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Life and Habits of the Gypsies.

TRANSLATED FROM "ESPERANTO"

By CHARLES C. STRANGER.

Corrected by REV. R. E. FAIRBAIRN, Delegate of the Universal Esperanto Association.

St. John's, Nfld., May 25, 1922.
Editor Evening Telegram.

Dear Sir,—A couple of weeks ago I read in the evening papers a short account of the arrival and settling amongst us of a Gypsy family, and being convinced that your numerous readers would be interested in the LIFE and HABITS of the GYPSIES, I am taking the liberty to send you herewith, a detailed statement relating to the life of the Gypsies, which has greatly interested me and I believe will equally interest many in Newfoundland.

Recently, while looking through a magazine written in Esperanto, I came across the following article entitled:

LA CIGANOY.

Trans: The Gypsies.

The writer of the article in Esperanto signs his name Rob. Greuz, and I have taken the trouble to make the English translation and, before sending the article to you for publication I have submitted my translation to the Rev. R. E. Fairbairn, who is the Delegate of the Universal Esperanto Association for Newfoundland and he has been pleased to correct it. Trusting that you will consider the

article of sufficient interest for publication and thanking you in anticipation of same,

Yours truly,
CHARLES C. STRANGER.

WITH the Gypsies! That is in the fanciful land of the wanderer, in the land of happiness, of gaiety, of the wanderlust of dreamy laziness; as free as the bird, travelling with the freedom of the wind—the gypsy goes wherever his caprice or will may suggest.

What does he need to be happy? A brown female companion, the sun, the fields, the horizon, the gurgling brook, the moss, something of the poetry of the wild life which makes the life of civilization appear so dull and monotonous.

Wherever he finds anything to feed his horses, sufficient wood to make a fire, there he pitches his tent and passes the day lying on his back, or on his stomach smoking his pipe, as tranquilly as if nothing on earth were lacking to him, and dreaming of the life of the future. Like a poet, he dissolves in the air. A poet said about them, "on account of their enthusiasm for independence

the gypsies are indifferent to poverty, and totally unconcerned about the injustice of fate"; (b) "I learned from them how to console oneself when fate betrays one; they console themselves sleeping, smoking and singing.

In his apparent poverty this strange person remains a millionaire of fancy, gaiety and good humor. He considers liberty his greatest blessing. Where one can enjoy inactivity; where one becomes intoxicated with music, there is his fatherland! the land which he seeks, which he adopts, about which he dreams.

Where could he better find that, than in the great steppes of Hungary, where they travel for whole days, without meeting any other living beings, but eagles, storks, flocks of ducks, and herds of wild beasts.

Like the Bedouin, his brother in the vastness and poetry, the gypsy does not take root in the soil, he has no home even when he lives in a hut or cabin. His house of cloth folds up when necessary, and he transports it from place to place like a suit in a valise. However a few of them dwell in small houses, outside the villages or dig out dwelling places in the earth like cave-dwellers.

But the home has so little attractions for the members of this wandering tribe, that they seldom spend the summer in their dwellings.

They go off to the woods, or wherever they may wander, urged forward by the feeling of the love of liberty.

There are gypsy cottages, which during whole years remain closed—one day the blue diaphanous smoke goes out anew through the doors, nude children, copper coloured like Indians play with a big dirty dog. Like a wolf, a man unloads a cart still harnessed to two lean horses, and a woman with a pipe in her mouth, half-

dressed with a skirt and a ragged blouse goes off to the well to fill an old basin with water. The family has returned, but not for any length of time—one morning the house is again closed, the wandering birds have flown away.

The gypsy has no fixed time to go to rest. He, according to the manner of the savage eats when he is hungry. His food consists generally of potatoes, milk and bacon; however they also have some luxuries.

For the gypsy, hedgehogs, foxes, squirrels, cats are princely luxuries. He trains his dog to hunt the squirrel and the fox. Both meats are not prepared in the same way.

The hedgehog, having been skinned of its spines is rubbed with garlic bacon and onions, spitted and roasted, because this animal is very fat, and has juicy flesh. The fox is placed during the day in running water, is cooked under embers in a hole in the ground covered with green leaves.

The gypsies are very fond of the meat of dead animals. When they hear of a fire they rush to the spot to get the bodies of the animals buried in the ruins. Like the Oriental he eats with his fingers.

