

ITINERANT MINORITIES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN THE NINETEENTH
AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURIES: A STUDY OF GYPSIES, TINKERS,
HAWKERS AND OTHER TRAVELLERS

by

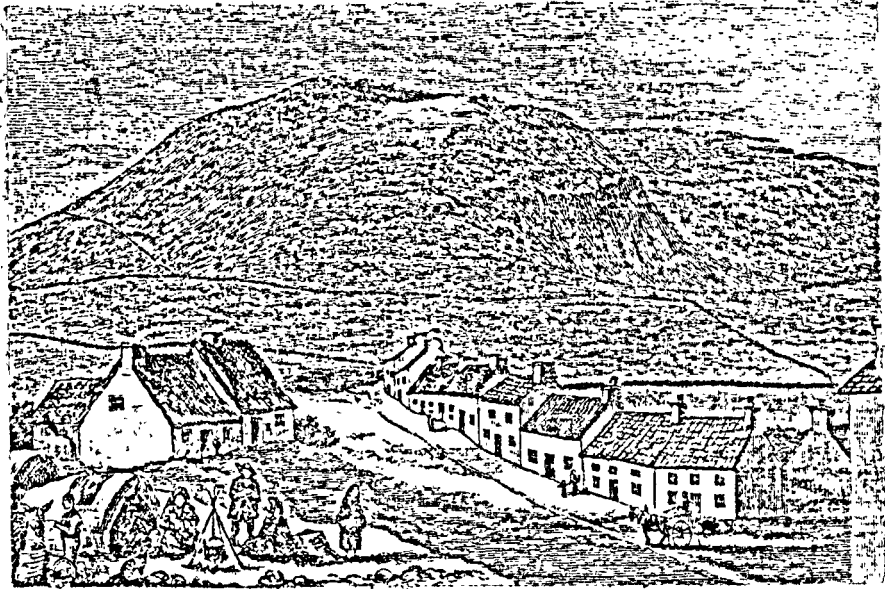
DAVID MAYALL



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CHAPTER 4

RESPONSES (1):
EVANGELISM AND THE REFORMING MISSION

Responses to gypsies have always exhibited a series of fluctuations and ambiguities. They could be welcomed as entertainers and vendors of small wares almost simultaneously with being greeted as 'gyppos' and treated with disdain, contempt and fear. They were both the appealing, romantic savage and the degenerate, villainous outcast. Condemnatory generalisations appeared frequently in newspapers, insults were shouted at them in the streets, and on at least one occasion the constant provocation of the gypsies by local schoolchildren led to retaliation and

The illustration depicts the gypsy dwellings and encampment at Kirk Yetholm, Scotland, the location of the reforming mission of the Reverend John Baird (from J. Lucas, The Yetholm History of the Gypsies, Kelso, 1882, facing p.1).

eventually resulted in one fatal injury,¹ However, for most people contact with these travellers was minimal and short-term, and no sooner had the abuse been cried than it was forgotten. Only when the camps had become more permanent and settled did the local population rally in active and vocal opposition.² But the travellers lingered on in some people's consciences and played on their fears, and, to them, it was evident that something had to be done.

Local authorities and the legislature were forced into taking action in an attempt to curb what were considered the more unacceptable excesses which resulted from a travelling way of life. The harshness of these responses varied from place to place, individual to individual, and over time, and will be considered fully in a later chapter. Suffice it to say here that the edicts and persecutions which were carried out before the nineteenth century sought to eradicate the gypsies from this country by transportation, banishment and execution. Yet such extreme measures proved impracticable and were gradually dropped. The hanging of a number of young gypsies at Northampton in 1780 can be taken as the symbolic watermark that signalled the end of the excessively severe persecution of previous times.³

1 Sheffield and Rotherham Independent, 23 August 1869, p.3. The incident took place at York. I am again grateful to John Field for this reference.

2 Examples of this are contained in Chapter 6. See pages 395-8.

3 G. Smith, Gipsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their children, with suggestions for their improvement (1880), pp.153-5. The offence was not recorded.

From this date it was realised that persecution alone would neither improve the gypsies nor drive them out of the country, Neither was the expulsion of the gypsies from the country a feasible solution, and so the best that could be hoped for was their reformation, to be achieved by their being educated to the ways of settled society. Persecution was to continue, though, often extremely harsh and grossly unjust. Yet this iron-fisted method gradually eased its grasp to allow the emergence of other forces which set about the task of reformation. Legislative excesses were therefore relaxed, although always present in some form, and the job of reformation fell to the evangelist missionaries:

"Law, rigid stern justice alone could do no good with them, and consequently handed them over to the minister of love and mercy".⁴

With a realisation of the failure of legislative measures and a belief that the number of gypsies was increasing, evangelists of every description, whether concerned individuals or members of organised, missionary agencies, took up the gypsy cause with varying degrees of enthusiasm and energy, seeking primarily to bring an end to their wanderings and to correct the laxity of their morals.⁵

The first known public appeal calling for the reformation of the gypsy population appeared in the Public Advertiser in 1778, yet this appears to have evoked no public response.⁶ The barriers of

4 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.153;

5 'The Gipsy's Grave', Church of England Magazine, Vol.14 (1843), p.75.

6 Quoted in 'Notes and Queries', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (hereafter, J.G.L.S.), New Ser., Vol.2, No.1 (1908), p.92.

ignorance and hostility were so great that many potential reformers did not even turn to the task, believing it to be impossible. The gypsy people were thought to be a race beyond recall.⁷ Perhaps the most significant advance towards arousing serious interest in the gypsy problem came with the publication of Heinrich Grellmann's treatise on the subject, and its translation into English.⁸ Although the book was concerned primarily with Continental gypsies it was the first real attempt to provide information on this class of travelling people, and to illustrate the urgent need for their social and religious reformation. Coming at the time when the Sunday-school movement was the physical embodiment of a general evangelistic zeal for reform and improvement directed at the poor and under-privileged children of the working-classes, to be achieved through teaching virtuous religious principles and elementary reading and writing, the call to reform the gypsies, and especially their children, aroused considerable interest among religious communities.⁹

By the opening decades of the new century this missionary fervour had gathered some momentum. For the time being, however, reformation was to remain a literary call rather than actual practice. The debate was next taken up in the pages of the

7 Even by the opening decade of the twentieth century this reasoning could still be heard. The real Romany of Eastern origins could not be reformed, it was claimed, for it would require a change in their nature, whereas the vagrant had merely to alter his habits (see Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. J. G. Legge, 1906, p.155, para. 4495, hereafter, Dptal. Cttee. on Vag.).

8 H. Grellmann, Dissertation on the Gypsies, translated by M. Raper (1787).

9 See G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.154-5.

Christian Observer.¹⁰ Several correspondents contributed their thoughts and proposals at great length, and the letters were unanimous in their criticisms. The language used was uncompromising in its opposition to the travelling way of life and in its detestation of the people. One correspondent had even written a letter on the subject as early as 1801 which he had intended to send to the Society for Bettering the Condition, and increasing the Comforts, of the Poor. He thought better of it, though, and did not send it as

"... any attempts to civilise a race of beings so degraded, and held in so much contempt, would be considered so very visionary, that I gave up the idea ...".¹¹

The tone of the language illustrated well their attitudes: 'savage life', 'pest to society', 'wretched vagrant life', 'second only to oppressed negroes in wretchedness and spiritual misery', 'state of degradation', and the like.

The image of the gypsy as a vagrant pest living a degrading life in the midst of a civilised and refined society was thus very clear. To some, such as the correspondent above, there could be no solution as the magnitude of the problem rendered it insoluble.

10 'Gypsies in England', Christian Observer, Vol.7 (February 1808), pp.91-2; (August 1808), pp.286-7; (May 1810), pp.278-80; (September 1810), pp.554-5; see also Vol.14 (January 1815), pp.23-5, 141; (September 1814), pp.590-1; Vol.20 (March 1821), p.159. An abridged copy of the correspondence contained in Volumes 7, 8 and 9 also appears in J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies (York, 1816), pp.199-219.

11 Christian Observer, Vol.9 (May 1810), pp.278-80.

But there were others who were far more optimistic about the possibilities for change. They believed that true reform could come about only if the gypsies were 'reclaimed from their vagrancy', or forced to settle, and were 'acquainted with the Saviour'. Missionaries were exhorted to go among them and do this work, financial assistance was offered, and a meeting was called to discuss the matter, though this never materialised. Other proposals put the onus of responsibility on to the parish. The parishes to which the gypsies belonged were to provide homes for the travellers and persuade them of the benefits of settlement by the offer of employment for the adults and free schooling for the children.¹²

Already, the problems which confronted the missionaries were emerging. More people called for reform than were prepared to act, parishes were unwilling to take responsibility and any inducements to settle, such as the provision of employment, suffered from local opposition. Finally, the mere fact of their travelling militated against prolonged contact with missionaries, and so with 'educating and elevating' influences.

12 It would seem that sometime in the late eighteenth century there was an early example of parish responsibility for settling and accommodating the gypsies. The overseers of the parish were required by magisterial order to find a house for Aaron Smith, owing to the fact that his father had settled there some 70 or 80 years previously. Since that time the descendants of this man appear periodically in the parish and demand relief payments which, if refused, was followed by a threat to force the overseers to find them houses also. Sometimes they were threatened with the workhouse and so withdrew their demands, but at other times they were given the money in return for their hasty removal from the parish. (See Report from His Majesty's Commissioners for Inquiring into the Administration and Practical Operation of the Poor Laws, Appendix A, Report of J. J. Richardson, Assistant Commissioner, 1834, p.402).

Despite these problems, though, the missionary ball had been set rolling, and was helped on its way by the next major series of correspondence calling for reform, which appeared in the Northampton Mercury in 1814,¹³ and by the interest taken in the problem by the Quakers and the publication of a book by one of their number, John Hoyland, in 1816.¹⁴ Again, the emphasis of the correspondents to the Northampton Mercury was on 'calling the wanderers home', by providing them with an asylum of some description which would encourage their reformation and persuade them to abandon their "accustomed vices".¹⁵ This theme was expanded on by 'Junius' who called for 4 to 6 stations to be built for them in different parts of the country. At each of these places a village was to be erected and the gypsies were to be housed there. However, these were not to be purely gypsy colonies, and the hand of paternalism was not far away. A house or a farm was to be attached to the village where a 'respectable person' was to be placed, and the able-bodied villagers were to be employed on the farm. Children were to be educated at sex-segregated schools and when old enough were to be apprenticed to a useful trade. Moreover, the scheme was not proposed as a 'voluntary' remedy. Any gypsy found wandering was to be placed in the nearest station,

"... and should any either leave their residence, or refuse to accept of this asylum, I see no reason why the law should not be enforced upon them with the greatest severity".¹⁶

13 Northampton Mercury, 29 June 1814, p.4; 9 July 1814, p.2; 23 July 1814, p.2,

14 J. Hoyland, op.cit.

15 Northampton Mercury, 25 June 1814, p.4.

16 Ibid., 9 July 1814, p.2.

Here, then, was a call to the legislature to introduce a Bill designed specifically to deal with the problem of 'troublesome mendicants' by forcing compulsory settlement. It was thought that such a plan would benefit the gypsies by raising them out of wretchedness to comfort, and would benefit the community by making property more secure and by the gypsies contributing by their industry to the general good.¹⁷ A characteristic of all these demands was that they were argued, with strong moralistic and religious fervour, from a position of almost total ignorance about, and certainly a lack of any real contact with, the people whom they sought to reform. The proposals sought to destroy the travelling way of life, split up families by removing the children to schools and by apprenticing them to various trades, and by making their actions and activities subject to the control and supervision of an overseer. None of this was possible unless organised on the principle of absolute compulsion.¹⁸

In 1815, a meeting was called by the Quakers to discuss the possibility of reforming the gypsies. It was decided that a great deal more had to be known about the people, and the responsibility for this fell to John Hoyland, a member of the Society of Friends. A circular letter and questionnaire was drawn up and sent to the clergy and laity in most of the counties of England, and Hoyland himself added to the material obtained, by supplementing it with details drawn from personal visits to their camps

17 Northampton Mercury, 23 July 1814, p.2.

18 See Christian Observer, Vol.14 (September 1815), pp.590-1.

in Northamptonshire, Hainault Forest and Norwood.¹⁹ The results of his findings and the replies to his questionnaire were published as a book, which was destined to become one of the most important and influential books written about the gypsies in the nineteenth century. The circular mixed sympathy with the degraded and persecuted gypsy with a desire to spread the word of Christ and to reclaim undesirable and parasitic elements to society so as to benefit the people as a whole. Hoyland's concern was with improving the efficiency of society generally. To allow the gypsies to continue their existence as they pleased would be detrimental in this respect for the gypsies would remain only parasites and depredators. Hoyland's objective was to transform them into useful citizens.²⁰

It was not thought that this would be an easy task. Although possessing a certain amount of sympathy for these people, Hoyland condemned them for their lack of religion, their propensity to wander, their thieving habits and their tendency to idleness. The remedy was to enforce settlement, give them a rudimentary education and a sound religious training. The emphasis on retraining to the ways of settled society was to fall heaviest on the children, who were to be sent to charity schools when between the ages of 6 and 14 years:

19 See J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.158-68 for a reproduction of the questionnaire and replies.

20 J. Hoyland, op.cit., pp.195-7.

"Their being placed among a much greater number of children, and those of settled, and in some degree of civilised habits, would greatly facilitate the training of Gypsies to salutary discipline and subordination, and the associations it provided for them out of school hours, being under the superintendence of a regular family, would, in an especial manner, be favourable to their domestication",²¹

On leaving the charity schools the boys were to be sent out as apprentices and the girls were to enter domestic service. Inducements, such as amounts of cash to assist in clothing and the buying of tools, were to be offered. Hoyland pleaded equally with the gypsies and with the sedentary population to accept this remedy. The gypsies had to accept a drastically altered way of life and the break-up of the family, and the settled members of society had to abandon their antipathies to employing gypsies. To achieve any kind of lasting change force necessarily had to be applied on the gypsies and persuasion on the rest.

There remain three further published sources from this early period that evidenced the depth of concern among Christians of every description. The first of these was by Samuel Roberts,

21 J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.251.

whose work was published at the same time as that of Hoyland,²² His position stood in direct contrast to Hoyland and the other evangelists. No less eager for their reformation and conversion to Christianity, Roberts differed in his refusal to accept that force and compulsion were necessary to achieve these ends. He refused to accept the common image of the gypsy as a lawless vagrant, and his approach showed a greater respect for the gypsy way of life and family ties. However, Roberts' desire to remain unconvinced by the arguments of his contemporaries on this subject led him to adopt a similarly extreme, though contrasting position. He saw them as "more sinned against than sinning", and any crimes committed had been forced on them by settled society, who must take responsibility for their actions.²³ He admired them for their liberty and independence, and for the plain and simple life they pursued. Even so he recognised that their condition demanded amelioration, although not until their habits and ways were better

22 S. Roberts, 'A Word for the Gypsies', in his The Blind Man and his Son (1816). See also, by the same author, Parallel Miracles: or, the Jews and the Gypsies (1830), later re-published as The Gypsies: their origin, continuance, and destination, as clearly foretold in the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (1836); The Jews, the English Poor, and the Gypsies; with a proposal for an important improvement in the British Constitution (1848). See also S. Roberts, 'Samuel Roberts of Park Grange, Sheffield, 1763-1848', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.3 (1912), pp.161-6; C. Holmes, 'Samuel Roberts and the Gypsies', in S. Pollard and C. Holmes (eds.), Essays in the Economic and Social History of South Yorkshire (Barnsley, 1976), pp.233-46. Although Roberts believed the gypsies were a separate and distinctive race of people, though originating from Egypt and not from the Suder caste of Hindu from North India as claimed by Hoyland, he conceded that they had no superstitious observances, forms or ceremonies (see his The Gypsies ..., p.182).

23 S. Roberts, 'A Word...', loc.cit., p.107.

known. Any suggestion of compulsion was to be avoided, and a reciprocal feeling of love, confidence and gratitude was to be obtained.²⁴ This method, though, won few supporters, and Roberts' writings and ideas never achieved the prominence that later evangelists accorded to Hoyland.

The two remaining published sources illustrating that the call for reform was very much alive, and in fact spreading out to the gypsy camps, appeared, firstly, in the publication by a clergyman of the Church of England of a pamphlet, describing his missionary adventures with the gypsies at York in the early 1820s. Secondly, a letter proposing an alternative remedy to the gypsy problem appeared in the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine in 1828.²⁶

The York pamphlet described how a clergyman chanced upon a gypsy encampment and having engaged the gypsy group in conversation then distributed religious tracts to them to be read aloud by those among their number who could read. He later came across another camp and having again distributed bibles and tracts, he gave a sermon

24 Such a response was largely a product of Roberts' belief that the gypsies had a Divine mission, and were symbols of a Divine power, and so caution and consideration were essential. (See C. Holmes, 'Samuel Roberts ...', loc.cit., pp.240-1; E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion amongst the Gypsies of Great Britain', D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1967, pp.255-7).

25 A Clergyman of the Church of England, The Gipsies; or a narrative, in three parts, of several communications with that wandering and scattered people; with some thoughts on the duty of Christians to attempt their instruction and conversion (York, 1822).

26 Letter from 'Scoto-Montanus', in the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 3rd Ser., Vol.7 (1828), p.244.

and held a prayer-meeting. The aim of the narrative was to show the gypsies in a more favourable light, not devoid of religious and moral feelings, as was commonly supposed, but in fact "ready and desirous for improvement".²⁷ In their present condition they were useless to both the government and the country, and were injurious to its morals, and yet they were both desirous of their own reform and were ready and able to accept any helping hand offered, thus opposing the widely-held view that the gypsy was beyond reformation and that the task was hopeless.

The final call for reform worthy of note came from 'Scoto-Montanus'. In his letter to the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine he proposed that two or three small huts should be erected for gypsies in each parish of England and Wales. The adults could then be put to work in fields or found other suitable employment, and their children could be apprenticed to trades and honest occupations. It was estimated that within two generations the gypsies would be absorbed into the mass of the population.²⁸

Although other calls for reform appeared in these years, these examples above show the way in which the evangelistic movement gathered strength and provoked interest and comment. It can

²⁷ A Clergyman of the Church of England, op.cit., p.44. This device of publishing works which illustrated that reform was indeed possible even with the most outcast elements of society was common practice by reformers of every description. See, for example, the anonymously-written novel, The Gipsies (1842).

²⁸ Letter from 'Scoto-Montanus', loc.cit., p.244. The author believed, wrongly, that this had already taken place in Scotland, and that the gypsies had been absorbed.

be seen that, with the sole exception of Samuel Roberts, the attitudes were harsh and single-minded in their determination to destroy the gypsy way of life, by force if necessary. During these years of mounting concern Roberts provided the lone evangelical voice calling for reform that respected the travelling lifestyle of the gypsies. The remainder sought only to circumscribe and eventually eradicate the gypsy and his way of life. They saw the problem from an evangelical, humanitarian and strictly conservative viewpoint. The gypsies had no religion or understanding of religious principles and morality, and so had to be taught them. They had to be pulled from the poverty and degradation that characterised their existence, and they had to be made into useful members of society, respectful of civil associations and order.²⁹ Settling and reforming gypsies would thus have desired political ends.

On the whole the evangelists adopted the image of the gypsy as a depraved outcast, without hope or comfort, unable and unwilling to escape from his low position and uncomfortable surroundings. This image, though, was subject to subtle variations, with some stressing the Romantic 'natural' aspect of the travelling life, while others saw mainly the parasitic element. All, however, were agreed on the need for reform, to be achieved through forced sedentarisation and religious education. The real work had to be done with the children as, to a large extent, the adults were beyond redemption. Reform, both in spirit and in practice, was thus oppressive and destructive of gypsy traditions and ties.

29 See, for example, J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.253.

The opening decades of the nineteenth century thus saw a growing evangelical call for the reformation of the gypsies together with increasing efforts to provide information on a people about whom little was known or written. Grellmann, Hoyland and Roberts were among the first writers to comment on gypsy habits and way of life, and to speculate on their origin and language. They were soon followed by a host of other writers who took up various aspects of gypsy life to push forward their own ideas and interests. However, the early writers were faced with an extremely difficult task as centuries-old antipathy and ignorance towards this people had first to be broken down. The evangelists' call, although appealing also to humanitarian and conservative instincts, was heard by only a few. To the vast majority the gypsies were either beyond redemption or simply not worthy of time and consideration. Even so, a few beginnings were made into effecting a practical amelioration and reformation in the gypsies' condition. The grandiose proposals for gypsy stations throughout the country, and for all gypsy children to be forced to attend charity schools, came to nothing; instead there were a few minor efforts in this direction, all of which proved to be unsuitable and ineffective.

A few scattered and sporadic attempts were made to send gypsy children to schools in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, but these were only piecemeal efforts with a very few children. The first practical attempt to educate gypsy children, allegedly successful, appears to have taken place in Cambridge in

1810. The correspondent to the Christian Observer quoted earlier, managed to persuade a gypsy, who had settled in the district for the winter, to send his son to a new school established in the area.³⁰ The first account mentioned by Hoyland, of gypsies receiving education, came from Thomas Howard, a Calvinist preacher and proprietor of a glass and china shop in Fetter Lane, London. In the winter of 1811 he had assisted in establishing a Sunday-school at Clapham, intended principally for the children of brick-makers, "and the most abject of the poor".³¹ A gypsy family named Cooper was lodged opposite to the school for the winter, and a 13-year old girl named Trinity applied for admission. She was turned down because she was a gypsy. However, she persevered and eventually gained entrance for herself and her two brothers. Howard commented that the gypsy children were very attentive, and soon "... acquired habits of subordination, became tractable and docile...".³² Both he and the children were sorry when, with the arrival of spring, the gypsies left the area for their usual travels. This experiment acted as an inspiration to others, and Thomas Jackson, of Brixton-Row, minister of Stockwell Parish, admitted several gypsy children to the sabbath school run under the direction of his congregation.³³ A final instance of gypsy children receiving education in this period was held up as a fine example of the gypsies' desire for improvement and of self-help.

30 Letter from 'J.P.' of Cambridge, in the Christian Observer, Vol.9 (May 1810), pp.278-80.

31 Quoted in J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.173.

32 Ibid., p.174.

33 Ibid., pp.174-5.

For four winters Uriah Lovell paid sixpence a week for each of his three children to attend a school for the Irish kept by Partak Ivery. Ivery confirmed that he had had six gypsy children at his school, who, when placed among other children, were reducible to order.³⁴

Besides these largely insignificant educational efforts there were also the occasional excursions by missionaries into gypsy camps, but again these did nothing more than merely scratch the surface of the reform problem.³⁵ It was not until the Home Missionary Society and James Crabb at Southampton took up the problem that a more serious and long term approach to the issue was adopted.

The Home Missionary Society and the Southampton Committee

Although clergymen of the establishment, dissenting ministers and home missionaries had undertaken occasional visits to gypsy camps, it was not until 1820 when the Home Missionary Society took up the cause that the problem was approached in a more organised

³⁴ 'Gipsies', The Literary and Scientific Repository, Vol.3 (1821), p.404. G. Smith wrote that this took place in the 1820s, and when a question of religion arose the children were sent back to their gypsy parents (Gypsy Life ..., pp.274-5). Trigg apparently confuses this even further by claiming the gypsies were sent to St. Patrick's charity school in London in 1809, but when some difficulty arose over the question of religion they were sent to a school for the Irish ('Magic and Religion ...', p.237). Trigg does not quote a source for this.

³⁵ See, for example, A Clergyman of the Church of England, op.cit.

and deliberate fashion that contrasted with the spontaneous efforts of the early years.³⁶ The Committee of the Home Missionary Society had their attention drawn to the gypsy problem by a letter from a Quaker woman from Bath, who urged the Society to take some action to reform the gypsy people.³⁷ The Committee responded to the appeal by sending from among them one sympathiser to the cause, the Reverend Cobbin, and one other who confessed his belief that reform was not possible, the Reverend Hyatt, to tour Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire, and neighbouring counties, in order to ascertain the state and condition of gypsies.³⁸ Both men returned dedicated to a mission that they hoped would rescue a large section of the population considered destitute of moral and religious advantages. The Society denied that persecutions and prosecutions could have any positive effect, and instead called for visits to camp sites when in the neighbourhood and for education for the children.

Again, the solution was thought to lie with educating the children away from their parents to the ways of settled society, and persuading them to become apprenticed to a trade. However, it was recognised that two major obstacles worked against this plan. Firstly, the expense, and secondly, the unwillingness on

36 See J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate (1832), p.134.

37 Letter from Rev. C. Hyatt to Rev. J. Crabb, quoted in J. Rudall, A Memoir of the Rev. James Crabb, late of Southampton (1854), pp.135-8.

38 Ibid.

the part of the gypsy parents to part with their children. The Committee urged Christians of all beliefs to come forward to support this plan, but no such coordinated effort came about.³⁹ Hyatt confessed sadly that few people cared sufficiently about the state of the gypsies to take remedial action. He quoted Leigh Richmond on this:

"Ah sir, the scene of distress you describe is too near home. If you could prove to British Christians that 18000 beings were in the state you represent the gypsies in, at the most distant part of the globe, you would soon find funds and missionaries enough to send to them the word of eternal life".⁴⁰

However, the H.M.S. remained committed to the cause and the pages of their journal, the Home Missionary Magazine, are sprinkled with references to the reform work undertaken in gypsy camps by the roadside, especially Hargreaves' work with the tent-dwellers in Gipsy Lane, Morcombelake.⁴¹ Yet the work of the Home Missionaries could necessarily have only limited lasting achievements as the meetings with the gypsies were brief and on an annual basis when the gypsies revisited the missionaries' own stations. Yet, towards the end of the 1820s, a Sub-Committee was set up for the

39 'Gipsies', loc.cit., p.404.

40 Letter from Rev. C. Hyatt, in J. Rudall, op.cit., p.136.

41 I have come across references to articles in the Home Missionary Magazine for 1820; 1821; February 1829; and December 1837, but have been unable to confirm them as the volumes were either missing from the collections or from the shelves at the British Library and at the University libraries of Oxford and Cambridge. I have been unable to locate them elsewhere. Those I have seen are for, (September 1836), pp.44-5; (July 1838), pp.118-9; (December 1838), pp.200-1; (December 1841), p.303; (March 1845), p.60. See also Home Missionary Quarterly Chronicle (Midsummer 1827), pp.71-2.

purpose of devoting full attention to gypsy mission work. Their first positive sign of success was that three gypsies had been persuaded to settle in a town, six children had been put into an infants' school, and one had become apprenticed to a carpenter.⁴² Again, though, practical achievements were small. In order to find evidence of a more prolonged and continuous effort at the reformation of the gypsies it is necessary to turn to James Crabb and the work of the Southampton Committee.⁴³

Crabb's biographer, John Rudall, presented him as a man wholly in the grip of his faith. His faith was his life and his mission was to encourage others to acquire it. He worked first of all with the prostitutes, poor, children, sailors and fishermen around Southampton, Romsey, Kingsland and Itching Ferry, being drawn towards these groups by a real concern for their moral and spiritual condition. Symptomatic of this condition was the general physical degeneracy and squalor to be found among this group. Crabb sought to remedy this state of affairs by committed missionary endeavours. But whether from despair and resignation or perhaps because he was made aware of a group of people crying out even more urgently for the word of God to be given them, Crabb turned his attention to these "... outcasts and aliens from society, dwelling as heathens in a Christian land ...",⁴⁴ the gypsies. The single

42 Home Missionary Magazine (February 1829), quoted in E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion...', p.265.

43 For an account of Crabb's early life, see J. Rudall, op.cit.; also I. H. S. Stratton, 'The Work and Ideas of John West, 1778-1845', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Durham (1977), pp.64-5.

44 Quoted in J. Rudall, op.cit., p.132.

most important event that caused Crabb to divert his attention from the working-class poor of Southampton to a group of heathen travellers, was the injustice and cruel treatment meted out to a gypsy offender at Winchester Assizes in 1827. When two men were convicted of horse-stealing, the non-gypsy was offered the hope of mercy, but when the gypsy pleaded for his life the judge replied,

"No; you can have no mercy in this world: I and my brother judges have come to the determination to execute horse-stealers, especially Gipsies / my emphasis / because of the increase of the crime".⁴⁵

To begin with, Crabb took into his home two gypsy children, whom he placed in an infant school. Following the death of one of the children the other was taken back from Crabb's care, and this, together with the alleged contempt shown by the other gypsies to the women for giving up their children, must have caused Crabb to despair about his prospects of doing good with these people.⁴⁶

However, he somehow managed to regain the gypsies' confidence and a further three children were entrusted to his care, and who were also placed in the infant school. The parents of the children settled in a house in Southampton, the rent of which was paid by Crabb and a few friends.⁴⁷ These initial steps in the direction desired by Crabb encouraged him to extend his work.

