Sinclair, A.T.

American gypsies.

Exchange
Account

AMERICAN GYPSIES

By ALBERT THOMAS SINCLAIR

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AMERICAN GYPSIES[1]

MY first acquaintance with American Gypsies was at Mount Desert several years ago [c. 1880]. One day while out walking I came across a Gypsy camp, and stopped there a half-hour talking with a boy of about seventeen who was the only person at home in the camp. He asked me where I lived, my business, and various questions about myself. The next afternoon I went to the camp again with several gentlemen. As we approached, a large fine-looking Gypsy woman of fifty with a face and figure like a Roman matron commenced to tell the company where I came from, my business and various other particulars. Afterwards, evidently thinking she had made an impression by her power of divination, she wished to tell the fortunes of the rest of the gentlemen who were much surprised at her correct accounts of myself. The whole thing showed the shrewdness of the Gypsy race. She had met and spoken with me the previous morning and had seen me go to the camp, and the boy had evidently related to her what I had told him. She recognized me the second day and sought to surprise us all by her skill in fortune-telling by pretending to divine all she told by her arts.

As these Gypsies intended to remain a week or more, and I had little to do at the time, it seemed to be a good opportunity to learn Gypsy, which I accordingly improved.

As a rule Gypsies are unwilling to teach a stranger their language. It was therefore only by liberal presents of cigars and tobacco to the men and bright silk handkerchiefs to the women and girls that I induced this band to teach me. Again, Gypsies seldom can read or write, and it is not easy to learn a language accurately from ignorant people. For instance, I asked how they said in Gypsy "Will you have a cigar?" They said "Will *tuti lella tav.*" Later, however, I discovered this phrase meant "Will you have a smoke," not "Will you have a cigar." Ignorant people also soon tire when teaching you, and mislead by their answers, saying "yes" often when they should say "no," simply because that happens to make it easier for them. Frequently their replies are very amusing, and it is difficult to get an answer to your question.

Once I remember, I asked a Gypsy how he said in Romani "How much will you take for that horse?" The horse was near us. He answered "One hundred and fifty dollars." "No," I said, "you do not understand me. I

[1] This is the sixth article on Gypsies and their language published by the Library. They are all edited by Dr. George F. Black from the Sinclair mss. in the Library. They appeared in the Bulletin for October, 1915; December, 1915; May, 1916; November, 1916; January, 1917; and May, 1917. Each has been published separately.

do not want to buy the horse, but I wish you to tell me what the Gypsy is for these words 'How much will you take for that horse?' " His reply again was "One hundred and fifty dollars." It was only after explaining to him three or four times over that I could learn what I wished to know.

For over a week I talked and studied Gypsy two hours a day, writing down all the words and phrases as they occurred.

This band consisted of the following persons: Cornelius Cooper, twenty-seven years old, strongly and handsomely built, six feet in height, black hair and eyes, beautiful teeth, and complexion not very dark. Richard Stanley was not quite as tall as Cornelius, but darker, and pitted with the small-pox. Both of these men had an extraordinary muscular development, and were fine-looking, polite, agreeable, bright and witty. The wife of Cornelius was a pretty young woman, rather delicately formed, and quite lady-like. She was dark complexioned, dressed in gaudy colors and looked the real Gypsy. The wife of Stanley was a magnificent looking matron of fifty. She was quite tall and large in build, had a handsome figure, but was rather coarse in her manner. Still she was jolly and good-natured. Her daughter, Celia, seventeen years old, was a strikingly beautiful girl, both in face and figure, with clear red and white complexion. Another good-looking young woman of twenty dressed with much taste, and always wore a rose or some becoming flower in her dark hair. Then there was a boy of seventeen, another of twelve, and two small children. All these people had the Gypsy look. Their eyes and smile particularly had a distinctive, unmistakable Gypsy expression.

The old woman and one of the boys danced a kind of jig or shuffle for ten minutes or more, Richard Stanley playing the violin. The tunes, however, were all English. They knew no Gypsy tunes or dances. All these Gypsies were English born, and had traveled a good deal in Wales. It was very curious to notice that the old woman and Carrie quarrelled about half the time and still always addressed each other as "my dear." The names Cooper and Stanley are two famous English Gypsy surnames. These Gypsies had very handsome china and silver spoons and teapots, and lived well. Their bread was baked in an iron pan over an open fire, and all their cooking was done in the open air.

As a means of livelihood, the men traded horses and the women made and sold baskets and told fortunes. In Mount Desert, Gypsy-like, they sold Indian baskets as made by themselves, it being less trouble to buy them ready-made than make them themselves. Many times I have eaten with them and everything tasted very good and was very clean. They had four tents, three large gaudily painted wagons in which they slept and traveled about. This

band also seemed to have plenty of money, and had with them eight or ten horses, some very good ones.

