EXPLOITS & ANECDOTES

of the

SCOTTISH GYPSIES

by

WILLIAM CHAMBERS,

LL.D.

SCOTTISH GYPSIES.

Edition limited to 100 copies on fine paper, numbered and signed, and 300 on common paper.

THE FRAY AT LAURIES DEN.
"Strike laigh Rob! Strike laigh"

EXPLOITS AND ANECDOTES

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WITH TRAITS OF THEIR ORIGIN, CHARACTER, AND MANNERS

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EXPLOITS

AND ANECDOTES

OF THE MOST REMARKABLE

GYPSIES

IN THE SOUTHERN COUNTIES OF

SCOTLAND.

Together With Traits of Their Origin, Character And Manners.

Come, princes of the ragged regiment,
You of the blood! *Prigg*, my most upright lord,
And these, what name or title e'er they bear,
Jarkman, or *Patrico*, *Cranke*, or *Clapper-dudgeon*,
Frater, or *Abram-man*—I speak of all—

Beggar's Bush.

EDINBURGH:
PRINTED AND SOLD BY WILLIAM CHAMBERS.

1821.

The original edition of this little volume, one of Dr William Chambers' earliest literary efforts, has long been of interest to collectors of scarce books, and so keen has the competition for copies become, that in recent years the few that have appeared for sale have brought upwards of three pounds.

Besides its rarity, however, the book has the more substantial attraction of presenting a popular subject in a very popular form. The pages are full of curious anecdotes of the Scottish Gypsies, told in a very enter-

taining fashion, and the author informs us in his *Memoir* that its publication not only brought him "a few pounds," but "the acquaintance of a few persons interested in that wayward class of the community."

It originally appeared in 1821, and is now reprinted for the first time, the text being given exactly as it left its author's hands, and the original frontispiece reproduced in exact facsimile.

To meet alike the requirements of the bibliophile and the general reader, a very limited number of copies on fine paper, and a larger number in a less expensive form, have been issued.

May 1886.

INTRODUCTION.

GRELLMANN, author of an "Inquiry concerning the Gypsies," endeavours to show that they came originally from Hindostan. The chief basis of his theory, however, is no other than that very dubious one, a similarity of language. He compares the gypsies with the Parias, the lowest class of the Indians, and enumerates many circumstances in which they agree. He conjectures that the cause of their emigration from their country was, the war of Timur Beg in India. In the years 1408 and 1409 this conqueror ravaged India; and the progress of his arms was attended with devastation and cruelty. All who made resistance were destroyed; those who fell into

the enemies' hands were made slaves; of these very slaves 100,000 were put to death. As on this occasion an universal panic took place, what could be more natural than that a great number of terrified inhabitants should endeavour to save themselves by flight? Dr Clarke, and various other writers, seem to be of the same opinion in regard to the Indian origin of the gypsies; while Salmon, the English geographer, and others, have endeavoured to prove, by satisfactory evidence, that the gypsies came from Egypt. As it would be almost endless to enter into details on this subject, which would merely end in uncertainty and doubt, we will proceed to mention, that from whatever part of the world the gypsies came, they made their first appearance in Europe about the beginning of the fifteenth century. They entered Bohemia and Hungary from the east, travel-

ling in numerous hordes, under leaders who assumed the titles of *Kings, Dukes, Counts*, or *Lords of Lesser Egypt*, and they gave themselves out for *Christian Pilgrims*, who had been expelled from that country by the Saracens for their adherence to the true religion. However doubtful may now appear their claims to this sacred character, they had the address to pass themselves on some of the principal sovereigns of Europe, and even on the Pope himself, for real pilgrims; and obtained, under the seals of these potentates, various privileges and passports, empowering them to travel through all Christian countries under their patronage, for the space of seven years. Having once gained this footing, however, the Egyptian pilgrims were at no great loss in finding pretences for prolonging their stay; and though it was soon discovered that

their manners and conduct corresponded but little to the sanctity of their first pretensions, yet so strong was the delusion respecting them, and so dexterous were they in the arts of imposition, that they seem to have been legally protected or silently endured by most of the European governments for the greater part of a century.

When their true character became at length fully understood, and they were found to be in reality a race of profligate and thievish impostors,—who from their numbers and audacity had now become a grievous and intolerable nuisance to the various countries that they had inundated,—severe measures were adopted by different states to expel them from their territories. Decrees of expulsion were issued against them by Spain in 1492, by the German empire in 1500, by

France in 1561 and 1612, and England took the alarm much earlier; yet they always returned as soon as the storm passed over. Though their numbers may perhaps have since been somewhat diminished in particular states by the progress of civilisation, it seems to be generally allowed that their distinctive character and modes of life have nowhere undergone any material alteration. In Germany, Hungary, Poland,—in Italy, Spain, France, and England, this singular people, by whatever appellation they may be distinguished,—*Cingari*, *Zigeuners*, *Tziganys*, *Bohemiens*, *Gitanos*, or *Gypsies*,—still remain uncombined with the various nations among whom they are dispersed, and still continue the same dark, deceitful, and disorderly race as when their wandering hordes first emigrated from Egypt or from India. They are still everywhere cha-

racterised by the same strolling and pilfering propensities, the same peculiarity of aspect, and the same pretensions to fortune-telling and warlockry.

"It was about the beginning of the sixteenth century that the gypsies appeared in Scotland, and at first seem to have enjoyed some share of indulgence, for a writ of Privy Seal was passed in the twenty-eighth year of James V. (1540), in favour of Johnne Faw, Lord and Erle of Litill Egipt, in the executioun of justice upon his cumpany and folkis, *conforme to the laws of Egipt*, and in punissing of all thaim that rebellis agains him."