45 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.65.

46 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.69.

47 A Summary Account of the Proceedings of a Provisional Committee associated at Southampton with a view to the consideration and improvement of the Condition of the Gipseys (c.1830), p.2. (hereafter, A Summary Account of the Southampton Provis. Cttee.).

A provisional committee was nominated on 12 November 1827,

"... to take into serious consideration, without loss of time, the peculiar habits, character, and condition of the forlorn Gipseys; and to adopt such measures as might be considered best calculated to promote their general improvement".⁴⁸

A Sub-Committee was immediately formed to collect information about the gypsies, and a questionnaire was drawn up and sent out.⁴⁹

Although 12,000 copies were distributed to clergymen and laity throughout the country the response did not, as Trigg claims, attract very wide attention; nor did it bring in a large number of replies. The Sub-Committee bemoaned the lack of response in its Second Report, November 1828, and commented that it reflected a "grievous unconcern" for the gypsies.⁵⁰ Even so, the response was sufficient for Crabb to extract enough information to compile a book on the subject, and to drive him and his Committee onwards with their missionary endeavours.

Judging by the replies to the questionnaire reprinted by Crabb and Rudall it seemed to be the case that very little had been done

48 A Summary Account of the Southampton Provis. Cttee., p.2. It was called, 'The Southampton Committee instituted for the amelioration of the state of the Gipseys; and for their religious instruction and conversion'.

49 The similarity with Hoyland's method was no coincidence, for Crabb acknowledged his debt to this author. Moreover, the similarity did not end there, as Crabb also published the information collected in a book. The Gipseys' Advocate was an unqualified success, and ran to three editions.

50 Second Report of the Sub-Committee, 12 November 1828, in A Summary Account of the Southampton Provis. Cttee., p.8, (both the first and second reports of the Sub-Committee are to be found in this publication).

to ameliorate the gypsy condition. Yet Crabb had support for his proposals, with the suggestion that the nobility and "other classes of the higher orders" would subscribe to so worthy a venture.⁵¹

Although unprepared to initiate any active steps towards the reform of the gypsies, these classes of society appeared willing and ready to offer their moral and financial backing to such a programme. Others were more cynical, believing that reform could be achieved only by the compulsory domestication of the children, by bringing this "idle, worthless set of wanderers" under the cognizance of the civil magistrate, or by first getting the Government to "fix", that is, settle, them.⁵²

Crabb, however, attempted to avoid the forceful and compulsory element. Although he shared with many of his contemporaries an abhorrence of the travelling way of life and the evil habits and characteristics it engendered, he did not think that forced settlement was the solution. Not only did reform have to be gradual to achieve any lasting effect but it also had to be voluntary. To force a gypsy to settle in a town against his will was likely to create more problems than it would solve. Part of the problem was that the children of one family would belong to a number of different parishes, and if no employment could be found for the family the children would have to be removed to their own parishes.⁵³

51 Letter from Rev, Cobbin, quoted in J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.187-8.

52 Quoted in J. Rudall, op.cit., pp.138-9.

53 J. Crabb, op.cit., p.61.

Not until the gypsies remained for longer periods in one place, so that all the family belonged to the same parish, would this objection be invalidated.⁵⁴ Moreover, unless they really wanted to settle with the necessary commitment to the ideals of a civilised and settled society, instilled in them by sound religious training, Crabb thought their morals stood in great danger of being more severely corrupted,

"... and they would be capable of more extensive injury to society, should they take to their wandering habits again".⁵⁵

The gypsies' travelling way of life made the establishment of an institution, such as a school, for their instruction, of limited use, and in any case Crabb turned his back on any suggestion of forced teaching. He also believed that a travelling missionary was not the solution, not for reasons of potential success or failure by this method, but because he thought such a task was personally inconvenient, expensive and "highly improper".⁵⁶ A travelling life-style was thus as detrimental to the morals and character of the missionary as to the gypsy, and was offensive to all senses of decency even if the intentions were worthy.

Before considering the methods proposed and practised by Crabb and the Southampton Committee, it is necessary to bear in mind a few essential points. Firstly, his moralistic fervour,

54 Ibid., pp.30-1.

55 Ibid., p,95,

56 Ibid., pp,53-5.

high religious principles and complete disdain for the travelling way of life undoubtedly had a marked effect on his actions. Next, his attitude to, and impression of, the people on whom he focussed his attentions were of great importance.

Essentially, Crabb saw the gypsy way of life as one of poverty, hardship and deprivation, often in the most appalling material conditions. He related a story of a visit to a camp near Southampton and described the physical discomforts of an al fresco life, and the suffering imposed on the children. The mother of one of the families was a fortune-teller and swindler, and the father was "a most depraved character", who robbed from fences and folk and squandered his ill-gotten money on alcohol and extravagances.⁵⁷ Restraint, self-control and discipline were concepts unknown to this people. But just as he was convinced of their immorality, irreligiosity and depraved and degrading conditions of the people and their existence, so he was equally convinced that these people could be reformed if given the right encouragement and guidance.

To achieve this end the Committee proposed a general plan, which they hoped would be adopted throughout the country, of engaging agents to make daily visits to the gypsy camps, for the purpose of talking to the gypsies, reading to them, and providing instruction for both adults and children. The emphasis was to be on the rising generation, but the older generations were not to be ignored. Agents were to be found from among the 'lower orders' -

57 Ibid., pp.130-3.

pensioned soldiers and others - who had available time, could be hired cheaply and were said to be accustomed to the simple habits of the gypsies. If every camp was visited daily, with some uniform plan of instruction being observed, then reform would speedily take place.⁵⁸ Testimonials on a card of good conduct were to be given them, when about to move, to serve as an introduction to other persons interested in their reform in the next area in which they camped. Also, small financial donations were to be given them to discourage them from pilfering and to assist in paying rents and becoming apprenticed when they had the wisdom to settle.⁵⁹

This aim, then, of teaching them the "... inconveniences, hazards and impropriety of a wandering life",⁶⁰ was to be achieved by imbuing them with a sense of honesty and morality and instructing them in the Christian religion.⁶¹ When this was achieved settlement would soon follow. The emphasis had to be on the children, and although Crabb avoided compulsion he did desire to persuade the gypsy parents to hand over their children to some philanthropist for education, and subsequently for sedentary employment. The erosion of family ties was to be eased by allowing the parents free access at any time to their children, and actively encouraging them to see their children at

58 First Report of the Sub-Committee, 3 May 1828, loc.cit., pp.2-5.

59 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.135-6.

60 First Report of the Sub-Committee, 3 May 1828, loc.cit., p.4.

61 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.135-6.

their studies when in the neighbourhood,⁶² This, then, was the theory, but what of the practice?

A concerted effort on a nationwide basis was a rather naive and optimistic plan, and although Crabb's work undoubtedly acted as an inspiration to others, the reforming mission remained restricted to a few localities. However, the work of the Southampton Committee with the gypsies of Southampton and the New Forest went ahead with enthusiasm. Crabb himself frequently visited the gypsy encampments in Hampshire offering the tent-dwellers advice, sympathy, practical help and religious instruction. A free school was opened by him which the gypsy children were invited to attend, and he erected a mission hut and employed a lay teacher and preacher, at his own expense, for the adult gypsies and poor of the district.⁶³

It was soon decided that more assistance was needed and in 1828 the Sub-Committee appointed a man "of Christian character", already acquainted with the gypsies, Mr. Cope, to visit their camps and give them instruction.⁶⁴ William Stanley, a settled Christian gypsy, was also considered for employment as a visitor to the camps "... when the funds are adequate to pay the salary".⁶⁵

62 First Report of the Sub-Committee, 3 May 1828, loc.cit., p.5.

63 V. S. Morwood, Our Gypsies in City, Tent and Van (1885), pp.336-7.

64 Second Report of the Sub-Committee, 12 November 1828, loc.cit., p.8.

65 A Summary Account of the Southampton Provis. Cttee., p.11,

These were soon forthcoming, Despite the absence of any great positive evidence of widespread reform the progress made was sufficient to encourage Crabb to extend his operations, and so missionary work spread into the neighbouring counties and perhaps reached something of a peak in May 1831 when Stanley and Crabb travelled over to preach to the gypsies encamped on Epsom race-course.⁶⁶

Although the news of the work of the Southampton Committee was spreading far and wide, amongst both the travellers themselves and other interested groups, the event that brought Crabb and his mission into the public eye was the annual festival held for the gypsies in the grounds of his house. The first of these meetings was held in December 1829. Besides the gypsies, the meetings were numerously attended by the gentry of the neighbourhood, and by persons from London and various parts of the country, who had a keen interest in the proceedings.⁶⁷ The gypsies, numbering on average about 150 persons, camped in a field adjoining Crabb's house. The meetings opened with hymns, prayers, Scripture readings and addresses, when Crabb attempted to persuade them of the advantages of industry and the blessings of social life.

66 J. Rudall, op.cit., pp.141-2. Any gypsy new to the Southampton area would not have escaped their attentions either, as money was given to children who reported the presence of any new gypsy camp to a member of the Committee (J. Crabb, op.cit., p.128).

67 Hampshire Advertiser, 1 January 1842, p.2.

After the preaching came the meal, and the gypsies

"... on this one day of the year, obtained a taste of the comforts of civilised life, and had an opportunity of contrasting its blessings with the miseries of a houseless, homeless, wandering life".⁶⁸

After the meal blankets, clothing and bibles were distributed.⁶⁹

The meetings continued up to 1847 when Crabb was forced to discontinue his activities by the onset of ill-health and old age.

A final meeting, the nineteenth, was held in the grounds attached to the mansion of William Betts in December 1848. The work of the Southampton Committee was then transferred over to the gentlemen who managed the Farnham Institution.⁷⁰

An assessment of the relative success or failure of the work of Crabb and the Southampton Committee must necessarily depend on the criteria adopted. The aim of missionary work was clearly to encourage the gypsies to settle and to adopt the ways of settled society, and be absorbed into the sedentary population. This was to be achieved, primarily, by the conversion of the gypsies to Christian beliefs and practices. This provides a clear example of the commonality of interest between the evangelists and the upholders of the new morality of the emergent industrial society, which is well illustrated in the following quote:

68 J. Rudall, op.cit., p.145.

69 Derby Mercury, 4 January 1843, p.4. See also J. Crabb, op.cit., p.149; W. Simson, A History of the Gypsies (1865), p.369,

70 For the missionary work of Rev. John West and the Farnham Committee, see pages 308-11.

"It was a leading object in every arrangement to endeavour gradually to overcome their early, deep-rooted habits of restlessness, sloth, and inactivity, and the evils arising from gratuitous charity, by stimulating them to industrious and provident habits, and inducing them to contribute small weekly deposits out of their earnings for their future maintenance and clothing; thus raising the tone of self-exertion, and giving suitable encouragement when their personal efforts entitled them to some testimony of approbation". [Original emphases_ /⁷¹

Testimony to the shared ideals and objectives between the evangelists and the new town bourgeoisie is provided by the large amount of cash raised by subscription by the Committee, estimated to have totalled £20,000+ for the period from when Crabb came to Southampton to the end of his ministry.⁷² The figure may have been inaccurate, or even exaggerated, but the implication remains the same. But the question still to be answered is the extent to which it was money well spent, or rather invested.

It is difficult to establish the truth behind the various claims for the success or failure of the mission work owing to the obvious bias of the sources. The pro-gypsy lobby and evangelists clearly wished to illustrate the great advances being made as a result of their endeavours. Consider, for example, the following quotation from the Home Missionary Magazine:

71 J. Rudall, op.cit., p.140.

72 Ibid., p.224.

"(Crabb) . . . proved them to be as teachable, to be as capable of learning trades, of being good labourers, work people, and servants - as steady, honest, and deserving, as the poor of any other class in the kingdom; and he has shown that more extended means alone are wanting to remove the great moral stain from among us, of having a heathen population in a Christian land".⁷³

Those retaining a fundamental antipathy to the gypsies held on to a strong cynicism about the claims made. The reports of the Southampton Committee, and its Sub-Committee, were full of references to the number of children being educated at Crabb's school, to those apprenticed to various trades, and to the families who had ceased to make the lanes and commons their home in preference for a permanent home and employment in Southampton and the neighbourhood.⁷⁴ For example, in the first year of the mission, six children had been settled at infant school, and by the following year were said to have "exchanged their restlessness of body and unfixedness of mind for habits of attention and self-control".⁷⁵ By the middle of 1829, twenty adults and children were said to be under moral and religious instruction, six women were settled in Southampton and were seeking employment, four boys were apprenticed to various trades, and a number of small children were at school.⁷⁶ After five years of almost continuous persuasion 46 gypsies had

73 Home Missionary Magazine (July 1838), pp.118-9.

74 See A Summary Account of the Southampton Provis. Cttee.; Report of the Southampton Committee for the amelioration of the state of the Gipsies; and for their religious instruction and conversion; Aug. 1827 - May 1832 (Southampton, 1832), (hereafter, Rpt. of the Southampton Cttee.).

75 Second Report of the Sub-Committee, 12 November 1828, loc. cit., p.6.

76 J. Rudall, op.cit., p.140.

been tempted away from their vagrant habits in favour of a settled state of domestication.⁷⁷

However, although some had taken to various employments, ranging from shoemaking and making Gloucester boots to charring, washing and mangling, and to apprenticeships, this picture of apparent success is somewhat misleading. Of these 46, only 20 remained in Southampton for any length of time, with the rest either returning to the travelling way of life, entering service, removing to another town, travelling in the summer, or dying.⁷⁸

Furthermore, it has to be asked how many of the remaining 20 gypsies were families. It seems to be the case that many of the 20 were women and children, almost being forced to settle through the death, imprisonment or transportation of their husbands.⁷⁹

Travelling was possible, but hard, without an adult male to assist in the bread-winning. Also, the long term achievements of education and settlement are suspect, with the suggestion that the gypsies adopted different faces for different people and circumstances, and even the reformed and educated children almost all returned to their old wandering life.⁸⁰ Finally, it was even alleged that the settled gypsy adults mostly turned out more criminal and unhappy than their travelling brethren.⁸¹

77 J. Rudall, op.cit., pp.140-1; Rpt. of the Southampton Cttee., p.4.

78 Rpt. of the Southampton Cttee., p.9.

79 Ibid., pp.4-9.

80 E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.335.

81 J. G. Kohl, England and Wales (1844; 1968), p.191.

Crabb's claim that the gypsies' minds had become more enlightened and their characters more religious as a result of the evangelistic preaching is also a claim difficult to substantiate.⁸² Attendance at the annual meetings was certainly not through any religious conviction, and it was highly improbable that many, if any, came away converted to the Christian faith. The attendance of the gypsies would have been based far more on pragmatic self-interest. Friends and relatives could be met in a convivial atmosphere, free from the worry of harassment from the authorities, and the prospect of free food and clothing was an additional incentive to get to the site on time. Where the mission work and annual meetings may have succeeded was in drawing the attention of outsiders to the need to reform, showing that it was both desirable and possible, and by advertising that the presence of gypsies need not necessarily be synonymous with dirt, squalor, depredations and petty crime. It is also possible that the constant entreaties of the missionaries persuaded the gypsies away from excessive thieving and a general change in their habits. It was said that some had developed into steady, respectable workmen who treasured the Bible, and whose morals were greatly improved.⁸³ The settled gypsies soon lost all vestiges of their travelling way of life and were so keen to reject and forget their past that they even declined to attend the annual meetings, their presence being intended by Crabb to act as an example to others,⁸⁴ In fact, at

⁸² J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.62-3.

⁸³ See Scottish Christian Herald, 2nd Ser., Vol.1 (6 April 1839), pp.216-7.

⁸⁴ Home Missionary Magazine (July 1838), pp.118-9.

one of the meetings Mr. Sturges Bourne stated that in his long experience as a magistrate he had never known a quarter session or assizes held in the county in which there was not a gypsy among the prisoners, but since the labours of Crabb and his associates there had not been one of them up for trial.⁸⁵ And so it was said that Crabb's most significant achievement was in reforming the gypsies by 'enlightening their ignorance' and 'overcoming their prejudices'.⁸⁶

Again, though, these claims, and the assertion that gypsies had reformed their manners and ways as reflected in their absence from the courts, have to be treated with some reservations. Consider the following quotation:

"The magistrates, county gentlemen, and farmers, in the neighbourhood of Mr. Crabb's (sic.) gipsy colony, complain bitterly of the effects of his benevolent scheme - affirming that it subjects them to the perpetual depredations of swarms of vagrants of all sorts, and that the good man himself is the dupe of nine-tenths of these persons, who allow him for a time to reckon them among his reformed gypsies".⁸⁷

It seems, then, that for every claim there is a counter-claim. The assertion by Crabb that news of his labours had spread among the gypsies seems positive evidence of the good being done until it is realised, as commented by Stanley, that the gypsies at the

⁸⁵ Quoted in J. Rudall, op.cit., p.157.

⁸⁶ H. Woodcock, The Gypsies (1865), p.99; Home Missionary Magazine (July 1838), pp.118-9.

⁸⁷ W. Howitt, The Rural Life of England (1840), p.186.

Epsom races were under grave misconceptions as to the actual nature of the missionary work.⁸⁸ The sources are thus very unreliable. It would seem likely that something was achieved given the amount of time and effort put into the venture, but there must be a very large question mark hanging over the extent of the reform and its long term significance.

The one thing about which there can be little doubt was that the work of Crabb and the Southampton Committee acted as an inspiration for other evangelist missionaries to set about the task of reforming the gypsies. Following the example of the Southampton Mission, and as a result of the direct entreaties of Crabb, similar missions were commenced in earnest by the Reverend John Baird in Kirk Yetholm, by the Reverend John West at Chettle in Dorsetshire, and then at Farnham, and by the London City Mission.

The Missionary Endeavour Gathers Momentum

Baird's mission for the reform of the gypsy population was centred on those who lived, at least for a part of the year, at Kirk Yetholm in Roxburghshire. There is no satisfactory account of how or when they came to settle there, though one estimate stated that they had been there for three centuries.⁸⁹ By the

88 Similarly, the gypsy hoppers at Farnham told Stanley they thought the children at school were all confined and waiting to be transported (J, Crabb, op.cit., pp.139, 155).

89 'Gossip about the Gipsies', Leisure Hour, Vol.10 (1861), p.447.

nineteenth century, then, they had become firmly established, living in Tinklers Row, possessing leases for 19 times 19 years.⁹⁰ In 1818 they were said to number fifty persons, and had increased to one hundred and twenty six by 1862.⁹¹

They used to be known either as the tinklers, or tinkers, of Yetholm owing to the men going about the area mending pots and other utensils, or as the 'Horners', from their occupation of making and selling horn spoons called 'Lutties'. By the 1830s they had come to be called the 'muggers' or 'potters'.⁹² Cast or faulty items were bought from the manufactories of Newcastle and Staffordshire, which were then hawked chiefly around Northumberland and the Border counties.⁹³ They were also known to assist with the reaping, and to collect and sell rags and bones, old iron, broken crystal, as well as making heather baskets, pitchers, fishing-tackle and besoms, which were sold by the women

90 J. A. Fairley, Bailie Smith of Kelso's Account of the Gypsies of Kirk Yetholm in 1815 (Hawick, 1907), p.3. Only 30 copies of this pamphlet were privately printed. This pamphlet provides a fuller version of the replies of William Smith, Bailie of Kelso, to Hoyland's circular, which the latter reproduced in his book (op.cit., pp.98-103).

91 W. Baird, Memoir of the late Rev. John Baird, Minister of Yetholm, Roxburghshire, with an account of his labours in reforming the Gipsy population of that parish (1862), p.17.

92 J. A. Fairley, op.cit., p.3.

93 See Chapter 1, pages 87-91. See also W. Brockie, The Gypsies of Yetholm (Kelso, 1884), pp.39-40; W. A. Chatto, (S. Oliver), Rambles in Northumberland and on the Scottish Border (1835), pp.270-1; letter from a clergyman in Scotland, (Rev. J. Baird), in J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.113-7; J. A. Fairley, op.cit., p.3; J. M. M'Whir, 'The Muggers of the Border', Glasgow Herald, 5 May 1906, p.9; Notes and Queries, 2nd Ser., Vol.11 (9 March 1861), pp.196-7; letter from R. Harrison, in the Standard, 20 August 1879, p.2.

alongside needles, thread, trinkets and other smallwares.⁹⁴ The variety and nature of employments was said to be a progressive development, starting off in youth by selling besoms and baskets, saving money to buy an ass and cart, from which earthenware and other items could be hawked. If frugal enough, a horse may then have been bought by this industry, only to fall back into poverty and wretchedness with old age.⁹⁵ In the first part of the century this emphasis on itinerancy occupied around eight months of the year, with the gypsies returning to their homes on Tinklers Row for the hard winter months.⁹⁶

Even before the evangelist reformers had got to them they were said to be much intermixed with the natives of the country and with other wanderers, and had even established other colonies in Kelso, Jedburgh and Coldstream.⁹⁷ Yet their conditions of existence and way of life still marked them off from the sedentary-oriented householder. When travelling they camped by the roadsides

94 J. Baird, The Scottish Gypsy's Advocate (Edinburgh, 1839), p.12; W. Brockie, op.cit., p.41; Sir G. Douglas, 'Essays on Kirk Yetholm Gypsies', in his The Diversions of a Country Gentleman (1902), p.283; W.B., 'The Gypsies of the Border', Monthly Chronicle of North Country Lore and Legend (1891), p.55; First Report of the Committee for the Reformation of the Gypsies in Scotland (Edinburgh, 1840), p.18 (hereafter, First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee.).

95 First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee., pp.18-19.

96 J. Baird, op.cit., pp.14-15; W. Howitt, op.cit., pp.179-80; W.B., 'The Gypsies of the Border', loc.cit., p.54.

97 Letter from a clergyman from Scotland, quoted in J. Crabb, op.cit., p.113ff.; see also Rev. J. Baird, op.cit., pp.11-12; Notes and Queries, 3rd Ser., Vol.8 (30 December 1865), p.537; Globe, 17 June 1898, pp.1-2; C. G. Leland Manuscript Collection: letter from D. MacRitchie, 15 January 1890 (37174).

and were considered a nuisance and menace. Their conditions when settled were scarcely an improvement. Their houses were said to be generally poorly and sparsely furnished, and inferior even to the houses of ordinary day-labourers.⁹⁸ Although there were times, such as the Shrovetide football game, when the gypsies mixed freely with the rest of the villagers, for the most part their different ways of life kept the two groups apart.⁹⁹ Even so, on at least one occasion following the game, the local villagers turned against the 'muggers', causing them to barricade themselves inside their houses to avoid serious injury.¹⁰⁰ High spirits, combined with one too many drinks consumed, permitted the violent outbreak of a generally-felt antipathy to the inhabitants of Tinklers Row.

They were resented for their alleged propensities to thieving, poaching and 'blackguardism', and, added to these, they got drunk, fought, were revengeful, idle and "... had a bad effect upon the morals and industry of the neighbourhood".¹⁰¹ The male

98 J. Baird, op.cit., pp.12-13.

99 The game was played from 2 p.m. till dark between married and single men, and was started traditionally by a local landowner dropping the ball. After the end of the game the combatants retired to the inns to feast on food provided free and drink provided by their own cash (see W. Brockie, op.cit., p.23; J. A. Fairley, op.cit., p.4). I am grateful to Mr. Tony Delves, of Sheffield City Polytechnic, for allowing me to read his as yet unpublished paper on popular recreation and social change in Derby, 1800-1850, in which he analyses the role of street football in the context of a cultural struggle between the working and middle classes.

100 W. Brockie, op.cit., pp.134-5.

101 W. Baird, op.cit., p.11; J. A. Fairley, op.cit., p.4.

population were thought to have particular cause for complaint against the male gypsies, who did only the lightest of work, never "draining, or digging, or ploughing", and, by leaving their womenfolk to carry heavy armfuls of goods from door to door, they constituted a positive affront to manliness.¹⁰² A major part of the responsibility for their poor character depended not on race or blood, but on their itinerancy:

"Their wandering ... exposes them to many peculiar temptations, idleness and rapine lead them frequently into scenes of mischief and wickedness, and necessarily leave them ignorant, uneducated and uncivilised. Withdraw them therefore from this mode of life ... and you save them from innumerable evils, and probably render them valuable members of society ...".¹⁰³

Baird was here stating his intentions.

Reverend John Baird was appointed minister of the parish of Yetholm in the spring, 1829. Although clearly very aware of the gypsy presence, and problem, in Kirk Yetholm the early years of his ministry were marked more by improving the physical appearance of the two towns (Kirk Yetholm and Town Yetholm) rather than effecting any reform among the gypsies.¹⁰⁴ Yet he was not blind to the problem:

102 A 'well-informed gentleman', quoted in W. Brockie, op.cit., p.40.

103 Letter from a clergyman from Scotland, quoted in J. Crabb, op.cit., pp,115-16.

104 W. Baird, op.cit., p.11.

"The reclaiming the gipsies - the breaking down of their wandering vagabond habits, and bringing these heathen men and women to become Christians and useful members of society - was a cherished plan of his, a work which he set himself with patience and fortitude to fulfil".¹⁰⁵

Baird viewed the problem in a similar way to Crabb, proposed the same solutions, and likewise found the financial backing to put his proposals into practice. Such similarities can be easily explained. Both men shared the popular antipathy to gypsies and to itinerancy then current among evangelists and those classes of society most concerned with the ideological, spiritual and moral welfare of the population as a whole. It seems likely that these latter groups were prepared to offer financial assistance not merely from evangelistic motives but from a desire to curb the excesses of a society which they sought to make increasingly efficient by regularity and conformity with their own image of how it should develop. Moreover, ideas and thoughts were communicated between Baird and Crabb, when support, encouragement and confirmation of ideas were expressed.

Baird's motives for devoting his attention to the gypsies were not through any love of the people or sympathy or admiration for their way of life. In fact, the reverse was the case, and Baird was keen to expose the romanticism that surrounded these people as being a plethora of lies and mythical fantasy. He was unable to find any redeeming features in the people or their way of life. He described them as a set of idle,

¹⁰⁵ W. Baird, op.cit., p.13.

worthless, unprofitable, deceitful and dishonest vagabonds who hated all work and pursued occupations that provided the best excuse and cover for idleness. To add to this, they preferred to want rather than work, and steal rather than want; they lacked any religious knowledge or principle and were poor, ragged and dirty.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, Baird expressed concern that such a situation should have been allowed to carry on unchecked:

"... and why the community and magistrates should permit a set of idle, worthless, thievish vagabonds to wander about the country, pilfering and doing mischief wherever they go, when they can be so easily prevented, is showing a forbearance, a timidity or an indifference, productive of no good but only of evil".¹⁰⁷

From the beginning, then, Baird was never averse to the use of coercion. He sought prohibitions against camping, selling without a licence, or selling goods not of their own manufacture, or even their own goods except in public markets and such places.¹⁰⁸ He expressed grave doubts that the problem could be effectively resolved without the legislature imposing restraints and prohibitions upon the gypsies' wandering habits and offering them encouragements to settle at home.¹⁰⁹ However, a considerable portion of this state of affairs was believed to rest with the way of life rather than with the people themselves. That is, a cultural rather than racial argument:

¹⁰⁶ J. Baird quoted in W. Baird, op.cit., pp.19-20.

¹⁰⁷ First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee., p.21.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁰⁹ J. Baird, op.cit., p.7.

"All their peculiar vices ... are obviously traceable to their wandering life. This engenders idleness, ignorance, poverty, a fierce lawless temper, and to what crimes and evils will not these lead? They have so many opportunities, when unobserved, of indulging their thievish propensities, that they are bold and unblushing in the practice. Unaccustomed to any kind of control or restraint, but that exerted over them by superior strength, their passions, when excited, are fierce and ungovernable, and on such occasions they are addicted to the use of awfully profane language".¹¹⁰

This, and their cunning and revengefulness, made them, according to Baird, feared, hated, shunned and persecuted. In short, they were little better than "demi-savages"; they were, indeed, "a lawless nomadic horde".¹¹¹ His view of the people, and of the cause of the problem, was thus similar to Crabb's, and so, not surprisingly, were his proposals for the solution.

