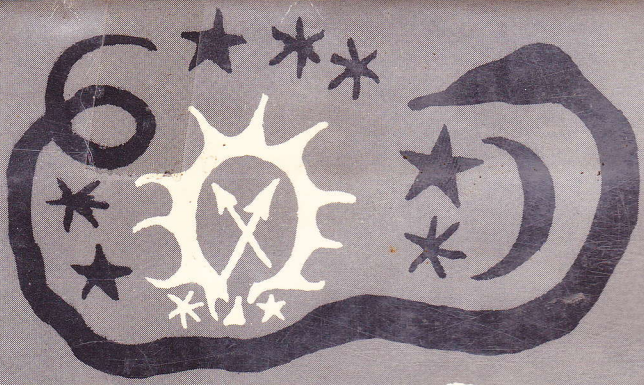
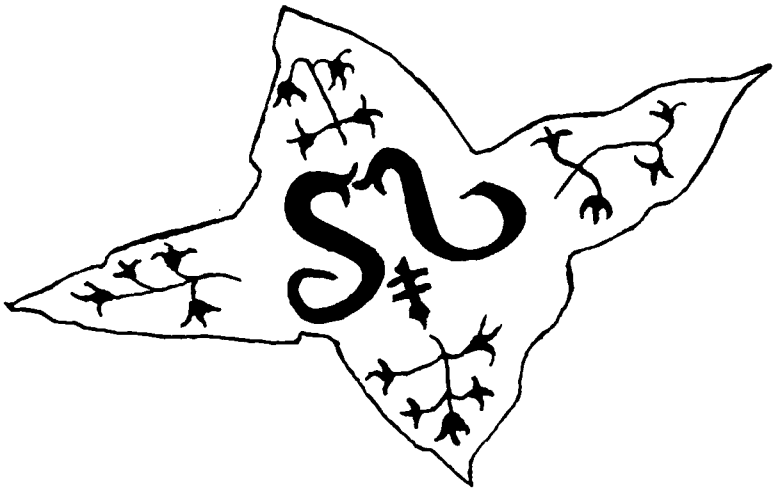


Gypsy & Demons Divinities

The Magic and Religion of the Gypsies

Elwood B. Trigg



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Preface by Sir Edward Evans-Pritchard

Gypsy Demons and Divinities

The magic and religion of the gypsies

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Dedicated
with love
to my wonderful parents
in gratitude
for their unfailing
support and encouragement

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PREFACE

There is something fascinating about gypsies, at least for those gorgios who like myself have Romany hearts: their proud independent character, their freedom to wander wherever they choose, and the mystery which hangs about them, or seems to do so. There is the uncanny feeling that they possess forgotten arts and can see into the future. Hence, for many the charm of Matthew Arnold's poem about the Oxford scholar who left the university to join the gypsies who "had arts to rule as they desired the working of men's brains" but, he added, "it needs Heaven-sent moments for this skill."

There would seem to be no doubt, on both cultural and biological grounds, that the gypsies originally came from India many centuries ago, though they claimed on their arrival in Europe to have come from Egypt ("Little Egypt"), apparently because they thought the claim would enhance their prestige,

as indeed for a time it did. Also, when they arrived in Western Europe, probably in the fifteenth century or earlier, they made out, with the audacious cunning which has always distinguished them, that they were some sort of Christian pilgrims. In the course of their migrations they settled all over the Balkans, Russia, the countries of Western Europe and eventually in America. They became in this diaspora much diversified, though they retained a certain similarity in their way of life and, it would seem, in many of their sentiments and ideas. They also became inured to ostracism and persecution, the most severe being Hitler's holocaust of their people because of their oriental origin (and even today they suffer some disabilities, if minor ones, at the hands of petty bureaucrats in England's green and pleasant land).

It is only recently that scholarly interest was taken in the gypsy way of life, language and history, but by this time much has been recorded about them in different parts of the world and there are societies devoted to these studies. There is indeed a considerable literature on the subject and much of it of value. But in spite of all efforts and achievements, somehow the gypsy remains an enigma, and I suppose he is an enigma because he has chosen to remain one; and, given what he has had to endure, can one wonder that he has never, or very seldom, let gorgios entirely into his confidence or, if it comes to that, that he has been prepared to meet gorgios more than halfway. There is always reserve and often a scarcely disguised measure of contempt; for it isn't right that the gorgio stock should live as the Romany do. I am sure that it is much easier to enter into a primitive Melanesian or African community than that of the gypsies. The Melanesian or African has not had to build his barricades as the gypsies have had to do. Like the Jews, but even more so, gypsies have been for centuries living in societies to which they have not belonged.

Perhaps what is most difficult for the gorgio, to understand, well acquainted with the literature though he may be, as Dr. Trigg certainly is, are what gypsies really believe about the nature of the world, man's destiny and the spiritual realm, for they have no formal dogmas set down in catechisms, liturgies or any other writings which might guide us in our attempts to grasp their magical and religious notions. Dr. Trigg has had to do the best he can by putting together bits and pieces collected from all over the world: India, the Near East, Europe and America, in all of which areas the Gypsies have been strongly, and differently, influenced by their neighbours—Hindus, Moslems, Christians (Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant) and just pagan; as witness for example their strongly held acceptance of vampires in the Balkan countries. The outcome of Dr. Trigg's procedure makes a strange mosaic and his method may be considered hazardous, but it is ethnologically justifiable in circumstances in which he had no choice. And I would like to say that I think he has shown great tact and understanding in what he writes about gypsy religious syncretism. Gypsies have had to assume for protection the guise of Hindus, Moslems and Christians, a cloak not uncommon among minorities, such as some of the Shia sects of Islam. But a cloak for protection does not mean total pretense, and it would be a superficial appreciation to suppose that it does. Indeed Dr. Trigg has shown clearly that it is not the case.

Gypsy studies could still be advanced if only anthropologists and others would take a deeper interest in them before gypsie and gorgio alike are destroyed, as both may be, by what should be our common enemy, the money-making, materialist, bureaucratic, speed-hypnotized, industrial society. If Dr. Trigg cannot tell us about the future, he has given us an excellent picture of past and present. I think we both wonder who is going to have the last laugh:

Unless you come of the gipsey race
That counts all time the same,
Be you careful of Time and Place
And Judgment and Good Name:
Lose your life for to live your life
The way that you ought to do;
And when you are finished, your God and your wife
And the Gipsis'll laugh at you!

E.E. EVANS-PRITCHARD

Gypsy Demons and Divinities

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

There are few people in our society who have ever heard of gypsies or come into contact with them who fail to be intrigued by them. For many, they are human symbols of a free life, full of romanticism and mystery. Beyond that superficial impression, however, they remain an enigma, a lost and wandering people about whom little or nothing is known.

On the basis of their numbers alone, there would seem to be little justification for such lack of knowledge. Though it is true that in proportion to the size of some nations they are a small people, on a world scale they are far more numerous than many would assume. Their world population, estimated at from five to nine million, with representative populations in most countries of the world, has received relatively little study. One need only consult a library catalog for books written on nations of equivalent size to see that in comparison they are a people who have been grossly neglected.

Of equal importance to their population is their extraordinary role as world nomads. As nomadic peoples coming into contact with a vast variety of cultures and spreading those cultures as they traveled, it would seem they deserve attention (if for no other reason) as important culture carriers.

But beyond all this, there are humanitarian reasons for a study of the gypsies. If we, as non-gypsies, or gorgios, have found offensive the deception, theft and general dishonesty, which they have turned against us we have committed an even greater offense against them by cruelly persecuting them over many centuries. Throughout the world, the gorgio's ignorance of the gypsy has led first to fear, and then to distrust and hatred, bringing to the gypsy centuries of torture and death. Most people are aware, for example, of the suffering of the Jewish people under Hitler, but few realize that four hundred thousand gypsies were also executed by his order. In a supposedly enlightened age, the veil of mystery surrounding the gypsy must somehow be lifted, so that he will no longer be subjected to the persecution that has resulted from popular fear and ignorance.

Once the significance and value of the gypsy people is acknowledged, the importance of their magical and religious beliefs and practices is obvious. Few elements in a people's culture reveal so clearly their true nature as those of their deepest convictions.

In the case of the gypsy people this truism would seem to be even more valid than usual. Their own convictions, and the ceremonies attached to them, have, for various reasons, remained a secret. A combination of this secrecy and the disinterest and social ostracism of the gorgio, has led to a great deal of popular ignorance about their beliefs. One writer once stated:

> The fact is, the gipsies have hitherto been so completely

> despised, and held in such thorough contempt, that few ever thought of, or would venture to make inquiries of them relative to, their ancient customs and manners; and that when any of their ceremonies were actually observed by the people at large, they were looked upon as the mere frolics, the unmeaning and extravagant practices of a race of beggarly thieves and vagabonds, unworthy of the slightest attention or credit.[1]

Apparently blinded, then, by the gypsies' disreputable habits, most people thought of them as lacking both principles and convictions. Such an attitude was, of course, also caused by the general ignorance of the universality of world magical and religious belief.

Throughout this book it is the authors's intention to provide an introduction to those beliefs which have so long remained shrouded by ignorance and mystery. Through years of information gathering by personal experience, interviews and reports both from gypsies and gorgios, as well as extensive use of the excellent scholarship of those who have contributed their discoveries to the Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, an attempt will be made to bring to light some of the historical and contemporary convictions of this remarkable people.[2]

Before we begin, however, it is important that we recall the origin and history of this extraordinary people for those readers whose curiosity extends beyond the present into the mysterious past.

CHAPTER TWO

Sudden appearance
Eastern origins
World history

In the year 1417, a peculiar, dark-complexioned people suddenly appeared on the frontier of Germany. Dressed in exotic and colorful clothes and bearing aristocratic titles, they claimed themselves to be exiles from a country known as Little Egypt. When asked the reason for their exile they explained that they had been driven from their country on account of their profession of the Christian faith. For this reason they claimed to have been given a penance by the Pope to wander for a period of seven years without settling. To prove this they provided papers from various reigning monarchs and even the Pope himself.

These documents, and a popular feeling of pity for the sufferings of these strange people, immediately brought a favorable reception from the villagers. Knowledge of these people, and the cause for which they were exiled, quickly spread throughout Europe. Everywhere they went they were lavishly entertained; with good deeds being done for them considered to be an act of piety.

As years passed, however, they continued to linger in Europe, giving no indication that they planned to return to their country once the time of their penance was served. Earning for themselves a reputation for trickery and theft, there seemed to be no indication of any great devotion to matters of religion. The alleged origin of these people had caused many, at first, to call them "Egyptians." Growing distrust of these so-called Egyptians on the part of many people caused them to begin to take steps in order to prevent the nomads from entering their towns and villages. Belief in the "Egyptians" as wandering penitents was soon denounced, while government authorities came to consider them as no more than outlaws. Though at various times and places they came to be known as "Bohemians," "Tartars," and even "heathens," the earlier term "Egyptians" or its later corruption "gypsies" remained the term used most often in describing these strange people.

When people began to disbelieve the earliest explanation of the "gypsies" wanderings in Europe, other theories soon became popular to explain their mysterious origins. Some claimed that because a gypsy had once refused the Holy Family refuge in Egypt, all gypsies were condemned to wander. For some, the Bible was thought to offer the clue to the origin of the gypsies. One writer thought the forefathers of the gypsies to have been the ancient Egyptians scattered by the hand of Yahweh. Others thought that the gypsies might be the last survivors of the disaster which destroyed Atlantis. Even Voltaire offered a theory of the origin of the gypsies when he claimed that they were the descendants of the priests of Isis mixed with the followers of the Syrian goddess, Astarte.

But all these fantastic theories and many more were faced with extinction as soon as gypsiologists turned their attention toward a scientific study of gypsy origins and language. In the case of such a wild, wandering and erratic people as the gypsies

only the language was found to be adequate to give an authoritative basis to any study of their origins. It was Pott, in his definitive work *Die Zigeuner in Europa und Asien*, published in 1844-45, who firmly established for the first time that the gypsy's language, Romany, was an Indian language, and that their origins as a people could be traced to that country.

It has been subsquently discovered by scholars that Romany is very closely related to some of the languages spoken in the Hindustan. Some continental gypsies were known to call themselves Sinti, which bore close resemblance to their original homeland of Sind in India. What is more, some Syrian gypsies call themselves Jats, the very same name as a great tribe living in the valley of the Indus. History tells us that in the fifth century the Persian king Bahram-Gur asked the Indian King Shankal of Kanoj to send to him ten thousand Looris to act as musicians for his people. To this day, Persian gypsies are known as Looris. Authorities on the Indian tribes have been able to form close associations between certain tribes in northwestern India and the European gypsy.

Any discussion of the nature of those Indian tribes which could be called gypsy, is highly complex. It is certain, however, that such tribes do exist, and that the language they speak is very similar to the dialects of northern India.

An equally complex question is that of the date of the gypsies' departure from India and their reason for such an action. Miklosich, in the nineteenth century, claimed: "What caused the gypsies to fly from India is a mystery and we have scarcely any hope of ever unveiling this mystery."[1] History has proved him to be right. Records of such an illiterate and obscure people are much too confused to establish such historical arguments with any certainty.

There seems to be good reason, however, for believing that

gypsies were in Europe before they were seen in Germany in 1417. While most proof is scarce, eminent gypsiologists would seem to agree that there was a major dispersion of gypsies from India no earlier than the mid-ninth century and no later than the year 1000 A.D.[2] Between these dates and their appearance in 1417, however, very little is known of the gypsies and their activities in Europe. It is certain that if they were in Europe, as is claimed, their numbers must have been small. Otherwise, their arrival in the fifteenth century would not have drawn the amount of public attention which it did.

Though many reasons have been offered for the gypsies' original departure from India, the authorities are inconclusive. It is sufficient to make the hypothesis that a thousand years after the appearance of the Aryan peoples in northern India, the area was continually invaded by successive armies of first the Greeks, then the Persians, Scythians and Kushites. In the later era, both the Huns and Mohammedans also invaded the area. It would seem that the incessant military and political turmoil which these successive invasions caused to northwestern India succeeded in dislodging certain tribes of people which have come to be known to us as gypsies. It is possible that these people, forced to become sedentary by their conquerors, moved west in hope of retaining their nomadic way of life.

Once dislodged, the gypsy moved rapidly west throughout the fifteenth century and in such numbers as to cause considerable alarm on the part of most government authorities. Their sudden increase in population by the sixteenth century was to cause a major social problem in Europe. Not only did they cause a threat to safety through their clandestine movements and actions, but they also threatened the economic stability and social structure of eastern European serfdom. The Christian Slavic countries, in an age when they had good reason to fear

the aggressive instincts of the infidel Turks to the East, also had good reason to fear the oriental gypsy. That this fear was not entirely unjustified can be seen in the fate of Count Eberhard of Würtemberg, when in 1468, on a pilgrimage to Palestine, he was betrayed by gypsies and as a result fell into the hands of the Sultan of Egypt. The only factor which may have saved the gypsies from immediate annihilation was their profession of being wandering Christian penitents. The fact, too, that gypsies would willingly spy for any prince who would be willing to pay for their services, no doubt served to alleviate any fear that they might be acting exclusively as agents for the Turks.

The greatest problem on the part of European states was integrating these nomadic people into a conventional social pattern. Many gypsies, in order to survive, settled as serfs on the estates of great landholders. As early as 1496, when they prepared cannonballs for the use of Sigismund, the Bishop of Fünfkirchen, there is evidence that gypsies were being used for purposes of war. Later, in 1557, gypsies were used more actively. Francis von Perenyi had the command of defending the castle of Nagy Ida when it was in the danger of being taken by imperial troops. Finding himself short of regulars, he collected a thousand gypsy serfs, provided them with arms and stationed them in his entrenchments. Grellman recalls the event:

> The Blacks, behind their fortifications, supported the attack with so much more resolution than was expected, returning the enemy's fire with such alacrity, that they suspected nothing less than a swarm of Gipsies to be the defendants, and were actually retreating. They had hardly quitted their ground, when these conquerors, elated with joy on their victory, crept out of their holes, crying after them, 'go and be hanged, you rascals, thank God we had no more powder and shot, or we would have played the very Devil with you, nor have suffered a soul to escape.' 'Ha! ha!' replied the retiring besiegers, as they

turned about, and, to their great astonishment, instead of regular troops, discovered a motley Gipsey tribe, 'Are you the heroes? Is it so with you?' immediately wheeling back to their works, forced their way after, and in a few minutes totally subdued them. Thus the affair ended.[3]

Never again were gypsies used in a large body to do active fighting. Later, however, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, gypsies were used as arsonists and saboteurs, and in this capacity proved exceptionally effective. Later, gypsies were to be incorporated into regular army units and given the official status of "nongypsy."

The problem of forcing the gypsies into a sedentary life continued to plague the countries of eastern Europe. Evidence that a temporary compromise between the State and the gypsy was eventually reached can be seen in a report in 1839 which makes the following remarks dealing with the gypsies of Wallachia:

They are almost all slaves, bought and sold at pleasure. One was lately sold for 200 piastres, but the general price is 500. Perhaps three pounds is the average price, and the female Gipsies are sold much cheaper. The sale is generally carried on by private bargain.[4]

From the very nominal prices offered and paid for such "gypsy slaves" we can deduce only two things: (1) Either gypsies were in very little demand, or (2) the terms of their "slavery" must have been very liberal. It would seem that such "slaves" were owned by their masters chiefly for the purpose of populating their lands and satisfying their own vanities. This would seem to satisfy both conditions. The gypsies themselves profited from such an arrangement because by submitting to one landholder they were offered his protection and saved from the oppression and persecution of others.

Perhaps it was the early development of this system in the East which caused the more nomadic of the gypsies to move fur-

ther west. It may well have been that even the mildest form of serfdom was offensive to many gypsies, particularly in its requirement of a sedentary life and the threat of impressment into military service. For whatever reason, gypsies invaded western Europe in great numbers in a remarkably short period of time. They brought with them the same tale and legends and the same explanation for their travels as that of which they had spoken in eastern Europe. It was not long, however, before the countries of western Europe, like those in the East, suffered disillusionment about their "Christian pilgrims."

The gypsies were to receive a much cooler reception in the West than they had been given in the East. Contemporary Europe was, after all, in a most crucial period of transition. The Reformation and Counter-Reformation were critical issues. Most countries were striving for a national awareness. It was no wonder that a strange and foreign people, considered to be of uncertain religious faith, were made to feel unwelcome by nations attempting to gain identity through the force of conformity in matters of both Church and State.

There could be only one reaction to such an invasion, and that was persecution. Spain in 1492, under King Ferdinand, was the first to take action. Anxious to remove its profitable but nonconforming Jewish population, the Spanish crown was even more adamant that the gypsy should be banished or exterminated. An edict to that effect followed.

England followed Spain in the year 1531 with an edict encouraged by Henry VIII. France in 1561 under the reign of Francis I gave directions to the governors of all cities to drive gypsies away with "fire and sword." By 1572 they were forced to leave Milan, Parma and Venice. Pain of death was the alternative to not leaving the United Provinces in 1582. Sweden by 1662 had followed suit and attacked groups of gypsies on dif-

ferent occasions after they had remained unmoved by orders of expulsion. In 1500 Maximilian I at the Augsburg Diet gave directions that:

> Respecting those people, who call themselves Gipsies, roving up and down the country. By public Edict, to all ranks of the empire, according to the obligations, under which they are bound, to us and the Holy Empire; it is strictly ordered, that in the future they do not permit the said Gipsies; (since there is authentic evidence of their being spies, scouts, and conveyers of intelligence, betraying the Christians to the Turks,) to pass or remain within their territories, not to trade or traffic; neither to grant them protection nor convoy. And that the said Gipsies do withdraw themselves, before Easter next ensuing, from the German dominions, entirely quit them, nor suffer themselves to be found therein. As in case they should transgress, after that time, and receive injury from any person, they shall have no redress, nor shall such person be thought to have committed any crime.[5]

In each case legal enforcement of such edicts was made extremely difficult through ineffective policing, lack of conviction, and the action of those who were sympathetic to gypsies.[6] With such extensive persecution by virtually every country in western Europe, the gypsy people tended to withdraw into the more secluded portions of the countryside rather than risk venturing to another country where they would have to face very much the same prohibitions. Uncoordinated legal prosecution on the part of the various governments, fortunately for the gypsies, made for a highly ineffective enforcement of antigypsy legislation. By the late eighteenth century, banishment, execution and other persecution had failed to dislodge the still growing gypsy population. The gypsy's swiftness and cunning proved to be more than most countries and their legal enforcement could deal with. Enforcement of laws led only to purposeless brutality and seemed to be largely ineffectual. Indeed, it often turned a people content

with only petty theft and trickery into one involved in major banditry and murder. Persecution, and threat of execution for no other reason than being gypsy, made many of them believe they had nothing to lose by their crimes. Under such conditions the small-time poacher was unwittingly encouraged to become a menacing highwayman.

Such a situation could not long continue. The states of Europe in the late eighteenth century were becoming more and more aware of their nationhood and were anxious to make full use of their potential. Purposeless brutality was not only a waste of national energy but it was also undignified and occasionally offended consciences. Consequently, new suggestions were made for the solution of the "gypsy problem." One idea was to turn the gypsies into state slaves, another was to put them into penitentiaries, while yet another was to sentence them to be galley slaves. These suggestions were rejected, however, because "when they were extinct, they could offer no further service to the community."[7] Such plans would require too much of "an expense, and inconvenience to superintend them."[8]

One solution attempted was to deport gypsies from the home countries to the new world, thus, at one and the same time, ridding themselves of a public nuisance at home while providing much needed population for the colonies. Great Britain, France and Spain each made attempts at such a solution.

At the close of the eighteenth century a group of gypsies deported by the British government were sent to Barbados. When the gypsies learned the true nature of their situation, both the ship and the gypsies disappeared. Tradition claims that they intermarried with the local Indians and became so well absorbed that their blood is now integrally related with that of the Indian tribes. The first gypsies to arrive in North America

and Australia were petty thieves sent from England to be punished for their crimes by deportation. It is possible, too, that some immigrants arrived as indentured servants having sold their services for passage money.

Evidently the French made a similar attempt by exiling several hundred of their Bohemians to Louisiana. Descendents of these French-speaking gypsies still flourish in that state centuries later.

Spain exiled groups of her *gitanos* to Brazil where they have since intermarried with the other populations and have become numerous.[9]

Empress Maria Theresa, lacking colonies to which she could send her empire's sizable gypsy population, proposed yet another solution to the problem by her decree of 1767. Offering an alternative to banishment, slavery and death, she conceived the idea, novel for its time, that instead of continuing the persecution against gypsies, efforts should be made toward reform in order that they might become useful citizens. Against considerable opposition, she insisted that with sufficient force even gypsies could be disciplined to lead "productive lives."

This first attempt at gypsy reform was in no way less brutal than earlier attempts to deal with the "gypsy problem." The empress' first decree forbade gypsies to live in tents, to move freely, to trade in horses, to eat carrion, to elect their own leaders, and to use Romany. Henceforth, gypsies were not even to be called "gypsies" but rather the *Uj Magyar* [the new Boors]. Characteristic gypsy apparel was to be exchanged for the peasant clothing of the Boor. All young men were expected to enlist as soldiers. All sense of identity, therefore, was to be surrendered. The government allowed the gypsies just one year to accomplish the new transformation by finding new occupations and building themselves homes. How a people were to train

themselves, build homes and completely alter such important customs as language, clothing, living habits, and occupation within a year was not explained.

Grellman, referring to the Empress' edict, says in his *Dissertation on the Gypsies*:

> Nevertheless so apparently as these regulations were calculated, entirely for the good of these people and the state; just as little were the greatest part benefited by them.[10]

Apparently the gypsies were not prepared to be "benefited" by such efforts on their behalf. Opposition on their part, coupled with a total lack of effective legal enforcement, ended in the edict's complete failure.

The Empress, obviously a woman of determination, and not one to be dismayed by her first failure at reform, passed yet another decree in 1773. Without realizing that it was not new restrictions that were needed but simply power to enforce the old ones, she made the new decree even more strict. One highly significant change from the previous decree was the State's new attitude toward gypsy children. The failure to force the adults to comply with the earlier decree convinced the State that if the adults could not be forced to take advantage of such "benefits," undoubtedly, the children could be trained to do so. The new edict decreed first, that no gypsy was to be given permission to marry who could not prove himself capable of supporting a wife and children. Second, all gypsies who were married and had children over five years of age were to be forced to surrender their children to be educated by the State.

As would be expected from such an edict, force was necessary to implement it. Overseers were appointed in each district to manage the operation of removing gypsy children from their homes. On two different occasions raids at night on gypsy camps actually succeeded in taking the children away from their families. Taking into account the extremely close gypsy

family circle, the importance of children to gypsy life, and a potential for emotionalism equaled by few other ethnic groups, the soldiers' removal of the children from their mothers must have been harrowing in the extreme. After several such attempts the second decree was considered to be as much a failure as the first.

Undeterred by these two failures, however, Joseph II passed a third decree making more specific demands and, it appears, in this case had some success in their implementation. His decree had the added directions that gypsies were not to own horses, attend fairs or barter, and not to play any music except on holidays. Their livings were to be earned by agricultural work. By removing children from their families, forbidding movement to a people who are nomadic by nature, outlawing the use of their favorite animal and their favorite amusement, directing what they wear and what they should eat and how they should live and finally forcing them into an employment for which they have both a strong dislike and a lack of ability, the State finally succeeded in settling a limited number. Surely, here alone was sufficient evidence to show the gypsy's determination to preserve his ethnic independence even in the face of a determined and powerful opposition.

This last decree of Joseph's takes on added significance when it is realized that five of its fourteen edicts dealt with the question of the gypsies' religious welfare. Of primary importance in this regard was the order that the gypsies must put themselves and their children under the guidance of a religious teacher and then follow his directions. Gypsies also were expected to attend church on Sundays and all holidays, "to give proof of their Christian disposition." Joseph's edict also took action to discourage the "unseemly dress" of the adults and the lack of dress offered the children who go "running about naked, in the house, the roads, and streets thereby giving offense and disgust

to other people." The complete lack of understanding of gypsy sexual morality was revealed by the edict that children should be required not to sleep "promiscuously by each other, without distinction of sex." Exactly how Joseph planned on putting these edicts into effect is difficult to imagine, for it would have required a large army to have put them into effect by force. The only other alternative would have been to convince them of the advantages of "religious" behavior by sending missionaries to work among them. The edicts of Joseph, however, make it quite clear that force, not conversion, was to be the method of requiring gypsies to conform to religious observances.

Though the secular edicts were to enjoy moderate success, the religious edicts were doomed to failure from the very first. The significance of the fact that secular oppression should be so closely associated with religious requirements, was not lost on the gypsies. It is regrettable that both reformers and missionaries throughout the next century would look back to the actions taken by Maria Theresa and Joseph II and see in them valid methods of gypsy reform.

Heinrich Grellman was the first author to show real interest in social and religious reform among gypsies. In his *Dissertation on the Gypsies,* published in Germany in 1784, he advanced ideas which he thought might succeed in converting the gypsies of Europe into useful citizens. Greatly concerned by the persecution that was still widespread even in late eighteenth century Europe, he opposed the policy of banishment, which was still being practiced on grounds which were chiefly economic and practical. Banishment, he claimed, had only a temporary effect because European governments failed to cooperate in eliminating their gypsy populations. Without cooperation the gypsy had always managed to withdraw into an area where persecution was less rigorous, to return later after a relaxation of

law enforcement. Then, too, such policies were highly wasteful since they eliminated potentially useful citizens in an age when larger national populations were considered desirable. Reform, to Grellman, seemed to be both a practical and desirable solution to the gypsy problem. He had rejected the idea, proposed by some, that the gypsies should be made slaves or put in penitentiaries. This, he reasoned, would not allow for their fullest use by the community. Quite on the contrary, they should be allowed to propagate, and with time, planning and education, "whole districts and large cities could be built, merely to turn the thousands of these wretches into." Besides, if they were turned into slaves, "it would constitute a great expense and inconvenience to superintend them . . . though the idea might seem plausible to us at first mention."

His answer to the gypsy problem, then, was forced reform, and for that reason he was a great admirer of the reforms of both Maria Theresa and Joseph in Hungary. If such reforms seemed oppressive, he argued, then it was necessary oppression. "It is true," he claimed, "the means here made use of are compulsory, but necessary, and the only ones capable of insuring success."

Grellman, like Joseph II, thought that religion could effectively serve to "insure success" and therefore proposed that men and women be sent among the gypsies to bring them knowledge of God. While there might be some hope in approaching adults, there was much more hope for the future in educating their children and bringing them into some degree of conformity to Christian behavior and thinking. But such a reform called for more than example; it called for active reformers and missionaries to be sent among them:

> They have been long enough among civilized people, to prove, that they will not be allured, by the mere example of others, to free themselves from the fetters of old customs and

> vices. In order to accomplish that, foreign and more effectual help is requisite. It were in vain to hope for any considerable progress, from those who are grown up, would be sufficient by compulsion, to make them quit their unsettled manner of life, by instruction and teaching, to convey a glimmering of light to their understanding, and endeavour at some melioration of the heart. Proper care being taken of the education of the children, society would be more likely to have its endeavors crowned with success.[11]

From the time of Grellman throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, this close association between legal oppression and forced religious conversion was to have a profound impact upon the gypsy mind regarding attitudes toward non-gypsy religious convictions. In some cases it would mean that gypsies would hold ever more closely to their own magico-religious concepts while often adopting only superficially those convictions of the surrounding society which they considered necessary for their survival. In those instances where they did come to accept the teachings and practices of other faiths, only those concepts congenial to the gypsy character and culture were adopted.

CHAPTER THREE

An introduction to gypsy magic and religion

The gypsies, when first arriving in Europe, had claimed to be wandering penitents from a mysterious land called Little Egypt. They had spoken of a nation which had large cities and great wealth. Bearing aristocratic titles and richly dressed, the wanderers had caused the people of the time to theorize as to the locale of such a remarkable land. As years passed, however, many Europeans came to regard Little Egypt as merely another hoax perpetrated to deceive them.

Far from being merely a deceptive hoax, however, the tales which the gypsies told of their mysterious origins and homeland were deeply rooted in their legends and folklore.

Some gypsies believe that there was a time, many ages past, when there lived a great gypsy emperor named Pharaun (Pharoah) who ruled a rich and powerful empire which extended over the entire world. Though the Emperor was a just man he was also a severe ruler and had little respect for God.

He would chastise his people frequently and revile God but then later pray to be forgiven.

On one occasion, setting out to war, Pharaun and his army were halted in their advance by the sea. Now it happened that God loved Pharaun in spite of the fact that He was often cursed by him, so He commanded the sea to divide so that Pharaun and his armies could cross over to the other side by dry land. When Pharaun reached the middle of the sea, God asked him whose power it was that controlled the sea. Foolishly, the emperor replied that it was his own power which was in control. God became so angry at his arrogant reply that He caused the sea to come rushing back and thus destroy Pharaun together with all his army. Only one hunchbacked woman and a blind man survived the great calamity. God, seeing that they had survived, spoke to them and asked them if they feared Him. They replied that they did fear Him and wished to obey Him. That being the case God commanded them to marry and to have children which would be gypsies.

In time the couple had one male and one female child. God commanded them to travel the world separately, the boy as a musician and the girl as a beggar. After many years had passed they met each other again, but having forgotten that they were brother and sister, they became husband and wife. It was from this incestuous relationship, so many gypsies believe, that they originated.

Many variations of this tale exist and are told even today by gypsies living in many different parts of the world. One variation on the legend claims that after Pharaun and his army were drowned in the sea, only one gypsy woman was left alive. As she bewailed the fact that she would be the last gypsy in the world, the Devil heard her and proposed marriage to her. All of the gypsies in the world are descendents of that union.

Yet another variation claims that the gypsy woman and the Devil had three children all of which were born dead. The Devil could not give them life until God told him to blow into their mouths. Doing as God told him, the Devil's breath brought the children to life. The three children are the common ancestors of all the world's gypsies.

Such legends of the origin of the gypsy people obviously show a great deal of influence from Old Testament sources. While this influence exists in the West, it does not exist among the gypsies of the East.

One tale told by the gypsies of India claims that the Romany people had their origins when the great God Baramy commanded his daughter Mata to marry the guardian of the Universe, Lakipadi Jandra. From this origin resulted all the worlds plants and animals. When Mata ate one of the fruits which she had produced she gave birth to a horse.

The evil God, Pramori, longed to steal the horse but Baramy wouldn't let him. Pramori, frustrated in his aims, grew very angry and revenged himself against Baramy by first flooding the whole earth and burning everything that remained. Baramy was very irritated at the destruction of his creation. He immediately created a good spirit with the body of what had been his beloved horse. From the viscera of this being he created a whole new world of animals and from the head he made a new horse which he gave to the Gypsies forever.

From the time of their first arrival in Europe, the myths which the gypsies told about themselves, further exaggerated by the popular imagination, served to distort the true facts about gypsy life. This distortion was especially evident when it came to the matter of their personal beliefs. It will be remembered that the gypsies first appeared in Europe under the guise of pious Catholic pilgrims doing penance for their past sin of re-

nouncing the Christian faith. The populace, however, came to believe that the gypsy, far from being a penitent Christian, was, in fact, nothing more than an unrepentant unbeliever. The gypsies' craftiness and lack of church association served to both intensify and justify this belief. As years passed the gypsies' isolation from the rest of the community served only to prolong the life of such an impression. Indeed, for many years it was simply assumed by most people that gypsies were completely amoral and lacked any beliefs of their own.

Grellman had been the first European writer to concern himself with the matter of the personal beliefs or religious convictions of gypsies. Grellman claimed that gypsies were completely lacking in any form of religious convictions or morality when they first arrived in Europe. Finding agreement with other writers, he concluded:

> . . . ancient, as well as the more modern, writers agree, in positively denying, that Gipsies have any religion; and place them even below the Heathens. This sentence cannot possibly be contradicted; since, so far from having any religion, they have an aversion to everything which in the least relates to it.[1]

More than a century later, de Goeje argued that there was virtually no trace of religion among the heidens or Dutch gypsies.[2] There were, he claimed, virtually no religious rites practiced by them, and while reverence was paid to the graves of the dead and the oath "by the dead" was sacred, he could find no belief in immortality. He found also that any form of superstition was rare with the possible exception of a limited acceptance of certain omens.

Hoyland, in his book published in 1816, was the first British author to mention the matter of religious beliefs amongst gypsies.[3] By publishing a series of letters written to newspapers, he gave clear evidence that he, too, thought of the gypsies as

unbelievers. Fifty years later, the Rev. Henry Woodcock found that the "Gipsies, with rare exceptions, are utterly without religious impression, and care only for that which directly ministers to their appetites."[4] That famous Victorian gypsiologist, George Borrow, also claimed:

> If the Gipsies trusted in any God at the period of their exodus from India, they must have speedily forgotten him. . . . They brought with them no Indian idols. . . . nor Indian rites or observances, for no traces of such are to be discovered amongst them. All, therefore which relates to their original religion, is shrouded in mystery, and is likely so to remain. They may have been idolaters, or atheists, or what they now are, totally neglectful of worship of any kind; and though not exactly prepared to deny the existence of a supreme Being, they are as regardless of him as if he existed not.[5]

These earlier authorities, dealing so superficially with native gypsy beliefs, lacked the academic sophistication which was to come later with the development of the studies of comparative religion and social anthropology. Often, it seemed they tended to assume that a lack of obvious religious practice also meant the absence of all forms of belief.

In 1873, the American gypsiologist, C. G. Leland, published a book entitled *The English Gypsies and Their Language.* Like all the authorities before him, he claimed:

> . . . the real Gipsy has, unlike all other men, unlike the lowest savage, positively no religion, no tie to a spiritual world, no fear of a future, nothing but a few trifling superstitions and legends, which in themselves indicate no faith whatever in anything deeply seated.[6]

Apparently, however, between the year 1873 and 1889, Leland had begun to concern himself more and more with the study of what he had previously called the "few trifling superstitions and legends" and had begun to see their great significance in

understanding the gypsy mind. In a paper read before the Congrès des Traditions Populaires held in Paris in 1889, Leland claimed that it had come to be his conviction that the gypsy people have always been the teachers of what is really the only practical belief of the poor—magic and folk medicine. "Very few," he claimed, "have any conception of the degree to which gypsies have been the colporteurs of . . . witchcraft."[7] Two years later in a book entitled *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling*, Leland published the results of many years of research into the beliefs of world gypsydom. It was a unique book reflecting remarkable scholarship. To substantiate his claim of the vital importance of his work, he argued:

> Gypsies . . . have done more than any race or class on the fact of the earth to disseminate among the multitude a belief in fortune-telling, magical or sympathetic cures, amulets and such small sorceries as now find a place in Folk-lore.[8]

Greatly concerned by the possible extinction which many native beliefs and practices of the gypsies were then facing, Leland saw himself as chronicler of their beliefs without necessarily attempting to develop any systematic theory about them. His book had a number of disadvantages, for while it claimed to be a study of gypsies in Europe, Asia and America, the vast majority of accounts dealt only with the Slavic gypsies. Gypsy morality and the closely associated concept of taboo were left unmentioned. Then, too, investigation into the gypsy rites of baptism, marriage and burial were left untouched by Leland. In short, his work was research not into gypsy beliefs and practices as a whole but into a very specific aspect of those beliefs practiced chiefly by the gypsies of eastern Europe. There has remained, then, a need for a more general study with full advantage taken of modern knowledge.

The first and most important question is, of course, in the

light of modern knowledge do gypsies actually have convictions of their own? The answer is quite simply and emphatically—yes. Whether these beliefs are original to the gypsy or have their origins from other people with whom they have come into contact is irrelevant at this stage of the investigation. The attempt to discover the nature of these beliefs is, however, a difficult problem. The fact that gypsies are spread throughout the world and are therefore influenced by many of the world's beliefs is perhaps the major complication.

Any discussion of gypsy beliefs and practices must first begin with a proper definition and distinction between the two terms "religious" and "magical." When the earliest writers spoke of gypsies as being nonreligious they had a variety of meanings in mind, ranging from non-Christian to totally amoral and unbelieving. A satisfactory definition of "religion" must then be agreed upon before proceeding further.

The practice of religion could, perhaps, be correctly defined as the reverent recognition, by act or thought, of some divine ruling power or powers that have influence on man and demand his obedience. Even under such a liberal definition as this, the noted modern authority on gypsy rites and ceremonies, E. O. Winstedt, would still have made the claim that the gypsy people are essentially nonreligious. Though Winstedt claimed that gypsies possess an active awareness of luck and superstition, he claimed in no sense could it be considered a religion. When it comes to an "actual religious sense," he once wrote, "they have none."