"It is well known," says the author of "Guy Mannering," in vol. i. p. 98, "that the gypsies were at an early period acknowledged as a separate and independent race by one of the Scottish monarchs, and that they were less favourably distinguished by a subse-

quent law, which rendered the character of gypsey equal, in the judicial balance, to that of common and habitual thief, and prescribed his punishment accordingly. Notwithstanding the severity of this and other statutes, the fraternity prospered amid the distresses of the country, and received large accessions from amongst those whom famine, oppression, or the sword of war, had deprived of the ordinary means of subsistence. They lost, in a great measure, by this intermixture the national character of Egyptians, and became a mingled race, having all the idleness and predatory habits of their eastern ancestors, with a ferocity which they probably borrowed from the men of the north who joined their society. They travelled in different bands, and had rules among themselves, by which each tribe was confined to its own district. The

slightest invasion of the precincts which had been assigned to another tribe, produced desperate skirmishes, in which there was often much blood shed. . . . Some rude handicrafts were entirely resigned to these itinerants, particularly the art of trencher-making, of manufacturing horn spoons, and the whole mystery of the tinker. To these they added a petty trade in the coarser sorts of earthenware. Such were their ostensible means of livelihood. Each tribe had usually some fixed place of rendezvous, which they occasionally occupied and considered as their standing camp, and in the vicinity of which they generally abstained from depredation. These tribes were, in short, the Parias of Scotland, living like wild Indians among European settlers, and like them, judged of rather by their own customs, habits, and opinions, than as if they had been

members of the civilised part of the community. Some hordes of them yet remain, chiefly in such situations as afford a ready escape either into a waste country, or into another jurisdiction. Nor are the features of their character much softened. Their numbers, however, are so greatly diminished, that instead of one hundred thousand, as was calculated by Fletcher (about a hundred years ago), it would now perhaps be impossible to collect upwards of five hundred throughout all Scotland."

Having now exhibited a few outlines of the gypsey character, we will proceed to detail, in a desultory manner, some of those personal and remarkable anecdotes, which will more fully display their singular propensities, when encited by lawless passions, or private animosities. Although the authorities are not annexed to the

following anecdotes, they may be depended on as authentic, as those which are not original are selected and arranged from various periodical publications, and the rest from popular tradition.

"Hast thou not noted on the lye-way side,
Where aged saughs lean o'er the lazy tide,
A vagrant crew, far straggled through the glade,
With trifles busied, or in slumber laid;
Their children lolling round them on the grass,
Or pestering with their sports the patient ass?
The wrinkled beldame there you may espy,
And ripe young maiden with the glossy eye,—
Men in their prime,—and striplings dark and dun,—
Scathed by the storm, and freckled with the sun:
Their swarthy hue, and mantle's flowing fold,
Bespeak the remnant of a race of old:
Strange are their annals!—list and mark them well—
For thou hast much to hear and I to tell."

—Hogg.

ANECDOTES

OF

SCOTTISH GYPSIES.

CHAPTER I.

ANECDOTES OF JEAN GORDON, THE ORIGINAL OF THE CHARACTER OF MEG MERRILIES.

IT is impossible to specify the exact date of the nativity of Jean Gordon, but it is probable it was about the year 1670. She was born somewhere in Roxburghshire, probably in Kirk-Yetholm, the metropolis of Scottish gypsies, and was married to a gypsey chief named Patrick Faa, by whom she had ten or twelve children.

In May 1714, he, along with eleven

gypsies, were indicted at Jedburgh as guilty of wilful fire raising, and of being notorious gypsies, thieves, vagabonds, sorners, masterful beggars, &c., at least holden in repute to be such. It appeared from the proof that a gang of gypsies had burnt the house of Greenhead in Roxburgh. The principal actress in this concern was Janet Stewart, who was sentenced to be scourged through Jedburgh, and afterwards stand a quarter of an hour at the cross with her left ear nailed to a post. Patrick Faa, and other six, were sentenced to be transported to the Queen's American Plantations for life; he was, in addition, sentenced to be whipped through the town, and to stand half an hour at the cross with his left ear nailed to a post, and then to have both his ears "cutted off." Another was banished, and three were acquitted.

About 1714, one of Jean's sons, named Alexander Faa, was murdered by another gypsey named Robert Johnston. He escaped justice for nearly ten years, but was then taken and indicted at the instance of his Majesty's Advocate; and Marjory Young, relict of the deceased Alexander Faa, heckle maker in Home, for the murder of the said Faa. In the evidence brought forward upon this trial, we find the following curious account of this savage transaction:—

"John Henderson, feuar in Huntleywood, depones, that time and place libelled, Robert Johnston, pannel, and his father, came to Huntleywood and possessed themselves of a cothouse belonging to the deponent, and that a little after, Alexander Fall, the defunct, came up to the door of the said house, and desired they would make open the door: that the door was standing ajarr,

and the deponent saw Robert Johnston, pannel, in the inside of the door, and a fork (or graip) in his hand,—and saw him push over the door head at the said Alexander Fall — and saw the grains of the fork strike the said Alexander Fall in the breast, and Alexander Fall coming back from the door staggering came to a midding, and there he fell down and died immediately: and depones, that the distance of the midding from the house where he received the wound is about a penny-stone cast; and when Alexander Fall retyred from the house, he said to the rest, Retyre for your lives, for I have gott my death: Depones, he saw Robert Johnston, pannel, come out of the cotthouse with the fork in his hand, and pass by Alexander Fall and the deponent; heard the pannel say, he had sticked the dog, and he would stick the whelps too; whereupon the pannel run

after the defunct's sone with the fork in his hand, into the house of George Carter: Depones, in a little while after the pannel had gone into George Carter's house, the deponent saw him running down a balk and a meadow; and in two hours after saw him on horseback riding away without his stockings or shoes, coat or cape."

