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The Gipsy People

BY CAPTAIN GISPY PAT SMITH.*

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen;—I feel like a fish on dry land in this sort of meeting. I always feel shy when speaking to an audience of men. I think I am shy speaking to men because I am not a married man; and I feel there is something I have not taken part in, something in life I have not seen, and that I have no right to speak to men at all. I feel shy, of course, when speaking to women.

I want to speak just for a little while, as long as I am allowed, about the tribes of Gipsies there are today in the world—a distinct race of people with distinct language and customs and religion, practically unknown to the world today. I say "practically," because there are such men as Borrow—if you have not read his books on Gipsies and Gipsy life I would strongly recommend him. Such enterprising writers as he have written the Gipsies up in fantastic stories, not strictly true, but you will find a good deal in these stories that is true to Gipsy life.

In *Romany Rye* he has had the help of some Gipsy who even went so far as to give Borrow some of the Gipsy language. Many a man and woman comes to me in my meetings and says he or she is a gipsy, and when I speak to them in the Gipsy tongue they look at me in stupefaction. They are not Gipsies; or if they are, they are what we call "half and half," neither one nor the other. I don't know what to call myself in England; because in England I can be an Englishman, because my father was born in an English tent; or an Irishman, because my mother was born in Londonderry in the north of Ireland; or a Scotchman, because I was born in a Gipsy tent in Glasgow. That is Scotch enough. And soon I will be able to say I am half American as well, because on the 29th of next month I am marrying a New York girl.

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A lady from the Telegram who came to me for a story—and I want to thank the press of Toronto for the help they have given me; they have been very friendly; I have spoken to 40,000 people in this city and we owe it entirely to the aid of the press—the reporter said the only thing she had against me was that I was not marrying a Canadian or a Scotch girl. "Well," I said, "I am doing much better than that. If I married a Canadian or a Scotch girl, why, that would be no extension to the British Empire. But if I marry a New York girl, why, that is one more for us." Then, of course, you never know what might happen in the days to come.

The Gipsy, then, is a person who is distinct. If I were to answer the question, "What is a Gipsy?" I would say that a Gipsy is a person of Romany blood, with Gipsy upbringing in a Gipsy caravan. But you know being brought up in a Gipsy tent and living in a caravan all your days no more makes a man a Gipsy than a man going into a garage makes him a motor car. A person who is a Gipsy is one who is of Gipsy blood. And there are hundreds of thousands of people travelling in caravans, brought up in tents, and have spent all their days in tents, but they are not Gipsies.

There are the aristocrats of the roads; the full-blooded Gipsies. Every Gipsy boy and girl is taught from the moment they can understand their mother's tongue,—English, German, Spanish, or whatever it is—they are taught that they come from royal blood, and that every person in the world, including President Wilson, is a very low person compared to a Gipsy. And so, the Gipsy has quite a distinct standing and is a sort of aristocrat of the road. Then he is an aristocrat because of the life he lives, the ideals he has.

And then we have the Gorgio travellers! That's what we call you people; a person who is not a Gipsy and not as clever as most Gipsies are, he is a Gorgio. And then there are what we call the Gorgio travellers, people who find it much cheaper and much easier to live in tents than in houses, and travel around the country selling some things. They are not able, like the Gipsies, to tell fortunes, and are not so clever in telling lies. The real difference is that they are not of Gipsy origin, and these are the classes which you often come across who speak freely about Gipsy life. But you will never get a real Gipsy, except a person like myself, to give you any idea of what their home life is like, or what the habits of his people are. He keeps himself entirely apart with his own people.

And then there is the third class. These are the lower fifth or the bottom tenth, or whatever you term them, called tinkers, who go about mending pots and pans. These are the lower class Gipsies, for you will find an upper set and a bottom or submerged class among the Gipsies just as you have in other peoples' lives to-day.

Somebody asked me if I were any relation to the older Gipsy Smith. Of course, a man who is a Gipsy and has lived in a tent, his people call him Gipsy So-and so. They never call him by another name. For instance, an old man sixty years of age, who comes from a different part to what I do, is called Gipsy Rodney because his name is Rodney Smith. When he started out all his friends called him Gipsy Smith. He has gone all over the world, is one of the world's greatest preachers and has been a great blessing to man.