Magic, on the other hand, has been defined as a "highly specialized system limited in its operation and carefully restricted in its performance."[9] It differs from religion largely in that it lacks a transcendental and superior power to man. To say that magic is essentially a human art is not to say that the supernat-

ural plays an unimportant role. Indeed, the role of the supernatural is extremely important in magic, often more important than in some religions. The important difference, however, is that in magic the spirit world is under the direct supervision of man. By the performance of appropriate rites and ceremonies these spiritual powers can be turned to the practical purpose of man. This is not to say that the spirit world does not occasionally take its own initiative—among some peoples it often does. Whether or not man can perform a rite or ceremony which guarantees the return of the spiritual activity to human control is most important, for there lies the borderline between magic and religion. If man cannot, in some sense, guarantee the restoration of human control over this spiritual activity, then the borderline into religion has been crossed. On the other hand, if a guarantee of human domination over all spiritual activity can be made, the conviction falls well within the realm of magic.

On a world scale, gypsy beliefs and practices are heavily influenced by both magic and religion, with some groups being more heavily influenced by one than the other. In some cases their religious convictions may reflect a strong commitment to major world religions, while in other instances they are most apparent in their own cultic practices. An example of the former instance might be seen in the contemporary conversion of some French gypsies to Evangelical Protestantism. By contrast, the Slavic gypsy cult of Bibi, can be cited as evidence of what could be called a new indigenous gypsy religion. Evidence of religious conviction, however, is by no means universal among all gypsies.

There can be little doubt that the gypsies' nomadic habits have been important in discouraging the development of religious convictions. Nomadism in Europe and the Americas has, quite naturally meant that they never built religious buildings

which they could call their own. In India, for caste reasons, most temples are denied to them, while in the West, social disapproval has often excluded them from entrance to churches. As economic scavengers, they have rarely been able to travel in large numbers. This has made difficult the development of any authority determined to regularize or dogmatize religious beliefs. Constant movement in small numbers has also meant that any form of proselytizing by missionaries has been made extremely difficult. Historically, the gypsies moved over Eurasia in a comparatively short period of time. This meant that many of them made contact with a number of major world religions. It was their habit to adopt or reject any one of these religions as they traveled. At the time of their entrance into Europe, the inability to be religiously elastic in an age of religious dogmatism and reformation could have meant even worse persecution than that to which they were subjected. Such elasticity, so long developed as a protective mechanism, would seem to have discouraged many gypsies from adopting a definite conviction for any one specific religion. In most instances, gypsy religious beliefs tend to be syncretic, incorporating only those teachings or practices of world religious which are most complementary to their culture.

Magical belief and practice, on the other hand, is virtually universal. Though, admittedly, in practice it becomes extremely difficult to make arbitrary divisions between the magical and the religious in the case of the gypsy people, nevertheless the nature of their beliefs in various superstitions, taboos, myths, omens, and ghostlife is more suggestive of a magical emphasis than it is of a religious one. Gypsies possess an extremely active spirit world, which, if properly channeled, is thought to be of great practical use to them. Their spirit world is not only extremely active, it is also extremely complicated. This complication

is caused largely by the fact that it has been accumulated through contact with the beliefs of the many people among whom gypsies have lived.

If Frazer is to be accepted when he claimed that an "Age of Magic" preceded an "Age of Religion" when "man trusted solely in magic for the satisfaction of the wants which transcended his immediate cravings" it would seem that the gypsy is to some degree a throwback to that earlier age.[10]

It should be noted here, too, that as a persecuted nomadic people the practice of their magical beliefs in the form of occult activities, whether it was in the form of telling of fortunes or peddling of charms to nongypsies, required few or no props and gave considerable advantage to them over their enemies. The practice of the occult provided for the gypsies, on one hand, a seemingly endless source of financial opportunities, while on the other hand, created in the gorgio mind a respect and fear of the gypsy's supernatural powers.

The practice of these supernatural powers, or witchcraft, was regarded with awe by both gorgios and gypsies, and probably more than any other factor in the past, was an occasion of periodic meetings between gorgio and gypsy. The practitioners of witchcraft, the *chovihanis* [witches], serve the important function in gypsy society of being able to both bless and curse, heal or make sick. Equally important however, the chovihani is one who is respected for both wisdom and knowledge of magical beliefs and practices. It is the chovihani, for example, who has knowledge of the many social taboos which regulate gypsy life, as well as the many magically based social ceremonies such as baptism, marriage, or divorce.

Equally important and closely related to the practice of witchcraft is their practice of what could only be called the cult of the dead. The deceased, and everything relating to the deceased

is of fundamental importance to the vast majority of the world's gypsies. Death is a mystery which must be handled most cautiously if there is not to be an intrusion made by it into the affairs of the living. Consequently, we find that a people who in the popular image are jolly and carefree, tend rather to be a people with a most active sense of the morbid.

Then, too, among many groups of gypsies we find that the cult of the dead gives way to an even more horrifying cult of the vampire. The dead, more easily dissatisfied with their state among some groups of gypsies than others, on occasion find reason to leave their graves in order to act maliciously against the living. It is the fear of this development which gives rise to numerous magical rites and beliefs.

Among some gypsies, however, the depths of their convictions are not reached solely by such magical practices and concepts. Where there exists no common thread of religious belief among them, they do subscribe to a large variety of the world's great religions as well as a number of smaller cultic practices such as penis worship, fire worship, goddess worship, animal sacrifice and moon worship.

When considering the vast variety of gypsy magico-religious beliefs it is important to realize that down through the ages, as various improvisations have taken place, some of the most ancient of their convictions have been lost, others have been adapted to meet new needs and still others have continued to be held in the most orthodox and traditional fashion. Added to this have been the constant accretions of new ideas and practices, each undergoing the same process as their own native beliefs. This rich conglomeration of beliefs and practices, incorporating within it, as it does, many cultures belonging to various periods of history, provides a uniquely valuable panorama of world magic and religion.

If the gypsies have been so greatly influenced by gorgio society, they, in turn, have also made significant contributions to gorgio society. Even if it were possible to discard the gypsies' influence as exponents of music or dance, it would be impossible to ignore the influence of their magical practices and beliefs. From the time of their first arrival in Europe and the Americas, they immediately became regarded as authorities on occult matters. Throughout Europe, especially, gypsies practicing their magic encouraged belief in fortune telling, charms, and all sorts of medical cures. The magic lore of country people has for centuries been immeasurably enriched not only by the gypsy's own beliefs but also by those which he brought with him from elsewhere. Any occult bookshop will reveal the extent to which gypsies have been responsible for keeping the magical arts alive through the centuries. One authority once stated:

> Gypsies . . . have done more than any race or class on the face of the earth to disseminate among the multitude a belief in fortune-telling, magical or sympathetic cures, amulets and such small sorceries as now find a place in Folk-lore.[11]

Some of the rites practiced may be of interest only inasmuch as they are the practices of a people who have been so long surrounded in the popular mind by mythology and mystery, while others of their rites are greatly significant because of their influence on Western mythology. In the latter case, it is virtually impossible to determine the exact extent of this influence. Suffice it to say, however, that a great deal of evidence would seem to point to the fact that the migration of the gypsies into Europe carried with it an introduction or at least a major revival in European thinking of some of the most terrifying and horror-filled beliefs regarding the mysterious world of the dead. Such an image as this, of course, boldly contrasts with the

traditionally popular conception of the gypsies as a people given to frivolity and romanticism. Whatever the gypsies are, and wherever they may be, they are real people with real fears and superstitions, like all of us. As perhaps, befits a people, however, who are so close to nature, so given to nomadism, so utterly foreign to so many of the world's peoples, their fears and superstitions, their beliefs and rituals are more exotic and mysterious to our ears.

The question remains, however, are the strange beliefs, and extraordinary magical and religious practices of the gypsies only one of many mysteries concerning them or are they really the source of all those mysteries which have made them a hidden people?

CHAPTER FOUR

Witches
The evil eye
Curses
Medical cures
Charms
Love philters
Fortune telling

It is common among peoples who have a complex belief in magical practices that there be certain individuals who are set aside as expert practitioners. It is important that such experts not depend on any outside supernatural forces to work their magic but rather on their own occult powers.

Gypsies believe that among their own people there exist such individuals who are possessed of great power through their special knowledge and ability to work magic. Some believe that such individuals are agents of the Devil and, as such, do his evil will in the world. Most, however, seem to believe their power to come not so much from the Devil as from some other mysterious source of power.

Such individuals, commonly called witches, wizards or warlocks in gorgio society, are known as chovihanis by the gypsies. It is apparent that long before their movement into Europe the gypsies, even then a nomadic people accustomed to the wilder

and more cruel side of nature's behavior, required the services of the chovihani to improve their chances for survival. The Dravidian peoples of northern India, from whom the gypsies of the world are descended and to whom they remain closely related, make frequent use of such practitioners to cast spells, produce charms, and deliver curses on their enemies.

From the time of their first arrival in Europe, the chovihanis and the magical arts they practiced made a dramatic impact on gorgios, by often reviving practices and superstitions that had long fallen into disuse or disbelief. What one expert claims for England would, in fact, apply throughout the Continent:

> Historians have observed that there was a sudden revival of witchcraft and sorcery in the fifteenth century, and among the causes of this was no doubt the arrival of the gipsies. Some time towards the close of the fourteenth century this nomadic people arrived in Europe, probably from Asia, bringing with them magical practices which, in England, had long been concealed beneath a veneer of Christianity.[1]

The chovihani soon came to be consulted by gorgios for all manner of reasons, whether it be for fortune telling, spells, charms or other kinds of magical activities. This close association of the gypsies with the practice and indeed spread of belief in witchcraft did not long escape public notice by both government and Church authorities. Considerable evidence would seem to suggest that it was their occult practices more than any other habit which was the chief cause for such extensive persecution by government authorities. Gorgios, too, were punished for utilizing the services of chovihanis. As early as the sixteenth century, there exists documentary evidence of a gorgio being punished for the sin of consultation with a chovihani:

> Patrick Bodie, tailor, confessed that he made enquiry at the Egyptians for a gentlewoman's gown which as stolen out of his booth; and therefore, in respect of his consultation with

> witches, the bishop and session ordain him to compear before the pulpit on Sunday next, and there . . . confess his offence in presence of the congregation . . .[2]

Early historical accounts of chovihanis and their practices are, unfortunately, unavailable. Sufficient information to form a clear impression of gypsy witchcraft in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, does exist. From this information several important general facts can be derived. First, the role of the chovihani in gypsy society is, by nature, neither good nor evil. The role of the chovihani in itself is quite amoral. Second, while some chovihanis have had greater magical powers than others, all have the potential to work either good or evil with those powers which they possess. While some, for example, have become famous for the cures they have effected, others have become notorious for the bad fortune they have brought to others. Most chovihanis are capable of practicing both black and white magic.

Opinions vary considerably as to how chovihanis come into being. In some cases it is believed that they receive their vocation by inheritance, learning their craft from the time when they are young girls. While they are still in their childhood, either a water demon or earth demon will choose to have sexual intercourse with them while they are sleeping. It is after that that the girl will realize her magical powers and then proceed to gain proficiency in her craft. When she feels sufficiently accomplished, she announces the fact that she is a chovihani to her tribe. On occasion, this announcement has taken the form of sudden and irrational behavior which leads into a trance.

Among some groups of Indian gypsies it is believed that the chovihani has the power to steal by means of incantations the liver out of the body of a man without his knowing it. After proper preparation the chovihani will eat the liver and share it

with those whom she wishes to make into chovihanis like herself.

In many instances the true chovihani may best be recognized on the basis of physical attributes alone. Unlike the gorgio who believes witches to be women who have sold their souls to the Devil, the gypsy more often thinks of the chovihani in more general terms revealing, by the way, something of their oriental heritage. Chovihanis have been described as having eyes like a bird, with the corners of the eyes turned up like the point of a curved pointed knife. Their hair is often very straight but then curled at the ends. More generally speaking, such individuals are best recognized by any physical, mental, or behavioral attribute which is at wide variance from the norm of the group with whom they live.

Peculiar physical appearance, especially, is thought to be accompanied by extraordinary magical powers. An example of this might be seen in the use of the evil eye. Belief that the eye is the means by which spells are so often passed on to a victim, though widely held by many of the world's peoples, is especially widespread in India. It is said that in western India all witches whether they be gorgio or gypsy have the reputation for possessing the evil eye. The gypsy's eyes are normally darker and more brilliant than those of other peoples. Among some gypsies, however, this feature is even more intense than others. It requires little imagination to see how such individuals might be recognized as strangely different than others with a special power to work magic through the use of their eyes.

Extraordinary ugliness may also indicate that a person possesses the powers of a chovihani. One vivid description of a notorious chovihani would cause anyone to think twice before crossing her. She was:

[a] woman shrunken to mere skin and bone, a face blackened

> by years of sun and rain, a few straggling wisps of grey hair on an almost bald skull, and a face like some obscene old vulture, with two long yellow fangs overhanging the lower lip.[3]

Eccentric physical activity has also been important in allowing gypsies to recognize the chovihani in their midst. They have often been described as people with erratic body movements, given to muttering to themselves, violent activity, contortions of facial expressions and other strange patterns of behavior.

Like so many of the world's peoples, any type of misfortune, whether it be death or disease or any type of bad luck, is considered by the gypsies to be unnatural and probably caused by some great power. The same may be said for any mental or physical derangement in an individual, only here, in the case of the chovihani the power has actually possessed the victim.

To such extraordinary individuals the gypsies have always credited extensive and marvelous powers. They have been known to find anything which is lost, or cause anything they wish to disappear; they can start fires or stop them; they can unite lovers or separate them; they can cause disease or cure it; they can cause animals to become human or humans to become animals.

Perhaps the most frequently used power of the chovihani is that of mesmerism. Many tales are told of gypsies being arrested by the police, found guilty of the offense but then dismissed for no other reason than the presence of the chovihani at the trial.

In addition to the evil eye, one of the most common means by which a chovihani brings misfortune to people is the curse. In most instances she will utter such curses only at times of anger or frustration. Evidence for the use of premeditated curses is quite unusual although they were probably used in the past. Following are several examples of curses that have been recorded:

May thou become poor for thy life!

Might God grant that we devour all his money!

God grant that I break his neck so that I may not see him any more before my eyes!

God grant that thy son dies, that thou countest out sweet money for the coffin and pall, and that thou preparest a funeral feast, so that I get golden money for myself![4]

Because there is often a lapse of time between the utterance of the curse and any effect which it might have on the victim, it is, of course, sometimes difficult to determine its efficacy. It is probable that only those curses which, through either coincidence or supernatural activity, are efficacious are remembered later. Curses which fail to be effective would not deserve remembrance.

The curse may bring with it a variety of penalties, ranging from bad luck for a short period of time to the extreme of sudden death of the victim. Many stories are told of the curses which were effective. One tale is told of a young gypsy woman who refused to marry the son of a chovihani. For this the young woman was cursed to have a life of misery. When she married another man and had two children by him, one was born blind and the other paralytic. Both she and her husband died at an early age. More spectacular is the story told of an old chovihani who, when once attending a fair, was rudely insulted by a gorgio jockey. Angered by this, she cursed him to be dead within twenty-four hours. The next day the jockey rode in a race, was thrown off his horse and had his skull crushed by a hoof. Sometimes the curse has had the peculiar effect of producing a type of insanity in the victim until such a time as it is removed by some other practitioner of magic. The story is told of an old Russian gypsy woman who was thrown off the estate of a nobleman. Cursing him as she left, he was immediately

attacked by fits which forced him to run around on all fours, completely out of control and barking like a dog.

Such curses as these are especially interesting since they bear a relationship to the professed power on the part of some chovihanis to practice lycanthropy. Many tales are told of their ability to change not only themselves but also other people into animals. Rumanian chovihanis have been known to change their foes into trained bears. English chovihanis have claimed the power to transform both themselves and others into dogs or black cats. Many other instances exist of lycanthropic activity where the subjects of curses have found themselves transformed suddenly into horses, pigs, tigers, chickens and other animals.

The enormous power of the chovihani, however, is often used for more constructive purposes, as for instance, when she functions as a *drabengro* [a medicine man or healer].

For most gypsies any kind of bad health or sickness is considered unnatural. Illness is often thought to be caused not by natural causes but rather by some kind of evil supernatural interference with the normal healthy functioning of the body. When there is illness, the chovihani may be consulted in order to find the best method to be used in order to rid the sick person of the effects of such evil influence.

On some occasions, cures have been managed through the practice of a rite of exorcism. Though evidence of such rites being practiced is comparatively rare, it is fairly widespread in its practice. In such cases it is customary for the chovihani to gradually work herself up into a kind of frenzied state by flinging herself about and uttering numerous incantations over the sick person. The pitch of the physical exertions and the utterances is increased until finally a climax is reached with the chovihani often collapsing into a state of unconsciousness on the ground. At this point the exorcism is thought to be complete.

Though such rites of exorcism are comparatively rare today, it is likely they were far more common in the past. Most gypsies, while they attribute their illness to an evil cause, and therefore expect to find a magical cure, find the use of medicinal charms is far more practical. Such charms, or at least the directions how to make them, are often provided by the chovihani.

The gypsies' knowledge of the functioning of the human body is extremely rudimentary. A few individuals, however, have a considerable knowledge of the use of medicinal herbs. Such herbs, however, should not be regarded in any way as magical charms since often their use is largely justified in light of modern medical knowledge. Through the centuries their knowledge of herbal cures has grown to be very great. Handed down from one generation to another, the knowledge of such remedies has become perhaps their greatest resource of true scientific knowledge.

Other cures used, however, must be considered to be of a magical nature. As is common among many peoples, their medical pharmacopoeia often consists of things or substances which are repulsive, being offensive to either sight, taste or feeling. Consequently, we find a liberal use made of saliva, urine or excreta as well as putrid or rotten things in general in the composition of medicinal charms. The underlying logic behind such use may very well be to make the evil spirit causing the affliction as uncomfortable as possible in the victim, thereby causing him to vacate the body.

Some other cures, however, must be considered to be charms, since the logic behind their use is based on the ancient concept that plants or minerals signify by their external appearance the medical use for which they are intended.

A stone, for instance, may be crushed into a potion and ordered to be drunk because it more or less resembles the ailing

part of the body. A plant may be used as a medical charm if either it or its flower has the same color as the affliction of the illness. Parts of animals such as the skin of an eel or a snake is considered to be an especially effective remedy for rheumatism, sprains, or stiff joints.

Closely related to such sympathetic magic is symbolic transference, where the chovihani will hope to transfer by the use of her charms the sickness of one individual to either another living thing or an object. Instances exist, for example of gypsies wearing either spiders or woodlice in a bag around their necks. As the insects gradually die the affliction will leave the body of the wearer. A cure for asthma is to catch a trout alive, breathe into its mouth three times and then throw it back into the water. To cure a swollen knee, Slavic gypsies will stick wood chips into a fresh egg which is then wrapped up and hung in a room. As the egg diminishes in size it is expected that the swollen knee of the afflicted person will also diminish. Chovihanis have also become famous for their curing of warts. A popular remedy is to take a small stone resembling the wart, rub it on the afflicted spot and then throw it into a body of water. Many tales are told, too, of mental disease being cured by taking the brain of an animal, rubbing it against the afflicted person and then performing a more or less elaborate rite of disposal of the brain with the intention, of course, that the affliction be transferred to it.

Magical charms and remedies are also used for the purpose of preventive medicine. British gypsies have been known to carry and occasionally suck a hedgehog's foot to prevent toothache. Continental gypsies protect their babies from childhood diseases by having them wear necklaces of black nightshade, or strings of coral beads strung with pieces of red cotton or wool. Slavic gypsies are known to have their children wear antique gold coins in order to ward off tonsillitis.

Many of the charms and remedies used by the world's gypsies depend far less on any concept of magic than they do on simple superstition. There seems to be no medical or magical justification, for instance, in the practice of eating dormice to cure whooping cough, or the eating of bacon fat, pepper and vinegar to cure croup. The simple power of suggestion may be the most important justification for the practice. Among the Indian gypsies, for example, chovihanis have been known to work effective cures for swollen gums and dental cavities by applying a straw to the root of the troublesome tooth, repeating a number of colorfully unrepeatable incantations, and thereby removing from the tooth one or more living maggots. The effectiveness of many of these cures can often be seen to depend upon the knowledge and reputation of the chovihani who either prescribes or performs them.

Magical charms, however, are not limited in their function to medical purposes alone. The chovihani is also the source of other types of charms for other purposes, usually to either maintain good luck or else act as a preventative against bad luck. Such charms may be either placed in the home of a gypsy to prevent evil from entering the house, or else worn to protect the individual. Examples of the former type of charm might be seen in the widespread use of elderberry branches, leaves or even growing bushes to protect a house from evil spirits which find them an invincible barrier to entrance. Among some Continental gypsies the exhibition of a horse's skull or the burial of animal bones under a doorstep are considered to be effective charms to prevent the entrance of ghosts or evil spirits.

Perhaps the best known charm which gypsies use in their homes is the horseshoe. As a good-luck charm it has found its way into gorgio homes and mythology. Several reasons may be found for its use. First, gypsies have a very close relationship to horses since in many cases their livelihood and survival have

depended upon them. Consequently, the horse, or anything associated with it, is usually associated with good fortune for the gypsy. Beside this, however, the horseshoe is traditionally made of iron, a metal associated in the minds of many peoples throughout the world as a preventative against evil spirits. Important as these two justifications are, there is yet another justification for its use as a good-luck charm in a legend told by the German gypsies. It is said that at a time long ago there lived four evil demons who called themselves Unhappiness, Bad Luck, Bad Health and Death. One day, while out riding, a young gypsy chief was attacked by the demon Bad Luck. The chief fled from the demon, but as he was doing so his horse lost a shoe, hitting the demon and immediately killing it. The chief picked up the shoe and placed it outside his caravan. When the three surviving demons heard of Bad Luck's death they became very angry and set out for the chief's caravan in order to kill him. Arriving at the caravan, they saw the shoe which had killed Bad Luck hanging outside the door. Remembering that the horse had three other shoes, they immediately became very frightened for their lives and fled. From that day on, the horseshoe came to be regarded as a preventative charm against the four demons of Unhappiness, Bad Luck, Bad Health and Death.

Charms may also be worn or carried by individuals for the same purposes. Gypsy women very often wear charms in the forms of necklaces, while the men very often carry them in their pockets. While there are far too many different objects which might be used as charms to discuss them in great detail, there are several categories into which they can be classified. There should, for example, be a definite distinction drawn between those "charms" which are peddled to gorgios and those which the gypsies themselves use. Many of the so-called

gypsy charms which are sold at fairs or through door-to-door hawking are often manufactured articles to which few gypsies would attach any real magical value. Many of these charms have been specially manufactured for the purpose of deceiving the gullible gorgio. In some cases, they are no more than toys which have been purchased at local dime or drug stores.

Generally speaking, the most powerful good-luck charms for the gypsies are those which are not manufactured in any way but rather in their natural form resemble a man-made object or some other easily recognizable form. Rocks, for example, which contain a fossil, or are shaped like an animal or appear to have the markings of a human face are considered to be especially powerful charms.

Parts of animals, too, have special significance and power. Parts of the hedgehog, an animal, like the horse, of which gypsies are especially fond, whether it be the bones or the feet have often been carried for good luck. Among women, ornaments made of stag horn, cowrie shells and coral are considered to be especially powerful sources of good luck when either worn or sewn into garments.

Many times the chovihani has been approached to provide a charm for the purpose of either bringing back a lover or else gaining the love of a loved one. In some cases when a girl wants to have her absent lover return to her, the chovihani may tell her to sleep with an acorn or daisy root under her pillow, or in other cases to gather a bouquet of marsh mallows, placing them in a vase either outside her door or in a window.

Other love charms, those which are intended to elicit the love of a loved one, are far more sexual in their composition. As with many peoples, charms which are intended to win love are composed largely of ingredients which we most closely associate with the human sexual organs. Consequently we find in

almost all gypsy love potions such elements as urine, menstrual blood, semen, saliva, pubic hairs and perspiration. It is a common belief among many gypsies that love may be transferred to another by the process of causing them to either eat or come into contact with such elements from the body of the one who wishes to gain that love. In the case of a girl who is hoping to win the love of a boy, very often this is achieved by gathering various roots or leaves thought to have an aphrodisiac effect, and mixing them into a paste with her own menstrual blood and then putting it into the food of the boy she desires.

Among some Continental gypsies a potion is made from the ashes of a burnt piece of the girl's dress, which has been saturated with her perspiration and has some hair still adhering to it, and then given to the loved one without his knowledge.[5] In other instances pastes or potions may be made out of any one or all of the sexual ingredients and mixed with various fruit seeds, presumably to suggest growth, for the consumption of the loved one. There can be little doubt that such disgusting concoctions have often brought a response on the part of the loved one which could be described as being more digestive in nature than emotional.

Probably the most common image which most gorgios have of the gypsy chovihani is that of fortune teller. In this role she has gained a remarkable reputation as a star gazer, palm reader, interpreter of tarot cards and crystal-ball mystic. The gorgios, no doubt largely influenced by the gypsies' mysterious origins, their peculiar habits, their closeness to nature and the nomadism which guaranteed lack of familiarity as well as a type of "here today—gone tomorrow" living situation, did much to enhance the gypsies' reputation as diviners of fortune in gorgio society.

Within her own society, the chovihani is of chief importance

primarily because of the financial remuneration which she receives for her services from gorgios. Only on rare occasions have chovihanis been respected for their prophetic abilities by their own people. If, however, she has earned such respect and has gained a reputation for her wisdom and magical powers, she may earn leadership in her society.

It is important that there be a careful distinction made, from the very beginning, between the practice of divination or fortune telling as a magical art and the use of intuition, cunning, and basic information consisting of no more than a racket of clever deception. It is quite true that gypsy fortune tellers are not beyond taking the money of simple-minded and credulous gorgios who have an unquestioning belief in their farseeing and mysterious occult powers for seeing into the future. Such deception, however, has little to do with genuine gypsy convictions. Most such "fortune tellers" indulge in little more than a rather clever character analysis largely dictated by their client's response to what she is saying, as well as the appearance of the clothes, their manner of speech and so forth. What is important is the chovihani's power of prophecy, which the gypsies themselves believe in and respect as a form of supernatural power.

The practice of divination among gypsies is largely objective by nature. The chovihani's function is not to effect the future but to function as an objective channel through which the future can be seen. If that future, however, by some chance should present difficulties for the person whose future is being told, she would be willing to intervene by using her other magical powers in order to overcome the difficulties. In practice, however, there may be only a fine line between a prophecy of misfortune and a curse. The story is told of a woman who once refused to have her fortune told by an old gypsy. The old gypsy, offended at

being rebuffed, shouted a prediction that the woman's husband would one day be executed and that she, herself, would not die in bed. It is apparently a matter of record that many years later the woman's husband was hanged for murder and she was found burned to death in her home.

Gypsy divination for gorgios, without the use of a device, is very rare. Almost without exception crystal balls, tea leaves, the palm or tarot cards are used to facilitate divination. The use of crystal balls or tea leaves is usually more simple and nontechnical than other means, often depending largely on the imagination of the seer. The use of palmistry or tarot cards is, on the other hand, scientific in nature and requires considerable proficiency on the part of the diviner.

Palmistry is probably the most common form of divination used by the gypsies. It is probably also the form which gorgios most closely associate with their telling of fortunes. Evidence would seem to clearly point to the fact that gypsies, at least at the time of their fifteenth-century arrival in Europe, were not the original source of the introduction of palmistry to Europe. Evidence for its practice in Europe exists long before that time. It is very possible, however, that the origins for the practice may still be found through some earlier influence from India. It is conceivable, then, that palmistry may be a gypsy invention which was introduced to Europe through the mediation of some culture carrier long before the time when the gypsies themselves arrived in Europe. One way or the other, it is clear that gypsies from the time of their major entrance into Europe were important exponents of palmistry. Before that time it had been looked upon as a science, tolerated to a certain degree by the Church, and practiced by very few. Under gypsy influence palmistry became far less scientific at the same time that it became far more widespread and popular, coming as it did to be used on

any country lane or at any county fair. In many of these instances it was used merely as a device of deception, thus earning for it the condemnation of the Church by the close of the century. The bad reputation of deception and dishonesty which the gypsies gave to palmistry has forever earned the invective of those gorgios who to this day claim the practice to be scientific in nature. Such harsh judgments should, however, be moderated to a certain degree when it is recalled that gypsies were responsible in at least two instances for the initial instruction of two of the greatest contemporary authorities on palmistry, Benham and D'Arpentigny.

A combination of both chiromancy and chirology, palmistry is based on the belief that certain parts of the body have, in some sense, a form of independence. The hair, the teeth, the nails, and the hands have all been thought by some peoples to have a nature of their own. Among most seers both the palm and the fingers have significance in divination. Fingers are interpreted according to their digit and to which hand they belong. Traditionally, gypsies have always placed great weight on the importance of the thumb above the other fingers. No doubt the thumb's uniqueness and its counterrelationship to the other fingers have a great deal to do with this. Another factor may be the special power which thumbs from corpses are believed to have as a magical charm among many tribes. Interpretation of the palm itself depends largely on reading the lines of the palm and evaluating the relationship which the various lines have with each other and with the fingers.

The use of tarot cards for the purpose of divination is also traditional as a gypsy custom. As the probable forerunner of our modern playing cards, the tarot has been considered by some to be the compendium of gypsy philosophy and religion, or in other instances the Bible of the occult beliefs. Though

such claims may seem to many to be rather excessive, it is true that to the gorgio it might seem that the gypsies' long-time association with cards would reveal a more than average interest in, and commitment to them. The fact, however, that they rarely use such cards in their own magical practices would seem to suggest that they are not as important as some have suggested in the past.

A tarot pack consists of seventy-eight gaily decorated cards marked with a number of archaic symbols. The cards are divided into the Major Arcana, twenty-two initiation pictures of allegorical persons, and the Minor Arcana, fifty-eight cards of four suits. Bearing close resemblances to the conventional playing cards, each card has its own astrological, alchemical, numerological and philosophical meaning in relation to the others. It is rare for a gypsy to possess the entire pack; those missing are simply filled out with ordinary playing cards. A truly accurate and fluent interpretation of such a complex system usually requires many years of experience to gain proficiency.

There are, of course, many different methods which are used for interpreting the tarot cards. The best-known method directs that a large upside-down triangle be formed of thirty-three cards. The first card drawn from the pack is placed in the center and then eleven cards are used to form the right side of the triangle going from the top down. A second series of eleven cards forms the left side of the triangle going from the bottom to the top. A third series of eleven cards forms the top of the upside-down triangle and are laid out from the right to the left. The top side of the triangle represents the present, the right side represents the future, and the left side represents the past of the client whose fortune is being told. Next, thirty-three cards, or three more sets of eleven cards are laid out counter-

clockwise to form a full circle around the triangle. The remaining set of eleven cards are then placed under the first card drawn in the center of the triangle. By a complex method of analysis the chovihani then proceeds to interpret the cards as they bear relationship to each other and to the client whose fortune is being told.

Much has been said in the ongoing debate with regard to whether or not the tarot pack has gypsy origins. It would seem that at best the question is still unresolved. Some authorities claim that the gypsies brought the first tarot cards with them to Europe in the fifteenth century and then recreated them and their characters from oriental designs to medieval ones in order to better serve western needs. Others claim that the tarot pack existed long before their arrival, as early as the thirteenth century in Europe and thus could not have had their origins from such a source. The only possible resolution of these two arguments would seem to be the possibility that, as with palmistry, the origin of the tarot was oriental, having arrived in Europe about the thirteenth century, only to be later adapted to suit fifteenth-century popular art and characters later. It is this form in which they have come down to us today. The origin of the word tarot is likewise a mystery. Some have said that the word represents an anagram of the word Rota, which means a wheel, possibly the wheel of fortune. Some gypsies claim that the word comes from the Romany name for Thoth—Hermes, Tehutio or Tro—who is said to be the god of the cards.

Though the use of palmistry and tarot cards are by far the most common methods of divination used by chovihanis in telling the fortune of gorgios, many other methods have been used at one time or the other. Crystal gazing, for example, thought to be a common practice among gypsies, is relatively rare. With this method of divination, the crystal ball is stared into until it

reportedly becomes milky or misty and then grows steadily darker until there is a separation in the darkness and a vision appears in the glass. By this method it is claimed one can visualize events which are happening at the same time even at a distance or in some cases visualize events which will happen in the future. The same methods have been used to divine by staring into a jewel, a jug of water, a glass bowl, an inkwell, and more commonly among the Slavic gypsies, mirrors. The Transylvanian gypsies, for example, claim to possess mirrors that when looked into for a prolonged period of time will show all things, even the activities of the dead.

Slavic gypsies also use beans as a method of divination. The chovihani will ask her client to provide her with a coin which she will then put with dried beans in her hands. Murmuring various incantations she will rub the beans and coin together in her hands and then open her hands in order to deduce from their falling positions the fortune of the client. Closely related to this, is the practice of throwing beans on a drum on which have been inscribed three black and three white circles; the relative position of the beans in each case determines the nature of the client's future.

The Turkish gypsies are said to use live animals in divination. Dyeing doves in bright colors, they train them to pick out with their beaks little messages of fortune which have been written on paper.

Innumerable are the stories of those instances when a gypsy's prediction has come true. It remains only for us to determine how many predictions, by contrast, failed to be realized, or how important the factor of fatalism or wish-fulfillment was, in helping the prediction to come to reality.

It is well known, for example, that a gypsy foretold the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria, together with the

following events of World War I. Was this an example of an unusually keen insight into the contemporary situation on the part of the gypsy or was some other force involved?

The story is told of a famous Hollywood starlet who was told by a gypsy that she would meet death by drowning. Taking the prediction seriously, she learned to swim expertly, became heavily insured, refused to accept invitations to swimming parties and would never swim alone. Little did she know that she would meet her death in her own home by drowning in a bathtub! Was this an example of some kind of fatalistic acceptance on the part of the actress or was some extraordinary and mysterious power to see the future involved?

Considering the fact that there have been so many stories told of the unique gifts which the gypsy chovihani has for predicting the future by use of palmistry, tarot card reading, crystal gazing or other such means, it is a great curiosity to find that such methods of divination are used almost exclusively for the sake of foretelling the future of gorgios. There is next to no evidence that chovihanis have ever used any of these methods of divination among themselves. Nor, for that matter, is there any evidence that gypsies have ever sought knowledge of the future the way that gorgios do when they approach a fortune teller.

Gypsies do indeed have chovihanis who have stood out for their remarkable prophetic abilities but their number has been far smaller than perhaps one would expect considering the large number of so-called gypsy fortune tellers.

Two such chovihanis stand out in the twentieth century. The first was Urania Boswell. Born in 1852, and dying in 1933, she spent much of her life exercising her remarkable fortune-telling powers for gorgios. Her powers of divination, however, impressed not only gorgios but also her own people. She

seemed to have a special sensitivity to impending danger or death. Not only predicting accurately the time of her son's and her brother's deaths, she also foresaw her own death nine years before it took place. The high points of her prophetic career were reached when she predicted accurately not only the year of Queen Victoria's death, four years before it actually happened, but also the development of airplanes, submarines and radio.

A second chovihani of apparently remarkable powers of divination was Marta Lovell. Marta, grave and silent even as a young girl, showed herself to have remarkable powers for prediction of death and other misfortune. She was often known to predict illnesses and the time of the deaths of those whom she met or even the loved ones of those whom she knew. She was able also to accurately predict the time and place of her own death. Both of these chovihanis came to be widely respected among their own people as possessors of true prophetic abilities.

It is highly probable that in the past the chovihani played a more important role in the functioning of the cultic beliefs and practices of gypsy society than they do today. Nomadism, and the necessity of traveling in small groups in totally foreign lands, has been important in breaking down the authority of the chovihani. Contact with highly developed religions has also weakened the role of magic and with it the influence of the chovihani. The result is that, today, true chovihanis are rare, though their craft still has its occasional practitioners in the form of the fortune teller whom one encounters at any amusement park or on any country lane.

It is important to observe that among gypsies the magical crafts are almost, without exception, practiced by women. Evidence of the chovihani in gypsy society far outweighs that of

the chovihano. The gorgio impression of a gypsy fortune teller is, without exception, that of a woman and not a man. Reasons for this, no doubt, could be found in a general discussion of the emotional, psychological, and spiritual makeup of the female. Among gypsies, however, a more specific reason can be found in the sexual and social dichotomy of their society.

Among gypsies the male is the protector of the group institution. It is he who makes decisions, through the elders, pertaining to the welfare of the group with special regard to its cultural and material survival. The female, on the other hand, more influenced by her own biological function, concerns herself almost entirely with her own conjugal family. Men think of women as being dominated by the desire to help themselves, their children or perhaps their husbands, but having little interest in the welfare of the society as a whole. As such, the woman's interests often fall in direct conflict with those of the men. Placing the family welfare before that of the group, the woman is regarded as being antisocial and therefore ultimately dangerous to the welfare of the society. This basic suspicion of the antisocial nature of the female is the basis of the belief in the chovihani. The chovihani is looked upon as a natural, if extreme, development of the antisocial role which the woman holds in society. As women either show extraordinary attributes or else become old they may become chovihanis in the eyes of society. When the same attributes are recognized in the man, they become not chovihanos but rather highly respected elders of the society. It would appear that this antisocial role which women are thought to play in gypsy society is not confined to gypsies alone but indeed has important representation in even the most sophisticated of gorgio societies. As such, and wherever it can be found it is a social phenomenon closely related to that of witchcraft.

CHAPTER FIVE

Taboos against women
Sexual taboos
Food taboos
Theft taboos

In the primitive mind it is only a short step from the concept of the antisocial to that of the unclean, or the forbidden. Evidence for this among gypsies can be seen in many taboos which are enforced to protect the male from, among other things, excessive contact with the female. Through the years, it is true that many taboos have fallen into disuse among gypsies while the observance of others is definitely in decline. This development is to be expected as gypsies come more and more under the influence of modern society. Despite this, however, it is not unusual to find many different groups rigorously observing traditional taboo regulations.

Mokadi, or in some dialects, *magerdo*, *marami*, *mahrime*, is the Romany word used to indicate that certain actions or things are forbidden, or taboo. It has been defined by some to mean unclean, but this definition should not be taken too literally in all instances of mokadi. In fact, the word can be applied in a

number of major instances. One major category of mokadi regulations applies to a large set of taboos that are either directly or indirectly related to a fear of contamination from women. A second category concerns itself with sexual taboos. A third category deals with those actions or things which are considered to be dirty or unhygienic. A fourth category has for its purpose the discouraging of socially disruptive actions, especially theft. In actual practice, an action which is mokadi may fit into more than one of these categories.