Another witness swears that "she heard Johnston say, 'Where are the whelps, that I may kill them too?' that the prisoner followed Alexander Fall's son into George Carter's house, and the deponent went thither after him, out of fear he should have done some harm to George Carter's wife or children; there saw the pannel, with the said fork, search beneath the bed for Alexander Fall's sone, who had hidden himself beyond the cradle; and then there being a cry given that Alexander Fall was dead, the pannel went away."

Johnston was sentenced to be hanged on 13th June 1727, but he escaped from prison. However, it was easier to escape the grasp of justice than to elude gypsey vengeance; Jean Gordon traced the murderer like a bloodhound, she followed him to Holland, and from thence to Ireland, where she had him seized and brought back to Jedburgh, where she at length obtained a full reward of her toils, by enjoying the gratification of seeing him hanged on the Gallow-hill. Some time afterward, Jean being up at Stourhope, a sheep farm on Bowmont Water, the goodman there said to her, "Weel, Jean, ye hae got Rob Johnston hanged at last, and out o' the way." "Aye, gudeman!" replied Jean, lifting up her apron by the two corners, "and a' that fu' o' gowd has na done 't."

Jean's "apron fu' o' gowd" may perhaps remind some of our readers of

Meg Merrilies' pock of jewels, and the whole transaction indeed forcibly recalls the powerful picture of that stern and intrepid heroine.

The following anecdote displays the power and consequence of Jean among the gypsies, and her gratitude to her benefactors. Having been often hospitably received at the farm house of Lochside, near Yetholm, she carefully abstained from committing any depredations on the farmer's property. But her sons (nine in number) had not, it seems, the same delicacy, and stole a brood sow from their kind entertainer. Jean was so much mortified at this ungrateful conduct, and so much ashamed of it, that she absented herself from Lochside for several years. At length, in consequence of some temporary pecuniary necessity, the goodman of Lochside was obliged to go to Newcastle to get some money to pay his

rent. Returning through the mountains of Cheviot, he was benighted and lost his way. A light glimmering through the window of a large waste barn, which had survived the farm house to which it had at one time belonged, guided him to a place of shelter; and when he knocked at the door it was opened by Jean Gordon. Her very remarkable figure, for she was nearly six feet high, and her equally remarkable features and dress, rendered it impossible to mistake her for a moment; and to meet with such a character in so solitary a place, and probably at no great distance from her clan, was a terrible surprise to the poor man, whose rent (to lose which would have been ruin to him) was about his person. Jean set up a loud shout of joyful recognition. "Eh, sirs! the winsome gudeman of Lochside! Light down, light down; for ye maunna gang

farther the night, and a friend's house sae near." The farmer was obliged to dismount, and accept of the gypsy's offer of supper and a bed. There was plenty of meat in the barn, however it might be come by, and preparations were going on for a plentiful supper, which the farmer, to the great increase of his anxiety, observed, was calculated for ten or twelve guests, of the same description, no doubt, with his landlady. Jean left him in no doubt on the subject. She brought up the story of the stolen sow, and noticed how much pain and vexation it had given her. Like other philosophers, she remarked that the world grows worse daily; and like other parents, that the bairns got out of her guiding, and neglected the old gypsey regulations, which commanded them to respect, in their depredations, the property of their benefactors. The end of all this was,

an enquiry what money the farmer had about him, and an urgent request, that he would make her his purse keeper, as the bairns, as she called her sons, would soon be home. The poor farmer made a virtue of necessity, told his story, and surrendered his gold to Jean's custody. She made him put a few shillings in his pocket, observing, it would excite suspicion were he found travelling altogether penniless. This arrangement being made, the farmer lay down on a sort of shake down, upon some straw, but as will easily be believed, slept not. About midnight the gang returned with various articles of plunder, and talked over their exploits in language which made the farmer tremble. They were not long in discovering their guest, and demanded of Jean whom she had there. —"E'en the winsome gudeman o' Lochside, poor body," replied Jean;

"he's been at Newcastle, seeking for siller to pay his rent, honest man, but deil-be-lickit he's been able to gather in, and sae he's gaun e'en hame wi' a toom purse and a sair heart."—"That may be, Jean," replied one of the banditti, "but we maun ripe his pouches a bit, and see if it be true or no." Jean set up her throat in exclamations against this breach of hospitality, but without producing any change of their determination. The farmer soon heard their stifled whispers and light steps by his bedside, and understood they were rummaging his clothes. When they found the money which the providence of Jean Gordon had made him retain, they held a consultation if they should take it or no, but the smallness of the booty, and the vehemence of Jean's remonstrances, determined them in the negative. They caroused and went to rest. So soon

as day dawned, Jean roused her guest, produced his horse, which she had accommodated behind the hallan, and guided him for some miles till he was on the high road to Lochside. She then restored his whole property, nor could his earnest entreaties prevail on her to accept so much as a single guinea.