Until they became well acquainted with me they were continually misrepresenting things and trying to deceive me, although I had made them many presents and treated them handsomely. For instance, Carrie and Richard several times intimated to me that the latter knew a language, as they put it, "way down deep," which he would teach me for a sufficient consideration. Cornelius, however, who, with his wife, seemed the best and most honest of the lot, denied this, and said they were teaching me all they knew, which was the fact. Even afterwards these two often hinted that I was not getting all, and that they were keeping back the "deep" Romani. One day I promised to give the four women each a handsome silk handkerchief if they would come to my office in Boston and get them. All agreed to this but Carrie, who said she preferred one dollar then no matter what a handkerchief might cost. After I had presented her with the dollar, I asked her why she preferred it to a fine handkerchief in Boston. Her answer was not so foolish by any means. She said "If I have the dollar now I am sure of it. What I shall get in Boston and when I shall get it I don't know."

Celia, seventeen years old, was quite pretty. She had a pleasant smile, dimples in her rosy cheeks, and a clear red and white but dark complexion. Her figure was erect, lithe, and graceful. She was of medium size, and had black Gypsy eyes and hair, most beautiful teeth, and was very retiring and modest in her manner.

Carrie was above the medium height, rather stout and buxom, and yet with a fine figure, well-shaped and rounded, and very erect. Her eyes and hair were black, and, as already said, she always had a flower in her hair. In manner and voice she was rather coarse. Both she and Celia showed a good deal of taste in their dress and were always clean and neat.

Charlotte, the wife of Cornelius, was quite pretty when clean and well-dressed, and resembles Celia very much, though not so good-looking.

The country people in Mount Desert all seemed kindly disposed towards these Gypsies and much interested in them. Very many came to the camp to see them.

Oct. 15, 1882. I visited a Gypsy camp near Spy Pond, Arlington, Mass. There were three families: (1) Thomas Stanley, a rather good-looking Gypsy of twenty-six years of age, with dark curly hair and about the medium size; his wife, Emma, eighteen years old, a pretty plump flaxen-haired woman, and their baby, seven months old, also light-haired. Emma insisted that she was

a real Gypsy and her father and mother before her, in spite of her light complexion. (2) William Stanley and his wife, who were away to-day visiting some Gypsy friends in Somerville, and their children, Venie, eighteen years old, beautifully formed, erect, pretty face, nice teeth, dark hair, rosy cheeks and very bright. Merrilis, thirteen years old, a bright handsome, lively miss, and two boys, not very attractive in appearance, one about nine and the other about seventeen years old. (3) Treshiah Stanley, also away (his wife had died recently), and his daughter Elizabeth, twelve years of age, and Joe aged ten, Jimmie nine, and Henry aged seventeen. The boys were unattractive in appearance. When I arrived and greeted them in Romani they seemed a little surprised, and asked me to sit down in their tent. As soon as I was seated I offered them all a cigarette each, and every-one took one, girls included. The boy, Joe, proceeded at once to smoke his, and soon was stretched out on the straw, pale and very sick. The girls did not smoke, but evidently went on the principle of taking everything offered. These Gypsies are the dirtiest and least attractive I have as yet seen in the country, but the girls were all pretty and interesting. As soon as I promised Venie and Emma handkerchiefs they both sat down close to me, and anxiously tried to teach me all the Gypsy they knew. It was a rather striking fact that two of the girls refused to tell fortunes because it was Sunday, and told Jimmie he must not try to sell *boshito* [?] to-day. But they all begged hard for something. Venie wanted a handkerchief. So did Emma, and also a pair of boots for the baby. Merrilis wanted a pair of stockings. William promised to teach me Romani perfectly for a two-dollar-and-a-half pipe. All the boys wanted pennies and the larger ones tobacco.

From them I learned a great many new words, but found that I knew many words that they did not, and that I could talk Gypsy easier than they could. They had comfortable tents and slept in wagons. They baked their bread in a pot hung over the fire, and had plenty to eat of good food. The usual dislike to talk Gypsy before strangers was exhibited by all of them. There was not so much shyness in the girls as I have found before among Gypsies.

Oct. 22, 1882. Walked to Spy Pond and found that the Gypsies who were there last Sunday had gone. Then I went to Somerville, and was there taking a drink of water in the stable when Celia Stanley came in and rushed delightedly at me and asked me to come into the house, which I did. There I found Charlotte Cooper's father, Richard Cooper, fifty-four years old, his wife Marcella, aged fifty-six, his son, Esau, 26, his wife Brittania, about the same age, Cornelius Cooper, his wife, and lots of children, small and great.