What is certain is that in all cases of mokadi, the power which causes it to be enforced is based primarily on a fear of its violation that can only be described as essentially magical. The individual who violates a mokadi regulation exposes himself to dangerous powers of evil and destruction which are so intense that even his own family withdraws from him in fear of their safety. Such an individual becomes, in a manner of speaking, infected with evil and can be cleansed, and eventually readmitted to the safety of his society only by making some type of prescribed amends for the wrong he has done.

One of the most common categories of taboos are those which are to some extent associated with women. In the past, especially, the gypsy woman has had many of her actions severely restricted by mokadi regulations. Among most of the world's gypsies, women to varying degrees are considered mokadi from the age of puberty until after menopause. Only young girls and older women are considered free from such regulations. In traditional tribes, therefore, there are a large variety of actions which a woman may take which can make her mokadi, as well as other women or men with whom she may come into contact. Most frequently, this "contamination" may involve a woman's husband, thereby giving him the same antisocial status in society that is hers by virtue of her womanhood.

Logically, punishment for such offenses may mean exclusion from gypsy society for any time up to a lifetime.

Though, as has been said there are many ways in which the mokadi code may be broken, many of these violations have to do with eating and the preparation of food. In this case contamination may result whether or not there is any actual contact with the food. Often a thing becomes mokadi simply because a woman has been near it. Eating utensils, for instance, such as dishes or cooking implements, become mokadi simply if a woman were to walk over them. The food contained within these dishes also becomes mokadi. Whenever this happens not only the food but also all the utensils are destroyed immediately in order to prevent their accidental use in the future. This taboo has been extended sometimes to include even the tablecloth, or expensive pots and pans.

Consistent with this taboo is the regulation against women walking over a stream which is used for drinking water. Among the most traditional families, if this were to happen the water was thereafter considered defiled and unusable. Quite naturally, the observance of this taboo has caused women much inconvenience in the past by requiring that they walk a great distance to avoid a stream which might lie in their path.

If a woman's stepping over water or food makes it unclean, her actual contact with it may make it even more so. One of the more interesting taboos of this type is the one which forbids women to touch raw meat with their hands. In fact, in some strictly orthodox families it has been forbidden for women to come into contact in any way with red meat. Even if the contact were accidental, such families have considered the meat inedible. If there is any logic at all behind this taboo, it is likely that it is an extension of an older and less restrictive taboo which forbids women from handling red meat during their period of

menstruation. Possibly it is the association in the gypsy mind of raw meat and menstrual blood (considered in itself highly mokadi) which is the foundation of the taboo.

In some cases the taboo against female contact has been so extreme as to forbid a woman from using the same eating utensils as a man. Generally this regulation has applied only to drinking cups, but evidence would seem to suggest that in days gone by the taboo extended to include virtually all dishes. It is probable, then, that men and women, at one time may have had separate sets of dishes for their own use.

This fear of pollution by female touch will often extend to include even the clothing a woman wears. Among some gypsies it is a strict regulation that a woman must wear a white apron when preparing a meal. In such cases, it is believed that the touch of a woman's dress will pollute not only the food, but also the crockery and cooking implements. In such cases everything which has come into contact with the dress must immediately be destroyed in order to avoid contamination of the men. In the same ways, for example, among the Polish gypsies, if an article of women's clothing were to touch an article of man's clothing, as, for instance, if she were to sit upon it, the man would have no choice but to destroy it immediately in order to avoid the taboo associated with such actions. Among certain tribes of Russian gypsies, the taboo is so strictly observed that even such things as scissors and needles used in making or mending clothes must be kept separate, according to whether they were used on women's or men's clothes.

Mokadi regulations also, quite naturally, deal with the matter of washing clothes. In some families it has long been considered taboo to wash men's and women's clothes together. In such instances there is one basin for the washing of men's clothes and an entirely different one for women's clothing.

Among certain groups of American gypsies the women's basin is kept hidden away where no one might touch it inadvertently and thus become contaminated. In some groups it is considered taboo for men even to see women washing their own clothes.

Deportment of women has been another concern of the mokadi regulations. In the past, there were specific sitting postures for women depending on whether they were married or unmarried. Single women were to sit with their legs crossed and their feet underneath them, while married women might also sit with their feet straight out in front of them, provided that they did not separate their legs. Likewise, there were regulations prohibiting a woman from standing to wash herself in such a way that she would have to stoop and thereby expose her hips. In the same way, it was forbidden for a woman to pass in front of a sitting man with her hips close to his face. One last mokadi regulation dealing with a woman's deportment was concerned with her hair. Among some gypsy families it was once mokadi for a woman to let her hair down in the presence of men, no matter how closely related they were to her. It is possible that the origin of this taboo can be found in the custom of gypsy women letting their hair down at childbirth in the belief that it will facilitate delivery. Letting the hair down, then, would serve to remind the men of a condition in their women which they would consider to be highly mokadi, and therefore dangerous to their own safety.

It can be seen, then, that all those things which one most associates with femininity, whether it be food preparation, biological behavior, clothing, modest appearance, and even long hair, are all in some way included with the mokadi regulations. It is thus not surprising to find that that most feminine of all actions, childbirth, is the one most subject to mokadi regulations. It is at childbirth and the period following it that the

male feels under the greatest danger of contamination from the female.

Among certain groups of Hungarian gypsies, the rigors of taboo regulations begin during pregnancy. Women, for example, during this period must never yawn without covering their mouths, or stare at anything which is strange or peculiar in appearance. They must also remember not to kiss the face of one who is dead, as at a funeral. Any of these actions might cause the unborn baby to be born abnormal.

Among many groups special regulations begin for the pregnant mother as early as six weeks before the birth of her baby. It is customary, for instance, among the house-dwelling Slavic gypsies for the mother to be confined to bed during this time. The area of her bed is covered with cloth, and she is seen by nobody except her husband and female relatives, who also bring food to her. She is also provided with her own set of dishes since this is a time in which she is considered to be highly unclean.

Among caravan-dwelling gypsies it is more customary to isolate the woman closer to the time of birth. In such instances the woman is often given a small tent located some distance from the rest of the camp. Allowed to remain there alone, her food is brought to her by a female relative and served on a special set of dishes provided for the occasion. From this time until well after the birth, she is not to be seen by any men including her husband. In many instances in the past, because of lack of advanced warning or the difficulty of providing such an arrangement, the mother has given birth without such comforts. In virtually all cases, however, because the act of birth is considered so taboo, the mother has chosen to go off into a field, or a barn or some other remote location to have her child rather than expose her tribe to a violation of mokadi. Very

often the mother has had to look after the act of the birth of her child completely unassisted. For gypsy women to help her at such a time would make them and those with whom they came into contact just as mokadi as the mother. Because of the dangers involved in this, occasionally gorgio midwives have been hired to assist in the birth, or, as is coming to be more and more the custom, the mothers enter a hospital.

Following the birth of a child both the mother and baby are considered to remain highly mokadi for varying periods of time. Generally speaking, this period may last from three days to three weeks, depending on individual group customs. During this period it is customary for the woman to have no male company, including her husband. Among Rumanian gypsies this particular taboo is so strict that the woman will attempt to hide herself if there is some danger of being seen by a man. Women may visit the mother during this period but it is considered mokadi for them to either touch the mother or the baby. During this time and sometimes even beyond, female relatives have the responsibility of cooking for the woman's family. In the past, even with the conclusion of the appointed time of isolation the woman would be expected to wear gloves when preparing food and might not prepare anything which would require kneading.

During this period the woman continues to use the set of dishes given to her before the birth of her child. Then, at the conclusion of this time, she will destroy them and anything else with which she has come into close contact such as bedding, clothes, food, and, in the past, even the tent itself, if one had been used. She is then free, as is done in many countries, to conclude her isolation by going to the local church to be absolved from her "uncleanliness."

Among many gypsies, the baby is also mokadi for varying

periods of time. Among various groups of American gypsies, for example, the father will not touch, let alone kiss or fondle his baby until it is at least three weeks old. It is considered equally taboo for the father to witness the washing of babies or even such personal things as diapers.

When the child emerges from babyhood, whether it be a boy or a girl, it is not subject to such strong taboos. A young girl can associate with both men and women without being considered a source of contamination. Her clothes can be washed with those of either men or women, but customarily with the former. The boy's clothes are usually washed with those of the men. In the case of the boy as well as the girl, mokadi regulations apply to them only when they reach puberty.

Once the girl reaches the age of menstruation, all the taboos of full womanhood begin to apply to her. Among many families the mokadi regulations during the time of a woman's menstruation are especially strict. In some instances the woman may not work or attend either family or social meetings. In special circumstances such as weddings or funerals an exception is made to this rule if she wraps herself heavily and remains standing throughout the ceremony. During her period a woman may not cook or touch food intended for men, nor may she have sexual intercourse, embrace her husband or even sleep with him. In some instances, as among some groups of American gypsies, it is taboo for a menstruating woman to shake hands or even speak with a man. The most orthodox believe that it is mokadi even to make any verbal reference to a menstrual condition. Instances are known of men forbidding their wives to have anything to do with food preparation for a matter of weeks after overhearing them speak of their disability.

Gypsy sexual morality reveals a wide variance of taboos and

practices. Contrary to the popular image, most gypsies, especially in the past, have always practiced a very strict code of sexual behavior. Any variation from those rules made the offender mokadi for an indefinite period of time. In the past, the rules of conduct have been so strict that even the accidental overhearing by a man of a woman discussing her sexual functions was sufficient to make him mokadi.

There has been, in the past, very little evidence of either prostitution or promiscuity among gypsies. Marriage has generally come at an early age and has been considered to be for life. Generally speaking, any sexual activity outside the marriage relationship has brought with it severe penalties.

As with many of the world's peoples, the gypsies practice a double standard of sexual morality, depending on whether the offense has been committed by a man or a woman. A woman's punishment is by far the more severe, depending on the degree of defilement. Traditionally expected to remain a virgin until her marriage, she is expected to remain absolutely faithful to her husband throughout her life or else face punishments that range from temporary exclusion to death.

Among certain Slavic tribes, if a bridegroom discovered his bride was not a virgin, he was entitled to strip her of most of her clothing, put her backwards on a donkey, and take her back to her parents.

Husbands, too, have been known to strip their wives naked, when discovering their infidelity, and chase them out in the open as a means of showing their shame and dishonor. As a part of such a punishment, it has been common for the husband to cut off his wife's hair, or even shave her head, before chasing her. Her period of shame, punishment and uncleanliness, then, continued until hair grew out.

Such punishments as these have been the least which women

have had to suffer for breaking the taboo against adultery. In the past, more severe and permanent physical punishments have been practiced. Among Serbian gypsies, for example, unfaithful wives were first beaten and then dragged behind caravans. Russian gypsies have been known to brand their wives' bodies and faces with burning wood. Rumanian gypsies have practiced the slitting or cutting off of their women's noses, or their breasts before driving them from the tribe. Certain tribes of Hungarian gypsies made it their practice to beat their wives, gash their limbs in four places, expose them tied and naked for twenty-four hours and then drive them away. Other punishments included the gashing of both cheeks, the blinding of an eye, the breaking of teeth, or the tearing off or clipping of an ear. Men have been known to cut off both their wives' ears and feed them to animals.

As incredibly cruel and harsh as these punishments may seem, they may well represent a less severe punishment than that which was at one time required. Evidence shows that in the past women have been drowned or beaten to death for their crime.

In bold contrast to the severity of the punishment of the women, there is little evidence that men were ever punished for infidelity. The one exception is among the Hungarian gypsies, where it has been the custom for the erring husband to be shot in either an arm or a leg, depending upon the choice of the wife. Such a punishment, though unlikely to completely stop the faithless ways of the husband would, at least, have the advantage of slowing him down somewhat in his pursuits.

In many instances, the threat of mokadi and its accompanied exclusion seems to be a sufficient threat to keep most men faithful in their sexual behavior. Most tribes have had strong taboos against gypsy men having sexual intercourse with a prostitute, or seducing the wife of one who is absent or in prison. If such

taboos as these fail to keep a husband in line, the woman can always use her own mokadi status to her advantage. Faced with an unfaithful husband, all a woman would have to do is threaten to cover him with her dress or beat him with her shoe if he refused to change his ways. In such cases, the threat of such defilement would be sufficient to change his behavior.

Though most tribes observe more or less strict standards of sexual behavior, a few groups do not. Certain groups of Austrian gypsies, for example, have a most liberal attitude toward sexual intercourse, indulging in it fairly freely and considering it no great disgrace to have an illegitimate child. Certain groups of Albanian gypsies have acted as prostitutes for gorgios while at the same time being married to gypsy husbands. Some gypsies of the Near East earn money for their families through their prostitution. Such groups as these, however, are the rare exception, and, as such, are held in great disapproval by the majority of gypsies.

Outside their own concept of normal sexual behavior, gypsies have a horror of anything which is unconventional and reflect their fears in their mokadi regulations. Among most groups, any form of oral or anal sex, even in marriage, comes under the strongest taboo and can even be considered to be grounds for divorce. One well-known Polish gypsy chief, whose wife accused him of having violated a taboo by kissing her sexually, was deposed for his crime. It took him many years to be declared clean again.

In the same way, any form of homosexuality has come under the strictest condemnation, bringing with it severe mokadi punishments for the person involved. The story is told of one offender who was declared mokadi for life, together with the whole of his family. A young man who was engaged to the offender's daughter was offered the choice of giving her up or

else suffering the same lifetime condemnation. The youth chose to accept the condemnation rather than break off with the girl. The taboo was so strong that once when the youth's father was drunk and made the mistake of drinking from his son's glass, he also was declared mokadi and had great difficulty regaining his cleanliness.

There would seem to be evidence, however, that such a strong taboo against homosexuality has not always been the case among all gypsies. An exception can be seen in the practices of young Turkish gypsies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During this period thousands of gypsy youths were employed as dancers. Elaborately and expensively dressed and ranging in age from ten-year-old boys to mature young men, they performed erotic dances for the courts of the sultans. In this capacity they acted not only as entertainers but also as male prostitutes for the court. Such historical evidence as this, however, seems to be unique. By and large, unconventional sexual behavior among the gypsies has, at least in the past, come under the strictest taboos.

The entire structure of mokadi sexual regulations, however, seems to be changing rapidly, becoming less strict as gypsies come to be more and more influenced by the general gorgio population. Sexual behavior similar to that of the surrounding gorgio populations has become more common. The result has been an unusually high rate of illegitimate births among the very young and a decline of interest in the marriage relationship.

It would seem that gypsies have had very few other taboos associated with marriage and sexuality. With few exceptions it has been considered taboo to enter into marriage in a direct line of succession, but there have been instances of a man marrying his own daughter or granddaughter. There is, in the same way, inconsistency of practice when it comes to whether or not broth-

ers and sisters may marry, some groups considering the practice highly mokadi and others seeing no objection to it. When it comes to the matter of marriage for the next degree of kinship, however, the taboo regulations cease. Marriages between uncles and nieces, or aunts and nephews, for example, have existed in most of the major families of English gypsies. The marriage of first cousins has been even more common and sometimes preferred especially among some of the more important families of Welsh gypsies.

The absence of such marriage taboos as are common among gorgios has resulted in a number of peculiar family structures among the world's gypsies. Among the Serbian gypsies, for example, it has been the custom for a father to take a wife for his son when the boy is only five or six years old. She then lives with him as long as she chooses to do so. Certain groups of Indian gypsies have this practice until the boy is old enough to receive his wife and very often adopt the children which have resulted from the relationship between his father and his wife. This same practice has also been known to exist among certain groups of American gypsies.

A few gypsy families have also been polygamous in nature. In many cases this has meant the marriage of a man to two or more sisters. Generally these wives have themselves been of gypsy blood, though there have been some instances of gypsy men marrying two or more unrelated wives, and in a few instances one of the wives has been a gorgio. Though the phenomenon has always been extremely rare, it has also been quite widespread in practice, with gypsies of Bulgarian, Swedish, Serbian, English and American origins practicing it. In a few instances even three wives have been known to be married to one man, but the first wife has always been allowed the opportunity to divorce before her husband marries his third wife. In

some instances it would seem that the childlessness of the first wives has been an important factor in creating such unusual families.

The gypsy moral code may also find nothing sexually immoral in cohabitation. Evidence of men living with a wife and her younger sister or sisters has been recorded. As long as the sister does not become pregnant, she has been free to leave her brother-in-law and marry another man. There have even been a few instances of a mother and daughter sharing the same husband.

Among the Swedish gypsies, there have also been some examples of wife-swapping, where two men for various reasons will agree to trade wives. Such an unusual arrangement, however, is extremely rare.

The gorgio may find such marriage structures as these extremely unconventional, but such a viewpoint may be influenced very largely by the marriage taboos of gorgio society. Two important facts must always be remembered about the gypsy. First, he is essentially an Oriental, and should not be expected to follow either the beliefs or practices of Western society. Second, he has traditionally been extremely concerned with preserving the purity of his race in a foreign land. Given these two factors, it is easily understandable why the gypsy has seen nothing essentially wrong in close intermarriage, polygamous marriage, or other such arrangements.

Beside sexual taboos, there are a number of others regarding food which could be described vaguely as being unclean. The most important of these are those dealing with what kinds of meat should be eaten by gypsies. In this category of mokadi regulations there is very little consistency of practice and even in some cases clear-cut contradictions.

Some gypsies claim, for instance, that it is unclean to even look at red meat such as pork, beef, mutton, or liver while it is

in the raw state. Others claim that it is unclean to eat the flesh of any unweaned animal such as suckling pig, very young lamb or veal. In some instances it is thought to be taboo to eat any animal which had died with its blood still in it, such as animals killed by either choking or strangulation. Such a belief as this, however, is unusual because in the past gypsies have often been known to kill sheep by feeding them cotton and then later claiming the body from the owner as carrion.

This particular practice may have led some people to believe that gypsies made a habit of eating animals which had died naturally. The truth is that here, too, practices vary a great deal. Some gypsies would find it highly taboo to eat animals which had met a natural death but many others, such as various tribes of Hungarian or Syrian gypsies, would have no objection at all to eating dead meat, in some cases even preferring it. German gypsies have been known to eat animals which have died from disease, and even to dig up animals which had been buried. It is possible that tastes for carrion were developed through the theft practices of some tribes. At times it was their custom to kill an animal, quickly bury it, and then return several days later to retrieve it in order to avoid suspicion. A more important factor than this, however, is the fact that the gypsies, as a nomadic people have often been impoverished and near the starvation level. As such, we should not be surprised that they were willing to eat any type of meat available to them.

Having said this, however, it is interesting to note that even some of those groups who have no taboo against eating of carrion have a very strong taboo against the eating of horses. Most groups of the world's gypsies would cast out of their community anyone found guilty of eating horsemeat. The mokadi regulation is so strong in fact that it is wrong to kill a horse even for reasons of mercy, or for that matter to eat with, or even

shake hands with anyone who has done so. It is not difficult to see that this practice probably has its origin in the special relationship which has for so long existed between a nomadic people and the animal upon which they have depended for movement. Being so often associated in the gypsy mind with both transportation and livelihood, and thus, basic survival, the horse has taken on a value far beyond the commercial, to become intimately related to the most profound aspects of gypsy life and culture.

In only a few instances has there been any evidence that either necessity or taste has caused an exception to this practice, Syrian gypsies, it is said, will eat any meat save that of the hog and man, while certain groups of French gypsies have been known to eat horsemeat.

The mokadi regulation against the eating of dogs or cats is also virtually universal, but for very different reasons from those which apply to the horse. Generally speaking dogs and cats are considered to be a source of uncleanliness, caused perhaps, by the fact that they lick themselves all over. The taboo against eating these animals also extends to any contact which they may have with eating utensils. Dogs or cats are never fed from dishes used by the family. If by some chance one of these animals were to eat from such a dish it must be immediately destroyed.

This idea of contagion of dishes through coming into contact with some mokadi person, animal, or thing comes close to being an obsession among gypsies. This concern shows itself in two other ways. One is the mokadi regulation against using the same basin to wash both dishes and clothing. Often basins are kept for the exclusive use of one or the other, but never both. If it is discovered that dishes have been washed in the basin intended for clothes, then the basin and the dishes become mokadi and must be destroyed immediately. This regulation

would also apply if the basin were used even accidentally for the washing of one's hands and face. For the same reasons, different bars of soap should be used for the two purposes. A second mokadi regulation dictates that there should be two different sets of dishes, one clean and one mokadi. The latter set is kept for the use of either those who are themselves mokadi or else thought to be dirty. The two sets of dishes are never washed together.

Some gypsies consider that all gorgios are mokadi or unclean people. Such a belief is consistent with their concepts of what constitutes a taboo. For one thing, many gypsies consider gorgios to have dirty habits. It is true, of course, that a sizable number of gorgios do not have as high a standard of cleanliness as the true gypsy. Beside this, however, the gorgio's failure to observe the mokadi regulations casts doubts on his own standards of cleanliness. It is indeed possible that much of what the gypsy considers mokadi has resulted from observation of gorgio practices. Many stories are told of gypsies who would not allow gorgios to touch their food or even to wrap it because they were thought to be unclean. Gypsies will show disgust at such gorgio practices as drinking from a glass that may have been previously used for teeth cleaning, washing all kinds of linen in the same basin, or worse yet, sending all sorts of linen to a laundry where it will be washed together with other people's clothes. For traditional gypsies such mokadi practices made the gorgio permanently unclean. It is not surprising, perhaps, that many a fortune teller has made it her practice to wash her hands immediately after she told a gorgio's fortune, or in some other way had physical contact, in order to feel clean again.

We cannot leave the subject of taboo without discussing the matter of theft as it relates to gypsy culture. In the past, gorgios

have been shocked by gypsy habits of thievery, accusing them of total immorality in this regard. In fact, such an accusation is not true; gypsies have a very strong taboo forbidding theft from one another. If a gypsy is discovered having stolen anything from another gypsy, he is denounced publicly and is required to travel, eat and even camp alone until he has repaid the injured party for what he had stolen. Because he is understood to be mokadi, he may also be required to work for an unlimited period of time without pay until he has repaid his debt to society.

In such cases as these, the condemnation of being mokadi may be automatic. Where there is doubt, however, as the guilt of an individual in the case of theft, or for that matter in the instance of any taboo violation, it may be necessary for there to be a trial. Both accuser and accused are free to have witnesses testify for them before a court consisting only of men and presided over by a senior elder or the chief. If neither of the parties has a witness, they may be asked to swear the truth before a candle or a piece of iron, as is the case with the gypsies of India, or in the name of the dead, or in the name of a son. In the latter instance it is believed among certain groups of American gypsies that if one swears untruthfully in the name of one's son, it will mean the death of the eldest son. If the accused is found innocent, it is his place to pay for a celebration at which he has the privilege of offering the first toast.

If, on the other hand, the accused is found guilty, the least penalty he will face is the paying of all the trial's expenses, including the food and entertainment of the court members. Because of his status, he may or may not be able to join with the others at their meal. If his offense has been more serious and he has been forced into exclusion, he may call for another trial at a later date. The calling of another trial, however, is made difficult by the fact that it is necessary to gain the assent

of an elder to hold a new trial; it involves a review of past history as well as new evidence and the payment of all expenses of everyone involved. Finally there remains the possibility that the defendant will once again be found guilty.

The gypsies' attitude toward theft from nongypsies, however, may be quite a different story. Many groups of gypsies believe that to steal from a gorgio is not only not wrong, but highly commendable because of the courage and cleverness required to be successful. From the very beginning of their sojourn in Europe, they practiced a number of petty thefts of all kinds; bringing the fury of the gorgio law down against them. In order to justify their behavior, gypsies invented various popular myths relating to the life of Christ.

There is a very common legend, for example, which claims that as Jesus was being crucified, the Jews had the intention of driving nails not only through each hand and foot but also through his heart and forehead. A gypsy happened along and succeeded in stealing the two nails meant for the forehead and the heart. Because of this, God blessed the gypsies and told them that henceforth their thefts would be accountable only to Him. Another tale of the same type, apparently told by the gypsies themselves, says that a gypsy once tried to rescue Jesus from the cross, but instead, managed to steal only one of the four nails that were meant for his crucifixion. Out of gratitude, Christ, from His cross, granted the gypsies the right to steal. It is interesting to note that crucifixes using three nails for the corpus instead of four did not appear in Christian art until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and were worked in Byzantine copper. It is possible that since this was the time of the metallurgical monopoly of the Byzantine gypsies they might have introduced the modification from four nails to three in order to support their legend. Yet another legend of the French gypsies

claims that they are entitled to steal up to five sous a day because, it is said, it was a gypsy woman who hid the infant Jesus in her basket at the time of Herod's persecution.

Such legends as these, however, though they have often been used for justification, do not really explain the gypsies' philosophy or moral code toward theft. Generally speaking, gypsies believe that when God created the world He meant that all men should have what they need and should share the surplus with others. It is only because the gorgio is selfish and greedy that this isn't the case. Therefore, there is nothing wrong in stealing things from gorgios if they don't need them. In the same way, however, it is wrong to steal anything which one doesn't need oneself. Such a moral code applies especially to anything which grows wild such as fruits, vegetables, or wild animals. Such things as these can belong only to God and therefore can be taken by anybody who might need them. It is these two attitudes which have given gypsies such a notorious reputation for petty thievery and poaching.

Doubtless such a moral code has its origins in the outcast nature of the Indian gypsy. Very often existing outside the law, and being persecuted for many thefts, some of which they may not even have committed, gypsies both in the East and the West felt they had nothing to lose by indulging in petty thievery. If one's very existence is against the law, as it has been for centuries in Europe and parts of Asia, it stands to reason that punishment for petty theft would hold no threat for them. It would also stand to reason that as a nomadic people, often on the verge of starvation, they could not be expected to have a clear understanding of property ownership, much less the rights forbidding poaching that would go with it.

The practice of magic and witchcraft may play an important part in the actual act of theft. Such aids in theft may involve

everything from simple good-luck charms to elaborate and highly complex rituals which take place on special days of the year. Among the gypsies of Yugoslavia, for example, it is their practice in the afternoon of Christmas Eve to collect straw from the peasant villagers. Then, later in the evening they will cut three sticks from an ash, an oak and a beech tree respectively and then, binding them together, place them under the eaves. Inside the living quarters, a woman will then scatter the straw, and place a table on it upon which is placed all the food they possess except for animal fat. Throwing some nuts into the four corners of the house, she will then circle the house imitating a hen, while her children do the same imitating young chicks. When it is completely dark, the whole family will disperse in order to steal something such as a branch. Returning to the house, they then throw what they have stolen into a fire saying, "May it never be known that I have been stealing tonight." Then, as the branches begin to burn, they will utter: "As this fire burns brightly, so may I steal quickly and cleverly." Understandably, though there are many variations in the practice of such witchcraft, they are all intended for the purpose of protecting the family members during the next year from any discovery of their acts of theft.

It will perhaps be recalled that there is a duality of attitude in the gypsy mind regarding their fortune-telling practices. Certain methods are used for themselves, while others are used almost exclusively to appeal to superstitious gorgios. The same principle of duality applies to the use of magic in theft. We have spoken of that magic which gypsies believe will actually have power to help them in their thefts. There is, however, also a wealth of pseudo-magic which is performed by them to deceive gorgios for financial gain.

Almost without exception this pseudo-magic involves the use

of ritual and charmlike objects designed to impress the gorgio client with the magical power of the gypsy. The ritual may be simple or extremely elaborate in the same way that the "charm" may be nothing more than a strategically buried animal bone or as elaborate as a specially made doll. In all cases the success or failure of the trickery depends upon how clever the practitioner is in judging the intelligence and sophistication of the client.

The claims made by the practitioners of such pseudo-magic may include the attaining of such desirable objectives as securing the love of a loved one, finding a husband, curing illness, finding of treasure, overcoming loneliness or simply driving away troublesome evil spirits. Several examples of this type of "magic" will serve as an illustration.

On one occasion a gypsy persuaded a young woman that she would see a vision of the man that someday would be her husband if she would only hang her clothes turned inside out in the sun and lay down indoors naked and blindfolded. Much later, members of her family found her still in that position but by then all her clothes had been stolen, as had everything that could easily be taken from the house.

Another story is told of a sick woman who was told by a gypsy that she was under a curse and that her stomach was full of worms. In order to cure this affliction, the woman was asked to provide several eggs, a Bible and some of her own hair, which were then wrapped up in a towel and tied to a bedpost. She was then asked to spit into a jar containing broken glass. Then, being given dark glasses she was asked to look at the jar in order to see the worms contained in it (which had probably been slipped into the jar while she was putting on the dark glasses). The jar was then wrapped up in a towel and tied to another bedpost. The gypsy then revealed to the woman that the same evil powers which were causing her illness were also

concealing a large treasure buried nearby. By searching out and destroying the spirit she would not only recover, but be rich as well. In order to achieve this aim, it was necessary for the woman to collect some money from her savings account. This money was then wrapped up, held against the body of the woman and then wrapped up in a towel to be hung on the bedpost. The woman was then told that she would have a dream which would reveal not only the source of the evil spirit but the location of the buried treasure as well. The dream, not only never occurred, but when she opened the towel in which her money had been placed she found only a stack of paper, the gypsy having made the exchange during some stage of the ritual.

One last instance, which is said to have been practiced among the German gypsies, will serve to illustrate the painstaking efforts and attention to detail which a gypsy will go to in order to convince a householder of the presence of evil spirits. When it is discovered that there is a house where some misfortune has occurred recently, a gypsy will call on the house to notify the owner that it is being possessed by evil spirits. To substantiate this claim, the gypsy may unearth from the garden some obvious sign of witchcraft, such as an animal's skull, a snakeskin or the heart of a bat. If the householder can be convinced, he is told that the only way in which the problem can be solved is by the sprinkling of the house with a certain type of holy water which can be found only in India. The householder is then persuaded to provide the money by which the water can be obtained. When the water finally arrives the house is sprinkled, but then, much to the disappointment of all concerned, more evidence is found in the garden to convince all that a more powerful solution to the problem is required. In this case only a great chovihano can deal with the problem.

In due time the chovihano arrives with a great deal of impressive fanfare. Even the evil spirit is impressed because his arrival causes the windows to rattle and the cattle to become restless, there is noise on the roof and there may even be mysterious blue flames in the garden. The householder is told during this time that it would be dangerous for him to go outside. Meanwhile outside another gypsy is busy rattling the windows, frightening the cattle, throwing stones on the roof and lighting alcohol-burning fires in the garden. The chovihano then orders a plate of hard-boiled eggs to be placed on a table, over which he utters various incantations. Unseen by the householder, he also places a hard-boiled egg of his own among the others. This egg has been prepared by being pierced with a fine needle and having inserted into it a white horsehair before being boiled and the hole covered over with lime. Following this everybody is required to leave the room in order to let the chovihano's incantations work, but in fact, to allow the householder's eggs to cool. Returning to the room, the eggs are opened and the special egg is discovered, which is interpreted to the horror of all present, a clear indication that the entire household is under a very evil curse. The curse can be lifted only by the deposit of a large sum of money in the garden, buried together with three heads of chickens which the chovihano has ready. In a short time the buried money is examined, but to everyone's disappointment it remains untouched as a clear indication the evil spirit is still not satisfied. It then becomes necessary to resort to much stronger spells and greater sums of money, together with other valuables. Finally, the spirit becomes satisfied. The hole in which the money and valuables were buried reveals only a curiously shaped root, which is then kept by the householder as a lucky charm with the power to restore the house to its former good fortune.

CHAPTER SIX

Baptism
Marriage
Divorce
Blood brotherhood
"Coronation"

Among the gypsies there are a number of rites and ceremonies having magical significance which serve a social purpose. While some of these rites and ceremonies are still practiced, others have fallen into disuse.

Undoubtedly one of the most important of these rites is that of baptism. It would seem from extant records that ever since the gypsies' first arrival in Europe many of them chose to have their babies baptised into the Christian Church. It is extremely unlikely that such a prompt acceptance of the importance of the rite was motivated by anything resembling true conversion to Christianity. The alternative to such an unlikely prospect is that gypsies, even before their contact with Christianity, practiced rites of their own so similar in their purpose to the rite of baptism that they allowed for a quick acceptance of the Christian rite. Another, and closely related, explanation would seem to be that the magical aspect of the baptismal rite was found to fill a

need in their own magical practices, or at least complement them, and was therefore quickly adopted for its initiatory value.

It would seem that there is a large element of truth in both explanations. Ironically, as time has shown, Christianity has unwittingly provided a means by which gypsy magical practices and beliefs have managed to survive under the guise and respectability of the Church.

A great deal has already been said about the gypsies' fear of the dynamic power of evil in their daily lives. This threat of the power of evil forces or demons continues throughout their lives and even into the afterlife. It begins in their lives at the very moment of birth. Not only is the infant endangered by the demons of the world into which it has just been born, but, as we have seen, because of the baby's taboo status, it is also a threat to all those around him. It is possible, and indeed highly probable, that one of the most important motives in the quick adoption of the rite of Christian baptism was on one hand to protect the baby from the multitude of evil forces who would try to destroy him while at the same time help to cleanse him from being taboo in order that he would no longer be a source of danger to the society into which he had been born. Evidence of the fear of evil power which may destroy the newborn infant can be seen, for example, in the practice of certain groups of Scandinavian gypsies. As soon as the child is born, a large fire is built at the entrance to the tent in order to prevent demons from entering. Only after the child's baptism can the fire be safely extinguished. Only after its baptism, too, can the infant be considered safe for those who come close to it. This peculiar status of the baby before baptism of being, on one hand, seriously in danger from evil powers, while at the same time considered by adults as itself a source of danger, might best be

reconciled by a traditional belief held among various groups of Hungarian gypsies. It is their belief that should a child die before it has been baptised it will become a vampire, never knowing rest in the afterlife. As such it may haunt its mother and even suck her breasts. In such instances, the mother can protect herself only by taking earth from the child's grave, wrapping it up in cloth and sleeping with it underneath her pillow.

Because of this double threat both to the baby and to those whom he contacts, gypsies have always had special magical rites of their own, long before their adoption of Christian baptism. A few examples from the vast variety of rituals which they have performed will suffice to show how important it is that the infant be officially incorporated by one means or another into the life of his society.

One common way in which this is done is by the gypsies themselves immersing the child in running water. At that time he is given usually at least two names—one by which he will be known and the other which is to remain secret. This latter name is intended to deceive demons from ever truly knowing who the child is. Among some groups, tattooing has been used in order to serve approximately the same purpose by making the child unrecognizable to evil spirits and to protect him from the evil eye.

One rite which has been practiced among the gypsies of Hungary involves the drinking of brandy mixed with water and herbs, which is then sprinkled on the child's bed together with three pieces of bread, one for each goddess of fate. After this, the baby is laid on the ground, while a chovihani draws a circle around it and sprinkled coal dust and snake powder within the circle. If the baby cries under such conditions, it is considered to be an omen of future bad health for the child. In this case the

chovihani will burn a piece of the baby's navel string in a jar held over him while she and the oldest man present join hands over the jar. The ritual is concluded by children who dance around the baby and throw handfuls of nuts away from the circle.

Among certain groups of sedentary gypsies it is their custom to place the baby first on the threshold of the house, and then in the four corners of a room which has been scattered with thorn-apple seeds. The baby is then placed on the hearth, which has previously been smeared with goose and rabbit fat, and then placed where the family has its meals in order to be sprinkled with bits of bread and meat and brandy.

Following their departure from India, most gypsies came to accept and adopt the initiatory rites practiced by the people in whose country they lived, at the same time retaining their old rites. In some cases, this new supplementary rite was valid only if it was performed after the older rite had taken place. In other instances, the two rites might even be performed at the same time, with the chovihani magically casting herbs or millet into running water at the same time as the baby was being baptised in a church, or, in the case of a Moslem country, being circumcised.

Evidence would seem to make clear that for the European gypsy, the rite of Christian baptism has always held special magical significance. As early as the sixteenth century, records show that gypsies would have their children baptised repeatedly. An important motive for this practice would seem to be the simple logic that if baptism was good for an infant once, then it would be even more beneficial for the infant to be baptised on a number of occasions. Because gypsies are so concerned with evil spirits and the danger which they represent, they have often been anxious to have their children baptised again and

again whenever they have been able to find a clergyman willing to perform the rite. Failing this, in some cases, they have performed the rite themselves. For some, the power of baptism is so great that, even though it is a benevolent force, it may be necessary to protect the baby from excessive power by taping a protective charm to it.

Swedish gypsies believe that a child's good fortune in life may be largely influenced by repeated baptisms. In some cases this is even further enhanced should the baby be baptised by clergy of different Christian denominations, such as Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox priests. In some cases, the respect for the power of Christian baptism, has gone so far as to tempt the Moslem gypsies of Turkey to have their children given Christian baptism.

In the past, the power of baptism was so highly respected that parents would hide objects such as stones, or other objects on the bodies of their children so they would be baptised along with the baby. Such objects would then become especially powerful magical charms. This practice led to so many abuses that the German Church of the seventeenth century was forced, finally, to forbid babies to be baptised, whether they be gorgio or gypsy, from wearing jewelry, or buttons or any such objects which might later be used as charms.

There are, of course, other motivations for baptism. The first of these is the profit motive. In the past, gypsies have been baptised one or more times with the thought of the material rewards which it had to offer to them. It has been their custom to choose as sponsors, or god-parents for their children, wealthy gorgios from whom they could expect generous gifts. At one time it was considered an act of Christian piety for a gorgio to sponsor the baptism of those who were thought to be converts from heathenism. No doubt the gifts showered on one's godchild were also a

part of that action of piety. Consequently, many gypsies were tempted to indulge in multiple baptism not only for its magical benefits but also for the rich rewards it had to offer. As early as the eighteenth century it became apparent that many gypsies preferred to have gorgio sponsors for the baptism of their children. In some instances, when gypsies were disappointed with the gifts given to them, they would simply go elsewhere for a second or even a third baptism. In such instances, baptism became nothing more than yet another way of tricking the gorgio.

In fairness, it must be said here that this type of profit motive is rarely the case today. Many gypsies in Europe have their children baptised for clear-cut religious reasons. If this were not the case it would be difficult to explain the frequency of gypsy godparents used in today's baptisms, or the determination which some parents have shown in order to have their infants baptised without regard to sponsors.

A third motive for baptism, at least in the past, may have involved the matter of burial in consecrated ground. Such burial has been thought to be important to them for reasons not only of protection of the body in this world because of grave molesters, but also because it was thought to provide protection for the body from evil influences. This motivation, however, would obviously not apply to those who place great importance on the rite, but none on burial in consecrated ground as is the case with a number of gypsies.