There exists still one hundred and fifty thousand gypsies in the Moldan Wallachia. These eternal wanderers indifferent to all progress of civilization for so many centuries, these lazy kings of the desert as they are called, for the most part, homeless wanderers with carts dragged by means of two asthmatic dressed women, young girls, and nude boys, look now upon this land as their fatherland.

Up to the present every effort made to civilize them has been without effect. They cannot be allured by gold or by other promises. The savage nature always dominates them.

They tell a very characteristic anecdote in relation to this. A gypsy who had attained the grade of a superior officer, once disappeared for months; afterwards he was seen amongst a band of gypsies in the prairies. A young Slovak countryman had married a beautiful gypsy woman; whenever he would go away on any special business, his wife's custom was to go off to the woods and sleep under the stars, living on hedgehogs. In the time when she wandered at liberty.

The gypsy hates to be compelled to work, or anything that binds a man to the soil and limits his activity and his movements. The language of the gypsy has no expression to translate the words to dwell.

The most of the trades which they have are migratory. They are horse dealers, animal doctors (Vet), tinkers, blacksmiths, trainers and exhibitors of bears, and above all they are beggars.

Whenever you ride along a road behind the groves where they camp you will catch sight of gypsies, nude, beautiful and like antique bronzes, who will follow you by the half hour turning somersaults, until you throw them a coin.

In the city streets the old gypsy women to whom one may give alms, respond "my beautiful, dear, noble gentleman, you are so nice as bread-crust."

The gypsy styles himself a poor man. Their begging has become so ineradicable a custom, that the rich gypsies whom one meets, leading race-horses and wearing jewelry, gold chains, rings, silver sticks, cannot help begging.

Their women practice fortune-telling, sell love potions, are jugglers or dancers. The gypsies also are willing to fulfil the functions of executioners or helpers to an executioner and they know better than any person how to think out special and varied means of torture.

The gypsy seldom becomes an actor. There are, however, some gypsies who show marionette theatricals and write the popular plays, which they act.

The country people still believe that the gypsy, by means of magical formula is able to extinguish fires, shield the houses against fire, find hidden springs of water, and hidden treasures and to cure sickness.

They certainly are expert horse-doctors and thoroughly understand how to revive the strength and flexibility of the muscles of old horses; horse dealing is forbidden to them. They showed to me in the streets of Szegeid a gypsy horse-merchant who possessed two or three hundred thousand francs.

Since there is no rule without an exception, some of them do leave the wandering life, and become householders.

In Transylvania one could find gypsies who have become active, intelligent farmers, others are brush-makers, wood-carvers, makers of roofing-tiles, masons, stove-pipe-workers, blacksmiths, rope-makers, gold-washers, dentists and musicians. Brandy is their favorite drink and they will divide the smallest bottle of brandy with their wife, which these take to be filled by the Jew liquor-seller, whenever there are a few coins in the common purse.

The gypsy is a good example of natural selection. Amidst all the hazards of his wandering life, in every kind of weather, and during all seasons—those that are not strong enough for this kind of life stay by the roadside and die.



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may 25, 1922

Those who survive have very robust health. They resist all sickness and epidemics, you never saw a gypsy suffering from gout or rheumatism. When they contract disease, they will refuse all drugs; they know no other medicine besides brandy, the onion and saffron.

Of a flexible, graceful figure the gypsy is seldom above medium height. Under the bronze skin you can see neither the network of his veins, nor the movements of his muscles. His cheek never shows any colouring not even in anger. His face is oval, his eyes are black and deep and are shaded by long eye-lashes. His alert look has a wild and melancholic aspect. His mouth is beautiful, his lips are curved, his beard is slight, his teeth are small and have a whiteness which neither his too hot food, nor his abuse of tobacco can dull.

After his liberty, the gypsy most loves his pipe, whenever he has satisfied his hunger, if he has enough tobacco to fill his pipe the gypsy is happy and his face radiates contentment and pleasure.

In the gypsy tribe every person smokes: old men, women, and children. There is not for them any other delight on earth of equal value.

A gypsy condemned to death will always beg as a last favour, for permission to smoke his pipe.

The gypsy really does not possess any political rights and they do not want any.

Their nomadic life makes them appear as transient, somewhat feared guests, surrounded by the mystery of a vague and poetic legend.

R. KREUX.

Personal.

Mr. and Mrs. Barnabas Moss of Salvage, Bonaville Bay, are in town on the usual spring business trip. Mr. and Mrs. Moss took a schooner passage from home to St. John's and enjoyed the trip very much.

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