly a confused noise became audible, the cause of which was at first not



## *Gypsies*

clear. It then appeared that a recently pregnant woman was among them and that they were anxious to expel her. It was due to her that they had suddenly left their former camping-ground, but her cart had followed the rest despite all warnings. She was now sitting near it in front of her hastily pitched tent, wrapped in a blanket and pale as death, hiding her baby from the gaze of the men who surrounded her. She had been carefully lifted on to the cart and as carefully removed from it. Everything had been done at a speed which I should not normally have thought possible ; the only reason for this was to prevent the others complaining about the erection of the tent. The gypsy who had become a father could not and did not wish to leave his wife alone on any account and was trying persistently, in spite of general opposition, to camp with the others. After a deafening altercation he was finally allowed to pitch his tent by the river some distance from the camp itself. He was severely punished by the chief for infringing gypsy law (Illustration 43).

The father spends an uncomfortable time after the birth of a child. He can associate with his family but he may neither sleep, eat nor drink in the tent or caravan occupied by his wife with the child. This law is rigidly adhered to by all gypsies to-day. If a young husband who has just become a father for the first time pays his wife a visit soon after the

## *Birth, Life, and Death*

birth, his action is winked at and attributed to youth and inexperience. He is let off with a warning. But if the same thing happens after the birth, say, of his ninth child, there is no question of condoning it. The offender is immediately declared 'balešido'. Only after the child has received its gypsy baptism, which consists of dipping it in running water and happens six weeks or less after birth, is the father allowed to take it in his arms. In Germany, however, the 'quarantine' period has now been reduced to four or even to two weeks, and the woman by herself is no longer considered unclean.

A professional midwife is considered permanently unclean, like a horse-butcher. A gypsy may not even carry the bag containing her instruments, which she has with her when summoned to a difficult case, or when accompanying the father to the Registrar where they have to report the birth together. Many gypsies have been criticized for their apparent rudeness in this respect; but they are adamant in the face of all attempts to reform them.

If a gypsy woman dies in childbed it is a bad omen for her tribe. The vengeance of evil spirits can only be avoided by speedy burial of the corpse and removal from the ill-omened site. If the child dies or is born dead, it is buried in the belief that the soul of an old woman will carry it in a sack to the mountain of innocent children.



## *Gypsies*

Baptism in a Catholic or Protestant church is considered expedient in countries where the certificate provides a useful testimonial for obtaining employment. Among Turkish gypsies its place is taken by the first cutting of the hair.

Children are suckled quite openly. They go to the breast even when they are old enough to run, and cases have been known to occur of a mother suckling a young orphaned pig at the same time as her own child. After a certain time the child is given a name to which it becomes accustomed, but which is immediately changed if its owner has succeeded in surviving a serious illness. The precaution is taken in order to prevent the Sickness Spirit from recognizing the child. Twins very seldom occur among gypsies, but when they do and one of them dies the survivor's name has to be changed.

As soon as definite characteristics develop, the child receives a proper gypsy name, which it keeps for the rest of its life ; such names are, as far as possible, kept secret from the police as something sacred, which only gypsies may know. The following are a few examples which I found current in Germany : Latšo (the Good), Phuro (the Old), Bibi, Biba (Aunt, Grandmother), Abgai (i.e. 'ap kai', come here), Luludi (Flower), Kani (i.e. Kachni, Hen), Murš(a) (Man) ; for Deršeli, Duntši, and Mungela I could find no accurate translation. Nick-names are derived from parts of the body, or from



## *Birth, Life, and Death*

personal characteristics. There is no need for separate family names since the various groups are distinguished by the tribe to which they belong and which is sufficiently identified by the name of its oldest member or the tribal mother. Official Christian and surnames have had to be invented where registration or passport regulations make them necessary. They are naturally chosen from those current in the country concerned, in order to prevent the police from proceeding against their bearers as aliens. Police regulations also demand that every caravan should bear a placard with its owner's name upon it. Where the owner is illiterate it is quite liable to be displayed the wrong way up.

The children are allowed great freedom and grow up without much special attention being given to them. As soon as they can walk they spend the whole day rolling over one another in the open air, but never go so far away that they are out of reach of the camp. This is important, since their parents often have to leave their camping-ground in a hurry, if they have made themselves unpopular in the district. When the children are hungry during the day they beg for themselves or get some bread or maize pudding from their mother, if she happens to be near at hand. By evening the whole family is together again.

The children are extremely nimble. They like running races and are quite soon able to ride horses

## *Gypsies*

bare-back. Without anybody encouraging or teaching them they soon learn games like 'Thieves and Policemen', 'Horse Market', and 'Chicken Stealing', or other imitations of activities which they will soon be undertaking in earnest. They have no need of organized sports. Their whole life consists of physical exercise.

A dance, sometimes considered obscene from the spectator's point of view, is often performed by young children. The pride taken by their parents in such exhibitions, combined with the general amusement and shouts of encouragement, gives the children as they grow up some inkling of the significance of such movements. At adolescence the exhibitions cease, to begin again after full maturity has been reached; but even then they are not considered at all indecent. Astonishing contortionist feats are performed by older children in the course of these dances, which, in the case of the girls, provide a valuable exercise for the muscles used in child-bearing.

Every gypsy child is always on the look-out for a chance of getting something for nothing, and is not very particular about the means employed. Strangers are immediately greeted with demands for money. These activities may sometimes be restricted by compulsory school attendance, but the upbringing and nature of a gypsy child make it, as might be expected, an extremely unsatisfactory pupil.



## *Birth, Life, and Death*

Adolescents undertake things without the co-operation of their elders, but they never break the connection with their family, and return to it every evening. They buy, sell, and steal for the first time, in each others' company. This period is generally closed by a final robbery, committed this time within the gypsy circle, and having a bride as its aim. Nobody teaches a young gypsy or explains things to him, but one day he finds he has somehow acquired all the arts of which a gypsy should be master.

At his marriage a young gypsy forsakes the society of his contemporaries and becomes a fully-fledged member of the community, with his own horse and cart, and his own living to make. But love for his family and his tribe still persists and is indeed the basis of every gypsy's life. He lives for his tribe, and will never speak an unkind word against his fellow-tribesmen ; on the contrary, he will even submit to punishment on their behalf when he himself is guiltless.

When a gypsy youth falls in love with a gypsy girl, he has to find some means of meeting her secretly. Two lovers must never be caught together by their parents. This often makes things very difficult for them, but where there is real love, a way of deluding observers can generally be found. The circumstances are such as to encourage ingenuity. If things do not go smoothly and love is not returned,



## Gypsies

the sorceress has to be called in to find means of rousing the feelings of youth or maid as the case may be. She concocts love potions which are secretly poured into the drink of the beloved. Morning walks before sunrise are prescribed, during which the girl or, less frequently, the youth must pronounce special charms or perform special tasks, such as pouring water over themselves—all on an empty stomach. The love-sick girl tries to secure some of the hair of her adored in order to obtain magic power over him.

Even among gypsies there are certain recognized class distinctions which make it difficult for two persons of very different means to marry. Chief or parents can raise against any proposed alliance objections which it is impossible to disregard.

If the young couple think differently they must confront authority with a *fait accompli*. Hence the elopements which frequently occur in tribes where regulations are strict. Orthodox methods of courtship with the parents' encouragement are, however, equally common, and it frequently occurs that apparently hostile parents are secretly in favour of their children's choice. Daughters are encouraged to elope if it is thought that the chief has another less advantageous alliance in mind. Sometimes the lover takes the initiative, when he sees that the girl is promised to someone else, or that the chief wishes to keep her for himself. A daughter is often

## *Birth, Life, and Death*

cruelly treated by her parents in order to make her accept the husband of their choice. There is often bitter suffering in store for gypsy youths or girls before they are even eighteen.

While I was living among the Turkish gypsies there was a case of bride-stealing which split the whole tribe and finally resulted in some tents breaking away from the main body. The whole camp took sides and fought ; even the dogs joined in ; and all because two people, for whom the chief had made different plans, had eloped. The girl in this case was the favourite of the whole tribe, a lovely creature with blue eyes, who had decided to unite her fortunes with those of a man who in my opinion was neither handsome nor particularly well mannered. One evening she failed to return home, and at the same time several youths were also found to be missing. Every one knew at once what had happened but there was still just a hope that the man might not have succeeded in overcoming the resistance of his bride, if she offered any. As is usual when such incidents occur, the man had taken a few friends into his confidence. They had hired a cart (from peasants of course ; no gypsy would ever consent to such a use being made of his property) and laid an ambush for the girl, who had been decoyed out of the camp on some pretext or other. She fell into the trap. Her struggles were overcome and she was packed into the cart, which



## *Gypsies*

conveyed the party to the peasants' cottage where the wedding night was to be spent. The bride's behaviour during the hours which follow her removal varies according to whether it has or has not been desired. If it has not, there are some slaps and kicks behind the bedroom door, but the peasant knows how gypsies are and lets them alone. After a day or two bride and groom come back to camp, repentant. They are received with some hearty slaps in the face administered by their fathers, but after this not altogether gratifying reception, the goodwill of the parents is gradually regained and the marriage is confirmed. The chief is informed, and has no alternative but to give his approval, even if he makes a good deal of fuss about doing so. Refusal is out of the question, since the girl has lost her virginity and no gypsy would consent to marry her. Except to the partner in her escapade, she has lost all value.

When a bride has been stolen, the incident is talked of throughout the tribe. Before long there is nobody who does not know that Andrei has run off with Maria. Henceforth the two are held to constitute a family and the wife's first pregnancy is watched with interest.

In cases where love takes its normal course and bride-stealing or elopement are not in fashion, guests are invited to the celebration of the wedding night. They wait and ask the bridegroom how things have gone. Was she chaste? is the question the



### *Birth, Life, and Death*

answer to which is all important. If it is in the affirmative, the company becomes jubilant ; eating, drinking, and dancing begin again with new vigour. If however she is no longer 'Tšai bari' (virgin) her price is considerably lowered or she is given away for nothing ; her parents think themselves lucky to get her off their hands at all. It is even asserted that settled gypsies who have lost all their attractive characteristics, use hen's blood in order to suggest virginity where in fact none remains. Amongst these people it often happens that a bridegroom is told beforehand that his betrothed is no longer a virgin, and asked to accept a reward of some sort to keep the matter dark on the wedding night. A man who spends his wedding night with a girl who proves to be unchaste, loses value for any future ventures he may make into the marriage market. Vengeance taken by his family on his behalf may be postponed, but the disgrace will not be forgotten. At some Feast of Kettles or Spring Feast there is sure to be an opportunity of settling old scores.