Essentially, the remedy was to encourage the gypsies to settle, with the bulk of the persuasion being directed at the children, as the habits of wandering were thought to be too deeply ingrained in the adults to effect any significant reformation. In a letter to Crabb, written in December 1830, Baird commented that on the whole the gypsies expressed a desire for the education of their children and settled homes and jobs for themselves. The parents were said to be willing to leave their children at home during the summer while they travelled, and that they should be

¹¹⁰ J. Baird, op.cit., pp.15-16.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.16.

trained for some trade. For themselves, they admitted a willingness to remain in their settled abodes if they could be assured of constant employment.¹¹² Baird's plan was to keep the children at home throughout the year, and to send them to school and "... otherwise to attend to their temporal comfort and religious improvement".¹¹³ While their parents were absent on their travels the children were to remain in their own homes if they had a suitable person to look after them, or else were to be boarded with other families in the village. It was hoped that by this method they would be unwilling or physically incapable of following the wandering life of their parents. Furthermore, through their children and the closeness of family ties and the offer of regular employment, the parents may also have been persuaded to settle.

Such a plan needed considerable funding, though, in order to pay the school fees, a salary to the teacher, an apprentice fee for boys and lodging expenses. It was estimated that at least £100 a year was needed.¹¹⁴ It was not until 1838-9 when a Society was formed in Edinburgh, under the patronage of the Scottish Church, for the purpose of 'The Reformation of the Gypsies in Scotland', that funds became available.¹¹⁵ Although the intention was to reform all the gypsies in Scotland it was decided to try out the experiment first of all on the gypsies at Kirk Yetholm. The responsibility for the task fell entirely on

112 Quoted in W. Baird, op.cit., pp.24-5.

113 Ibid., pp.27-8.

114 Ibid., p.26.

115 See Preface to W. Simson, op.cit., p.6.

Baird's shoulders, and the first report of the Committee elected by the Society acknowledged that they were "... little else than collectors for him of the pecuniary contributions necessary for his assistance".¹¹⁶ This they continued to do for many years, but with a gradual falling off in subscriptions in the period from the early 1850s up to the death of Baird, in November 1861, perhaps due to the realisation that the expenditure was not being justified by the results.¹¹⁷ Even when this happened, Mr. Baillie, a Committee member, paid the greater part of the expenses from his own pocket until his death around 1859. This event proved to be the final blow to the Committee, and it broke up immediately.¹¹⁸ After 1861, when the work was carried on by the minister who succeeded Baird, expenses were paid by friends to the cause who lived in the neighbourhood, and by a grant of £100 from the Ferguson Fund.

Baird's work was made undoubtedly easier by the guarantee of a constant supply of funds, and also by the fact that the gypsies already had their own permanent homes in Kirk Yetholm. But he still recognised that there were some stiff barriers which needed to be climbed. Firstly, there was the problem of the general antipathy felt towards the gypsies. This made aid, sympathy and cooperation difficult to obtain from the neighbours and other villagers. Townspeople were reluctant to employ

116 First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee., p.3.

117 W. Baird, op.cit., p.51.

118 Ibid.

gypsies, or to take in their children as lodgers when their parents were away travelling, and the village children expressed an unwillingness to sit by the gypsies or otherwise associate with them at school. Secondly, Baird had to contend with the gypsies themselves, whose character, though in great need of reform, firmly resisted it. Baird saw them as greedy, unreasonable, dissatisfied, deceitful and jealous, and he felt it was his task to battle a way through such obstacles.¹¹⁹ Finally, when the gypsy decided to give up travelling he had few or no clothes, tools or furniture in comparison with his sedentary fellow-worker. He did the same work but was a long way, materially, behind his nearest point of reference. Baird feared that unless he had the same things and a comparable standard of living he would soon become discontented and return to travelling. Some financial assistance was therefore necessary to assist in the transition, but not too much as the aim was to show that rewards waited upon a life of industry, honesty and virtue.¹²⁰

Yet Baird went ahead with his scheme, and by February 1839 he was approached by the first gypsy family willing to leave their children in his care. One of the barriers had been surmounted, but the next proved, at least initially, more difficult. Baird had been unable to persuade any family in the village to take in the children on almost any terms, and so had no alternative but to house the children himself. Within about ten days, though,

119 W. Baird, op.cit., pp.29-30.

120 J. Baird, op.cit., pp.19-22.

offers reached him from villagers who had changed their minds, and after that initial stumble he had no further difficulties in accommodating the children left behind. By 1841, five gypsy children had been taken on as apprentices or servants or were engaged elsewhere in the locality, and forty were attending school. Of these seven to ten had been boarded out at a cost to the Committee of 2s. 6d. a week, and the rest remained in their own homes with someone hired to look after them.¹²¹

Baird then had to face the next obstacle, namely that the parochial school did not have the room or facilities for a large influx of gypsy children, thus rendering useless the freedom of choice given to the parents of to which school they wanted to send their children. As a result, by October 1842, a new school house had been erected and was ready for use. Every gypsy child who was capable of attending the school did so, with two exceptions, and Baird was urgently making preparations for them all to remain at home throughout the year. His success or failure in this venture was not noted. Over the years the number of gypsy children at school fluctuated between about 25 and 40, and it was stated that by the end of March 1839, 26 of these remained in Kirk Yetholm while their parents went off on their travels.¹²² The number at school dropped off when meals ceased to be provided owing to the absence of funds, and when a greater degree

121 It was hoped that the cost per child could be reduced to no more than 1s. 6d. a week. Any extra expense was to be borne by the parents. (Report by J. Baird to the Cttee., 1841, quoted in W. Baird, op.cit., p.33).

122 First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee., p.10.

of responsibility fell on the parents with the Committee's decision to extract some payment from them for fees, clothing and maintenance. Some parents responded to this by cutting back on their travels and returning home more often to see and care for their children, and by shortening their itinerant season to be at home in the autumn when they were able to assist in reaping in the harvest.¹²³ The Sabbath school, begun in 1844, was attended by similar numbers. The aim was to reinforce the work done in the day-schools by ensuring the children were given constantly to understand that in return for all that was being done for them they were never to follow the footsteps of their parents but were to be trained for some settled employment.¹²⁴

The second part of the Committee's plan, to persuade the adults to settle and adopt regular employments, was perhaps initially even less of a success. The Report for 1842 noted that "... the success hitherto has been next to an entire failure".¹²⁵ Some had tried to settle but had soon returned to their wanderings, expressing the opinion that they wished to settle but few were disposed to employ them.¹²⁶ By 1846 some gains had been made with four families leaving their wanderings to become settled with constant employments. Yet, if the men found themselves out of work the temptation to return to

123 First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee., pp.11-12.

124 Ibid., p.15; W. Baird, op.cit., p.39.

125 Quoted in W. Baird, op.cit., p.41.

126 J. Baird, op.cit., p.30.

travelling was very strong.

An awareness of this led Baird to restate his belief that reform could be achieved only if evangelism was assisted by legislative coercion. He called for the magistrates of the district to adopt measures for prohibiting encamping on the roadsides, and enforcing the payment for a licence for hawking. He wrote:

"I have always advocated, and still do, the propriety of the magistrates of counties combining to prevent, by every means in their power, the young men of the tribe from wandering about ...".¹²⁷

The magistrates responded to this appeal and made it illegal to camp by the roadside and light fires at night, and demanded that all those who travelled should have a hawkers' licence. The police enforced these regulations with great severity.¹²⁸ To begin with the gypsies simply moved into lodging houses, but soon found that they did not earn enough to enable them to do this for very long periods. Thus, by degrees, they took to narrower circuits and eventually returned to their homes each night. This crowded the district in terms of finding buyers for the goods and services they offered, so the younger and stronger among the travellers took to labouring, usually on farms, and left the travelling to the more elderly. The old people continued to travel, then, not because travelling was more deeply ingrained in their blood, but because of a pragmatic

127 J. Baird, op.cit., pp.42-3.

128 W. Baird, op.cit., p.55.

choice forced on the group by the actions of the county magistrates and the police.¹²⁹

The Reverend Adam Davidson took over Baird's work in 1861, and by 1864 he was able to report that there were only six nomadic gypsy families left in the village, and even their children were attending school. Moreover, they were not only settling but were inter-marrying with the villagers and working in service or at day labour like any other inhabitant of the village, many taking to farm labouring.¹³⁰ In short, they were becoming less distinct as a minority group and were being absorbed gradually into village life.¹³¹ It would seem, then, that over twenty years of practical mission work, providing education and inducements to settle, had had some effect. But whether the gradual turn away from an itinerant to a sedentary existence was due to their reformation or to that fact that itinerant occupations no longer provided the sort of income necessary to maintain an adequate level of subsistence and to the increased efforts of the magistracy to curb travelling, must be a matter open to question.¹³²

129 W. Brockie, op.cit., pp.110-11; A. Davidson, Present State of the Gipsies in Yetholm (Yetholm, 1862).

130 Letter from Rev. A. Davidson, quoted in W. Brockie, op.cit., pp.109-10.

131 Ibid.; R. Murray, The Gypsies of the Border (Galashiels, 1879), pp.31-2.

132 Even in 1840 the Committee noted that there were too many travelling families seeking out a living by the same means to sustain them all: "A few families may be said to be useful in supplying remote country districts with besoms, baskets, pottery ware, and such other things in which they deal. But there are, at least, more than four times the number who follow this occupation, than is at all consistent with any purposes of utility". (First Rpt. of the Scottish Cttee., p.17).

On balance, therefore, Baird's and Davidson's work can be said to have been met with not inconsiderable success, in contrast to what was achieved at Southampton, although the semi-settled state of the gypsies and the pressures on itinerancy from other directions would appear to have been more instrumental than evangelist missionary activities in effecting settlement.

John West was the other evangelist concerned with the gypsy problem to whom Crabb acted as a direct inspiration.¹³³ West was so impressed with the objectives and activity of Crabb at Southampton that in 1842 he erected two cottages in his parish, in Chettle, Dorset, in each of which he placed a gypsy family.¹³⁴ An acre of ground was provided for each family for cultivation and the children were placed in the parochial school. The most immediate problem that West had to meet was local opposition, with the local people being of the opinion that West was introducing a "nuisance" to the neighbourhood.¹³⁵ The townspeople

133 For a full account of the life of John West, see I. H. S. Stratton, 'The Work and Ideas ...'. Stratton presents West as a man wholly committed to his faith, with a strong belief in the close relationship between the Christian gospel and the spread of civilisation, and who also held the view that subordination acted as a social cement. He would have experienced contact with the gypsies who were employed by his father as seasonal hoppers in his farm in Surrey, but the stimulus to attempting their reform was undoubtedly provided much later by Crabb.

134 J. Rudall, op.cit., pp.147-58; I. H. S. Stratton, 'The Work and Ideas ...', pp.65-6; Dorset County Chronicle, 31 July 1845, p.3.

135 From the speech given by Rev. J. Crabb at the laying of the foundation stone of the Farnham Gipsy Asylum and Industrial School, quoted in J. Rudall, op.cit., p.154.

objected to the mixing of the gypsy children with their own, and great difficulties arose over the placing of the gypsy children in parochial schools. This prompted West into thinking in terms of a school built exclusively for gypsy children.

His first step towards making this a reality was to issue a pamphlet entitled A Plea for Educating the Children of the Gypsies, which he dedicated to the local M.P., Lord Ashley, and to the local nobility, gentry and magistrates.¹³⁶ At the beginning, the proposed school was to provide for the education and maintenance of 24 orphan gypsy children under six years of age, or boys and girls of the same age from the largest and most destitute gypsy families. Also, benevolent persons were called upon to 'sponsor' gypsy children at the cost of about £5 per year. Plans were submitted to the Government along with an application for a grant, which was approved and £100 was donated.¹³⁷ Lord Ashley consented to be the patron of the scheme and the list of subscribers included Parliamentarians, clergy and nobility. By December 1844 West was able to write that the fund had reached almost £500, and with the donations from Lord Ashley and others the sum of £1200 was raised within twelve months.¹³⁸ A site was obtained at Farnham, and on

136 Reproduced in the Dorset County Chronicle, 31 July 1845, p.3.

137 At the time this donation was heralded as an important step towards receiving royal and parliamentary recognition that the gypsy children were entitled to state protection and care. Indeed, this does appear to have been the first grant to come from any monarch or government intended to do good to the gypsies, thus perhaps reflecting some change in attitude and approach to the problem. (See ibid.).

138 Letter from Rev. J. West to Rev. R. Smith, of W. Stafford, near Dorchester, 13 December 1844 (Romany Collection); Dorset County Chronicle, 18 December 1845, p.1.

24th July 1845 the foundation stone of the Farnham Gipsy Asylum and Industrial School was laid by the aged gypsy evangelist from Southampton, William Stanley. A number of short speeches were given by various speakers, including Crabb and two reformed gypsies, principally on the work of West and on the progress of the programme of gypsy reformation.

Work on the school was slow, however, and with the death of West in December 1845, it lost much of its momentum. By the middle of the following year, the Farnham Committee, which was to take over the work of the Southampton Committee in 1847, called a meeting to discuss ways of ensuring its completion. The meeting must have acted as a kind of spur, and the Asylum was eventually opened on 5th October 1847, with six gypsy children in attendance. The school never really flourished, though. The Committee found it difficult to find and keep staff, and at least three school-mistresses ran the school in its eight year life span. The local residents were suspicious of it and it was never significantly supported by the gypsies themselves. By 1854 only 46 children had been admitted in seven years and of them only five remained. In 1855 the decision was taken to close the school and the money received was to be used as a salary for a new missionary. The first gypsy school thus came to an ignominious end. Even the handful of children educated there mostly drifted back into the travelling way of life.

The Farnham Committee's other venture was to finance a missionary to visit the gypsy camps at Norwood, Barnes, Putney,

Bow, Wandsworth, and other places. The report of the Committee for 1852 stated that he had met with some success, although the direction or nature of this was not expanded on.¹³⁹ However, Mr. Axford, the missionary, resigned after three years, in 1854, and no mention is made of a replacement.

By the mid-1850s, then, the first wave of gypsy evangelism seems to have tailed off. Crabb had died and the Southampton Committee had passed over responsibility, the Baird mission was suffering financial and other difficulties, and the Farnham School had closed, through a mixture of opposition and apathy. Moreover, the achievements of these early years had been small. Some gypsies had been settled, some educated and some converted, but no great change had been effected with any great numbers. Yet the missionary movement continued on, undaunted by these failures. The London City Mission, Alder at Chobham, and various missions with the New Forest gypsies and in the hop fields, took up the banner. Added to these, the attempts by certain individuals on a more occasional and independent basis must not be forgotten.

One of Crabb's final appeals before he died was to the London City Mission, requesting that they take up the gypsy cause. This they did, but not on the lines already drawn up by Crabb and others.

¹³⁹ Quoted in J. Rudall, op.cit., p.158.

They considered the absorption of gypsies into sedentary society by a policy of coercion or persuasion would only result in increasing the urban slum problem, as these were the only areas to which gypsies could afford to go. Instead, they sought to convert and educate the gypsies and eliminate such vices as gambling, drinking, brawling and fiddling, by going among the people with a Bible firmly grasped in their hands. Their horror at the vices commonly associated with working-class culture is unmistakable, thus identifying the class standpoint from which they were arguing. Yet their motives appear more purely evangelical than the earlier missionary endeavours, whose evangelism was distinctly coloured and flavoured by a bourgeois mentality.

The concentration of gypsies in and around London ensured that a good deal of missionary work was centred in the metropolis, and at the forefront of the various endeavours was the London City Mission.¹⁴⁰ A missionary named Brown was employed, who visited the gypsies in Epping Forest, and then Notting Hill and other encampments. Social gatherings were arranged in rooms and halls adjacent to the camps when bible readings, "short discourses of a simple character", and free teas were given.¹⁴¹ In fact, the Notting Hill tea party became almost an institution, and was held annually for at least twenty years.¹⁴² Up to 200 gypsies

140 J. M. Weylland, Round the Tower (1875), pp.224-5; 'The Missionary to the Gypsies', London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), p.1; Notes and Queries, 2nd Ser., Vol.12 (7 September 1861), pp.197-8.

141 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.339-40.

142 'The Gipsy Tea-Party', Missing Link Magazine (1 May 1865), pp.122-5; A. Beale, 'Among the Gypsies', Sunday Magazine (1875), p.49.

attended these gatherings, when free food and drink was served alongside missionary rantings. A similar tea party was organised by a Mrs. Bayly and was attended by about 100 people, including four city missionaries.¹⁴³ The spirit of co-operation among evangelists was evident. Mission tents were erected in Epping Forest, and the missionaries' areas would have covered most districts of London.¹⁴⁴

Direct attempts were also made to secure the education of gypsy children in and around London. In the area of the Notting Hill and Kensington Potteries a school was opened by the Misses Duncan and was attended by 24 gypsy children.¹⁴⁵ Other efforts in this district included a winter evening school and a missionary day-school in a tent called the 'Gipsy Tabernacle'.¹⁴⁶ Further, a young lady in Hounslow opened a school for the gypsy children who belonged to an encampment near the town early in the 1880s. She was making good progress with the children when her efforts were cut short by the gypsies moving on after two months.¹⁴⁷ Towards the end of the century the Ragged School Union joined in the work, and Mr. Dyer, Superintendent of the Union, and nine

143 'Meeting of the Gipsies: another of Mrs. Bayly's Thoughtful Plans', The Weekly Record of the National Temperance League, No.253 (2 February 1861), p.40.

144 C. Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London, 3rd Ser., Vol.5 (1902), pp.157-8, 205-6; V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.343.

145 'Meeting of the Gipsies ...', loc.cit., p.40.

146 C. Smith, The Life-Story of Gipsy Cornelius Smith (1890), p.45; H. Woodcock, op.cit., p.144.

147 V. S. Morwood, op.cit., pp.208-9.

voluntary workers opened up a mission for the Battersea van-dwellers in a railway arch.¹⁴⁸ This became known as the Gipsies Hall and was well attended by gypsies in the evenings and on Sundays.¹⁴⁹ A partition down the middle of the arch divided it from a blacksmith's forge. D. L. Woolmer provided a graphic description of this mission:

"Despite the fact that smoke from the bellows will creep through crevices and contend for the mastery with the whitewash, despite cracks in the wooden wall and peep-holes which young rascals have bored through the other, despite the lack of numerous conveniences generally regarded as essential to any educational establishment, the place attracts overflowing numbers ...".¹⁵⁰

The reasons for its success were partly due to the magic lantern services held at 6 p.m. on Sundays, such a novelty then being a great attraction, but more importantly success was achieved because this was the one place where the travellers were guaranteed a welcome. The Union also held annual tea parties.

R. Vanderkiste thought that the party witnessed by a friend of his on Banstead Downs was the work of the Union,¹⁵¹ although of more certainty were the annual entertainments given to travellers in the Shaftesbury Welcome, at Doddington Grove, near to the largest encampment. About 200 gypsies attended for the tea, addresses, sacred music and the handing out of Bibles.¹⁵²

148 D. L. Woolmer, 'Gipsies in their Winter Quarters', The Quiver (1903), p.530.

149 E. Brewer, 'Gipsy Encampments in the Heart of London', Sunday at Home (1896), p.113.

150 D. L. Woolmer, 'Gipsies ...', loc.cit., p.532.

151 R. W. Vanderkiste, Notes and Narratives of a Six Years Mission (1851), p.307.

152 D. L. Woolmer, 'Gipsies ...', loc.cit., p.532.

There is some evidence to suggest that a few gypsies were won over by the words of the missionaries, and abandoned such past sins as fortune-telling, fiddling and drinking, in favour of whole-hearted commitment to Christianity. Some even became evangelists themselves. A small colony of such a group were to be found on Wanstead flats in the early 1880s, though they preached not to fellow travellers but to the settled population.¹⁵³ The same was true of perhaps the most famous gypsy evangelist of them all, 'Gipsy' Rodney Smith, whose conversion led him to turn his back on his former way of life while also exploiting its appeal by retaining the title of 'Gipsy' to give himself some notoriety and publicity.¹⁵⁴ The other achievements of such missionary work, which had begun around mid-century and continued throughout the period under review and much after, were of a much more general and less obviously spectacular nature. More gypsies were said to attend religious services in the locality of their camps, many were now said to have proper Christian weddings, and others joined the Rescue (Temperance) Society.¹⁵⁵

To balance against this, scorn was levelled at the

153 Notes and Queries, 6th Ser., Vol.11 (4 December 1880), p.444.

154 See H. Murray, Sixty Years an Evangelist: an intimate study of Gipsy (Rodney) Smith (1937); and, by the same author, Gipsy Smith: an intimate memoir (1947); R. Smith, From Gipsy Tent to Pulpit: the story of my life (1900); and also his Gipsy Smith, his Life and Work (1905). It is probable that the evangelists on Wanstead Flats were Smith's father and two brothers.

155 See V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.340; A. Beale, 'Among the Gypsies', loc.cit., p.311; 'Meeting of the Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.40.

missionaries' attempts "... to wash away the Gypsies' sins with tea", for although they may have been forced to listen to sermons and Bible-readings, this by no means indicated inward and spiritual acceptance.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the attempts of a group of people, said to be "conceited and unpleasant", to persuade the gypsies to give up tents, beer, tobacco and music were likely to have little effect. Francis Groome commented thus on the gypsies' response:

"It would be amusing if they (the missionaries) could hear all that is said as soon as their backs are turned".¹⁵⁷

Once again, though, the actual extent of their achievements must remain open to question.

The New Forest, in Hampshire, was also another centre of gypsies subjected to a concerted missionary drive. Begun by Crabb, the endeavours continued throughout the period. In the 1880s and 1890s a missionary and his wife spent a good deal of time among the tent-dwellers, teaching them cleanliness, providing them with food and clothing, and instructing the children in reading and religion.¹⁵⁸ The achievements were small and gradual, but some gypsies were persuaded to get married in church, and others were talked into settling in houses.¹⁵⁹ This evangelistic

156 E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., p.336.

157 C. G. Leland Manuscript Collection: letter from F. H. Groome, undated, 1873? (37173).

158 R. C. de Crespigny and H. Hutchinson, The New Forest (1899; Wakefield, 1975), p.96.

159 R. W. S. Griffith, 'The Gipsies of the New Forest', Hampshire Field Club, Proceedings, paper read at Field meeting, 22 July 1893 (Southampton, 1894), p.282.

zeal even affected an aged Colonel, who lived near to the Forest, who attempted to bribe gypsy girls into having Christian marriages by offering a gold wedding ring to any about to marry in this way. He did not account for 'gypsy cunning', though, and some gypsy girls succeeded in getting two or three rings each, while still remaining unwed.¹⁶⁰ Nonconformist ministers also held Gospel meetings near to the Forest, though these were said to attract villagers and stragglers rather than 'bona-fide Gypsies'.¹⁶¹

This ran alongside the most serious and prolonged effort to reform the gypsies of the Forest, by the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity, set up in 1888-9.¹⁶² The Charity offered spiritual assistance, practical help, and instruction as to the benefits of a settled life. The success of their attempts at religious conversion cannot easily be estimated, though by 1909 they had encouraged over forty couples to marry in the orthodox fashion. Their practical aid was of more direct value. In the first ten years the Charity had provided fifty families with parcels of warm

160 H. E. J. Gibbins, Gypsies of the New Forest, and Other Tales (Bournemouth, 1909), p.33.

161 Ibid., p.45.

162 The J.G.L.S. quotes from the 19th Annual Report, 1907-8, of the New Forest Gipsy Mission, which is presumably the same as the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity. ('Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.3, 1909, pp.278-9). Extracts from the 10th Annual Report of the Charity, undated, are to be found in A. Symons, 'In Praise of Gypsies', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.294, and in H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1908', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1910), p.277. If I am wrong in linking the missions then, clearly, the New Forest Good Samaritan Charity did not commence until 1898. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate any of these reports, other than these brief references, or any other archival material relating to the Mission.

clothing, supplied two families with ponies and four with hawkers' licences, and several with money to assist them on their journeys to the hop fields.¹⁶³ However, their greatest claims concerned the number of gypsies they had persuaded to adopt a sedentary way of life. The 10th Annual Report of the Charity claimed to have decreased the number of gypsies living in the Forest by more than three-quarters. Eighteen families had been placed in cottages, and ninety children had been clothed and sent to school. Eleven boys had joined the militia and four girls had gone into domestic service.¹⁶⁴ The rent was paid for those in the cottages, and they were given a weekly supply of groceries, tea and tobacco.¹⁶⁵ Some, though, soon returned to their former way of life. Priscilla Sherred, aged ninety years, only remained within the confines of a house for a short time. She explained the reasons for this in the following way:

"I couldn't abide that 'ere roof over my 'ed. I couldn't bide it no hows. If I'd a stopt there another day I should a died".¹⁶⁶

However, others did remain, and "good employments", that is, sedentary employments, were found for the boys and fathers, and so they were soon paying their own rents and earning an honest living.¹⁶⁷

163 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1909'. J.G.L.S., Vol.5, No.2 (1911), p.122.

164 Quoted in H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs ... 1908'; loc.cit., p.277.

165 H. E. J. Gibbins, op.cit., pp.27-9.

166 Quoted in ibid., pp.48-9.

167 Ibid., p.35.

The intentions and methods are very clear. By friendly advice and practical assistance the gypsies were gradually pulled away from their tent life and into a gorgio existence. This antipathy to travelling underpinned the missionaries' work and objectives, and was made explicit in the 10th report when gypsy life was equated with that of the nomadic, thievish tramp, and was a way of life that "should be made impossible".¹⁶⁸ By regular contact with sedentary friends the gypsy children were shown the comforts of house-living in stark contrast with the harshness and discomfort of tent life. Yet the reasons for settlement cannot be solely, or even chiefly, ascribed to the moderate success of this tactic and the work of the Charity. There were a number of forces in operation which gradually constrained the gypsies to move out of the Forest, the most important of these being economic and legal.¹⁶⁹

One further individual remains to be named for his work with the gypsies. Stanley Alder, a Home Missionary, was one of the teachers at the Farm and Shaftesbury Schools at Bisley, and he had *the responsibility for the missionary work with the large numbers of gypsies who camped each year at Lucas Green and Folly, Chobham.* Alder had for some time visited their tents and conversed with them on religious subjects, though the mission proper was not begun

168 Quoted in A. Symons, 'In Praise of Gypsies', loc.cit., p.294.

169 See Chapter 1, pages 63-4.

until Autumn 1881, with the first report on the work covering the period 1881-2.¹⁷⁰

Alder and his fellow workers were not blind to the immensity of the task which they faced. In short, Alder viewed the gypsies as heathen, ignorant and wretched.¹⁷¹ They played pitch and toss on Sundays, their children were in a dirty and wretched condition and they used the basest language. Misery and vice were prevalent and "pernicious habits and corrupt influence" were rampant amongst them.¹⁷² The objectives and methods of the mission followed the usual pattern. The aim was to change their habits and lives by converting and settling them. For one evening a week, and on Sunday afternoons, the gypsies gathered together for religious instruction. Mrs. Harrison, of Frees Farm, gave Alder the free use of a room in her house for the evening meetings and even provided potatoes and milk for the gypsies. Open-air meetings were held in the camps if the weather was fine. From February 1883 the cottage meetings were held in the home of one of the gypsies who had been settled by the mission. By 1886-7 it was decided to build an Iron Room, at the cost of £60, to house the meetings as the cottage was too small to accommodate all those who

170 See S. Alder, Work among the Gypsies (Chobham, 1893); West Surrey Times, 30 December 1882, p.5; Letter from S. Alder, in Surrey Advertiser and County Times, 9 January 1886, p.6. Alder also published, in 1890, a penny tract entitled 'From a Turf Hut to a Mansion', and although it sold 400 copies at the time it does not appear to have survived until today (West Surrey Times, 27 December 1890, p.7).