One last motive for baptism would seem to be the appeal of family tradition. There exists, especially in British records, evidence of children from one family, being baptised in the same parish church for a period of over one hundred years. It would seem that for some families, at least, a single parish church has become associated with the beneficial aspects of baptism, or else in some way has become closely related to some family tradi-

tion. From a practical viewpoint, it should also be said that a gypsy family would naturally tend to return to a church where they knew they would not be rebuffed by either the congregation or the clergy.

A second and equally important set of magical rites are those used by gypsies in order to perform a marriage. As in the case of baptism, gypsies have always possessed a wide variety of different rites and ceremonies. Generally speaking, the actual rite of marriage is extremely simple, while the various preliminaries required for the marriage to take place and the various ceremonies and festivities which take place after the rite may prove to be more complex.

The simplest and most basic of these rites, in the past, has been the expedient procedure of elopement. At a time agreed upon, it was once the custom for a young couple to simply leave their camp secretly. After several weeks away from their families, they would then return. After chastisement from their families, the marriage of the young couple was accepted. In some cases, of course, such an elopement was used to resist the will of the concerned parents.

Traditionally, however, the typical procedure for marriage among gypsies is that which is common among American gypsies. Though in the past, instances exist of child marriages, it is today the practice for the families of boys approximately eighteen years of age to begin preparations for marriage by visiting the parents of an eligible girl. Once the reason for the visit is made clear, and the idea is found to be acceptable to all concerned, an agreement is then reached on a dowry, and the period of engagement is considered to have begun. When next the two sets of parents meet, it will again be at the bride's home, where, witnessed by family and friends, the exchange of dowry money takes place and there is a ceremonial drinking of brandy by all present.

Following this, festivities leading up to the marriage begin in a few days, while family members who live at a distance begin to arrive for the forthcoming marriage. Wedding sponsors, similar in role to sponsors at baptism, are selected and perform a role similar to the bridegroom and maid of honor in gorgio society. In this case, however, they must be a married couple whose function will be to give moral support to the young couple throughout their marriage. A red silk scarf is often suspended on a pole to mark the location where the actual wedding will take place.

As has been said, the actual rite of marriage may, in some cases, be very simple. One of the most common is the simple joining of hands by the couple in front of the assembled family, accompanied by their promise to remain true to each other. By many gypsies, this rite is considered to be the basic minimum necessary to make the marriage valid, no matter what other rituals may accompany it. Among certain groups of Indian gypsies, this mutual declaration of matrimony is accompanied by the couple's marking each other's forehead with red lead as a further declaration of espousal.

An equally common marriage rite is ritual communion using bread, wine and salt. One practice is for the chief to break a loaf in two, salt each piece, and hand it to the bride and groom, who then exchange their pieces and eat them. Another practice is for the couple to squat opposite each other and eat the salted bread off each other's knees without using their hands. Yet another variation is for the young couple to receive salted bread soaked in wine, as is the practice among Mexican gypsies. As there are many variations on this ritual communion, so is there also a number of different explanations for its meaning. Some say they are offered together as a symbol of inseparability, some say that as bread and salt are fundamental to the diet, so also should the couple's love be fundamental to their lives, while

others, the Canadian gypsies, for example, claim that the bread is the symbol of man as the provider, the salt is the symbol of the woman as the source of love, and the wine is a symbol of their enjoying life together. Remembering that bread and salt are often used as powerful charms to ward off evil influences, this might yet be another explanation for their widespread use.

Another ritual, closely related to the gorgio practice of throwing rice at weddings, is the gypsy practice of pouring a pitcherful of grain over the heads of the newlyweds and then smashing the pitcher. In the same way, certain groups of Spanish gypsies, will smash a pitcher containing a white silk hankerchief and three red carnations, one each to symbolize the family's approval of the marriage, the purity of the bride, and the completion of the marriage.

Various Slavic, German and Italian gypsies have been known to practice circumambulation as one of their fundamental marriage rites. Either after sunset or before sunrise the young couple declare their intention to be husband and wife in the company of their families and then proceed to walk three times around either a beech or a willow tree to make the marriage binding. It is possible that the couples think of the fate of their marriage to some extent as being identified with the fate of the tree. It is more likely, however, that the practice is both a survival and an adaptation of the more ancient Indian practice of circumambulation of wooden poles in order to complete the marriage rite.

No doubt, these marriage rites may in some sense be related to one which is commonly attributed to a gypsy practice, namely, "broomstick marriage." In the past century, it is claimed that a young couple were married simply by stepping over a broomstick that had been laid on the ground. Though few records exist of such marriages it seems evident that such

rites using either broom or besom may at one time have been relatively common, at least in England. It seems to be closely related to another rite, which required that the couple would leap back and forth across two long branches of broom that had been laid on the ground. The jumping over broom and besom, like the circling of the beech and willow trees, would seem to serve a primarily magical purpose. These woods in different cultures have long been regarded as valuable charms for the prevention of evil spirits. They are known to be woods which are held in terror by various ghosts and demons and, as such, are known to be effective instruments in protecting houses from such evil beings. It is, for example, well known among many Europeans, whether they be gorgio or gypsy, that stepping over a branch of besom will prevent one from being followed by ghosts. It is quite possible, then, that these various marriage rites involving the use of wood whether it be living in the form of a tree, or dead in the form of branches or twigs, has for one of its chief purposes the protection of the young couple from the various evil forces which would seek to assault and destroy the relationship.

The use of a marriage bowl made of solid wood may have had a similar significance in a marriage rite said to have been practiced among the Scottish gypsies in the nineteenth century. In that rite it is said that when the whole wedding party was assembled an elder of the family would pass such a bowl, first to the bride and then to the groom, with the instructions that they urinate into it. To this bowl of urine the elder would add earth from the ground and then some brandy. This concoction was then offered to the young couple with the request that they separate the ingredients. Failing to be able to do so, the young couple then joined hands over the bowl, while the elder pronounced them man and wife, as inseparable as were the ingre-

dients of the bowl. Later, the contents of the bowl were poured into a jar and kept as evidence of marriage.

One other body fluid beside urine, namely blood, has also been used in marriage rites. The use of blood, because of its magical properties, was probably far more common in the past than it is today. British gypsies have been known to have the young couple eat a cake into which has been baked some of their own blood. In yet another instance, the bride and groom drank each other's blood from a cup. Other rituals involving the use of blood are those where the bride and groom have incisions made on their wrists or hands and then join them together by tying a red scarf around them in order that the blood of the young couple might mingle. Hungarian gypsy couples have been known to smear each other's left sole with their blood.

Songs and dances play an important part in the marriage rite of the Spanish gypsies. Special words, gestures, songs and dances called the *debla*, *alborea*, *cachucha*, and *mosca* form the most important part of a very ancient magical rite. The debla contains remnants of various incantations, probably brought by the gypsies from India for the purpose of appealing for the blessing of the beneficent spirit or spirits who are thought to preside over all such ceremonies. The alborea is likewise very primitive and may very well be the predecessor of flamenco. The other two parts of the rite, though less magical in their purpose, still contain elements considered necessary to the completion of the total ceremony.

In most of these instances, both in Christian and Moslem countries, the native rite is either preceded by or succeeded by the marriage ceremony of the predominant religion. Very often, however, this rite is not considered to be binding unless somehow accompanied by the native rite. Even in the Church rite, however, gypsies have been known to include magical rites

of their own. Among the Rumanian gypsies, for example, brides have been known to hold a coin under their left arm throughout the church ceremony. As they leave the church it is their practice to drop the coin secretly to the ground, as a fee to the devil, to protect their marriages from the evil eye. Whoever finds the coin will enjoy seven years of good fortune.

The final and most essential part of virtually all gypsy marriage rites is the physical consummation of the marriage. Almost all gypsies place great importance on the virginity of the bride. In some instances the confirmation of the bride's virginity may be done by the husband but in other instances, it is thought that the blood which results from the breaking of the hymen is a source of contamination or taboo for the husband. In such cases, a female relative of the groom will take a branch from a tree which is known for its power against evil spirits and break the hymen of the bride. In other cases, an elder male relative of the groom may take his place, since they are not subject to the same dangers of contamination as he is.

If the bride is found not to be a virgin, her failing may, in more modern families, be kept quiet, while in traditional families, the marriage may be considered invalid and the disgraced girl sent back to her parents. If, on the other hand, the bride is found to be a virgin, the blood from the broken hymen is wiped on a white silk handkerchief and in more traditional groups exhibited for the entire wedding company to see.

With very few exceptions, divorce is far more simple to effect than marriage. Generally speaking, divorce is frowned upon, though exceptions to the rule can be found at both extremes. Among the gypsies of France, who have recently become converted to Evangelical Protestantism, it is not only frowned upon but absolutely forbidden, although a separation of two or three years is allowed, during which all members of

the family work toward reconciliation. At the other end of the spectrum exist certain groups of Slavic gypsies who think nothing of frequent divorces.

Most gypsies subscribe to the philosophy that any relationship between a man and woman which is lacking in true love is by definition wrong. Whenever, therefore, there ceases to be a love relationship, the marriage should cease. Many reasons have been cited as justifiable reasons for divorce. Sometimes the wife is guilty of infidelity, fails to provide her husband with children, becomes a source of bad luck for her man, or simply is in some way incompatible.

Generally speaking, simple separation is considered sufficient to effect a divorce, without any form of ritual being required. Among the Hungarian gypsies, for example, one or the other of the couple simply collects his possessions and then leaves. If it should be the husband who wishes a divorce but the wife is reluctant to agree, he may simply marry a new wife and move her into his house in order to make the position intolerable for the old wife. If he does not want to remarry immediately, he may simply and intentionally get drunk and then beat his wife until she threatens to leave him. He accepts this threat as a promise, and the divorce is effected. If, however, the wife is young, it may be necessary for the matter to come before the council of elders for their consideration. In some cases this may be automatic, as among the Swedish gypsies, or, as has been the case among the Welsh gypsies, the woman may choose to speak to the council. The elders have a hearing on the matter and decide whether the divorce is justified. With few exceptions, it is usual for such a court to decide in favor of divorce. The court's purpose is chiefly to determine responsibility for the breakup of the marriage, and, if the woman is young, and there has been some financial arrangement made between the former parents-in-law, to make an appropriate adjustment.

Though there is no magical rite of divorce still being practiced today, it would seem that at one time there must have been several. Evidence indicates, for example, that Scottish gypsies once divorced each other by simply reversing the ritual of the broomstick marriage. The divorce was effected by the partners standing on either side of the broom, back to back, and then jumping away from it.

A second and far more complicated divorce ritual has also been attributed to the Scottish gypsies. It would seem that in the nineteenth century, and probably before, it was necessary for a couple to sacrifice a horse if they wished to obtain a divorce. In such instances it would appear that the breakdown of the marriage was always assumed to be the fault of the woman. To effect the divorce it was necessary to associate her guilt by use of sympathetic magic with another living thing, in this case a horse. First, a horse without blemish was chosen. Then, one of the elders, or perhaps the chovihani, took a pole and walked around the animal several times, repeating the name or names of all those who had owned him. Afterwards it was released and driven away. A chase of the horse then followed to determine the guilt of the woman. If the horse was easily captured the woman's guilt was minor; if it was wild and difficult to control, the woman's guilt was considered very serious. At one time, if the latter were the case, it is possible that both the horse and the woman would then be killed. In latter days, the horse was captured and the faults of both the horse and the woman were recited over him. This completed, the elder would take a long knife and plunge it into the heart of the animal, allowing it to die by bleeding to death. When the horse was dead, the married couple held hands over the horse and uttered a few words of repudiation of each other. They then separated and walked around the animal uttering further repudiations, finally stopping at the tail, shaking hands and walking off in different

directions. Following such a rite men were free to remarry, but women were given tokens indicating their divorced status. If they did remarry or were so unfortunate as to lose their tokens they might be punished by death.

Two remaining, if completely unrelated, rites deserve to be mentioned, if for no other reason than that the facts of their observance have been much distorted by popular gorgio romanticism and they do have magic significance.

The first rite is that of blood brotherhood. In the past, there have been a number of accounts of gorgios, either willingly or unwillingly, being admitted into gypsy society as blood brothers. The authenticity of such accounts is very doubtful, being based largely on gorgio fear of kidnapping or the myths of popular folklore.

There does exist one account of such an initiation, however, which seems very likely to be true. A noted gypsiologist, Charles F. Payne, claimed that sometime between 1901 and 1902 he took part in a ceremony which was intended to make him a true brother of the gypsy blood, by initiating him into the membership of two pure-blooded gypsy families at the same time. Many years later he described the ceremony:

> With his curi [knife] he then made tiny cuts in my wrist and also in the right wrist of Sampriel [Huron family] and the left wrist of Fēro [Lovell family]. The right arm of "The Beng" [nickname for Sampriel Huron] was placed along my own so that the two cuts lay over each other and the wrists were tied with a piece of gold-coloured ribbon. My left arm was tied in similar fashion to that of Fēro, only with a white ribbon. Then Perro spoke a kind of ritual in which he said that I was now blood kin to both families and from then on I must live Romani-wise and keep the Romani law, as all their people did.[1]

Payne then promised not to reveal anything that he had seen

while those present were still living and was subsequently given two Romany names. Until other instances of such initiations are recorded, it would be impossible to draw any conclusions from such a unique example.

A second rite that deserves to be mentioned is the so-called coronation of Gypsy "kings" and "queens." In the past so much romanticism has been involved in the matter of kings and queens that it often proves difficult to separate fact from fiction.

The gorgio belief in gypsy royalty no doubt began with their first arrival in Europe when they styled themselves counts, dukes and princes. Since that time the belief has been encouraged by two factors. First, newspapers, in order to appeal to their readers' romantic imaginations, have either ignorantly or intentionally distorted the truth about what their reporters have actually seen. Secondly, in the past, gypsies have staged pseudo-coronations in order to create an opportunity to charge admissions, sell trinkets and charms and, occasionally, pick pockets. It was discovered by them that some credulous gorgios would respond enthusiastically at the prospect of seeing what they believed to be an actual gypsy coronation.

Rather than speaking of gypsy royalty it would be more correct to speak in terms of heads of families, chiefs or *voivodes*, as the actual leaders may be called. Such chiefs may have jurisdiction over only a few families or in some cases, thousands. Generally they are men who are known for their sense of justice and wisdom as well as their loyalty to the people and the culture. Such factors as their family name, physical strength and wealth have also been important factors. In most instances the chief, as a representative of the group, has the authority to inflict corporal punishment and, if necessary, to pronounce the exclusion of a member from the group. It is also the chief,

together with the elders, who decides questions dealing with the welfare of the group as a whole. In such cases, the chief's power depends almost entirely on the respect which his people have for him. If he has that, his influence and power can be considerable. Though in some instances, the role of chief has been hereditary, more often it has been by election either for a period of time or for life.

On occasion a form of enthronement or rite of appointment has been practiced to institute a new chief. Clebert illustrates such a ritual in his description of such an event among the Rumanian gypsies. Following election, the new chief is seated on a chair which is separated from the group by a chain. This is done in order to symbolize that the thronelike position which he occupies has authority to rule over others. Later a blood oath is taken by the cutting of the left wrists of both the new chief and his predecessor. Both men then join their wrists together in order to mingle their blood and convey ritually the continuity of power between the new and the old.

A few of these chiefs, in times past, have indeed had genuine pretensions to be true gypsy kings and have made claims to leadership over all of Europe's gypsies, or America's, or in some cases have even claimed to be kings of the world's gypsies. Such ambitions, however, have been ill-founded and generally have not been well received by a people who are too proud of their individual freedoms and family loyalties to allow themselves to be ruled by a single leader. Consequently such claims for kingship have, to date, met with frustration, and even in a few cases, assassination.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Omens of death
Death bird
Prophecies of death
Death vigils
Corpses
Death taboos
Property destruction
Burial

The magic world of the gypsy consists of a complex of omens, superstitions, devilry, prophecy, witchcraft, legends, taboos, and various rites and ceremonies. The most important aspect of all, however, is that it is a world of spirits, almost always in some sense associated with the dead. In fact, death and the spiritual occurrences associated with it form the very core of gypsy beliefs.

Death, for the gypsy, is both a horror and a curious mystery. There is also, of course, the pain of separation from a loved one. This pain is alleviated by the important family vigil before death, the all-important funeral rite, and the proper period of mourning after death.

From a spiritual point of view, however, there is a crisis. Gypsies, as a general rule, are much more concerned with the living than with the dead. What will become of the deceased with the loss of his family ties and the decomposition of his

body is not of great importance. Their concern at death deals almost entirely with the question of what relationship the dead will have with those who remain among the living. The dead are allowed to dwell in their own realm, wherever or whatever that might be, unmolested by the living. Only when the dead begin to encroach in some way upon the living, will the interest of the gypsy be aroused and the magic he possesses be used to take action against the deceased. This invasion of the dead into the realm of the living is far more common than might at first be supposed. Spiritual activity associated with the dead begins, in fact, to take place even before the death, in the form of funeral portents. The most important form which this portent takes is the *merimásko cerikclo* [death bird].

Birds, since prehistoric times, have often been looked upon as the harbingers of either good or bad luck. It is only natural that men living in a natural environment should consider those birds which were beautiful in either sound or plumage, or those which appeared only in good weather as omens of good luck for those who might see them. Continental gypsies have many superstitions dealing with birds of good omen. The sighting of such birds as the water-wagtail, cuckoo, or swallow is invariably interpreted as signs of future good fortune. In the same way, however, predatory birds, nocturnal birds, or birds which make a particularly frightening sound have generally been regarded as an omen or imminent misfortune or even death. It is this latter form of omen, the bird as a bringer of death, which is by far the most common among the gypsies.

The bird most commonly associated with death by the gypsies is the owl. Such an association between the owl and misfortune is by no means unique. In fact, many peoples have thought the owl to be a familiar of evil spirits and sorcerers. Among the Romans, the owl was regarded as funereal. *Striges*, the word for horned owl, was used by the Romans as the same word for

witches. A number of tribes of American Indians regard the appearance of an owl as an especially evil portent.

Among the British gypsies the belief in the owl as a harbinger of death is widely held among both English and Welsh gypsy families. The death bird often makes its appearance several days before the event of death and proceeds to make its mournful cry in the neighborhood where the death is to occur. The more distinct the cry of the bird, the more distant is the person whose destiny it is to die. Yates claims:

> Some assert that if its cry is dull and distinct as though proceeding from a distant place, it betokens the death of a near neighbour; whereas, if its notes are clear and distinct, as if proceeding from a short distance, it is a sure harbinger of the death of a person in a remote neighbourhood—the more distinct the voice, the more distant the individual whose death is indicated, and the more indistinct the voice, the nearer the person whose death is certain![1]

Among the Polish gypsies the owl becomes the death bird if it hoots near their tents. When this happens they believe the bird must be caught and burned alive if its prophetic role is not to be fulfilled.

Closely related to this is the Swedish gypsy belief that when some member of the group is sick and they hear the owl cry three times they know that the patient must die. After the death, the owl will cry three more times as part of the prophetic fulfillment. It is also an omen of death if a large flock of owls should fly among the tents when someone is ill.

There are some who say that the bird need not be an owl. Some claim that the death bird can be a moor-hen, while others would go so far as to claim that any nocturnal bird would qualify as the merimásko cerikclo. In one instance, the death bird took on almost a spiritual nature. Job Boswell, speaking of the time when Urania Boswell predicted her own death, said:

> On Friday she said that the storm-thrush would sing before her death. It sat in that tree there and sang all Saturday . . . when she died, it left . . . I heard the death-bird crying in the night of Saturday. You might say it was an owl, but it is a different bird and you would never see it, no, not if there were 20,000 of you, you wouldn't see that bird because it cannot be seen! It is the death-bird.[2]

There is evidence that portents of death are not strictly limited to birds. In fact, there have been a few rare accounts of other occurrences which are prophetic of death. One man claimed to have had a distinct presentiment of his son's death while he was away from his home on a trip. Feeling distinctly restless, he could not sleep the first night of his trip. When he returned home the following day, certain that something was wrong, he found that his son was dead, even though the previous day the boy had been in perfect health. A far more unusual presentiment has been recorded in the form of a phantom funeral. One commentator claims that on one occasion while she was camped with a group of Welsh gypsies, they all saw a funeral procession passing down the road:

> Then we all heard the tramp of feet and the solemn chanting of a funeral hymn; and many, though not I, saw the bier and the bearers and moved aside from their way. They passed down the lane. ["] What will they do with the dead yonder?["] whispered one of our women, and we all wondered, for the lane ended with a gate on to the marsh; there was no graveyard in that direction. As the woman was speaking, a thick dark mist hid the gate from us, and when it lifted again the lane was empty; those who had seen before saw the procession no more.[3]

The very next day, one of the young boys who had witnessed the procession was drowned in the sea. The first time the family was to hear of the death was when they witnessed a real funeral procession carrying the boy's body.

In gypsy magic, it is assumed that a true death prophecy, whether it be in the form of a bird or some other means, is always followed by indications of the death which it has been sent to herald. Indeed, among the gypsies of Vienna, the Lovari, it is believed that the form in which the impending death is announced is actually the cause of death itself. They believe that the *mulesko angelo* [death angel] appears to the very ill in such an alarming way that it literally frightens them to death.

Many times, as it happens, following the prophecy the actual death does not follow immediately. When this is the case, a form of death vigil begins as soon as there is some reasonable assurance that death will follow in the near future. As soon as a gypsy feels seriously ill and believes death to be near, as many of his family and friends gather around him as possible. Every means known is used to contact family members over very great distances. Almost without exception, relatives heed the call for the vigil of the dying since it takes priority over all other responsibilities. Several reasons can be given for such loyalty to the dying. Most important, perhaps, is its social function. The vigil, attended by a large group, serves to give assurance to the small community that, though there is a break in its unity caused by the imminent death, the community's solidarity will continue. There is, too, of course, the reassurance to the dying that he remains a part of the community and that he is an important member of it, even in his weakened state. This family solidarity, and the motive behind it, is important throughout the time of the death and the rites which follow it. Once the vigil has begun, the dying person is never left alone. The most intimate of his family wait by the bedside, while those who are less close will gather outside the dying gypsy's tent or caravan.

It is very common among Continental European gypsies for the dying to be removed from their usual beds and placed on a mattress outside their own tents or caravans. In some cases during this period the dying may even be removed to a special death tent. The probable reason for this peculiar action is to be found, in their concept of death as a pollutant. As with other taboos relating to their tents or caravans, it is thought totally improper to perform an act such as dying in a habitation in which others have lived. This rite of removal of the dying, however, is most unusual among the English and Welsh gypsies. Unlike their Continental counterparts, there is little or no evidence that the dying are removed either from their beds or from their domiciles.

Those attending the predeath vigil show very little emotion, spending most of their time in light discussion with each other and occasionally drinking or smoking. Most often the predeath vigil lasts for a period of time ranging from a few hours to a few days. On rare occasions, however, the vigil has lasted considerably longer. In one recent instance a vigil for an English gypsy lasted three months before she finally died. During this time, she was surrounded by female relatives while a small group of men kept their vigil nearby. Such a long vigil is an example of the influence which modern medicine has had on gypsy custom. Apparently the woman had been told by a doctor that she had three months to live. Rather than alter its customary rule of vigilance from the time when there is knowledge that death is inevitable, the family was willing to considerably extend the ordinary period of time for the vigil.

The reason for such a vigil is closely linked to the importance which gypsies place on having all members of the family and also all friends of the dying present for it. It is vital according to gypsy belief that the person dying depart from this

life with as little resentment or hatred of those still living as possible. One of the primary reasons for the attendance at the vigil by all those who knew the dying is to obtain his forgiveness for any wrongs which they might have done toward him during his life.

Immediately after death, preparations are begun for the proper observance of the rites associated with the burial of the dead. As a rule, gypsies show little interest in the nature of the next world. This is not to say, however, that they fail to show interest in the comfort and happiness of the deceased. Indeed, a considerable amount of time and attention is given to the proper arrangement of the funeral rites.

The period between death and burial is considered by the gypsies to be a period of transition. The dead are caught, in a sense, between the world of the living and the world of the dead. The dead, they believe, are confused by their sudden change of state and feel themselves to be in a very precarious state of transition.

This frustration caused by "worldlessness" is further aggravated by the anger which the dead feel toward the world of the living. To those who live, death is considered the worst of all fates. Therefore, it seems to the gypsies that the dead must be extremely unhappy with their condition. As with many primitives, the gypsy thinks of death in the terms of guilt and responsibility. Death is unnatural. It therefore follows that someone must have been responsible for the death which has occurred, whether it be by use of violence or magic. In any case, such unnatural factors as these serve to further aggravate the discontent of the dead, and causes him to desire revenge on those who might have caused his death. Thus, the deceased becomes maliciously bent on punishing those whom he thinks are responsible for his condition. More than any other single

factor, it is the fear which the living have for the dead's anger and power for revenge which causes gypsies to place such importance on gaining the forgiveness of the dying at the pre-death vigil.

If the dead are frustrated by their being caught between the world of the living and the world of the dead, the living, too, are frustrated by being caught between the two emotions of fear of the dead and love for the dead. After all, the dead, at least in their physical appearance, are still themselves. The physical body can still be related to what was once a living person, who once held a useful place in society. The gypsies' feeling of love for the deceased causes them to want to give him comfort and to give him a pleasant trip into the next world. But, at the same time, the living realize that something terrifying and highly mysterious has happened to the deceased. While the physical appearance remains more or less the same, the spirit and personality of the deceased has changed into a powerful malevolent force that is highly dangerous for the living. Therefore, while in a sense the death rites are performed to assure the dead a good trip into the next world, it is much more important to the gypsies that the dead, dangerous as they are, be hastened out of the world of the living. The surest way of accomplishing this removal is a concerted effort on the part of the entire family to properly perform all the rites associated with death, while, all the time, avoiding as much as possible those things closely associated with the dead. This predominant motive underlies virtually all the funeral rites performed by gypsies.

It comes as no surprise, then, that most gypsies have a very strong aversion to the handling of the corpse.[4] With the deceased still in transition between two worlds it is considered that the body still harbors his malevolent spirit. It is possible, of course,

that there exists an element of sentiment in such an aversion. Emily Lee, the only recorded English gypsy to have helped lay out a body for burial, claimed that the others hadn't helped because they "haven't got the heart for it."[5] Swedish gypsies share this reluctance to have any part in preparing the body for burial, although, ironically, they feel it an honor to be asked to do so. This almost universal unwillingness to have any contact with the corpse is clear evidence that there exists a much more deeply rooted aversion to it than can be explained by simple sentiment. Evidence of the degree of horror which some gypsies feel toward their own dead is best illustrated by an account of the reaction of some Welsh gypsies when one of their number suddenly died on the road. As soon as he died:

> His companions thereupon fled from the scene in abject terror, leaving his body on the hillside, exposed and unattended; and though subsequently they returned to bury it, in a nearby graveyard long since disused, they had to be compelled, or at least persuaded, to do so.[6]

It is common for the gypsy to show reluctance in allowing even gorgios to make contact with the corpse. Usually, however, gorgios are hired to prepare the body for burial, but with the most explicit instructions from the family. Very often this preparation consists only of closing the eyes and mouth, and having the face sponged over. Such bodies are then laid on a carpet in preparation for placing them in a coffin by holding on to the edges of the carpet. Usually, in such circumstances it is absolutely forbidden to make any measurements of the body to determine the size of coffin required. Among the Swedish gypsies, however, a new silk ribbon is used to measure only the length of the corpse. This ribbon takes on powerful properties which cause it to be treated with utmost respect, in some cases proving useful as a charm to ward away enemies.

Such an extreme fear of the corpse and contact with it, however, must not be considerd to be a taboo universally practiced among all gypsies. As has already been suggested, many gypsies do not have the same fear of gorgio corpses as they do their own. In India, many tribes of gypsies earn money either by disposing of the gorgio dead or else make magical charms from the various parts of the dead bodies. The Shadgarshids of Bengal, for example, collect bones, and sinews from the breasts, wrists and ankles of women who have died in childbirth. These bones and sinews are considered to be powerful charms against evil.

Even fear of their own dead is not universal among all gypsies. In a few instances, far from being fearful, their treatment of the body could be considered to be nothing less than frivolous. Some Hungarian gypsies have a very lighthearted attitude in the presence of the corpse and even play a game with it to amuse the children:

> While the young folk are singing inside the house with the mourners the old people at a given signal suddenly snuff out the candles. The young people, frightened by the sudden darkness, run outside. Now the old ones bind some thick thread to the hands and feet of the dead man. The end of the thread is held by the man crouched at the head of the body. Then the candles are lit again and the young people invited to return. . . . They sing again but not for very long. All at once the hands and then the feet of the dead man begin to rise. The terrified youngsters rush out in great haste. But the figure of Death is waiting for them outside: a Gypsy clad in a white sheet and holding an old scythe! Now they do not dare to move either out of the house or into it—and the elders rock with laughter at the jest.[7]

When the family allows the corpse to be touched by gorgios a request is sometimes made for it to be washed. Often, this is done using salt water, but it may also be done using soap and water, and in some cases, such as the Hungarian gypsies, even

wine. If the deceased is a man he may also be shaved. It would seem that the motive behind such practices is to prepare the body so that it will be clean and presentable upon its entrance into the next world. Serbian gypsies, for example, believe that however a person is buried, he will remain that way forever in the next world.

Related to this belief is the necessity that the corpse be properly dressed. If a man were buried naked, he would remain that way forever in the next world. In preparation for their long travels through eternity it is important that the dead have both a head covering and something on their feet. In the case of head covering, usually a hat for a man and a scarf for a woman is sufficient, while a pair of socks is considered adequate for the feet. Considering the gypsies' reluctance for the corpse to be handled, dressing the body after death presents a real problem for them. Resolution of this problem has often been accomplished by the dying person's bathing and dressing before death. Considering it a special dignity to die properly attired, the dying have often washed, shaved and combed their own hair if necessary with the assistance of others. Added to this motive for predeath preparation is the feeling among some dying gypsies that they want their bodies after death to come into as little contact with gorgios as possible. In one example, a dying man struggled to get properly dressed, because "He didn't want no nasty gorgios seeing or touching his naked body."[8] Whether or not there is to be predeath preparation, however, seems to be largely dictated by the group's attitude regarding the fear of the corpse.

It is very common among all gypsies for the burial clothes to be as good as possible. While clothes are usually not purchased with the express intention of use as burial clothes, they are probably the deceased's best clothes and, at least in the later

years, were probably considered suitable for burial. In the West, suitable burial clothes for men usually consist of a dark suit, white shirt and tie, sometimes with shoes but always with socks. The women wear their best dresses and a scarf on their heads. There seems to be three motives behind the use of formal burial clothes: to make the body appear presentable to visitors during the death vigil, to prepare the body for its journey to the next world and to make it presentable in the afterlife. Such formal burial dress and motivations for it are common not only to the vast majority of the world's gypsies but to a large number of the world's gorgios.

There are a few rare exceptions to the use of formal burial dress. Among the Welsh gypsies there is some evidence of bodies being buried in ordinary daily clothing, but this was usually done despite protests made by members of the group. In such cases, reluctance to change clothes might very well be explained by the corpse taboo.

Among gypsies of the East it is common for bodies to be buried in a shroud, but left otherwise naked or dressed simply in a loincloth. On rare occasions, vestiges of this practice can be seen among European gypsies when corpses have been buried dressed in cloths, linen or undergarments accompanied by a shroud.

If Simpson is to be believed, it would seem that in the past, the Scottish gypsies have also been an exception to the rule of formal burial dress. Scottish gypsies a century ago were buried in the nude with a paper cap on the head and paper wrapped around the feet, the body decorated only by a circle of red and blue ribbons on the chest.

This same practice of a burial circlet has been used by English gypsies, but instead of ribbons it was once common to decorate the body with round pieces of sod placed on the chest. The

reason behind this practice is unknown, but it may be a custom acquired from the country people of Westmoreland and Cumberland.

Closely related to this practice is the use of tufts of grass and flowers on the chest of the corpse. Whatever may be the motives behind this procedure, it would seem safe to speculate that it bears some relationship with past earth or nature worship.

The taboo against things associated with the dead includes not only the body of the deceased but also most of those personal objects with which he was associated when he was alive. The fact that the deceased was alive when he owned these objects or had contact with them apparently does not change the survivor's attitude toward these personal effects. Upon the death of the owner, his possessions immediately become taboo for the living.

It is therefore one of the most important principles of gypsy death rites that all traces of the deceased be blotted out by one method or another. This process begins by the deposit of the deceased's most cherished items with him inside the coffin. There are a number of reasons, both practical and religious, why this is done. First is the practical matter of the undesirability of the accumulation of property among a nomadic people. Death provides a convenient opportunity to limit the amount of property. Second, from one magical point of view it is unthinkable for survivors to make use of the deceased's possessions because of the fate which has befallen him. It is thought that the same fate might befall the new possessor through the dead's selfishness in keeping the living from using those things which once belonged to him. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, is the belief that personal effects are likely to remind the survivors of the deceased. Such reminiscence might cause the dead to become restless and therefore act as an encouragement for the

deceased's spirit to return to the world of the living—an event thought to be extremely undesirable. The act of eliminating personal possessions through coffin deposits is only the beginning of the rites associated with disposal of private property; it is not complete until certain rites are performed following the burial of the body.[9]

The use of coffins for burial has been common among gypsies for at least a century. Usually the coffin used is of rather high quality, but plain in its decoration and inscription. Often, however, gypsy coffins have to be specially made because of the unusually large size required to contain not only the body but also the number of personal effects to be enclosed with the body.

Sometimes these enclosures have been made in the coffin for no other obvious reason than the pleasure which the deceased derived from them when he was alive. In some cases, such as jewelry, this may amount to pride of possession. Many women are buried with as much personal jewelry on their bodies as they can wear properly. Other pieces may often be deposited alongside the body, or on occasion be thrown into the grave or deposited underneath the coffin. Men, for the same reason, may be buried with a favorite pipe, ring, pocket watch or some other item of value with which they were closely associated and of which they were especially fond.

As has been said, these coffin deposits are made by the family out of fear of angering the dead in an attempt to avoid the restlessness that the dead will feel without those things which they have so long cherished. While these are, without doubt, the primary reasons for these deposits, an important secondary motive can be seen in provision for the dead in the next world. Without such a motive it would be very difficult to explain the reason for certain types of coffin deposits.

Deposits of food in the coffin, for example, although far from common, provide important evidence for this secondary motive. Though it is possible that deposits of such food as bread and grain may be intended to serve as good-luck charms for the purpose of keeping away evil spirits, this explanation would prove inadequate to explain the occasional instances of meat burial among the Spanish and English gypsies.

Evidence for the idea that the body is prepared for a trip into the next world does not, however, depend on food deposits alone. There have been a few instances of tableware being included with the body, too. The famous evangelist, Gypsy Smith, claimed that when an uncle of his died, the old man's eating utensils were included in his coffin. A Nottinghamshire gypsy was once buried with a cup, plate, knife, fork and spoon wrapped up together in a cloth because the deceased's daughter thought her father would have need of them.

It is fairly common for money to be included with the body. Usually the amount of money is not very large. Often, the amount is only a few coins, although there have been instances of larger amounts of money being buried with corpses—on one occasion as much as 3,000 pounds. When such large sums have been the case, there is evidence that gypsy cunning has easily circumnavigated such a troublesome custom. Once an old gypsy told his sons that he would give each one of them a certain sum of money before his death if they would promise to put what he had left into his coffin with him when he died. To this they agreed, but were greatly surprised after he had died to find that he still had 600 pounds left. Rather than part with such a large sum of money, one of the sons decided to write 600 one-pound checks, and subsequently deposited those in the coffin instead of the currency.

It is common among both Scandinavian and Hungarian gyp-

sies for currency to be placed in the hands of the corpse and coins used to decorate the body. Coins may be placed between the fingers, over the eyes and even on the mouth. Coins may also be placed on the chest of the deceased or else thrown there at the funeral for the purpose of providing traveling money for the deceased's trip into the land of the dead.

Tools or instruments closely associated with the deceased are also frequently buried with them. In the same way that it is important that the dead have good clothes, adequate food, and some money to provide for them in the other world, it is equally important that they have the tools by which they earned their livelihood. Life in the land of the dead is so similar to that of the world of the living, so some gypsies believe, that a blacksmith will need his hammer, or a violinist, his violin, for eternity. Often Spanish gypsies have been buried with their violins for the additional purpose of the expiation of the sins of the living against the dead man. After the living identify all their sins against the deceased, they ask the dead man whether he forgives them or not. If the corpse begins to play his violin that means he does not forgive them and they will be deafened by the music; if the dead man does not play then that means that he has forgiven them.

Candles, and sometimes even matches, may be buried with the corpse also. Without such provisions, some gypsies believe, the deceased would be condemned to wandering in darkness for the rest of time.

By far the most common deposit with the body is clothing. On occasion, this may include the entire wardrobe of the deceased, while on other occasions it has meant only the deceased's finest clothing. The burial of clothing with fully dressed corpses is rarer than in those few cases where the body is only partly clad. While many gypsies have claimed that the pur-

pose of the inclusion of clothes has been merely to dispose of them, it would seem that they, too, are included to provide for the dead's future needs.

Sometimes it happens that the clothes deposited in the coffin are turned inside out. On some occasions, too, clothes on the corpse may be treated likewise. A number of reasons have been given for this peculiar rite. It is possible that this may be only for the purpose of preventing evil spirits to interfere with the dead. As such it may be just one more provision by the living to insure the deceased's easy journey into the next world. It would seem more consistent with gypsy belief, however, for there to be a more complex rationale in such a rite. It is more probable that the clothes reversal is intended to make the body stay in the grave out of shame at being seen so strangely attired in the world of the living. Such reversal is also thought to confuse the dead and may be closely related to the Indian gypsy custom of burying their dead face down in order to make difficult their attempts to escape the grave. It would not necessarily appeal to the logic of many gypsies that the corpse might be strong enough to turn over as well as turn its clothes right side out. Whether this rite is done to embarrass the dead or confuse him, or both, it appears clear that this rite, like all gypsy funeral rites, is intended certainly to hasten the dead into the next world but more importantly to make certain that he will remain there. Once more, the motive for the rite is not so much to provide for the happiness of the deceased as it is to provide security for the living.

During the time of the body preparation and its placing in a coffin, friends and relations continue a vigil for the dead. Practically speaking, this period of time from the moment of death to the moment of burial allows, first, for the preparation of the body for burial, secondly, it provides time for the deceased's

friends and relatives to travel in order to take part in the funeral rites, and thirdly, it offers time for psychological adjustment to the fact of the separation of the dead from the living.