And there are a good many Smiths in the world. Like the old lady who saw the sign, "Smith Manufacturing Co." She said, "Oh, that is where they all come from, is it?" There are a good many Smiths in the world, and a man who happens to be called Smith is in an unfortunate position. So, when the first Gipsy Smith started out as "Gipsy Smith" it makes the next man sort of under a cloud, in the sense that he was not called some other name. I wish I had been called some other name. I was called other things in days gone by, you know. For instance, Gipsies have got into trouble before now, and very often when the law comes down they have got to change their names and go into another city. And sometimes now I have got to think, "Well, what was my name in that city?" Because, you know, if your father changes his name you have got to change your name, too. When father turns, we all turn.

The Gipsies are a distinct class of people, as I have tried to explain. A friend of mine was teaching in his school—he had been at my meeting and was interested in Gipsies—and one day he asked his class of boys, "What is a Gipsy?" One little fellow said, "Please, sir; a Gipsy is a man that goes round about and round about and round about, to see what he can find." That is pretty nearly true. Gipsies never steal anything. I never knew a Gipsy in my life that would steal. They often *found* things but they never *stole* them. I knew a Gipsy one morning to find a horse in a field! What is more natural than to find a horse in a field? He took it home and put some more spots on it and that night went

and sold it to the man who owned him. The next morning the buyer took the animal out to the field to put him with his other horse and found the other one gone. Upon looking closer at the one he had just bought he saw that the places that had been grey spots were now brown. By this time the Gipsy was far away and had changed his name.

We ourselves, if we answer the question as to who Gipsies are, say we believe we descended from Hagar and Ishmael of the old Testament. And every Gipsy is instilled with that belief when he starts out in life—that he is descended from Ishmael of the sixteenth Chapter of the Book of Genesis. He is of a distinct race, his is a distinct language, and a distinct class of people. We in Britain some years ago had an invasion. Not a German invasion, but German Gipsies. These came across and did some shady things—a muggy bunch they were. The press wrote up large stories about these German Gipsies; and we were anxious, because there are a number of real Gipsies in Germany. When we came across these people we spoke to them in Romany, and not one of them could speak Romany. The acid test is their language; because, if a Gipsy has been all his days in Germany or Spain or Bohemia or any other land, he may not be able to speak one word of English or American, but all genuine Gipsies speak Romany.

The name "Gipsy" is no help to find out who we are. The Scotch people in the Highlands, when they speak about Gipsies, do not call them Gipsies, but call them Egyptians. And it is a popular idea among many people that the name Gipsy is derived from Egypt and that Gipsies were originally Egyptians. Now, we never call ourselves Gipsies. The only person who calls Gipsies "Gipsies" is the Gorgio. The Gipsy calls himself Romany, and our language is called Romany. And when we speak to Gipsies,—there are some in this city and I have met and talked to them in their own tongue in my meetings,—we talk the Romany tongue.

I have heard it explained that we call ourselves "Romany" because we roam so much about the country. But our language has a great many Hindustan words, and I think science is trying to prove that the Angle race really came from some part yonder or from some part of India and settled down in England and Scotland—I am not so sure about Ireland—began to grow and became a nation, and married and inter-married until the Anglo-Saxon race became what

it is. I think the Gipsy race is of the original Angles, and has not inter-married but has kept its own identity separate from that of any other people in the world.

We say we are descended from Ishmael. It was said that his hand shall be against every man and every man's hand against him, and there is no race in the world to-day to which this condition is so applicable as the Gipsy race. Gipsies absolutely distrust everybody; and everybody, speaking in general terms, distrusts them. At least, the Gipsies themselves feel that they do. The reason, I suppose, is their mode of living; and the Gipsies never make anything. Some writers have spoken of them as metal workers, but you never met a real Gipsy that made anything in his life—plenty of mistakes you know, but never anything else. A Gipsy can find things and be no trouble to anybody, and he has more sense than to do a hard day's work. But, of course, there are other people than Gipsies who do not believe in work. If any Gipsy has to take off his coat and do a hard day's work he is looked down upon by the rest of his tribe as being almost a Gorgio. He is supposed to live on his own wits without doing any work. And the Gipsy motto is, "Do everybody and let nobody do you." But that is also the motto of some of you fellows on the stock exchange.