Some of the above I had met at Mount Desert, and since then they had been traveling about the country camping out. All had improved in looks wonderfully. Evidently the air had done them good. They were glad to see me and invited me to stay to supper, which consisted of cake, a kind of sweetened bread with raisins in it, and tea. Marcella calls herself a doctress, and some people came in for her medicines, and were much impressed by what she said to them. From Somerville I walked to Warren Street, where I found Richard Cooper and his wife Fannie, Carrie Stanley, a married sister with two small children, her mother, Ann Stanley, and two boys. They too, were very glad to see me and called me Romanichal. Ann's mother, named Hicks, an old woman of eighty-two, joined the Mormons some twelve years ago. I read to them a letter from her which indicated that she was very happy and wished them all to come out [to Utah?] and become Mormons. But as the letter was written in such a pious strain and the handwriting was so good I suspected the old woman had little to do with it. I also read for her a letter from her daughter in Toronto. Richard had been on a wild drunk for a week and was not feeling very well. The married sister's husband had left her, and was a good for nothing fellow addicted to drink. She herself had a bad toothache. Carrie was cross and was talking very hard and loud about some Gypsy friends who had been interfering with her young man. So it was evident that the Gypsies are not all or always the happy, contented, sober people Richard pictured to me in Mount Desert. Still the Gypsy camp looked quite romantic with its tents and dusky inmates, and a bright log fire lighting up their dark faces and characteristic dress. The moon soon broke through the clouds and lent an additional charm to the picturesque scene.

Sept. 17, 1882. I called at the corner of Broadway and Lincoln Street, East Somerville, Mass. There I found three families of Gypsies: (1) Samuel Cooper, his wife, and nine children. (2) Richard Cooper and family, and (3) his son and the son's wife and three children. They all live in the house together, and keep a sale-stable adjoining the house. There is a sign on Broadway: "S. Cooper & Brothers, Sale Stable." When I arrived the son was alone with his nephew, a boy of ten years. The son was twenty-six years old and was born in Tennessee, he told me. He was a healthy, well-built, good-looking man. He seemed somewhat surprised to hear me talk Gypsy, and evidently was curious to know who I was. He could hardly read or write, although he had had a good opportunity to go to school which he said he had neglected. He understood almost all I said to him in Gypsy, but said he could not talk much as they never talked it much among themselves. Soon his uncle Sam Cooper

drove into the stable. He was a good-looking, well-built man of sixty, but did not look ruddy like most of the Gypsies. At first he did not seem much surprised to hear me talk Gypsy, but after a little while he became quite interested and asked me in a subdued but very earnest tone of voice if I really was a Gypsy. His manner then was peculiar, and he spoke and acted somewhat as a man would who really wished to know whether I was an old friend or a relative. About eight or ten young Gypsy children, from four to twelve years old, then came in. Some were very pretty, with dark, brilliant eyes, lithe forms, and beautiful olive complexions. When I addressed them in Gypsy they appeared greatly surprised and interested and asked what kind of a man I was. It was a very striking fact that two of the boys, aged ten and twelve respectively, and two or three little girls somewhat younger understood all I said and seemed to know as much if not more Gypsy than the men. They could certainly give me the pronunciation more exactly. My explanation of these facts is that as they could read and write, and went to school they learned more easily and had more exact ideas of what a word was. Then Sam's wife came out, a fine looking old woman of sixty perhaps, nicely dressed, but in bright colors and with a Gypsy's taste. She seemed quite interested in me, but seemed to know but little more Gypsy than the rest. She told me not to talk when *gorgios* [non-Gypsies] were present, as they never liked to do it because people made fun of them. She said she did not teach her children Gypsy, and although they understood it a good deal they seldom talked it and never when *gorgios* were about. The old woman brought out her daughter, evidently to have a look at a curiosity — a *gorgio* who could talk Romani. The daughter was a very beautiful girl of nineteen, just above the medium height, indeed rather tall, with black lustrous hair, a little wavy, the brightest of black eyes, an olive complexion, red lips and cheeks. Like almost all Gypsy girls here she was very timid and modest, and kept at some little distance outside the stable, but evidently anxiously listening to everything. Her mother several times, particularly when I was leaving, talked to me in a very pious strain, such as a revivalist uses to a new convert, telling me to "trust in Christ and all would be well," etc. I asked her if she went to church, and she answered "too much." I could not make out what she meant by such talk. She also asked me if I were married, and when I said no, she gave me much good advice on the subject. These Gypsies seemed to do a fair business in trading horses, and judging from their own talk and what several men said who evidently had traded with them, they were reasonably honest for horse dealers. Richard Cooper himself was in Canada buying horses. These Gypsies lived very comfortably and evidently were doing well.

They are permanently settled and do not wander about like the majority of their race. They told me there were not so many Gypsies in this vicinity as formerly, as they found business better in Canada, New York, western Massachusetts, etc. There was one family camping out in Dedham, but they knew of no others hereabouts now, although others might come here for the winter. Sam and his nephew both told me that there were a great many "Tinkers" in this country, who knew the Tinker's talk and that this was a complete language.[1] They said the tinkers came from Ireland, and talked what they supposed was Irish. At all events it was not Gypsy, and they could not understand one word of it. These tinkers, they said, traveled about and mended tin-ware, etc. Many of them went about the country in wagons, camping-out like Gypsies. They said they had seen a tinker encampment near Northampton, Mass., of twenty–five wagons, and that they often saw them about here. From their account it seems that there must be a good many of these tinkers in Massachusetts, as well as in other parts of the United States. I had never heard of this and the fact is not generally known because everyone supposes these tinkers, particularly those camping out, are Gypsies. They told me that one old tinker named Sweeney, lives in Union Square, Somerville.