171 S. Alder, op.cit., p.20.

172 Ibid., p.15.

wished to attend. Appeals were made for prayers, sympathy and money. The local clergy and several gentlemen promised support, but this proved insufficient and the scheme had to be abandoned. Instead, another of the cottages inhabited by a settled gypsy was opened up for the meetings. In line with the methods adopted by the other missionaries more than just religious advice was offered. Cocoa, bread and butter was provided at the evening meetings, and several free teas and Christmas dinners were also held and well attended. The Chobham Jubilee Committee even gave money to Alder to provide the gypsies with a Jubilee breakfast and dinner. Assistance was also offered to those gypsies who gave up travelling in favour of living in rented accommodation, by buying furniture and other items to assist in the transition to a settled way of life.¹⁷³

The mission was said to have had the moral and financial support of the local clergy and gentry, and of all classes and creeds, and the local press consistently recommended the mission work to their readers.¹⁷⁴ But there was also a strong body of local opposition to the mission, which was seen to encourage the unruly, disreputable and dishonest gypsies to the area.¹⁷⁵ Antipathy to the gypsies was shown by the scarcity of employment and homes for those gypsies who had decided to settle. The gypsies themselves expressed a willingness to work and settle but were

173 See 1st to 11th Reports, 1881-1892, which comprise the volume by S. Alder, op.cit.

174 See, for example, West Surrey Times, 30 December 1882, p.5; 27 December 1890, p.7.

175 See, for example, correspondence in the Surrey Advertiser, 20 January 1883, p.5; 10 February 1883, p.3.

faced with obstacles in both directions:

"If he wants a house the name of a Gipsy, or a man from tents, shuts the door against him".¹⁷⁶

In the winter of 1891-2 this opposition was taken to its logical and inevitable conclusion. That winter saw the influx to the gypsy encampments of some twelve to fourteen vans and tents, eight or so more than usual, composed allegedly of an unlawful group of travellers, who broke up hedges and quarrelled and fought with the villagers. While legal steps were being taken to remove them a gang of youths decided to take the matter into their own hands, and went in and broke up the camp and herded the tent-dwellers from the neighbourhood. Alder's work with the gypsies was thus brought to an abrupt end.¹⁷⁷

The mission did not cease without having first registered some small successes, though. Alder provided a neat summary of his work in the report for 1889-90:

"Ten years ago, only 3 out of 18 families could read even a little; no one cared to go to teach them God's message of love; the encampments were indeed awful dens of vice and blasphemy; the nights were hideous with their quarrels; their habits degraded. Now we have four tents at the Folly, where ten years ago there were 14; and four at Lucas Green, where there were from four to eight 10 years ago. Those families we placed in cottages eight years since never want to go back to tents. Some of the children who went to school have begun life for themselves, but prefer the cottage life to tent. We have five families now in cottages in this parish, and the children going to schools".¹⁷⁸

176 7th Report, 1887-8, in S. Alder, op.cit., p.28.

177 11th Report, 1891-2, in ibid., p.48.

178 9th Report, 1889-90, in ibid., pp.37-8.

In all, Alder had persuaded eight families to take up residence in cottages, though the employments of the men still bore the signs of their past, itinerant lives. One was a chimney-sweep, another a beehive-maker, and many of the other families still relied on seasonal labour, and left their homes in the summer to begin the circuit of pea-picking, hay and harvest work and hop-picking. A few gypsies attended Night Schools for the Improvement of Young Men in West End, and others attended the Penny Readings held at the West End and the Farm School, Bisley. However, Alder was forced to admit that, on the whole, the spiritual results were not as encouraging as the moral results.¹⁷⁹ In terms of numbers settled and converted the success was again decidedly on a small scale.

Hopping Missions

A picture has thus been drawn of persistent evangelical attempts to reform the gypsies wherever they appeared. When on their travels they were met by local clergy who ministered to their religious needs, while more concerted attempts were made in the camps and van-towns of a more permanent nature.¹⁸⁰ The gypsies met with the evangelists at race meetings, and their seasonal migration to the hopfields in

179 8th Report, 1888-9, in S. Alder, op.cit., pp.32-3.

180 See E. W. L. Davies, Memoir of the Rev. J. Russell, and his out-of-door life (1878), pp.203-8; Rev. J. H. Swinstead, A Parish on Wheels (1896), pp. xiv, 165; 'The Gipsy's Grave', Church of England Magazine, Vol.14 (1843), p.91; Hampshire Advertiser, 1 January 1842, p.2.

September was matched by an exodus of evangelist missionaries to the same places.¹⁸¹

For some individuals and agencies, such as the Church of England Missionary Association, the Hop-Picking Mission Committee, the London Oratory and the Church Army Mission, the evangelical drive was directed at the spiritual needs of all the hoppers, with no special emphasis on the gypsies.¹⁸³ Others, though, saw this guaranteed gathering of large numbers of gypsies, tied to one place for at least a couple of weeks, as a supreme opportunity for attempting their reform. Crabb and his fellowworker, Stanley, were perhaps the first to grasp at this chance, and visited the gypsy hoppers at Farnham in the autumn of 1830, distributing tracts and conversing with them.¹⁸³ A public meeting was also held after the day's labours, when God's words were related to the tired and hungry pickers. The London City Mission also looked to the hopfields, and the Annual Report for 1859 of one of their workers stated that he had made 1017 visits to the gypsy hoppers at Farnham, Surrey, Kent, and to the races and fairs, and had distributed 1088 tracts and 127 readings of the Scriptures.¹⁸⁴ However, it was the mission work of Samuel Chinn

181 E. Grey, Cottage Life in a Hertfordshire Village (St. Albans, undated, 1935?), p.201; H. Woodcock, op.cit., pp.120-1.

182 See F. Cuttriss, Romany Life (1915), p.217; J. Denvir, The Irish in Britain (1892), p.154; F. Vidgen, 'Hop Pickers' Memories', in M. Lewis (ed.), Old Days in the Kent Hop Gardens (Tonbridge, 1962); J. E. Revington-Jones, Among Kentish Hoppers (1901); Reports of Medical Inspectors to the Local Government Board (L.G.B.), No.292: Dr. Reginald Farrar's Report to the L.G.B. on the Lodging and Accommodation of Hop-Pickers and Pickers of Fruit and Vegetables (1907), p.27 (hereafter, Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B.); Annual Report of City Missionary, 1859, in London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), p.36.

183 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.151-4.

184 Quoted in London City Mission Magazine (2 January 1860), p.36.

that is deserving of most attention,¹⁸⁵

Chinn began his work in about 1861 with the gypsies who flocked to the Hampshire hop districts. He shared the common evangelical view of the gypsy as a filthy and degenerate outcast and set about his reformation not by regular services but by going amongst them while they worked, being careful to make sure he helped to fill their bins whilst he talked.¹⁸⁶ Gradually others joined him in his work, among them Mr. John Farley of the London City Mission. With more people setting about the task the visits became more extensive and regular. Camp meetings were held and open air services took place on Sundays. In time, the idea of a permanent mission tent superseded the more informal one-to-one conversion process of the earlier days. Although some opposition was expressed at the idea of having a tent containing 500 or so "wild and lawless" people being erected in the hopping district at Binstead, Chinn went ahead with the scheme.¹⁸⁷ Free tea was offered after work to entice the gypsies away from the public house and into the mission tent. The tent proved to be a very popular meeting place and so it was decided to erect another at Selbourne, which met with an equally favourable response from the gypsies. This was followed by another at Worldham, and then at Bentley, the latter despite the fact that a farmer offered £50 for it not to go up, as he feared it would become a focus for quarrelling and fighting.¹⁸⁸ Although it was

185 See S. Chinn, Among the Hop-Pickers (1887).

186 Ibid., p.40.

187 Ibid., p.69.

188 Ibid., pp.86-90.

believed that the roughest class of pickers frequented the tent at Bentley, the farmer's fears proved groundless. In 1880 a tent was erected at Holybourne, to be soon followed by one at Wyck, making six in total, employing a total of about twelve to fifteen missionaries, with an annual expenditure of around £300.¹⁸⁹

The majority of opinion seemed to be that Chinn and his fellow missionaries had achieved a remarkable change among the gypsies in the 26 years of their work. The mission found unqualified praise in The Nonconformist, The Christian, and Word and Work, and several magistrates were prepared to give testimony to the good results achieved:

"(The mission) ... has had the best effects, not only from the religious point of view, but also from the social point of view... The improvement in the behaviour of the immigrant hop-pickers ... is remarkable".¹⁹⁰

"When I first sat on the bench it was a matter of course that numbers of hop-pickers were brought before us for assaults, sometimes most serious ones, and for drunkenness. In the last three years we have scarcely had a hop-picker before the bench".¹⁹¹

Although no statistics were available to prove these claims the magistrates' clerk unhesitatingly reported that crime among hop-pickers had reduced by almost 70% in six or seven years.¹⁹²

G. Duncan, an employer, confirmed this impression and in his statement is a suggestion of the reasons for its popularity

189 See S. Chinn, op. cit., pp.92-116.

190 Lord Wolmer, quoted in ibid., p.204.

191 Chairman of the Alton bench of magistrates, quoted in ibid., p.205.

192 Quoted in ibid., p.207.

"... I have pleasure in bearing my willing testimony as to their (the tent services) beneficial influence socially, morally, and religiously; from the fact that the people when they have done their work have a comfortably-seated and well-lighted (sic.) tent to go to direct, and are provided with well-made, excellent tea without charge, where they can eat their bread and cheese and butter or bacon in comfortable social intercourse, and where there is provided for them some kind of entertainment when tea is over, either by the magic-lantern, addresses, and a great deal of singing, which the people greatly enjoy, and all with a decided moral and religious tendency ...".¹⁹³

The effect of this was that the local villages were blessed with order and peace and not riotous drunkenness. Any long term reform must be doubtful, though. The mission had solved the problem of a great influx of strangers and travellers to a region for a short period each year by providing a free form of entertainment close at hand for the pickers. It is extremely unlikely that the teachings decrying the pickers' moral turpitude and proposing Christianity as the means of reform had any significant lasting effect.

In conclusion, the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth saw a move away from the objective of expelling and executing gypsies towards reforming and absorbing them, of welding them into the sedentary-based social system as orderly residents.¹⁹⁴ The disappearance of this minority group, distinctive because of its travelling way of life, was the desired aim in both cases. To begin with there was much talk, missions were proposed and a small number of gypsies were accepted into

193 See S. Chinn, op.cit., pp.207-8.

194 Suburban Press, 28 February 1880, p.2.

schools. Such action, though, was directed only at small numbers and was of little consequence. Crabb's mission at Southampton was the first attempt to deal with the problem in a methodical and organised manner, and with any great numbers. This was then followed by a number of other similar ventures. The achievements of such missions have already been discussed, leaving the picture of some limited success at reforming the morals of the gypsies by converting and settling them, but otherwise of a much more general failure. Perhaps of more significance, though, than any list giving numbers of Christian gypsies, is an awareness of the causes of the antipathy shown to the gypsies and a realisation that the reforming mission was an attempt to deal with a problem that legislation had not solved. The failure of evangelism in turn rekindled the legislative and persecuting drive.

There is no simple explanation for the general antipathy shown towards the gypsies by the evangelists. Ethnic, religious, cultural and class factors joined together in a curious admixture. Ethnic factors were those linked with the view of the gypsy as an outcast and alien race that was marked by its propensities to crime, violence and vice. Religious arguments were used as a plea to Christianise the heathens at home before turning to those in the remotest parts of the world. Finally, cultural and class factors were mostly tied to their travelling way of life. Not only was this evidence of idleness and an aversion to the principles of a settled society, but it meant also that the conditions of existence were of the worst kind. The emphasis given to each of these factors varied between individuals, though it is possible to

see that the evangelists' cries for religious conversion became less loud and widespread as the century progressed. With changes in emphasis came modifications in aims and methods. However, the theme throughout was to show the gypsies the benefits of sedentarisation and the evils of nomadism.

Travelling was the chief cause of the problem. It resulted, according to some interpretations, from the nomadic instincts of the gypsy tribe and it was a cause of poverty, vice and degradation. By a process of reeducation the nomadic instinct could be curbed and the evils resultant upon a travelling existence would be destroyed. The ultimate aim of all the reformers was, therefore, the settlement of the gypsies. Naturally, the methods adopted were various, involving different degrees of voluntarism and coercion, responsibility and obligation. Some sought to keep the gypsies in one place and then reeducate them, others thought that settlement would follow from good teaching. Baird summarised neatly the different tactics adopted to come to terms with the problem.

"(It is) ... no longer the object to extirpate, but to ameliorate; no longer to irritate, but to soothe; no longer, by severe and persecuting enactments, to inflame the worst passions of their nature; but, by instruction, by encouragement, by inculcating the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, to enlighten their minds, to influence their affections, and to reform their lives - to lead them to see and acknowledge the evils of their present wandering life, and induce them to relinquish it".¹⁹⁵

195 J. Baird, op.cit., p.7.

The humble and inadequate attempts of the pioneering, but unassisted, individuals were successful in only a very limited degree.¹⁹⁶ The most significant factor that emerged from the later evangelical efforts was not that more gypsies were persuaded to settle and become Christians, but that the work was no longer unassisted. The various reforming missions sought for, and found, moral and financial support from other classes in society equally repelled by the travelling way of life, and the parasitism and chaos, freedom and anarchy which it was seen to symbolise:

"A population living on the toil of others is certainly a serious burden for a state; in accord with morality, then, political economy advises the trial of regenerating the gypsies".¹⁹⁷

Viewed in moral, political, and economic terms, their return to society was the motive of the reform endeavour.¹⁹⁸ History had shown that violence was unable to achieve this end, and so support was given to evangelism, with its system of "enlightened and persevering charity".¹⁹⁹

The evangelists were motivated by an awareness of moral and spiritual degeneracy, combined with a desire to contribute to the structural solidity of the nation by reforming 'low' elements to 'high' ideals. They approached the gypsies with the same self-righteous missionary zeal that was usually reserved for distant

196 J. Baird, op.cit., p.9.

197 A. Esquiros, op.cit., p.203.

198 Ibid., p.221.

199 Ibid., p.220.

savages and 'inferior' races. Their uncompromising attitude and approach was largely a product of their belief that the gypsy was an uncivilised savage, made so by race and by the nomadic life-style, and just as these missionaries were spreading their doctrines abroad it was equally essential, in fact more so, that these savages at home should be reformed and absorbed into the domestic social fabric.²⁰⁰

Attempts to discuss the reasons for the failure of the reforming mission are faced with serious methodological and historiographical obstacles. In concise terms, the problem is that contemporary writers on this subject nearly always wrote from a position of sympathy with the evangelists' methods and objectives. The methodology of these writers, whether the evangelists themselves, their biographers, or interested outsiders, was thus to seek out the successes, not failures, of the people and their missions. There was an understandable reluctance to admit that their work was a failure and of limited consequence. More recently, Elwood Trigg has written from a similar perspective.²⁰¹ He recognises that an assessment of the relative success or failure of the evangelists' work must depend on the criteria used, yet it must be questioned whether the new criteria adopted by Trigg reflect any real grasp of the nature of the problem, and of the solutions proposed and tried. Trigg claims some success was

200 See B. Street, The Savage in Literature; representations of primitive society in English Fiction, 1858-1920 (1975).

201 See 'Magic and Religion ...'. Note that Trigg's thesis was supervised from within the Department of Theology, University of Oxford.

achieved by introducing gypsies to Christianity and by encouraging them to observe Christian rites and ceremonies. However, he also admits that on the whole the reform mission was a failure in terms of making them adopt a settled way of life and moulding them into a Christian people in the Victorian image.²⁰² Trigg's attempt to salvage some vestige of success and cause for optimism from the missionary endeavours, and his reluctance to admit to their failures, betrays his sympathy with their objectives.

Thus, when attempting to assess the reasons for the failure to achieve any lasting or significant reforms, there is the immediate problem that many of the writers who are relied on for source material were unwilling to concede that there was a failure. Even so, certain causes are apparent, and can be seen to be a product of both the evangelists' method and approach and how the gypsies interacted with, and responded to, this. Regrettably, though, sources offer only little confirmatory evidence and so, however probable, the causes mentioned here have to remain more supposition than fact.

From 'above', the evangelists' didactic and often patronising method of preaching was likely to have alienated rather than converted, and their attempts to offer practical assistance were inhibited by the fact that nomadism lessened the duration and impact of the missionary work. A further claim was that the racial characteristics of the gypsies made reform extremely

202 See 'Magic and Religion...', pp.413-5. His uncritical acceptance of the writers involved in the missionary attempts is further evidence of Trigg's methodological descent.

difficult, if not impossible. Gypsy traits of deceit, suspicion, drunkenness and tendency to violence, were said to make missionary work a hazardous and fruitless enterprise.²⁰³ Moreover, a gradual but distinct diminution in the amount of moral and financial support offered by other interested parties, and the general antipathy of the sedentary population made finding homes and employment for the reformed gypsies a serious problem.²⁰⁴

Finally, the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the attempts at the mass conversion and settlement of the gypsies have to be sought from among the gypsies themselves. Once again the inadequacy of the sources acts as a severe obstacle in obtaining empirical support for any comments respecting the response of the gypsies to various missionaries. Despite this, certain points are worthy of consideration. If the problem is looked at from the perspective of the gypsies, a possible pattern of responses emerges. The missionaries could be regarded as attempting to persuade the gypsies to settle and to adopt sedentary employments. That is, they were seeking to alter completely the gypsies' way of life, and even the most ignorant and illiterate among the travellers would not have missed this point. This would have necessarily involved a change in cultural habits, attitude and responsibilities. Freedom of movement, choice of employment, and of when and how to work, would have been taken from them and replaced by disciplined and servile labour. Subservience to

203 This offshoot of the racist myth has been discussed fully in the previous chapter.

204 See H. Woodcock, op.cit., p.99ff.

external authority and participation in the wage labour system would have replaced a much-valued independence. To moderate the impact of this transition the evangelists offered gifts, money, homes and advice. Clearly, the response of the gypsies would have varied greatly. Some would have rejected entirely these overtures, no matter how amicably they were presented. Others would have gladly accepted all that was offered, and would have given themselves over to their benefactors' paternalism with a quiet conformity. Still others would have shown all the outward signs of acceptance while in reality changing little from their previous ways. Gypsies were more than willing to declare their conversion to Christianity if this brought with it a flood of gifts and a grateful response.²⁰⁵

Thus, whatever criteria are used, the reforming mission has to be seen as a failure. The causes for this can be found in the evangelists' methods and aims, and in the fact that, in the main, the gypsies themselves did not want to be reformed in a way that would so drastically alter their way of life. Evidence of reform was, therefore, little more than a token gesture. A growing realisation of this failure of the evangelists' missionary work led to a gradual readoption of other methods for the absorption of the gypsies.

²⁰⁵ See E. B. Trigg, 'Magic and Religion...', pp.425-6; E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., p.334; Yorkshire Post, 24 August 1907, p.11. Note that the attempts to convert the Jews met with a similar superficial acceptance, but inward rejection, by the receiving group (see C. Holmes, Anti-Semitism in British Society, 1876-1939, pp.251-2, footnote 90 to chapter 4, and the references contained therein).

CHAPTER 5

RESPONSES (2):
GEORGE SMITH OF COALVILLE AND THE LEGISLATIVE ATTACK

Despite the disappointments of the evangelistic attempts at reformation, some men of Christian conscience still sought to reform the gypsies by means of conversion. Schools and travelling van schemes continued to be proposed throughout the century, and the

The illustration is of George Smith of Coalville (from the Graphic, 24 May 1879, p.508).

gypsies remained a central concern of evangelist agencies.¹ Yet the tendency was to move away from evangelists and evangelism, and the concern expressed about the gypsy problem took on an increasingly scholastic, practical, humanitarian and conservative tone. The reforming mission continued to operate but it became pushed further and further into the background. By the latter decades of the century the plea for religious conversion now came largely from the numerous gypsy lorists, from Francis Groome through to the Reverend George Hall.

Whereas the earlier reformers had seen religious conversion to go hand in hand with settlement, whether as a precondition or result, this was not the case with the evangelistic lorists. For these, the assimilation of the gypsy into the culture and ways of settled society was to be prevented at all costs, and not in order to protect the sedentary population from the demoralising and degrading ways of the gypsies, as would have been an earlier argument, but rather so as to protect the distinctiveness of the gypsy and his culture. Conversion to Christian beliefs was to be achieved by clergymen visiting the camps and spreading the doctrines of Christ, and by teaching the

1 A scheme was proposed by Rev. W. C. Fenton, of Mattersey, near Bawtry, to set up a school for gypsy children in central England, but nothing came of it (Scottish Christian Herald, 2nd Ser., Vol.1, Supplement, 1839, p.48; 'Notes and Queries', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, hereafter, J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.1, 1908, pp.92-3). Similarly, in 1894, a journal called Caravan raised subscriptions for a travelling van school, but this also appears to have come to nothing (E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4, 1908, p.342). Concern was also expressed by the Salisbury Diocese, and eventually resulted in travelling mission work, and by the Presbyterians of Breadalbane, Scotland, who petitioned Parliament on the matter in 1884 (J. H. Swinstead, A Parish on Wheels, 1897, pp. xiv, 165; G. Smith, I've been a Gipsying, 1885, p.289).

children at schools, if the permanency of the camp so permitted, or in the encampments themselves by literate gypsies and visiting ladies. For these writers conversion and education were to be treated as ends in themselves, and not as a step towards the acceptance by gypsies of the ways of settled society. The Gypsy Lore Society, and the numerous gypsy lorists, remained throughout their history true to this anti-assimilationist stance.

The continuing call for settlement now came from people with no less strong religious beliefs, but who possessed a different approach to the problem from the earlier evangelists. The problems and intentions remained the same, namely, to regulate and control those who pursued a travelling way of life, with the ultimate aim of ending it altogether. Yet the proposals and methods saw a move away from evangelism to a more rational scholasticism. The arguments put forward were no longer based on the need to reform the 'savage' at home but were rather to do with raising the lot of the degraded traveller and reestablishing some kind of balance with the sedentary population by making the traveller equally subject to the laws and controls falling on the settled man. Although rarely stated in such terms, reform was thought to be a political, social and economic necessity, and was to be achieved not by religious persuasion but by legislative coercion. The growth of the bureaucratic state and the increased efficiency of local government administration was thought to facilitate the process of enforcing regulations and restrictions.

To first appearances, then, it would seem that there was a conflict between the gypsy lorists and the proponents of settlement.

That is, between the assimilationists and the anti-assimilationists. However, the issue is not as clear-cut as first appearances would suggest. The two apparently conflicting groups were in fact very much closer in their approach and interpretation of the problem, and the key to explaining why this was so again brings us back to the ever-present theme of definition.

The gypsy lorists held firmly to the racial view of the extent of 'gypsy-ness' being largely dependent on the amount of pure gypsy blood that flowed through the veins. It was only the pure-blood gypsies, the 'real' or Romany gypsies, who ought to be prevented from assimilating with the sedentary population, and it was their culture that needed to be preserved and recorded. Their antipathy to half-bred gypsies and other travellers was equal to the fervent diatribes made by others about this group of nomads, and they too called for an end to be made to this 'poor imitation' of the gypsy way of life. These half-breeds, it was claimed, served only to give the 'real' gypsies a bad name, and were guilty of all the charges laid at their feet: it was this group who were the thieves, beggars, illiterates and degenerates, not the Romanies. Any attempt to regulate and restrict the wanderings and activities of this 'mummy-group' was met with sympathy by the lorists. Their recourse to such a definition thus permitted, and even supported and justified, the persecution of the great majority of travellers.

Meanwhile, the pro-settlement lobby frequently excused the 'real' gypsy from the unacceptable excesses of his half-blood brothers. Time and time again it was stated that the intention was not to

prevent the 'true' gypsy from following his natural way of life, but only that of the imposters and degenerates who took up, or married into, this nomadic way of life. In the Parliamentary debate over the Moveable Dwellings Bill, in August 1885, Mr. Kenny expressed support for the Bill,

"...(it) being aimed, not so much at genuine gypsies, as at people who pretended to be gypsies - people who were a great annoyance to those amongst whom they lived, and people who lived, to a great extent, by spoil".²

Such 'pseudo-gypsies' were also discovered in Lamb Lane by George Smith and a reporter from the Weekly Times:

"For the genuine Gipsy tribe, and their mysterious promptings to live apart from their fellows in the lanes and fields of the country, we have a sentimental pity; but with such as these Lamb-lane people, off-scourings of the lowest form of society, we have no manner of sympathy; and we hope that a gracious Act of Parliament may soon rid English social life of such a plague ...".³

Although George Smith did not concern himself greatly with subtleties of distinction, and on the whole ignored the isolation of a Romany elite by the scholars, anthropologists and philologists, he nevertheless occasionally made reference to the 'true' Romany, who was in a more elevated position than the majority of travellers. To have done this too often, though, would have undermined the moral force of his argument, as it would have amounted to an admittal of the existence of a commendable and worthwhile group of travellers. Such references were therefore few.

2 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Vol.300 (11 August 1885), cols. 1705-6.

3 Weekly Times, 8 February 1880, p.2.

The inevitable outcome of these two standpoints, or rather one as they are in fact strikingly similar, was that persecution and antipathy continued to be directed at all travellers. The persecutors felt safe in their actions and thoughts for they were not condemning the romanticised Romany, who coexisted in their imaginations with the depraved and outcast traveller. No-one claimed to want the assimilation of the Romany race with their own ethnic, cultural traditions, but only those travellers whose travelling way of life conflicted with the interests of settled society. It was claimed, then, that it was the culture of travelling, not of a race, that was to be ended. George Smith of Coalville channelled this sentiment into a forceful legislative drive, intended to secure the circumscription of the travellers and their nomadic life-style.

George Smith was born the son of a local brickmaker and Primitive Methodist preacher at Clayhills, in Staffordshire, on 16 February 1831.⁴ His background was one of poverty and deprivation, and, like other children of his class, at nine years of age he went to work for thirteen hours daily in the local brick-fields.⁵ Yet, in a supreme example of self-help fed by strong religious beliefs, he pulled himself out of the slavery of child

4 E. Hodder, George Smith of Coalville: the story of an enthusiast (1896), pp.18-22.

5 Ibid., p.26; Dictionary of National Biography (hereafter, D.N.B.), Vol.53 (1898), p.41.

labour by attending night-school and educating himself from books purchased out of the extra wages obtained by working some nights at the brick-kilns.⁶ Before long, Smith was running his own brick and tile yard in Reapsmoor, Staffordshire, where he first put into practice his evolving plans for the moral and spiritual enlightenment of his employees.⁷ He then moved to a larger works at Humberstone, near Leicester, and eventually to Coalville, where he was employed by the Whitwick Colliery Company between 1857 and 1872. He resigned from this job following disagreement with the management, ostensibly over the amount of time he was devoting to bettering the lot of the workers and not the Company.⁸ While he was now free to devote all his attentions to his own personal missionary adventures with the brickyard children, the canal-dwellers, and eventually with the gypsies, his unemployed status meant that he was without any income to provide for his wife and family or to subsidise his work. As a result his furniture was sold to raise money, and his family

- 6 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.28. It is a sad irony that in later life, as an employer of child labour, he refused, on humanitarian grounds, to allow his own workers to labour at nights or on Sundays, thus preventing them from taking the escape route from manual labour he himself took.
- 7 Ibid., p.36. Smith also refused to employ any girls or women, or boys aged under 13 years (or 12 years, as stated on p.40).
- 8 Ibid., p.63. Elsewhere, it was stated that he was dismissed from his job, having aroused considerable ill-will from within the trade. It would seem that his essential humanism in attacking the use of child labour was believed to amount to an attack on the vested interests not only of his own employers but also of the large manufacturing class. Although it would be entirely wrong to label Smith as an opponent of the methods and structure of industrial capitalism, it is possible to see how his criticism of one of its exploitative ingredients could be construed and exaggerated in this way (see D.N.B., Vol.53, 1898, p.41).

moved from comfortable surroundings to a house that "leaked water from all directions".⁹ In a very short time he had reduced his family to a condition of poverty and squalor equal to that which he came to abhor when it applied to canal-dwellers and gypsies. Yet the physical comfort of himself and his family had to take second place behind his philanthropic endeavours.

From his personal life, then, there is perhaps the clearest instance of his single-minded devotion to his work that characterised his entire life: "He lived and moved and had his being in his work",¹⁰ all the while showing "indomitable perseverance and self-denial".¹¹ Of this there can be no doubt, yet while his single-mindedness enabled him to continue with his work in the face of hunger, poverty, distress and opposition, it meant also that he took a narrow and blinkered view of the cause for which he was fighting, a failing common to philanthropists and evangelists of whatever ilk; and it was said

"... He saw visions and dreamed dreams; he mistook for realities 'the unsubstantial images of the brain'. It became difficult for him sometimes to discriminate between facts and fancies; it led him into a great deal of unconscious exaggeration".¹²

Whether unconsciously expressed or not, there can be no argument with the claim that his writings contained gross exaggerations, plagiarisations and generalisations, and were, in the last instance, so

9 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.68-9.

