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The Works Of The Right Honourable Joseph Addison, Esq.

In Four Volumes

Addison, Joseph

London, 1721

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-----*Semperque recentes*

Conveclare juvat prædas, et vivere rapto.

Virg.

AS I was yesterday riding out in the fields with my friend Sir ROGER, we saw at a little distance from us a troop of Gypsies. Upon the first discovery of them, my friend was in some doubt whether he should not exert the *Justice of Peace* upon such a band of lawless vagrants; but not having his Clerk with him, who is a necessary counsellor on these occasions, and fearing that his poultry might fare the worse for it, he let the thought drop. But at the same time gave me a particular account of the mischiefs they do in the country, in stealing peoples goods and spoiling their servants. If a stray piece of linnen hangs upon an hedge, says Sir ROGER, they are sure to have it; if a hog loses his way in the fields, it is ten to one but he becomes their prey; our geese cannot live in peace for them; if a man prosecutes them with severity, his hen-roost it sure to pay for it: they generally straggle into these parts about this time of the year; and set the heads of our servant-maids so agog for husbands, that we do not expect to have any business done, as it should be, whilst they are in the country. I have an honest dairy-maid who crosses their hands with a piece of silver every summer; and never fails being promised the handsomest young fellow in the parish for her pains. Your friend the Butler has been fool enough to be seduced by them; and though he is sure to lose a knife, a fork, or a spoon every time his fortune is told him, generally shuts himself up in the pantry with an old Gypsie for above half an hour once in a twelve-month. Sweet-hearts are the things they live upon, which they bestow very plentifully upon all those that apply themselves to them. You see now and then some handsome young Jades among them: the Sluts have very often white teeth and black eyes.

Sir

Sir ROGER observing that I listned with great attention to his account of a people who were so entirely new to me, told me, That if I would, they should tell us our fortunes. As I was very well pleased with the Knight's proposal, we rid up and communicated our hands to them. A *Cassandra* of the crew, after having examined my lines very diligently, told me, That I loved a pretty maid in a corner, that I was a good woman's man, with some other particulars which I do not think proper to relate. My friend Sir ROGER alighted from his horse, and exposing his palm to two or three that stood by him, they crumpled it into all shapes, and diligently scanned every wrinkle that could be made in it; when one of them who was older and more sun-burnt than the rest, told him, That he had a widow in his line of life: upon which the Knight cryed, Go, go, you are an idle baggage; and at the same time smiled upon me. The Gypsie finding he was not displeas'd in his heart, told him after a further enquiry into his hand, that his true-love was constant, and that she should dream of him to night. My old friend cryed Pish, and bid her go on. The Gypsie told him that he was a Batchelour, but would not be so long; and that he was dearer to some body than he thought: The Knight still repeated, she was an idle baggage, and bid her go on. Ah Master, says the Gypsie, that roguish leer of yours makes a pretty woman's heart ake; you ha'n't that simper about the mouth for nothing——The uncouth gibberish with which all this was uttered like the darkness of an Oracle, made us the more attentive to it. To be short, the Knight left the money with her that he had cross'd her hand with, and got up again on his horse.

As we were riding away, Sir ROGER told me, that he knew several sensible people who believed these Gypsies now and then foretold very strange things; and for half an hour together appeared more jocund than ordinary. In the height of this good humour, meeting a common beggar upon the road who was no conjurer, as he went to relieve him he found his pocket was pick'd: that being a kind of Palmistry at which this race of vermin are very dexterous.

I might here entertain my Reader with historical Remarks on this idle profligate people, who infest all the countries of *Europe*, and live in the midst of Governments in a kind of Common-wealth by themselves. But instead of entering into observations of this nature, I shall fill the remaining part of my paper with a story which is still fresh in *Holland*, and was printed in one of our monthly accounts about twenty years ago.

“ As the *Trekschuyt*, or Hackney-boat, which carries passengers from
“ *Leiden*

“ *Leiden to Amsterdam*, was putting off, a boy running along the side
 “ of the canal, desired to be taken in; which the master of the boat
 “ refused, because the lad had not quite money enough to pay the usual
 “ fare. An eminent Merchant being pleased with the looks of the boy,
 “ and secretly touched with compassion towards him, paid the money
 “ for him, and ordered him to be taken on board. Upon talking with
 “ him afterwards, he found that he could speak readily in three or four
 “ languages, and learned upon further examination that he had been stoln
 “ away when he was a child by a Gypsy, and had rambled ever since
 “ with a gang of those strollers up and down several parts of *Europe*.
 “ It happened that the Merchant, whose heart seems to have inclined to-
 “ wards the boy by a secret kind of Instinct, had himself lost a child
 “ some years before. The parents, after a long search for him, gave
 “ him for drowned in one of the canals with which that country abounds;
 “ and the mother was so afflicted at the loss of a fine boy, who was her
 “ only son, that she died for grief of it. Upon laying together all parti-
 “ culars, and examining the several moles and marks by which the mo-
 “ ther used to describe the child when he was first missing, the boy pro-
 “ ved to be the son of the Merchant, whose heart had so unaccountably
 “ melted at the sight of him. The lad was very well pleased to find a
 “ father who was so rich, and likely to leave him a good estate; the
 “ father, on the other hand, was not a little delighted to see a son return
 “ to him, whom he had given for lost, with such a strength of Constitu-
 “ tion, sharpness of Understanding, and skill in Languages.” Here the
 printed story leaves off; but if I may give credit to reports, our lin-
 guist having received such extraordinary rudiments towards a good edu-
 cation, was afterwards trained up in every thing that becomes a Gentle-
 man; wearing off by little and little all the vicious habits and practices
 that he had been used to in the course of his peregrinations: Nay, it is
 said, that he has since been employed in foreign Courts upon national
 business, with great reputation to himself, and honour to those who sent
 him, and that he has visited several countries as a publick Minister, in
 which he formerly wandered as a Gypsy.

Tuesday