It is related, that all Jean's sons were condemned to die at Jedburgh on the same day. It is said the jury were equally divided, but that a friend to justice, who had slept during the discussion, waked suddenly and gave his vote for condemnation, in the emphatic words, "HANG THEM A'." Jean was present, and only said, "The Lord help the innocent in a day like this!" Her own death was accompanied with circumstances of brutal outrage, of which Jean was in many respects wholly undeserving. Jean had,

among other demerits, or merits, that of being a staunch Jacobite. She chanced to be at Carlisle upon a fair, or market day, soon after the year 1746, where she gave vent to her political partiality, to the great offence of the rabble of that city. Being zealous in their loyalty when there was no danger, in proportion to the tameness with which they surrendered to the Highlanders in 1745, they inflicted upon poor Jean Gordon no slighter penalty than that of ducking her to death in the Eden. It was an operation of some time, for Jean was a stout woman, and struggled hard with her murtherers, and often got her head above water; and while she had voice left, continued to exclaim at such intervals, "Charlie yet! Charlie yet!"

Her propensities were exactly the same as those of the fictitious character

of Meg Merrilies. She possessed the same virtue of fidelity—spoke the same language, and in appearance there was little difference; yet Madge Gordon her grand-daughter, was said to have had the same resemblance. She was descended from the Faas by the mother's side, and was married to a Young. She was rather a remarkable personage — of a very commanding presence, and high stature, being nearly six feet high. She had a large acquiline nose, penetrating eyes, and even in her old age, bushy hair that hung around her shoulders from beneath a gypsey bonnet of straw—a short cloak of a peculiar fashion, and a long staff nearly as tall as herself. When she spoke vehemently (for she had many complaints) she used to strike her staff upon the floor, and throw herself into an attitude which it was impossible to regard with in-

difference. From these traits of the manners of Jean and Madge Gordon, it may be perceived that it would be difficult to determine which of the two, Meg Merrilies was intended for; it may therefore without injustice be divided between both. So that if Jean was the prototype of her character, it is very probable that Madge must have sat to the anonymous author of "Guy Mannering," as the representative of her person.

CHAPTER II.

ANECDOTES OF THE ROXBURGHSHIRE GYPSIES, ETC.

ABOUT thirty years ago, the Kirk-Yetholm gypsies had for their chief a descendant of Jean Gordon, who usually went by the nick-name of the "Earl of Hell." He had this name bestowed upon him, for his numerous and successful depredations upon the public, and his address in concealing them; to illustrate which, take the following anecdote.

He was tried before the High Court of Justiciary for a theft of a large sum of money at a Dalkeith market. The proof seemed to the Judge fully sufficient, but the jury being of a

different opinion, brought in the verdict Not Proven; on which occasion, the presiding judge when he dismissed the prisoner from the bar, informed him in his own characteristic language, "That he had rubbit shouthers wi' the gallows that morning;" and warned him not again to appear there with a similar body of proof against him, as it seemed scarce possible he should meet with another jury who would construe it as favourably. Upon the same occasion, the prisoner's counsel, a gentleman now deceased, thought it proper also to say something to his client on the risk he had run, and the necessity of future propriety of conduct; to which the gypsey replied, to the great entertainment of all around, "That he was proven an innocent man, and that naebody had ony right to use siccan language to him."

The following anecdote of another leader shows the character of the gypsies on the borders.

The late Mr Leck, minister of Yetholm, happening to be riding home one evening from a visit over in Northumberland, when finding himself like to be benighted, for the sake of a near cut he struck into a wild solitary track or drove road across the fells, by a place called the Staw. In one of the derne places through which this path led him, there stood an old deserted shepherd's house, which, of course, was reputed to be haunted. The minister, though little apt to be alarmed by such reports, was however somewhat startled on observing, as he approached close to the cottage, a "grim visage" staring out past a window claith, or sort of curtain, which had been fastened up to supply the place of a door,—and also several "dusky figures" skulk-

ing among the bourtree bushes that had once sheltered the shepherd's garden. Without leaving him any time for speculation, however, the knight of the curtain bolted forth upon him, and seizing his horse by the bridle, demanded his money. Mr Leck, though it was now dusk, at once recognised the gruff voice and the great black curly head of his next door neighbour, Gleid-neckit Will, the gypsey chief. "Dear me, William," said the minister in his usual quiet manner, "can this be you? Ye're surely no serious wi' me? Ye wadna sae far wrang your character for a good neighbour, for the bit trifle I hae to gie, William?" "Lord saif us, Mr Leck!" said Will, quitting the rein, and lifting his hat with great respect. "Whae wad hae thought o' meeting yow out owre here away? Ye needna gripe for ony siller to me—I wadna

touch a plack o' your gear, nor a hair o' your head, for a' the gowd o' Teviotdale. I ken ye'll no do us an ill turn for this mistak', and I'll e'en see ye safe through the eerie Staw, it's no reckoned a very canny bit mair ways nor ane; but I wat ye'll no be feared for the dead, and I'll tak' care o' the living." Will accordingly gave his reverend friend a safe convoy through the haunted pass, and, notwithstanding this ugly mistake, continued ever after an inoffensive neighbour to the minister, who on his part observed a prudent and inviolable secrecy on the subject of this rencounter during the life-time of Gleid-neckit Will.