Their religion! They do not have any particular religion. They are chiefly Protestant. When I say Protestant, there are no Baptists among the Gipsies. I say these things like Mr. Lodge, with reservations. There are no Baptist Gipsies. And there are no Anglican Gipsies. There are no particular denominations. They are Protestants, and that is all. They do not understand these fine distinctions. I myself, three months after I gave my life to the Master to live for Him, three months after that, a man said to me, "Do you see that man there, that old man. He is a Plymouth Brother." I said, "Well, he is a long way from home, isn't he?" I didn't understand. He said, "You don't understand. The man is a member of the Plymouth Brethren." "I understand," I said, "he belongs down in the south of England." We were in Glasgow and it was a long cry to Plymouth: "But he belongs to the Plymouth Brethren, a part of the church." "Oh," I said, "they are a distinct race of people, apart from the church!" Some of my finest friends on earth belong to the Plymouth Brethren, and Godly people they are.

So, Gipsies do not know any denominations. Sometimes

amongst the Gipsies you come across a few Roman Catholic, but very few. The difference between a Roman Catholic Gipsy and a Protestant Gipsy is that the Roman Catholic Gipsy rises in the morning and goes to mass while a Protestant never goes to church at all. And that is quite true of other people apart from Gipsies.

Up until the age of sixteen in my own home I never once heard the name of Jesus. Our Gipsy mothers and women are a lovely type of womanhood. Some of the finest society women in London who have been spoken about as society's beauties are ordinary Gipsy girls some men have fallen in love with. These girls are ostracized from their people when they leave their tents. We can number from the Gipsies at least a dozen of the finest society women of England to-day. And they are looked down upon by the other Gipsies in Great Britain because they left their tents and married Gorgios. The biggest crime a Gipsy can commit is to marry anybody who is not a Gipsy; so, of course, I am an outcast. Not so much an outcast, though, because among my own people I always have a good time.

After I became a preacher and things went rosy and bright for me, and when my work became well known; I remembered my own home and I went home and got my mother to decide, and then my father. And when my mother died my father was getting old and was not able to do very much so I bought a house for him and a business in Glasgow. The Gipsies call me Romany Rashi, Gipsy Brother, or Romany Rye, Gipsy Gentleman. I have no brighter moments than when I walk into tribes of my own people who do not know me, except perhaps by name, and sit down and talk with them.

My father was an ordinary Gipsy man who had a great big heart and no ideals in life except to care for mother and myself. My mother was the best mother God ever gave a boy. I never once came across one Gipsy mother who ever touched strong drink. Gipsy women never speak about Jesus or God. They make no profession of religion. They never teach their children to pray. I was never taught to pray, and until I was sixteen I never once knew God. But there is religion in a Gipsy mother that somehow is not in a Gipsy man. A Gipsy woman usually does the work. She comes out and sells her baskets and sells her lace and sells different things, and tells fortunes. Their mainstay in life

is fortune-telling. When she comes in if she hasn't made enough money the husband usually gives her a good thrashing, and the more he thrashes her the more she seems to like him—I pass this on to you for what it is worth; some day you can try it out. Anyhow, there is no such thing as divorce among the Gipsies; at least, they never come into the law court with their troubles.

There are many kings and queens among the Gipsies. Every tribe has its king and queen. The oldest Gipsy man and the oldest Gipsy woman in every tribe is called by that tribe the king and the queen. And we recognize the authority of the country in which we live, generally speaking; but we recognize the authority of the king and the queen of our own people. If two chaps have a quarrel the usual way of settling it is to get all the other Gipsy men and all the other Gipsy women to form a ring; and they take off their coats and fight it out, and the man who wins has the right side of the argument. As a result, the Gipsy men as a rule are good fighters. I am not a scrapper any more, but in my younger days I used to be. When I left school, if a fellow struck me I would hit him back because if I told my father I had not hit him back I would be half killed by my father. And I had to fight from two points of view, first from my father's point of view, and then from the other fellow's.