The price of the bride must be paid before the wedding. The bridegroom's father pays on his behalf either in money or in kind (horses, for instance) whatever her father demands. The bridegroom himself makes small presents to his future parents-in-law, and is generally given something by the bride's father. When all the exchanges and

## *Gypsies*

bargaining are finished the bride is allowed to enter the bridegroom's tent. He presents her with a scarf for her head and some ribbons, one of which must be red ; and besides regular meetings there are other ways in which he may show his affection. Here and there special wedding clothes are made of stolen silk, linen or wool. Among some Hungarian gypsy tribes it is said that the bridegroom sews an apron for his betrothed as well as he can ; on it he embroiders the figure of a woman in childbirth which he hopes will have a beneficial effect on the fertility of the wearer. The apron is worn by the bride throughout the wedding day, after which it is either burnt or kept until the birth of the first child, when it is produced as a reminder that the wish embroidered on it has been granted.

Most gypsy weddings take place at Whitsun or in the autumn, but never during the summer journey. The chief acts as Rasai or Priest, but there is no ceremonial. Formally the bridal pair had to step over a broom ; to-day a firm handshake generally concludes the proceedings. A marriage contracted without the knowledge of the chief is invalid and is punished by banishment from the tribe. Strict precautions are taken to prevent a gypsy marrying outside his own people. To do so is to condemn him- or herself to perpetual exile from the gypsy community. The oldest woman in the group of families concerned undertakes the consecration of



## *Birth, Life, and Death*

the marriage. A complete loaf of bread, some salt, and a bottle of wine are brought as symbols of the plenty with which it is hoped that the marriage will be blessed. The old woman breaks the bread and sprinkles a handful of salt on each of the broken halves. Bride and groom exchange halves with one another, take a few bites and wash them down with some wine. The guests then wish them luck amid a good deal of noise, and dancing begins.

Numerous gypsy dances owe their survival to these wedding festivities. All ages take part and make some contribution to the general enjoyment—either money, a present, a song or a story. The chief and the parents of the couple have one dance specially reserved for them as a mark of honour. A proper gypsy wedding lasts eight days and is extremely costly for any one who has a position to keep up.

Marital infidelity is severely punished among gypsies who live in tents or caravans. Here and there one sees women with their noses cut off, with only half an ear, or with a scar across their faces ; one even meets men who have had a bullet through the knee or arm. These are all examples of what used to be and sometimes still are the consequences of unfaithfulness, in addition to the whipping already described. The offender bears the mark of his crime until his dying day. The secret tribunals referred to above are dreaded by every



## *Gypsies*

gypsy. They see that the gypsy law is obeyed and maintain a general supervision over the morals of the tribe. There is no unjust punishment ; a gypsy will never lie before these tribunals ; every crime is immediately admitted. Since in giving judgement the chief is the mouthpiece of the tribe, for an individual to show pity for the condemned person or doubt the rightness of the decision is unthinkable.

To be happy a gypsy must have plenty of children ; he is essentially a family man. Tiny children tend to be spoilt. 'I feed upon your eyes' is the most affectionate expression I have heard them use while fondling a child.

The more arduous duties are extremely unevenly divided between the two partners in a marriage. The wife has to do all the housework and obtain provisions ; she must wash, cook, look after the children, and go out hawking her wares, while her husband keeps to his own affairs, which may consist of playing, or doing nothing at all. Women thus lose their youthfulness very quickly, but this is never accompanied by the loss of their husband's affection, which they retain even when wrinkled and bent with work and child-bearing. The gypsy family is not based upon the transitory appeal of youth and beauty, but on a genuine love of community life, the aim of which is the preservation of the race.

The relations between the members of a gypsy

### *Birth, Life, and Death*

family are patriarchal. Affection suffers no set-back if the husband strikes his wife. It is his right, because he is her husband. Far from resenting it she actually regards it as a sign of affection. I have often heard a gypsy woman complain that her husband does not love her any more because he has not hit her for a long time. She never raises any objection if he boxes her ears ; only occasionally, if he becomes rather too rough, she may go and spend the night with a relative until he has recovered his temper. In spite of, or perhaps just because of, the primitive conditions in which they live, husband and wife preserve a high degree of mutual respect in their relations with one another, except during the minor quarrels just described.

Both partners can rely upon each other. Neither man nor wife asks the other where he or she has passed the day. A gypsy woman seldom goes on a business expedition by herself. She takes with her another of her sex, who can act as a witness if the husband is at all suspicious of her story. It is a carefully thought-out system, slightly reminiscent of the precautionary measures taken in certain Orders of Catholic monks. This hunting in couples has however the additional advantage that four eyes see more than two and much mutual assistance can be given.

A photograph of a gypsy woman in a state of nakedness is practically unobtainable. Any that are



## *Gypsies*

sold can only be of women who have been expelled from their tribe.

The women spend more time in the caravan than the men. It is almost as if they practised some sort of mental discipline in their solitude and in this way gathered energy for their profession of fortune-telling. They have no use for chatting while standing about or while visiting each other indoors, as our women are so fond of doing ; but their conversation while walking on their various errands is as lively as one could wish to hear. The husband is little talked of. There is no desire to unburden the soul, such as so often leads to involved conversations and gossip in our society. Experience and events during the day are the commonest topics.

Women's underclothes must never be hung up in a caravan or tent. A woman's skirt must never come into contact with things which are used for eating or drinking. Eatables may not be wrapped in women's clothes or laid upon them. This generally escapes the notice of the casual observer and even where it does not he regards it as a chance occurrence.

The gypsy woman's dislike of sewing or knitting has already been referred to. Keeping clothes in good repair is not one of her strong points.

The gypsies have little use for ceremony. Their habits are natural, and aim at the achievement of a practical purpose. It is possible that, as magicians



## *Birth, Life, and Death*

themselves, they have no need of ceremony to increase the impressiveness of magic. The basis of their life is an unquestioning trust in the working of the Universe, the rightness of which it would never occur to a gypsy to doubt. For this reason he is never discontented with life. He takes it for granted, and accepts the fact that it cannot be different from what it is. Nature, he knows, is unalterable. He feels himself a part of life. One lives and laughs. Nature's handiwork is never misused. There are no morose bachelors, no old maids ; the problem of the sexes has been solved successfully. The position of women is regulated by tradition. No marriage which has resulted in children is ever dissolved. The only unhappy marriages therefore are those which result from the husband becoming impotent. All troubles are forgotten in the joys of wandering, of family life, of existence as a whole.

Most male gypsies do not live to a great age and few die quietly in their beds. Some are knifed, some shot, some die of pulmonary disease. Any who wear the 'dead man's shirt', i.e. are in danger of blood vengeance, may meet their fate at any moment. Epidemics have not reduced the numbers of the gypsies, since losses are quickly replaced by new life. Those who grow old remain healthy to the last, owing to their open-air life.

The continuity of the gypsies' life was impressed upon me by those depicted in Illustration 76, who told

## *Gypsies*

me that they had lost their old 'mother' during their journey and had buried her beside the road. There was not a trace of their sad experience on the faces of those who related it. Even before they had unharnessed their horses the men sat down together and held their usual discussion, over which the next in age among the women presided, having now succeeded to the rank of 'Tribal Mother'.

The gypsy is born in the open air and in the open air he must die. When he is at the point of death he is carried out in front of his tent or his caravan. If, owing to the absence of his relatives and the suddenness of the death, he is allowed to die inside the tent, the body may not be carried out through the door of the tent. The back of the tent must be specially lifted for this purpose. If, as often happens in winter, gypsies are living in dilapidated houses or even in properly repaired quarters which they have rented, and a death occurs in one of the rooms, a hole is broken through the wall. A death in a tent or caravan causes serious financial loss to the members of the family concerned, for either must be burnt or broken up with all its accessories. Only money and photographs are exempt.

It is worth noting that this custom, which is nothing more nor less than a sacrifice to the dead, has been discontinued among certain German tribes, in which the caravan is now sold, completely furnished, to non-gypsies. In this way a part at least



## *Birth, Life, and Death*

of its value is saved and the loss borne by the relatives is diminished. A gypsy would in no circumstances buy a caravan in which one of his own people had died. Even to offer it for sale would as a rule be punishable under gypsy law. If a gypsy is setting up house for himself he always either buys a new caravan or takes over one belonging to a rich gypsy who is in a position to buy a new one ; he would never buy one in which a death had occurred, however low the price.

Where Church burial counts for something, they are quite prepared to engage a parson and have everything done properly. If the dead man was a person of some consequence, a gypsy band precedes the coffin through the streets on its way to the cemetery. One of the pall-bearers digs into his pocket from time to time and throws a handful of copper among the crowd. The children engage in a brisk struggle on the ground for possession of one or two coins. The whole picture provided by a gypsy funeral varies according to the country in which it takes place. In the Balkans, where the atmosphere is freer and the people less self-conscious, the procession is more impressive than in central Europe. When the priest has finished, the crowd of gypsies bursts into an indescribable series of shouts, screams, and wails. The corpse is set down at all street corners since according to local super-



## *Gypsies*

stition the spirits are supposed to be particularly prevalent at these points.

The funeral lamentation cannot fail to move any one who listens to it, but it would be wrong to interpret it as the first manifestation on the part of the gypsy woman of a grief which is likely to be long-lasting. Her people are much too realistic for that ; to them every event is just one episode among many ; they cannot wait long before passing on to the next ; there is no use grieving over what cannot be altered. The only important thing is to give the dead man a good funeral with plenty of weeping and lamentation. It is thought that this affords him enjoyment.

Where the law permits, the body is carried to the grave uncovered. Its little finger has been broken and on a red ribbon a piece of money has been fastened to enable the dead man to pay his passage across the river of shades in the country of the dead. All the personal belongings which were dearest to him in this life are laid with him in the coffin, so that in the other world he may not feel the lack of anything which he enjoyed in this. His violin is buried with him. Some wine is poured into the grave while it is still open and some more over it after it has been closed. If the dead man when alive had the reputation of being likely to harm people, branches of thorn and brushwood are thrown into the grave in order to prevent his soul

## *Birth, Life, and Death*

from leaving it and finding its way back to the land of the living.