The following story contains perhaps nothing very remarkable in itself, or characteristic of the gypsey race, but it seems worthy of being inserted from other considerations. Tam Gordon, the late captain of the

Spittal gypsies, and a very notorious and desperate character, had been in the habit of stealing sheep from the flocks of Mr Abram Logan, farmer at Lammerton, in the east of Berwickshire. Numbers having successively disappeared, Mr Logan and the shepherd sat up one night to watch for the thief; and about midnight, Tam and his son-in-law, Ananias Faa, coming for their accustomed prey, the farmer and his servant sprung up and seized them. Abram Logan, a stout active man, had grappled with the elder gypsey, while the shepherd secured the other;—the ruffian instantly drew a large knife, used for killing sheep, and made repeated attempts to stab him; but being closely grasped by the farmer, he was unable to thrust the weapon home, and it only struck against his ribs. With some difficulty the thieves were both secured. They

were tried for the crime before the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh, —convicted and condemned to be hanged,—but afterwards, to the great surprise and disappointment of their Berwickshire neighbours, obtained a pardon—a piece of unmerited and ill-bestowed clemency, for which it was generally understood they were indebted to the interest of a noble northern family of their own name. Tam Gordon died only a few years ago, at a very advanced age. He was a relation of the aforementioned Madge Gordon.

Before quitting the Roxburghshire gypsies, we may insert the following anecdote, which displays their licentious and independent spirit. Between Yetholm and the border farms in Northumberland there were formerly, as in most border situations, some uncultivated lands called the Plea

lands, or Debateable lands, the pasturage of which was generally eaten up by the gypsies.

Many years ago, Lord Tankervile and some other of the English borderers made their request to Sir David Bennet, and the late Mr Wauchope of Niddry, that they would accompany them at a riding of the Plea lands, who readily complied with their request. They were induced to this, as they understood that the gypsies had taken offence on the supposition that they might be circumscribed in the pasture of their shelties and asses, which they had held a long time, partly by stealth and partly by violence.

Both threats and entreaties were employed to keep them away, and at last Sir David obtained a promise from some of the gang, that none of them should show their faces on the occasion.

They however got upon the hills at a little distance, whence they could see everything that passed. At first they were very quiet. But when they saw the English Court Book spread out on a cushion before the clerk, and apparently taken in a line of direction interfering with what they considered to be their privileged ground, it was with great difficulty that the most moderate of them could restrain the rest from running down and taking vengeance, even in sight of their own lord of the manor. They only abstained for a short time; and no sooner had Sir David and the other gentleman taken leave of each other in the most friendly manner, as border chiefs are wont to do since border feuds ceased, and had departed to a sufficient distance, than the clan, armed with bludgeons, pitchforks, &c., rushed down in a body; and before

the chiefs on either side had reached their home, there was neither English tenant, horse, cow, nor sheep left upon the premises.

CHAPTER III.

CURIOUS ANECDOTES OF THE SELKIRKSHIRE GYPSIES.

THIS county was at one time greatly celebrated for the gypsies it contained. The Faas and the Bailleys were the two principal gangs which infested it. They used to traverse the country in bodies of from twenty to thirty in number, with their horses and ruddies, among whom were many stout, handsome, and athletic men. They generally cleared the waters and burns of fish, the farmers' out-houses of eggs, and the lums of all superfluous and moveable stuff, such as hams, &c., that hung there for the purpose of reisting. It was likewise well known

that they never scrupled to kill a sheep occasionally, but they always managed matters so dexterously, that no one could ascertain from whom they were taken. These gypsies were otherwise civil, full of humour and merriment, and the country-people did not dislike them. They fought desperately among themselves, but were seldom the aggressors in any dispute or quarrel with others. The following instance of their depravity may be depended on as authentic.

About a hundred years ago, in the month of May, a gang of these gypsies came up Ettrick;—one party of them lodged at a farm house called Scobcleugh, and the rest went forward to Cossarhill, another farm about a mile farther on. Among the latter was one who played on the pipes and violin, delighting all that heard him; and the gang principally on his account were

civilly treated. Next day the two parties again joined, and proceeded westward in a body. There were about thirty souls in all, and they had about five horses. On a sloping grassy spot, on the farm of Brokhoprig, they halted to rest. Here the hapless musician quarrelled with another of the tribe about a girl, who was sister of the latter. Weapons were instantly drawn, and the piper losing courage, or knowing that he was not a match for his antagonist, fled—the other pursuing close at his heels. For a full mile and a half they continued to strain most violently,—the one running for life, and the other thirsting for blood, until they came again to Cossarhill, the place they had left. The family were all gone out, either to the sheep or the peats, save one servant girl, who was baking bread at a kitchen table, when the piper rushed breathless into

the house. She screamed, and enquired what was the matter. He answered, "Nae skaith to you—nae skaith to you—for God in heaven's sake, hide me!" With that he essayed to hide himself behind a salt-barrel that stood in a corner, but his ruthless pursuer instantly entering, his panting betrayed him, the ruffian pulled him out by the hair, dragged him into the middle of the floor, and ran him through the body with his dirk. The piper never asked for mercy, but cursed the other as long as he had breath. The girl was struck motionless with horror, but the murderer told her never to heed or regard it, for no ill should happen to her. By the time the breath was well out of the body of the unfortunate musician, some more of the gang arrived, bringing with them a horse, on which they carried back the

body, and buried it on the spot where they first quarrelled. His grave is marked by one stone at the head, and another at the foot, which the gypsies themselves placed; and it is still looked upon by the rustics as a dangerous place for a walking ghost to this day. There was no cognizance taken of the affair!