Among the gypsies there are a number of different ways in which the death vigil is performed. Some prefer that the coffin be left open so that the mourners can view the body. Others, on the other hand, exclude visitors of all sorts and even bar close relations from visiting the body. In most cases very strict mourning taboos are kept between the period of death and burial. In a very true sense, the living take up habitation with the dead, since it is expected that as they keep watch over the body the mourners will avoid either cooking, eating or sleeping.

The observance of this food and sleep taboo during the preburial period of mourning is most important. Its chief purpose would seem to be to show the deceased the sorrow which his family and friends feel about his death. There are a number of reasons that can be given for the importance of this display of sorrow. By some gypsies it is thought that sorrow on the part of the deceased's family is a joy and relief to him in the next world. Then, too, there is the concern that if there is not sufficient sorrow for the dead, he may feel restive and return to the world of the living. Related to this, however, and even more significant, is the belief that the mourner who shows the least amount of sorrow may be punished by the dead as the guilty party who caused his death. There is, of course, a genuine and deeply felt sorrow, but it would seem that specific taboos are observed more for the protection of the living than for the comfort of the dead.

There are small variations in vigil fasting rules. While under no conditions is the deceased's family to do any cooking, there is evidence among some families that the mourners are pro-

vided with bread and water and sometimes tea. The taboo is also sometimes extended to include smoking. Children are normally exempted from the taboo, having their needs provided for by those not of the mourning party.

The taboo against sleeping also has some variations in practice. It is observed by the family's gathering around the body of the deceased for the entire period of the vigil, not getting any more sleep than they would get through occasional dozing. Fully dressed and sitting up, no one must try deliberately to sleep. Of the mourning party, it is usual that at least three must stay awake at all times to insure that the spirit of the deceased will take no action against the mourners. This body watching is especially critical among the Serbian gypsies, for if anything should jump over the body during the death vigil, it is inevitable that the deceased will become a vampire.

To protect the dead from such a fate, and to also protect the living, two or more elderly women of the immediate family will occasionally be chosen to remain awake for the vigil, which usually lasts three days.

The gypsies' fear of what action the dead might take in darkness requires that one or more lights burn continuously in the presence of the corpse. This is also explained as a way of providing light for the deceased as he begins his travels into the other world. On occasion these lights may be oil lamps but more often they are a small number of candles.

Closely related to the food and sleep taboos and the motives behind them is the matter of the mourners' lamentations for the dead. When the death of a relative is announced, some groups of gypsies will show an extravagant display of grief. Their lamentation in its unrestrained form has included crying, moaning and in some cases even yelling. Such an emotional display is also often accompanied by extraordinary actions of grief, such

as hysteria and reluctance to leave the body. In extreme situations a widow may go so far as to tear her hair, scream, and beg to be allowed to throw herself on the coffin in order to be buried alive with her husband. Clebert, speaking of the Kalderash gypsies of France, claims that at their vigils:

> On the announcement of death, the whole tribe begins to weep and cry out, even yell. Men and women whimper and cry bitterly showing much sorrow; and there is no reason to believe that their grief is feigned. Among some groups, the loud lamentations continue long into the night, and then change into rhythmic chanting. Their faces are literally contorted with suffering. Even the children wail as though they have been thrashed.[10]

There can be no question, in these instances, that there is a strong element of true grief at the loss of a loved one. The fact, however, that their lamentations are so lacking in restraint and can go on for many hours to eventually become a funeral chant, and that even the children participate in an unrestrained manner, would seem to suggest yet another reason for such display. It is likely that such extreme lamentation, like the food and sleep taboos, is yet another form of convincing the deceased that he is greatly missed. If the dead are not convinced of the sorrow of their family, so believe the gypsies of Scandinavia, it is likely that they will return from the realm of the dead. In the same way as with the other taboos it is important that those who are closest to him, and therefore might have most reason for his death, show the greatest amount of grief possible during the death rites. The more obvious and extravagant the sorrow, the happier the dead person will be, and therefore his spirit will have no desire to haunt the world of the living.

Having said this, and offered an explanation for unrestrained lamentation, it seems perhaps curious to say that such behavior

is very rare among certain groups of British, Slavic and Russian gypsies. In fact, among such groups it is very common for there to be little or no lamentation either before or during the death rites. Welsh gypsies, especially, have a strong taboo against any form of lamentation either before, during, or after the burial. Many Welsh gypsies, looking upon weeping for the dead as a sin, believe that any tears shed over the dead will cause them great discomfort and even burn the heart of the deceased. One writer quoted an English gypsy talking about his grandfather's funeral when he said:

> And all the time, nobody made a sound 'cept when one or another of 'em would bend over the grave and say a word or two of farewell for the old man. But everybody was behaved most proper; it was beautiful to see. And of course, there was no tears, for you know, sir, tears is a disturbance for the dead.[11]

This same taboo against lamentation quite common among gorgios may have had some degree of influence on gypsy practice and belief. Whatever the cause of the gorgio taboo, it is safe to say that gypsies have found sufficient rationale for it in their obsessive desire to do nothing which would cause the dead any discomfort. If tears and lamentations cause the dead to suffer, then under no circumstance must there be any sign of lamentation, because it might mean that the malevolent spirit of the deceased will enter the realm of the living to seek the cause of the disturbance.

It can be seen, then, that, even though evidence exists that gypsies have two different major attitudes toward whether or not lamentation belongs to the rites of death, their motivation is identical—to keep the spirit of the dead from disturbing the realms of the living.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Funerals
Mourning
Grave decoration
Fear of grave robbers
Disposal of property
Mourning taboos

Perhaps no single gypsy ceremony has drawn more public attention and been more widely publicized than the rite associated with burial of the dead. There would seem to be no end to the extent to which newspaper journalists are willing to go in distorting facts of what they have seen, merely to satisfy the romantic imaginations of their readers. As early as 1837, when the romanticism of the period was having its day, a correspondent wrote of the gypsy funeral ceremony:

> they seem to consider death as annihilation. Whenever one of their number dies, they bury him by midnight, frequently in the midst of a storm, while the howling winds moan their funeral dirge.[1]

It would, no doubt, come as a great disappointment to such romantics if they were to be told that, in fact, the true gypsy funeral is relatively uneventful and lacking in the richness of rites characteristically gypsy. For the most part, the funeral is very much like that used by the gorgio population.

It is common among gypsy families to provide as extravagant a funeral as they can possibly afford for their dead. It is considered an important honor to the deceased that their descendants spare no cost in seeing that they are properly buried. Among some gypsies the staggering amounts of money which they have been willing to spend on funerals has amounted to financial ruin for the family of the deceased.

The funeral rite usually begins with a walk or a ride from the camp either to the local church or, in those cases where the cemetery is separate from the church, to the cemetery. Considering the size of gypsy families and their loyalty of attendance at funerals, such a walk can amount to a large procession. In the case of poorer gypsies the body may be carried in its coffin by the stronger men of the group. Among wealthier families, the coffin may be carried in an elaborate hearse drawn by as many as six horses. In many countries of Europe and the Americas the coffin, today, would be taken by a motorized hearse, with the family following shortly behind, and more distant relatives and friends at a greater distance, each in their own cars, or cars especially rented for the occasion.

Almost without exception, gypsies prefer the established national church to perform the funeral rites. This being the case, they prefer the services of the Eastern Orthodox Church in eastern Europe, the Roman Catholic Church in much of western Europe and the Anglican Church in Great Britain. Exceptions to this pattern can be found in Scandinavia, where gypsies identify with Roman Catholicism, and in North America, where, because of their Slavic and southern European origins, they prefer the services of Eastern Orthodoxy and occasionally Roman Catholicism.

Even though it is unlikely that the parish priest is known to them, and their other contacts with the church are usually very

limited, the necessity that the funeral rite should be performed by one of these churches seems to go unquestioned.[2] In some instances, of course, there may be deep-seated religious convictions which cause this choice. It must also be said, however, that force of custom and family tradition, as well as a strong superstition which dictates that the deceased should always be buried in consecrated ground, play an important part in this association.

The coffin is opened either at the end of the funeral rite or else after it has been taken to the graveside. This is done to enable the mourners to file past the exposed corpse and to say a few parting words. This occasion may also be taken to throw a few coins into the grave. Among the gypsies in Scandinavia this may become virtually a shower of coins. The reason for this rite is essentially the same as the previously mentioned deposit of money with the corpse during the period of vigil. As Swedish gypsies throw their coins into the grave they say, "This I throw to thee, so that thou canst pay thy fares and custom duties."[3] Much the same motivation is revealed in an account of the funeral of a gypsy living in Essex, when a friend of the deceased dropped half a crown into the open grave saying, "Here, Jimmy; here's something for a drink on the way."[4]

In some cases, the drink itself may be poured on the coffin or grave. French gypsies sprinkle water by hand on the deceased while the Serbian gypsies may shatter an entire jug of water on the grave. English gypsies have been known to sprinkle beer or ale on the grave while the gypsies of Germany go so far as to pour the deceased's favorite drink on the grave whether it be wine, brandy or beer. The purpose for this action is simply to provide liquid nourishment for the journey of the dead. This rite, together with the observance by some gypsies of the lamentation taboo, is the only one which makes the gypsy funeral distinctive from the traditional Christian ceremony.

There are, however, two other eccentricities about the occasion which deserve attention. First, the matter of mourning colors. Distinctive clothing during funeral rites is commonly worn for two primary reasons: to symbolize suffering at the loss of the deceased, and to establish a different status from that of the rest of the community. While to a certain limited extent distinctive clothes may be worn among gypsies to show their suffering to the dead, a much more important factor is the matter of protection. This protective motive can be seen in the two colors which gypsies have traditionally worn during their funeral ceremonies.

At one time it was customary for white to be used as the color of mourning. In the nineteenth century there are a number of accounts of female relatives of the deceased dressing entirely in white while the men wore white gloves and ties and had white mourning bands on their hats. In some instances men, too, wore all white and even decorated the horse-drawn hearse with white plumes. Among the gypsies of the Isle of Man, white is so much the color of mourning that it is not worn on other occasions in daily life. Slavic gypsies, too, wear white, especially on Whitsunday when they traditionally mourn for their dead. Generally speaking, white seems to be considered as a color symbolic of protection and good fortune and therefore appropriate for such occasions.

Red, however, has been even more common among gypsies as a color of mourning. Among many groups it has been common for women mourners to wear red clothes to a funeral while the men wear red neckerchiefs. When red clothes have not been worn, small rosettes or other scraps of red have been provided for the mourners. In the past, American gypsy funerals have revealed a predominance of the use of red in the funeral trappings including red plumes for the hearse. German gypsies use red in the plaiting of their hair and in their horses' manes when

attending a funeral. It is also commonly used for grave decoration.

The use of red as a funeral color is by no means unique to gypsies, however. It is used by many of the world's peoples for numerous reasons. The reason for this use is probably rooted in prehistoric man's belief in blood as the source of vitality and life. From this arose the practice of painting the bones of the dead, the color of blood, which was thought to give them some kind of eternal vitality.

From this origin, red came to have several meanings for various peoples. Red clothes, for instance, have been commonly used for people when they were ill, since red was the color of life, warmth and health. More important, perhaps, in the case of the British gypsy, is evidence that red has been used by a number of people as a protection against evil spirits. In northern Britain red berries were put in windows and over doorways to protect the living from the dead on Halloween. In Scotland, red thread was thought to be a protection against witches and was wound around women when they were about to give birth. It is likely, then, that the gypsies' use of red may be for the protection of the mourners in an extremely dangerous environment, whether it be to help them continue their lives, guarantee their good health, or quite simply as a protection against the malevolent spirit of the dead. Today, the use of the gorgio's black is becoming more and more common. Certain tribes of Austrian gypsies, such as the Sinti, have given up red altogether in favor of black. This would seem to indicate a definite decline in the gypsies' confidence in the magical qualities of red as a prophylactic color.

A second eccentricity associated with gypsy funeral rites is in the use of flowers and plants. While it is customary for gypsies to decorate the grave with flowers at the funeral, some gypsies,

especially in England, shun the use of real flowers in favor of artificial ones.[5] The reason would seem to be that they want nothing as quickly perishable as live flowers to be laid on the grave. Closely related to this aversion for cut live flowers on graves is the onetime custom of planting flowers or flowering shrubs on graves in order to determine the state of the dead by observing whether the plants flourish or die.

This reluctance to use living cut flowers is by no means common to all gypsies. Scandinavian gypsies have always used fresh flowers as have many other continental gypsies. When British gypsies do use fresh flowers, the form which these floral tributes take is of special interest. At a funeral in 1955 all the favorite possessions or preferences of the deceased were depicted in floral arrangements for the coffin. In this case, wreaths representing a dog, a birdcage, a chair, a cushion, a cooking tripod, a boar's head and a horse collar, were present at the grave. At a funeral in 1964 a caravan and a truck were depicted in flowers, while yet another funeral had as floral tributes a chair, a bird and even a television set. It would seem the reason for these tributes is much the same as the deposit of personal items inside the coffin—the difference in this case being that the items depicted were either living or else too large to be included within the coffin.

In the past there has been evidence of gypsies planting thorn bushes on graves. Bodies have also been buried under thorn trees, in some cases. A number of different motivations could be cited for this practice. In some cases it may mean no more than a symbolic final recognition of the close relationship between the gypsy and his lifelong dependence on the hedgerow to provide shelter for him. In other cases, especially among the gypsies of Germany, bushes which are considered symbolic of the family of the deceased have been planted. It is probable, how-

ever that many gypsies practice this custom either to prevent the dead from coming out of their graves, or at least to prevent strangers from walking over the grave, and thereby disturbing the dead.

Considering the gypsies' fear of the dead it is naturally very important that a proper grave be provided for the deceased in order that his spirit will not become restless, or, if it does, to provide the maximum amount of protection against his spirit rising from the grave. This concern that the deceased be comfortable in his grave sometimes results in extreme measures being taken. An example of this might be found in the case of a gypsy father who bought seven grave plots for his son's burial, "so he wouldn't be crowded in his death."

Concern for the grave begins immediately after the burial of the deceased. In the past, it has been the custom for gypsies to keep a vigil over a grave for the period required for the body to reach a state of decay. It may be that this observance has no particular primarily magical significance but rather was a caution taken to prevent the activities of resurrectionists. In an age when corpses for medical purposes were much in demand, resurrectionists found that bodies of either vagrants or traveling people were those most easily obtained. Especially did this apply to the corpses of gypsies, since it is probable that gypsies would normally make haste to leave the area where a burial had taken place. This would have allowed the resurrectionists to quickly remove the body from the grave before it reached a state of decay. Besides resurrectionists there were other body snatchers who sought parts of corpses or other burial properties for magical purposes. The fact that the corpse was that of a gypsy, and was therefore closely associated in the popular mind with magic and witchcraft, made the procuring of such properties all the more desirable. Further, if the gypsy had died

through violence or had been executed for illegal activities, then the magical properties of the corpse became all the more potent.

Gypsies, with their concern for the comfort and peace of the dead, have a horror of any form of body disturbance. Therefore, during the period in which such activities were taking place, they developed several procedures for the protection of their graves. One procedure was to maintain a vigil over the grave until the body had reached a stage where it was unfit for dissection. Gypsies have been known to use various means to hasten this process. Occasionally the body has been put into hot lime before burial. Hungarian and some Indian gypsies have made it their practice to behead the corpse to hasten decay. During this period a vigil may be maintained to protect the body. In one instance the wife of an executed man put his corpse into hot lime, buried it herself, and then chose to sit on his grave in a state of intoxication until she was certain that his body was not suitable for dissection.

Other procedures were unusually deep burials and, in some cases, iron fences around the grave. The most common procedure, however, was the filling of the grave at burial, not with earth but with a mixture composed largely of grain or chaff. The purpose of the mixture was twofold. Resurrectionists usually would excavate over the head of the corpse only, and, using leverage, would pry the top off the coffin and extricate the body by pulling it out through the top. With the loose mixture of earth and chaff, their digging would be made much slower since the sides of the grave would keep falling in. Then, if the body ever was reached, the soft soil on top would fail to provide the leverage needed to break off the top of the coffin. This same procedure was used among gorgios to prevent resurrectionist grave robbers. In both cases, heavy stones were often

placed over the prepared grave. The gorgios customarily placed the stone on the grave to identify the person buried. By contrast, Gypsies often left the stone unmarked; the purpose being to provide one further obstacle to resurrectionists as well as preventing the body from leaving its grave.

Closely related to these burial procedures in the custom among many gypsies, whether they be Christians or Moslems, to prefer burial in consecrated ground. It would seem that one of the major motives for this is, once again, to provide security for the body. This quest for security from body snatchers has even led some gypsies to bury their dead in church floors. When they have failed to obtain burial inside the church, they have been known to ask for burial plots to be as close to the church as possible—even near the church door or under the porch. This might explain at least one of the motivations for preferring the burial services of the established church or religion in whatever country they live.

While there was often some reluctance on the part of gorgios, in the past, to burial of gypsies in their churchyards, in some cases such burials were actually desired to satisfy the needs of a gorgio superstition. In Wales, for example, there exists a superstition that the first body buried in a cemetery goes to the Devil. To give the Devil his due, first burials were quite often the bodies of social outcasts, or apparently, in some cases, gypsies, thus enabling a churchyard to be opened for the benefit of the more respectable villagers.

As common as consecrated burial is among gypsies, it would be wrong to say that it was a universal practice. Among some families the fear of the corpse is so strong that a body is often quickly, even hurriedly, buried on the spot where it died. Curiously, the most important motive behind such unconsecrated burial may be the same as the motive for consecrated

burial. It would seem that these families believe that the faster the body was disposed of, the less attention was drawn to it by grave markings, and the more desolate the place of its burial, the less likely was the possibility of its being discovered by resurrection men. Recorded instances of such burials, however, are rare, and by their clandestine nature difficult to substantiate. It is perhaps interesting to observe that most gypsies have clung to the custom of churchyard burial in the past despite the difficulties of securing the services of a priest, the clerical objections to burying what they at least often thought to be unbaptised heathens, the villager's fear of gypsy disease, and the gypsies' own fear of arrest for any crime which they might have committed. All these difficulties, then, were overcome in order to make sure that their dead would remain undisturbed.

There is one last and very rare form of burial which deserves to be mentioned—river burial. Gypsies have occasionally used under-river burial as a method to protect the body from resurrection men. In these cases a river would be temporarily redirected, the body buried on the river floor, and then the river allowed to continue over its old course. Instances of such burials among nongypsies would seem to substantiate the motive for such a practice as being that of protection of both the body and the valuables buried with the body.

In contrast to the earlier-mentioned practice of placing heavy stones over graves for their protection, some gypsies will erect monuments over graves. In most cases these monuments have been simple but expensive. In a few instances these monuments will have carved on them such curiosities as horses, inscriptions in Romany or even masonic signs.

In some instances, simple monuments consisting of no more than a small wooden cross, or marking the grave with small stones, may be done by the family. On a few occasions these

crosses have been decorated with red or yellow cloth, while in at least one case the stones have been painted red, white and blue. These few cases of color being used on monuments can be seen as instances of where color is used for its prophylactic value. The use of yellow for this purpose among Western gypsies may have its roots in the practice of the gypsies of India. In northern India, gypsies use turmeric occasionally to stain the corpse yellow, but always to dye the shroud that color before the body is burned.

The burial of the body is followed by one of the best known and perhaps most spectacular of the gypsy funeral rites. Immediately after the graveside ceremonies, the family returns to the camp in order to make preparation for the disposal of the deceased's belongings.

It will be remembered that it is common gypsy practice for a number of personal possessions to be included with the body at burial. The most important motive behind this deposit in the coffin is to rid the family of objects which might cause the deceased to return to the world of the living either through interest in objects which once belonged to him, or out of jealousy of others using them.

The complete rite of disposal of personal property, however, includes more than small personal objects. It applies to virtually everything owned by the deceased. To make sure that the spirit remains in the world of the dead and to ward off the effect of the social taboo which would affect the welfare of the survivors, literally every trace of the deceased must be removed. The fear which gypsies feel for such possessions, and even objects indirectly associated with the deceased, requires a remarkable thoroughness in such removal, which usually ends in destruction of the possessions. In some instances this practice has been so extreme that even pictures of the deceased may be destroyed, or even something which the deceased had made and given away

may meet the same fate. If, as has occasionally happened, a few of the deceased's possessions are accidentally not disposed of at the time of the burial, but discovered later, they may be sealed into a box or a drawer, never to be opened again. One old woman once explained this very powerful taboo against retention of the deceased's property by saying:

> If yous was to do that, yous'd be ha'nted and da'nted wid back luck and resease into all your days. Yous'd have none renjoicement of nothink, and whatsumever yous did it'd prove a curse to yous. And maybe yous'd go out'n your mind, or maybe yous'd waste away into a skelinton. And nobody'd dissociate wid yous, not your own kinspeople. If yous was to meet wid your sister, what yous had bin brought up along of, she'd not know the side'n the road yous was on. "Bide away from they," she should say to her husband and her children, "for theys is under a curse, what'll pass on to we an we mix and mingle wid they.[6]

The foundation of this social curse, however, is the more basic fear of the dead man's restlessness and jealousy of the living. The same old woman once explained:

> My mother wouldn't have stayed into her grave unless wes had restroyed heverythink belonging to her, heverythink, that is, what was hers for her own. She wouldn't have liked for we, or for hanybody, to keep and use her things after when she was gone.[7]

In a few instances where the dying may have had good reason not to trust his family with disposal of their possessions, they may go so far as to order destruction of their property to be performed under their own supervision. Many gypsies believe, then, that the spirits of the dead haunt their past possessions and find no repose until all their possessions are either destroyed or at least removed from any future contact with the living.

The most dramatic of the rites of disposal are, of course,

those that require complete destruction of all the deceased's possessions. When this is to be the case, the family returns from the graveside rite and goes immediately to the deceased's caravan. It is then pulled away from the other caravans into an open space. All the deceased's combustible possessions are placed inside the caravan. Inside, the bed is torn up and straw is spread liberally all over the interior. When that is done, a gallon or two of inflammable liquid is poured all over the interior. Then a torch is thrown inside so as to set the caravan on fire. The family then gathers around the burning caravan, making sure now and then that the flames are completely consuming the possessions. After the fire has died down, any solid objects remaining after the fire are battered into shapelessness and buried. Often even the remaining ashes are carefully buried or strewn on water so that not the slightest trace remains.

The loss of a caravan with all the property of the deceased often constitutes a staggering economic loss to the survivors. It is understandable, then, that even though the motives behind the disposal rite would suggest that it should take place after every death, it is often not performed on the occasion of a child's death. In such cases, disposal is usually limited only to the most personal of the child's belongings such as toys and clothes. There have been, however, rare occasions when destruction of the family caravan has been carried out even for children.

Even the destruction of the caravan and all the possessions contained within it does not always complete the rite of disposal. Possessions which do not burn such as fine china, silver, and jewelry are often either broken or smashed into shapelessness. Sometimes they are thrown on the caravan fire, while at other times they are either buried or dropped into a river or the ocean. Curiously, on a few occasions, a single souvenir of the

deceased may be held back from this destruction but rarely are such items closely associated with the deceased. As a rule virtually everything is disposed of, for, at best, objects belonging to the dead are considered extremely unpleasant even to touch.

This rite of disposal by destruction also includes any animals which might have been owned by the deceased at the time of death. Most often this has meant horses, though, on occasion, it has included smaller animals such as dogs. At one time the animals of the deceased were shot and their bodies were either buried or else dumped into a river or the ocean. Though this particular rite has become less common than it was in the past, it is still known to take place in America and Great Britain, where the destruction of the animals may be supervised by officials of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

The ancient origin of such a complete rite of disposal by destruction may very well have its origins in the funeral practices which many Indian gypsies and Hindus have in common. In the ceremony of suttee it has been customary for not only the possessions of the deceased to be burned, but also the corpse, and if the deceased were a married man—even his widow. There exists no evidence that the gypsies in the West ever went to the extremes of their Eastern counterparts by burning the bodies of either the living or the dead. A remnant of this practice, however, may be seen in instances of Transylvanian gypsy widows burning their clothing at their husbands' funerals. One of the major reasons for such destruction by fire, is, like that of the burial of possessions, to provide for the needs of the deceased in the next world.

Evidence that this is not the primary reason for property destruction, however, can be seen in the fact that not all gypsies practice such a drastic rite. Some groups are quite content to

sell or give away the larger possessions rather than destroy them. Various groups of German, Austrian and Scandinavian gypsies will sell the deceased's property to provide for his funeral expenses. This would seem to suggest that the survivors are indeed anxious to remove all traces of the deceased from their presence, but that they have little interest in honoring or providing for the dead in the next world. The Swedish gypsies are a case in point. They are extremely concerned about the return of the deceased's spirit and yet they seem to have no custom demanding destruction of the deceased's property. Indeed, with the exception of the personal items which are placed in the coffin, virtually all of the deceased's possessions are sold, given away or kept by the heirs, but nothing is destroyed. There is evidence, however, that some of the property retained by the heirs has been the source of so much spiritual activity by the deceased that they have later been forced to sell it.

Largely for economic reasons, the more ancient rite of complete property destruction has become less and less rigorously observed. Before the advent of the use of elaborate and expensive caravans by gypsies, it was a simple matter, for example, to destroy the crudely built twig hut or tent of the deceased. With the extensive use of the horse-drawn caravan in the nineteenth century and the car-drawn trailer in the twentieth century, many families became increasingly reluctant to destroy such valuable possessions at the time of death. While some families, even to this day, continue the practice of the complete destruction of the deceased's habitation no matter how valuable it may be, others have adapted their customary rite allowing for the caravan or trailer to be sold rather than destroyed. The fact that so many gypsy families have found sale of the caravan acceptable in the practice of their death rites is excellent evidence that the primary purpose of the postburial disposal rite is

to prevent the return of the deceased's spirit. On the other hand, the reason that other families cling so tenaciously to disposal by destruction could be that they believe, in some way, that the objects thus destroyed will find their way into the world of the dead and be useful to the deceased.

In some instances this changing of custom between destroying property and selling it has led to a conflict within families. The story is told of the funeral of an English gypsy woman where some of the less traditional members of her family protested the destruction of her trailer. After an hour or two of quarreling the difference of opinion nearly led to an out-and-out battle between the traditionalists and the modernists. In the end, however, the traditionalists won, and the trailer was burned.[8]

In many instances there does seem to be a definite correlation between the performance of the death rite and the prosperity of the family. Families which are prosperous often seem to prefer complete destruction of the deceased's property, while the poorer families usually make it their practice to sell what they can.

The same motivation would seem to be behind the decline in instances of animal destruction. Invariably, even when the other valuable property may have been destroyed, the animals will be sold. Under no circumstances, however, are the animals ever sold to other gypsies. They are always sold to gorgios. The most extreme action to be taken in the sale of the animals is that they be sold to be butchered for use as animal food or for other such purposes. On other occasions they may be sold to farmers. A number of stories are told, however, of instances of such sales to farmers giving the families a bad conscience. Occasionally this may lead to the sold animal being secretly poisoned or otherwise disposed of.

The story is told of one unique instance where the property

of the deceased was neither destroyed nor sold. In the case of one woman, it was directed that her richly decorated caravan should be allowed to stand in its place until it gradually fell to pieces through exposure to the elements. It seems very likely that this decision was a rationalization in order to prevent the destruction of the valuable property. As a wealthy woman she had also left substantial amounts of money, jewelry and even three houses she owned. Needless to say, such properties were not destroyed. This would seem to be an exception to the usual complete property destruction by wealthy families.

Modern economic conditions are making it increasingly difficult not only to destroy the property of the deceased but even to dispose of it. With the use of modern trailers, destruction of such expensive property has become an economic impossibility. Gradually, at least in Europe, families are becoming settled into permanent trailer camps owned by public agencies. Legally it would be forbidden to start a fire on such a site. The unwillingness of other gypsies to buy a trailer where a death had just occurred would, in turn make a sale impossible. The desertion of the trailer would not only be illegal but impractical. Gorgios have repeatedly shown their unwillingness to buy a trailer in which gypsies have lived. More and more, the only choice left to many families is to continue living in the deceased's trailer and to attempt to rationalize away the fear of his spirit. In this case the last concession open to them is to repaint the trailer after a death. This way, at least, the dead will not recognize the trailers as being their own.

In those countries where gypsies have long since been required to become sedentary or are now required to do so, yet another problem has been presented for them in the continuance of the practice of the disposal rite. Here, too, repainting of the house has provided a solution to the problem. Among

the gypsies of Hungary, for instance, it is customary to white-wash a house after the death of its occupant. In such cases, as now, where families have been moved into publicly owned housing, even such a simple and harmless rite as this will, of course, not be allowed.

Among many families, mourning procedures following a death often include the observance of at least two major taboos. The first taboo is the one against the use of the name of the deceased. From the moment when the funeral ceremonies have been completed it is often very common to find considerable reticence on the part of the family to ever again mention the deceased relative by name. Evidence that the name arouses in the gypsy a feeling of both fear and power, can be seen in two instances when it is used. If by some chance the name should be used unintentionally it is often followed by an apology for doing so. Phrases such as "God rest him," "May he forgive me for mentioning his name," or "May she rest in her grave" have often followed accidental use of the name. This reluctance would seem to be motivated by the fear that the dead will think they are being called by the living and therefore seek to return to them.

When the names of the dead are mentioned they are usually used in the form of a powerful invocation, being used in oaths. The Bhantu tribe of Indian gypsies take oaths in the name of their dead ancestors, as do their counterparts living in Germany and England. Such oaths are so powerful that they must never be violated. Even in such cases as these, however, it is customary that assurance is given in the oath itself that the deceased is not wanted among the living, but is to remain in the land of the dead. To be absolutely safe on this point, oaths are often made mentioning the relationship of the deceased but not actually naming him.

This taboo against the name of the dead applies traditionally not only to the deceased but to any others who might have the same name. Often, if there is a living relative by the same name as the deceased, his name may be changed. If the name is not formally changed then the close relatives of the deceased may adopt a nickname for the deceased's namesake.

Among the Serbian and Turkish gypsies the sacred nature of the name is the most evident. On the seventh night after a burial, it is customary for them to call the deceased by name, making a promise never to use the name again, and imploring the deceased to leave the presence of the living and do nothing to torment his family.

The avoidance of camping sites once used by the deceased is a related taboo. A number of instances can be mentioned where, even years later, families would avoid sites where one of the members had died, presumably out of fear of encountering his spirit.

A taboo, equally as common as that against names, is the one against certain types of food, drink or amusement. It is quite common for the closest relatives to abstain either for a number of years or for life, from some food or amusement closely associated with the deceased. Austrian gypsies, for example make it their practice to abstain from certain foods or from dancing for a period of a year. Although this practice may often be no more than an act of self-denial as is commonly practiced by many peoples, it is interesting to observe once again that it is not the mourner's favorite foods or pastimes from which there is abstention but rather those of the deceased. In practice this abstention may mean deprivation from some of the most basic edibles: meat, fish, beer, potatoes, fruit and a number of other foods. Amusements such as smoking, card playing, violin playing, or dancing may also come under this self-imposed taboo,

therefore requiring great sacrifices on the part of the mourners. As in the case of the name taboo, it would seem that the purpose of this practice is not to do anything which might provide a temptation to the dead to leave his abode.

Occasionally other forms of mourning deprivations are practiced. Some gypsies will neither comb their hair, wash, or use makeup for a given period of time after the funeral. Swedish gypsies, for example, will not sew, wash or shave for a period of six weeks after a funeral. Here at last, it would seem, is a practice which exists solely for the reason of self-sacrifice and sorrow on the part of the mourners. It would indeed seem that way if it were not for the Swedish gypsy legend which claims that soapsuds used by mourners cause discomfort to the corpse by burning its eyes, or for the fact that the period of abstention also happens to be very close to the amount of time required for the body to reach a state of decomposition.

CHAPTER NINE

Afterlife
Cemetery cult
Vampires
Werewolves and other creatures
Sex and vampires
Destruction of vampires

Gypsies for the most part have a practical outlook on life. For centuries their attention has been almost entirely devoted to questions and problems associated with survival in foreign lands where both the environment and public persecution presented great dangers. Because of their problems in this world, they have had little time or inclination to reflect on the nature of the world to come. As has been shown, even the death rites themselves are intended more for securing the safety of the living than for benefiting the dead.

Attitudes toward the buried dead vary depending on the state of the corpse. In gypsy belief the corpse remains highly dangerous to the living until it has reached a state of total decay. After that time the dead may still be dangerous but are far less so than before, since they have lost their bodies and therefore to a certain degree forfeited their claim to the world of the living. The actual state of the disembodied spirit thereafter holds little interest for gypsies.

Various folktales and legends, however, do give some small idea of that eventual, and eternal, fate of the deceased. British gypsies have been known to believe in no afterlife at all, while others have said that they believe in a heaven much as the Christians do, but that hell and the punishment associated with it is realized on earth before the death of the individual.

Some German gypsies have been known to express the belief that the dead are eventually reborn as new babies in the world if they have led virtuous lives. This will happen up to three times with the passage of five hundred centuries between each birth. If, however, the deceased has had great responsibility in life but has treated people badly, he may return for a time as either a horse or a dog. Emperors or kings who have led brutal lives return in the next life as either lions or tigers.

A Serbian gypsy legend claims that in the other world life is just the same as it is in the world of the living, except that there is no such thing as death. The dead who are able to enter the world of the living through dreams have verified that they perform the same occupations as they did on earth. When a man dies he remains forever the same age as when he died, with the possible exception of an older persons, who may age. Otherwise everything in the next world remains absolutely changeless.

A Bosnian folktale claims that gypsies eventually pass into a type of super-paradise which is quite literally a land of milk and honey. It is a beautiful place where people have vast areas in which to roam, where everything they could possibly ever use is simply free for the taking. Trouts, cheeses, pork, sausages, dumplings and other foods are lying virtually everywhere. Three rivers pass through paradise, one flowing with sweet milk, another with sour milk, and the third only with cream. Nongypsies are not allowed within the paradise but can be seen on the outside shivering with cold and suffering with hunger. When

they beg for food, the gypsies ignore them and continue their feasting.

Some Austrian gypsies believe that the dead go either to heaven or to hell depending on how virtuous a life they have led. Immediately after death, sinners are burned in hell, during which time they visit their acquaintances and friends, giving them much trouble and generally annoying them. This continues for six weeks until the family has a mass said for the deceased, which frees the tortured, and torturing, soul to go to heaven.

Belief in a period of only six weeks for the soul's remaining on earth is comparatively rare. As has been said, it would seem that many believe the departure of the deceased can take place only after total decomposition of the body. Among many gypsies, however, it would seem that there is a concern either that the normal process of decomposition will not take place, or else that in some sense the spirit never totally leaves the place of the burial.

Such beliefs have given rise to what only could be called a cemetery cult. With a few exceptions but with many variations, gypsies of different lands make regular visits to the graveside of the deceased, either for a limited period of time after the death, or indefinitely. In some cases such visits may be made at varying intervals within the first year after death but in other instances they may recur annually.

These special visits ordinarily involve the eating or at least the sacrificing of food. In some instances a special feast has been held at the cemetery immediately following burial but more often such special feasts take place at varied intervals. Greek gypsies have been known to celebrate special memorial feasts at the graveside on the eleventh day following burial, as well as three months later and a year later. Indian gypsies are

also known to distribute food at the time of burial, while on the seventh and also occasionally on the fortieth day following burial, it is their custom to have a large public feast for the mourners. At that time a share of the feast is taken to the graveside where, if a crow eats the food, it is a good omen. If a dog eats it, it is an omen of evil.

At such memorial or funeral feasts, it may be the custom for the food to remain uneaten by the mourners. In some cases the feast has been thoroughly and elaborately prepared but then given away without any of the deceased's family even tasting the food.

Among some groups, on the other hand, these feasts have been occasions for great revelry with lavish eating and drinking. In the past, for example, British gypsies were known to gather at the gravesides of their deceased usually around Christmas to toast the dead but also to meet relatives whom they had not seen for some time. Occasionally these commemorative feasts became so indecorous as to deteriorate into a brawl necessitating police intervention. More often, however, such gatherings seem to have maintained a sense of propriety.

Whether the mourners participated in the feasts or else left the food untouched, it appears clear that their purpose was not only to honor the dead but also to have the dead in some way join the feast. In all such meals portions of the meal were either poured on the grave in the case of drink, or left on it in the case of solid food.

In many cases, especially in western Europe, these original memorial feasts which required a large expenditure of both time and money to prepare and celebrate, have come to be reduced simply to a grave offering. In some instances even the feast at the time of burial has come to be a token offering of food, wine, or beer to the deceased. Among Slavic, Spanish,

German, Austrian, and French gypsies, however, the custom remains of making periodic visitations to graves in order to place a portion of food or pour a drink on the burial place.

Among many British gypsies even the offering of food seems to have come to be neglected. Many, however, still make it their practice to visit the graves of their deceased at appropriate intervals. There they may spend many hours in quiet meditation or even, as evidence would seem to show, actually talking with the deceased. Witnesses have verified the fact that they have seem women, when visiting graves, search for tiny crevices in the earth through which they will proceed to whisper messages to the deceased. Presents, such as a bit of tobacco or a new clay pipe, may also be brought to the grave and either pressed into the ground or buried there.

Final evidence of a cemetery cult among the gypsies can be seen in the practice common among both American and British gypsies of grave photography. Because of the great distances involved in the United States, and legal restrictions on movement in Great Britain, it is often impossible to make regular visits to gravesites. For this reason it is common for families to photograph the gravesite as a form of compromise with their past habits of personal visitation.

The practices of the cemetery cult, with its memorial feasts, its offerings of food and drink, visitations involving talking with the dead and offering of presents, coupled with the previously mentioned property destruction of larger items and deposit of smaller items with the deceased at the time of burial, all seem to point to the fact that for many gypsies the world of the dead is none other than the grave itself. With the exception of a few legends from folklore regarding gypsy concepts of afterlife there seems to be no other evidence of popular belief regarding death.

Obviously this cult of the dead makes great demands on the living. Initially, the living are denied any right of inheritance from the deceased when his property is destroyed or buried. It is also required, however, that the deceased be buried as elaborately and expensively as possible, even to the point of impoverishing the living. The demands of the dead on the living, however, do not cease with burial. Death taboos regarding the favorite food or pastime of the deceased continue to impose a burden on the living. Finally the practice of the cemetery cult requires continued loyalty to the dead through regular visitation to the graveside.

The cult of the dead may also have influenced gypsy lifestyles and history in other ways. At least one factor causing their nomadic habits may be their concern to visit the graves of their deceased. The cult of the dead also exposed gypsies to great dangers in a Europe which has been for so long determined to see their annihilation. To those countries where persecution was the most extreme, where execution of gypsies was most common, gypsies were drawn in greatest numbers through their determination to remain loyal to their dead.