If two Gipsy men have a quarrel they never go to a law court, but they fight it out. If the fight is a draw they go to the oldest member of the family, the king or queen, and place the whole thing before him; and if the king says it is, it is, even if it is not.

Now, as to divorce among the Gipsies. You never come across them in a divorce court. And because of that some people argue that Gipsies are extra moral. That is not true. You will find the devil in a Gipsy tent just as much as you will in other places. The Gipsy is just like the Irishman who could resist everything except temptation, and was not such a bad fellow after all if the devil would only leave him alone. The Gipsy man is more or less a law unto himself. If his wife leaves him and goes to somebody else, he says, "all right." If she goes, he never bothers to fetch her back, and the fact that she left him means he is free, and when the time comes to marry somebody else he marries without any bones about it. The result of that is that not many Gipsy women leave their husbands. The Gipsy woman never

leaves her husband when she has a quarrel, and says she is going home to mother; because she knows if she goes she may not come back. You fellows go and fetch them back, that is your trouble.

The Gipsy men usually sit at home and sell horses and buy old scrap metal and *find* things. That is how they make their livelihood. The mainstay is their knowledge of fortune telling, which, of course, I do not know now, as I have given up telling lies. But the old system is lies from beginning to end. They study a person's face and give him a surprisingly accurate description of his life by his face, for every man's portrait is in his face if you know how to study it. And it is quite easy to tell any woman her path will be crossed by a dark young man.

To me it is wonderful how easily people are persuaded to part with their money, and how credulous they are to believe the lies our people tell them. When I was a boy a long, long time ago, there was a man in Glasgow reading bumps. He was a phrenologist. And there were two young women living outside of Glasgow, and they asked my father to come and read their bumps. He was Professor Smith in those days. I sat down beside him at the camp fire and he wrote out on two sheets of foolscap what he was going to say. They came down and he read their bumps and got ten shillings from each of them. Those silly girls believed that man could tell their fortunes.

It is wonderful how absolutely credulous people are. Why, on Fifth Avenue, New York City, just the other week two women went into those hard heads dressed up as Gipsies and actually tried to tell their fortunes, and did it; and left with three or four hundred dollars out of the till and were arrested for it. It is difficult to believe how easily gullible people are to be so taken in. For instance, in our country, over home yonder, a man was in prison. He broke out of prison, and then disguised himself as a sardine or a blade of grass and came across the ocean in the hold of a vessel; and when he arrived in New York City he presented himself as the full-fledged president of the Irish Republic. Not only that, but he is a Spaniard. There is not a drop of Irish blood in his body. And he stands up and asks these American people to give him ten million dollars, and they are giving it to him. I never heard of anybody so easy and so gullible in my life. A bunch of newspaper men came to me in Brook-

lyn when I arrived some time ago, before I came here, and asked me what was my opinion as to the settlement of the Irish question—as if it made any difference what my opinion was. I said the settlement of the Irish question is for the United States government and people to give De Valera the ten million dollars he asks for. So they said, "How do you mean." I said, "Well, many years ago in Ireland there was what we call a Fenian rising, and those Fenians got together and sent a bunch of ruffians across to America and appealed to the Americans for two or four million dollars. And they got it. And that settled our Irish questions for many years. Now, if you American people will be good enough to give this ruffian his ten million dollars, then the American government will settle Britain's Irish question for a long time to come, until that money is finished, so far as De Valera is concerned."

I was brought up in a Gipsy tent, and when I was sixteen I had no ambition in life. I had had only two years at school. I went to school at eight, attending irregularly, and left it when I was twelve. I never went to school in summer, but drove around the country seeing what I could find. In winter we settled in different cities. At fourteen I went to a school in Glasgow, where Thomas Carlyle was born, and I had been there no longer than a day when the school master said something about history that was not just correct. Whatever I know now, history used to be my great subject. The only date I remember now is the Battle of Hastings, 1066. So I said to the school master, "That is not true." He said, "You are too blank blank clever for this school," so he sent me home in disgrace.