Sam asked me quite earnestly whether Gypsy was really a language. He said he had always supposed it was a mere gibberish like thieves' jargon. When I told him it was a real language like English he seemed pleased and asked where the Gypsies came from. I told him, India probably, and he said "Is it true that we be Indians then?" He said his ancestors were English, and that his father and grandfather he knew were English and he himself was English. He also said that they had no traditions or idea where the Gypsies came from, but that he had supposed they were English. Then he asked if there were Gypsies in other countries, and when I answered yes, he wanted to know if they talked the same language as he did and understood it. He plainly had no idea where the Gypsies originated, or that there were any outside of England and the United States. These Gypsies, like all I have seen, seem to live very happily and pleasantly together. They do not get drunk. One said to me, "We generally don't trouble liquor much."

Oct. 25, 1885. This afternoon I found a Gypsy camp in Brookline, near Newton, of about fifteen persons. One of the members, a Mrs. Hicks, was born in New York of Irish parents and married to a Gypsy. She was bright, intelligent, and fairly educated. She told me her uncle, who was born in

[1] See note on the language of the Tinkers at the end.

Bombay, had a Hindu mother and an English father. He came to this country and married a Gypsy. He spoke the language of Bombay better than English. Of her own accord, without any suggestion from me, she said that her uncle had told her that he thought the Gypsies were Hindus. Almost all the Gypsy words and talk he understood perfectly, and stated that they were the same as Hindustani. The customs and ways of the Gypsies also were in many respects like those of the Hindus. For example, the Gypsies do not wash their dishes in the same tub as clothes. Neither do they use the same piece of soap for both purposes. He also said that the Gypsies had many peculiarities and habits which he noticed and said were the same as those of the Hindus. When I asked her to give me some other customs, she said she could not think of any of them, but she did remember that he had told her that if the shadow of a person fell upon food or water of which a Hindu was about to partake, it was considered a bad omen in India, and a Hindu would not touch either. The Gypsies will. It seemed to me that some of these customs were of such a nature that she was unwilling to speak to me about them. She said many of the Hindu words she understood and that they were the same as Gypsy, but that her uncle pronounced them a little differently. For example, Gypsy *pănĭ* and Hindu *pānī;* Gypsy *mūĭ* and Hindu *mōī;* G. *kăn,* H. *kān;* G. *băl,* H. *bāl.* All this information she gave me without any suggestion whatever on my part. She had not seen her uncle for many years and believed he had died two years ago. As she had read a book by Crabb [1] on Gypsies she may have got these ideas and words from his book and Gypsy-like deceived me. If not, it seems to me that this information tends strongly to prove that the Gypsies came from India, and that Gypsy is simply the common language of India as spoken when they left the country. How much I regretted not to have been able to see this man, one who understood Hindustani and Gypsy both perfectly. In order to settle the question a person should know how to speak the common Hindustani and Gypsy well. Mrs. Hicks had noticed that the Hindustani words were the same as Gypsy, but that they were put together differently. Being naturally bright and intelligent and also fairly well educated, her observations were far more valuable than those of Gypsies who seldom can read and that never well.

Dec. 6, 1885. This afternoon Richard Stanley gave me the following account of Gypsy customs, which was confirmed by the wife of Cornelius Cooper. When the Gypsies are travelling on the road, and others are to

[1] *The Gipsies' advocate; or, Observations on the origin, character, manners, and habits of the English Gipsies...* By James Crabb. London: Seeley & others, 1831. 167(1) p. 12°. A third edition of this work, with additions, appeared in the following year (London: Nisbet, 1832. xii, (9)–199 p. 12°.). On pages 15 and 16 the author gives a brief comparative table of Romani and Hindustani. — *G. F. B.*

follow them, they place at cross-roads leaves or twigs with a stone on them, pointing in the direction they have gone, to apprise those following of the way they have taken. This sign they call a *pátern*. When a Gypsy dies they bury with him or her all the deceased's clothes. A young girl named Brittania died recently and they buried with her in the coffin her finest dresses. Such as there is not room for in the coffin are never afterwards used, but are burned or made away with in some other way. They never wear the clothes of the deceased, but occasionally part of a dress is retained as a keepsake. Jewelry and ornaments they keep. If a person while cooking takes snuff they will not eat of the food. This does not apply to smoking, however. If a drinking cup or any dish used on the table is thrown in the dirt or in dirty water they never use it again but throw it away. It is *mokerd* "spoiled." The soap and tub used for washing dishes is never used for washing clothes. They say there is no penalty or punishment among them for infidelity in a husband or wife. The fact that the shadow of a *gajo* [non-Gypsy] falls on eatables or drinkables does not prevent their making use of the food. They will eat pork, but do not like to do so. They assert that there are many other peculiarities and customs, but said they could not think of them. Those above mentioned they only spoke of when I suggested them. Being illiterate people they cannot tell you about such matters unless something is said which brings the idea into their minds. As I have only very recently learned of these customs, although I have repeatedly asked them if any such existed during the last four or five years, it is very probable many others exist. If I, who know the same Gypsies so well and so long, find so much difficulty in obtaining information from those perfectly willing and even anxious to inform me, how much more difficult it must be to get information in European countries where the Gypsies are suspicious, secretive, and much less intelligent.