There is a similar story, of later date, of a murder committed at Lowries-den on Soutra-Hill by one gypsey on another. It happened before many witnesses. They fought for a considerable time most furiously with their fists, till at last one getting the other down he drew his knife, and his wife assisted him by holding down his opponent till he was despatched by repeated stabs. This virago, thinking that her husband was not making quick enough work, called out to him, "Strike laigh! Strike laigh!" When

he pulled the weapon out, the blood sprung to the ceiling, where it remained as long as that house stood, and though there were many of the gang present, none of them offered to separate the combatants or made any observation on the issue, farther than one saying—"Gude faith, ye hae done for him now, Rob!" The story bears that the assassin fled, but was pursued by Walter Scott, then a very young man, and Mr Fairbairn, long afterwards innkeeper at Blackshiels, who chanced to pass about the time this murder was committed, and being shocked at the indifference with which the bystanders seemed to regard what had passed, pursued, and with the assistance of a neighbouring blacksmith, who joined in the chase, succeeded in apprehending the murderer, whose name was Robert Keith. He was afterwards tried, condemned, and hanged for the murder.

About sixty years ago, when the gypsies began to be called tinklers, there lived Old Will of Phaup, a well-known character, at the head of Ettrick, who was wont to shelter them for many years;—they asked nothing but house-room and grass for their horses, and though they sometimes remained for several days, he could have left every chest and press about the house open, with the certainty that nothing would be missing, for he said "he aye kend fu' weel that the tod wad keep his ain hole clean." But times altered sadly with honest Will, which happened as follows:—The gypsies were lodged at a place called Potburn, and the farmer either having bad grass about his house, or not choosing to have it eaten up, had made the gypsies turn their horses over the water to Phaup ground. One morning about break of day, Will found the

stoutest man of the gang, Ellick Kennedy, feeding six horses on the Coombdean, the best piece of grass on the farm, which he was carefully haining for winter fodder. A desperate combat ensued, but there was no man a match for Will—he thrashed the tinkler to his heart's content, cut the girthing and snaks off the horses, and hunted them out of the country. A warfare of five years' duration ensued between Will and the gypsies. They nearly ruined him; and at the end of that period he was glad to make up matters with his old friends, and shelter them as formerly. He said, "He could maistly hae hauden his ain wi' them an' it hadna been for their warlockry, but the deil-be-lickit he could keep fra their kenning—they ance fand out his purse, though he had gart Meg dibble't into the kail-yard!"

CHAPTER IV.

INTERESTING ANECDOTES OF THE MIDLOTHIAN AND PEEBLESSHIRE GYPSIES.

THESE two counties about a century ago were dreadfully harassed by wandering tribes of gypsies, especially the clans Bailley and Wilson. Their principal rendezvous was at Middleton, which in the present day is still noted for them. Although they are now nearly assimilated in their habits and occupations with the peasantry, yet there are some of them still practise the trades of making horn spoons, bosses, &c., and traverse the country with these and other trifling articles for sale. At Gilmerton, a village a few miles from the metropolis, there

lives one of them named Peter Bailley (popularly Pate Bailley), who is married and follows the above mentioned occupation. He is reckoned by good judges to be among the best violin players in Scotland, so much so, that he is in great request at all country weddings or festivals; in fact a ball would not have a sufficient relish for the country people, if it wanted Pate Bailley. He plays entirely by the ear, and is such an amateur in the art that if set down to play with a sufficient supply of whiskey before him, and surrounded by his admirers, he will scrape for days and nights together; and indeed he was once known to sit a whole week without intermission.

Pate, we are told, is the grandson of a well-known tinkler named John Bailley, who was married to a woman named Jean Wilson, and who was of

a most thievish and drunken disposition. Most of their sons suffered more or less by the hand of justice, owing to the bad example shewn by their mother. We understand that their father was a man of quite a contrary inclination, and was as much respected among the peasantry as his wife was hated; some even say, that never a night passed on which he did not perform family worship;—a circumstance so singular among the tinklers, that it has not a precedent in gypsey annals.

In former times the ancestors of these tinklers traversed the whole mountainous districts of the south, particularly Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, and Tweedale, and committed great and daring depredations.

A gang of them once broke into the house of Pennycuick, while the greater part of the family were at

church. Sir John Clerke, the proprietor, barricaded himself in his own apartment, where he sustained a sort of siege—firing from the windows upon the robbers, who fired in return. By an odd accident, one of them while they strayed through the house in quest of plate and other portable articles, began to ascend the stair of a very narrow turret. When he had got to some height, his foot slipt, and to save himself in falling, the gypsey caught hold of what was rather an ominous means of assistance—a rope, namely, which hung conveniently for the purpose. It proved to be the bell rope, and the fellow's weight set the alarm bell aringing, and startled the congregation assembled in the parish church. They instantly came to rescue the laird, and succeeded, it is said, in apprehending some of the gypsies, who were executed. There is a written

account of this daring assault kept in the records of the family.

Dr Pennycuick, in his "History of Tweedale," gives the following account of a bloody skirmish which was fought between two clans of gypsies near his own house of Romanno.

"Upon the 1st of October 1677, there happened at Romanno, in the very spot where now the dovecoat is built, a memorable polymachy betwixt two clanns of gipsies, the Fawes and the Shawes, who had come from Haddingtoun fair, and were going to Harestains to meet with two other clanns of those rogues, the Baillies and Browns, with a resolution to fight them; they fell out at Romanno among themselves, about dividing the spoil they had got at Haddingtoun, and fought it manfully; of the Fawes were four brethren and a brother's son; of the Shawes, the father and three sons, with several

women on both sides; old Sandie Faw, a bold and proper fellow, with his wife, then with child, were both killed dead upon the place, another brother, George, very dangerously wounded. February 1678, old Robin Shaw the gypsie, with his three sons, were hang'd at the Grass-mercat for the above mentioned murder committed at Romanno, and John Faw was hang'd the Wednesday following for another murder. Sir Archibald Primrose was Justice-general at the time, and Sir George M'Kenzie king's advocat." Dr Pennycuick built a dove cote upon the spot where this affray took place, which he adorned with the following inscription:—

"A.D. 1683.
The field of gipsie blood which here you see,
A shelter for the harmless dove shall be."