10 Ibid., p.5.

11 Derby Daily Telegraph and Reporter, 16 August 1879, p.2.

12 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.93.

obviously one-sided as to do more harm than good to his cause.¹³

His utter lack of sympathy both with the objects of his concern and with others whose nature and interpretation did not fit in with his own, served only to alienate him from both groups.¹⁴ This blind devotion to a single cause is well illustrated by his work with the nomadic population.¹⁵

It was not until Smith had completed, to his own satisfaction, his work with the canal-dwellers, by securing the passing of the Canal Boats Act Amendment Bill, in 1884, that he felt able to turn wholeheartedly to the cause of the gypsies, though his work among them had begun some years previously. For thirteen years he had laboured for the brickyard children and then the canal-dwellers in a state of complete deprivation and poverty. Even allowing for the bias of the commentator, who was to oppose Smith over the issue of

13 For example, whenever Smith began a sentence, "Some time ago ..", meaning anything from eighty years to a few months, it is more than probable that what followed was taken directly from another author. Smith did this frequently, without acknowledgement or conscience.

14 E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., p.343.

15 Consider the following quotation as further evidence of this: "Mr. Smith never takes up more than one thing at a time, and upon the accomplishment of it he concentrates all his energies ... he becomes thoroughly possessed by his subject, and the most important event that may happen for the country, or for the world loses all value in his eyes unless it bears directly upon the accomplishment of the object in hand ... from the time we sallied out together in search of a gipsy camp, until the moment we parted at night, Mr. Smith thought of nothing, spoke of nothing, remembered nothing, saw nothing but what had some relation to the gypsies and their mode of life". ('Gypsies near London', Weekly Times, 26 October 1879, p.5).

the Moveable Dwellings Bill, the following assessment of Smith conjures up a pitiful picture:

"More like a pirdo he was when he first come out; never a pair o' decent shoes to his feet, and his clothes al'ways in rags. I give him a pound o' soap one day to wash hisself (sic.) with, for the dirt on the man was a sight to make anybody ashamed; and more 'an once I've gi'n him a pos-bar to pay his railway home. His wife reloed (sic.) him so much money, but he used to get drinking it them days; and then he'd come begging to us, saying as how he wanted money for to provide schools for the children".¹⁶

Presumably this was said of Smith prior to the mid 1880s, from when his condition improved markedly. In November 1884 he received a Treasury order for £300 in recognition of the work he had done for the canal-dwellers, and immediately he put this grant towards helping forward the cause of the gypsy children.¹⁷ Also in that month the Pall Mall Gazette issued a notice and appeal for monies to set up a George Smith Fund, and very soon this brought in a sum of £800, which prompted Smith to write in his diary for 31 December 1884, "We are better off than we have been for many, many years. Thank God!".¹⁸ The year 1885 saw his material position improved even further with a grant from the royal bounty fund, and the closing of the Pall Mall Gazette fund at the sum of £1480.¹⁹ With this he bought a house at

16 Wester Lee, quoted in 'Anglo-Romani Gleanings', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.3, No.3 (1924), pp.112-3. Lee has here accused Smith of the same complaints levelled by the latter against the gypsies. Wester Lee was a founder and leader of the United Kingdom Van Dwellers' Protection Association, which was at the forefront of the opposition to Smith's Moveable Dwellings Bill (see pages 365-8).

17 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.136.

18 Quoted in ibid., pp.136-8. See also Rev. E. N. Hoare, Notable Workers in Humble Life (1887), p.217; Pall Mall Gazette, 21 November 1884, pp.4-5.

19 D.N.B., p.41; E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.161-2.

Crick, near Rugby, and even managed to form a George Smith of Coalville Society, whose members were to assist him in his endeavours.²⁰ Thus, when he took up the gypsy cause Smith was able to go about his work with a vigour revitalised by a measure of financial security.

It will have been apparent from earlier references to Smith that his attitude towards the gypsy people, and the problem they caused, was uncompromising in its opposition and condemnation. He possessed a hatred, antipathy and disgust towards them drawn from his early experiences while working in the brick-yards. Smith admitted to having had a "nervous dread of the black-eyed gipsies encamped beside the brickyard", and many times was "half-frightened out of my senses by gipsies and tramps".²¹ They stole his clothing, food, drink and, most hurtful of all, the first book he ever possessed.²² Visits to encampments in the Midlands, London and even Scotland, only confirmed and added to these damning impressions. Smith was further motivated to expose the 'truth' about present-day gypsy life by a desire to redress a balance upset by the efforts of novelists to paint the gypsies white. Their contrasting positions are well shown in the following:

"To dress the satanic, demon-looking face of a Gipsy with the violet-powder of imagery only temporarily hides from view the repulsive aspect of his features ... The dramatist has strutted the Gipsy across the stage in various characters in his endeavour to improve his condition. After the fine colours have been doffed, music finished, applause ceased, curtain dropped, and scene ended, he has been a black, swarthy, idle, thieving, lying, blackguard of a Gipsy still".²³

20 D.N.B., pp.41-2.

21 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.29, 94.

22 Ibid., pp.29-30.

23 G. Smith, Gipsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their children, with suggestions for their improvement (1880), p.167.

Smith's distaste for the 'backwood romantic gipsy novelists' was surpassed only by his antipathy towards the gypsy.²⁴ No-one could have been more comprehensive in his criticisms, which covered everything from education to morals to diet and to dress. Often Smith drew the analogy between gypsies and savages and animals, at times openly comparing them to pigs and dogs and at other times less obviously though with equal force and venom:

"A few days since I wended my way to a large number of Gipsies located in tents, huts, and vans near Wandsworth Common, to behold the pitiable spectacle of some 60 half-naked, poor Gipsy children, and 30 Gipsy men and women, living in a state of indescribable ignorance, dirt, filth, and misery, mostly squatting upon the ground, making their beds upon peg-shavings and straw, and divested of the last tinge of romantical nonsense, which is little better in this case - used as a deal of it is - than paper pasted upon the windows, to hide from public view the mass of human corruption which has been festering in our midst for centuries, breeding all kinds of sins and impurities ...".²⁵

By bombarding the newspapers and journals in this way Smith succeeded in bringing the matter to the attention of the public. He accused the gypsies of shocking ignorance and illiteracy, and provided much evidence, some factual, some impressionistic, to support this claim.

24 G. Smith, I've been ..., p.34.

25 Letter from G. Smith in the Daily Chronicle, 20 November 1879, p.5. Yet despite the unquestionable venom of his remarks T. Acton has argued that Smith thought of the gypsies as his equals, and spoke to them and treated them as human beings and not as inferiors. Insofar as Smith was clearly opposed to the travelling way of life and the vices it encouraged rather than to the people themselves, then Acton is correct. However, the nature of his propaganda hardly permits us to believe that Smith saw them and treated them as equals (see T. Acton, 'The Development of Ethnic Ideology and Pressure Politics in Gypsy-Gaujo Relations in England and Wales from Victorian Reformism to Romani Nationalism', unpublished D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1973, pp.220-1).

Comments from gypsies themselves were recorded with delight when in his favour. At the camp described above not more than four or five of those assembled there could read a sentence or write a letter. He generalised from his personal observations to state that not 2% of the 30,000 poor gypsy children were able to read or write, and he quoted a number of gypsies who bemoaned the lack of literacy amongst their number.²⁶ Their total lack of morals expressed itself in a number of ways. They lied, cheated and demoralised all with whom they had contact by their degrading and crafty habits.²⁷ They were only able to maintain themselves by pilfering and poaching, fortune-telling, and selling the odd item such as clothes-lines and clothes-pegs, although they seldom used such things themselves as they rarely washed.²⁸ They lived huddled together "like so many dogs", regardless of either "sex, age or decency", and with little regard for marriage ceremonies.²⁹ Their diet was "little better than garbage and refuse", their dress, if any, was ragged and dirty, and as a result they were among the main conveyors of infectious diseases.³⁰ The absence of religious

26 See G. Smith, 'The Conditions of our Gypsies and their children, with remedies', paper read at the Social Science Congress, Nottingham, 26 September 1882, quoted in his I've been ..., p.239; Letters from G. Smith in the Daily Chronicle, 20 November 1879, p.2; the Standard, 14 August 1879, p.6.

27 G. Smith, 'The Conditions of our Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.239; Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, Minutes of Evidence, of George Smith (1884-5), p.526, paras. 14038-41 (hereafter, R.C. on Housing).

28 Letter to the Standard, 14 August 1879, p.6.

29 Ibid.; G. Smith, 'The Conditions of our Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.239; R.C. on Housing, Minutes of Evidence, of George Smith (1884-5), p.526, para. 14040.

30 Letter to the Standard, 14 August 1879, p.6; G. Smith, 'Our Gypsies and their Children', London Society, Vol.47 (1885), p.40.

feelings and sentiments among them was added almost as an afterthought.

Smith, therefore, believed that the romantic gypsy of poetry and fiction had long since died out, "... and neither the stage, romance, nor imagination will ever bring him to life again in this country".³¹ Instead of scenes of sunshine, freedom and romance Smith substituted squalor, wretchedness and poverty. Taking his knowledge and experience mostly from the gypsy encampments of the Midlands, Smith saw only dirt and idleness, and a people who "... live like pigs and die like dogs".³² In his opinion the tents and encampments contained even more filth and disease than the overcrowded cabins of the canal boats. To add to this already appalling state of affairs, the gypsies were free from inspection and interference. By taking to a nomadic way of life they escaped taxes, rent, the inspector of nuisances and the school-board officer. Their existence was not officially recognised except at the time when a census was taken, when, at the expense of the householder, a register was made of them. They contributed nothing to government, national or local, and although their living conditions were marked by indecencies and dangers to health, no representative of the Board of Health troubled himself to remedy the problem.³³ Some change in their condition of life was therefore thought essential. They were a

31 G. Smith, 'The Conditions of our Gipsies ...', loc.cit., p.239.

32 G. Smith, quoted from a paper presented to the Social Science Congress, at Manchester, October 1879, in F. H. Groome, In Gipsy Tents (Edinburgh, 1880; Wakefield, 1973), pp.240-2.

33 Letter from 'J.W.B.' to May's Aldershot Advertiser, 13 September 1879, quoted in G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., pp.87-90. See also letter from G. Smith to the Standard, 21 August 1879, p.6; E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.150-1.

danger and disgrace to themselves, and to the nation as a whole, "a plague spot", both present and future, and only their removal would alleviate the problem.³⁴ The gypsies were seen as an anachronism in a Christian and civilised society, and their existence was both farcical and a discredit.³⁵ Their ability to reduce others to their own level acted as a threat to the whole of society, and through their parasitism they were believed to be delaying the spread of civilisation, and thus negating a belief in material progress:

"It is my decided conviction that unless we are careful, and take the 'bull by the horns', and compel them to educate their children, and to put their habitations, tents, and vans under better sanitary arrangements, we shall be fostering seeds in these dregs of society that will one day put a stop to the work of civilisation, and bring to an end the advance in arts, science, laws, and commerce that have been making such rapid strides in this country of late years".³⁶

In short, then, they lived in defiance of social, moral, civil and natural law.³⁷ Viewed from every angle, whether moral, educational, religious, sanitary, economic or political, their reform seemed essential.

34 Derby Daily Telegraph and Reporter, 16 August 1879, p.2.

35 Letter from G. Smith in the Daily News, 5 September 1882, p.2. Consider also the following comment from G. Smith: "It is not creditable to us as a Christian nation to have had for centuries these heathenish tribes in our midst. It does not speak very much for the power of the Gospel, the zeal of the ministers of Christ's Church, and the activity of the school-master, to have had these plague spots continually flitting before our eyes, without anything being done to effect a cure". (Quoted in E. Hodder, op.cit., p.142).

36 G. Smith, Gipsy Life . . ., p.193.

37 Letter to May's Aldershot Advertiser, loc.cit.

Despite the generality and inaccuracy of many of Smith's statements and claims, he succeeded in awakening the general public to the seriousness of the gypsy problem by means of the many letters and articles printed in local and national newspapers. Hodder commented thus on the importance of the press in publicising Smith's endeavours:

"His career is the best illustration I have ever come upon of the splendid willingness of the press of any country to hammer the proposed remedies of genuine philanthropists into the head and heart of the public, and compel adequate legislation to render them permanently effective".³⁸

Editorial comments appeared in many papers and dialogues were conducted in the correspondence columns of national and local newspapers, often providing general support and corroboratory evidence.³⁹ Sometimes, though, gypsies and lorists wrote to point out that Smith was looking at 'mumple-travellers' and tramps and not the 'real' gypsy at all. Even so, the latter correspondents tended to sympathise with the black picture painted by Smith, but excluded

38 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.258.

39 See, for example, Birmingham Daily Mail, 8 October 1879, p.2; Daily News, 6 September 1879, p.7; 13 September 1879, p.3; 6 October 1879, p.4; 5 September 1882, p.2; Derby Daily Telegraph and Reporter, 16 August 1879, p.2; Daily Chronicle, 14 August 1879, p.5; 20 November 1879, p.5; Graphic, 13 March 1880, p.275; Morning Post, 11 October 1882, p.2; Standard, 14 August 1879, p.6; 15 August 1879, p.5; 16 August 1879, p.3; 19 August 1879, p.6; 20 August 1879, p.2; 21 August 1879, p.6; 30 August 1879, p.3; 10 September 1879, p.5; 12 September 1879, p.2; Sunday School Chronicle, Vol.8, No.270, 19 December 1879, p.640; Suburban Press, 28 February 1880, p.2; Weekly Dispatch, 12 October 1879, p.1; Weekly Times, 26 October 1879, p.5; 11 January 1880, p.2; 8 February 1880, p.2.

from it the 'real' Romany gypsy. But Smith did not rely entirely on the written word to convert the general public and legislators to his cause, and he made good use of a range of resources to force home the message. He spoke at Social Science Congress meetings in 1879 and 1882, at Manchester and Nottingham, and he began a lecture tour in 1885, speaking at meetings of the Young Men's Christian Association, at Leeds, Hull and elsewhere. In 1887 he lectured to the Association of Public Sanitary Inspectors on 'The Insanitary State of Gipsy Homes', and again at various YMCAs and literary societies.⁴⁰ Yet Smith recognised that he had to do more than convince public opinion: he also had to win over the legislators, local authorities and the gypsies themselves. He set about each task with equal determination.

Smith published books on the gypsy problem and dedicated them to the members of Parliament.⁴¹ He petitioned Parliament and engaged in an extensive letter-writing campaign, which he also directed at the local authorities.⁴² Again his persistence achieved results as he came to be regarded as the authority on gypsies and van-towns. It was in deference to his knowledge, or perhaps to his self-advertising, that he was called to give evidence before the Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes, 1884-5.

40 Smith was already experienced in the art of public speaking, having lectured many times on behalf of the brickyard children and canal dwellers (see E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.48-9, 157, 179; F. H. Groome, op.cit., pp.240-2; G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.238-40).

41 cf. his Gipsy Life ...; Gipsy Children; or, a stroll in Gipsydom. With songs and stories (1889).

42 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.54-7.

After he had appeared before the Commission Smith wrote in his diary that he was satisfied he had convinced the Commissioners that the cause of the gypsy children was a good one.⁴³ However, his greatest attempt to influence the legislators was with his Moveable Dwellings Bill, which was repeatedly put before Parliament between the years 1885 and 1894.

Smith visited the gypsies at their camps, fairs, feasts and in the many "nooks and corners of the land", in an attempt to persuade them of the benefits of their reformation and education.⁴⁴ He took with him illustrated pamphlets, picture-cards and literature to distribute to the old and young alike, and to sweeten the effect of the elevating and didactic he also took oranges and confectionery for the children and tobacco for the adults.⁴⁵

His talk of reform was met by these various groups with a mixture of optimism and pessimism, though, on the whole, he found general support for his call for the education of gypsy children, their religious instruction and the imposition of minimum sanitary requirements on all van-dwellers compatible with the maintenance, or establishment, of physical and moral health. Yet even though gaining wide support for the idea of reform, Smith had to face the same pessimism and cynicism that greeted the earlier reforming evangelists. Some challenged altogether the notion that reform was necessary, claiming that crime and disease were not common among

43 Dated 4 July 1884, quoted in E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.130-1.

44 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 1, p.1.

45 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.115-6. See Appendix 9, illustrations 18, 19.

the gypsy people. . . An Irish gypsy wrote to the Standard praising Smith's efforts to improve the condition of his fellow-travellers, but argued that the gypsy was neither morally degraded nor criminally inclined, stating there was not one gypsy registered in the crime statistics for every five hundred criminals who attended religious services.⁴⁶ Smith replied to this kind of criticism by drawing on ample 'evidence' to expose these claims as errors and the writers as romantics. The other challenge came from those who thought that the gypsies' habits and ways could never be changed, as they were a part of their nature, a product of 'untameable blood'. The gypsies' nomadism, disrespect of property and rights of ownership and contempt for legislation were considered irrefutable racial characteristics.⁴⁷

The correspondence columns of the newspapers gave publicity to writers who answered this pessimistic outlook by providing evidence of reform that had taken place, and of the gypsies' willingness to seek education and reform. Smith in fact expressed much satisfaction with the responses to his campaign from the gypsies themselves. His proposals were said to have their "heartfelt sympathy", even to the extent that they subscribed halfpences and shillings to assist his work, despite this generosity often leaving themselves penniless.⁴⁸ Smith even quoted direct from the gypsies:

46 Letter to the Standard, 16 August 1879, p.3.

47 See Weekly Dispatch, 12 October 1879, p.1. Also pages 183-6.

48 Christian Herald, 31 March 1880, quoted in F. H. Groome, op.cit., pp.259-60.

"Lor, bless you, my good mon, I'm reight glad you big fokes are going to do sommat in the way o' givin our childer a bit o' eddication, for they've nowt as it is".⁴⁹

During November 1890 Smith, according to his own testimony, visited several hundreds of gypsy families in the Midlands, distributing copies of his proposals to them all. He reported that all but seven were in favour of it, and that he subsequently received many letters of support from among them.⁵⁰ However, Smith's crowning glory, and the most often quoted example of gypsy friendship and support, was when the Lee family sold to Smith, for a nominal sum, a small copper and brass box, dated 1197, a family heirloom, "... for his long efforts to improve our condition and educate our children..".⁵¹ The presentation took place at a large gathering of gypsies at Plaistow Marshes in November 1888.

The aims of reform thus seem to have been met with a general approval. However, Parliament, the public and the gypsies were by no means so unanimous in their support over the need to resort to the legislative process to secure the enactment of a Bill containing proposals which appeared both harsh and impracticable.

49 Quoting a gypsy named Winter, who lived in Bulwell Forest. Note how Smith has transcribed the (imaginary?) conversation in order to convey the ignorance and illiteracy of the gypsy, who was speaking, as Smith noted, not in Romany but in a Staffordshire dialect (G. Smith, I've been ..., pp.234-5).

50 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, pp.11-12.

51 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.183-5; 'Notes and Queries', J.G.L.S., Old Ser., Vol.1, No.3 (1889), p.176; Graphic, 4 May 1889, p.476; Manchester Examiner, 26 November 1888, p.2; Newcastle Daily Chronicle, 16 May 1889, p.6.

In order to appreciate why this was so it is necessary to take a closer look at the clauses and provisions of the various Moveable Dwellings Bills, 1885 to 1894.⁵²

The Attempt at Direct Legislation, 1885-1894

Essentially, Smith sought to apply the principles and provisions of the Canal Boats Acts, of 1877 and 1884, to all moveable dwellings. This was to be achieved by the registration of all such dwellings; the compulsory school attendance of the children of gypsies and van-dwellers; the enforcement of regulations concerning their dwellings, governing the amount of cubic space required by each individual, and the separation of the sleeping accommodation of males and females; the power to enter the dwellings to inspect for health, sanitary and moral irregularities; and encouragements to be given to gypsies to localise and settle. By bringing what he regarded as the 'lowest dregs of society' within the educational and sanitary laws, it was hoped that they would be taught loyalty, honesty, industrious habits and faithfulness, thus converting them into useful members of society.⁵³ It was hoped that by improving the moral and physical condition of the gypsies this would lead, ultimately, to their social absorption.

52 1884-5 (239) iii, 479; 1887 (256) vi, 303; 1887 (370) vi, 315, amended by Select Committee; 1888 (200) v, 251; 1889 (316) v, 403; 1889 (206) viii, 231; 1890 (170) vi, 795; 1890-1 (222) vii, 137; 1892 (212) iv, 597; 1894 (298) vii, 39.

53 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.294; also, his Gipsy Children ..., Part 2, p.14.

The registration of all moveable dwellings, including tents, shows, caravans, auctioneers' vans, carriages, wagons and the like, was considered essential if regulation was to be effective. Without registration it was not thought possible to enforce the proposals regarding sanitary arrangements and education. Registration was to be by a certificate, issued annually, at a stated, nominal fee, though with heavy fines for non-compliance. By this means the owners of vans were to have been brought under the watchful eye of the authorities at least once a year. Even Groome supported the idea of registration, not because he thought it essential on regulatory grounds, but because of the benefits it would bring for the gypsies. It would enable them to find camping grounds on application to the local police station, and it would reopen sites that had been closed to them under the Highway and Commons Acts.⁵⁴

More general support for the principle of registration was motivated by a similar desire to Smith's for regulation and control. The attitude was that legislation was urgently demanded to control the nuisance of the gypsies, and if sanitary and educational standards could only be imposed and enforced by registration, then so be it. The press gave support to the principle, and Smith claimed to have received letters in his favour from chief constables, some of whom requested even greater powers, county magistrates, town councils, various school boards and from different religious denominations.⁵⁵ The Association of Sanitary Inspectors even passed

54 F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.26lff. Quite how this would operate, and why registration was necessary for this purpose, was not made clear by Groome.

55 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.17.

a resolution in favour of the Bill.⁵⁶ In Parliament, though, the response given to the clause was not one of unanimous approval. When the Bill was considered in Committee, in 1889, Mr. Stephens, a member of the Liberty and Property Defence League and a mouthpiece for the United Kingdom Showmen's and Van Dwellers' Protection Association, expressed the belief that the clause was "... entirely unworkable and cruelly oppressive".⁵⁷ The demand to register with a local County Council was intended to suppress the mode of life followed by the travellers, and would in effect,

"... force these people from a healthy, harmless country life, into our overcrowded towns, where they are not at all wanted, and where ... it will be impossible for them to earn their living".⁵⁸

Registration would have to be the responsibility of some local authority official as the Council itself was not always sitting, and

56 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.17, and also his I've been ..., pp.288-9, 292.

57 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons (2 August 1889), col. 264. The Liberty and Property Defence League was formed in 1882 by Lord Elchs (later Lord Wemyss), Herbert Spencer and others. It aimed to uphold the principle of liberty, to guard the rights of threatened and weak bodies against undue state intervention, and "... for resisting Overlegislation, for maintaining Freedom of Contract, and for advocating Individualism as opposed to Socialism irrespective of Party Politics" (see volume of Annual Reports, 1888-94, p.57). Its motto was 'self-help versus state-help'. During its life it gave rise to other laissez-fairist and vehemently anti-socialist associations, notably the Employers' Parliamentary Council, the Free Labour Protection Association (1898), and the Middle Class Defence League (see the journals of the League, Jus, 1887-8, and the Liberty Review, 1893-1909; also N. Soldon, 'Laissez faire as Dogma: the Liberty and Property Defence League, 1882-1914', in K. D. Brown, ed., Essays in Anti-Labour History, 1974, pp.208-33).

58 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons (31 July 1889), cols. 1839-40.

this involved handing over power to a person not under the direct control of the representative authority, and "... far more under the influence of the residents and landlords of the neighbourhood".⁵⁹

Mr. Stephens' persistent blocks, on this ground and others, proved to be the most serious obstacle confronting Smith in his endeavour to get the Bill approved.

The proposals regarding sanitary regulations met with an equally equivocal response. The Local Government Board had power over every dwelling in England, on land and water, to make regulations regarding health and sanitary matters, but Smith pointed out that they had no effective power over moveable dwellings.⁶⁰

Similarly, although local authorities possessed the power to enforce bye-laws respecting the sanitary conditions of moveable dwellings, Smith considered that the powers were not great enough, and in any case very few of the 1,576 sanitary authorities had taken any steps to extend their influence over the van-dwellers. The need for such regulations was visibly apparent for all to see. Smith dismissed as nonsense claims that van-dwellers were a healthy people and that their encampments were not hotbeds of infectious diseases. To him, it was inconceivable that the people could be healthy and free of disease given the conditions under which they existed, and he was able to quote a number of respectable sources that, in his view, proved this beyond reasonable doubt. For example, the gypsy children camped on Danbury Common,

59 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons (31 July 1889), cols. 1839-40.

60 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.17.

"... are daily passing before us untaught, and suffering in health through exposure to cold and wet, versed in arts of deception and quite inaccessible to influence ... I am sure that those who dwelt under tents / original emphasis_7 must have perished or laid the foundation of fatal disease during the late severe weather ...".⁶¹

Similar testimonies were received from other, equally 'reliable' sources.⁶² Consequently, clauses were put in the Bill governing the fixing of the number, ages and sex of the persons who were allowed to dwell in such temporary abodes, "having regard to the cubic space, ventilation, provision for the separation of the sexes, general healthiness and accommodation", and the promotion of cleanliness in such dwellings and the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases. The manner in which it was possible to regulate regarding cubic space and ventilation in a tent, which may be no more than canvas stretched over sticks, was just one of the ways in which this clause was thought to be unworkable.

The real point of contention, though, rested with the way in which these regulations were to be supervised and enforced. Provisions were made in the Bill for any officer of the county or sanitary authority to have the power to enter the moveable dwelling between 6 a.m. and 9 p.m. on his own motion, or if with a magistrates' warrant at any time. Lord Wemyss, of the Liberty and Property Defence League, commented on this in the following way:

61 Letter from the County Magistrate of Danbury, Essex, to G. Smith, 1881, quoted in the latter's I've been ..., pp.288-9.

62 Quoted in ibid., pp.291-2.

"What! is not this a gross violation of the rights of the subject? Every gipsy's van is his castle, and he should be at liberty to make a pig-sty of it if he likes".⁶³

Smith answered his critics by pointing out that the powers of entry were more stringent in the Canal Boats Acts, 1877 and 1884, the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1875, and the Public Health Act, 1875.⁶⁴ Even so, opposition caused him to modify the provisions and, by stages, powers of entry applied only to the hours between 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. He now said that he did not want the power to enter vans and tents at night, "... as officers have under other Acts", and that the powers were given to local authority officers and not the police: "I want to keep the policemen clear of the vans".⁶⁵ Yet these amendments and appeals were to no avail and this clause proved another stumbling block.

Finally, the later Bills, though not the original presented in 1884, made provisions for the education of the children of the van-dwellers. The Elementary Education Acts, of 1870 and after, had been ineffective in extending the principle of compulsory education to the children of travellers, and Smith's earlier attempts to evoke positive response from Parliament had met with disappointing results. Mr. Mundella, Vice-President of the Committee of the Council on Education, said in reply to a Parliamentary question from Mr. Burt:

63 Quoted in E. Hodder, op.cit., p.206.

64 See Canal Boats Act, 40 & 41 Vict., c.6, clause 5, 1877; Canal Boats Act, 47 & 48 Vict., c.75, sec.4, 1884; Housing of the Working Classes Act, 48 & 49 Vict., c.72, sec.9, 1875; Public Health Act, 38 & 39 Vict., c.55, clauses 72-89, 1875.

65 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, pp. 9,16.

"It is exceedingly difficult to devise any effectual scheme for the education of the nomadic population ..., and up to the present we have received no suggestion for dealing with the subject which appears to be practical. The matter, however, is 'under consideration', and we propose during the recess to confer with the Local Government Board respecting it".⁶⁶

Smith endeavoured to supply the practical solution by suggesting that a clause should be inserted in the Canal Boats Act Amendment Bill to cover gypsy children. Mr. Burt warned Smith not to be too hopeful, and was proved to be justified in his pessimism when the clause was blocked on its second reading, 18 April 1883, by Mr. Salt, M.P. for Stafford.⁶⁷ No education clause was inserted in Smith's first Moveable Dwellings Bill, partly because he had been seeking its insertion elsewhere and partly because he feared the education clause would be the block on which the whole Bill would fall. But this omission was rectified in all his subsequent Bills.⁶⁸ Smith suggested that a book be issued to the children, in which their names and attendance at school could be entered, which would be taken from place to place and endorsed by the schoolmaster, thus showing to the School Board officer that the child was attending school. The small extra cost incurred by educating gypsy children was to have been paid by the guardians of the poor out of the poor rates.⁶⁹ The children would thus be brought under the Education Code, by means of a "free, easy, simple national system".⁷⁰ It was not thought that the education obtained in this way would be entirely adequate,

66 Quoted in G. Smith, I've been ..., p.296.

67 Ibid., pp. 297, 336-8.

68 See E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.170-1.

69 G. Smith, Gipsy Life ..., p.288.

70 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.10.