Simple loyalty, however, cannot be seen to be the only, or for that matter even primary, motivation in their practice of the cult of the dead. A far more important factor is fear. Essentially the cause of this fear is that the dead for any one of a number of reasons may become discontented with the world of the grave. Among many gypsies it is believed that when a man dies his soul leaves his body, but upon burial the soul returns to the body and dwells with it. Others believe that the soul never really leaves the body but remains with it. Either way, it is believed, the world of the dead is nothing more or less than the grave itself.

It is clear that one of the most ancient and widespread moti-

vations for the practices associated with the cult of the dead is the fear that the corpse in its grave-world will become restless and seek to return to the world of the living. We have already discussed a number of ways in which this could happen. They are clearly implied in the various funeral and death rites. Insufficient mourning, the survivors' use of the deceased's property, excessive lamentation by the family, and use of the deceased's name are only a few examples of the kinds of actions on the part of the living which could cause the spirit of the dead to become restless. A failure to practice the various rites of the cemetery cult is also considered by many groups to be sufficient cause to make the dead feel neglected and therefore restless.

There are, however, many other reasons which could cause the dead to become restless through absolutely no fault of the living. If, for example, during the burial rites any kind of animal were to jump over the coffin, this is considered a future source of great discontent.

In the same way, any death which may have occurred unnaturally, such as by violence or by suicide, is thought to leave the dead restless in the grave. Included in this category are those babies who are either born dead or else are born monstrous and then die soon after birth. Some say that the baby, though buried, will continue to grow until his eighth year, while others claim that he may grow to full adulthood before he becomes restless in the grave. People who have died by sudden accident, and certainly those who have died by execution, are also thought to be potentially restless.

People who in their former lives were especially evil are also thought to be restless in the next world. If the deceased was noted in his life for being violent-tempered or an incorrigible drunkard, or in any way ruthless or treacherous, his state, too, is thought to be one of discontent with his afterlife. Anyone who

suffered from insanity or other mental and physical disorders while he was alive may also fall into this category. Such an association between evildoers and the mentally or physically deranged can be seen as a reflection of the primitive concept that sickness of all types is caused by evil spirits and is thought to be an indication of spirit possession. Either because such illness may run in families, or because the temperament of individuals within families may be similar, it is also believed, at least among the Swedish gypsies, that restlessness in death may be to some degree hereditary and therefore run in some families more than others.[1]

When any of these occurrences takes place, it is believed by many gypsies that the dead will become so restless in their grave world that they will seek to return to the world of the living by emerging from their graves in one form or another. It is this belief and the many practices associated with it which justifies the claim that many gypsies, both in the past and even down to the present day, are exponents of the cult of the vampire.

What gypsies often call the *mullo* [the living dead, or what we call the vampire] is a creature which is generally regarded by them with unmitigated horror. However, in the same way that we have seen that a multitude of different factors can cause the development of a vampire, so also there are many different traditions among the gypsies as to what actually constitutes a vampire. Though the relationship between the vampire and the living may vary a good deal, by far the most common attitude is one of outright malevolence and viciousness.

Such an attitude might at first seem surprising. Why, for example, should a dead man, who may have loved his family and his friends during life, suddenly radically change his attitude toward them after meeting death in a sudden accident?

The reason for this change of heart lies in the primitive concept of death and what causes death. The gypsies, like virtually all primitive people, look upon death as being a highly unnatural occurrence. It does not seem reasonable to them that life with all its pleasures, satisfactions, and close relationships could suddenly come to an abrupt halt. In tribal societies where there is often a large degree of conformity or at least similarity of belief and experience, it does not seem reasonable that one member of the group should be singled out to face the highly individual experience of dying. The only explanation for such an occurrence is that some evil force has caused the death—an evil force or power which, in fact, opposed the natural force of life and destroyed it. In primitive logic, such evil power does not happen merely by accident; it is in some sense initiated by an individual or a group that sought to terminate the life of the deceased and send him for eternity to his grave-world.

Thus, given certain conditions, the dead, if they are able to do so, will rise from their graves to become vampires in order to seek revenge on those living who caused their deaths. A vampire may seek out certain individuals, or he may be highly indiscriminate in seeking revenge for the injustice done to him. Because some gypsies believe that any form of death is unnatural, it therefore follows that all who die, regardless of the conditions of the death rite, may become vampires.

Filled with hatred and revenge, it becomes the purpose of the vampire to discover the identity of those who caused his death, together with their motivations for doing so. If, for example, the motivation was greed, the vampire would seek out those who had not totally destroyed all his belongings in the burial rite but rather had retained valuable possessions for themselves. If the motivation was personal dislike, he might seek out those

who failed to observe the various rites associated with the cemetery cult. If his death was sudden, he might seek out those who would have something to gain by his death.

The origin of the gypsy cult of the vampire may very well be found in India. Certainly the gypsy did not have to come to Europe in order to discover a popular belief in vampires. India has a strong vampiric tradition of its own, which may have either influenced gypsy thinking or else quite possibly been itself strongly influenced by gypsy belief. The *bhuta*, for example, a vampirelike creature known in western India, is the soul of a man who has died an untimely death, was insane in life, or was born deformed. Wandering usually between midnight and the early hours of the morning, bhutas often appear as dark shadows, flickering lights, or misty apparitions on the marshes. They have been known to enter men's bodies, causing them great sickness, and even death. They have also been known to animate dead bodies and then proceed to devour men alive. In northern India, the *brahmaparusha*, a similar creature with equally objectionable habits, is commonly depicted wearing a wreath of intestines around his head, gnawing the flesh off a man's head and drinking blood from a skull.

When the gypsies first came to Europe, whatever their belief in vampires may have been at the time was given new support by their contact with the Balkan peoples. Settling as they did in the area for a long time and in large numbers, they added to their own vampiric tradition the beliefs and practices of a people who had long had such a tradition of their own. In the Middle Ages, in fact, the belief in vampires had come to be so widespread that the Serbian emperor, Stefan Dusan, condemning the magical means which were used to suppress vampires, decreed that any village which participated in such magic would be

fined, and any priest present would be defrocked.[2] How unsuccessful was this fourteenth-century attempt at suppression can be seen in a report written three centuries later:

> In the year 1731 vampires disturbed the village of Medvedja. The High Command from Belgrade immediately sent a commission of German officers and others to the spot. They excavated the whole cemetery and found there really were vampires there, and all those dead found to be vampires were decapitated by the Gypsies, their bodies cremated and the ashes thrown into the river Morava.[3]

Under the influence of the Balkan peoples, the vampire in gypsy tradition came to have a number of varied attributes. The most common form which the vampire takes when he enters into the world of the living is that of a dead man who, after an indefinite time of burial, deserts his grave, generally in the depth of night, and goes about strangling animals and people and sucking their blood, by which he finds nourishment. Though filled with blood, he generally takes on the same image as that which he had when buried. The corpse itself remains uncorrupt, without any sign of decay. Among various groups of Slavic and German gypsies, it is believed that vampires have no bones in their bodies, the chief difference between the truly living and the living dead. No doubt this belief has its origins in the discovery that vampires often leave their bones behind in their graves, apparently having no use for them.

In some gypsy traditions, the vampire is especially horrible in appearance, apparently having undergone some dreadful change in the grave. It has been known to have hair so long that it touches the ground, or as is the case among certain groups of Indian gypsies, it may have yellow or even flaming hair. The color of the vampire itself may be that of congealed blood, while his mouth may have fangs or tusks.

Often the vampire is visible only to a few. In some instances only those he has the intention of attacking may be able to see him, while in other instances the performance of various acts of magic will allow him to be seen. Various groups of Slavic gypsies believe that vampires can be seen by looking under one's own arms, or those of a chovihani, or by use of various charms. To try to see a vampire by such means, however, may bring serious illness and perhaps even death.[4]

In certain rare instances, vampires, though quite normal at first appearance, may be detected by something extraordinary about their physical bodies. In some cases they lack middle fingers on both hands, while others have hands or feet which are not human, but belong to other animals. This latter instance is of special interest since it seems to suggest the metempsychosis of the vampire at least partially into the form of an animal.

Instances of total metempsychosis are more common in gypsy belief. The Slavic gypsies claim that vampires can appear as dogs or cats, while the Swedish gypsies claim that they may also take on the appearance of a horse or a bird. Here, too, it is possible to see close connections between Indian beliefs and those of the Slavic peoples. The *rakshasa* [an Indian vampire], known for his habits of haunting cemeteries, animating dead bodies, and generally horrible appearance, also has the power to transform himself into any kind of animal he chooses. In the same way, Brahman mothers have had to guard their newborn babies very carefully following birth for fear that the baby would be attacked by vampires appearing in the form of a dog, cat or hen, which would eat its heart and skull.[5] Slavic folklore claims that a vampire may also take the form of a frog, a spider, or, logically enough, a flea.

Perhaps one of the most common examples of metempsy-

chosis in gypsy belief is the appearance of the vampire in the form of a wolf, or what has come to be known popularly as the werewolf. The close association in the gypsy mind between the vampire and the wolf is understandable when one recalls that for centuries packs of wolves made living and traveling in the forested areas of Europe extremely dangerous. As a nomadic people, gypsies were especially aware of the vicious and aggressive temperament of these animals and thought of them as being so evil that they were closely associated with the Devil. Many folktales exist in Slavic countries recalling that the wolf was the Devil's own creation.[6]

Gypsies believe there are a number of ways in which werewolves can come into being. At one time belief in such creatures was not necessarily related to the belief in vampires. Some believe, for example, that people who have led especially evil lives become transformed into werewolves as they lie dying. Slavic gypsies believe that werewolves are those who, while sleeping, have had their blood sucked from them by evil witches. The victims soon after begin to lose their power of speech, and at night transform themselves into dogs or wolves. Accompanying the witch, the victim may become leader of a wolf pack, making raids on cattle and men in order to satisfy the pack's insatiable appetite for fresh meat. The werewolf during daylight then transforms himself back into human form.

Later, however, the association in the popular mind between the werewolf and the vampire became so strong that most werewolves came to be looked upon as the souls of men who had died. Through some strange transformation, the corpse, rather than appearing as a man, takes on the appearance of a ravenous wolf, bent on performing the same malicious tasks as his more anthropomorphic counterpart. In some cases this transformation of the vampire may take place involuntarily; in other

instances the vampire may be able to change himself into this form at will.

It is a great curiosity to note that among the Slavic gypsies not all vampires who have been at one time living men need appear as either men or animals.[7] Among some groups it is believed that dead animals, as well as men, may become vampires. Generally speaking, these creatures are not as dangerous to men as are human vampires but they may still be much feared.

The Moslem gypsies of Yugoslavia believe that such animals as snakes, horses, cocks, hens, dogs, cats, and sheep may all become vampires, though the vampire snake is the one most to be feared. Essentially any animal might become a vampire under certain conditions. If, for example, something alive jumps over the corpse of the animal soon after its death, this may take place. A living animal may also become a vampire at its death should it jump over a human corpse while alive. In some cases, too, gypsies will not kill large fur-bearing animals, because it is feared that an animal so killed will become a vampire which will return to have revenge on the one who killed him.

In the same way that animals have vampires, the same may be true of certain fruits and vegetables. The same group of gypsies believe that pumpkins and watermelons, if kept for more than ten days, or kept after Christmas, will begin to stir and make noises. A trace of blood may even be seen on them. When this happens, they will go around by themselves to harass people in their homes and cattle in their stables, without, however, being able to do great harm.

A few tools may even become vampires in some cases. A wooden knot for a yoke and wooden rods for binding sheaves of wheat, may both become vampires, if they are allowed to remain undone for more than three years. Though not able to

cause real harm to living things, they are able to cause disturbances.

Opinions vary a great deal as to exactly when and where vampires may be seen. There are some who say they appear only from midnight to sunrise, while others say they may also appear at noon, when there are no shadows. Other accounts claim that they may be seen at dusk, while still others say they can be seen at any time of the day or night.

Opinions also vary a great deal as to exactly when the vampire first emerges from his grave. In some instances, apparently, vampires have been so anxious to return to the world of the living, that they were able to return to their homes even before their own funeral party was able to do so.[8] More commonly, however, the vampire may choose the third night after his burial, or a Tuesday, or any day of the week except Saturday, to leave his place of burial. At that time, he may either lurk in the shadows of the cemetery, return to his home, occupy a forest, or even take up residence in the local mill.

As has been said, the vampire's intentions upon leaving his grave are almost always malicious. Appearing most often to those whom he considers his enemies, he may seek to kill them by sucking their blood, eating parts of their bodies, doing other violence to them, or simply causing them such terror that they die.

Short of this, they have been known to cause the living physical harm by beating them and destroying their property. They have been known also to disturb families by causing loud noises, setting fires, turning over caravans, breaking dishes, and killing domestic animals by choking them to death. By the use of such means they have been known to cause mental illness in the living to the point of insanity. By entering into the body, usually when the victim's mouth is open because of either snoring or yawning, the vampire may also cause physical illness

such as nausea or loss of energy. He may even feed over a long period of time on the blood of his victim, eventually causing his death, whereby the victim, too, becomes a vampire.

A secondary cause for the return of vampires to the world of the living is their virtually insatiable need to have sexual intercourse. Male vampires especially are well known for a sexual drive so strong that it will bring them back from their grave-world.

In the case of a man who was married in life, his first action may be to go to his wife and immediately have intercourse with her. Over a period of time it is even possible for the wife to become pregnant by her vampire husband and have a child by him. Beliefs vary as to the nature of the child resulting from such a union. The child, which among the Slavic gypsies is called a *dhampir*, according to some beliefs can only be a boy. Some say he will have unusual powers for detecting vampires though otherwise being normal, while others say he will have a short life because of his slippery, jellylike body.

Because of the vampire's insatiable need for sexual intercourse, his widow is often driven to the limits of exhaustion. Her health may fail, and she may become quite emaciated because of these nightly visitations from her vampire husband. Far from actually enjoying the return of her husband, she shows all the signs of intense suffering.

In some instances, vampires have been known to return in order to have sexual intercourse with the woman they were never allowed to marry in life. In such cases, the vampire may ask this woman to return with him to his grave-world for the remainder of eternity.[9]

In some instances, too, a vampire, whether married or not, may return in order to have sex with any woman he may choose. Indeed, in some instances young women are believed to

have had long romances with men whom they later came to discover were vampires. Some gypsies claim that such vampire-lovers are visible only to those with whom they are having sex. In such instances it may be highly dangerous for the woman to speak of him to others. While having intercourse it is safe for her only to scream. To reveal to others what she sees, or to search out the grave of the vampire without his approval, may bring death to her family and also to herself.

Female vampires have also been known to carry on romances with young men who, not knowing that the vampire is one of the living dead, will go so far as to marry them. It is said, also, that such vampires will sleep with young men and have intercourse with them without their ever knowing it, save that their health begins to fail through sheer exhaustion.

Whatever the motivation may be for the vampire to leave its grave, it is clear that for the gypsies, its presence in the world of the living is considered highly undesirable. Virtually all those rites associated with the cult of the dead can be seen to be motivated by the obsessive fear that the vampire will leave his grave-world in order to harass the living.

Besides all those preventive rites associated with the cult of the dead, however, the use of various fetishes may be employed to further insure the safety of the living. Examples of the use of such fetishes may be seen in the practice of driving a steel needle through the heart of the corpse before burial, or placing bits of steel or iron between its teeth, in its ears and nose and between its fingers. Iron, with its derivative, steel, has always been considered by many peoples as an especially effective charm against evil spirits. The intention to inhibit the corpse from walking any distance can be seen as a motivation for removing the heels on its shoes, or placing a branch of hawthorn into its sock. If by some unfortunate circumstance the body

should be leaped over by an animal before burial, the survivors drive a hawthorn stake through one of its legs.

When, as often happens, in spite of these measures, and many others, the willful vampire still insists on leaving his grave, other measures must be used in order to stop his evil ways. If the vampire is not of the hostile variety it may suffice simply to order him away. Far more often, however, it is necessary to use various charms to effect this purpose. In order to protect themselves from the evil ways of the vampire, Indian gypsies will wear a tiger's tooth or nail around their neck or loins or else wear an iron ring set with pearls on their finger. One tribe, the Dóms, believe that vampires can be kept out of their homes by casting fishing nets over the doors. Before the vampire can enter the house, he must count all the knots. Because vampires have a special fear of wood, many gypsies believe a piece of a grafted tree, a piece of juniper wood or in some cases the sprinkling of thorns around a house are particularly efficacious in keeping them away. Christian gypsies have long believed that the use of a rosary, a scapular or a cross as a charm is an effective means of forcing vampires to withdraw. One of the most extraordinary, but apparently indispensable, assets which a Slavic gypsy village can have, however, in protecting themselves from vampires, is a twin brother and sister who were born on Saturday and who are willing to wear their underclothes inside out. Gypsies believe that seeing such a couple will cause a vampire to flee virtually head-over-heels.[10]

By the use of such charms it may prove to be most desirable merely to wait out the lifespan of the vampire in hope that it can at least be held at bay until such a time as it becomes no longer destructive. In some cases the vampire's destructive lifespan may be thought to last no longer than forty days, after which it wanders into a forest where wolves eat it. More com-

monly however, it is believed to live anywhere from three months to five years. Quite often, however, its life span is considered to be so long that the only solution to its constant threats is the destruction of the vampire by magical means.

Among some gypsies it is believed that a simple curse is sufficient to destroy a troublesome vampire. In one Rumanian gypsy folktale, for example, a vampire is quickly destroyed simply by saying to him, "God send you burst." On hearing this the vampire was so outraged that he literally burst, leaving nothing but a large pool of blood where he had stood.[11]

More often, stronger magic, in the form of various charms, has to be used. Some believe that if a vampire is encountered he can be quickly killed by simply pricking him in the stomach with a steel needle. If this is done the vampire will immediately dissolve into a jellylike substance. Others, chiefly those who live in countries where the Eastern Orthodox Church is important, believe that the vampire can be destroyed by simply pouring holy water on him. His response to this dousing will be the same as though he were being boiled in oil, his body disintegrating almost immediately.

One very popular method of destruction used in the past has involved the use of the vampire's left sock. Once the sock is procured, doubtless not without difficulty, it is filled with rocks, or earth from the grave. It is then thrown outside the village boundaries, often into running water. The vampire, realizing that his sock has been stolen will then search for it. It is believed that in the process of this search, he will pass over or through a body of water, accidentally drowning himself.

In some instances even powerful charms such as these have proved ineffective. In such cases it has become necessary to resort to some kind of physical confrontation with the vampire if it is to be destroyed. For example, vampires have been known

to be destroyed by the use of a knife, a gun, or even occasionally by being nailed to wood. Since they are seen mostly at night, one cannot but wonder how many of the truly living may have lost their lives in years past in this specially horrifying way through some case of mistaken identity. Usually the function of shooting the vampire is performed by the dhampir, so this, at least, would have some effect in reducing the number of mistakes which might occur.[12] Occasionally animals are thought to be destroyers of vampires. Black dogs, black cocks, and especially wolves are thought to be able to detect vampires and then attack them usually leaving only blood, a jellylike substance or a few intestines as a remnant of the creature. Some Rumanian gypsy villages believe that many cemeteries are occupied by white wolves. It is only because of the vigilance and viciousness of these wolves in discovering and destroying the vampires in these cemeteries that living men are kept safe from a complete takeover of the world of the living by the world of the dead.

All these methods of vampire destruction assume that at the time of his destruction he is abroad in the world of the living. Many gypsies believe that because the vampire is so dangerous, such methods of destruction are extremely foolhardy, it being far safer to encounter him during that time of his existence, whether it be a certain time of day or certain times of his "life" when he is in his immobile and stuporlike trance within the grave.

Usually, a grave's occupation by a vampire can be detected in several ways. The first method is, of course, to follow a vampire during his waking hours, and seeing which grave he returns to at the close of night and the beginning of a new day. A second method of detection is to notice the condition of graves within a cemetery. Those which have sunk are most likely the ones

occupied by vampires. The third method involves exhumation of the body. If it is noticed after a reasonable passage of time that the body has shifted in the grave or has not gone through a process of decomposition, this is considered to be a sure sign of vampirism.

Often vampires may be destroyed without resorting to such a drastic means as exhumation. Boiling water poured into any cracks or holes which may have appeared on the gravesite, will destroy the vampire in his grave. Some gypsies believe walking a horse several times over a grave will have the same effect. By far more common than these methods has been the use of wooden stakes. At one time it was the practice to take poles made of such woods as ash, hawthorn or juniper and drive them into the suspected grave. In some instances the graves were first covered with hide or cloth and then these stakes were hammered through the material, so as to be driven either through the stomach or the head of the corpse. Evidence that the corpse had been a vampire could be seen later when the grave was covered with a blister filled with blood. In case there was any doubt, however, or if the body was buried in a coffin, where the stake could not penetrate, it has been common practice for the body to be exhumed.

For those who might think exhumation of corpses for magical and religious purposes to be an extraordinary and especially gruesome custom, it should be pointed out that this, like so many rites practiced by gypsies, is by no means limited to them. The fact, however, that they as a people, have settled for so long and in such great numbers among gorgio peoples that have long practiced it, has no doubt had a profound impact on their own attitude toward it. Among many Slavic peoples it has long been the custom to open graves after the period of time thought necessary to insure the decomposition of the body. The

bones have then been collected, often washed in wine and then either reburied or placed in tombs. The common practice of such funeral procedures, together with the discovery in some cases that the corpse had not gone through its expected degree of decomposition, must have gone far in giving substance to the vampiric tradition.

Such beliefs, together with the gypsies' own morbid preoccupation with death and evil spirits, often required that exhumation of the body be the only way in which total destruction of the suspected vampire could be assured. The vampiric nature of the exhumed corpse can be easily confirmed by a mere examination of its appearance. If, after a period of time, it remains uncorrupt, exactly as it was buried, or if it appears to be swollen and black in color, having undergone some dreadful change in appearance, suspicions of vampirism are confirmed.

When this is discovered, rites vary as to what is done with the corpse. In times past, after the grave was dug, a fire would be set all around it in order to contain the evil spirits within the grave area. Then as a clergyman read prayers appealing to the soul of the dead man to forever leave the corpse, a stake or thorn branch would be driven through the stomach or heart or forehead of the corpse. Following this, the body would be reburied, or in some instances decapitated and cremated.

As final proof of the vampiric nature of the corpse, it will often let out a blood-chilling scream or moan as it is being destroyed by such methods. It is said that in many cases, cremation has not been necessary, because as soon as the prayers have been said, and the stake driven through the body, it will go through a process of immediate decomposition, becoming dust in a matter of only minutes.

CHAPTER TEN

Ghosts
Fairies
Devils

Having discussed the cult of the vampire in gypsy belief and practice, it is only logical to go on to discuss briefly the closely related phenomena of their concept of ghost life. For the gypsy, as with many other peoples, the relationship between the ghost and the vampire is so close, in fact, that the same Romany word, *mullo*, has often been used to refer to either one of the creatures without distinction. This is true, largely because the nature of their origin and their functions are so similar. For example, they both have their origin following the death of a specific man or animal. In both cases they return to the world of the living usually because they are deeply restless in the world of the dead. Last, most vampires and ghosts were either evil while alive, or else died by violence or some other means of unnatural death.

Several reasons may be cited for mentioning the ghost separately from the vampire. First, in popular gorgio belief the

ghost is a far different creature from the vampire. On one hand we see the whitish, often transparent specter which we call ghostly, while on the other hand we see the highly anthropomorphic, almost gentlemanly, blood-sucking, Count Dracula type of vampire. To be sure, there is an element of truth in both characterizations, but they represent extreme poles of the same phenomena which the gypsy calls the mullo [living dead].

A second reason for identifying the ghost separately from the vampire is to suggest that the ghost, whether in gorgio or gypsy belief, may in some cases be nothing more than a faded remnant of a far older vampiric tradition. Among the gypsies, for example, belief in the vampire is strongest in India and eastern Europe, where such belief is also commonplace among the gorgios. As the gypsies traveled into western Europe, however, and came into contact with peoples who lacked the vampiric tradition, the vampire mullo came to be replaced by the concept of the ghost mullo. Though retaining the same similarities of origin, and still the source of great fear in the world of the living, the mullo in western European gypsy thinking came to be more of a specter with a spiritual nature than it was a living corpse. It also came to be less associated with the grave itself, being able to take up more or less permanent habitations elsewhere, such as homes, highways, forests, and in the case of the gypsies, caravans. Fortunately, for the living, this mobility was also accompanied by a decline in the vicious nature of the mullo. The mullo then became merely a pale reflection of earlier vampiric horrors, unable to accomplish the same extent of damage but still greatly feared by those who saw him.

To those who have seen the ghost-like mullo, he may appear very much like the classical gorgio image of the ghost—phantomlike, silent and whitish in color. In other instances, however,

he has been known to appear as an animal, as a human being or occasionally as merely a head, a hand, an arm or even a finger.[1] Like the vampire, he has been shown to have powers of metempsychosis, being able to change himself at will into either a man or an animal.

The ghostly manifestation of the mullo is most evidently different from the vampire in its relationship to the living. Where it is most common for the vampire mullo to return to the world for reasons of hatred or satisfaction of its sexual lust, the ghost mullo returns most often for reasons of affection or love for the living. Among many gypsies, then, the ghost, far from being a vicious soul, is very often helpful and even lovable.

Many stories are told, for example, of ghosts returning for no other reason than to be close to their loved ones. A mother may return in order to help her children, or a husband may return in order to help his wife with the housework of weaving, sewing and cleaning. Wives have also been known to return in order to help their husbands and occasionally even provide them with money. This belief that ghosts can be helpful spirits may even cause gypsies to call upon them for help when they are in trouble. Swedish gypsies, for example, have been known to call upon the ghosts of dead relatives to silence or otherwise incapacitate police authorities.[2]

Though often helpful and always harmless, the ghost mullo can be frightening for those who see or hear him. Occasionally a ghost's presence and the noise which he may make of laughing or banging have caused a considerable nuisance.

In such instances, gypsies believe it is wise to leave the haunted area as soon as possible. If this is neither feasible or desirable the only other alternative is to either ignore the apparition or else learn to live with it. In no case should anyone say anything critical against the ghost. If this were done, the

ghost might undergo a rapid change of personality, becoming vicious, and causing ill luck or even death for the one who insulted him.

So far, in discussing the mullo, whether it be in its vampiric or ghostly manifestations, we have dealt only with those beings who, though now dead, were at one time among the living. The gypsy spirit world, however, is not limited only to those who were once among the living. In fact, like many other peoples, they believe in supernatural beings who, though they were never human beings, nevertheless involve themselves in human affairs. Such beings, if they have a malevolent attitude toward men, can be thought of as devils. If, on the other hand, they have a more or less benevolent relationship to man, they are often known as fairies.

These latter beings, also known occasionally as brownies or pixies, usually strongly resemble human beings in their appearance though they are often thought to be diminutive in size. Smallness of size, however, has not always been the case, for quite often, fairies have appeared to be of ordinary stature varying only from mortals in their proceedings and use of magical powers.[3] It is quite possible that much of this popular image of the fairy may have been directly influenced by the nature and activities of the gypsy.

The most casual comparison between the attributes of the fairy and that of the gypsy reveals a number of similarities. First is the association of the gypsy, in the popular mind, with magical powers. Their mysterious appearance and behavior along with their claim to occult powers have served to underline this association. Second, fairies are thought to be nomads living in wild and forested areas in temporary beehive-like huts. From the earliest times gypsies have tended to live in forest areas because of food provision and protection from out-

side interference. There is evidence that before the day of the caravan and tent many of them lived in small domed huts which could be moved or even deserted if necessary. Fairies, as a rule, are considered not so much objects of fear or horror by human beings but rather as mischievous beings who steal children and elsewhere are often thought to be responsible for the disappearance or theft of property.[4] The similarities in the popular mind with the behavior of the gypsy are obvious, since gypsies have a long-standing tradition of petty theft, and were, for centuries, incorrectly accused of being kidnappers. Perhaps the most telling similarity between the gypsy and the fairy, however, is their appearance. Fairy women wear bright colors and rich embroidery together with large amounts of jewelry. Their long hair either hangs over their shoulders or else is covered with a veil or a hood. Fairy men, also wearing bright colors for their clothing, dress themselves in caps, jackets and boots. One of the best descriptions of the appearance of fairies was once recalled by a British gypsy when he came across a couple who were camping by a country lane:

> Outside a stick fire was burning; an' standing agen de tent was a dotty little man happen about eighteen inches to two foot high: hardly as tall as what it was, he wa'n't. He'd knee-breeches on, an' top-boots; an' a red waistcoat he had, an' a green an' yellow hankisher round his neck. It was into de summer time, an' he'd ta'en his jacket off being as it was a bit warm. His missis was at home an' all, not having gone out wid her basket dat day. She was wearing a red dress, a bit owld-fashioned even for dem times, but good an' expensival; an' her hair was done all into ringlets hanging down over her shoulders. Jet black it was: in fact dey was both 'n 'em very dark.[5]

Such a description as this could easily be used to apply to the gypsies themselves. The dark complexion of the fairies is espe-

cially interesting, bearing as it does the racial characteristics of the gypsy, and very probably being the origin of the term "brownies" often used to describe fairies.

It is possible that the common image of the fairy was inspired originally by the gypsies, by means of the tales which they told both among themselves and to superstitious gorgios. Supporting this contention is the evidence that gypsies themselves believe in fairies.

The other and more likely alternative would seem to be that the popular image of the fairy was largely influenced by the appearance and actions of the mysterious gypsies, who were then, in turn, influenced by the beliefs of the gorgios into accepting this particular form of supernatural manifestation.

Closely related to this belief in fairies is the belief in the *ursitory* [fateful spirits]. It is believed that on the third day following the birth of a child three male ursitory appear to a child and immediately determine his fate for life.[6]

Far more to be dreaded than either the fairies or the ursitory are those devils which interfere in the life of mortals. These spirits can have a remarkably destructive power reminiscent of that of the vampire. They can destroy property, seduce mortals sexually, cause them sickness and even bring death. A belief in such powerful devils as the source of disease and all sickness is especially strong among the gypsies of Rumania.

These gypsies believe that one time long ago there lived in the mountains of Transylvania a very beautiful girl, who was Queen of the Fairies.[7] At the same time in the depths of the earth there lived a king who had authority over all the devils. This King of Devils fell in love with the Queen of Fairies and sought to make her his bride. The Queen, however, refused him because she found his appearance so horribly repulsive.

Rejected, the King in his anger ordered his devils to destroy the fairies. Just as they were about to exterminate the fairies, the Queen consented to marriage, if the devils would only spare her people.

From this horrible union there resulted the birth of nine devils, each one of which had a special malevolence toward the human race. First there was Melalo, who had the appearance of a bird with two heads and was covered with dirty green plumage. With his sharp claws he could tear out hearts and lacerate bodies. He had power to cause madness in men and might even drive them to rape and murder.

The second devil was named Lilyi, whose body was that of a fish with a human head. From each side of her body hung nine hairs or sticky filaments, with which she was empowered to cause catarrhal disease in mortals.

The third devil, called Tculo, looked like a little ball covered with prickles and would enter the human stomach to bring about violent pains, especially in pregnant women.

Tcaridyi was the name of the fourth devil. She had the body of a small hairy worm, and would enter bodies and cause burning fevers.

A fifth devil was named Schilalyi [the cold], because with a many-footed mouselike body, he could enter into bodies and cause cold fever.

The next devil was named Bitoso. Shaped like a worm with several heads, he had the power to cause a loss of appetite, stomachaches and headaches.

The name of the next devil to be born was Lolmischo. When this devil ran on the skin of a sleeping man he would develop eczema.

The eighth devil to be born was named Minceskro. Her responsibility was to cause diseases of the blood in men. Later

she was to marry Lolmischo and from this incestuous union she gave birth to many other devils, who are considered the cause of smallpox, scarlet fever and measles.

Lastly, the Queen gave birth to the worst of all the devils. Named Poreskoro, he was a hermaphrodite who had the power to fertilize himself. Described as having four cat's heads and four dog's heads, with a tail like a snake with a forked tongue, he had the power to start all the worst epidemics, such as plague and cholera.

The King was so horrified with their offspring that he gave the Queen of the Fairies her freedom. She now lives alone in an inaccessible castle, where she is seen very rarely, always in the form of a golden toad.

Not only such devils as these, but the Devil himself, is considered to be the source of much evil for men. The Devil, or *Beng* as he is known in Romany, taking one form or another, involves himself in the affairs of mortals, causing for them one misfortune after another.

Theories conflict as to the origin of the Devil in gypsy belief. Beng may represent one-half of a belief in Manichaean dualism, reflecting an earlier influence which could be traced to Zoroastrianism. Belief in the other half of the duality, the god Del, or the principle of good, is certainly a popular belief among various groups of Slavic gypsies.

Another theory maintains that gypsies don't really know whether good exists in the world—they are only certain that evil exists. It is this principle of evil that they call Beng, or the Devil. Under this theory, gypsies originally lacked even the concept of the Devil as a supernatural being until in Slavic countries they came into contact with Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Under the Church's influence they were influenced by the frequent presentation of the icon of St. George and the dragon.

If was from this vivid imagery that they first conceived of a clear-cut idea of real conflict between good and evil. One authority claimed:

> It is evident that the gipsies on coming amongst Christians were forced to give names to the persons of the rite which was new to them. . . . in the Christian pictures (representing St. George pinning down the devil, or dragon) the devil became familiar to them in the form of a great frog. Such pictures are very common everywhere, and, being painted by poor artists, have perhaps more than anything else contributed to assimilate the idea of the devil with that of a dragon or frog.[8]

To further support this theory, we find that the word *Beng* is used by various gypsies to mean not only devil, but also frog or dragon. The original source of the word most likely comes from the Sanskrit word *vyranga* [having deformed limbs]. It seems probable, then, that the gypsies when they first came to Europe were influenced by Eastern Orthodoxy into adapting their word *Beng* [malformed or froglike] to include also the meaning, dragon or devil. From this it would seem that the gypsies' earliest image of the Devil was that of a rather repulsive reptile. Through the passage of years this image was to undergo extensive changes.

Among gypsies, the Devil makes his appearance in at least three different ways. The first and most mysterious is in the form of a silent shadow, sometimes in the shape of some recognizable object. Appearing often as the dark silhouette of an animal, he will neither make any sound nor do any harm, but because the apparition is sinister in appearance it is very frightening for those who see it.

The Devil may also appear as a man or change into an animal of more or less normal appearance. Often he has been seen in the form of an unusually large dog, either black, or black and white in coloring. He may also appear as a horse,

donkey, or mule, later transforming himself into a man before vanishing altogether.

A third and most interesting example of the Devil's appearance among the English gypsies took place when a woman gave birth to a baby who was immediately identified as being Beng himself.[9] Apparently the baby's appearance frightened everyone who saw it, including the doctor. The baby was described as having "a tail, a silver mane and shining scales all over its body." This description is of particular interest and value since it would seem to harken back across many years to the original reptilian image of the Devil. In the end, at the doctor's recommendation, the baby was let die, since it was agreed that it might prove to be a menace if it were allowed to live.

Some descriptions of the Devil are strongly reminiscent of the ghostlike mullo. One nineteenth-century sighting described him as being

> a wizened, ill-looking mannikin, dressed very old-fashioned like, with a villainous brickdust-coloured face, and two long curls hanging one each side of that face. . . . as it spoke it kept wriggling like an eel. . . .[10]

The various appearances of the Beng and mullos, then, are often confused in the gypsy mind. The important difference between the two would seem to be, first, that the Beng bears no relationship to a deceased person and, secondly, that the Beng has more power in human affairs than does the ordinary mullo.

The concept of the Beng has become important to gypsies. For some, all evil in the world is directly attributed to the action of the Beng. Whether a possession be lost, a disaster occur, or there be bad health—all this misfortune can be directly attributed to the work of the Beng.

Perhaps, because the history of the gypsies has so often been full of such misfortune, some attribute their own origins as a

people to the devil. One legend which came to be popular among European gypsies claims that once a long time ago there was a great pharaoh who ruled both the Jews and the gypsies. He ordered the gypsies to build a great temple so that the Jews could worship God, and told the Jews to do the same for the gypsies. Three days before these great temples were to be completed, however, the gypsies poured shells into the sand which the Jews were using to build their portion. When the Jews began crushing the sand with their feet, they cut themselves, which caused them to complain to the pharaoh. In order to keep the two peoples from fighting he decided he would separate them. Gathering together the Jews, he ordered the sea to divide and he led them through to the other side. Returning alone, the pharaoh then ordered the gypsies together. Once again ordering the sea to divide, he started with them across the dry sea floor, when suddenly the sea closed up and drowned both the gypsies and the pharaoh. The entire gypsy people would have been lost if it had not been for one gypsy girl who miraculously escaped the deluge. Blind in one eye and lame, she was discovered by a very handsome young man who restored her to health and then married her. Much too late, the young woman was to discover that the young man was no less than the Devil himself in disguise. Nevertheless, the two of them had children, which came to be known as the children of the Devil, or, as they are known today, the gypsies.[11]

Whether or not the gypsies feel the Devil to have fathered their people, it is clear that he is one father figure who is to be avoided at all costs. Far from having any close relationship with him, they believe great care must be taken to avoid any occasion which might cause the Devil to think he is welcome among them. The Serbian gypsies, for example, take care not to even mention his name. They fear that as soon as he hears his

name he will believe that somebody is calling him. If he does appear, however, in no way must he be either angered or antagonized, since he possesses considerable power to do harm. One account recalls a time when a gypsy, walking down a country road suddenly encountered a being which he knew to be the Devil. Though terrified, he handled him in an exemplary fashion:

> An' then 'e begins to talk, an' I talks civil to 'im. An' we come to a big mansion, all lit up and feasting going on inside. 'E axes me in, and I daren't refuse,—you understand Rai, I was terrified, I knowed it was the Beng. Inside there was all feastin' and fiddlin', an' the best of everything. An 'e wants me to 'ave what's goin', an' I refuses. Then 'e wants me to shake 'ands, an' I wouldn't, an 'e sees it wa'nt no good, an' the 'ole lot disappears. If I'd a had anything to eat or drink, or a' shuk 'ands with 'im, e'd 'ave 'ad me. There's two kinds of sperits, ther's good an' evil sperits, an' if you meet an evil sperit, you must just speak civil, an' don't 'ave nothing from 'em, or shake 'ands, then they can't touch you.[12]

Occasionally, however, there have been instances of gypsies who apparently failed to heed such sage advice. In such instances they may suffer all kinds of evil, or as some believe specific types of bad fortune and illnesses, such as loss of property, epilepsy, or loss of appetite.

