

**THE SOCIAL  
EMANCIPATION  
OF THE GIPSIES**

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The social emancipation of the Gipsies by James Simson

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**JAMES SIMSON**

**THE SOCIAL  
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THE SOCIAL EMANCIPATION

OF

THE GIPSIES.

BY

JAMES SIMSON,

*Editor of*

SIMSON'S HISTORY OF THE GIPSIES."

*And Author of*

"CONTRIBUTIONS TO NATURAL HISTORY AND PAPERS ON OTHER SUBJECTS," ETC.

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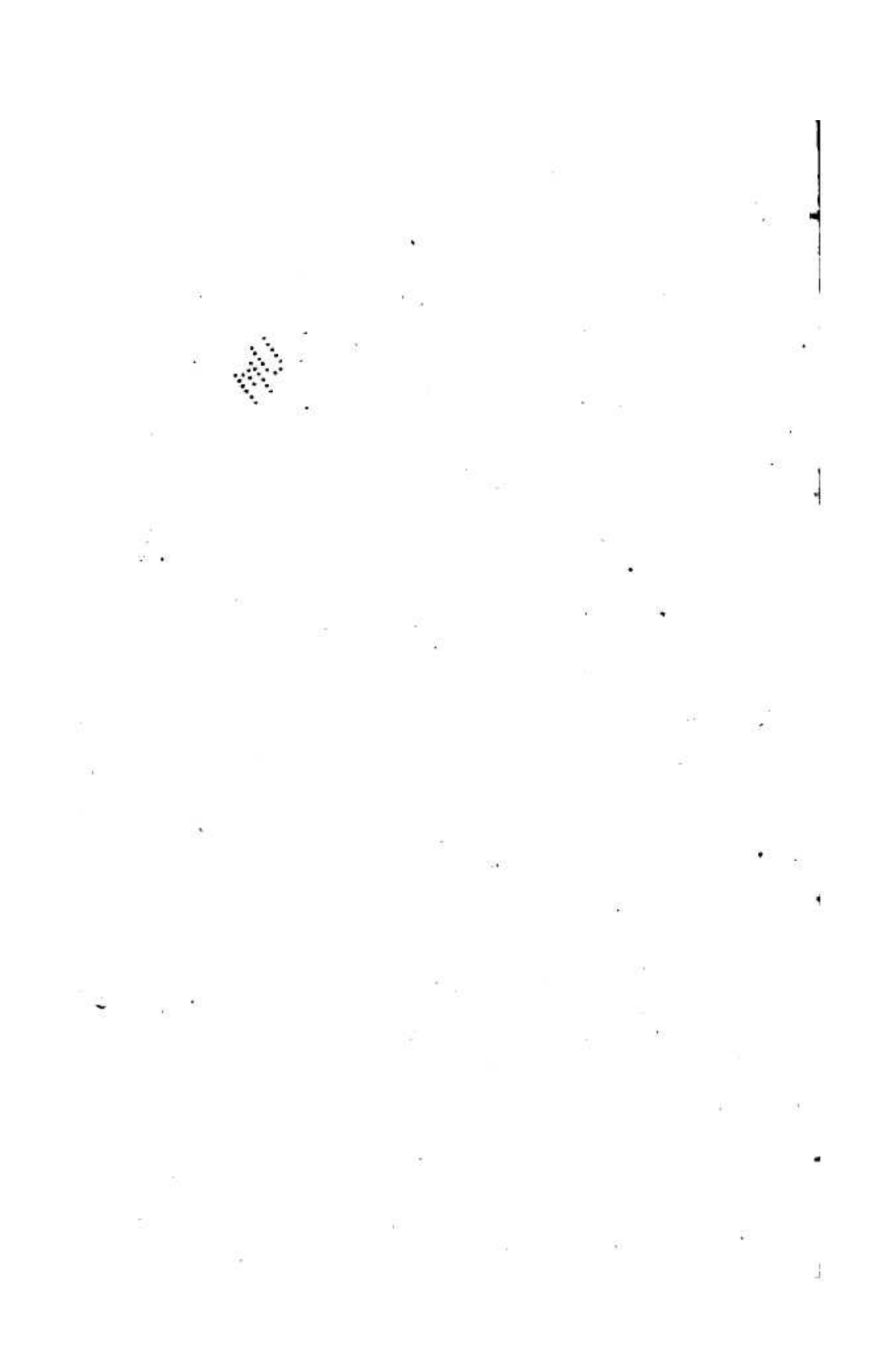
"And hath made of one blood all nations of men."—ACTS xvii. 26.

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## PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

I HAVE said, at page 11, that owing to its "practical unfamiliarity with the idea of two distinct races living on the same soil," "the principle, or rather fact, here involved" in the Gipsy nationality, in a more or less mixed state as regards blood, and living exactly like other people, "is evidently very difficult of comprehension by the British mind." And that in America "the extreme prejudice against the Gipsies, and the consequent singular incredulity towards anything good or sensible that may emanate from them as a race," are "somewhat obviated" by "the distance from the location of the people principally described."