"... but through the kindness of the schoolmaster ... and the vigilance of the School Board visitor, a plain, practical, and sound education could be imparted to and obtained by these poor little gipsy children and road-side arabs ...".⁷¹

There was little doubt or disagreement that provision ought to be made for the gipsy children, and Smith was not slow to recount from helpful gypsies stories and claims about their own ignorance and illiteracy. There was, then, widespread approval for the principle of compulsory education, but the dispute was over how that education should be imparted and the regulations enforced.

Clearly, the problem with enforcing the principle of compulsory education on a nomadic population was that it challenged individual liberty. The only way of ensuring that the minimum number of attendances were reached, was by forcing the gypsies to settle in a particular district or by preventing the children from travelling with their parents until they had satisfied the School Board Inspector.⁷² Either solution involved an interference with personal liberty that the Government was unlikely to recommend, despite Smith's call for the rejection of such a concept when liberty went hand in hand with ignorance and vice.⁷³ However, there were even greater problems involved with the attendance of gipsy children at state elementary schools. Chief among these were those to do with cost and with the widespread antipathy shown to the children, whose attendance, it was thought, would harm the children of settled

71 G. Smith, quoted in F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.262.

72 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.172.

73 Ibid., p.173.

parents. Firstly, it was claimed that gypsy children increased the numbers at state schools but lowered the average of those passing the examinations, resulting in a lower government grant than if they had not been at the school.⁷⁴ The Caravan's plea that a government grant should not act as a barrier to the education of any class of children strikes a rather despairing note. Perhaps an even greater obstacle, though, was that expressed in the manifesto of the Liberty and Property Defence League:

"The attendance of travelling children ... would do very serious harm to schools ... and if any attempts were made to enforce it very vehement and insurmountable opposition on the part of school managers, school teachers ... would certainly be exacted".⁷⁵

Hodder expressed a similar view, and in so doing provided a good illustration of how Smith provided his opponents with more than enough ammunition to shoot down his proposals:

"There are ... caste distinctions and class distinctions which deserve great consideration and respect, and personally we sympathise with the teachers who protested that it would be a great moral wrong to flood their schools and bring their scholars under the contaminating influence of gypsy children, who, according to George Smith's own persistent showing, were the very scum of the earth, brought up in the midst of the grossest indecencies and profanities".⁷⁶

The nature and extent of the proposals gradually filtered down to the gypsies, either by Smith visiting their camps and explaining it to them and distributing copies of the Bill, or by word of mouth,

74 Caravan (October 1890), p.4.

75 Quoted in G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.13.

76 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.174.

which tended to lead to misunderstanding and exaggeration. For example, the gypsies at Ascot were under the impression that Smith's measures were going to result in their children being taken from them.⁷⁷ A careful study of the works of Smith, and others, brings to light sufficient evidence to show that many gypsies were opposed to the Bill and to Smith's methods of reform, and this opposition often expressed itself in a most violent manner. At Birmingham Onion Fair a group of van-dwellers turned against Smith and chased him up and down the streets of the city. Eventually, Smith turned to confront them, and managed to cool their animosity by providing them with money for tea and lodgings.⁷⁸ At the Northampton races and the Leicester and Market Harborough fairs, he was given police protection against the threat of violence from the van-dwellers, but at one fair they got close enough to chalk a large cross on his back, presumably as a target.⁷⁹ Similarly, the gypsies insulted and roughly treated him at the Nottingham and Peterborough fairs, and only a blunt knife ensured that he left a group of Worcestershire gypsies with his beard, and neck, intact.⁸⁰ At Ascot races his life was again under threat, and cries of "Burn him alive" were heard; when a woman offered to pour the paraffin over him and set fire to it, it was realised the threat was not merely an idle

77 Extract from G. Smith's diary, quoted in E. Hodder, op.cit., p.222.

78 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.2.

79 Ibid., Part 2, p.4.

80 Ibid.; Extract from G. Smith's diary, May 1886, quoted in E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.178-9; E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., pp.343-4. Groome related the story of a gypsy who, on hearing Smith's description of gypsies and his proposals to reform them, hurled a teapot against a wall and exclaimed, "I wish to mi-Dúvel George Smith's head were in it" (F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.224).

one.⁸¹

The opposition was not, however, always so spontaneous and emotional. Lazy Smith, a gypsy, took it upon himself to visit the House of Commons in order to speak out against the Bill and correct the impression of the gypsies given to them by Smith. He was alleged to have shouted at those present in the House:

"Yer Lordships this man Smith never knowed a rale Gypsy. Them folks as 'e knows is tinkers an' peg-makers - the' ain't Gypsies".⁸²

Once again, the best form of defence was to shift the blame. Yet the real force of opposition came not from the outbursts of individuals but from the organised efforts of the Liberty and Property Defence League (LPDL), and the United Kingdom Showmen's and Van-Dwellers' Protection Association (UKSVDPA), later the Showmen's Guild. The two organisations often worked in co-operation, and offered a coordinated opposition.

The LPDL challenged the claims of the "... patriarchally got-up Mr. George Smith ...", concerning the health and character of the gypsies, offering him financial support if he could prove any of his "wild" assertions.⁸³ In general terms they stood opposed to Smith's attempts to introduce legislation necessitating state intervention and help, which conflicted with their own belief in *laissez faire*. More specifically, the provisions of the Bill

81 Extract from G. Smith's diary, 15 June 1893, quoted in E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.222-3.

82 Quoted in J. Myers, 'Lazy Smith in Egglestone's Notebook', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.16, Nos. 1-2 (1937), p.4.

83 Liberty Review (2 December 1893), pp.1-2; (20 January 1894), p.114.

permitted the inspection and regulation of people's homes without sanction of a magistrate's warrant, thereby infringing upon individual rights. Their method of organising opposition was to send out many printed summaries and objections to federated societies, M.P.s, the press and elsewhere, and by the assistance of nine members in the House of Commons nine notices of motion for rejection of the Bill were placed and maintained on paper throughout the Session when the Bill was to be presented.⁸⁴ In 1890 an appeal was addressed to all owners and occupiers of travelling vans, carts, wagons, or tents, to combine against the Bill.⁸⁵

Opposition was thus mobilised inside Parliament, and outside at a 'grass roots' level. Meetings were held, often with the UKSVDPA, to organise the opposition and rally public opinion against the Bill. The latter association won the backing of Mr. Stephens, M.P. for Hornsey, Middlesex, and it was largely due to his Parliamentary blocks that the Bill never went through. The UKSVDPA was not, though, a pressure group that acted on behalf of all van-dwellers, despite its title and the fact that its stated object, as laid down in the Rule Book, was to protect the rights of showmen and van-dwellers in general against any possible harmful legislation.⁸⁶ From the first it was more concerned that the public should not confuse the gypsies with showmen, and that the showmen class of travellers alone should not be brought under the restrictions of the Bill. The Association's

84 Annual Reports of the LPDL, 1892-3, p.51.

85 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.177.

86 Quoted in T. Murphy, History of the Showmen's Guild, 1889-1948 (privately printed, Oldham, 1949), p.32.

chaplain, Reverend Thomas Horne, was keen to make this clear:

"... Mr. Smith fails to make any distinction between say the living vans of George Sanger and the most miserable ramshackle carts ceiled over with hoops and canvas; between the true and legitimate showmen and his family, well cared for, and the veriest wretch of a miserable gypsy - one who is a pariah among pariahs of the road - vitiates his whole scheme and justifies up to the hilt the strong language of outraged parents. The proposed legislation is the same old story over again; the punishment of the just for the unjust; and in this the injury is all the more glaring because it is quite possible to separate the evil from the good. Mr. Smith seems to have no power of discriminating between the wretched drink-besotten gypsy and the showman proper ...".⁸⁷

Founded in 1889, the Association emerged for the specific purpose of opposing the Bill. The first meeting of importance, in relation to the Bill, was held in the Agricultural Hall, Islington, in 1890.⁸⁸ It was from this meeting on that the Association began to take its shape. The following months saw a massive campaign of pamphleteering and petitioning, and many more meetings were held. The next of note was again at the Agricultural Hall in January 1891. One of these meetings was attended by Smith himself, who was there to address the large number of travellers and showmen present. But he was not given the chance as the audience clambered over the benches in order to "tear him limb from limb".⁸⁹ Smith managed to escape from the hall by the back door, later to be congratulated

87 Quoted in T. Murphy, op.cit., pp.23-4.

88 Ibid., p.28.

89 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, pp.2-3.

"on my hairbreadth escape from the jaws of death".⁹⁰ In 1892 further meetings were held in London, Manchester, King's Lynn and Hull.

The Association appeared to be in a strong position. Its campaign was efficient and effective, its membership peaked at about 1000 in 1893, and its finances were said to be good.⁹¹ However, the success of its efforts in opposing the Bill was to contribute to its decline and, from 1894-9 its membership fell off drastically, and with the setting up of other trade associations for fairground people, competition for members was tough. It revived around the turn of the century to challenge Private Bills and local authority bye-laws which threatened to place restrictions on the holding of fairs, but it relied on the generosity of 'Lord' George Sanger and others in order to survive. The revival of agitation for a Moveable Dwellings Bill in 1908 acted as a spur to the Guild, and it again mobilised opposition to the proposals. It now remains to consider the application and effectiveness of its opposition by looking at the long, tortuous and eventually unsuccessful passage of Smith's Bill through Parliament.

90 Murphy stated that Smith attended the 1890 meeting, and does not mention his presence at that of 1891 (T. Murphy, op.cit., pp.28-9). Smith gave the date of the meeting as February 1891 (Gypsy Children..., Part 2, pp.2-3), while Hodder dated it at 28 January 1891 (op.cit., p.207). Elsewhere it was reported that the attacks on Smith were more verbal than physical, and it was probable that Smith's picture of drunken men and women clambering over seats and each other in order to inflict violence on his person, was again an image coloured by imaginative exaggeration (E. O. Winstedt, 'Gypsy Civilisation', loc.cit., pp.342-3).

91 T. Murphy, op.cit., pp.29, 45-9.

The Moveable Dwellings Bill was presented to Parliament for the first time in July 1885. It was immediately opposed on the grounds that it was a "tinkering attempt at legislation", and, as gypsies would probably soon have the right to vote, it would be well advised not to press for such legislation that would harass them.⁹² Despite these objections the Bill was read for a second time, but was then withdrawn without debate the following day. It next appeared two years later when it was introduced by a temporary coalition of Conservatives, Liberal Unionists, Gladstonians and Irish Nationalists. After a second reading it was referred to a Select Committee, which accepted it with minor amendments. It was then blocked as being too costly and eventually it "... suffered Parliamentary shipwreck in the Irish storm that had raged so long".⁹³ It was rejected again the following year as a "drastic measure".⁹⁴ Meanwhile, a miserable George Smith watched on despairingly. When objections were again raised in 1889, Smith, "in the intensity of his anxiety", lost his self-control and shouted out from the Gallery of the House of Commons, but he was silenced by the ushers before he had managed to utter barely a word.⁹⁵ Whether his impassioned plea had any effect on the outcome of the debate is doubtful, and yet the Bill went its furthest to date when it was referred to a Committee of the

92 Mr. Healy, quoted in Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Vol.299 (22 July 1885), cols. 1512-3; Vol.300 (11 August 1885), cols. 1705-6.

93 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.174-81.

94 Ibid.

95 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 1, p.46.

House. But once more the Bill collapsed before objections. Each of the following years, up to Smith's death in June 1895, with the exception of 1893, saw the Bill introduced time and time again. Meetings between Smith and his opponents led to modifications being made in the Bill, but in essentials it remained unaltered, and the fruitless meetings ensured that the blocks were put on the Bill with monotonous regularity.⁹⁶ The Bill died along with Smith, no closer to being passed than it had been ten years earlier.

Why, then, did the Bill fail? The body of support which Smith claimed to have behind his proposals makes such an outcome all the more surprising. His backing was said to include the main body of the House, the press and public opinion, the Select Committees who had had the Bill before them, the various Government departments which would have been called on to assist in its implementation, and the Scottish Home Office and Education Department.⁹⁷ Such exaggerated claims served only to anger further his opponents. While Smith may have been justified in claiming wide approval and support for his idea of reform, the specificity of his proposals and his recourse to legislation were by no means so widely accepted. Moreover, whereas much of his support was in the form of tacit acceptance of the principle of reform, the opposition to his particular methods and proposals was active and effective. Standing opposed to his campaign were various journals, notably Truth and Caravan, and sections of the press, many of the travellers themselves, but more important in terms

96 E. Hodder, op.cit., pp.202-3.

97 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 2, p.10; E. Hodder, op.cit., p.177.

of blocking the Bill, were the activities of the Liberty and Property Defence League and the UKSVDPA.

In effect, by the beginning of the 1890s, the tide was turning increasingly against Smith and his proposals. Many interests were opposed to it, and in Hodder's words, "there was neither enthusiasm nor interest on its side".⁹⁸ Even public sentiment came to be swayed by the argument that the Bill would interfere with the free and joyous life of the gypsy.⁹⁹ The ambivalence of the stereotypes, which permitted the existence of the romantic Romany alongside the degenerate gypsy, served to strengthen the confusion and doubt over which side to support. However, the more the tide turned against him, the harder Smith swam against it, and the louder he cried out pointing to the truth behind his presentation of the gypsy. His pamphlet Gypsy Children: or, a stroll in Gipsydom, was an attempt to revive public interest and support. Evidence of the gypsies' amorality, filth, irreligiousness and ignorance was again presented. Consider, for example, his account of an interview he had with a gypsy lad in Epping Forest:

"I asked what his name was. He answered, 'I don't know; I have got so many names. Sometimes they call me Smith, sometimes Brown, and lots of other names'. 'Have you ever been washed in your life?' - 'Not that I know of sir.' - 'Were you ever in a school?' - 'No.' - 'Did you ever hear of Jesus?' - 'I never heard of such a man; He does not live up in this Forest.' - 'Where does God live?' - 'I don't know. I never heard of him neither. There used to be a chap live in the Forest named like that, but he's been gone away a long time. I think he went a hoppin' in Kent.' ".¹⁰⁰

98 E. Hodder, op.cit., p.200.

99 Ibid.

100 G. Smith, Gypsy Children ..., Part 1, pp.13-14.

It does not matter whether or not such an interview took place. Smith desperately and vividly created a conglomerate picture drawing in many threads. But it was the struggle of a drowning man. In the final instance the opposition's arguments against the Bill were more convincing than his own in defence of it. In the main, they relied on the criticisms that the Bill threatened individual liberty, that it was unworkable, and that it was unnecessary.

The defence of the rights of the individual stemmed from a variety of motives. Some may have been genuinely concerned about the harassment of a minority group, and so sought to defend their interests. The gypsy lorists and the UKSVDPA would be included in this context, though it could be said that the latter's opposition to the Bill was based less in ethical considerations and more in a desire to protect their not inconsiderable profits and investments which would be adversely affected by excessive regulation.¹⁰¹ Others, notably the Member of Parliament who spoke out against the Bill in debate, were motivated more by self-interest. If eventually gypsies were to have the vote then it would not pay to disillusion them with the system or with individuals, by being seen to pass a measure that threatened their very existence. Finally, and perhaps the most important and most effective of all the strands, was that put forward by the Liberty and Property Defence League which characterised the debate over the Bill as, in all essentials, an ideological battle between the laissez fairists and the state interventionists. In the name of defending individual

101 See D. Dallas, The Travelling People (1971), p.26.

rights, the League, and its offshoots, stood firmly opposed to anything that hinted at state intervention, or as they saw it, interference. The cooperation that existed between the League and the UKSVDPA served to justify the motives of the other. Moreover, their claims that the Bill would harass and persecute the gypsy were not without foundation. The aim of the Bill was to bring the gypsies under the watchful eye of the authorities, and the proposed regulations would have necessarily interfered with how and where they lived. In the long term it was hoped that their way of life would be brought to an end. That is, persecution extended to its logical conclusion.

Accusations that the Bill was impractical and unworkable were also justified. Any attempt to impose the specific regulations outlined by Smith was made extremely difficult, if not impossible, by a number of factors. Firstly, the gypsies' nomadism made it difficult to track them down and enforce the provisions on them with any effectiveness. The gypsy had only to move on when approached by visiting inspectors. Next, it was said the character of the gypsy acted against reform and regulation, and his fear and distrust of officials and authority would prevent cooperation. Thirdly, it was thought that the proposals were too costly, and the reply that the expense could be met out of the poor rates, the income from the registration fee, and from a government subsidy, was not thought sufficient. Finally, the practical enforcement of many of the measures, particularly those relating to the education of the gypsy children, was made difficult by the antipathy of those necessarily involved in their implementation, such as the school-teachers.

The final thread of the argument of the opposition stressed that the Bill was unnecessary, since legislation elsewhere more than adequately covered the problem. Appendix 6 lists the major Acts, for England and Wales, that had some bearing on the gypsies and the travelling, vagrant way of life.¹⁰² Their variety and extent is readily apparent. While the pre-nineteenth-century Acts were harsher in their provisions, threatening banishment and execution, than anything enacted or in force in the 1800s, it would be wrong to think that this was evidence of weakness or relaxation on the part of the legislature. Rather, it was a more realistic attempt to come to terms with the problem. The laws had become more generalised, and the gypsies, or Egyptians as they were once referred to, were no longer singled out for special legislative treatment. Their racial isolation in the early Acts had given way to their inclusion in less specific Acts that dealt generally with the problem of itinerancy and vagrancy. It is instructive to consider more fully the most important of these.

The various Hawkers and Pedlars Acts between 1810 and 1888 provided that all such travellers needed a licence to carry on their employments, thus resulting in the registration of all such nomadic salesmen and saleswomen. The occupations were essentially the same, but with the legal distinction that the pedlar went about on foot, carrying his wares in a basket or a wheelbarrow, and the hawker

¹⁰² Although the list covers mainly the nineteenth century, some earlier and later enactments have also been included. This list is necessarily abbreviated, for it would be an impossible task to list every Act relating to, for example, commons regulation or vagrancy which would have a direct or indirect effect on the travellers.

carried his goods in a cart drawn by a horse. A pedlar's licence cost 5s. and a hawker's £2. Most travellers would have had a licence of one kind or the other, as it acted as an effective safeguard against the Vagrant Act, though some were issued illegally by forgers.¹⁰³

The 1824 Vagrancy Act was perhaps the most pernicious piece of legislation in force against gypsies and travellers in the nineteenth century. It has already been mentioned that it gave considerable discretionary powers to magistrates, who showed little reluctance in enforcing it.¹⁰⁴ By sweeping the countryside as "a remorseless drag-net", no nomadic family was able to feel immune from its generalised provisions.¹⁰⁵ Even at the time of its enactment it was criticised for its severity and was said to have been "framed in a spirit unknown to the constitution, endangering the ancient liberties of Englishmen".¹⁰⁶ Yet to others the Act was thought to be far too lenient, especially when it was considered who were the objects of the laws:

103 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Minutes of Evidence, of Capt. H. McHard, Chief Constable of Ayrshire (1906), p.258, para. 7706; Report of the Commission appointed to inquire as to the best means of establishing an efficient Constabulary Force in England and Wales (1839), p.36.

104 See pages 386-8.

105 R. D. Paine, 'The Gypsy of England', Outing, Vol.45 (New York, 1904), p.330.

106 A barrister, The Vagrant Act in Relation to the Liberty of the Subject (1824), pp.3-4.

"... this 'unruly brood'... (who) may be compared to the overflowings of a stream left to stagnate - impoverishing the land, and distempering the air; or like those lazy peccant humours of the body, which, unless dispersed, or purged away, weaken and eventually destroy the whole constitution".¹⁰⁷

The summary power entrusted to the magistrates was believed to allow for a cheaper and speedier redress of wrongs than "... could possibly obtain by the tedious and expensive mode of trial by jury".¹⁰⁸ The Act was frequently called upon to deal with the gypsies by these powers, and many were prosecuted under its provisions. Moreover, the Act gave power to police constables to carry out an effective persecution of the gypsies by forcing them, under threat of prosecution, to move on, unless tented on private property and by permission of the owner.¹⁰⁹ The gypsies were able to counter this, up to a point, by taking out a Hawkers' and Pedlars' licence and by encamping on the border of two counties. They moved across from one county to the other when challenged by the county officers, who had no jurisdiction beyond the boundaries of their own shires.¹¹⁰

By the various Commons and Enclosure Acts, notably of 1899, and also by the Local Government Act (1894), local authorities were empowered to make bye-laws regulating village greens and commons. This had the effect of further restricting the places where gypsies could encamp, and which had supportive legislation from the 1835 Highways Act, which penalised gypsies who encamped on any part of

107 Quoted in A. barrister, op.cit., p.4.

108 Ibid., p.45.

109 See V. S. Morwood, op.cit., p.45.

110 See W. Simson, op.cit., p.352.

the highway. The result of these laws was to close commons and highways as camping places. Captain Fullarton James, in his evidence to the Departmental Committee on Vagrancy in 1906, even went so far as to say that the effect of the 1899 Act in particular was to abolish the gypsies.¹¹¹

Not only were their traditional sites being barred to them, but those they were still permitted to use were being watched a great deal more closely. This was achieved mainly by recourse to Section 9 of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1885, which extended the provisions of the 1875 Public Health Act to vans and tents. By this, moveable dwellings were brought firmly within the sanitary laws. Any such habitation which was in such a state as to be a nuisance, or so overcrowded as to be injurious to the health of the inmates, could lead to the prosecution of the occupier. Next, it allowed for bye-laws to be made for promoting cleanliness in and the habitable condition of such dwellings, and for preventing nuisances and the spread of infectious disease in connection with them. Finally, it allowed any person so authorised by the sanitary authority, or by a Justice of the Peace, to enter these dwellings by day. Smith said this about the provisions made under this Act:

"I thank God for the ninth clause. I have worked hard and long for this ...".¹¹²

111 Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Minutes of Evidence (1906), p.262, para. 7727.

112 Quoted in Rev. E. N. Hoare, op.cit., p.214.

The only aspect of Smith's Bill not dealt with adequately elsewhere was that regarding the education of the children of travellers. The Elementary Education Acts, 1870 to 1902, had proved ineffective in extending the principle of compulsory education to travelling children, and attempts by Smith to have education clauses inserted in other Bills had proved unsuccessful.¹¹³ It was not until the Children Act of 1908 that the principle of compulsory education was enforced in relation to the children of nomadic families, and then only for the months October to March. The children had to have 200 attendances at school in a year, under threat of a substantial penalty if they failed to do so. Although this represented only about half the attendances required of other children, it did necessitate that, for the winter months at least, the nomads had to remain in one place. The Act was welcomed for the provisions it had made for the education of the vagrant children, yet it created an unanticipated problem, which appeared especially acute in Scotland. Because of their poverty and the antipathy shown them by sections of the settled population, their enforced settlement in the winter months resulted in their being accommodated in the worst properties of the slum districts, thereby exacerbating an already bad housing problem. This, and the difficulty of finding employments, meant that the School Boards were often unwilling to prosecute if the law was disobeyed, and the Courts were unwilling to convict. On balance, the provisions made in the Act for compulsory education neatly tidied up the final loose end of

113 A. Thesleff, 'Report on the Gypsy Problem', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.2 (1911), p.94. See also J. W. Adamson, English Education, 1789-1902 (Cambridge, 1930).

Smith's proposals, and effectually marked the realisation of his short-term objectives.

Thus, the gypsies were a long way removed from the free and uninhibited life ascribed to them in the romantic novels. In the nineteenth century the law treated them as vagrants, rogues, beggars and vagabonds, having moved on from the racial implications of the much earlier legislation against Egyptians. Legislation existed for the registration of travellers, for regulating where they could camp legally and under what conditions, and for supervision of their health, sanitary arrangements and education. Apart from educational provisions, the remainder of these controls were in existence at the time when Smith was campaigning for his Bill. However, to say that the laws existed is not to say that they were applied either in the manner or spirit in which they were intended, or that their practical application was as effective as was anticipated. It therefore remains, in the following chapter, to look at their operation at a local level, and, more generally, at the response of the local authorities to the gypsy problem. It is in this context that the endeavours of George Smith should be assessed.

Smith identified the group who were at the root of the problem, provided a definition of them and gave publicity to their distinctive features and relations with sedentary society. The conclusions that followed from his work were as clear as they were

necessary, namely that earlier attempts to accommodate the travelling population had failed, and that the time had arrived when more positive steps had to be taken to assimilate this 'unruly' element. By the time of George Smith, the position of the travellers in relation to the sedentary society had become increasingly unacceptable, offering less than formerly in the way of social and economic contributions. In this sense their position had become increasingly marginal, and although the gypsies modified their way of life and occupations according to changes in the wider society, there was a lag that had the effect of exposing them as an anachronistic parasite. Smith, then, was the first person to confront the problem of a travelling population living in the midst of a settled society in a context similar to that which exists today. His findings and suggestions about the need and nature of assimilation formed the basis of contemporary responses from those, notably local authorities, who were forced into taking some kind of remedial action.

CHAPTER 6

RESPONSES (3):
THE GYPSY VERSUS MAGISTRATES, POLICE AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Confrontation between the gypsies and authority was most marked at the local level. Legislative enactments give an overview of the situation but without really casting a great deal of light on the relationship, usually expressed in terms of conflict, between the gypsies and the officials of the various authorities of settled society. It was, therefore, the response of the magistrates, the police and local government officials that most clearly illuminated the clash between the nomadic and the settled ways of life.

The illustration represents the forcible eviction of the gypsies from the site at Black Patch, Birmingham, in 1905 (from the Penny Illustrated Paper, 5 August 1905, p.1).

Scarcely any authority looked on the gypsies with favour, and the major differences in terms of responses were in the methods used to regulate the problem. These varied from persecution by stretching the word of the law to its limit, to the turning of a blind eye until the matter had solved itself by the gypsies moving their camp to another area of their own accord.

Up to the 1870s, when local authorities were given greater powers to impose their own bye-laws regulating gypsies and van-dwellers, the chief means of confronting the gypsy and vagrant problem was by recourse to the police and the courts. Gypsies were classed alongside criminals and rogues and were treated as such, with the result that resort to prosecutions was frequent. In the latter decades of the century prosecution for various offences, even if loosely defined as vagrancy, gave way to a more general and all-encompassing persecution and harassment by the authorities. Prosecutions against individuals and families were replaced largely by a wider persecution of the gypsies in their camps, thus matching the tendency of the gypsies to live in larger groups in camps on the edge of cities. The problem had become urban rather than rural, and so had to be treated accordingly. However, the desire seems to have been to disperse the problem and move it on rather than solve it, and there was a general unwillingness to accept responsibility for the measures taken.

The Policing of Travellers

As might be expected, records concerning the policing of gypsies and vagrants in the early part of the nineteenth century are very

scarce. Yet it is clear from those that do exist that the various policing agencies kept up the tradition of persecution. Placards appeared by the roadsides and notices were printed in newspapers which ordered the gypsies' apprehension and committal to prison.¹ Few of these have survived, but the notice issued in Sussex in 1799 illustrated the tone and intention:

"At the respective General Quarter Sessions of the Peace, holden at Chichester and Lewes, the 15th and 17th Days of January 1799 (sic.)

The Magistrates met and Assembled at the abovesaid Sessions, having taken into their consideration the great number of Gypsies and other Vagrants of different descriptions infesting this County; were pleased to order, that if any Gypsies or other Vagrants of whatever description, should be found therein after the 25th Day of March next, they will be punished as the Law directs, of which all Constables and other Peace Officers, are particularly Ordered to take Notice and apprehend all such Gypsies and other Vagrants, and carry them before some of his Majesties Justices of the Peace for the said County for that purpose; and if any Constables, or other Peace Officers after this Notice shall neglect or refuse so to do, they will be immediately proceeded against and punished with the utmost vigour that may be by Law for such their neglect or refusal.

By order of Court,

Wm. Ellis,

Clerk of the Peace, for the
County of Sussex.