From the day of his death the dead man's name must not be mentioned again. Any attempt to find it out from a gypsy is bound to be unsuccessful ; belief in 'bibacht' is too strong. The dead are taboo. To swear by them amounts to staking one's life upon the oath. It cannot be broken. Only a short time ago I had to promise to bring a gypsy a photograph which I had taken of him. He added to his request : 'By the dead, you shall die if you don't.' I was careful to keep my promise.

After the death, family life proceeds as calmly as before. The widow or widower is taken in by relatives. If the survivor is still young, a husband or wife is soon found, and new children grow up beside the others ; a fresh family has been founded. The step-children are brought up exactly like the others. A gypsy mother makes no distinction between them. If the survivor is a woman and already old she will not marry again. She has no need to do so in order to preserve her status, since she is assured of recognition in the group to which she rightfully belongs. She has no caravan of her own, but lives with a son or daughter in theirs, or in a tent. Despite all the vicissitudes of her life, at least one out of the many children whom she has borne is sure to survive and be able to offer her a home in

## *Gypsies*

which to end her days. Gypsies are very seldom found living alone.

There is no special worship of the dead. On New Year's Eve it is the custom of some German gypsies to pour an offering of wine for them, and they are also commemorated by the custom of throwing them the first few drops of a bottle or glass before drinking oneself. Except for this, however, no gypsy would dream of concerning himself with the other world. The dead belong to the past and he is not concerned with that.





51. In south-eastern Europe bear-leading gypsies form a special tribe, whose nearest relatives are the locksmiths



52. On the outskirts of Bucharest there is a whole settlement of Hungarian gypsies like the above, who sell old clothes or exchange them for glass or enamel-ware



53. *Among other things, Rumanian gypsies also make bricks. Clay is watered, kneaded and pressed into a wooden mould. It is then turned out to dry in the sun. When dry the bricks are built into the kilns seen in the background*



54. *A horse-dealer recounts his experiences on returning from a fair*



55. *Among the settled gypsies of Rumania are some who manufacture mats, using rushes and a primitive type of frame. The liberated slaves have not taken to agriculture as they were expected to do. Handwork is more to their liking*



56. *A still from the film "Melodie des Herzens" (Music of the Heart). Most gypsy musicians come from Hungary or Rumania. Some confine their activities to towns, others to villages*





57. *A dancing lesson in progress at Craiova (Rumania). Every gypsy is a natural dancer*



58. *Berlin gypsies accompany a dance by one of their number*



59. Among gypsies the ancient *Paparuda* or rain dance is still practised. Naked children, hung with leaves, dance, sing and pray for rain. Only in a very few places is this custom still observed by the native population

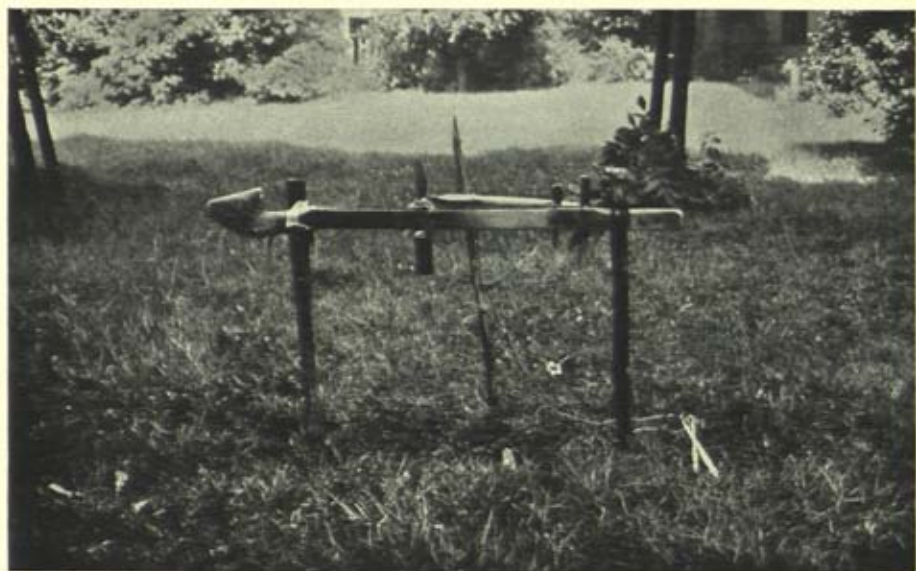


60. It is hoped that just as the water splashes over dancers, so the heavens will open and pour down the longed-for rain to ripen the crops



61. Two gypsy-like figures, but their features, carriage and clothing, make one doubt their genuineness. They are, in fact, Rudari from Zlacu or La Glod, in the highest part of the Carpathians

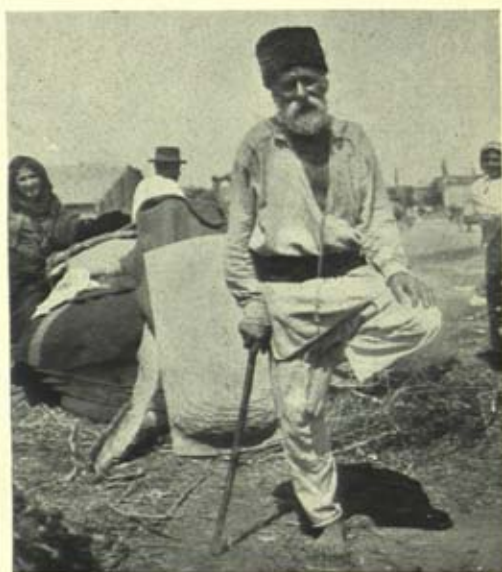




62. *The primitive lathe on which the Rudari women of Rumania turn spindles, handles and sticks*



63. *Bowls, plates, axles, etc., are still turned on this primitive machine*



64. *A strange position of rest adopted by an elderly Rumanian Rudar*



65. *A wooden bowl in the making*



66. *A Rudari woman, waiting for customers, carves spoons of various shapes and sizes*



67. *A gypsy woman returning to her camp from a village, where she has been exchanging her bowls and kneading-troughs for maize*



68. *Rudari women at the market in Bucharest. Their Rumanian clothes distinguish them sharply from the gypsies, to whom they are supposed to be related. They cannot speak a word of Romany. Their language is Rumanian, which they pronounce with only a very slight accent*





69. At Whitsun Rumanian gypsies dance the Rumanian Caluș, originally an ecstatic dance. Here again they act as guardians of national customs, which are disappearing among the peasantry



70. Another scene from the Caluș. It has several distinct movements and often bears a close resemblance to the sword-dance



71. The school for gypsies at Uzhhorod in the Carpathians. Violin lessons are included in the syllabus



72. The open-air music school in Bucharest. In wet weather lessons are transferred to a room in a neighbouring café



73. *The younger members of a gypsy colony in Berlin set about their homework in a not very convenient environment*



74. *An open-air service for gypsy children in Berlin. The girl on the right does not appear to be much handicapped by the fact that her hymn-book is upside down*





75. The Waywode of all Rumanian gypsies, G. Niculescu, dedicates a flag at their congress. In private life he is the owner of a Bucharest flower-shop



76. Tent-dwelling nomad gypsies preserve the traditional meeting of elders. The above was the first to be presided over by the new tribal mother, whose predecessor had died during the journey which was just over



77. A congress called at Bucharest in 1935 to further unity, patriotism, and the Orthodox Faith among gypsies

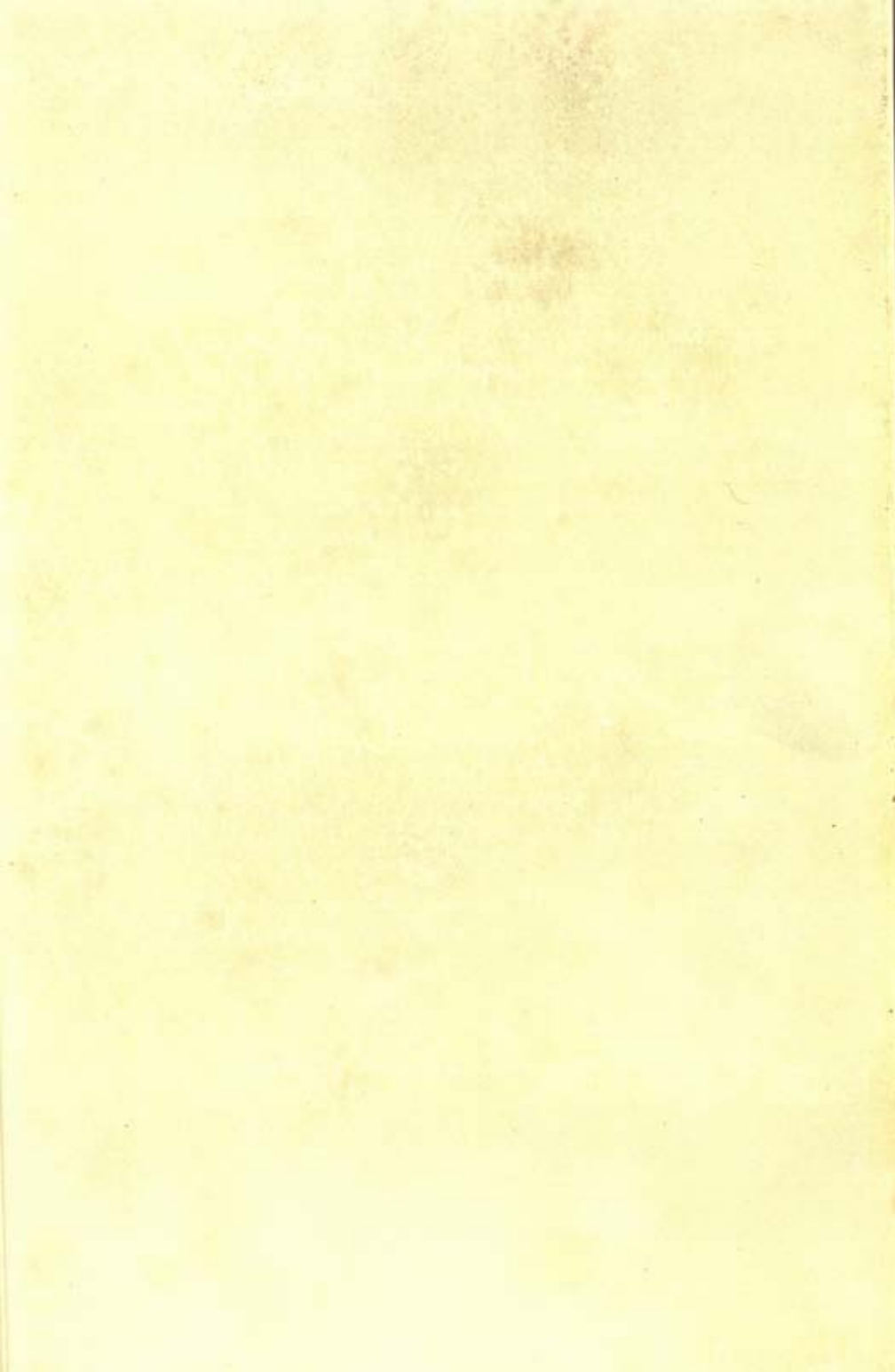


78. *A gypsy funeral. The dead man is dressed and laid out in front of his tent. Wreaths of artificial flowers, candles and flowered materials—result of a mixture of Eastern and Western customs—are brought by the mourners. All are intensely interested in the proceedings*