Jan. 20, 1886. Richard Cooper and Cornelius Stanley told me to-day that girls do not wear any cord (*dikla*) about the waist before marriage and neither are they examined on marriage. The *luveni*'s mark, a slit in the ear or lip, they had heard of. They had never heard of any wound or punishment inflicted for such or any offense [in America]. Richard Cooper came here [from England] thirty-four years ago, traveled all over the southern, western, and middle states. He saw no Gypsies except those who came over with him or about the same time. He never saw or heard of any Gypsies here before that time, but his grandfather had told him that Gypsies were transported to Virginia for crimes.[1] They have no customs or habits except those

[1] See note at the end on early arrival of Gypsies in America.

noted above, but he did not mention these until I spoke of them. They never knew or heard of any settled Gypsies here except the horse-dealers in Somerville and one who kept a hotel in Canada. They had seen Hungarian Gypsies in museums [shows], and could talk some with them in Gypsy. The Hungarian Gypsies, however, told me they [the American Gypsies] could not talk much.

[c. 1910.] Some thirty years ago when learning to speak American Gypsy, I prepared a vocabulary of words,[1] which I used to carry in my pocket when visiting the Gypsies in their camps to aid me in talking the *čib* [language]. All the words were collected by myself from Romani *vušta* (lips) and before I had read any publications about the Gypsies. Fortunately I have preserved this little book. In it were noted down all I could gather, and I have been unable to add much to it since although I have been continually seeking for *nevo lavs* [new words]. Undoubtedly I have heard other words formed from these, as nouns from verbs, etc. Still it has seemed to me best to add nothing from memory. The Gypsies knew also some slang and tinker words, but I never heard them use these in conversation. During the winter of 1908–1909, one family which I knew then lived in Allston, and I improved the opportunity to verify the sound and meaning of every word, but found no changes necessary. The father, sixty-three years old, is as fine a specimen of the English Gypsy as ever delighted my eyes. Over six feet in height, straight as an arrow, broad-shouldered, heavily built, strong and vigorous, his beautiful teeth still well preserved, and his coal-black hair untinged with grey. He is flourishing financially, has plenty of good horses, and is a money-lender on a considerable scale. Heretofore he had always been a strictly temperate man. This winter with little to do, and several *gajo* companions who were hard drinkers, I was sorry to notice him several times under the influence of liquor I thought the matter over, and one day I took him aside and quietly said to him "You promised your father on his death-bed never to touch a drop of liquor. It killed *him, kek pi tato pani apopli, tato pani*'ll *mer tute.*" (Do not drink whiskey again, whiskey will kill you.) His big, black, shining Gypsy eyes caught mine for a moment, and seemed to look through me. He simply answered, holding out his big hand, *miro puro romani pral, ker vastas* ("my old Gypsy brother, shake hands"), and he has not touched *tato pani* since.

Most of the English Gypsies have wandered all over the United States and Canada. One woman, who sometimes winters in Allston, was born

[1] This vocabulary, with additions from other manuscripts of Mr. Sinclair, was published as "An American-Romani Vocabulary" in the Bulletin of The New York Public Library, v. 19, p. 727–738. New York, 1915. — G. F. B.

"between" Georgia and Alabama "just before the war." One of her brothers "is always on the road in the south, and another camped out for many years in California." A girl belonging to another family which sometimes camps here was named Tennessee because she was born in that state.

I have very rarely, if ever, seen or heard of a Gypsy family in America which did not get on comfortably. Sometimes the *rom* [husband] drinks, or is shiftless, but then the *romni* [wife] seems always to support the family well. One such I know *dukers* [tells fortunes] at fairs given for churches, hospitals, etc. She receives one-half the profits, and her share is often as much as twenty-five dollars a night. Selling baskets at houses and telling fortunes also brings her a good deal of money. Relatives always assist if necessary. The men deal in horses principally, and do well at the business. They have learned by experience that a reputation for fair dealing is a valuable asset. A newspaper item, some years ago, stated that a Gypsy furnished all the horses for the horse-car lines in San Francisco, and made a large fortune through his ability and honesty.. Many have accumulated handsome properties. In Boston, Somerville, Fall River, Providence, Worcester, Hartford, New Haven, Springfield, in New England, and in many other cities of the Union, Gypsies own real estate, free and clear, worth from twenty to a hundred thousand dollars. Many have thousands of dollars in ready money, and some are money-lenders. I have full details of such cases. The very large proportion are temperate, much more so than formerly, I think. They are nearly always on good terms with every-one who comes in contact with them, and the old prejudice against their race has largely disappeared.