Horsham, 22d Feb. 1798 (sic.) "²

Gypsies and other vagrants were thus deemed guilty of an offence even before they were accused of any crime. Their mere presence as

1 Letter to the Northampton Mercury, quoted in J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies (York, 1816), pp.244-5.

2 Printed notice, held at the East Sussex Record Office.

travellers and vagrants was sufficient cause for prosecution. The Northumberland magistrates issued similar notices and orders, demanding that active steps be taken to rid the county of "rogues, vagrants and other idle and disorderly persons".³ To achieve this rewards were given to constables for the apprehension of such persons, and penalties were threatened if it could be proved that they had been negligent in this duty. Such action was thought to be

"... the most effectual step towards driving these detestable characters from society, who by their lying stories and distressed appearances, too successfully work upon the feelings of the charitable and humane, and too frequently devour the portion of the fatherless and the widow, and those who are really afflicted".⁴

Concern over the question of vagrancy was heightened during the years following the end of the Napoleonic Wars, when demobilised sections of the militia added greatly to the vagrant numbers. It was considered essential to come down harshly on all travellers, in order to curb what were regarded as their mendicant, poaching and other offensive and parasitical habits. In 1817 the Norfolk magistrates made the position very clear when they passed the following resolution:

3 Sheffield Mercury, 9 September 1815, p.4.

4 Ibid.

"That the clerk of the peace do give public notice in the newspapers circulated within the county of Norfolk, that all persons pretending to be Gipsies, or wandering in the habit or form of Egyptians, are by law deemed to be rogues and vagabonds, and are punishable by imprisonment or whipping. And the chief Constables in their respective hundreds, and the petty Constables in their respective parishes, are required to put the law in execution, by apprehending such gipsies, or pretended gipsies, and to carry them before some of his Majesty's justices of the peace acting in and for the said county, in order that they may be dealt with according to law".⁵

Throughout the whole of the period under review the felt, or perceived, increase in vagrant numbers led to such demands being frequently repeated by magistrates and Chief Constables alike. Reports of Chief Constables from around the mid-nineteenth century provide ample testimony to the desire to suppress the growing problem of vagrancy.⁶ Although there is a problem in characterising the response of magistrates as a body, it nevertheless seems to have been the case that judging from past and present experience of their statements and actions in relation to the travelling population, the Chief Constables were able to rely on their assistance in securing the prosecution or removal of the vagrant elements.⁷ Hoyland noted that in some places they were sent to prison under the Vagrancy Act without even being charged for committing depredations on property.⁸ Similarly, Crabb related stories about gypsies who were arrested and

5 Quoted in New Monthly Magazine, Vol.8 (1817), p.462; see also Bedfordshire Times and Independent, 30 August 1907, p.9.

6 See Reports of Chief Constables (P.R.O., HO45/9340/22208); also C. J. Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy (1887), pp.308-9.

7 See Chelmsford Chronicle, 20 October 1882, p.7; Letter from the Clerk of the Peace for Norfolk to the Under Secretary of State, 14 July 1911 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/17).

8 J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.230.

taken before the magistrates on suspicion of having committed thefts, but when they had proved their innocence, against all odds, they were then proceeded against for having allowed their animals to stray, for living under a hedge, or some other pretext.⁹ It was also stated that gypsy fortune-tellers were flogged and openly discriminated against in the law courts.¹⁰

Perhaps the most famous case of all, though, which resulted in questions being asked in the House of Commons, was that of the seven gypsies committed to 21 days' hard labour by the Rev. Uriah Tonkin, at Hale, Cornwall, in 1864. Tonkin justified this penalty in a letter to the Home Secretary, Sir George Grey, which was reprinted in the Cornish Telegraph.¹¹ Prior to their appearance before Tonkin, one of the party had been apprehended at Redruth, on the charge of vagrancy, but was discharged after promising to leave the neighbourhood. Yet the next day she was only three miles away, and two of the party were now cautioned by the police for sleeping under a wagon that did not belong to them. They travelled about begging and telling fortunes, and eventually camped on the Trelissick Estate, where they were said to have done "a great deal of injury" by breaking down trees and lighting fires. It was at this point that they were apprehended and brought before Tonkin. From the moment of

9 See J. Crabb, The Gipsies' Advocate (1832), pp.58-62. It will be remembered that the discriminatory treatment meted out to gypsy horse-stealers by the Winchester justices of the peace caused Crabb to become involved with this group (see pages 221, 279).

10 Ibid., pp.64-5.

11 Cornish Telegraph, 18 May 1864, p.2.

their arrival in the district they had been closely supervised by the police, under direction of the Superintendent of the Police, as many thefts had been committed in the area and, as usual, the gypsies were the chief suspects. Tonkin then examined the party "individually and collectively", and finding that they had no visible means of support and that they were unable to give a satisfactory account of themselves, as required by the Vagrancy Act, he considered it his duty to commit them to a lengthy period of hard labour "... for the safety of the county".¹² When this latter phrase was read out in the House members expressed their approval and cried out "Hear! Hear!".¹³ It is worth adding at this point that the party consisted not of a group of marauding adults but of a man and his wife and their five children, aged from 20 to 8 years.¹⁴

Reaction to the sentence in the local press was one of surprise and indignation. It was stated that the law as interpreted by Tonkin made it illegal to sleep beside a hay-stack or in a tent, and there was fear that it set a dangerous precedent:

12 Cornish Telegraph, 18 May 1864, p.2.

13 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Vol.175 (May 1864), cols. 193, 461-2; The Times, 14 May 1864, p.8.

14 Elsewhere it was reported that the party consisted only of the mother and her six children. See G. L. Boase and W. P. Courtney (eds.), Bibliotheca Cornubiensis, Vol.2 (1878), p.729; H. Woodcock, The Gypsies (1865), p.14; 'Notes and Queries', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (hereafter, J.G.L.S.), New Ser., Vol.4, No.4 (1911), pp.318-9; Cornish Telegraph, 4 May 1864, p.3; 11 May 1864, p.2; 18 May 1864, p.2; The Times, 10 May 1864, p.8; 14 May 1864, p.8.

"... soon it will be thatch, and so we shall soon have the police down upon all rascals below the grade of the twenty-pound householder".¹⁵

Tonkin's law was said to "smite the poor" and the newspaper quoted similar opinions expressed in the Examiner and the Observer, which showed amazement at the severity of the sentence and which saw no wrong in sleeping under canvas. Mr. George Hunt, M.P. for Northants North, raised the matter in the House, and requested that the Home Secretary make inquiry into the circumstances of committal and conviction, with a view to securing a remittal of the sentence.¹⁶ However, Tonkin's reply must have satisfied the Home Secretary, and the sentence stood.

In terms of the actual and specific response of the local policing agencies to the problem caused by travellers and vagrants, the rural constables needed little encouragement from their supervisors to carry out effectively their duties of watching, moving and apprehending this section of the population. Although the rural constables were, in the early part of the century, "... untrained, indifferent, unpaid, unwilling",¹⁷ there were perhaps two chief factors that would have acted as an incentive for them to carry out an effective persecution of the nomadic population. Firstly, at least before the reorganisation of the

15 Cornish Telegraph, 11 May 1864, p.2.

16 Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, Vol.175 (9 May 1864), col.193.

17 Report of the Commission appointed to inquire as to the best means of establishing an efficient Constabulary Force in England and Wales (1839), p.198 (hereafter, Rpt. of Comm. on Constab. Force).

Constabulary Force, the rural constable was partly motivated by a desire for the bonus or reward that was often paid for the apprehension and successful prosecution of vagrants, perhaps amounting to ten shillings.¹⁸ The second factor stemmed from the place of the constable in the local community. The constables, or their deputies, were appointed locally, and had to carry out their policing duties often simultaneously with their own full-time employment. It was thus likely that a certain amount of local crime was committed by persons known personally by them, perhaps as friends or as customers. In the local context, then, self-interest and personal responsibility conflicted with their public duty as enforcers of the law. In such a situation it was not surprising that the 1839 Commission on the Constabulary Force was forced to report that the constables often did not want to get involved with the acts of apprehension and policing generally.

From time to time travellers wandered into this inefficient and contradictory arrangement. Not being of the community there was no protective bond of reciprocity of friendship, custom and goodwill. In all senses they provided a convenient scapegoat, to be accused of many local crimes. It suited the magistrates, who wanted a conviction, and the local population, who sought to divert blame and attention, to seek the offender in the gypsy camps, irrespective of the true location of guilt. Local feelings and connections were absent, and the inhabitants of the camp had no protection from persecution and prosecution. At times the watchful

18 See First Report of the Society for the Suppression of Mendicity (London, 1819).

and supervisory gaze of the local constable was used as nothing more than a warning and threat, but more usually it was translated into an active and persistent persecution, with the gypsies being hunted like "... beasts of prey ... from township to township".¹⁹ Crabb was eager to point to the numerous examples of such harassment on the part of the police, who, when challenged about this, replied simply that they were obliged to do their "duty".²⁰ The gypsies were frequently moved on, under threat of prosecution for contravening the various Vagrancy Acts and the Highways Act, by which they could be summonsed as rogues and vagabonds for simply encamping on the highway or living without any visible means of subsistence. It was said that this constant harassment was especially applicable in relation to the gypsies dwelling in the south of England, with the result that they migrated northwards in great numbers, though no evidence is available to substantiate either of these claims.²¹

Perhaps the most blatant example of persecution and harassment did take place in the southern area, at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries, when the gypsy encampment at Norwood, near London, was raided by the police,

19 J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.230.

20 J. Crabb, op.cit., pp.58-62. However, Crabb also provided a few instances, drawn from his experience of policing in the locality, of the police acting humanely. On one occasion a group of constables, having first driven off the gypsies' horses and donkeys and then fined their owners, felt remorse for their victims and returned the fines levied. One of the constables, a carpenter by trade, even offered a coffin for an unburied child among the party if the parish refused to bury it (ibid., pp.61-2).

21 J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.180; 'Gipsies', The Literary and Scientific Repository, Vol.3 (1821), pp.401-11.

resulting in the eventual committal to prison of the entire group. The first raid occurred in 1797, when ten police officers broke up the camp by tearing down all the tents and taking to prison thirty men, women and children, who were proceeded against under the vague and all-encompassing clauses of the Vagrancy Act.²² Yet their removal from Norwood was only temporary. In 1802 three Norwood gypsies were arrested on suspicion of the murder of the Dulwich hermit, and in October 1803 several gypsies from the area were in attendance at the Surrey Quarter Sessions to answer the charge brought against them by the Society for the Suppression of Vice for "bringing idle persons about them at Norwood, to have their fortunes told on a Sunday".²³ Although the charge of fortune-telling was proved, the gypsies expressed contrition for their past and, on the promise of not repeating the offence, were freed.

The common was enclosed in 1808, but even this did not succeed

- 22 F. H. Groome, In Gipsy Tents (Edinburgh, 1880; Wakefield, 1973), p.116; J. Lucas, The Yetholm History of the Gypsies (Kelso, 1882), p.135; E. O. Winstedt, 'The Norwood Gypsies and their Vocabulary', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.9, Nos. 3-4 (1916), p.139.
- 23 The three gypsies arrested on suspicion of murder were later acquitted. The murder was later confessed to by Isaac Evans, on his deathbed at Lewisham Workhouse, February 1809. See R. S. Kirby, The Wonderful and Scientific Museum, Vol.1 (1803), pp.53-67; Gentleman's Magazine, Vol.73, Part 1 (1803), pp.84, 280; E. O. Winstedt, 'The Norwood Gypsies ..', loc.cit.; Leicester Journal, 1 April 1803, p.2; London Chronicle, 28-30 December 1802, p.629; 4-6 January 1803, p.18; 13-15 October 1803, p.367; The Times, 6 January 1803, p.3; 20 January 1803, p.3; 25 January 1803, p.3.

in removing the gypsies from the neighbourhood, and they were to be found in the woods of Dulwich College in that year, and in 1809 encampments were again to be seen at Norwood.²⁴ Six years later a further effort was made to remove them from the area:

"On Sunday the police officers attacked the Gipsy encampment at Norwood, from which they made a precipitate retreat; they, however, captured three coach loads, together with their queen and princes Thomas and John! The officers were attacked by a rallying party of about 40, in an attempt at rescue, in which they failed. They were committed as vagrants".²⁵

But even this, combined with the progressive encroachments on their sites brought about by enclosures, did not entirely rid Norwood of the gypsies. Around 1830 building began in the area in an attempt to turn Norwood into a health resort, necessitating the removal of the gypsies from their long-established haunts.²⁶ After this, they were to be found in the woods about Penge and Anerley, and also encamped in a field in Lordship Lane, in Dulwich, which had been purchased by a gypsy capitalist.²⁷

24 M. Howitt (ed.), Mary Howitt, an Autobiography (1891), p.50; N. N. Solly, Memoirs of the Life of David Cox (1873), p.21.

25 Niles' Weekly Register, Vol.9 (16 September 1815), p.41; see also J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.180; H. T. Crofton, 'Gypsy Life in Lancashire and Cheshire', Manchester Literary Club, Papers, Vol.3 (Manchester, 1877), pp.36-7.

26 See A. M. Galer, Norwood and Dulwich: past and present (1890), pp.9-12, 38, 61, 117; E. O. Winstedt, 'The Norwood Gypsies ...', loc.cit., p.152.

27 See The Builder, 11 November 1876, p.1094; The Guardian, 15 November 1876, p.1490; The Times, 30 December 1878, p.4; 'Gossip about the Gipsies', Leisure Hour, Vol.10 (1861), p.464.

The reform of the Constabulary Force, recommended by the 1839 Commission, affected different areas at different times, yet the overall effect was the gradual replacement of a highly parochial and amateur arrangement by one systematically rationalised and organised on a professional basis. Such a development was not made compulsory, though, until 1856, when the County Constabulary Act was passed. Methods of surveillance, harassment and persecution likewise became increasingly efficient, and there are many references to the constant pressures exerted by the police on the travellers, driving them from the rural roads into the towns.²⁸ On occasions, camps were raided and the people persecuted simply because of the suspicion that they might have stolen something.²⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century the travellers could be prosecuted, or threatened with prosecution, for sleeping-out, overcrowding, possessing no dustbin, or neglecting to provide a proper water-supply for their habitations.³⁰ Any travellers who set up camp in the district of the Metropolitan Police were

28 See R. Smith, Gipsy Smith, his Life and Work (1902), pp.61-2; D. Townsend, The Gipsies of Northamptonshire: their manner of life ... fifty years ago (Kettering, 1877), p.30; H. Woodcock, op.cit., p.39; W.B., 'Gipsies and their friends', Temple Bar Magazine, Vol.47 (May 1876), pp.70-1; R. E. Chatfield, 'The English Gipsies', Theosophical Review (April 1899), p.106.

29 F. S. Atkinson, 'Gypsies in East Anglia!', The Kendalian, Vol.11 (1911), p.10; The Times, 30 November 1841, p.3; signed manuscript by H. T. Crofton, 1873, verso engraving of a gypsy encampment (Scott Macfie Collection).

30 R. A. Scott Macfie, 'The Gypsies: an outline sketch', Romanitshels', Didakais' and Folk-Lore Gazette (hereafter, Folk-Lore Gazette), Vol.1, No.2 (1912), p.45.

immediately cautioned, and this invariably had the desired effect of removing the gypsies from the area. If the caution proved slow to evoke a response then a further incentive to move on was administered to the travellers by seizing, or threatening to seize, their horses. The expense entailed in recovering their animals acted as a great deterrent to the gypsies remaining in the district.³¹

In Worcestershire, Hertfordshire, Middlesex, and other parts of the Home Counties, similar steps were taken, though the "hunting" of the gypsies did not always remain bound by the confines of the law, and in at least one instance the travellers were prevented from entering a district by the police drawing themselves across the road in a line, thus presenting an impassable human barrier.³² In the East Sussex division persecution was less overt but scarcely less threatening, with a close surveillance being maintained over the travellers. Diaries were kept by various police stations recording the site and location of the camp, whether it was situated on waste land or private property, the names and numbers of the persons on the site, their date of arrival and proposed date of departure, and any complaints issued against them.³³

31 Correspondence between E. Henry, Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, and the Under Secretary of State, 1909 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/5).

32 Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. A. Haynes (1909), pp.29-30, para.581; of Mr. Pedder (1909), p.53, para. 1078 (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw.).

33 Diaries were kept by the following police stations: Fernhurst (1898-1903); Burgess Hill (1912-13); Glynde (1898-1913); Upper Beeding (1898-1914); Burwash Common /Weald (1898-1925); Burwash (1898-1926). I am grateful to the Archives and Public Relations Department, East Sussex Constabulary, for this information.

The cooperation of all members of settled society, acting in unison against the vagrant travellers, was a major factor contributing to the general system of policing and surveillance. This may have extended to the positive participation of 'lay' members in the duties of policing or simply acting as the complainants who made the newspapers, council officers and the police aware of the travellers' presence and demanded that some remedial action be taken. The nuisances said to be caused by the travellers were extensive, ranging from camping opposite dwelling houses to contaminating water, stealing, lighting fires and using abusive language.³⁴

From at least the eighteenth century onwards, rural policing was supplemented by groups of local inhabitants banding together to carry out specific policing functions. This is evidenced by the proliferation of locally organised associations for the prosecutions of felons, brought into existence as a response to the inadequacy of the formal system.³⁵ Mr. William Allen, who

34 See 'Gipsies and Dwellers in Tents, Vans, &c.': synopsis of replies received from District Councils and Superintendents of Police in East Suffolk, February 1899 (Surrey Record Office, hereafter, Su. R.O., CC28/158).

35 See A. Shubert, 'Lest the Law Slumber in Action: Associations for the Prosecution of Felons in England, 1744-1978', unpublished M.A. Dissertation, University of Warwick (1978). It is interesting to note here that in the late sixteenth century in Scotland, under various statutes passed in the reign of James VI, coal and salt masters were empowered to apprehend all vagrants and put them to labour in the mines, with the result that Simson was able to claim that some of the colliers of the Lothians were of gypsy extraction (W. Simson, A History of the Gipsies, 1865, p.111).

was in the legal profession at Higham Ferrers, Northamptonshire, commented that associations such as these made the situation of the gypsies increasingly deplorable, for by persecuting them it pushed them further from the civilising habits of settled society.³⁶ In relation to this study, one of the most interesting of these associations was that formed at Southampton in January 1818 to prevent depredations by gypsies and vagrants. It was felt by a meeting of "gentlemen inhabitants" of Southampton that the depredations committed by gypsies and other vagabonds had increased to such a degree that it was necessary to enforce with greater strictness the existing laws for the apprehension and prosecution of such offenders.³⁷ Specially appointed constables were the means by which this was to be achieved, and any found "remiss and negligent" in this duty was to be punished severely. The ten parishes and towns in the Association also swore to inflict the severest penalties on all offenders and vagrants who were caught. Likewise, in 1907 the 130 years old Beare Green Society for the Prosecution of Thieves endorsed a suggestion that they turn their attentions to the increasingly serious gypsy question.³⁸

Elsewhere, local residents decided to take direct action themselves to remove the problem. In 1799, near Bath, a violent affray took place between the gypsies and a farmer assisted by his neighbours, resulting in the successful eviction of the gypsies.³⁹

36 Quoted in J. Hoyland, op.cit., p.iv.

37 Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle, 26 January 1818, p.3

38 Surrey Times, 1 June 1907, p.3.

39 W. G. W. Watson, 'Pestiferous Carbuncles in Somerset', J.G.L.S., 3rd Ser., Vol.12, No.2 (1933), pp.82-3.

It was even thought by some that such violent assaults were entirely acceptable and would have the approval of the law agencies. For example, in 1874 a vigilante group visited a gypsy camp at Sale, near Manchester, pulled down the tents and attacked the gypsies, inflicting serious injuries on them. That the attackers thought they had the tacit approval of the authorities was shown when one expressed great surprise for his subsequent apprehension and conviction at the Altrincham Petty Sessions for what was described as "a most gross assault".⁴⁰ Thus, even though the gypsies may have offended notions of order, it would seem that at least some magistrates did not give their backing to unprovoked assaults.

Such forcible methods of securing the gypsies' removal were, however, common. In 1895 a gang of freeholders of Long Horsley Moor, Northumberland, forcibly expelled the gypsies camped there, and in this instance their actions were given legal sanction by the subsequent judicial decision which banned the gypsies from ever again using the moor as a camping ground.⁴¹ Similarly, an army of farmers resorted to violence to remove the gypsies camped at Effingham in 1908.⁴² It was more usual, though, for the police to be in attendance, ready and willing to give assistance in preventing a disturbance. The police were not legally able to move the gypsies and their tents and vans from the camp site, yet if this was done for them and the gypsies and

40 Preston Herald, 31 October 1874, p.6.

41 Rev. J. H. Barker, 'The Gipsy-Life of Northumberland', in W. Andrews (ed.), Bygone Northumberland (1899), p.239.

42 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. R. Bray (1909), p.63, para. 1229.

their belongings were deposited on the highway, then the police could proceed against the gypsies for causing an obstruction and other minor misdemeanours. The gypsies who camped in various parts of North Hampshire in the early 1890s were forced away by such combined action of landowners and police. The gypsies were unable to move as they had no horses, so each landowner provided two or three horses, forcibly removed the gypsies and their possessions onto the highway, and left it to the constables to ensure that the highway was not obstructed by demanding that the gypsies moved on.⁴³ Such an effective combination of local residents and police also occurred at Ipswich in the opening decade of the twentieth century, when a committee of the Freehold Land Society decided to take their own measures to remove the gypsies from a plot of land in Henniker Road:

"... 10 or 11 committee men - all stout men - armed themselves with umbrellas, and proceeded to the meadow in question, there surprising 9 horses quietly cropping the valuable grass. The men spread themselves out in a half-circle ... and advanced on the horses with flapping umbrellas. Eventually 7 were driven onto the road, and impounded by 3 constables".⁴⁴

The result was that four gypsies appeared at the Ipswich Police Court, and were fined a total of £3. 18s. for doing wilful damage to growing grass. Although the initiative for persecution had been taken by others the police and magistrates were only too willing to assist in its effective implementation.

43 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Lord Clifford of Chudleigh (1909), pp.76-7, paras. 1553-5.

44 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1909', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.2 (1911), p.125.

A Question of Responsibility

The comprehensiveness of the policing of travellers by the various members and agencies of settled society thus appears impressive. But although in general terms the response was one of antipathy and persecution this has to be qualified, firstly, by the realisation that the interpretation and application of the law varied from region to region and chief constable to chief constable, and that, secondly, this lack of uniformity could in fact result in serious disputes among different sections of settled society as to where lay the responsibility for dealing with the problem of the travellers. On at least one occasion this led to a serious questioning of the legality of the various police actions when, in 1909, the Chief Constable of Surrey, Captain Sant, refused to sanction tactics he considered to be ultra vires. At the core of this dispute was the position and role of the lords of the manors and, by way of an introduction to the disagreements at Surrey, it is instructive to consider an earlier expression of the issues, at Wimbledon, around mid-century.

During the late 1850s and early 1860s the 5th Earl Spencer, Lord of the Manors of Putney and Wimbledon, was receiving many letters and petitions from local residents, complaining of the gypsy and vagrant nuisance on Wimbledon Common.⁴⁵ The Putney

45 Select Committee appointed to inquire into the best means of preserving for the public use the forests, commons, and open spaces in and around the Metropolis, Minutes of Evidence of Earl Spencer (1865), pp. 18-19, paras. 397-407, (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Open Spaces).

ratepayers even held a meeting on the subject in 1860, drawing up a memorial which highlighted the need to curb the 'problem'.⁴⁶ In 1861 Earl Spencer replied thus to one such complainant, a letter that shows many signs of anger, frustration and impotence:

"Sir,

I regret that the Gypsies on Putney and Wimbledon Manors should again be troublesome.

I assure you it is not the first time that this question has been brought before me.

It has given me great trouble and annoyance because whatever I do my powers are so limited that I cannot take effectual means to get rid of the nuisance.

The defect in my powers lies in the difficulty of conviction, and the facility that exists for the gypsies to escape wherefore the summons can be executed ...

The position is an extremely harassing and difficult one for my common keeper ...

I assure you it is my earnest wish to do all I can for the neighbourhood in this respect: & my orders are strict to lessen the nuisance as much as possible.

I am willing to adopt any effectual way of putting down the gypsies.

It is curious that at this very time last year I annoyed a lady friend of Lady Spencer's by refusing to comply with her request, which was just the contrary to yours, that the gypsies might be allowed to remain on the Common in order that their children might go to school".⁴⁷

The problem thus continued unabated, with as many as 130 gypsies camping in a corner on the Common,⁴⁸ until it was decided that the

46 Sel. Cttee. on Open Spaces, Minutes of Evidence, of Earl Spencer (1865), pp. 18-19, paras. 397-407; see also *ibid.*, Appendix 3, p.82.

47 Letter from 5th Earl Spencer to Mr. C. Hutton, 30 December 1861 (Romany Collection).

48 Sel. Cttee. on Open Spaces, Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. W. S. Forster (1865), p.37, para. 910.

only possible effective remedy would be enclosure.⁴⁹

Earl Spencer's proposals to sell Putney Heath, which comprised about one-third of the land, and to turn the rest into an enclosed and fenced park, met with much opposition.⁵⁰ Such a solution served to annoy the commoners even more than his inability to remove the gypsies from the common land. Even though there was a general desire to preserve order and prevent nuisances on the Common, a Committee was formed in opposition to these specific proposals.⁵¹ The issues concerned, about the nature and legality of enclosure, were of such a nature that a Select Committee was called into existence to appraise the arguments. In relation to the specific problem of the gypsies much contradictory evidence was presented. Generally most of the witnesses provided testimony to the presence of a gypsy nuisance, though there then followed great differences in the assessments of the menace posed by the gypsy presence and the steps needed to bring about a solution. These varied from enclosure to policing of the commons by keepers, paid by a small rate contributed willingly by the local residents.⁵²

49 Under the Statute of Merton the Lord of the Manor could enclose common land without either the assent of the commoners or the sanction of Parliament. This statute remained in force until 1893, despite the recommendations of the Select Committee on Open Spaces, urging that it be repealed in 1865.

50 Lord Eversley, Commons, Forests and Footpaths (1894: 1910), pp.20-1.

51 Ibid., p.22.

52 Sel. Cttee. on Open Spaces, Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. W. S. Forster (1865), p.37, para. 509; of Rear Admiral B. J. Sullivan (1865), p.51, para. 1228.

The Select Committee eventually reported that it was both unnecessary and undesirable that any part of the Common should be sold, and that it was not expedient that the Common should be enclosed. The proposals were withdrawn. A clash of interests and responsibility, over the rights of the commoner, and the duty of the Lord to curb a menace taking place on land over which he was the legal owner, thus resulted in inactivity and a continuation of the gypsy 'problem'. Similar clashes took place elsewhere,⁵³ though perhaps the most lengthy and most fully-documented took place in Surrey in the early years of the twentieth century.

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the county of Surrey had developed into a main centre for British gypsies. Pushed out of the city of London by the combined actions of the Metropolitan Police, land agents, sanitary authorities and building developments, the nearby open spaces of Surrey provided a suitable and convenient alternative.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in Surrey, the gypsies had the added attraction of employment prospects at Ascot races and

53 See S. J. Marsh, Ashdown Forest (privately printed, 1935); R. Samuel, 'Village Labour', in R. Samuel (ed.), Village Life and Labour (1975), p.8; H. Wolff, Sussex Industries (Lewes, 1883), pp.151-3; Letter from A. Lee to the South Bucks Standard, 29 May 1908, p.8.

54 Letter from the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to the Clerk of the Surrey County Council, 6 September 1913 (Su. R.O., CC 28/249A). Many of the gypsies found in Surrey were said to have come from Battersea, and were "... mostly Londoners, bred and born ..." (Rev. G. Hall, The Gypsy's Parson, 1915, pp.200-1). Others were said to have come from Sussex, where the authorities had been effective in driving them out (type-script copy of R. Bray's evidence to the Sel. Cttee, on Mov. Dw., 1909, P.R.O. HO45/10999/158231/9).

on the local fruit, vegetable and hop farms.⁵⁵ During the winter of 1896 their numbers were so great that it was estimated that 10,000 gypsies were encamped in the county.⁵⁶ Although this estimate is undoubtedly a wild exaggeration, it does provide an indication of how seriously the problem was perceived. The numbers, as provided by the census enumerators for the county of Surrey, are tabulated below.