79. *Mourners at the funeral of the daughter of the gypsy chief Karpath at Mitcham, Surrey, in 1911*





## XVII

### MEDICINE

The gypsies seldom call in a doctor. The tent-dwelling nomads even refuse to have a death certified by one, and proceed with the funeral without a certificate. In central and western Europe they are, however, compelled to summon a doctor when death occurs, since the death cannot be registered without his declaration, and burial is not permitted until after registration. Death is accepted by the gypsy as something natural and therefore inevitable. He is quite prepared to surrender his life when the time comes at which, in his own phrase, 'he has no more days'; but he will never try forcibly to alter the course of nature; there are no gypsy suicides. The gypsy loves life and grasps it as long as he can. Anything which makes life difficult for him he avoids.

There are, however, two things which he fears—loneliness and sickness. Loneliness he can escape by complying with all the demands of gypsy law and thus avoiding banishment from his tribe. But sickness is caused by demons, who wish to harm

## *Gypsies*

the gypsy and he can only fight them by spells or forcible measures. By these he hopes to steal back from the demons the strength which they have stolen from him or his horse or his ox.

The gypsy smith is also a veterinary. In south-eastern Europe he is generally acknowledged as more efficient than a properly qualified non-gypsy. Peasants bring him sick cattle, which he sets about curing by well-tried methods. There is nothing he does not know about the ailments of horses and cattle. If, however, an animal is said to be bewitched, a man is powerless. In such cases a gypsy woman is called in and proceeds against the witchcraft with spells.

When a gypsy falls ill it is exceptional for any one but his wife to attend him. Objections against massaging with spittle are easy to raise but such treatment has at least the justification of being natural. Every animal licks a wound. Dogs', horses', and cows' excrement are also popular remedies, as indeed they are amongst almost all primitive people who keep domestic animals. Urine also is frequently used in the treatment of sickness. In cases of venereal disease gypsy women impose an ascetic régime upon the patient and compel him to partake regularly of certain prescriptions. The result of such measures is, strangely enough, if not actually a cure, at least a general improvement in health. Among the gypsies at Piatra Olt a little



## *Medicine*

child obviously suffering from stomach-ache was treated as follows. Water was heated in a clay bowl, and an earthenware vessel was put in the water for the child to sit on, so that it was completely enveloped in the steam. An upturned bowl was then laid gently on the child's head while the officiating sorceress hammered on the earthenware vessel with a bundle of wooden spoons and bones. Finally the child's feet were put into the vessel which was now full of steam and it was given a mouthful of the dirty water to drink. Another time I watched a child being washed with soap in a wooden bowl as a remedy for some malady.

The gypsy woman performs the duty of a chemist as well as those of a doctor. Age-old remedies which she has learned from her mother, her grandmother or her great-grandmother are cherished by her with the utmost secrecy. Her daughter is only initiated into these mysteries when she too becomes a mother. Preserved in these prescriptions is the experience of thousands of years. As a girl the young mother will herself have collected in the woods all the herbs whose names she may not know but of whose healing properties she has no doubt whatsoever. Such medicines are known as 'drab', a word which is also frequently used to mean tobacco.

Elderly gypsy women love quackery. Besides medicinal herbs, they collect parts of the bodies of animals which are supposed to have a similar effect.

## *Gypsies*

Bear, wolf, frog, and snake fat mixed with gnat form the ingredients of an ointment. Tender parts of the flesh, like the heart, lungs or tongue, are dried, pulverized and mixed in the form of a powder with the food of the person who is ill. Frogs' livers and tongues are pounded down with beetles and drunk in brandy as a remedy against fever. The woman who administers it generally provides a spell for the occasion. Pulverized beetles are also taken for female ailments. A mixture of pitch and fried onions is another popular medicine.

It is quite impossible to produce a catalogue of all the gypsy medicines and their uses. They are nearly as numerous as those available in a chemist's shop. In addition to those generally known, every gypsy woman has certain private concoctions which nobody but herself employs. It is perhaps unnecessary to add that auto-suggestion and faith both play a considerable part in the cures performed by these means.

The knowledge of herbal remedies possessed by gypsies rivals that of the Benedictine monks, but they are not averse to using it for destructive purposes. They mix poisons. In the East they have more than once had to defend themselves in court for so doing. They have been known to concoct some which only work after several days, when they begin gradually to affect the health of the person to whom they have been administered until



## *Medicine*

he finally dies. The ingredients of such poisons are naturally kept secret by their makers and it is thus extremely difficult to ascertain the cause of death, even at a post-mortem.

The psychological approach to the patient is one with which gypsy women have long been familiar. Their practice of suggestion and hypnosis and the hold which they can obtain over the minds of those whom they are treating raises the same questions as those with which students of Indian magic are faced. Fakirs are said not only to tame animals by the power of the human eye, but even to cause hallucinations in human beings by the administration of potions. A comparison of these arts as practised by the two races would be interesting.

At every consultation the gypsy woman lays one hand on the patient's breast, holds the other aloft and mumbles a number of sentences which are hardly ever clearly audible. To ask for a more intelligible repetition would be considered bad form. Anyway a real gypsy would never reveal her cherished spells, since she imagines that this would result in the loss of her magic powers. Her repertoire also includes spells made up of intelligible sentences. Judging from those which I have heard and succeeded in understanding, these differ little from such as are current among European races. The gypsy woman has spells against fear, nervousness, shooting pains, 'act of God', miscarriage, childbirth pains,



## *Gypsies*

bad luck, curses, evil spirits, ugliness, worms (either in men or animals), evil eye, and fire ; she has a particular spell which facilitates the theft of treasure—a practice of which her people are particularly fond.

Amulets are another means by which gypsy women seek to benefit their children and the local inhabitants, while at the same time augmenting their own earnings. They usually consist of a small bag which has to be worn upon the breast. Non-gypsies like to buy such things, since if a gypsy woman has dedicated them they are supposed to possess extraordinary powers. Talismans made out of dough or small stones are hung round the necks of children to bring them luck in love and plenty of money. It makes no difference to the value of the amulet if the desired wealth fails to materialize. Faith in such trifles gives to anxious mothers a confidence which remains unshaken when the hoped-for protection is not forthcoming. The mother of a child which has died despite all such precautions cannot be separated from the amulet which her darling has worn. Its loss might mean misfortune for the child in the After Life. Amulets are not given away. It was only by cunning and the help of a non-gypsy accomplice that I obtained possession of one of them. It was properly dedicated and in full possession of its powers. Any unauthorized person who opened it subjected himself automatically to a curse. It is

## *Medicine*

still unopened, owing not so much to cowardice as to my desire to present a museum with an amulet in its original state. Its contents are probably nothing more interesting than a collection of roots, pebbles, pieces of broken glass, and herbs. Sugar soaked in a mother's milk is supposed to be particularly potent. Muscles and snails keep one's luck in and are considered a good defence against everyday mishaps. Pregnant women hang children's teeth and bear's claws round their bodies to bring them healthy children. The 'blood of nine brothers' is a cure-all which is generally concocted and consumed. As a rule it is made from nine different herbs which are mixed with little stones and pieces of glass and sold at the fairs held in smaller country towns.

Running water plays an important part in the gypsy's life. It is by the side of a stream (much less frequently, of a lake) that he pitches his tent during his wanderings ; it is beside running water that the dreaded court of justice sits ; on the river-bank vows are made or oaths sworn. Running water is indispensable when a gypsy medicine is being mixed. It must be obtained before sunrise if it is to keep its healing or magic properties. No man nor other living thing may meet the woman who fetches it ; no word may pass her lips during her journey. She must be particularly careful in all her practice of magic not to frighten the spirits or arouse their suspicions.



## *Gypsies*

An illness can be checked if the patient spits into a hole which has been stopped up with a wedge. For one sort of amulet the gypsy woman must have ashes from three different hearths. Without telling any one she goes to the hearth with the words 'I enter the house to fetch myself ashes' and takes a handful. These only have magic power if she has not been caught or spoken to while securing them. When she has been successful three times, she puts the ashes in a piece of cloth, mixes some breadcrumbs with them and makes the sign of the cross. The amulet is then ready for use.

Tattooing is a special branch of magic. It has the reputation of being the most reliable protection against the evil eye to whose power small children are exceptionally liable. For this reason anxious mothers lose no time in having a small mark tattooed on their children. If they are not able to do it themselves they call in a specialist, and the process is repeated every time the unfortunate effects of the evil eye are observable. The reason, however, which is given for the infliction of this painful process on a child is always the desire to make it beautiful. I was once visiting a gypsy settlement in Bucharest with a doctor who belonged to that city, when we met a young girl whose face was disfigured by a running eye. My companion called her to him to see if he could not do anything for her. In order to see what was wrong he looked carefully



## *Medicine*

into the eye, whereupon the bystanders shouted to the girl that the gentleman had an evil eye and had bewitched her, and that she would be certain to fall ill. Someone else suggested that the victim should have a mark tattooed on her cheek in order to ward off the effects of the evil eye. On the display of or failure to display such 'beauty spots' the whole future happiness of the unfortunate girl was supposed to hang. Even adults, who believe in the power of the evil eye and think that they are suffering from it, frequently have their lips and cheeks thus decorated.

