

Gypsies of Hindu Origin

Ethnology

Gypsies are on the wing in their motor caravans again, migrating chiefly northward for the summer and just as hard for scientists to track and study as any rare migrating birds.

It seems likely that the real gypsy race is slowly on the road to extinction, according to Dr. Walter Hough, anthropologist of the U. S. National Museum, who has long been interested in these elusive wanderers. The clearing of forests and the broader settlement of this country leave fewer peaceful havens for gypsy encampments. Horse trading and tinkering are not good twentieth century business projects. Gypsy fortune telling must compete now with forms of popular psychology, character reading, astrology and other more learned-looking methods of dickering with the future, although the gypsies are shrewdly taking on some of this learned patter.

But scientists have learned and deduced some facts about the gypsies and their mysterious ancestry before it is too late.

"More than 100 years ago, a student of comparative languages showed that the gypsies are originally from India," said Dr. Hough. "They came to Europe in the middle ages by way of Egypt. When any one asked where they were from they said, from Egypt, and they still claim Egypt as their native land. But many signs point to their Hindu origin."

A camp of pure blood gypsies, such as are rarely seen nowadays, would reveal tawny, lithe men with

expressive faces, black eyes and hair and clean cut features, a real Hindu type, Dr. Hough points out. Then, too, the gypsy maiden's love of finery betrays the oriental strain. The gypsy dances suggest the oriental freedom and postures. Gypsy love of horses no doubt was brought from the hills of India, the anthropologist also believes, for it is known that when the gypsies emerged into Europe they had fine animals and plenty of money, and they have always been connoisseurs of horses and dogs.

A few traces of Hindu religion have clung to them.

"They will not eat eels and a few other animals because they think that in the mutations of the soul the spirits of their ancestors may inhabit them," Dr. Hough states.

"A long standing custom of the gypsy that is a survival, no doubt, of India, is their burning of the possessions of the dead. In 1900, in Maryland, chief Seth Lovell's gaily painted palatial wagon valued at \$2,000 and filled with his property was burned. The ceremony was conducted by his widow Rhoda, and several relatives who wept while the flames destroyed the gypsy chief's equipage."

The gypsies steadily tend to blend racially, as wanderlusting strangers with red hair, freckles, alien features, or un-gypsylike speech join a gypsy band and marry into gypsy families. It is difficult now for an anthropologist to find a pure gypsy type, but gypsy temperament runs as true to form as ever.

Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928

Medicine in Stars

Medicine-Astronomy

Aesculapius, the classical god of medicine, though promised a place in the stars by Zeus, has never till now been placed with his Olympian confreres among the celestial bodies.

This neglect, however, has been repaired. In a recent letter, Dr. Edwin B. Frost, director of the Yerkes Observatory, informed the American Medical Association that the medical profession is at last represented in the heavens by an asteroid of the fourteenth magnitude, circulating between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter. The tiny planet was christened Aesculapius at Dr. Frost's suggestion

by its discoverer, Prof. George Van Biesbroeck also of the Yerkes Observatory.

"Doctors wishing to consult their Patron Saint," said Dr. Frost, "will have to use a pretty good sized telescope, and we shall be glad to be of any assistance."

Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928

Long-distance electrical transmission of energy in the United States dates from 1893, when a current of high voltage was carried from Pomona to San Bernardino in California, a distance of about 19 miles.

Maya Glories—Continued

"They did not worship snakes and other animals, but raised them as the Cristianos raise cattle and hogs, and they offered these to the Sun in sacrifice.

"The ancianos did not kill every snake they saw, however little it might be, like the Cristianos do," an act which he illustrated with a stick. "They let them get old and fat and when the king ordained they killed them.

"They ate the flesh for food and made clothing and ornaments out of the skins and rendered the fat like the lard of the hog. The fat was burned in the hollow stone pots you see lying in the ruins as an offering to the Sun."

He asked if I had seen the black stains on the walls and ceilings of the inner rooms of the temple that stands on top of El Castillo, the highest building in Chichen Itza. That comes from burning snake oil, he stated.

The sun went down, the log was cut through, and the wife fell off the other end giggling, while the baby took up the machete.

"The snakes were different in the old days from what they are now," the Indian continued. "They had big mouths like large lizards and they had strong teeth. You have seen them in the frescoes. I don't believe there were any animals existing then that are not shown in the carvings and paintings in the temples.

"I believe the Castillo was built before the flood," he said, "I mean the Great Flood when Noah saved a pair of every kind of animal. Just how long ago was the Flood?" he asked.

Six thousand years, I told him. He showed surprise. His reckonings were all upset, and it took him a long time to struggle through his private system of logic and set the Christian faith up again in perfect accordance with what he believed of the story of his own race.

The unfortunate "break" about 6,000 years cost almost as many bug-bites there on the ground on the edge of the jungle in the dark. It was not until after nine o'clock that he got the two religions hooked up once more to his own satisfaction, after which he lighted the way, proud as any Greek logician, back to my own hut on the main road.

Science News-Letter, June 23, 1928