Many Gypsy children attend the schools except when on the summer tramp. They are popular with their teachers, and liked by the other children with whom I see them playing every day. The Gypsies here are *let alone,* and taken as a whole are fully as well behaved and prosperous as any of the immigrants who come here. They do not engage in mercantile pursuits, or become professional men, and hence rarely acquire the large fortunes sometimes possessed by these classes. Those who have secured a good deal of money and own comfortable houses of their own look vigorous and healthy, both themselves and their children. But those who are obliged to rent the poorer class of houses for six or seven months in the year in order to give their children an education, find different results. Their children show by their looks, health, and physique, that the life led necessarily in our cities by the poorer classes simply saps the vitality and life of the Gypsies.

The following phrases I have copied from old note-books. They were taken down as I heard them when I was learning Gypsy, and illustrate the

ordinary Gypsy talk as I used to hear it. Some old Gypsies still speak in the same way at times, but the younger generation has lost the greater part of their Romani tongue.

mūš palāl tūte; dīk avrī, a man behind you; look out.
lende sī bīnō adrē kova tem, he is born in this country.
tūt's jólen[1] *adrē pūro tem ūprō bēro pārdâl bâro pānī,* you are going to the old country in a ship over the ocean.
mâr čal čīčī, don't take anything.
čéro kūvo, mâr dūker lénde, poor thing, don't hurt him.
mor dul lénde aprē the *mūī,* don't hit him in the mouth.
*lénde sis kómlo dik*en *mūī,* he has a pleasant-looking face.
ker the *wúdar,* shut the door.
*dūī mūšās kūr*en, two men fighting.
dúvā's a *dúl*en *grái, kek tād adrē* the *wúrdar,* that is a kicking horse, he doesn't pull in the wagon.
mâ riv yājúfo adrē kóngerī, čiv it *pâle,* don't wear the apron to church, put it back.
mánde koms[2] *čúmini* to *hâ,* I want something to eat.
mánde jins kúmier than *dúva mūš,* I know more than that man.
Tilly, *lel siv* and *tav* and *siv aprē* the *hev adrē* the *čáfo,* Tilly, take a needle and thread and sew up the hole in the coat.
tūte si místō adrē the *tem,* you are better in the country.
duvā's feterdērus tūvlo, that is the best tobacco.
del mánde mâro and *kúro líveno,* give me some bread and a mug of beer.
síker the *rái* the *rūpeno pīāméngero,* show the gentleman the silver teapot.
mūk lende ač kūrī, let him stay at home.

SECRET LANGUAGE OF TINKERS

This Tinkers' talk is a secret language once in common use among our traveling tinsmiths and umbrella-menders, but now, like the Romani, rapidly dying out. The language is variously known as Shelta, Shelrun, Sheldrū, Shildru, Bog Latin, Minklers' Thari, Tinkers' Cant, "the ould thing," etc., and in Scottish Gaelic as *Laidionn nan ceard* "the gibberish of tinkers." The study of this idiom is one of much interest, and it has fortunately received the attention of a few scholars, chief of whom is Dr. John Sampson, librarian of the University Library, Liverpool. The first to draw attention to it was the late Charles Godfrey Leland, who collected a number of words and sentences from an English vagrant at Aberystwith, in North Wales, and from an Irish tinker in Philadelphia (*The Gypsies,* Boston, 1881, p. 354–372). The language is based on old Irish of from one thousand to fifteen hundred years ago. Numerous references to it occur in early Irish manuscripts, and it has been

[1] The suffix -en, here and in *dik*en and *kūr*en, further down in the list, is simply the English termination -ing.

[2] The *s* here and in *jins* is the *s* in vulgar English "I wants."

identified with the ancient secret language called *ogham* or *ogam,* a word which probably survives in the Shelta *game* or *gamoch,* meaning "cant" or "slang." Several Shelta words are found in an old Irish manuscript called *Duil Laithne* or "Book of Latin," copied in 1643 from an older ms. Shelta words are manufactured from Irish by reversing or transposing the letters of the original word, as, *ad* "two" (Irish *da*), *kam* "son" (Ir. *mac*), *nap* "white" (Ir. *ban*), *nyuk* "head" (Ir. *ceann*). A few instances where Shelta and Irish are identical are found in the words *braas* "food" (Ir. *bras*), *muog* "pig" (Ir. *muc*), *shkiblin* "barn" (Ir. *sgiobolin*), *nedas* "place" (Ir. *ionadas*), *she* "six" (Ir. *se,* pron. she), *kunya* "priest" (Ir. *cairneach* "a druidical priest"), and *gyukera* "beggar" (Ir. *geocaire*). Other methods of forming Shelta words from Irish are by changing the initial letter, and by the prefixing, suffixing, or interpolating of certain letters, principally *gr, b, sh, th,* etc., e.g., *jumnik* "Sunday" (Ir. *domnach*), *laskon* "salt" (Ir. *salann*), *grasol* "ass" (Ir. *asal*), *binni* "small" (Ir. *min* "fine"), *shlug* "weak" (Ir. *lag*), *minker* "tinker" (Ir. *tinceir*), *tober* "road" (Ir. *bothar*), etc.