These pin-pricks, about 2 to 3 mm. in diameter, are generally arranged symmetrically below the corners of the mouth, on the chin and cheeks and sometimes on the forehead. There are also cases where they are arranged quite irregularly. I once saw a gypsy who looked as if her face had just been peppered with shot. This tattooing is specially frequent among bear-leaders, musicians, and half-settled gypsies; I noticed it less among Turkish gypsies and those engaged in tinkering.

The extent to which tattooing is practised among gypsies may be estimated from the fact that in Persia gypsy women have a monopoly of it. Persian women have their faces, as they think, improved by these tattoo artists. In Cairo such gypsies cry their business in the streets. The Armenian gypsies are said to adorn their hands as well as their fore-

## *Gypsies*

heads. Even here and in Germany there are gypsies to be found who are covered with these blue spots. Tattoo marks, however, are seldom made on any part of the body except the face. I have never seen any on a gypsy's arm or chest.

The method used is as follows. Three or nine sharp, home-forged needles are tied together by a thread after having a charm spoken over them (this is an indispensable preliminary to all gypsy magic). The 'artist' now takes these needles and pricks the cheek of her patient until blood flows at the point where the beauty spot is required. She then dips the needles in a liquid which has been mixed beforehand, and sets to work. The patient does not move a muscle during the whole of this painful operation.

Strangely enough the wound never goes septic. The mixture of children's urine, plum brandy, and petroleum, with some rust off the pot stirred into it, which has been used for tattooing since ancient times, seems to act as a disinfectant. No water must come into contact with the wound for three days after it is first made. When it has healed, a blue spot remains in its place. The purpose of the operation is then achieved. For a period at least, protection against the evil eye has been insured.

## XVIII

### NEWS, AND THE LANGUAGE OF SIGNS

I was constantly astonished at the extent to which the gypsies were informed about every matter which concerned their scattered tribe. They knew about family celebrations and deaths among relatives who might be camping a hundred miles away. Inquiries about this extraordinary phenomenon were always answered with the same sparkle of the eyes and a cautious 'Oh, we just know', or a more suspicious 'Why do you want to know?' One got no further, along those lines. I kept my eyes open for some time without result, until one evening my efforts to steer the conversation round to an ethnological topic were defeated at the moment of success by the sudden arrival of a courier who immediately occupied all the attention of the gathering. Conversation about mutual acquaintances continued until late at night. Smaranda, it appeared, was being married to Jonitza; Hâdârî had had a big quarrel; Andrei had eloped with Tibere's daughter . . . these were only a few of the exciting events related in the news bulletin.



## *Gypsies*

These couriers disappear as suddenly as they arrive, without any formal leave-taking. No one notices the guest's departure. He does not use the main roads, but reaches his destination by roundabout ways, as the Rumanian peasants used to at the time of the Turkish occupation, to avoid being pressed into any sort of service.

This courier system is common among the half-settled, cattle-breeding, Turkish gypsies of Rumania. The bear-leaders or *Ursari* use sign language more, owing to their greater mobility, but it is most frequent among the tent-dwellers or *Cortorari*—the most mobile of all the gypsy groups. The half-settled gypsies have a fixed headquarters from which they set out at certain times of the year for the district which the chief has allotted them for their wanderings. They have no need of a sign language. But amongst those who change their camping-ground daily it is indispensable. Where such gypsies find no sign message awaiting them they send out scouts to report upon the lie of the land and the attitude of the local inhabitants. These leave the result of their investigations in sign language for the benefit of those who come after. Every gypsy knows how to read such signs; they are never ambiguous and luckily are either not noticed or misunderstood by non-gypsies.

Only the gypsies themselves possess the key to these messages. Once obtained it will serve, with

## *News, and the Language of Signs*

a very few exceptions, for any country. Such at least has been my experience after studying those of Hungary, Poland, Serbia, Rumania, and Bulgaria. Unfortunately it has so far been impossible to trace these signs as far as India. It yet remains to be proved whether the system originated there or was only developed after the migration to Europe, where it is certainly unique. Neither the Rumanians nor Bulgarians have anything of the kind.

This sign language is thus a closely guarded gypsy secret. In the presence of its messages a kind of religious awe possesses them. Their primitive intelligence concludes that the signs are actually speaking instead of the man who made them. To an illiterate, any scrap of paper which has writing on it seems mysterious and endowed with magic powers. A gypsy, especially one of those in south-eastern Europe, will often preserve with the greatest care a piece of paper containing some quite trivial sentences which some one has solemnly presented to him as a joke. He wraps it up in the best cloth he has, to keep it clean, and produces it for inspection as though it were some priceless jewel.

Before going on to discuss the sign language, I ought to say something of the particular badges by which a single section of a tribe can be identified. The chief often has on his chest a few brass buttons which he has taken off some old uniform. He has a heavy staff inlaid with bones and zinc, its only



## *Gypsies*

ornamentation. All members of a tribe have a common badge, which however is only worn when they are separated from their fellows (e.g. when the tribe separates into family groups in spring). There are no badges of rank. A gypsy would not dream of making himself different from his fellows by dressing more expensively than they, or wearing exceptional jewellery.

Tribal badges consist of pieces of wood with a number of notches in them, of scraps of rag or thread of various colours, or of twigs taken from some particular tree which the tribe in question has chosen as its favourite. Usually every message in sign language has one of these badges attached to it. Since every tribe and indeed every family has the area in which it may wander allotted to it, these badges are generally confined to that area. Badges belonging to other groups on their way through are however respected. No gypsy may interfere with them in spite of the fact that they belong to a strange tribe. Any one who wilfully does so is banished. But on rare occasions, when two tribes are not on good terms, blood has been shed, owing to the strange tribe displacing sign messages in order to facilitate their passage through territory where they have not the right to be.

By means of the sign language dates, places, numbers, and other exact information can be passed on. They are specially useful when a police order



## *News, and the Language of Signs*

has made it necessary for the chief's instructions to be altered suddenly. On such occasions they are used to convey warning and information. It is difficult to believe that bits of rag, branches or bones which are bespattered with dung and appear to have been quite thoughtlessly thrown away, may contain messages of vital importance. The unpractised eye hardly notices such things ; a gypsy never misses them.

Gypsies often camp at the junction of two roads, near running water or, where possible, on the edge of a wood. It is at such places, after their departure, that signs are found. They are not usually disturbed. Some people are superstitious about the consequences of interfering with them. Notched bones are also left lying on roads. According to whether they contain one, or three such notches the initiated can tell whether a man or a whole family have passed that way. A long line with four short ones crossing it shows that a larger group has been on the move.

I was once walking along a road which, after mounting steadily for some time, led for a little along a ridge, before plunging into the valley on the other side. On the summit I caught sight of several trees hung with rags ; below them was another so extensively decorated that one might have thought an overheated traveller had left his shirt there and undertaken the descent half-naked.

## *Gypsies*

At first I imagined that the wind was responsible, but when I examined the arrangement of the rags more closely, I found that it had not been left to chance. They were carefully set out so as to form a downward sloping line, and, as if to press home the point, several had been broken in the same direction. On other trees farther down the valley I only found a few isolated rags and broken branches, the tips of the latter always pointing in the same direction. It was all a sign left by gypsies who had passed this way not long before and wished to leave particulars of their numbers, the direction they were taking and how far ahead they were, for the benefit of others who might follow them.

On a camp site stones laid in a line, rags, and branches are used to indicate the direction taken by its occupants on leaving. Branches of elder or lilac announce illness ; charred branches record the death of a tribesman, willow-branches the birth of a child (the addition of red thread indicating a boy, of white a girl). Fir-branches are the sign of a wedding (the same custom is found in Rumania where a fir tree at the entrance of a house or hung from a gable has the same significance). Two willow-branches bound firmly together with bark symbolize the embraces of two lovers. Birch always carries a warning ; a branch of it indicates that an arrest has been made by the police, and makes those who see it keep a particularly sharp look-out. Paper



## *News, and the Language of Signs*

serves a similar purpose. WlislOCKi is the main source of information on this subject.

Human ordure in conjunction with the tribal badge shows that an undertaking has been successful. According to gypsy belief the befouling of the scene of a theft insures the thief against pursuit—a custom which is also familiar to students of non-gypsy crime. Cow-dung is also used as a warning. Bits of animal skin with threads sown on to their upper side serve to call together all gypsies engaged in begging in the neighbourhood in order that some announcement may be made.

A white feather left on a camp site means : ' We have stolen hens here.' If there is a piece of tin lying as though some one has thrown it away, it means that the place is a good one for camping. Some signs, however, can only be understood by members of the clan with whose affairs they deal.

These sign messages are to be found throughout the gypsy world. From Constantinople to the north of Scotland stretches a chain of gypsy paths on which messages which have been disturbed are continually being set right again or undisturbed ones are having fresh information added to them. During the pursuit of some one who has been declared ' Baledšido ' they naturally prove invaluable.

In addition to the signs already mentioned there is a special system which some gypsy women use in connection with fortune-telling. Signs of it are



## *Gypsies*

to be found on the doors and door-posts of houses, and would be taken by most people for the work of a child. But every circle, triangle, or line has its significance. Two wavy lines, for example, show that the woman who lives in the house would like to have children. Circles in conjunction with wavy lines indicate that either the owner or his wife is dead. Infidelity, frequent quarrels and other information which a gypsy woman picks up in conversation with her client are all marked up on a wall or door or gate so that the next of her colleagues to enter the house is equipped with a store of information about its inmates which astonishes them and insures the success of her visit.

Some signs give information about the chances of success in begging and any unpleasantness which it is likely to cause. Many of these have the same meaning among non-gypsy tramps. A cross warns against excessive optimism in regard to the inhabitants of the house on which it appears. Two horizontal lines with two vertical ones beneath them mark the house of an official. Where gypsies have found themselves unpopular they leave two crosses. Where they have committed a theft, they make perpendicular lines. It is a thoroughly efficient system.

## XIX

### MUSIC

The gypsy's favourite instrument is the violin. If he has not the means to buy one, he will make one for himself out of whatever materials are available. I watched the process during the war in a prison camp where some gypsies were confined. The finished article frequently produced more scrape than music but it at least afforded the emotional outlet which its maker required. When gypsies buy a violin in a shop they are extremely hard to please, and their final choice is sure to fall on an instrument well suited to the accompaniment of their songs. This is very necessary since such songs are the main source of their income.

Other equally popular gypsy instruments are the cymbal and the lute, but as well as these three, gypsies also play flutes made of willow or aspen wood, pan-pipes and, less frequently, bagpipes or the jew's-harp. The bear-leaders carry a sort of tambourine and real ones are used by the gypsy dancers of Spain and Russia.