At the age of sixteen I was the ring leader of a rough crowd of young fellows in the city of Glasgow. I had twenty-one in my bunch—some crowd. We were an entire army and we specialized in University students. I was the youngest of the bunch. We were outcasts, of course, and these students used sometimes to issue challenges. Sometimes we got the best of it, sometimes they did. One night, in one of these battles I got hold of a student, and after we had pummelled each other he said "nough", got up and shook hands, and he asked me my name. I told him my name and asked him his. I found out he was the son of one of the richest business men in Glasgow, but a perfect scalawag, just like myself. We struck up a friendship. I found out he had promised

his mother to go to church and I said I would go to church with him.

We went to a little Mission Hall in Glasgow. I don't remember anything the preacher said. But afterwards the preacher came to my chum and asked him if he were a Christian. He was not, of course. Then he came to me and said, "Are you a Christian?" I was sixteen years and seventeen days old; and, would you believe me, men, that was the first time in my life that question was asked me. I never had any chance to stand up for Christ. Something welled up in me. I said to myself, "This is what you need. Why not tell this man?" But I was afraid my chums would laugh. I said, "Yes," and hung my head with shame. Then for six days I could not play, and for six days I asked every man and woman with my eyes to tell me something about peace and rest, and for six days I could not sleep. I was afraid that if I died in the night I was not ready to meet God in Heaven. My own mammy could not tell me.

Next meeting I came back to the same hall. At the close of the service the preacher asked anybody who wanted to get right with God to stand up, and he told about how the Master had died for us to redeem our sins. Up to that moment I always believed in the death of Jesus as a historical fact and not as personal. With tears streaming down my face I rose up, and with all my heart declared that by the grace of God I should live for Jesus from now on. At that moment I was His child. I came home to my mother and I was crying. I put my arms around her neck and I said, "Mammy, I have found Christ." Nine months after that night I knelt by her side and led my darling mammy to Jesus before she died. I have led some of the greatest political men in Great Britain to Christ, but I never had the honor shown me on earth like the honor God gave me that night when he allowed me to lead my darling mother to Jesus.

And then I talked to dad and he put me out of doors because a Christian never found anything. I was telling everybody far and near about Jesus. When I left home I became a preacher, and I went out and became an evangelist. Mother died. I came back home and found father standing between two horses in the stable. I put my arm around his neck and said, "Dad, isn't it time you started for Heaven." And I saw the first miracle I had ever seen. I saw two big tears run down his cheeks. He got down on his knees and I never

heard a man cry to God for mercy like he did. To-day he is in Glasgow. Six years ago I was preaching in Glasgow and at the close of the service a great many people came out to take my hand and take my Master for their own. Among them were two dark haired Gipsy girls, my two sisters, and I led them to the Master. So my whole home was transformed by the stand I had taken for the Master.

When war was declared I was about to go on a nine months' campaign in the United States. The day war was declared I was on board the *Carmania* at Liverpool, and when I read in the daily press that war had been declared and that Kitchener was asking for 100,000 men I took my bags off the steamer; and that night I joined Lovat's Scouts as a private. I was offered a commission but I did not know much about war so I stayed a private. In ten months I became a sergeant. I was more proud of being made a sergeant than I would have been had I been made mayor. I went recruiting and got 1500 men for the army in the voluntary days. In early 1915 I was offered a commission with the Scottish and went with them to France in 1915, and was behind the Canadians in the Second Battle of Ypres. I went over the top on July 1, 1916 and got a big dose that day, a broken arm and leg. I lay all day in No Man's Land and crawled back at night to the British trenches, arriving at 8.30 next morning. I was nineteen months in the hospital and underwent nine operations. I asked the surgeon to cut that arm off and he would not cut it off. It is perfectly good now.

When I got out of the hospital I was offered my discharge and army pension. I got back into the line again for the last seven months of the scrapping. When the armistice was signed I was acting Major and felt I was too young, and so I started growing a mustache. When I came home my sister said she did not like my mustache so I sat up in the bath and shaved it off and let my majority go down the sink. Since then I have been all over the States and am starting in Canada. I am going back home with my wife in December of this year, and start a campaign in Belfast in January, 1921. And that is the story of a Gipsy boy's life.