Prince Henry's boast (*First Part King Henry IV.,* act ii, sc. 4) that he could "drink with any tinker in his own language," has always been taken to refer to Romani, but Shelta is more probably the language Shakespeare had in mind when he penned the lines.

GYPSIES IN AMERICA

That Gypsies were in America at a very early period is shown by the two following documents, now rendered into English for the first time:

"The King. The president and judges of our royal court which resides in the city of La Plata of the province of Charcas [a part of old Peru, nearly corresponding to modern Bolivia]: We learned that there passed secretly to some parts of our Indies, Gypsies and persons who go about in their costume (and speaking their) language, making use of their intercourse and irregular residence among the Indians (whom they deceive easily on account of their simplicity); and because, having considered the damage they are causing in those dominions, order was given to gather them up, and since their life and manner of behaving is so harmful over here [in Spain], the courts have to deal severely with them, it is understood that over there [in America] it is much more harmful on account of the distances between the several towns, whereby they are able to hide and conceal their crimes, and as it is not convenient that any one of them should remain there, we command you to inform

yourselves and to find out with much care, whether there is in that province any one of that tribe or goes about in that costume, and if there should be any, you will order that they shall be sent at once to this kingdom [Spain], embarking them on the first ships which may get there, with their wives, children, and servants, without permitting anyone to remain in those parts for whatever reason or cause they may bring forth, because this is our will. Given at Elbas on February 11, 1581."

"In the city of La Plata, on November the 5th 1582, the president and judges of this royal court, in accordance with justice (or law) having seen the royal letter of His Majesty, obeyed with due reverence and in its fulfilment they have said that up to this date there was no indication in the district of this royal court, of any Gypsies or persons going about in their costumes, and they (the president and judges) will take care to know and hear whether there are any here or will come here hereafter, in order to perform and execute what His Majesty is commanding." [1]

The Gypsies of Brazil, according to Dr. Mello Moraes (*Os Ciganos no Brazil: Contribuição ethnographica,* Rio de Janeiro, 1886), are mainly descendants of Gypsies transported from Portugal towards the close of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century. By a decree of 27th August 1685 the transportation of the Gypsies was commuted from Africa to Maranhão (p. 23); and in 1718, by a decree of 11th April, the Gypsies were banished from Portugal to the city of Bahia, and special orders were issued to the governor to be diligent "in the prohibition of their language and cant (*giria*), not permitting them to teach it to their children, that so it might become extinct" (p. 24). On p. 40–41, Dr. Moraes mentions M..., afterwards marquess of B..., belonging to the Gypsy race ("pertencia á raça

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[1] As these entries are of considerable interest the original Spanish is here added: "*El Rey.* Presidente é oydores de la Neustra Audiencia Real que reside en la ciudad de la Plata de las provincias de los Charcas: Nos somos ynformado que encubiertamente an pasado a algunas partes de las Neustras Yndias xitanos y personas que andan en su traxe y lengua vssando de sus tratos y desconcertada viuienda entre los yndios, a los quales por su simplicidad engañen con facilidad; y porque habiendose considerado los daños que caussan en estos Reynos, se dio orden en recogerlos, y siendo aca su vida y termino de tratar tan prejudicial, teniendolos la justicia tan á la mano, se entiende que lo sera alla mucho mas por las distancias que ay de vnos pueblos a otros, con que se podran encubrir y disimular sus hurtos, y no conuiene que alla quede ninguno dellos, os Mandamos que con mucho cuydado os ynformeis y sepais si en essa prouincia ay alguno de la dicha nacion o que ande en el dicho traxe, y hauiendolos, ordenareis que luego sean embiados a estos Reynos, embarcandolos en los primeros nauios que vinieren a ellos con sus mugeres, hijos y criados, sin permitir que por ninguna via ni caussa que aleguen quede ninguno en essas partes, porque esta es neustra volundad. Fecha en Elbas en once de Hebrero, 1581."

"En la Ciudad de la Plata, a cinco dias del mes de Nobiembre de mill y quinientos y ochenta y dos años: los señores Presidente y oidores desta Real Audiencia en acuerdo de justicia, haviendo visto esta Cedula Real de Su Magestad la obedescieron con el acatamiento debido, y en su cumplimiento dixeron que hasta agora no se a tenido noticia que en el destrito desto Real Audiencia anden ningunos xitanos ni persona que anden en su hauito, y tendran cuydado de sauer y entender si ay algunos ó que vengam de aqui adelante para cumplir y executar lo que Su Magestad manda." — "Cédulas y provisiones del Rey Neustro Señor para el gobierno é provincia, justicia, hacienda y patronazgo real, etc., desde el año 1541 á 1608." In: *Coleccion de documentos inéditos relativos al descubrimiento, conquesta y organizacion de las antiguas posesiones españolas de América y Oceania sacados de los archivos del reino y muy especialmente del de Indias competentemente autorizada,* v. 18, p. 138–139. Madrid, 1872.

bohemia"), who acquired an immense fortune from his acting as middleman in the purchase of slaves. From incidental notices throughout his work it would seem that the Brazilian nation from the highest to the lowest, is strongly tinctured with Gypsy blood.