A gypsy orchestra generally consists of two or

## *Gypsies*

more violins, a viola, a 'cello, a double bass, and a cymbal, with here and there the addition of a clarinet. There is never any brass. The leader is the first violin. In cafés the members appear in evening dress carefully groomed, but they play with the same enthusiasm for the ragged and louse-ridden audience which waits for them in their camp. A sceptic seeing them on the stage for the first time might be inclined to judge their playing by their appearance, which in that environment is not prepossessing. But such opinions are quickly altered, as soon as the orchestra begin to play. Their appeal then is irresistible and one understands why Boyars and captains of industry have been known to pay fortunes for their services. Such music produces in them a feeling of romantic exaltation which temporarily obscures the suffering and hatred in the midst of which they live, affording them glimpses of a peace of mind which they have long ceased to enjoy.

Unfortunately their music is steadily losing its originality. Impresarios are partly responsible in that they introduce gypsies to the 'Bohemian' life of great cities, where the profit-making urge robs them of much of their peculiar charm. Professional gypsy musicians to-day form a society in themselves ; many take courses at academies of music where they are taught the most intricate problems of harmony. They have also been known to learn



## *Music*

the latest song-hits, though there is a considerable body of older gypsy musicians who warn them against this desertion of their traditional art. On the other hand those who, as in Bucharest, Budapest, and some big Russian cities, organize the gypsy musicians of the locality into a group which devotes itself exclusively to gypsy music, seem to me to be equally misdirected in their efforts. They have centres for instruction and practice where teachers and pupils do all their playing in the open air and are only driven indoors by bad weather. It may all be very well meant, but its effects are unfortunate. It saps the naïve individuality, the creative element, which has always been the most powerful ingredient in gypsy music. Nature speaks more clearly and directly to the ordinary man than art produced according to the rules of a school ; without its naturalness gypsy music is ordinary, insipid, even dull.

Franz Liszt, the great composer, gives us the approach to this primitive gypsy music as no one else could. He is indeed its interpreter. What he has written about it is so much to the point that I quote his own words :

What fascinates the listener more than anything else in this music is its rhythmic freedom, wealth, variety, and flexibility which are not to be found anywhere else to the same degree. These rhythms change constantly, are crossed and tangled up with one another and lend them-

## *Gypsies*

selves to the finest subtleties of expression. From the wildest fury to a lulling sweetness and the tenderest plaintive melancholy. From a battle-cry to a dance. From a triumph to a funeral. Passing swiftly from the fairy-rings in moonlit meadows to bacchic orgies. They are all characteristic, full of fire, suppleness, impetuosity, and the surging of waves. Full of invention and whimsical fantasy. Now they stand out sharply with a challenging charm ; now breathe a sigh as from a heart in pain. Now they dash along like a thoroughbred steed ; now they are little birds hopping about daintily in the sunshine. Then they are like the swift, startled flight of a stag before the hounds, or the dull roar of a wild boar who has been frightened back into his thicket. Passionately complaining like a love-sick swain or prancing and swaggering like a warrior hurrying to fresh combat. Tittering and chattering like a group of schoolgirls, and again spurred and snorting like a troop of cavalry horses galloping to storm a citadel. One cannot sufficiently stress the importance of the rare beauty which springs out of this richness of rhythm. In the matter of rhythmic invention and its right employment we know no other source from which European music could so abundantly learn. Its rhythmic content is overflowing and incalculable.

A great deal has already been written about gypsy music. Again and again has the question been asked : Have the gypsies a music of their own or do they merely give a gypsy twist to native music ? No one has settled this vexed question. Gypsy music is a phenomenon which, perhaps, will always remain an unsolved problem.

In his work on the gypsies, and their music in



## Music

Hungary, Liszt stood out for the originality of Hungarian gypsy music, for which he was much blamed by the Hungarians. Particularly strong was the protest of the folklore enthusiasts who will not allow that the gypsies are more than executants of folk-music. The final word in this argument has been spoken by Bela Bartok, that great student of folk-song who, as the highest authority on Hungarian folk-music, maintained that the chief musical talent of the gypsies lies in their ability to transform whatever folk-music comes to hand. And, as a matter of fact, they are true executants and their whole strength lies in the performance of given material.

Armed with a fiddle, Walter Starkie, the professor of Spanish at Dublin University, lived for a long time with Hungarian and Spanish gypsies in order to study their music. The story of his wanderings is related in his fascinating books.<sup>1</sup>

Every gypsy musician through his playing—particularly through his violin playing—has the ability to carry the listener away with him. He knows as no other how to give Hungarian and Rumanian folk-music its greatest appeal. The Hungarian or Rumanian, whether in sad or festive mood, needs a gypsy band to interpret his own melodies. The Primas plays now with melancholy, now with fire. Soon he leaves the platform, walks between the

<sup>1</sup> *Raggle-Taggle*, *Spanish Raggle-Taggle*, and *Don Gypsy*.



## *Gypsies*

tables as he plays, or leans over various guests trying to find a tune which suits their mood. If the one he has chosen fails in its object he tries another. He is tireless in his efforts and has a remarkable instinct for finding some tune or song to induce a few moments' gaiety in the gloomiest of listeners.

Leaders of gypsy orchestras love the sensational. They perform almost acrobatic feats with their violins, balancing them on their heads, against the backs of their necks and in the small of their backs, or even wielding the bow with their teeth. Using the same instrument they can imitate the song of a canary or a nightingale, and the sound of an organ. They are never tired, and will play without a break into the small hours of the morning if some one is willing to pay for the performance. When their working hours are over, by which time they are seldom sober any longer, they indulge in an orgy of their own, which generally ends with the burial of the violoncello accompanied by an amusing ceremony.

Quite apart from the astonishing fireworks which prove their virtuosity, music is to them the expression of their life, it belongs to their life, it is gypsy life itself. Their feelings find spontaneous expression in singing and playing.

Gypsies can still achieve by music what is no longer possible for others in words, the conveying of a thought exactly as it sprang into consciousness.

## *Music*

They do not need brain work to set it in order and clear it from inessential associations so as to present it in a shape approaching the original. Their music springs from the fountain of life, it has no rules and cannot even be written down, for our system of notation does not contain the infinitesimal degrees of tone from which the gypsies derive their unique wealth of colour, light, and shade. It is the colour, and, above all, the rhythm of their playing which sweeps the hearers away into the realms of ecstasy.

In gypsy music the melody is taken by the leader, who does not allow any one else to steal it from him. The double bass supports and stresses the chosen theme, which is given out by the chief voice ever seeking new variations.

The instrumental music of the early Middle Ages was also one-voiced in character, and came much nearer to the rhythmic mood of the gypsy music than does our music of to-day. Rhythms like those in gypsy music are to be found on the extreme borders of Europe. In Scotland and Norway relics from the Middle Ages have been handed down from generation to generation, and in eastern and south-eastern Europe native folk-music keeps them alive. Here they are for the most part adopted by the gypsies, for they feel themselves at home with these rhythms so akin to their own, which they brought with them from the Near East. They only had to tap the sources which were already there.



## Gypsies

The Oriental source of this particular expression of musical feeling can be taken as certain, because it is also to be found in all the Mediterranean countries which were more or less exposed to the Oriental influence. Gypsy music is therefore a happy blend of Oriental rhythm and European folk-tunes found by the gypsies in the countries of their adoption. Gypsy-like, they seized on these melodies and gave to them their own inimitable colour, recasting them in a gypsy mould. And because Europe has drifted so far from the music of the Middle Ages it finds this gypsy music, which seems to break every rule of the classics, alien. The absolutely pure tone recognized by the musically-trained ear is not to be found in this music. For the gypsy as for the Oriental the embroidery round the melody is its very life. A musical thought that is worked out in meticulous detail by the European musician leaves the Oriental cold. With them a theme is repeated over and over again, yet with every repetition there are spontaneous and minute changes in the notes and rhythms until, very gradually, new *motifs* emerge.

The gypsy's whole conception of music is different from ours, otherwise they would play the Hungarian and Rumanian folk-music as the natives themselves render it. One realizes this most clearly when one induces a gypsy to play our classical music. The same piece would sound quite different if played by an academic musician with his polished technique.



## Music

As I have said before, the gypsy is an artist in his ability to perform given material, clothing it in a gypsy garb. This characteristic shows itself chiefly in the town bands whereas the village gypsies express themselves in a more primitive manner.

When European composers such as Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, etc., make use of gypsy *motifs* they give them a European flavour. Musicians like painters shape their work to fit their Age and artistic temperament and the result is indeed a work of art, as they conceive art, but of genuine gypsy music only a glimmer remains. Liszt comes nearest with his Hungarian Rhapsodies, which give us a real picture of Hungarian gypsy life founded on their own melodies, while to-day the compositions of Dvořák and Novak perhaps make an even greater appeal to us, because they interpret for our own times.

Gypsy music provides a fitting accompaniment for gypsy songs. Some of these, either comic or satirical, are found in Russian song-books towards the end of the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth a regular style known as Gypsy Romance developed. A writer as early as Borrow relates how in Moscow gypsy women would sing long extracts from opera. In Bulgaria, Russian gypsy women nowadays earn a living by singing in cafés. There is no sort of training for this. The songs are handed down as folk-songs always have been and the public taste

## *Gypsies*

soon weeds out unsatisfactory performers. Choirs of gypsies are only heard in Russia.

There is a tradition of gypsy singing in Spain, where, as elsewhere, they have adopted the folk-music of the indigenous population. The 'Canto Flamenco', which, in spite of its Flemish name, is markedly Oriental in character, is especially popular in Andalusia. According to some scholars it was introduced into Spain at the time of Charles V by Flemish gypsies who immigrated at that time together with some groups from Bohemia. It seems more probable, however, that it actually originated among the gypsies. During their passage through North Africa it may well have become subject to Arab influences before its introduction into Spain. This is all the more likely since the manner of singing this song and its melancholy content are the same in Russia and Tunisia, so that it may well have persisted in these countries from the time of the first immigration into Spain.

Gypsies practise singing throughout south-eastern Europe, where their concerts are a common form of entertainment in restaurants. In the rest of Europe, however, their singing has become a rarity.