There was a gypsey who, about fifty years ago, frequented the county of

Peebles, and was well known to its inhabitants by the name of Will Rivens (properly Ruthven). He exercised the trades of a tinker and horner, in which occupations he gained great celebrity. He is described as having been a strong, stout, athletic, and handsome man, not less than six feet high, and was possessed of an honest disposition, a sagacious deportment, and a good naturedness, which rendered him at all times a welcome guest in the farmer's ha'. Notwithstanding these amiable traits in his character, he was not without the gypsey propensities of his ancestors. He used often to lament the declension of hospitality in his day, compared with the olden time, "when his forbears," as he used forcibly to express it, "had siccan scowth and rowth in the country." Among the many innovations which had made such annoying inroads on the assumed privi-

leges of the tinklers, was the establishment of numerous turnpikes in every direction. Against them he cherished such an aversion, that he seldom let an opportunity escape of evading payment. Witness the following ludicrous incident :—

Will being acknowledged chief of the extensive tribe or clan of Ruthven, it might reasonably be expected that he would have had a retinue suitable to his supposed dignity, yet, lamentable to be told, his whole *stud*, when put under requisition, mustered only one solitary ass, which animal was constant companion of his rambles, over all the roads in the south of Scotland. It served him instead of both a riding horse and a baggage cart, just as the necessity of the case required. Upon it hung two creels which contained the whole of his camp equipage, consisting of a variety of lumber, which

to delineate would merely be a description of the indescribable. Although this useful animal demeaned itself at all times in a most becoming manner, and was well worthy of being paid for at all toll-bars, yet that was a custom which Will never could condescend to comply with. As it would be uncharitable to suppose that it was done out of any disrespect to the laws, we may conclude it must have been entirely owing to the state of his *treasury*, which was constantly in much need of replenishing; in fact, the abstraction of a single penny from it would have been almost instantaneously attended with bankruptcy. Once happening in the course of his peregrinations to be travelling from Peebles to Traquair, on the southern bank of the Tweed, he was arrested in his progress by a turnpike, from which, owing to the enclosed state of the surrounding country, there

was no visible prospect of evasion, except by fording the river, which he was loath to do. So, leaving the ass, he went forward to reconnoitre if the coast was clear, that he might slip past unperceived; but as his evil genius would have it, the tollman being as unremitting in his duty as Cerberus, keeper of the gates of the infernal regions, was at his post. Will seeing it was now a desperate case, courageously marched up and inquired if he demanded any toll for "back burdens." On being answered in the negative, he immediately returned, and, as the *dernier resort*, lifted his ass on his back (God only knows how), carried it fairly through the gate, and set it down with the greatest composure at a short distance, to the man's no small surprise, who did not expect such an infringement of his lawful rights.

Will had been a soldier in his youth,

and according to his own account had undergone many hardships "by flood and field!" He died of a good old age at Selkirk, in rather abject circumstances. His son Rob (who was not so respectable a character as his father) being some time after at Jedderfield, a farm near Peebles, and a great resort of all the "randie, gangrel bodies" in Tweedale, the gudewife enquired if his father had had an easy death. "He did not," replied he, "loup and spang like mony ane, for deil rive't was on him but *bare kett.*"

CHAPTER V.

REMARKABLE ANECDOTES AND CURIOUS TRAITS OF THE CHARACTER OF BILLY MARSHALL, A GYPSEY CHIEF.

THIS celebrated Galloway gypsey, according to his own computation, was born in or about the year 1666. In his youth he was a private soldier in the army of King William, at the Battle of the Boyne. It was likewise well known, that he was a private in some of the British Regiments, which served under the great Duke of Marlborough in Germany, about the year 1705. But at this period, Billy's military career in the service of his country ended. About

this time he went to his commanding officer, one of the M'Guffogs of Roscoe, a very old family in Galloway, and asked him if he had any commands for his native country. Being asked if there was any opportunity, he replied, yes; he was going to Keltonhill fair, having for some years made it a rule never to be absent. His officer knowing his man, thought it needless to take any very strong measure to hinder him; and Billy Marshall was at Keltonhill accordingly.

Now Billy's destinies placed him in a high *sphere;* it was about this period, that either electively, or by usurpation, he was placed at the head of that *mighty* people in the south-west, whom he governed with equal prudence and talent for the long space of eighty or ninety years. Some of his admirers assert, that he was of *royal ancestry*, and that he succeeded by the laws of

hereditary succession; but no regular annals of *Billy's house* were kept, and oral tradition and testimony weigh heavily against this assertion. From any research I have been able to make, I am strongly disposed to think that, in this crisis of his life, Billy Marshall had been no better than either Julius Caesar, Richard III., Oliver Cromwell, Hyder Ally, or Napoleon Bonaparte. I do not mean to say that he waded through so much blood as some of those, to seat himself on a throne, or to grasp at a diadem and sceptre; but it was shrewdly suspected that Billy Marshall had stained his character and his hands with human blood. His predecessor died very suddenly, it never was supposed by his own hand, and he was buried as privately about the foot of Cairnmuir, Craig Nelder, or the Corse of Slakes, without the ceremony, or perhaps more properly speaking, the

benefit of a *precognition* being taken, or an *inquest held* by a coroner's jury. During his long reign, he and his followers were not outdone in their exploits, by any of the colonies of those gypsies already detailed; yet, however adventurous they might have been, the following anecdote which is related by "Black Matthew Marshall," his grandson, reflects no great credit on their bravery.