Sometimes individuals may be accused of intentionally entering into a contract with the Devil. People who are known for being very evil or blasphemous are thought to be disciples of the Devil, especially if they are in someway especially fortunate in life. The story is told, for example of one old man, who suddenly came into a great deal of money from an unknown source. Those who knew him suspected that he had sold himself to the Devil. Their suspicions were confirmed by his close association with a mysterious old chovihani who was known to be

able to change into various animals or even totally disappear at will. When the old man's evil though prosperous life finally ended, there was a sudden climatic change which brought with it lightning and thunder and even an earthquake, all of which convinced those who knew the old man that their suspicions were more than confirmed.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Worship of vampire gods
Blood sacrifice
Worship of the goddess Bibi, the child-strangler
Animal and tool worship
The worship of mountains

Many thousands of years ago, long before the advent of written history, the earliest men came to believe that there existed powerful forces above and beyond their own physical control. The world was seen as a place filled with unknown and mysterious occurrences over which they seemed to have little influence. Bright days and dark nights, sweltering heat and freezing cold, thunderous storms which brought with them lightning and floods marked the lifetime of the earliest man, as did the diseases which racked his body and the final mystery of death which brought his life to a close.

As time passed, he came to see that the power behind these mysterious events in his life originated with the actions of spirit beings. Some of these spirits were the souls of ancestors, while other had supernatural origins. In some instances these beings had a benevolent relationship with living men, while in other instances their behavior was evil and full of hatred. Whether

these beings were good or evil, men came to believe that they could to some extent be influenced by men. If good spirits were pleased with men they would bring all kinds of fortune to them. Good spirits could also be called on to control evil spirits. All the same, it was important, too, that nothing be done which would antagonize or anger those spirits that had any inclination to be destructive or hateful.

Man discovered, that through the use of magic, by using incantations, charms, and various rites and ceremonies, the spirit world could be brought under his control and made to do his bidding. If, as often happened, the spirits did not respond in the manner desired, it was concluded that either the magical formula had been used incorrectly or else stronger magic was needed. After the performance of all the correct rites and the use of the strongest magic possible, in many instances, the spirits still failed to respond. The assurance of the blessings provided by good spirits remained unpredictable and the evil caused by malevolent spirits still remained out of control.

Faced with this problem, earliest man was forced to conclude that many of these spiritual beings had very much of a mind of their own and were not under the control of even the most powerful magic. If such things chose to respond to man's magic they could, but they also had the power to ignore it, if they chose to do so. Man concluded that spirits who had the power to choose whether they wished to respond to or ignore his strongest magic were very powerful—so powerful indeed that he began to refer to such spirits as gods.

The spirits of nature, those who manifested themselves in the form of lightning and thunder, the sun, the moon, the earth and the heavens, often ignored man's magical powers and thus came to be thought of more as gods than spirits. Other types of gods also came to be recognized. Great men after their deaths,

and eventually even before their deaths, came to be thought of as gods. Creator gods were seen to be an explanation of the origin of the world. Fertility gods were seen as the source of life whether through the provision of food from Mother Earth or the gift of sexual fertility for man. National gods, or even personal gods, were seen as the source of either group or individual identity. In each instance, these gods which so greatly shaped the nature of human history were, in turn, greatly shaped by the social and cultural status and aspirations of the people who served them. Such gods throughout history have grown, changed, and often even vanished depending on how well they met the needs of their worshippers.

Though most peoples came to recognize the importance of the gods, they never totally gave up their earlier beliefs in the spirit world. What is certain, is that none of the world's peoples have ever been known to lack a belief in either the cult of the spirits or the cult of the gods. Rather, in most instances, they came to be practitioners of both beliefs.

It was once believed by some authorities that the world's gypsies were the one exception to this otherwise universal rule. It will be recalled, for example that Leland believed:

> the real Gipsy has, unlike all other men, unlike thee lowest savage, positively no religion, no tie to a spiritual world, no fear of a future, nothing but a few trifling superstitions and legends, which in themselves indicate no faith whatever in anything deeply seated.[1]

It should be clear from what has already been said that gypsies do in fact have many ties to the spiritual world and that whatever might be claimed about their magical beliefs they are anything but "few and trifling." It is apparent that as a people, gypsies have been and continue to be perhaps one of the world's greatest practitioners of the magical arts.

To say this, however, is to say nothing about the nature of their religious beliefs. Religion, it will be recalled, differs from magic inasmuch as it recognizes a divine ruling power or powers which to some extent demands obedience from men. The practice and belief in religion teaches that instead of men having magical mastery over the spirits, the gods have divine mastery over men.

It may be that it is precisely the question of mastery which gives us an important clue to understanding the beliefs of the gypsies. As a proud, free-living people they have found it far more congenial to their temperament to practice those magical arts which promise them mastery over the spirit world than they have to submit to the dictatorial mastery of the gods. Their nomadic habits were also an important factor, of course. Moving over large expanses of territory, contacting many different religions, and suffering persecution at the hands of their adherents, did nothing to endear them to the religious convictions of those among whom they lived.

Through the years, gypsies evolved a number of legends to explain their lack of religious convictions. One Turkish legend claims that a long time ago religions were distributed to the world's peoples. So that they would not forget their religion, each of the recipients wrote down their creeds. Some chose to write their beliefs in books or on stone while others chose to preserve them on wood or metal. Only the gypsies chose to write their creed on cabbage. Unfortunately, one day, a donkey happened along, and seeing the cabbage, quickly ate it. From that day until this the gypsies have forgotten the religion given to them.[2] A similar legend of Serbian origins claims that long ago the gypsies had a church of stone, while the gorgios had a church which was built of cheese. The gorgios offered to trade their church for the one of stone. At first the gypsies refused

but when the gorgios also offered gold as a part of the trade the gypsies readily agreed. One gypsy, entering the church of cheese, found that it tasted good and promptly shared it with others. Before long, the gypsies had eaten their whole church. To this day, they have no church of their own.[3]

A combination of such factors—their own legends, the persistently false claim by gorgios that they were nonreligious, and the great emphasis which they have always given to magic—have all contributed to the general impression that gypsies practice only magic to the exclusion of religious beliefs and practices.

Such an impression, however, is quite wrong. Definitions of magical practices and beliefs as distinct from religious ones are helpful only to a degree. In experience, it often becomes difficult to separate one from the other since the two are so closely related. Such a leading expert as E. O. James claimed that the two disciplines of magic and religion "are at once so distinct and so intermingled that they cannot be kept in watertight compartments."[4] It should come as no surprise then to find that a people such as the gypsies who are such active exponents of magic should also be expected to adhere in varying degrees to religious beliefs.

It has been seen that their magic is highly complex. Many of their religious beliefs and practices are very much the same. Their own beliefs, combined with and influenced by the beliefs of those people with whom they have come into contact in many different areas and cultures of the world, have resulted in a variety of religious beliefs surpassed by no other single people. Today, the range of their religious beliefs and practices extends to include not only some of the world's most sophisticated beliefs, but also some of its most primitive.

The likelihood that the origin of the gypsy people can be found in northwestern India has been discussed previously. It

would seem logical, perhaps, to expect to find a large number of meaningful parallels between Hinduism and the religious beliefs of the gypsies. If such were the case, such parallels might even be seen to provide further proof of the Indian origin of the gypsies, as well as enable us to see each belief and practice of the gypsies against a backdrop of Indian religion.

Such an approach, however, would prove to be unsatisfactory. The many years which have passed since the gypsies' first departure from India, their nomadic habits and different environments have introduced such a complexity of customs that it has become virtually impossible to draw meaningful parallels between their practices and those of the contemporary Indians, Crooke, a noted gypsiologist, and author of the authoritative work, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, believed that any analogies between Hinduism and gypsy religious belief were inconclusive. Speaking of the latter beliefs he once wrote:

> There are analogies from India to some of these customs and beliefs. But in many cases these are not peculiar either to the Gypsies or to the people of India. Even if any substratum of Gypsy custom can eventually be traced to India, it must have been greatly worn down and contaminated by admixture with the beliefs of other lands, Syria, Asia Minor, the Balkan Peninsula, and other regions in which the Gypsy race seems to have been for a long period domiciled.[5]

What analogies do exist are to be found not among the Aryan peoples of India but rather among those people whom we can best describe as pre-Aryan.

The pre-Aryan people of India have always been what could be called spirit worshippers or animists. In their practice of animism they are largely at one with Indian gypsies with whom they have so much in common. This very ancient practice of

spirit worship, shared with virtually all primitive peoples, is not only at the root of most gypsy beliefs and practices but also provides the link between their magical and religious concepts.

Animism, as it has been and continues to be practiced by many of the world's peoples, is based on the belief that dead men, and animals or even objects can be animated by spirit beings. Usually they are highly concerned with worldly matters, with the power to control sickness, cause death, or bring good fortune to those among the living that they contact. Earliest religion usually involved the supplication and propitiation of these beings. It is probable that the incantations and rites used in the earlier practices of magical spirit control were gradually replaced by the religious practices of sacrifice and prayer as evolution took place.

We saw that in many of the magical practices of the gypsies their rites were performed out of an almost overwhelming fear of the dead. Their mourning procedures, funeral rites, death taboos and cemetery cult illustrated their dread of the power of the deceased very clearly. Such practices are very closely related to the pre-Aryan Indian and Indian gypsy belief that not only holds such spirits in awe, but goes so far in their veneration as to worship them as gods. There is, however, a difference, for while the function of magic with regard to these spirit beings was to exclude them from interfering in the world of the living, the function of religious worship of such beings is to placate and to honor them as being divine.

In both origin and nature the souls of the dead are otherwise the same whether they become merely spirit beings after death or they receive the more elevated status of divinities. In gypsy belief, the souls of the dead become vampirelike creatures, whether the living attempt to exclude them from the world of the living or venerate them as gods. For this reason we may

accurately refer to the religious practices of certain groups of gypsies as the worship of the vampire-gods.

Many tribes in India believe in various types of vampires to whom they believe worship is due. The major categories of such creatures are known as the *preta*, the *pisacha* and the *bhuta*. Such beings are virtually identical with the vampire of European gypsy tradition. The preta is always the vampire of a child, usually one which was born dead, died early in infancy or was to some degree deformed or monstrous. The pisacha, on the other hand, is the vampire of an adult who in life was alcoholic, insane, or otherwise violent or treacherous. The bhutas are those vampires of men who have died in any unusual way such as by suicide, accident, violence or execution. Usually the word *bhuta* is used loosely to identify all the various categories of vampires.

Many of these bhutas are described as dark, shadowy figures who wander through isolated and deserted places at night. They frequent cemeteries or any place which is especially filthy. Loving to eat excreta, they occupy toilets, and will even enter the intestines of a man in order to gain nourishment. Like the European vampire, they will cause destruction, death and disease for men if they are not kept under control.

One especially vicious type of bhuta is the *rakshasa* [the harmer or destroyer]. Usually appearing in the form of an old man, he has enormous teeth, dark brown skin and matted black hair. Loving raw flesh, he eats carrion and devours human beings. If he wishes, he can change into any form he chooses, appearing very tall or twisted, very fat or mutilated, and even sometimes quite handsome. His female counterpart, the *rakshasi*, has been known to marry men, have mortal children and then eat them. In either case, they may occupy a town where they will demand the sacrifice of a human every day.[6]

As with the vampire in European gypsy tradition, not all of the dead who return are malicious toward the living. Such creatures may be considered to be highly useful to their families, under the assumption that a family member who in life was especially helpful to the family or very protective of it continues to perform that function after death. Such a belief, coming close to ancestor worship, believes that a dead family member, if properly prayed to and worshipped, will help protect those whom he loves and destroy their enemies.

In order to worship these vampire-gods Indian animists build *bhandara* [small shrines], which are thought to be the dwelling places of the god. In some instances a cot or cradle is placed on the ground or else suspended by ropes or chains. In this cradle is placed a bell, a knife or sword, and a bowl full of water. On the last day of each month flowers are laid on it and perfume is burned before it. Sometimes pegs or bricks are set up, or a pile of stones is built to serve the same purpose. A single slab of stone may also be set up where the ashes of the bhuta were put into the river. Such small shrines have two major purposes. First, the bhuta must be placated by the offering of oblations if he is to be kept from causing trouble for the living. Secondly, he must be provided with a place to reside where he will feel comfortable. Though such shrines vary in nature, they must have the common feature of keeping the bhuta off the ground. The bhuta, being evil, is not able to sit on the earth since that is considered to be a source of goodness.

In some instances, great bhutas may come to be worshipped by entire villages. A *Bhustastan* [large shrine] is built to honor one or more bhutas. Inside are placed images of brass in human or animal form which act as symbols relating to the demon or demons.

Around such structures occasional festivals are celebrated.

When this is done, a flag symbolizing the bhutas to be honored is hoisted, the brass symbols are cleaned and a fire of purification is kindled. The ceremony, always held at night, begins when the village shaman takes the shrines bell in one hand and the sword in the other and begins to dance. Sometimes he may dance in imitation of the bhuta, or else one of the tribesmen will do so. If a tribesman dances, his body will be naked, though smeared with yellow, white and red paint. A number of drums will accompany his dancing, which will become more and more frenzied. Finally, when he has worked himself up into a trance, he will suddenly stop. The moment will have come for the bhuta, the vampire-god to speak to the people through him. Customarily the god will address himself to the tribe, talking about their needs, settling any disagreements between members and finally stating whether he was pleased with the ceremony which they had offered to him. With this concluded, the people then offer him food, or, in many instances, some kind of blood sacrifice.

It is highly debatable to what extent Indian gypsies participate in such ceremonies. Certainly the practice of the cemetery cult among European and New World gypsies is very reminiscent of the practice of the Indian animists in setting up small shrines where the dead is thought to reside and where regular offerings of good and other objects are made. Likewise the shamanic role of leading the religious ceremonies through which the demon to some extent speaks is very reminiscent of the role of the chovihani.

Whether or not these are valid parallels, and whether or not gypsies have ever practiced such ceremonies, it is certain that the concluding rite of offering oblations and sacrifices to the vampire god is a widespread gypsy practice. Vampires are known to love milk. This may be the case because milk, like

blood, is a body fluid, or as seems more probable, many vampires had their origin as stillborn or malformed infants. Whatever the reason, gypsies have been known to make offerings to vampires of milk and water, balls of rice boiled in milk or even the milk of young coconuts. It is the custom among Slavic gypsies to make offerings to the vampire of such foods as are common among them.[7] In some instances food offerings of bread and cheese are sacrificed to the vampire in hopes that it will no longer injure people or cattle. Usually the food is taken into another village and left there to be devoured by the creatures. Among other Slavic gypsies, those of Moslem convictions, the sweet *halva* is left for the vampire, to achieve, it is hoped, the same purpose.

It is probable that such offerings of food have to some extent replaced the practice of blood sacrifice, either because the vampire god was thought to be easily appeased or because the poverty of the worshippers did not allow for the expenses of sacrificial animals.

Most practitioners of the cult of the vampire god, however, apparently believe that only blood is sufficient to satisfy his appetite. It is possible that in ages past the blood offered to him was that of humans, but fortunately this has come to be replaced by the blood of other animals.

The sacrifice of blood is offered for a number of purposes. Primarily, of course, the offering of animal blood to the vampire is intended to keep him so satisfied that he will have no interest in the blood of human beings. Offerings of blood, however, are also thought to be highly efficacious in appeasing the vampire and gaining his good will. As the source of bad luck, disease and death, it is wise to make offerings to him of what he needs and desires the most, if one is to avoid suffering from his evil power.

The practice of blood sacrifice varies considerably. In India, it has been the custom, that immediately following the ceremony honoring the bhuta, a fowl is held above a ball of rice and a lighted torch. As prayers are said and incense is burned, the throat of the animal is cut and the blood is allowed to drop on the ball.

Sickness may also be cured by the blood sacrifice of a fowl. Among the Indian gypsies, when a man is thought to be suffering from an illness caused by a vampire, a cock is passed over the patient's face three times. Its neck is then twisted until the blood falls upon him. Later the blood is rubbed on his body. It is hoped that the vampire god will accept the sacrifice of the cock in lieu of the man's life.

A similar rite has been known to take place among Russian gypsies. When someone is sick, the neck of a fowl is wrung and the head is cut off. A cross is then scraped in the ground and the knife used to cut off the head is buried at the crossing.[8]

In the case of illness, Slavic gypsies have been known to cut out the hearts of a black hen, a quail and a hare. These hearts were then given to a black dog, who in turn was buried alive. On the third day following the burial, the sick person returned to the place where the dog had been buried. If he still heard the dog howling, the sacrifice was unacceptable and he would die. If the dog was quiet, then the bones of the hen, quail and hare were burned on top of the dog's grave to complete the sacrifice.[9]

In some instances, even though the original motivation of satisfying the vampire-god by such practices, has been forgotten, blood sacrifice has continued to be performed by gypsies as a means of protecting themselves from his evil power. In times past, for example, English gypsies have been known to offer a sacrifice whenever they have completed the building of a new

caravan. In some instances a cock was decapitated and used to splash the interior of the new wagon with blood. A similar procedure was performed by sacrificing pigs. Before the new caravan was painted, a pig was purchased and tied inside the new home. Its throat being cut, it was then allowed in its death agony to splatter the interior with its own blood. This same protective motivation would seem to explain why some gypsies have been known to sacrifice an animal such as a lamb, and then proceed to wash their hands and smear their faces with its blood.[10]

There can be no question that many such practices have ceased to be performed by gypsies, either by their own choosing or by legal regulation. The gypsies and the local gorgios of the Balearic Islands were prevented for this latter reason from the sacrificing of bulls by pouring brandy down their throats, soaking their rear legs in gasoline and then setting them on fire. Even today, however, the bull to be sacrificed is driven through the streets of a village, tortured and tormented by the villagers until through exhaustion and loss of blood it becomes docile. It is then sacrificed in hope that its blood will appease the vampiric underworld.[11]

While in some instances, the gypsies' acceptance of major world religions may have been an important deterrent to the practice of blood sacrifice, this has not always been the case. In years past, for example, Christian gypsies of Bulgaria have made it their practice to sacrifice sheep on their Feast of Our Lady. This ritual was performed by attaching wax tapers to the horns of the sheep and lighting them. Then small trays of burning incense were placed around the animals. This being completed, they were then sacrificed, while prayers were addressed to the Virgin for the prosperity of the family.[12]

Far from being a deterrent to such sacrifices, the Church in at

least one location has been known to condone them. Each year on the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, gypsies make a pilgrimage to the monastery of Grancanica in Serbia. There they camp outside the building and prepare a ritual meal. It is the usual practice for them to have brought two hens; one is given to the monastery and the other is decapitated at a location determined by the Superior of the monastery. Before the hens are sacrificed, they are carried by the pilgrims through the monastery church, making it clear that they are an offering to God. In some instances, wealthy gypsies have also either brought lambs or else purchased them from the monastery for the same purpose. They too are walked through the church. If these more expensive animals are not to be killed, at least a few drops of their blood is allowed to fall on the monastery ground to indicate the sacrifice. The heads of the slaughtered hens are allowed to form a pile outside the monastery walls where they are left untouched—a symbol of the sacrifice made to maintain the health, fertility, or good fortune of the worshipers.[13]

Such syncretism between Christianity and the beliefs related to the worship of the vampire god is not unique. A far more important example can be seen in the religious practices of various groups of Yugoslavian gypsies.[14] The worship related to the cult of Bibi succeeds in combining the traditional concepts of the vampire as the source of danger, disease and death with the Christian concept of sainthood. It also reveals the deep-seated pride which gypsies have for their race combined with their equally strong hatred of gorgios.

Many different legends are told regarding the origin of this cult. One of the most popular was first told by a gypsy fortune teller who called herself Mother Kona. She claimed that one cold and wintry evening in the town of Kloka, near Belgrade,

she had just finished her dinner when she heard a knock at the door and an old woman's voice asking if anyone was home. Mother Kona's husband opened the door and saw there an old woman who was thin and tall with long, black hair hanging down her back. She had a red dress and bare feet and was attended by two little girls and two white lambs. Mother Kona and her husband very cordially invited the old woman, together with her children and lambs to come indoors out of the storm. They told the old woman to make herself comfortable and even offered her accommodations for the night. They gave her food to eat and even a new pair of shoes for her feet, but no sooner had they done this than, to their amazement, their guest, the children and the lambs suddenly vanished. The couple, however, did hear a voice saying, "Let God always give you whatever you may need."

Mother Kona and her husband, wondering what had become of the old woman and her entourage, looked outside only to see that she was knocking at the door of a rich gorgio woman who lived near by. Instead of receiving a hospitable reception at that house, however, the old woman was driven away with a flood of abusive words. She immediately cursed the house and returned to spend the night with Mother Kona. It was during the evening that the old woman identified herself as Bibi, known by many as the disease called cholera. It was her function, she claimed to strangle the children of gorgios. She ordered that in the future this day of her appearance should be kept holy, by recognizing the fact that she was a mother to all the gypsies and they were all her children. The next morning the couple awoke to find Bibi, the girls and the lambs gone. Later they were to discover that the children of the wealthy woman who had turned Bibi away the previous day had all died of cholera during the night. From that day on, it is said, many

came to recognize the power of Bibi, celebrating her day and worshiping her.

A second group of legends regarding Bibi's first appearance recalls that there was a time when cholera was sweeping many villages, killing many gypsy and gorgio children alike. One night during this epidemic, an old gypsy woman had a dream which showed to her the vision of an old hag who went from door to door strangling children by merely breathing into their mouths. The following morning the old woman revealed her dream to her neighbors. It was decided that the only way the children could be saved from the dread disease was to worship the old hag, who was none other than Cholera itself. They decided, however, not to call her Cholera, but rather Bibi, which is "aunt" in Romany. To this day, they pray to Bibi in the hope that she will spare their children.

There can be no question that the goddess Bibi has come to have great power in the minds of the gypsies. She not only has the power to strangle children by giving them her disease of cholera but she may also cause other diseases such as typhoid and tuberculosis. Some gypsies believe that she has the power to cause all kinds of disease, especially at the beginning of a new month when there is a full moon and she is known to walk about the most.[15]

Bibi, however, is not totally vengeful and heartless. Those who honor her and worship her, especially on her day, will be able to avoid her diseases and will be cured, should they be afflicted. Given due honor, she may also cause such other miracles to occur as bringing various types of prosperity to families.

All gypsies who recognize the power of Bibi respect her for the evil that she can do, but, ironically, there is great variance as to how she should be treated. Some groups of gypsies believe that she must be appeased and made to feel as comfortable

among men as possible, while the other groups feel that she must be driven away. Both groups, however, are one in believing that Bibi deserves worship of one kind or another if she is to be kept from harming children.

The first group has two ways of honoring Bibi. One way, so they believe, is to always keep their homes orderly and clean, since Bibi loves cleanliness. When she comes to a home and sees that it is clean, she will leave the inhabitants alone.

The second way to honor her is to celebrate her day as she ordered. First celebrated in 1888, the actual date of the festival varies between different groups. Some celebrate the third Friday in Lent as her day while others celebrate the Friday before Lent. In some instances a second celebration is held on July 13, or St. Paul's Day. The festival itself is celebrated very much in the way as a saint's day is celebrated in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

In villages where Bibi is honored a plot of land is customarily purchased by the local gypsies and set aside for her worship. On the morning of her day, gypsies begin to gather on the site. As each devotee enters he sees before him a table dressed in white, with a cake, and an offering plate in front of an icon depicting Bibi as an old gypsy woman surrounded by women, infants in arms, pleading to her. It is customary to make the sign of the cross, kiss the icon, take one or more pieces of the special cake and then make a donation in the plate. The cake is not eaten, but rather taken home and saved to be given to children when they are ill since it has miraculous powers of healing.

In some areas a small chapel may have been erected in honor of Bibi, but more often there is either an apple or a pear tree which serves the same function. After making the donation, it is customary to light candles as a votive offering to Bibi and place them either in the chapel or underneath the tree. Incense

is also available to throw on the hot coals of a brazier. If a priest can be obtained he will come to bless the cake devoted to Bibi and say a prayer before her icon. Following this ritual, all present share in food and drink, which they have brought with them, making frequent toasts to Bibi and asking her for prosperity and good health.

As has been suggested, some gypsies have quite a different attitude toward Bibi than the one just described. They, too, believe that she is the source of all disease and therefore must receive their prayers, but rather than seeing her as an old hag as depicted in her icon, they believe she appears as a hen whose chicks each represent a different disease. Some say that gypsies eat the carrion of chickens because they fear if they were to do otherwise, they might eat Bibi or one of her offspring. They, too, believe that Bibi loves cleanliness, but for that reason they feel it is safest to keep their houses as dirty as possible, in order to make Bibi feel uncomfortable should she come to them.

One way to cure diseases, thus driving Bibi away, is to take earth from an unknown tomb, an insect from the crevice of a gravestone and a bit of Bibi's vomit (a heap of small grains), which they mix with water taken from three different wells at midnight. The next day, after sunrise and after the sick person has been bathed with this mixture, it is mixed together with fresh water from a stream. The person who is seeking to cure the illness and rid the victim of the presence of Bibi will then face east with this liquid in his hands and utter an incantation, giving back to Bibi the disease she has caused.

Probably the clearest reflection of the nature of the cultic belief in this strange being is a prayer which they will say in times of stress, danger or illness:

> I pray thee, Bibi, do not kill my children, give them health, because I have your medicine and they have bathed in it. Go

far from my house and do not harm me. Go far from my house. If thou dost not harm me and dost not stop near my house, I will buy thee a big candle, and will light it for thee on thy day.[16]

The worship of the gypsies is by no means directed solely toward those gods whose nature it is to be destructive and evil. There are many other strange godlike beings in their religious pantheon who have a more benevolent attitude toward their devotees. This factor of benevolence would seem to be the chief reason why some gypsies have chosen to give divine qualities to certain animals which in the past have been vital to their survival as a people. The honor which some groups of gypsies accord to both the horse and the bear are examples of totemism as practiced by many of the world's peoples.

This belief is best illustrated in the cult of the horse as practiced by many of the world's gypsies. It is not difficult to see how a people who are nomadic and who have for so long depended upon quick movement to survive persecution, have long since come to regard the horse in a very special way. Through the ages many a nomad has owed his life to his horse. This alone would be sufficient grounds for justifying an association in the gypsy mind between his horse and good fortune, but reasons of commerce provide yet another one. Many of the world's gypsies depend upon horse dealing and trading for their livelihood. If the horse has the power to provide man both with mobility and a means of livelihood, it is only logical, in totemistic thinking, that it could also have the power to provide other blessings to its owner. From this natural progression of thought, it has followed that the horse has the power to perform all kinds of beneficial acts if only due honor was accorded to it.

Some of the most extreme examples of this belief have been

practiced among the Kunbis of India. It is their practice, for example, to wash their horses on the Holy Day of Dasahra, cover them with flowers, and then, after sacrificing a sheep to them, sprinkle them with its blood.[17] The worship of horses as godlike beings is known to have one of its primary sources of origin in India. Gypsies may or may not have been influenced by such beliefs but it seems likely that their attitude toward the horse may reflect at least a remnant of some earlier belief which has since come to be strengthened by their dependency on the animal.

Among the gypsies there seems to be no evidence of any special rites of horse worship as in India. The horse in the past may have figured importantly in both the funeral and divorce rites. It will be recalled that evidence of the burial of a horse with its owner at the time of his death and the sacrifice of a horse at the time of divorce, does exist. Much more significant, however, is the importance which the horse has in gypsy folklore, where he is often depicted as an animal deserving of adulation because of his special powers to assist men. Specifically, he is seen as an animal which can bring all kinds of good fortune to its owner, while at the same time having the power not only to detect the presence of evil powers such as vampires and ghosts, but to protect the owner against them.

The horse's power for good, in fact, is so great that some believe even those things closely associated with him contain a power through association. It is, for example, likely that the belief in the horseshoe as both a symbol of good luck, and a means by which evil spirits can be excluded from a house if hung over a door, may very well have its origin in the gypsy beliefs relating to the cult of the horse.

It is said that Albanian gypsies have similar beliefs about the power of a horse's bridle. An oath taken by the bridle, for example, is reserved only for the most solemn purposes and can

never be broken. Under no circumstances is the bridle ever to sold, even if the horse should be.

One legend explaining the origin of the sacred nature of the bridle claims that there was once a gypsy king who had in his service a prophet of God. The king thought of himself as being very great, indeed as great as God himself. When he beat his drum, he said it sounded like God's thunder, when he poured water through a sieve he said it was like God's rain, and when he waved a firebrand he said it was like God's lightning. One day the prophet could take no more of this bragging, so he went to God and reported all that was happening. God grew very angry and told the prophet to shoot the king and then run away. The prophet shot at him, but the king, apparently unharmed, chased the prophet with his army. The prophet, reaching the sea, thought he was trapped until suddenly it opened up for him and he was able to cross on the dry sea bed. The king and his army followed him but just as he was halfway across the sea, it closed up and they were all drowned, with the exception of one gypsy. This one man was leading his horse by the bridle when the sea closed. The horse began to swim and dragged its owner, still holding the bridle, to safety. Ever since that day, say the gypsies, the bridle is held to be sacred.[18]

It is interesting to note that this legend, beside justifying the sacredness of the bridle, also shows that the horse, by saving the gypsy, was directly responsible for saving the gypsy people, all of which were the gypsy's descendants.

In a lesser, but still significant way, some groups of gypsies have come to give special honor to the bear.[19] In the same way that many gypsies have been dependent on the services of the horse, the bear-training Slavic gypsies have become dependent on dancing and performing bears for their livelihood. The devotees of the cult of the bear believe him to have exceptional

powers to effect cures or to provide general good fortune. The bear is thought to have such power to effect good that his mere presence in a village will drive away the evil forces which are causing any illness in the place. The ashes of burned bear fur are thought to cure illnesses such as fevers. Other forms of illness may also be driven away by the use of the bear's nails, teeth, and bones.

The most effective way, however, of benefiting from the power of the bear is to lie on one's stomach in front of him and have him jump up and down on your back. If one is sick, a cure will be effected. If one is healthy, it is a good way of making sure that good fortune lies ahead.

The same cultic association which some gypsies feel for horses and bears, others hold for the tools of their trade. Gypsies have had a long history as metal smiths with many of them functioning in that capacity to this day. For the metal smith, the anvil is as indispensable to his work as the horse is to the horse trader. Without it his work would stop, and his source of livelihood would cease. Even more than the horse or the bear, this recognition has led groups of Serbian and Rumanian gypsies to venerate the anvil as sacred.[20]

One of their legends claims that at the time of the great flood, God appointed one gypsy to play the violin, another He gave a hammer and anvil, and a third He ordered to make tubs, spoons and baskets. At that time the gorgios living in Serbia had a church, but as it was made of cheese they asked to have a better one. God asked the second gypsy to build one out of iron and stones. For the first time a cross was made by using an anvil. Thereafter the anvil has always been considered to be sacred.

Among these people, the anvil is so sacred that it is considered blasphemous to sit on one, to place dirty objects such as

shoes on it, or to spit or swear at it. If anyone drinks wine or spirits near an anvil he is expected to pour a few drops on it as an offering. Some, believing that the sacred nature of the anvil is greater than that of the Church since it is so much older, will make contributions of money to it rather than to the Church. The sacred nature of the anvil, in fact, is so great that it, and everything closely associated with it, is also considered to have special power. The water, which is used for cooling the iron, is considered holy and is used for curing illnesses, as is the coal used for heating the iron.

The recognition by men that the anvil has a special power and status begins even before one is manufactured. Before beginning to forge one, the maker will pray to God that it may be lucky and trustworthy. When it is finished, it is carefully concealed, for until an appointed time it is wrong to look upon it. At an appropriate time, the owner will give a feast in honor of the anvil, preparing brandy and slaughtering a sheep or a hen. After the meal, the anvil is exposed and admired by all present. It is then placed in the middle of the table, where one lighted candle is placed on top of it and one on each side. With the people standing by, the owner then prays that the anvil will provide him all kinds of prosperity. He then strikes the anvil for the first time and all present make contributions of money to it.

On special days such as St. George's Day, St. Elias' Day and New Year's Day, the anvil is decorated with boughs and a lighted candle is stuck in it with the exclamation, "May it be lucky." In some instances, the anvil may even be censed and given an offering of straw in hopes that it will provide a prosperous year.

If oaths are to be made the anvil may also be used. In the case of theft, for example, the injured party will take an anvil,

and placing it either in front of his house or at a crossroads, he will place on it a lighted candle, some salt and a piece of bread. Around the anvil are placed various tools made of iron which have been collected from all those who may be suspected of the theft. All those who might have committed the crime then assemble around the anvil, while the victim lights yet another candle to place on it. He then asks the guilty party to identify himself. If he does so, he is forgiven and the stolen property is returned. If guilt is not established, each one present has returned to him the iron tool which had been collected from him. Each in turn then kisses the anvil, the bread and the candle and strikes the anvil with his tool. Afterwards an oath is said together, cursing the thief and wishing him deep misfortune until such a time as he admits his guilt.

Such special powers attributed to the anvil are not limited to it alone. Among some groups of gypsies, other tools and instruments such as the axe, hammer, or even violin occupy a similar place of veneration. In each case, the instrument is thought by the group to be not only the means by which prosperity is achieved but also its source.

Considerable evidence also exists that gypsies have been exponents of the worship of mountains.[21] From time immemorial many peoples have associated mountains with the divine. Belief in holy mountains, mountains on which God speaks to men, or mountains as the dwelling places of the gods are extremely common in the religious beliefs of almost all peoples. When one considers that mountains are often inaccessible as well as being sparsely inhabited, that they form the horizon between the earth and the sky, that they are closest to the sun, and also by virtue of their height closest to the heavenly gods, it is not surprising that they should be thought to be a place of special supernatural activity.

The gypsies of Hungary and Rumania have legends which explain the origin and nature of their beliefs regarding mountains. These tales claim that before the creation of man, Heaven and Earth dwelt as a married couple living peacefully and happily. They had five sons, however, who were known as Mist-King, Fire-King, Wind-King, Moon-King and Sun-King. Their progeny were always quarreling among themselves disturbing the peace of creation. Heaven and Earth came close together to confine their sons and limit their potential for destruction. This confinement, however, made their sons very angry and so they attacked their parents in the hope of freeing themselves. In the end they were successful in separating their parents, but the problem remained as to which parent they would choose to dwell with in the future. All of them decided to stay with their mother Earth, but she chose to keep only Mist-King and Fire-King with her. Their father Heaven grabbed hold of the other three sons, taking them up with him. Since they were reluctant, however, to go with him, they grabbed hold of their mother's garment as they were being pulled up to Heaven. To this day, when one looks at the mountains of the earth, one can see where they struggled to hold on to their mother, the Earth. She, however, to make certain that her troublesome sons would not return to her, filled these places with all kinds of demons and other spirits, all of which remain to this day.

Gypsies believe all kinds of hills and mountains to be occupied by a multitude of peculiar supernatural beings. Witches, it is believed, gather in them on special occasions, and indeed, consider them to be their homes. A strange giant, Suyolak, whose whole body is covered with hair, is honored by the witches, but kept imprisoned by a great yellow serpent who each year winds himself around Suyolak's body, thereby chaining him to a rock for another twelve months. If he should ever break free, so the

gypsies believe, he would quickly and easily destroy the whole world. All mountains, being hollow, as they believe, have within them men and women who have been changed into snakes and doves, respectively, and whose responsibility it is to guard vast treasures. Such is their punishment for having desecrated in some way the sanctity of holy mountains.

In spite of such dangerous demons, nomadic gypsies feel it highly desirable to set up their winter quarters in the caves of such mountains, since they are thought to contain all kinds of valuable properties. Some mountains, thought to be more powerful than others, have rivers containing water which will cause pregnant women to have beautiful babies. Stones from such hills are thought to be powerful amulets to ward away evil spirits and cure attacks of insanity and epilepsy. Herbs found on these mountains also have special magical properties. The powder of dried snakes, frogs and lizards captured on such mountains have great power to guarantee the well-being of domestic animals, while even the earth itself, if either sprinkled on a marriage bed, deposited in a grave, or eaten by the living, will bring good fortune to those concerned.

To defile such holy mountains is a most serious offense. If one were to walk on one while chewing, or forget to clear one's mouth by spitting before approaching one, it would cause sickness. Before any properties can be removed from the mountain, whether they be herbs or stones, it is important to remember to spit three times. If a woman should accidentally drop a child either on the ground or into a stream of a holy mountain, her next offspring would prove to be a monstrous creature, half-human and half-beast, who would brutalize and terrify its mother. Couples who have sexual intercourse on such mountains risk the chance of being turned suddenly into stone.

It is often considered appropriate for offerings and sacrifices

to be made to such mountains. In thanksgiving for something good which has happened, many gypsies take meat and tie it to a tree on a holy mountain. If it is gone by the next day, then the offering has been accepted. If not, then each day more meat should be offered until it is found missing the next day, the offering then having been accepted as sufficient.

All holy mountains are named after meat-eating animals such as bears, foxes or wolves. It has been the practice among Hungarian gypsies to bury the flesh of an animal as a blood sacrifice to the mountain. After this, the mountain is named after the animal sacrificed. Sometimes stores of animal parts are kept ready to offer to a holy mountain should misfortune afflict any of their number.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Sun worship
Fire worship
Worship of Alako, the moon god
Worship of Kar, the phallic god
Pharaun
Del
Major world religions
Christianity

The worship of holy mountains and the legend explaining the origin of the practice has implications for other beliefs of the gypsies. The five sons of Heaven and Earth—Mist-King, Fire-King, Wind-King, Sun-King and Moon-King—may very well represent the gods of nature in past gypsy belief. There seems to be no evidence that gypsies ever worshipped a mist-god or a wind-god, but we do know that supernatural beings, according to their belief, are capable of manifesting themselves in the form of those natural phenomena.

In the same way very little evidence exists to substantiate whether gypsies have ever worshipped the sun. The sole evidence seems to exist in a brief account in the mythology of the gypsies of Central Asia and Iran. The story goes that many ages ago, the god Obertsshi was traveling through the world when by chance he arrived at the home of the sun. Obertsshi, addressing himself to the sun's mother, asked if he was home. She

replied that he had left a long time ago to drive through the heavens in his golden car. The god asked if he could remain to await the sun's return, and the mother replied that he could. A long time later, Obertsshi, hiding himself in a corner, saw Jandra, the sun god, return in his golden car, immediately take off his brilliant garments, dress himself in clothes as dark as the night, and then disappear.[1]

These same attributes of sun-like brilliance are thought to belong to another gypsy god, Baramy, as shown in a prayer to him recorded many years ago:

> Golden sun, eye of the glittering father,—Pashivine! (burning father), cast thy glance upon our camp, and on our horses, our tents, our wives, and our children. . . . Let thine arrows [a metaphor for rays] awaken the earth from its cold slumber; may she, as a mother, bring forth fertile gifts—King of the immeasurable heaven, flashing with light . . . send unto us thy noun (spirit of life). . . .[2]

Such evidence as this, however, bearing as it does a strong influence from Hinduism, and being so fragmentary, cannot be considered sufficient to claim gypsies as worshippers of the sun.