## XX

### DANCES

Gypsy women are cheerful and full of vitality; they are, therefore, good dancers by nature. They dance almost before they walk, and thereafter, wherever a fiddler strikes up, skirts will swing rhythmically while their owners sing or hum an accompaniment. One never realizes the full beauty of gypsy songs until one sees them combined with a dance. Usually the performance is solo, but it is by no means infrequent for two or three to dance to the same music while each does her own steps.

Spanish and Russian gypsy women are as famous for their dancing as Hungarian gypsies are for their music. Aristocrats of both countries never failed to include one or more gypsy dancers in the entertainments which they provided for their guests, and the passionate intensity of such performances can easily be imagined by any one who is familiar with the tunes which accompany them. The reward of the artists on these occasions took the form of gold pieces which were provided by the host and other enthusiastic members of the audience, and stuck on to the forehead or cheeks of the recipient. Through



## *Gypsies*

appearing in such distinguished company some gypsy dancers attained the status of celebrities, and were often brought long distances in order to give a single performance. To watch such artists was considered much more than just a pleasant way of passing the time. Their dances resulted in scenes of the wildest enthusiasm.

The movements in many of these dances were so suggestive that strict Catholic countries had to forbid them, since over enthusiastic fathers tended to throw away all their earnings on the dancers and let their families go hungry. Prohibitive measures were actually taken in Spain in 1598 and 1630. Father Mariana undertook a crusade against these 'bailes' as they were called, especially against the least retrained of them, the 'Zarabanda' which apparently attained such a degree of lasciviousness in the words which accompanied it, and of impropriety in the movements which composed it, that it 'brought a blush to the cheek of every decent citizen'. In 'danzas' only the feet are moved, the body remaining still; in 'bailes,' on the other hand, every part of the body is set quivering and no muscle escapes the rhythm of the dance. Between 1580 and 1630 Spain went dance mad. People danced in the public squares, the streets, and the courtyards of inns and houses. Some of these dances even penetrated the churches when the more offensive songs were replaced by others with a

## *Dances*

religious content. The Seguidillas and the Chacona are still popular to-day.

It is significant that naked dances are never performed by gypsy women. The clothed body proves an entirely adequate attraction. The best-known and most popular item wherever gypsies perform is the belly- or snake-dance. Every gypsy child can roll its stomach, and the oldest records never omit to mention such movements among the features which outraged the public.

It would, however, be wrong to consider such exercises as signs of depravity or moral degeneration. These sensual dances are a natural occurrence among such people and do not in the least offend against their moral code, which is extremely strict in all other matters relating to sex. Our civilization has chosen to draw a veil over this side of life, and has thus created an attitude which is totally unintelligible to primitive peoples. This fact is apt to be forgotten by those who raise moral objections to such performances even when given in an exclusively gypsy gathering. They seem unnatural to us, because we have long lost touch with nature ; but it would be unnecessarily arrogant to expect the gypsy to take the same view. It must, however, be admitted that the gypsy is by no means blind to the opportunities for profit afforded by our attitude, and is always ready to have his wife or children perform a snake-dance, for an adequate consideration.



## *Gypsies*

The gypsies of Spain have made their dancing into a regular business. In the underground and cave dwellings of the south, everything is arranged with a view to profit-making. The setting, the costumes, the hair dyed red or golden are all calculated to produce the maximum effect on the tourist. Old and young gypsy women sit in a room which might be part of a brothel, waiting for clients. When engaged they give exhibitions either solo or in groups of what are, in fact, very beautiful national dances. The performers never show any tendency towards underestimating the monetary value of their services. The entrance fee is considerable and the haggling with the 'Capitana' (a sort of elderly female business-manager) over the appropriate tip at the end is generally so protracted that it has to be stopped by the police officer who accompanies tourists.

In the Balkan Peninsula gypsies have adapted the local dances just as they have done in Spain and interpret them, as one would expect, with a good deal more vivacity than their originators. Weddings are the occasions of rejoicing on an unbounded scale when even quite old women forget their years and join in the dance. Ragged skirts are soon flying and the shouting is nearly drowned by the castanet-like noise which gypsies make by snapping their fingers or clicking their tongues. Real castanets and tambourines hung with bells add to the general gaiety and inspire the celebrants to movement which



## *Dances*

becomes steadily wilder. Dance-music induces something very near to ecstasy in such a company.

Gypsies in charge of performing bears are a common sight in some parts of Europe. The bears are caught young and trained to follow them like dogs by a process in which cruelty plays an important part. A ring through the nose acts as a powerful deterrent upon obstreperous behaviour. The accompaniment for dancing is provided by a hoop over which sheepskin has been stretched. Drumming on this primitive instrument and shouts of "Diha ! Diha !" are the signal for the bear to begin his performance on the end of his chain. In quite a number of countries the desire to preserve the picturesque has been subordinated to humaner feelings and performing bears are now illegal.

Dancing is another of the activities in pursuance of which gypsies have been the means of preserving a national tradition. The rain-charm or 'Paparuda' dance which has been forgotten by the native population is still danced by gypsies throughout south-eastern Europe, especially in Rumania (Illustrations 59, 60). Another Rumanian dance, the 'Caluș', is becoming increasingly popular among gypsies. It is performed by a troop in special costumes, armed with sticks and led by an old man (Illustrations 69, 70). After the dance the leader's stick is supposed to possess magic qualities and mothers bring their children to smear it with garlic and wormwood as a protection against disease.

## XXI

### RELIGION

The popular view of the gypsy's attitude towards religion may be estimated from the following story which has fairly wide currency, especially in south-eastern Europe. The gypsies, it is said, once possessed a church of their own built of cream cheese (or according to another account, of bacon-fat). On one occasion, however, when they were particularly hungry, they ate the church and for this reason are now without a national religion.

It is certainly necessary to have lived a long time among gypsies and observed them very carefully, before any traces of religious feeling are discoverable. That such feeling exists is incontestable, but it naturally eludes the observation of many who expect it to take the form in which it usually appears among Christian peoples. The gypsy is no mystic and has nothing but contempt for the logical systems in which the products of a more developed culture are inclined to take refuge from the problems of existence. He believes in magic. Such religion as he has is based upon this, and all who attempt



## *Religion*

to convert him must take it as their starting-point.

In Romany there is a word of Indian origin, 'O Dewel', or 'O Del', which could be translated 'God', 'Great Spirit', or 'Good Spirit'; but the gypsy more often uses the diminutive 'O Deloro'. The name is perpetually on his lips—'O Deloro žanel' (God knows), 'Bachta te del o Del' (God bless you), etc. The 'Beng' or Unclean is always represented as the seducer and betrayer of the gypsy people. It exercises, however, only a fraction of the influence possessed by the Great or Good Spirit, who is master over the thunder and lightning, snow and rain. Since he can bring unpleasant as well as pleasant experiences to the gypsy, the latter is quite capable of abusing him, when something goes wrong or the Spirit takes one of his family from him. There is no situation in life where the Spirit may not appropriately be called upon. He is thought of as something apart from the world as well as in it, and the gypsy respects and fears him, but there is no indication that the idea takes any concrete shape in his mind. Anything approaching worship of images is entirely foreign to his nature. The 'phu(v)' (earth) is his all; he regards it as something holy, something absolute and immovable in the midst of a changing and unstable world. For him it has always existed; there was no need for a creation. Yet though this earth over which he



## *Gypsies*

wanders is the source of all the good which he enjoys, it never becomes an object of worship. Gypsies feel themselves somehow linked to the stars. The drinking of dew and rainwater strengthens the bond. It is with the stars as well as with the mother of the tribe that the recruit is united by the oath of admission. I have also found traces of moon-worship amongst them. One evening as I was sitting among a crowd of more than usually primitive gypsies, the moon suddenly became visible behind some clouds. At this the men removed their lice-infested hats, bowed their heads and muttered prayers which I could not understand. I had not seen this ceremony before and could not ask any questions about it without arousing suspicion. Moon-worship is the natural accompaniment of their secretly matriarchal society and is, therefore, only found among the purest nomad strains. Other displays again seem to point to totemism, which can also still be recognized in the stories of conversion of gypsies into plants and animals, which constantly recur in their folklore.

Throughout Nature, on this earth of ours which the gypsies reverence, all sorts of fairies and spirits are secretly at work. Their life is spent in gorgeous palaces of gold and silver, built in secluded valleys where no human foot has ever trod. Their sex is female and they remain young and beautiful until touched by man. Each group of good or evil

## *Religion*

spirits is ruled by a 'Matuja'. They do not actually live in trees or rocks, but they have the power to penetrate all material things. If a gypsy woman becomes short-tempered, an evil spirit is said to have found its way inside her. Charming fairies are especially fond of troubling young men during the night in order to have children by them. If a young man dies suddenly, it is said that a bad fairy has embraced him. The fairy is punished by losing her youth and beauty and bearing triplets. The numbers three and nine are important in the life of the gypsy as well as in that of the fairies, whose groups are always composed of three or its multiples. Fairies play all sorts of tricks on mortals. Wlislöcki relates that if children are born crippled or do not grow at the normal pace, a bad fairy in the guise of a black hen is said to have laid an egg in the lap of the mother at the time of conception. For this reason black hens are not popular with gypsies. If a child is afraid to wade through some water, a bad fairy is blamed. Fairies also visit a child after its birth and are responsible for protecting the new life.

Occasionally male fairies are found, such, for example, as the dreaded Earth Dwarfs, who live in holes and cracks in the earth's surface.

The gypsy tries to resist the evil influence of these spirits by every means at his disposal ; but his task is obviously not made easier by the fact that one



## *Gypsies*

never actually meets a fairy. She is only the originator of the trouble, so that it is the results of her actions which have to be faced and never herself. The 'evil eye' however is not, in my opinion, within her province. It is a power for evil latent in the eyes of certain gypsy women, who have enough of it by themselves without fairy aid, and use it when telling fortunes or pronouncing curses.

Nomad gypsies hate being photographed. Where possible they hold their hands before their faces, so that at least this hypersensitive part of them may be protected. My attempts to take a photograph were once punished by a gypsy woman suddenly spitting a mouthful of water into my face.

Any attempt to regard this world of spirits as part of a system would consist largely of speculation. They apparently exist alongside the 'del' without its exercising any influence over them. It does not occur to the gypsy to regard one as more powerful than the other. His feeling is simply that a world exists apart from himself which has power to influence him for good or evil. Fairies—earth fairies, wind fairies, water fairies or fate fairies—are with him everywhere. They are one side of the picture. The other is monotheistic and consists of a God with his less important evil counterpart the 'Beng'. All nature is thus subject to two powers. One is visible in the natural life of plants and animals ; the other is known by its evil results.