On a previous occasion I said that the original Gipsies "were a people differing nearly as much from the inhabitants of Scotland [and Europe generally] as the Indians did from the colonists settling in America."\* And I described the destiny of the two thus:—"In this they differ, that these Indians really die out, while the Gipsies are very prolific, and become invigorated by a mixture of the white blood; under the cover of which they gradually leave the tent and scatter themselves over and through society, enter into the various pursuits common to the ordinary natives, and become lost to the observation of the rest of the population."† The people of the United States occupy, in this way, a very favourable position for forming a correct and dispassionate opinion on the subject of the Gipsies, who exist among them as they do in other countries. They are also very familiar with the idea of the "nationality of Europeans consisting merely in birth on the soil, . . . while their children might acquire or form a new nationality by being born and reared on another territory";‡ which is somewhat applicable to the formation of Gipsydom, by its draw-

\* *Contributions, etc.*, p. 151.

† *History of the Gipsies* (1865), p. 54.

‡ *Contributions, etc.*, p. 162.

ing upon the blood of the white races and transmuting it into that of its own, like some mixed races in America.

It seems unnecessary to give the reasons for the Gipsies hiding from the world the fact of their belonging to the race, for these should occur, intuitively and instinctively, to others, without an explanation. Under any circumstances, the Gipsies are nothing if not secretive. The reconciliation between the two must come from the rest of the world, who should look upon "the blood," mixed as it is with that of others, as it emerged from its wild state, especially in Great Britain, since 1506, as "the baby of the family" among civilized peoples, however high in antiquity it may rank as a barbarous race. I have given Mrs. Carlyle as an instance of what I have been "fishing for" for many years, in the way of the acknowledgment of "the blood," however interesting it would have been to have had more particulars in regard to her case.

As the subject of the Gipsies, apart from the remnant of the race still in a wild state, presents little (and often nothing) that is obvious to the eye, it follows that the interest that attaches to it must be of a mental nature; making it necessary to treat it in the way I have done. It remains to be seen whether that interest can be created by this little publication, in connexion with preceding ones. It is a subject that has hitherto been greatly neglected by the world at large, owing apparently to its novelty, or its more or less abstract nature as it presents itself to some minds, however easy it is of being understood, on its merits, by others.

NEW YORK, 1st September, 1884.



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\* These two articles "appeared in the form of a pamphlet, in 1880," as alluded to at page 12.



## INTRODUCTION.

THE following articles, sent originally to the London monthly *Journal of Science*, are, I think, deserving of a better fate than allowed to remain in the pages of a magazine, whatever its nature or circulation. They are of too desultory a nature (as their dates indicate), or too little connected, to justify the title of *The Social Emancipation of the Gipsies*, but are rather illustrations of what I have been writing on that subject since December, 1857, as alluded to at page 14.

Perhaps the most remarkable phenomenon connected with the Gipsies is, that "the rest of the world, without any real investigation or knowledge, should have believed that 'ceasing to be Gipsies' has been brought about by a change of dress, character, habits, or ideas" (p. 14). I have, on various occasions, given the causes of this; and when alluding to them I wrote thus:—

"This feeling of conservative conventionalism has been characteristic of man in all ages, and under almost all circumstances; and has frequently strewn the ground leading to the advance of knowledge with every hateful passion. Conventionalism, in some form, is an essential element in society, or rather constitutes it, however it may change; and is a great good in itself, provided that it does not last too long or go too far, and is accompanied by the courtesy and candour that open the way to the entertainment, discussion, and reception of truth, whatever it may refer to. As regards social in-

tercourse, it is indispensable in civilized communities, and manifests itself more or less among savage and barbarous races, especially in relation to their religious or superstitious observances. Among civilized people, after many a battle, conventional beliefs, with little or no real investigation, may be said to be the mental condition of human nature; for which reason, if one's knowledge is limited to what is merely current, however much he may have been trained in it, or however much he may have acquired of it, it may still be said that, in the absence of originality of mind, he is little more than a 'common-place personage,' and often a 'bar in the way' to the development of every form of truth."\*

Making every allowance for this inherent peculiarity of humanity, it should still be said that, with the variety of publications and societies, classes of people and kinds of readers in Great Britain to appeal to, there should be no difficulty in getting the subject of the Gipsies, in all its ramifications and bearings, thoroughly examined and treated with justice, and my assertion made good when I said:—

"There is nothing in the nature of things to prevent the Gipsy race in Scotland [and Great Britain generally] from acknowledging themselves publicly, since they think so highly of themselves in private; or our seeing 'Scottish Gipsy societies,' after the fashion of the day, when it would be a distinction to be a member of them, especially as the

\* *Reminiscences*, p. 83.