When we come to considering the worship of fire and the worship of the moon, however, we see a different situation. There is a small amount of evidence that gypsies, at least in the past had a special devotion to fire, and there is extensive evidence of moon worship.

The nomadic gypsies' respect for and dependency upon fire is not surprising. It would be difficult to overestimate how important the presence of fire would be to a people who spend so much of their lives exposed to the elements. Fire gave them warmth when they lacked other forms of shelter, it cooked their food, it provided light at night and it kept wild animals away for the camp. It was not difficult for the gypsy mind to associate the power of goodness with that of fire. The use of the beneficial

qualities of fire in their funeral rites, and, when necessary, the destruction of vampires, had in itself a spiritual significance. Such rites as these may reflect an earlier belief in the Indian god, Agni, god of Fire, protector and purifier, together with the rite of consigning not only the property of the dead to the fire, but the corpse as well. Fire is thought by many peoples as a protection against both the evils of this world and the evils of the supernatural world. Apparently at least some gypsies in the area of Central Asia did recognize this great importance of fire as a divine element deserving of worship, which had the power to protect the weak, heal the sick, punish evil, and preserve health. Two prayers which have been preserved read:

> Great Fire, my defender and protector, son of the celestial fire, equal of the sun, who cleanses the earth of foulness! deliver this man from the evil sickness that torments him night and day. . . .
>
> Fire, who punishest the evildoer, who hatest falsehood, who scorchest the impure; thou destroyest offenders, thy flame devoureth the earth. Devour. . . . if he says what is not true, if he thinks a lie, and if he acts deceitfully.[3]

It is probable that the practice of magic by use of fire, especially in those instances where gypsies use a trial by ordeal to determine guilt or innocence, is at least one remnant of this earlier belief.

Evidence of the practice of moon worship among the gypsies, though equally fragmentary, is considerably more extensive. The attribution of divine powers to the moon and the worship of it as a god is very ancient and widespread among the world's peoples. Its mysteriously cold and glowing light, its mutability and consequent association with the measure of time, its surface features recognizable by the naked eye—all had the effect of convincing many peoples that it had a special power over men. The moon was thought to be the source of madness by some

peoples while others thought of it as a source of healing powers. Many peoples thought of it as the dwelling place of the sainted dead.

The antiquity of the legends which gypsies tell about the moon and its special relationship to them as a people make it clear that it has been honored by them since ancient times. One legend, originating probably in India, identifies the wandering habits of the gypsies with the constant movement of the planets. The sun, who was originally a gypsy chief, eternally seeks to seduce his sister, the moon, who constantly evades his advances. The incestuous nature of this relationship between the sun and the moon has caused both them and their children the gypsy people to be cursed to wander forever.

A second legend, told by the gypsies of Transylvania, claims that many thousand of years ago the Sun-King married a beautiful woman with golden hair. His brother, the Moon-King, likewise married a beautiful woman with silver hair. In time, both brothers had many children by their wives—so many, in fact, that creation became very crowded. The Sun-King suggested to his brother that they should eat their children in order to make room. To this suggestion, the Moon-King agreed. When the Sun-King had finished eating his children, his wife was so horrified at his cruelty that she died. Seeing this, the Moon-King decided not to eat his children for fear that his wife might also die. When the Sun-King discovered that his brother did not intend to eat his children, he became outraged and began to chase him around the world. To this day the Sun pursues the Moon and his children, the innumerable stars, around the earth.[4] The Moon-King's compassion both for his wife and for his children as shown by this legend has caused gypsies to revere the moon as a force especially helpful to children and child-bearing women.

A third legend implies an extremely intimate relationship

between the moon and the gypsy people. Long ago, it is said, when gypsies still lived in their ancestral home, God sent his son, Dundra, to them in the form of a human being. He taught them his law and wrote it down for them so that they would have it forever. Some say that following this he ascended to the moon and became known as the god Alako. Others say that while he was on earth he helped the gypsies in their fight with the Turks, who at that time were driving the gypsies from their homeland. Either way, Alako came to be known as the defender of the gypsy people during their time of exile. Someday, the legend claims, he will lead them back to their homes, but meanwhile he takes their souls after death to his realm. The enemies of the gypsies, the Devil and Christ, are also the enemies of Alako. Constantly struggling to destroy him, at times it appears they almost succeed when the moon decreases and disappears. Then, however, just as he appears to be vanquished he fights back bravely and once more emerges strong, full and bright.[5]

It is possible that at some time long past the gypsies of Scandinavia may actually have put into practice their worship of the moon god, Alako. Several nineteenth-century accounts claim that small carved stone idols of Alako representing him as a standing man with a quill in his outstretched right hand and a sword in his left hand were actually worshipped. On at least one night a year, it is claimed, all those who worshipped Alako would gather during a full moon. The idols of Alako were set up, and hymns and prayers were offered to him. Newly married couples were consecrated to him and all those children who had had Christian baptism during the previous year were baptised in the name of Alako. A celebration feast then followed these rites.[6] Whether the moon-god worshipped was Alako, or the moon-king of popular legend, his powers, were considered to be especally great during the time of a new moon.

Some gypsies have believed that most diseases are contracted during the time of the full moon. For this reason this is the best time to treat sickness by using prayers, spells and charms. As the moon diminishes so also will the effect of the sickness.

The moon has an especially powerful role to play in assuring the fertility of women. Some believe, for example, that no woman could become pregnant without the moon's help. Slavic gypsies have claimed that during a full moon on certain mountains there grows a mystical plant, the mere scent of which will cause a woman to beome pregnant. It is said that Rumanian gypsy women who had difficulty conceiving, at one time made animal sacrifices to the moon. During a full moon two male and female birds and two male and female four-footed animals were buried on a mountain. Libations were poured over the buried animals as a sacrificial offering to insure pregnancy.

Today, there exists little or no evidence that gypsies still actively practice anything which could be called moon worship. It would seem that the moon-god, unconquered in gypsy legend by the assaults of either the Devil or Christianity, has at last fallen prey to the impact of modern education and civilization.

The gods of nature, as typified by fire, the sun and the moon, are not the only natural forces which gypsies have in the past considered worthy of special honor and worship. Even today, certain groups of Gypsies, especially those of Yugoslavia, regard worship of the forces of sexual reproduction, as symbolized by the penis, to be their most important religious expression.[7]

Worship or adoration of the phallus is, of course, very widespread in historical religious belief and practice. Evidence of phallicism existed in many of the religions of antiquity and also exists in many primitive religions as well as some of the world's higher religions. Many peoples have considered the phallus, as an image of the penis, to be a symbol of fertility and

the reproductive power of nature. Consequently carved representations of the phallus were liberally used without, in most cases, any suggestion of the idea of indecency or obscenity. Generation and everything associated with it has been considered not only natural but in many cases absolutely necessary to preserve peoples whose existence was threatened by high death rates. Those rites associated with phallic worship were considered necessary in order to help nature procreate and preserve life.

Though phallic worship is a widespread phenomenon, it has found its most popular and prominent expression in India. The cult of Shiva gives tremendous importance to the phallus in its religious expression. Archeologists have discovered in the Indus valley of northwestern India many idols of a phallic god that may have been the predecessor of Shiva. It would of course be wrong to assume, necessarily, any links between these religious practices and the phallicism of the Slavic gypsies but the possibility of association does exist.

It may very well be that the honor and adoration given the phallic symbol in many of the world's religions was a later development from an earlier veneration for the penis itself. The beliefs and practices of some Yugoslavian gypsies would seem to suggest this as a possibility.

Among these people, *kar*, the male sexual organ, is believed to be the primary source of procreation and therefore, by process of association, also the primary source of new life, new values, virility and even good fortune. Kar is the source of good luck and well-being not only for the man, but also for all those who belong to his family. The larger a man's kar is, the more it may be expected to be a source of good fortune. Consequently among some groups the youth with a large penis is considered to be a very good prospect for marriage. The size of a man's kar is often common knowledge and may even be

boasted about by a youth's mother or relations. It is expected that such a man will bring happiness and popularity to all around him, especially those to whom he is closest.

In the same way, the use of one's kar is associated with assurance of prosperity. If a man, for example, is about to go on a business trip it is important to assure his success that he have sexual intercourse with either his wife or another woman, after which he should be blessed by her.

If the kar is considered the source of good fortune, it is also considered important in averting bad fortune. If, for example, something a man is doing is turning out poorly, all he needs to do is hold his kar and everything will turn out successful. In the same way, if a man should meet a priest on his way to work, he should hold his own kar in order to avert the evil influences which some gypsies believe priests to possess.

Second only to the penis itself as a source of good fortune and avoidance of evil is the use of the lingam, or phallic image. Any object which by either its function or shape reminds one of the penis, has served as a lingam. Poles, pillars, sticks, clubs, fish, or horns are only a few such examples. Most often such phallic symbols are carved out of wood such as fir, birch or hawthorn, and then placed over doors or windows in gypsy homes and caravans. As such, they are considered to be a protection against evil influences entering the house as well as the object for prayer for the inhabitant who seeks good fortune.

This association of good luck and prosperity with the kar also extends to include urine. Urine has often been used to cure skin and eye diseases and to heal wounds by being rubbed into the flesh. Lung diseases, it is believed, can best be cured by the drinking of urine. In some instances women will even wash their face in urine, thinking it to have a cosmetic, cleansing property.

So sacred is the kar in the thinking of Yugoslavian gypsies,

that it is incorporated into their prayers. The expression in Romany, *hav co kar* [I eat thy penis], is often used in reference to God Himself without any intentions of blasphemy. If one should, for example, petition God in prayer for a wish to be granted, he would precede his request by saying, "O God, I eat thy penis. . . ." As extraordinary as this might seem to us, it is considered by some gypsies to be a worthy prayer emphasizing their own proper relationship of humility to God. There is another implication, however, which is perhaps more important. Given their concepts of phallic worship, if a man's kar is the source of prosperity and good fortune, how much more so must be God's kar? To spiritually partake of God's kar, by eating it, would be in effect to take within oneself the highest and most primary source of all new life, of all goodness of all prosperity and good fortune.

It is probable that at one time gypsies may also have used the expression *hav co kar* in their sacred oaths. Since that time, however, it has come to be used in their ordinary conversation whenever it is necessary for the speaker to assure another of the integrity and honesty with which he is speaking.

Invariably the origin of the expression *hav co kar* and the reason for its sacred associations have been forgotton by the people. The question whether it might be the last remnant of a very ancient practice of cannibalism must be considered. Certainly, the association of the penis with new life, virility, and strength would give sufficient motivation for such a practice in the primitive mind. Whatever the origins of phallic worship may be, it seems clear that the belief and practice still continues to hold considerable influence over the thoughts and actions of the gypsies of Yugoslavia.

Two other gods in the gypsy pantheon of native gods also deserve to be mentioned. The first, Pharaun, has previously

been mentioned as a legendary pharaoh who once ruled a great empire and was himself a gypsy. Pharaun in Russian Gypsy legend has been elevated beyond the level of being a great emperor to the level of a divine being who is half-gypsy and half-god.

The legend claims that once long ago a gypsy woman left her baby in the woods. Before long the baby became hungry. An angel who saw this gave the baby her breast and fed him. Nourished by this divine food, the baby grew up to be part gypsy and part god.

Pharaun was told by the angel that he must live a very good life except for on Fridays, when he could feast and do anything he pleased. One Friday he gave a very great feast that included every type of food and drink, except for fish, which he had forgotten. A man without a soul, who was very jealous of Pharaun, came to the feast and immediately pointed out to his host that there was no fish on the table. He did this to embarrass him, because he felt certain that Pharaun would not be able to buy any fish at that late hour. However, when Pharaun went out and returned with fish, the man became angry and started a fight with him. The man, being evil, was very strong—so strong in fact that every time he hit Pharaun he drove him into the ground up to his knees. The Angel who had fed Pharaun saw that he was in trouble and whispered that he should defend himself with a knife in his pocket. The next time the man hit him, Pharaun drew his knife and cut the man open. Immediately two large snakes fell out. They told Pharaun that if he ate them he could become twice as strong as he was then. Pharaun, however, seeing that they were evil and unclean, did not eat them, but rather killed them. Ever since that time he has remained the god of the gypsies, neither all good nor all bad but at least clean inside.[8]

The second god, if we may speak of him as such, is Del of Slavic gypsy legend.[9] Del means both "God" and "everything which is above." Del is not an anthropomorphic being, and rarely is seen as a being which in any way could be considered to have a personality. Del is everything which is physically above man—heaven, the sky, clouds, the sun and moon and stars. Del fills the unlimited space above the earth. Legend claims that long ago Del was so close to the earth that it could be touched with one's hand. In those days life was very good and easy. But then, one day, a gypsy was washing her baby's diapers when one hit Del. Del was very offended by this and immediately rose high in the sky. Ever since that time Del has sent rain and hail and snow down to the earth. The use of Del figures prominently in gypsy speech. Del is used in blessing: "May Del go with you," as well as in cursing: "May Del take you." Del may also be used in verbal expressions which appeal for help, giving thanksgiving for good fortune, and prayers for a specific purpose to mention only a few examples.

Neither Pharaun nor Del command of their people any special type of worship or even moral behavior. It would seem that their sole purpose is the explaining by legend the relationship of the gypsy people to the whole of life.

It should be clear from what has been said that many gypsies in either their beliefs, legends or practices recognize a variety of gods which to some extent are unique to them. This still, however, leaves unanswered the question to what degree major world religions have made an impact on Gypsy belief and practice.

In the past, they have been accused of adopting a superficial commitment to the major religion of the land in which they were living for reasons either of financial gain or self-preservation. Historically, and certainly even today, examples of such

nominal commitment are abundant whether we are speaking of gypsies in the Americas, Europe, the Near East or the Orient.

To conclude from this, however, that none of the world's gypsies have any truly serious commitment to the world's major faiths, would be greatly mistaken. Very often, for example, because gypsies may prove to be syncretic about their beliefs, either between their own concepts and those of a major religion, or between two major religions, they have been accused of being irreligious or nonreligious, lacking both in honesty and integrity. Such an accusation as this reveals a failure to understand the gypsy mentality. Essentially, they are a free-spirited people in more ways than one. Normally nomadic in life style, they have always reserved the right to be able to pick and choose what they feel is best or most beneficial for themselves whether the choice is between places in which to live or faiths in which to believe. Then too, the social and religious rejection, alienation and persecution which they have suffered in virtually all lands by people of all faiths has often ruled out commitment to an orthodox belief in favor of one which is syncretic. Many Indian gypsies, for example, have formed a synthesis between Hinduism and their own native beliefs. The Dôms revere many gods and have a profound dread of a multitude of evil spirits, almost all of which are Hindu in origin. Though they are not welcome to enter most of the temples, they have been known to gain admittance by deception. They have no Brahmans, however, and no particular idols or altars of their own. Thus, while they largely accept Hindu beliefs, they are not really accepted by their coreligionists into its practice. This has led to various tribes developing their own distinctive religious synthesis. Many Dôms, for example, worship the god Gandak as a part of the Hindu pantheon of gods. Gandak, a historical figure who was hanged for theft, died promising to

help the gypsies in their thefts. Now considered to be the god of theft, the people offer sacrifices to him and feast in his honor after each successful raid.

In the same way, many gypsies have been known to form a religious synthesis in their beliefs between two major religious faiths. In the East, tribes which consider themselves to be Moslem see nothing wrong in offering worship to the Hindu goddess, Kali, while many of those gypsies who primarily think of themselves as Hindu see nothing wrong in observing the Bakariya Kund, a Mohammedan festival. In Europe, Albanian gypsies who identify with the Moslem faith observe many Christian holy days while the Christian gypsies of Bulgaria make it one of their practices to sacrifice sheep much as the Moslems do, at the close of Ramadan.

Not all gypsies, however, have chosen to adopt this syncretic approach to religion. Whenever or wherever exponents of a major faith have seen fit to welcome the gypsy by granting him dignity and at least a hesitant welcome to places of worship, the response on the part of the gypsies has been favorable. Such has been the case both in Mohammedism and Christianity. In primarily Moslem areas of Slavic Europe, for example, gypsies are allowed to worship in the mosques as long as they remain in the back. In other instances, prosperous sedentary gypsies have been allowed to actively participate as equals in worship. In some areas they have even been allowed to build their own mosques.

A more impressive, though far from perfect, relationship has come to exist between the gypsy and Christianity, though it has taken many centuries to achieve. It is virtually impossible to ascertain exactly when the gypsy people were first introduced to Christianity. We know, of course, that they entered Europe in the role of Christian pilgrims. We also know that this role was

maintained for some time afterwards through either religious conviction or an almost uncanny ability to deceive. It is however, difficult to believe that they were totally lacking in genuine Christian conviction. It seems highly likely, for example, that so intelligent a pope as Alexander VI could have been deceived by the gypsy chief Martin Gnougy, when the latter appealed to him for a paper of free conduct in order that his people could wander as Christian penitents.

There are other indications that the majority of gypsies observed more than nominal Christianity. Fitz-Simeon, a Franciscan friar from Dublin, described seeing people in Crete in 1322, whom scholars since have regarded as gypsies: "We there saw a people living outside the city [of Candia] who worship according to the Greek rite, and declare themselves of the race of Ham." We also know that the Gypsy "pilgrims" wore the appropriate pilgrim dress and used the cross as their chief symbol. If all this was merely a masterful deception to take advantage of the religiosity of the age it is curious that such a facade was able to be maintained over such a long period of time. Over two hundred years later, for example, when a group of three hundred gypsies found themselves in danger they took refuge in the Augustinian convent of Plainpalais. On Corpus Christi Day in 1584, a number of gypsies sought refuge with the Knights of St. James when authorities in Santiago sought to seize them. Both such events might be explained by the right of sanctuary then in force, but it does not seem likely that the friars or the knights would have defended a mixed group of alien and criminal wanderers unless they could have been fairly sure of their Christian religious convictions. One last monument to the either real or pretended piety of the medieval gypsy is the Church of Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, in the Ile de la Camargue, Gouches-du-Rhone. It is here, in the crypt, that gyp-

sies since 1450 have regularly made a pilgrimage to honor St. Sara, the saint who has become patroness of all gypsies.[10]

For many years there has been a great deal of speculation about when the gypsy first came into contact with Christianity. There is reason to believe that gypsies may have lived in the Near East for well over two thousand years. If so, this would suggest that gypsies might have come into contact with the early church. Speculating even further, it has been suggested that since gypsies at the time of Christ tended to monopolize coppersmithing in the Near East, it is possible that the coppersmith at Troas who did St. Paul so much evil was none other than a gypsy.[11]

For many years it was thought that the earliest contact between gypsies and the Christian West was in 1417 in Germany. Wiener, with his discovery of a specific reference in a late eighth century general admonition of Charlemagne, attempted to prove that gypsies were already in Europe in sizable numbers by that time.[12] Certainly there are many similarities between the people against whom Charlemagne passed legislation and the European gypsy. If, in fact, this document is the first antigypsy legislation, as he seems to prove, then the origin of the gypsies in Europe and their first contact with Christianity was much earlier than previously thought. Curiously there seems to be evidence that the legend of the gypsies' origin in "Little Egypt" may go back to before the fifth century. We are told that Stephan of Byzantium, as early as the fifth century, in a dictionary of names and places mentions among other nations, Little Egypt. This, then, would seem to suggest that gypsy people have been in contact with Christianity for a minimum of fifteen hundred years but possibly as far back as the apostolic age itself.

Just as the legend of the pilgrims out of Little Egypt can

help to give us some of the earliest evidence of contact between Christians and gypsies, so also can other legends originating in medieval Europe help to give us some idea to what extent the medieval mind associated the gypsy with the Christian religion. There are, rather surprisingly, a large number of popular legends and tales which associate the gypsy with various significant moments and actions in the life of Christ. Composed by both gorgios and gypsies, these legends serve to give an additional insight into the religious feelings and actions of the medieval gypsy, and his relationship with the contemporary Europe.

Gypsy-Christian legends fall into three major categories: legends associating the gypsy with the Holy Family, legends associating gypsies with the Three Magi, and finally legends associating the gypsies with the Crucifixion. There are a number of legends dealing with the nativity of Christ. Undoubtedly, the most famous and most lovely, however, is the *Ballad of the Madonna when she fled to Egypt with the Infant Jesus and St. Joseph*, an Italian ballad originating sometime in the late Middle Ages. In the ballad, a gypsy woman sees the Holy Family in Egypt, and taking them for pilgrims offers them her home in which to rest. Recognizing divinity in Mary and Jesus she receives them with great respect and praises them both for their beauty. Offering to tell the fortune of Mary, she tells her of all the suffering she must undergo in her lifetime because of the actions of her Son. The ballad systematically goes through each of the major events in the life of Christ. After the fortune has been told, instead of asking for the usual alms, the gypsy woman asks only that Mary would grant her the grace to know true repentance and thereby gain an eternal life.

Medieval Europe often associated the legend of the Three Magi with the gypsies. The fact that the gypsy leaders had

passed themselves off as eastern potentates was important in giving rise to this traditional belief. One traditional tale states that there was a certain eastern nation which had kept watch for the star centuries before the birth of Christ. Twelve astronomers were continually maintained to watch for the star on a hill which was named the hill of Vaws. Finally the star was sighted by the astronomers and the three kings who ruled that nation made their visitation. Thereafter, the descendants of those kings were called the "progeny of Vaws." Since it is believed the tale originated in the North Country near the Borders of Scotland, it is not difficult to see the connection between the large Scottish gypsy family of the Faws located in that area and the "progeny of Vaws." The most noted Christmas carol illustrating the Three Magi as gypsies was written by Sieur Nicolar Saboly in the seventeenth century. It begins:

> We are three Bohemians
> Who tell good fortune.
> We are three Bohemians
> Who rob wherever we may be;
> Child, lovely and so sweet,
> Place, place here, the cross [coin],
> And each [of us] will tell thee
> Everything that will happen to thee:
> Begin, Janan, however,
> Give him the hand to see.[13]

The carol continues by recognizing the divinity of Christ, foretelling all that would happen to Him during His life, and then going on to tell the fortune of Mary and Joseph. Unlike the Nativity tale, however, these three gypsy Magi required the proper pecuniary rewards before they could be induced to prophecy. The carol ends with a plea by the Magi that they may be granted an eternal life in reward for the good fortune which they have offered the Holy Family.

A far more common legend and one much less favorable to the Gypsy is that which says that it was a gypsy blacksmith who forged the nails for the Crucifixion and because of this was cursed by Mary:

And by a Gipsy smith they passed, a smith who nails was making.
"Thou dog, thou Gipsy dog," said she, "what is it thou are making?"
"They're going to crucify a man and I the nails am making.
They only ordered three of me but five I mean to make them.
Two for his two knees I design, two for his hands I fashion,
The fifth, the sharpest of the five, within his heart shall enter."[14]

Another legend of the same theme tells of two soldiers who were commissioned to buy four nails for the Crucifixion. They went to three different Jewish blacksmiths who, refusing to forge nails for the crucifixion of a fellow Jew, paid with their lives at the hands of the soldiers. Finally, they approached a gypsy blacksmith who said that he would be willing to forge the four nails. After he had finished only three, the soldiers took them and went away. He continued with his work and finished the fourth nail, but much to his dismay it would not cool but rather remained as red-hot as when he had been forging it. No matter where the blacksmith fled he could not lose the nail—it always remained with him. To this day, wherever there are gypsies the nail appears and the gypsies still try to escape from it. This is why they are continuously moving from one place to another and are never able to settle.[15]

From such legends it can be seen that gypsies have had a long history of contact with the Christian religion. This contact has drawn much closer with the passage of years and the decline of legal persecution. Missionaries representing both the Roman Catholic Church and Protestantism have come to show

both a social and religious interest in the gypsies of Europe, while gypsies, themselves, have assumed leadership in the evangelical movement which is currently making a considerable impact especially among the nomads of France. With this new development it is likely we are witnessing one more chapter in that long and complex story which speaks of the complexity of gypsy belief and practice.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Conclusion

Out of the ages of ignorance, persecution and misunderstanding, there is gradually emerging a clearer picture of those beliefs and practices which perhaps more than anything else make the gypsies one of the world's most mysterious peoples. Where at one time their outlawed status served to obscure and make unimportant their native concepts of magic and religion, a more tolerant and curious age has begun to reveal a wealth of discoveries which tell us not only about the gypsies, but indeed the whole human spiritual experience. The picture which emerges for us is that of a people who over thousands of years have exercised their nomadic instincts by contacting at one time or another most of the world's peoples and their cultures.

From this contact, and the cultural exposure which it provided, gypsies have come to formulate, undoubtedly, one of the most complex patterns of magical and religious belief ever practiced by any of the world's peoples. Such is the extent of

multi-cultural influence on gypsy rites and beliefs that if it were possible to read the collective unconscious of these remarkable people there would be found a compendium of most of the world's magical and religious beliefs.

In spite of this influence, however, the gypsy has always shown a remarkable ability to absorb different cultural concepts without endangering or losing his own identity. No matter how alien a belief or practice might be, once it is adopted by the gypsies it gains a certain mystique which marks it off and makes it somehow different from that of the nongypsy. History may show that their real offering to world society is not that of originality but rather one of being a carrier of culture. As an exponent of foreign cultures, exotic beliefs and practices, they have few equals among world peoples.

What seems equally as certain as the breadth and variety of their beliefs, is the ability they have shown to preserve some of man's most ancient, indeed, primeval, magical and religious beliefs. We know, for example, that some gypsies practice phallic worship and incorporate into their prayers and daily conversation reference to eating of the penis as proof of their integrity. Is it completely unreasonable to think of these practices as a harmless remnant of the far more primitive, cannibalistic practice of the tribal warrior eating the entire body of his dead enemy in order to gain his strength and virility? We know, also, that many gypsies have a deadly fear of the ghastly man-eating habits of the vampire. To what extent, it may be asked, could this fear be a response to the actual primitive behavior of earliest man, whose habit it was to collect heads after eating the brains from their skulls?

Some might ask, to what extent may truth be found in the beliefs of such a people? Are their fears of gruesome apparitions, their strange spells and charms, only fantastic figments

of the imagination of a highly naive people? Or, on the other hand, is it possible they might have powers which others have long since lost? We should, perhaps, not be too quick to make judgments. At a time when scientists are questioning the bounds of reality, when parapsychology and extrasensory perception are causing us to question the long-established assumption that man has but five senses, we cannot rule out the possibility that a people close to the natural world and unfettered by the inhibitions of so-called civilized society may very well possess strange gifts.

Today, of course, the natural world of the gypsy is being threatened in many places by such shattering developments as high-speed highways, automobiles, radio and television, and modern educational programs. It remains to be seen whether a people who have survived so many hardships, persecutions, and even genocide to preserve their independence and freedom of belief and practice, will be successful in resisting the enormous pressures toward conformity which the twentieth century demands of them.

Either way, one thing is certain. It will be many years before the gypsies' traditional beliefs can be spoken of only in the past tense. In remote areas, throughout the world, gypsy magic and religion will continue to be practiced as living traditions. Until those areas, too, are included within the march of modern civilization, gypsies will continue to be one of the world's most intriguing and mysterious peoples.

Notes

NOTES

Chapter One

1. Walter Simson, *History of the Gypsies* (London: 1865), p. 32.

2. I am especially indebted to the excellent scholarship of such contributors as A. Petrovic, T.W. Thompson, C.H. Hillhagen, and H. Wlislocki. The author, of course, assumes full responsibility for any erroneous observations or statements made in the text of the book.

Chapter Two

1. R. Pischel, "The Home of the Gypsies", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 2, p. 317.

2. For discussion of this question, see M. J. deGoeje, "The Heidens of the Netherlands", *JGLS*, Old Series, p. 132; Pischel, *op. cit.*, p. 303; and Clebert, Jean Paul, *The Gypsies* (London: 1963) pp. 22-23.

3. H. M. Grellman, *Dissertation on the Gypsies* (London: 1787), p. 72.

4. Walter Simson, *History of the Gypsies* (London: 1865), p. 73.

5. Grellman, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

6. A few German princes ignored such laws and furnished passports and safe conducts for gypsies. *loc. cit.*

7. Grellman, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

8. *Ibid.*

9. With the mass arrival of European immigrants in the latter half of the nineteenth century many more gypsies, mostly from Slavic countries were to arrive in the United States. By 1885, however, gypsies were excluded by immigration policy and returned to Europe. Under these conditions many chose to immigrate to Canada, Australia, and Central and South America.

10. Grellman, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 85.

Chapter Three

1. H. M. Grellman, *Dissertation on the Gypsies* (London: 1787) p. 60.

2. M. J. deGoeje, "The Heidens of the Netherlands", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. II, pp. 133-134.

3. John Hoyland, *An Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits, and Present State of the Gypsies* (London: 1816), pp. 199ff.

4. The Rev. Henry Woodcock, *The Gypsies . . . . with Suggestions for Their Reformation and Conversion* (London: 1865), p. 84.

5. *Ibid.*

6. C. G. Leland, *The English Gypsies aand Their Language* (London: 1873), p. 10.

7. C. G. Leland, *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling* (London: 1891) p. xxvii.

8. *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

9. E. O. James, *Comparative Religion; An Introductory and Historical Study* (London: 1938), p. 1.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
11. Leland, *Gypsy Sorcery and Fortune Telling*, p. xxviii.

Chapter Four

1. Eric Maple, *The Dark World of Witches* (London: 1962), pp. 33-34.
2. D. MacRitchie, "The Sin of Consultation with Witches", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. I, p. 375.
3. Charles Payne, "Martha Herne: The Black Witch", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 30, p. 48.
4. John Myers, "The 'Greek' Nomad Gypsies in South Wales, During August 1942", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 22, p. 100.
5. Heinrich Wlislocki, "Love Forecasts and Love Charms Among the Tent Gypsies of Translyvania", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. II, p. 225.

Chapter Six

1. Charles Payne, "An Initiation Ceremony", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 29, pp. 72-73.

Chapter Seven

1. Dora Yates, "*I Merimasko Cerikclo*", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 4, pp. 301-302.
2. D. M. Bartlett, "Two Recent Gypsy Funerals", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 13, p. 93.

3. John Sampson, "The Wood Family", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 12, p. 37, quoting M. Eileen Lyster, *Gypsy Life of Betsy Wood* (London: 1926).

4. It is important to note here that this aversion to corpse handling is largely confined to gypsy corpses and not to those of the nongypsy dead. The gypsies of India very often have as their occupation the disposal of the bodies of the non-gypsy dead.

5. T. W. Thompson, "English Gypsy Death and Burial Customs", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 3, p. 15.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

7. Istvan Nagy, "Gypsies of the Sarret", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 19, pp. 12-13.

8. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

9. The second, and equally important postburial rite of property destruction will be discussed later.

10. Jean-Paul Clebert, *The Gypsies* (Baltimore: 1969), p. 231.

11. G. E. C. Webb, *Gypsies: The Secret People* (London: 1960), p. 41.

Chapter Eight

1. *The Revivalist*, 1837, p. 294.

2. The influence of Christianity on the gypsy rites of baptism and marriage will be discussed later.

3. C. H. Tillhagen, "A Gypsy Funeral in Stockholm", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 30, p. 98.

4. T. W. Thompson, "English Gypsy Death and Burial Customs", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 3, p. 26.

5. This custom may have given rise to the proficiency which

many gypsies have for making artificial flowers and selling them as an occupation.

6. Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

8. D. M. Bartlett, "Two Recent Gypsy Funerals", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 13, p. 95.

Chapter Nine

1. C. H. Tillhagen, "Funeral and Death Customs of the Swedish Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 31, p. 52.

2. T. P. Vukonovic, "The Vampire", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 36, pp. 129-30.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

4. Vukonovic, *op. cit.*, Vol. 37, p. 114.

5. William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, (Allahabad: 1894), p. 165.

6. M. Gaster, *Rumanian Bird and Beast Stories* (London: 1915), pp. 79-85.

7. The author is indebted to T. P. Vukonovic for his unique research on the subject of the Slavic gypsy belief in vampires as contained in *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 37, pp. 26-28.

8. Alexander Petrovic, "Contributions to the Study of the Serbian Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 16, p. 18.

9. Mateo Maximoff, "Tales of Terror", Translated and Annotated by D. E. Yates, *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 32, p. 42ff.

10. Vukonovic, *op. cit.*, Vol. 37, p. 115.

11. F. H. Groome, "The Vampire: A Roumanian Gypsy Story", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. II, pp. 145-46.

12. It will be recalled that the dhampir is the son, or occasionally, the daughter, of a living mother and a vampire father. He or she are believed to possess remarkable powers to see and destroy vampires usually by using a gun.

Chapter Ten

1. C. H. Tillhagen, "Betrothal and Wedding Customs Among the Swedish Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 32, p. 128.

2. C. H. Tillhagen, "Funeral and Death Customs of the Swedish Gypsies", *JGLS*; Series III, Vol. 31, p. 54.

3. For evidence of this see J. Curtin, *Irish Folk-Tales* (Dublin: 1944) and M. Murray, *The God of the Witches* (London: 1933), p. 41, which claims that: "There is plenty of literary evidence in the seventeenth century to show that a fairy could be mistaken for an ordinary mortal . . ."

4. "Fairies", *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (London: 1925-1935).

5. T. W. Thompson, "Two Tales of Experience", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 22, pp. 47-48.

6. Mateo Maximoff, *The Ursitory* (London: 1949) is a novel written by a gypsy scholar dealing with the story of these fates.

7. Jean-Paul Clebert, *The Gypsies* (London: 1963) p. 183, recalls this legend in great detail.

8. Alexandros Paspates, *Etudes sur les tchinghianes on bohemians de l'Empire Ottoman* (Constantinople: 1870) p. 169.

9. Patrick McEvoy, "Birth of a Devil", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 17, p. 45.

10. F. H. Groome, *In Gypsy Tents* (Edinburgh: 1880) pp. 297-99.

11. See Mateo Maximoff, "Children of the Devil", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 27, pp. 110-114 for a more complete description of the legend.

12. John Myers, "Syrenda Lovell and the Beng", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 5, pp. 152-3.

Chapter Eleven

1. C. G. Leland, *The English Gypsies and Their Language* (London: 1873), p. 10.

2. W. R. Halliday, "Some Notes Upon the Gypsies of Turkey", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 1, pp. 163-189.

3. Alexander Petrovic, "Contributions to the Study of the Serbian Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 15, pp. 63-65.

4. E. O. James, *Comparative Religion: An Introductory and Historical Study* (London: 1938), p. 63.

5. William Crooke, "Gypsy Forms and Ceremonies", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 3, p. 182.

6. William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India* (Allahabad: 1894) p. 154.

7. T. P. Vukonovic, "The Vampire in the Belief and Custom of the Gypsies in the Province of Kusovo-Metohija, Stari Ras and Novopazarski Sandzak, Yugloslavia", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 38, p. 50.

8. E. O. Winstedt, "The Gypsy Coppersmiths' Invasion of 1911-1913", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 6, p. 294.

9. Heinrich Wlislocki, "The Witches of the Gypsies", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. III, p. 45.

10. John Myers, "Blood Sacrifice", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 28, p. 19.

11. Basil Rakoczi, "Magical Beliefs and Practices of the Gypsies and Witches of the Balearic Isles", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 46, p. 8.

12. Gypsy Petulengro, "Report on the Gypsy Tribes of North-East Bulgaria", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 9, p. 32.

13. T. P. Vukonovic, "Gypsy Pilgrimmages to the Monastery of Gracanica in Serbia", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 45, p. 21.

14. The author is indebted to Alexander Petrovic for his unique study on the worship of the goddess Bibi as contained in his report, "Contributions to the Study of the Serbian Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 16, p. 116ff.

15. The haglike night monster who is "Queen of Demons and murderess of young children" is a popular character in folklore. See William Crooke, *The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, (Allahabad: 1894), p. 174.

16. Petrovic, *op. cit.*, Vol. 18, p. 183.

17. John S. Campbell, *Notes on the Spirit Basis of Belief and Custom* (Bombay: 1885), p. 83.

18. A. Hasluck, "The Gypsies of Albania", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 17, p. 117.

19. Vukonovic, "Gypsy Bear-Leaders in the Balkan Peninsula", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 38, p. 120.

20. Petrovic, *op. cit.*, Vol. 14, p. 185.

21. Wlislocki, "The Worship of Mountains Among the Gypsies", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. III, p. 161ff.

Chapter Twelve

1. A. Elysseeff, "Materials for the Study of the Gypsies collected by M. I. Kounavine", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol. II, pp. 100-101.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 161-2.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 164-5.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

5. Eilert Sundt, *Beretning om Fante- eller Landstrygerfolket i Norge* (Christiania: 1852), pp. 105-7.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8.

7. The author is indebted to Alexander Petrovic for his study of phallic worship among the Yugoslavian gypsies as contained in, "Contributions to the Study of the Serbian Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 16, pp. 20ff.

8. Frances R. Vandercook, "Phara-Un, God of the Gypsies", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 18, pp. 111-12.

9. Petrovic, *op. cit.*, pp. 9, 25-6.

10. The origins of St. Sara as the patron saint of gypsies are lost in time. It appears that she can first be found in the legendary belief that the Virgin Mary and St. Mary Magdalene had an Egyptian servant girl whose name was Sara. When the two Marys took to wandering Sara went with them and begged for them. She was said to have died in Veroli, Italy. Later her relics and her cult were transferred to Provence. A later legend claims that she came direct to Provence in the miraculous boat which carried the two Marys there. For an excellent discussion of St. Sara and her cult see Walter Starkie, *In Sara's Tents* (London: 1953).

11. Joseph Lucas, *Yetholm History of the Gypsies* (Kelso: 1882), p. 65, refers here to 2 Tim., IV: 14.

12. Leo Wiener, "Gypsies as Fortune Tellers and Blacksmiths", *JGLS*, New Series, Vol. 3, pp. 253-76.

13. Wentworth Webster and David MacRitchie, "Christmas Carols: The Three Magi", *JGLS*, Old Series, Vol I, pp. 135-145.

14. W. R. Halliday, "Notes on the Gypsies of Turkey", *JGLS*, Series III, Vol. 1, p. 175.

15. Konrad Bercovici, *The Story of the Gypsies* (London: 1928).

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