## *Religion*

However hard gypsies try to conceal their habits from outsiders, they cannot prevent one's forming some idea of the after life as they picture it, by listening to their stories. They think that at the end of the world, which is stationary, there is a hole through which one can descend to the underworld. This can be reached by following the direction taken by the setting sun. The journey should be made on two cocks harnessed together. Is it perhaps conceivable that their ceaseless westward wandering is prompted by a desire to find the end of the world? In the Underworld it is time to sleep when our sun is high in the sky. Anyone who speaks there must remain for ever. It takes two months' walking through darkness before one sees a light and at the same time the castle of the black, man-eating Emperor. According to some gypsy tribes the world of the dead is situated on a mountain. A cavernous passage leads into the interior, which is guarded by nine white dogs. The souls of children born dead are borne to this mountain in a sack by an old woman. It is to this kingdom of the spirits of his ancestors that every gypsy proceeds after his death. The spirits have power over the living. Their vengeance is feared. They guard the tribe and the tribal morality. Every one is anxious to avoid insulting them. To talk in detail about his inmost feelings means to a gypsy that he is betraying his ancestors.

## *Gypsies*

An oath sworn by the dead is sacred. Death is the penalty for failure to keep it. With very few exceptions, however, it is valid only when taken by gypsies in the presence of gypsies. In Christian countries an oath by the dead is solemnized by a visit to church. The gypsy woman lights a candle before a picture and says: 'If I fail to keep my oath, may this child which I hold in my arms perish'. It is the most precious pledge she knows.

The gypsy does not worry much about the other world. He is firmly convinced that he will continue his life there as soon as it is finished here. According to his belief the dead are not dead. The soul lingers for some time round the body and the relatives of the dead man. Its departure must be made as easy and gay as possible, which explains why gypsy funerals are often such hilarious ceremonies. The drinking bout which is the inevitable aftermath of a peasant burial, begins among gypsies while the corpse is still above ground. I myself have played cards and thrown dice with gypsies by the side of a dead body. Every one was enjoying himself. The noisiest game played was 'I've fallen into a fountain, who'll get me out?' Its climax was always a kiss bestowed upon the victim, amid general acclamation.

On the death of a 'Tšochano', a gypsy who has had the reputation of sucking blood, his body is subjected to the most ferocious mutilation, in order



## *Religion*

to prevent his being able to suck the blood of those who survive him and draw them with him into the world of the dead.

All association with the world of the living ceases at death. The influence of the departed is confined to the world of the 'Mulos'. There is thus no worship of heroes. If a gypsy or a gypsy woman grows very old it is taken as a sign that they are specially in favour with the good fairies, and have been exceptionally successful in conciliating the evil ones. Age is, therefore, greatly respected. An old woman is in league with the supernatural, she has the gift of second sight. She charms and bewitches, practises as a doctor and advises lovers. She firmly believes in the magical power of her words and of the spells which she uses to heal the sick and coerce the wayward lover.

Thesespells and, indeed, their whole magical system are sympathetic. The piercing or tearing of objects in some way connected with the victim, are supposed to affect him personally by causing pain, ill-health, or illness which may prove mortal if the old woman further exerts her powers. But she can use these powers for good as well as evil. Spells for the patching up of quarrels, the solacing of unrequited love and the straightening out of misunderstandings are all included in her repertoire.

Her curse, she believes, will have exceptional power if her god is invoked when it is spoken.



## *Gypsies*

She will often make a special expedition to Church in order to make certain of obtaining this extra power.

All gypsies have a peculiar dislike of priests. The priest is in their view responsible for any and every ill to which they are liable. Even the wind is his fault, as the following story shows :

Through the fierce heat of a still summer day which brooded over a camp of twenty tents, a storm suddenly broke, blowing clouds of dust into them and rudely awakening the owners, who had been sleeping in their shade. These leaped to their feet, rushed inside as though in search of something and then, almost as if executing an order, returned to take up a position about twenty paces in front of the line of tents. Here they bowed several times in the direction from which the wind was blowing and shouted 'Go to the priest, wind ! Go to the priest !' Incidents which reveal the nature of their beliefs so clearly are rare and therefore worth recording.

In seeking for an explanation of this incident as of so much in gypsy belief, the fact that they are nomads must never be forgotten. It conditions their whole attitude of mind. They do not worry about the future. They like to lead their own life, observing the morals and customs of their fathers, and demand no metaphysical consolation. It is vain to expect in a nomad the depth of religious experi-

## *Religion*

ence which is reached by the inhabitants of an old-established agricultural community. He is not without a religious strain, but it finds its outlet in directions more adapted to the life he leads—in his talent for organization, his rigid tribal discipline and his stern moral code, all of which help to infuse a certain rhythm and stability into his life. In cases where a gypsy is compelled suddenly to relinquish his traditions, he at once loses his inner balance. It is for this reason that gypsies on becoming settled so frequently lose their most attractive characteristics. In order to avoid such disintegration, Christian Missionaries who work among them should try, as the first Christians tried, not to disturb the rhythm of their lives, but on the contrary to identify pagan practice with Christian significance. Dogma still forbids such methods, and as a result, the door to Christianity remains closed to numerous gypsies who would otherwise pass readily to the new life without any spiritual upheaval.

Outwardly the gypsies yield to the missionary efforts of various faiths and declare themselves to be Roman Catholic or Protestant, Orthodox or Mohammedan. In fact, however, they always remain gypsies and retain their ancient gypsy beliefs. It is noteworthy that they are more attracted by the Catholic than the Protestant faith, since the pomp and colour of the ceremonial in the former appeal to their imagination. They are quite often



## *Gypsies*

to be seen in Catholic churches. They make the sign of the cross, attend Mass and even receive the Sacrament ; but at the bottom of their hearts they remain indifferent. After the chief has officiated at a marriage the bridal pair often have themselves married in a church as well, or, if they do not, excuse themselves on the ground that the church was closed when they left the Registry Office. They are glad to have the services of a priest at funerals because they think he possesses magic powers. But this outward conformity to the dictates of the Church is mainly due to their desire to be accepted as good citizens. They have baptisms and marriages carefully registered in order to prevent the possibility of the refusal of a permit to work ; proof of a fixed abode and of children having attended school is furnished with the same end in view. They never fail to preserve outward appearances but their real nature does not change. They are quite ready to have their children baptised in several different places, in order to qualify them for a larger number of presents from godparents, who, however, are never gypsies themselves. They do not practise repentance for sin in the Christian sense, because the only sin they understand is transgression of gypsy law, for which they are punished. The gypsy god does not consider it sinful, when he is asked to help in a theft ; so in church they pray to the Christian God or the Virgin Mary to help them in



## *Religion*

their travels and in their, by Christian standards, dishonest activities.

At the same time they confess their faults themselves in the open air, and make promises never again to transgress the gypsy code or do anything which is sinful according to their standards. They will try to insure the success of an undertaking by voluntarily imposing a fast upon themselves. Friday fasts are probably copied from Catholic countries. Wittich tells the story of a gypsy who vowed to him that he would eat no meat for six weeks after every Good Friday and kept his vow till death, in spite of reminders from unsympathetic friends that hedgehogs were at their best at that time. Even the almost irresistible temptation of a hedgehog's hind-leg was rejected. Graffunder mentions a mother who, in 1835, refused meat for six months after the death of her child. Mothers make vows during pregnancy in the belief that their child will gain something from it. A change of heart occurs among them as suddenly as a change of camping site, and for reasons equally obscure. The vow must be made to themselves and kept by their own self-discipline. The day on which it is made is hallowed by general abstinence.

## XXII

### CONCLUSION

I have described gypsy life not as readers of cheap novels would like it to be, but as I know it. I think I am rendering the gypsies a better service by so doing. It is a disorderly, happy-go-lucky sort of life, but it has its purpose and its laws. If it had not, nomad gypsies could never have survived as they have. There is, in fact, a way of living other than our own, the disciples of which can claim the right to exist with as much justice as we can. We must make due allowance for the peculiarities of gypsies and endeavour by friendly and tactful intercourse with them to curb those of their eccentricities which most offend against our standards. A more generous allowance of freedom and a less vigorous interpretation of existing laws, would be a much more effective preliminary towards enabling the gypsies to find their place in our form of society, than the over-exact interpretation of every statute directed against them. With them more than with most peoples the method of one's approach is all important.

## Conclusion

Those who know them well, and have been able to see them off their guard, are astonished at the number of amiable characteristics which are to be found side by side with the faults more usually associated with them. They have strong feelings of family loyalty, they are proud of their people and its originality, and (among themselves) they are capable of deep, unselfish friendship, and of readiness to sacrifice themselves for others. Paradoxical though it may seem they possess (also among themselves), a keen sense of honour.

When gypsies are not given easy opportunities of stealing and are allowed to lead their natural life, the nomad life, they are quite able to live honest lives. There are plenty of gypsies living now who hardly ever come into contact with the police. They know that the police have an eye on them and that is sufficient to keep them well-behaved.

Their joviality is irrepressible. Poverty does not depress them and wealth makes no difference to their happiness. No stroke of fate is severe enough to disturb their equanimity. Death has no horrors for them. Worry and regret are unknown. 'Better next time' is their motto. 'We live in the present,' they say. 'O Deloro žanel' (God knows) 'what to-morrow will bring.'

By the roadside they utter their last heart-rending wail and die. By the roadside they are buried and forgotten. The carts move on. Their home is the



## *Gypsies*

world and continual change is the essence of their life. Movement is to them what rest and a settled life are to us. They never have time for self-examination or heart-searching. Each day brings new situations and new impressions which obscure the unpleasant memories of yesterday. Laughing, singing, dancing, playing, they have wandered for centuries through the civilized world, and the civilized world seems to have forgotten them, letting them pass by. It may be that they are stronger than civilization. But even if they are, why do they exercise that strength so relentlessly, rejecting all attempts to change them? Why do they go on wandering, and how long will they continue to do so? These are only a few of the questions which remain to be answered.





397 ✓

Gipsies, Nomads

Gipsies.  
Nomads



*"A book that is shut is but a block"*

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIBRARY

GOVT. OF INDIA  
Department of Archaeology  
NEW DELHI.

Please help us to keep the book  
clean and moving.