The gang had long held possession of a large cavern in the high grounds of Cairnmuir, in Galloway, where they usually deposited their plunder and sometimes resided, secure from the officers of the law, as no one durst venture to molest the tribe in that retired subterraneous situation. It happened that two Highland pipers, strangers to the country, were travelling that way; and falling in by chance with this place, they entered it, to

shelter themselves from the weather, and resolved to rest there during the night. They found pretty good quarters, but observed some very suspicious furniture in it, which indicated the profession and character of its absent inhabitants. They had not remained long, till they were alarmed by the voices of a numerous band advancing to its entrance. The pipers expected nothing but death from the ruthless gypsies. One of them, however, being a man of some presence of mind, called to his neighbour, instantly, "to fill his bags" (doing the same himself), and to strike up a pibroch with all his might and main. Both pipes accordingly at once commenced a most tremendous onset. At this very unexpected and terrific reception,—the yelling of the bag-pipes, issuing from the bowels of the earth, just at the moment the gypsies entered the cave,—

Billy Marshall with all his band precipitately fled in the greatest consternation, and from that night never again would go near their favourite haunt, believing that the blasts they had heard proceeded from the devil or some of his infernal agents. The pipers next morning prosecuted their journey in safety, carrying with them the *spolia optima* of the redoubted Billy and the clan Marshall.

The following characteristic anecdote displays their *tinkler mettle* in active service.

After Billy was firmly seated on the throne of his predecessor, he made a progress over his extensive dominions, with an intention to punish severely those neighbouring gypsey chiefs who had made invasions on his empire. 'Twas on a Sunday forenoon in the month of April 1707, that he along with part of his clan came to a solitary

farm house on the borders of Dumfries and Roxburghshire, in quest of a gang of Teviotdale gypsies, who he had understood had quartered there the night before. The family were all out at church except one female left to look after the house. No sooner had Billy and his train arrived, than their antagonists turned out and instantly gave them battle. The poor woman shut the door, and remained in the house in great apprehension, until the door being suddenly forced open, one of the combatants rushed into the apartment, and she perceived with horror that his left hand had been struck off. Without speaking to or looking at her, he thrust the bloody stump, with desperate resolution, against the glowing bars of the grate; and having staunched the blood by actual cautery, seized a knife, used for killing sheep, which lay on the shelf, and

rushed out again to join the combat. All was over before the family returned from church, and both gangs had decamped, carrying probably their dead and wounded along with them; for the place where they fought was absolutely soaked with blood, and exhibited among other reliques of the fray, the amputated hand of the wretch whose desperate conduct the maid-servant had witnessed.

It is not recorded whether the Teviotdale or Galloway gypsies came off victorious in this battle, but it is probable that Billy succeeded in expelling them from his country.

Billy's long reign, if not *glorious*, was in the main fortunate for himself and his people. Only one great calamity befel him and them during that long space of time in which he held the reins of government. It may have been already suspected that, with

Billy Marshall, ambition was a ruling passion; and this bane of human fortune had stimulated in him a desire to extend his dominions, from the Brigg end of Dumfries to the Newton of Ayr, at a time when he well knew the Braes of Glen Nap and the Water of Doon to be his western precinct. He reached the Newton of Ayr, but there he was opposed, and compelled to recross the river, by a powerful body of tinkers from Dumbarton. He said, in his *bulletines*, that they were supported by strong bodies of Irish sailors, and Kyle colliers. Billy had no *artillery*, but his *cavalry* and *infantry* suffered very severely. He was obliged to leave a great part of his *baggage*, *provisions*, and *camp equipage* behind him; consisting of kettles, pots, pans, blankets, crockery, horns, pigs, poultry, &c. A large proportion of shelties, asses, and mules

were drowned, which occasioned a *heavy* loss, in creels, panniers, hampers, tinkers' tools, and cooking utensils; and although he was as well appointed, as to a *medical staff*, as such expeditions usually were, in addition to those who were missing, many died of their wounds. However, on reaching Maybole with his broken and dispirited troops, he was joined by a faithful ally from the county of Down; who, unlike *other allies* on such occasions, did not forsake him in his adversity. This junction enabled our hero to rally, and pursue in his turn; a pitched battle was again fought, somewhere about the Brig of Doon or Alloway Kirk, when both sides, as is *usual*, claimed a victory; but, however this may have been, it is believed that this disaster, which happened A.D. 1712, had slaked the thirst of Billy's ambition. He was many years in

recovering the effects of this great *political* error; indeed it had nearly proved as fatal to the fortunes of Billy Marshall as the ever memorable Russian campaign did to Napoleon Bonaparte, about the same year in the succeeding century.

Billy died somewhere in Dumfries-shire about the year 1790, aged one hundred and twenty-four years; by his own confession he was above a hundred and twenty, which was never disputed. His character may be summed up in a few words. He had from nature a strong mind, with a vigorous and active person, and that, either naturally, or by acquirement, he possessed every *mental* and *personal* quality which was requisite for one who was placed in his *high station*, and who held sovereign power over his *fellow creatures* for such a length of time; but it is believed (that from

expediency, not from choice), with the exception of intemperate drinking, treachery, and ingratitude, he practised every crime which is incident to human nature—those of the deepest dye, I am afraid, cannot with truth be included in the exception. In short, his people met with an irreparable loss in the death of their king and leader; but it never was alleged that the moral world sustained any loss by the death of the man.

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