In 1665, the Privy Council of Scotland gave warrant and power to George Hutcheson, merchant in Edinburgh, and his co-partners, to transport to "Gemaica and Barbadoes" many strong and idle beggars and "Egyptians"; and fifty years later nine Gypsies from Jedburgh, Roxburghshire, men and women, were transported by the magistrates of Glasgow to the Virginia plantations in the ship "Greenock" at a cost of thirteen pounds sterling.

Dr. Alexander Jones, of Mobile, Alabama, in a communication to the *American Journal of Science and Arts* (v. 26, p. 189–190, New Haven, 1834), gave a brief account of a colony of Gypsies on Biloxi Bay in Louisiana, "who were brought over and colonized by the French at a very early period of the first settlement of that state [c. 1700]. They are French Gypsies and speak the French language, they call themselves *Egyptians,* or *Gypsies.* The French call them indifferently, *Egyptians* or *Bohémiens.*

"What is remarkable, since their colonization in this country, they have lost the distinctive character of their idle and wandering habits. They are no longer strolling vagrants; but have, in the lapse of time, become in all respects, like the other French settlers found in Louisiana. They appear equally polite, hospitable, and intelligent. They also possess all the industry and enjoy all the ordinary comforts of settled life, that belong to the French inhabitants generally.

"The only striking difference between them, is seen in their complexion and in the color of their hair, which is much darker in the Gypsies, than in the French population. Their hair is also coarser and straighter, than that of the French.

"Their intellectual vigor, appears to be as great, as that of any people. A young man of this colony, received a collegiate education at Georgetown, D. C., and is residing in New Orleans; and there are probably few men to be found in the United States of his age, whose knowledge, and learning are more profound and varied than his. He is also a good and ready writer. The most of the foregoing facts," Dr. Jones adds, "were derived from an eminent and learned lawyer of Mobile, who speaks the French language fluently, and has traveled among, and conversed familiarly with these Gypsies."

These Louisianan Gypsies are also mentioned by F. L. Olmsted in his *Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (New York, 1856). The author records

a visit made by him to the house of a southern planter, who, when a boy, had lived at Alexandria, Louisiana, which "was then under Spanish rule" [i.e., before 1803]. The inhabitants of the place at that time, it is stated, were of mixed nationalities, French, Spanish, *Egyptian,* Indian, Mulattoes and negroes. The Egyptians, the planter said, had a language of their own, but knew also French and Spanish. Though of a dark color they "passed for white folks" and frequently intermarried with Mulattoes. They appear to have been entirely absorbed in the general population by 1850, the period of Olmsted's visit, and probably, as is the case in Brazil, many of the oldest families in Louisiana at the present day may be of Gypsy descent.

A brief notice of a tribe or family of Gypsies "encamped in the woods of Hoboken, on the opposite shore of the North River, from New York," in 1851, appears in the *Family Herald,* v. 9, p. 335.

In a communication to the *National Gazette,* under date of May 19, 1834,[1] a writer mentions having known for several years a gang of Gypsies who occupied a spot of waste ground about four miles north-west of Kinderhook, called de Bruyn's Patent. They were, he says, "denominated Yansers by our Dutch inhabitants; probably from their family or patriarchal name Jansen. They have the features, complexion, and habits characteristic of the Gypsies of writers. Our tribe, it is conjectured, emanated from a larger establishment of them at Schoharie, with whom they maintain an intercourse ... There is yet another tribe at or near Schenectady, called Yansers, although their patriarchal name is Keyser. A gentleman appointed some years ago to some town office there, states that he found a charge of £4 10s. *for whipping Yansers;* the amount being small was allowed. A similar charge being brought the next year, he asked what in the name of goodness it meant? Behold, it was for chastising Gypsies whenever occasion presented, which was done with impunity and for some profit... It is due to the inhabitants of the village to state, that [when] seven years ago the small pox invaded the huts and caves of their settlement; the best medical aid and provisions were furnished to them the latter being delivered on a boundary line, which they were enjoined not to pass... It is supposed by the best informed of my neighbours, that they came over with the early settlers in the German Valley; that, disliking the laborious employment of their fellow-adventurers, they withdrew themselves to a separate establishment, where they might subsist themselves by their wits and lighter occupations. They are everywhere manufacturers of baskets, brooms, and other wooden wares."

[1] Reprinted in the *Family Magazine,* v. 2, p. 87. New York, 1835.