TABLE 4

NUMBERS OF DWELLERS IN BARNES, SHEDS, TENTS,
CARAVANS AND THE OPEN AIR IN SURREY,
1891-1911

	<u>Barns and sheds</u>			<u>Tents, caravans, and open air</u>			<u>Barns, sheds, tents, caravans, and open air</u>		
	Fe-		Total	Fe-		Total	Fe-		Total
Male	male	Male		male	Male		male	Total	
1891	304	64	368	465	409	874	769	473	1,242
1901	136	26	162	344	305	649	480	331	811
1911*							994	924	1,518

* Note that the Census for 1911 did not distinguish between the groups.

Sources: Census of England and Wales, Reports, 1891, 1901, 1911.

The numbers actually under the jurisdiction of the Surrey Constabulary, rather than the Metropolitan Police, were necessarily less, amounting to

55 Letter from the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police to the Clerk of the Surrey County Council, 6 September 1913 (Su. R.O., CC 28/249A); Letter from Captain Sant, Chief Constable of Surrey, to the Under Secretary of State, 1 July 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/25).

56 'The Surrey Gypsies', The Spectator, Vol.79 (18 December 1897), pp.894-5.

around 1,200 in 1906 and in 1913.⁵⁷ Although the actual numbers were far less than the estimates, the problem was still regarded as serious and one which still required an effective remedy.

Most of the urban and rural districts of Surrey were inhabited to a greater or lesser degree by the travellers, though they were perhaps the most numerous around Chobham, on Gomshall Marsh between Dorking and Guildford, on Wood Common, Worplesdon, at Netley Heath, Farnham, Hurtwood, Shere and West Horsley, and on the North Downs.⁵⁸ Each time, the gypsies and their camps were described in the most unfavourable terms. The people were said to be beggarly and parasitic, while their camps were an evil blot on the natural beauty of the Surrey landscape:

"An old pair of stays, two battered and draggled (*sic.*) straw hats, three old boots ... plenty of horse dung ... innumerable old rags half trampled into the mud, large sections of clothing in the way of old coats, old skirts, old trousers, and all these mingled with a mass of tin cans, broken bottles, and bits of bones, skin and offal, and so forth and so on: such is the inventory of the Gipsies' resting-place".⁵⁹

57 See Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Capt. M. Sant (1909), p.71, paras. 1406-8; Surrey Times, 8 June 1907, p.4; County Council Census of the Nomad Population, 1911 and 1913 (held at the Guildford Muniment Room; hereafter, G.M.R.).

58 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Colonel the Hon. Charles Hay Drummond (1909), p.65, paras. 1258-62; Lord Farrer speaking in support of the Moveable Dwellings Bill, quoted in Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.187 (1908), cols. 492-3; typescript copy of R. Bray's evidence to the Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., 1909 (P.R.O., H045/10995/158231/9); Census of England and Wales, Administrative Areas, 1911, Vol.1 (1912), table 22, p.636; H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1908', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1910), p.284.

59 J. Strachey, 'The Gipsy Scandal and the Danger to the Commons', National Review, Vol.59 (1912), p.461. See also B. Marsh, 'The Tent-Dwellers', The Argosy, Vol.63 (1897), pp. 679-82. In the winter of 1911 a diary was kept of the gypsies' presence at Newlands Corner, North Downs, and this interesting account is reproduced in Appendix 7.

Such, then, was the situation and conditions that had to be controlled and remedied. There was no shortage of people demanding that action be taken; the problem was over who was to act and in what way. Essentially, the county council responded by seeking to secure effective local and national legislation (to be discussed later), while the lords of the manors, major landowners, and the Chief Constable of Surrey, Captain Sant, carried out a long verbal battle in an attempt to apportion the responsibility and burden for physically moving the travellers on.

In the main, the travellers camped on private land belonging to the lords of the manors and the large landowners of the district, and it was around this that the argument concerning responsibility revolved. The debate was about whether the gypsies' removal should be carried out by the owners of the land on which the 'nuisance' was caused, or whether the 'nuisance' was of a general and public nature, and so should rest with public 'servants', the police and local authorities, and not with private individuals. Naturally, there was no disagreement amongst the protagonists that something had to be done.

The local landowners' campaign centred around the figures of Reginald Bray and Lord Onslow, and their argument is summarised well by Bray himself, in a letter (undated) to the Chairman of the Surrey County Council:

"There is no legal or moral duty on the landowners to remedy the nuisance. It is the duty of the State or the County Authorities".⁶⁰

Together Bray and Onslow sought to justify this claim, advertise it and secure its effective implementation. There was no shortage of letters and petitions received from local inhabitants which they could bring forward as evidence of the public nature of the problem, and the general demand from local residents of all classes for a remedy.⁶¹ One such petition was concerned with the travellers camped in and around Hurtwood:

"We, the undersigned inhabitants of Holmbury St. Mary and district, beg to draw your attention to the large number of tramps and vagrants now frequenting this neighbourhood and living on the Hurtwood Common and adjoining waste lands, in carts or wigwams. The children frequent the high roads and beg or endeavour to obtain alms under the pretense (sic.) of selling something, while the men and women frighten the summer visitors and prevent ladies going about without an escort, and the village children from gathering - (nuts?). The lawlessness practised by these vagrants, with regard to the noneducation of their children and the filthiness and, if not criminality, of their mode of life, set a bad example to our villagers, and their life amongst us has a degrading influence. We have to ask that the law may be put in action against them with a view to their dispersal from the extensive waste lands of the district, and thus any temptation to others to join their evil course of life, removed. In order to effect this it will be necessary to employ a considerable force of Police, as if only one or two warn them off, they remove only a little distance or refuse to move off at all. Some of these vagrants come with vehicles drawn by horses, which are allowed to wander loose about the village and commons, and cause much annoyance by disturbing the residents during the night".⁶²

Bray had had personal experience of many of these complaints, and reported that he had repeatedly sent his agents to drive away the gypsies, but this had proved ineffective for the gypsies simply

61 Such correspondence is to be found in the archive documents 85/29/8 and 173/18/16 at the Guildford Muniment Room.

62 P.R.O., H045/10995/158231/9.

moved back into another area of Hurtwood, which extended over 20,000 acres.⁶³ Correspondence received from other landowners testified to a similar impotence.⁶⁴ It was realised that for any measures to be effective, there had to be a concerted and unified effort on the part of all those concerned with the problem, landowners, local authorities, police and local residents alike.

Bray set about organising the landowners of the district by circulating to them letters and reports about the nuisance caused by travellers. The outcome of this was that on 19 February 1909, a meeting was held at the home of Lord Onslow, when it was decided to form an association of the lords of the manors and the owners and occupiers of lands, shootings and houses in the county, for preventing travellers encamping within the districts inhabited by the members. A further meeting, on 28 April, decided to appoint patrols to turn vagrants off the land of members of what was then called the Surrey Anti-Vagrants Association.⁶⁵ At the outset the Association covered only the districts of Guildford and Dorking, though it was hoped that in time it would extend throughout the county.⁶⁶ Concern was expressed in some quarters about this "Surrey tyranny ... this manorial

63 Letter from Bray to the Secretary of State, 30 March 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/9); Letter from Bray to the Clerk of the Peace, County of Surrey, 27 September 1911 (G.M.R., 85/29/8).

64 See footnote 61. An illustration showing direct confrontation between Lord Onslow and the gypsies is reproduced in Appendix 9, illustration 20.

65 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1909', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.5, No.2 (1911), pp.117-8.

66 G.M.R., 85/29/8; Graphic, Vol.79 (1909), p.529; Surrey Times, 20 February 1909, p.4.

persecution",⁶⁷ yet the Association defended itself by claiming it was not persecuting or harassing the gypsies who lived decent lives and earned their livelihood honestly, but only the dishonest and undesirable vagrants and travellers.⁶⁸ Although the local press initially gave support to the Association, the members delayed taking advantage of public backing, by acting against the travellers, until the Lords' Committee on the Moveable Dwellings Bill had reported. If possible, the Surrey lords would have preferred action to be taken by any but themselves. After June the Association had faded away and nothing more was heard of it.⁶⁹

Part of the reason for its demise has to be found in the general feeling among the landowners that they would prefer to delegate their powers to any authority willing to act in moving the gypsies, stressing that the problem was one demanding a solution from public not private authorities:

"... I have made up my mind that I will not again interfere to protect the property of the ratepayers, or to save them from annoyance. I am convinced that this is a duty which ought not to fall upon individual landowners but upon public authorities ...".⁷⁰

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- 67 Editorial, Liverpool Courier, 5 February 1909, p.6.
- 68 Letter from Bray, undated; Printed notice re the Surrey Anti-Vagrants and Prevention of Heath Fires Association. (Both items to be found at Guildford Muniment Room, 85/29/8).
- 69 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Sir R. Bray (1909), p.64, paras. 1248-51.
- 70 Draft question by Earl Onslow to the Home Secretary, undated (G.M.R., 173/19/91); see also letter from Bray to the Secretary of State, 30 March 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/9).

Increasingly, then, the landowners' campaign became directed towards pressurising the local authorities to secure effective legislation and the local constabulary to act positively in removing the travellers from the district. While the pressure on the local county council was intended to secure a permanent remedy, the debate over the allocation of responsibility to take immediate action against the travellers was clearly the most pressing concern of the landowners.

Their demand that the local police force were morally, if not legally, obliged to move the travellers on rested on the claim that a public nuisance should be treated by a quick and effective response by public authorities. Such action was necessary to prevent local villagers from taking the lead from other places to arm themselves and aggressively confront the travellers. Furthermore, it was argued, the police in other counties were only too willing to accept responsibility, and it was only in Surrey that the Chief Constable refused to act.⁷¹ It was even suggested that the gypsy nuisance in Surrey was exacerbated by the unwillingness of the Chief Constable to take any effective action, with the gypsies being attracted to a county lacking constant harassment by police officers.⁷²

However, the claim that Captain Sant was unprepared to take action was not entirely the case. He was prepared to take any

71 See, for example, letter from J. H. S. Walker, of the Worcester County Constabulary, 27 June 1910 (G.M.R., 173/19/92).

72 Letter from Bray to the Clerk of the Peace, County of Surrey, 27 September 1911 (G.M.R., 85/29/8); letter from Capt. Sant to Earl Onslow, 9 June 1910 (G.M.R., 173/19/82).

necessary steps against the gypsies, but only by process of the law. Not only would the police be acting ultra vires in forcibly removing travellers from private land, but, also, Sant was not prepared to allow the police to act as the agents or common keepers of private individuals, an action that both he and the Home Office agreed would set an unwanted precedent:

"It would not be possible for me to accept on behalf of my men the authority you have sent me for them to become your agents ... the Police, who are servants of the public, cannot become the agents of private individuals ...".⁷³

The police always acted when the gypsies committed offences, and were always present when the gypsies were moved on by the Lords of the Manor or their agents, in order to prevent any breach of the peace, but had they taken any active part in the evictions they were technically guilty of assault.⁷⁴ On one such occasion, Sant, an Inspector, a police sergeant and twelve constables were present for an afternoon when a single agent of the Lord of the Manor, with the help of one young man and a horse, removed about fifty gypsy vans from Chobham Common. The police were forbidden to assist and simply watched over the eviction until the vans were on the highway, when they were able to insist that the gypsies moved them on or risk pro-

73 Letter from Sant to Bray, 23 March 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/9); Letter from the Under Secretary of State to Bray, 10 May 1910 (G.M.R., 85/29/8). The correspondence between Bray, Sant and the Home Office extended to many lengthy and bitter exchanges, to be found at the locations mentioned in this footnote.

74 Letter from Sant to the Home Office, 5 July 1910 (P.R.O., HO49/10995/158231/15).

secution for obstructing the highway.⁷⁵ Sant complained that the presence of so many constables was necessitated by the scarcity of Lord's agents; thereby increasing the risk of a forceful refusal from the gypsies to move. The Chief Constable considered that this wasted his scarce resources by preventing constables from carrying out more necessary duties elsewhere; when constables were challenged over complaints of neglect of duty, the usual excuse was that they were "engaged in shifting gypsies".⁷⁶ Their lordships received no satisfaction from Sant's replies and explanations and so petitioned the Home Office for support. To their dismay the Home Secretary gave full support to Sant and tersely commented that either the landowners should combine to employ one or more common keepers to carry out the duty of removing the gypsies, or that it should be undertaken by the Rural District Council.⁷⁷

The matter did not, though, end entirely to the dissatisfaction of the landowners for they managed to get the approval of the local authorities for the appointment of a special uniformed constable, subject to all the normal police regulations yet to be paid for by subscriptions from the landowners and local residents.⁷⁸ The

75 Report of F. Smallpiece, Steward of Manor, to Lord Onslow, 21 June 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/15). For Sant's account of this episode, see letter from Sant to the Under Secretary of State, 1 July 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/15).

76 Letter from Sant to the Home Secretary, 19 April 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/25).

77 Draft letter from the Secretary of State to Lord Onslow, 27 August 1910 (P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/15).

78 Letter sent from Sant to Bray, 9 April 1913 (G.M.R., 85/29/21).

constable lived in a property provided by the landowners and was to receive his orders solely from those who paid his wages. His duty was to prevent gypsies from encamping if possible, or otherwise to remove them when found encamped.⁷⁹ It was thought that a uniformed member of the county police would do more good than any number of keepers and it was optimistically hoped that "... we may now be within measurable distance of getting rid of the trouble".⁸⁰ Yet, by the end of August, 1913, there were still around 1,200 travellers within the district of the Surrey Constabulary.⁸¹

The picture so far is thus somewhat confusing and contradictory. Although the various members of settled society sought the circumscription of the travellers and their way of life, there was no convincing response that would effectively bring this about. The landowners' actions proved impotent and were, in any case, tempered and qualified by a desire to pass on responsibility for any action. There was a general response from police and magistrates of harassment and persecution, though even this has to be qualified by occasional examples of justice, humanity and an unwillingness to act outside the legal limits. The response of the local population at times climaxed in active attempts to move the travellers on, though it more usually remained at the level of verbal intolerance, with them acting as informal policing agents by complaining of the gypsies' presence to the various police authorities. By the latter

79 Instructions for the Special Constable, 1913 (G.M.R., 85/29/21).

80 Letter from W. Joynson-Hicks to Bray, 15 May 1913 (G.M.R., 85/29/21); see also letter from Mr. Lovelace to Bray, 21 March 1913 (G.M.R., 85/29/21).

81 County Council Census of the Nomad Population, 31 August 1913 (G.M.R., 85/29/21).

decades of the nineteenth century a new agency entered into the debate when powers were given to local authorities to enforce their own bye-laws and successfully implement national legislation at the local level. Official harassment of tent- and van-dwellers then took on a new aspect.

Travellers and Local Authorities

Popular antipathy to the gypsies was such that there was never a shortage of people willing to bring the question of their presence in a particular district to the attention of the local council. Local residents protested at having dirty gypsies and their equally filthy encampments as neighbours, expressing fear for their property, children and health, complaining that they were continually pestered for water and other items, and that the travellers' presence devalued nearby properties. In most places where the gypsies encamped, therefore, the problems, real and imagined, posed by their presence would have been debated in the council chambers. On occasions it was decided that the gypsies should be allowed to stay in the area on condition that they pay the same levies as the ordinary householder, and there are instances of local councils attempting to extract from the gypsies payment of rates and rent for the hire of fields.⁸² At other times nothing was achieved beyond a general condemnation of the people and their way of life, with vague suggestions that, nationally, legislation should be introduced to curb the menace, and that locally the gypsies should be given a push to move on. The latter was to be achieved informally by making

82 F. H. Groome, op.cit., p.265; 'Affairs of Egypt', Folk-Lore Gazette, Vol.1, No.3 (1912), p.87.

life uncomfortable for the travellers and making them aware that their presence was not welcomed. Local residents were persuaded not to supply them with water, they were threatened with rates payments and refused permission to bury their dead in daylight.⁸³ On the whole, the problem was considered by these councils to be only temporary, and rather than go through the lengthy and expensive process of removing the gypsies, it was deemed more expedient to let the matter run its course.

When the gypsies had voluntarily removed themselves from the district, though, it was then possible that the council would take steps to prevent a recurrence of the problem, by passing bye-laws which restricted the use of common land and prohibited the drawing of vans on it. In 1912 such a scheme was submitted to the Board of Agriculture respecting Northleigh Common,⁸⁴ and in 1916 the Wincanton District Council expressed its anxiety to spend money on draining, levelling and improving Leigh Common, and to supplement this by making bye-laws "for the preservation of order".⁸⁵ The Gypsy and Folk Lore Club was alarmed at this attack on what they considered to be the fundamental right to encamp on common land, and issued an appeal for funds to oppose the decision:

83 See W. H. Hudson, A Shepherd's Life: impressions of the South Wiltshire Downs (1910), p.266; R. Smith, Gipsy Smith, His Life and Work (1902), p.16; Surrey Mirror, 15 May 1908, p.2.

84 'Affairs of Egypt', Folk Lore Gazette, Vol.1, No.3 (1912), p.87.

85 Folk Lore Gazette, Vol.2, No.2 (1913), p.44.

"There is a growing tendency (sic.) for local bodies to 'preserve order' at the expense of the ratepayer, and to the detriment of the picturesque travellers on our country roads; and it is earnestly hoped that all ratepayers who object to such a waste of money on 'draining, levelling and improving', and all who revere the old-time traditions of the Gypsies - the coalporteurs (sic.) of the Folk Tales of the world, will help to keep Leigh Common and all other open spaces free from such expensive, quite unnecessary and perfectly useless interference".⁸⁶

Judging from the number of subscribers to the fund, the council had a great deal more support for their interference than the Folk Lore Club did for their reverence.

Perhaps more common, though, than these responses of acceptance or qualified tolerance of the gypsy presence was that which evidenced intolerance, antipathy and opposition. This was especially the case in places where the gypsies were regular and relatively long-term visitors. In such instances the council most commonly relied on a mixture of informal harassment of the type described above, and of resort to the legal process in order to carry out a formal policy of regulation and persecution. This was achieved either by issuing injunctions to prevent them from setting up camp, or by the police and local authority officials enforcing a rigorous and comprehensive set of national and local legislation. In this their decisions and actions provided an effective complement to those of the police, magistrates, landowners and local residents.

If it could be shown that the travellers' camps would be dangerous to the health of the neighbourhood, then, under the

86 Folk Lore Gazette, Vol.2, No.2 (1913), p.44.

precedent set by the case of the Attorney-General versus Stone, in 1895, the local authorities had the power to obtain injunctions to prevent landowners from letting land to the gypsies. The Attorney-General, at the request of the Heston and Isleworth Urban District Council, applied for an injunction to prevent James Stone from allowing gypsies, and "other like people", from remaining on his land in Heston, or from using his land so as to be a threat to the health of the house-dwellers in the district. In addition, an injunction was applied for which was intended to compel Stone to "purify" the surface of the same land.⁸⁷ From January 1894 Stone had allowed the gypsies to camp on his land on payment of a weekly rent for each van or tent. The only facilities that he provided for the gypsies were two defective and unusable water-closets. In no time, claimed the plaintiffs, the land was made dirty and untidy and this, added to the noise made by them, was adjudged by the council to be injurious to the health and peace of the neighbourhood. The Council received many complaints from the local residents about the encampment, and some local medical practitioners testified that the camp smelt offensively, and their verdict was that

"... there was an accumulation of matter, no means of draining, and no water for flushing purposes ... the land was generally unhealthy, and as a direct result there had been several cases of illness in the district".⁸⁸

87 See *The Attorney-General v. Stone*, 1895, Justice of the Peace, Vol.60 (1896), pp.168-9; also Oldham Chronicle, 30 November 1907, p.8; 11 January 1908, p.9; Departmental Committee on Vagrancy, Appendix 34, 1906 (hereafter, Dptal. Cttee. on Vag.).

88 Quoted in *The Attorney-General v. Stone*, loc.cit., pp. 168-9.

In his defence, Stone claimed that the land was cleaned from time to time, that few complaints had been made about the gypsies, that refuse was washed away once or twice a week and so the land could not be filthy or dangerous to health, and, finally, that the gypsies themselves were an orderly and respectable set of people. He called a great number of witnesses to testify in his support, and was so convinced that his case was the strongest that he even said that if the local sanitary inspector could show any of the gypsies to be of dirty habits then the offender would be immediately turned off the land. However, the plaintiffs persisted and although they dropped the claim that a nuisance was created by noise from the camp, they continued to base their case around the allegation that the encampment was a public nuisance and injurious to the health of the neighbourhood. The decision went conclusively in favour of the plaintiffs. The Judge dismissed the weight of evidence produced by Stone's witnesses as being

"... of a class whose views on subjects concerning cleanliness and sanitation were likely to be of an abnormal character, and opposed to the views of the ordinary citizens, and whose evidence did not impress me favourably, and some of the defendant's witnesses ... were such partisans, and so extreme in their evidence as to make it worthless to the Court".⁸⁹

By way of contrast, the plaintiff's witnesses could not be accused of bias and partisanship, and were said to have given their evidence well. Furthermore, they were stated to be witnesses who could be trusted.

The legal decision, therefore, was that the gypsies had made the land insanitary, offensive and dangerous to the health of the neigh-

89 Quoted in *The Attorney-General v. Stone*, loc.cit., pp.168-9.

bourhood. It was not practicable to proceed against the gypsies themselves for they would simply give up their place on the site to others. The state of affairs had been brought about by Stone allowing them to camp on his land, and so responsibility for sanitary and health matters must be his. Summary proceedings before a justice were deemed to be an inadequate remedy, and the district council was said to have been well advised and justified in bringing the matter before the High Court. The legal precedent had thus been set. Now, not only the gypsies were liable to prosecution for contravening health and sanitary regulations, but so too was the owner of the land on which they encamped.

The means for proceeding against the travellers were many and various, as indicated by a breviat of some of the statutes listed in Appendix 6. Perhaps the most important of all these for the local councils was the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1885, which gave local authorities jurisdiction over moveable dwellings deemed overcrowded, nuisances, or injurious to health. More than this, it empowered urban and rural district councils to make their own bye-laws, subject to confirmation by the Local Government Board if outside London, and by the Home Office for London, governing the cleanliness and habitable condition of tents, vans and the like, and for preventing nuisances and the spread of infectious diseases in connection with them. The Local Government Board issued model bye-laws for this purpose, in order to assist their implementation and guarantee some measure of uniformity. By 1887 it was said that only Battersea had had their bye-laws accepted, and only two proposals

had been received, from West Ham and Pontypridd.⁹⁰ The stamp of approval was not awarded indiscriminately, though, and in 1897 both the London County Council and Enfield Council had their applications refused.⁹¹ In fact, it was thought that the Local Government Board and Home Office were too harsh in their refusal to sanction all that was put before them, and Lord Clifford of Chudleigh, speaking in the House of Lords in 1908, said that he did not think many had been approved since Battersea.⁹² This common belief was entirely unfounded. By 1906 bye-laws on the Local Government Board model had been made by 86 urban authorities, 57 rural authorities and 2 Metropolitan borough councils.⁹³ The number had increased to 211 by 1909, and included 43 made by town councils, 90 by urban district councils, 75 by rural district councils, and 3 by Metropolitan borough councils.⁹⁴

In practice these bye-laws enabled local councils, by means of their sanitary authorities, to serve notices on persons thought to be causing a nuisance, and which required them to abate that nuisance in a given time. If this was refused or ignored then the matter was referred to the justices, who could impose penalties if the habitations were considered overcrowded or unfit for humans. Critics of

90 Select Committee on the Temporary Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Sir H. Owen, Secretary to the Local Government Board (1887), p.2, para. 26 (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Temp. Dw.).

91 Local Government Journal (2 January 1897), p.6.

92 Quoted in Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.187 (1908), col. 449.

93 Dptal. Cttee. on Vag., Report, p.109.

94 See Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. H. Monro, on behalf of the Local Government Board (1909), p.1, para. 9.

these provisions argued that the bye-laws were not enforced, or were ineffective as the gypsies simply moved on when threatened with legal action, and in any case had been passed by only 211 of a possible 1,839 authorities. The first criticism will be discussed shortly when considering specific actions on the part of the local authorities. While the bye-laws may have been unsuccessful in achieving prosecutions in the law courts the mere threat of this had in fact been effective in moving the gypsies and this, after all, was the original and prime intention. Finally, bye-laws would have been made only by the authorities who felt a need for them. For example, the bye-laws encompassed most of the areas visited seasonally by gypsy workers in the hop fields and on the fruit and vegetable farms.⁹⁵ Yet even in the cases where bye-laws were thought necessary, few councils would have had the foresight to regulate the problem before it had arrived, and often the gypsies would have moved on just as the wheels had been set in motion to get bye-laws approved. Invariably the matter was then dropped until the time of the next visit from the van- and tent-dwellers. The case of the West Parley Parish Council illustrates well the lengthy process of seeking redress against the gypsy problem by recourse to making new bye-laws.

The matter was first brought to the attention of the council in 1896 when it was decided that the best solution was to ask respectfully the owner of the land on which the gypsies were encamped to

95 Reports of Medical Inspectors to the Local Government Board, No.252: Dr, Reginald Farrar's Report to the L.G.B. on the Lodging and Accommodation of Hop-Pickers and Pickers of Fruit and Vegetables (1907), p.25 (hereafter, Dr. Farrar's Rpt. to L.G.B.).

refuse them this privilege.⁹⁶ It was not until eight years later that the Council was required to take further action, when a Sub-Committee was appointed to enquire into the legal aspects and practices in the County respecting van- and tent-dwellers.⁹⁷ Neighbouring Councils were asked to provide information on how they dealt with the problem, and the matter was just gaining momentum when the gypsies left the area and it was allowed to drop.⁹⁸ The question of enforcing bye-laws reappeared sporadically in the following year, and by April 1905 the District Council passed a motion adopting bye-laws regulating tent- and van-dwellers.⁹⁹ Yet the problem of the gypsies remained an item on the agenda of subsequent meetings, when concern was expressed about the cost of enforcement of the bye-laws, the question being made more acute by the presence of a gypsy encampment on West Moors.¹⁰⁰ A Sub-Committee with executive powers had been set up specifically to keep a close watch over the gypsies, and the sanitary authorities and the Inspector of Cruelty to Children were instructed to keep the site under close observation.¹⁰¹

In 1911-12 the matter was again discussed, and concern was expressed that the model bye-laws were not being more effectively enforced. Local ratepayers were so dismayed at this apparent

96 West Parley Parish Council, Minutes of Meeting, 7 December 1896.

97 Ibid., 18 April 1904.

98 Report of Van and Tent Dwellers Committee, given at ibid., 13 June 1904.

99 Minutes of Meeting, 17 April 1905.

100 Ibid., 11 June 1906.

101 Ibid., 12 November 1906.

inactivity that a deputation was sent to the council to state their point of view:

"... they (the gypsies) were dirty and insanitary; the children ran wild and did not attend school, but went round the village begging, the trees and gorse were taken wholesale from the common and surrounding covers, and altogether they were a nuisance to the neighbourhood".¹⁰²

They demanded that the bye-laws be put in force, thus effectively ridding the area of the gypsies. Again, approval was given to this demand, and another Sub-Committee was appointed to watch over the matter, "with such delegated powers as the Council may in its discretion define".¹⁰³ In May 1912 they reported that they had done "everything in their power to remove the gypsies", and felt that responsibility now rested with the owner and others interested in taking action in the affair.¹⁰⁴ The owner, Lord Salisbury, reacted to this by considering the possibility of making over a small portion of the common to the gypsies, on which they could encamp at will on payment of a small rent.¹⁰⁵ His intention was to try to civilise the gypsies into a more regular and settled mode of living.¹⁰⁶ The Rural District Council responded immediately by informing Lord Salisbury that for years they had been struggling to rid the area of the gypsies. In 1914 the question of their settlement was still in abeyance, and the R.D.C. were still wavering over the best means of enforcing the various bye-law provisions.

102 West Parley Parish Council, Minutes of Meeting, 12 February 1912.

103 Ibid., 27 March 1912.

104 Ibid., 13 May 1912.

105 Ibid., 9 September 1912.

106 Ibid., 13 October 1912.

Here, then, is an example of a Rural District Council violently opposed to the gypsy presence and yet not extending its opposition to effect the prosecution of the gypsies themselves or the land owner, leading to their eventual removal. The matter was repeatedly allowed to drop when the gypsies left the area, so that the process had to be started anew each time the travellers returned. A careful watch was maintained over the encampments, yet, inexplicably, the authorities appeared reluctant to prosecute and take full advantage of their powers.

Elsewhere, the failure to pass and implement effective bye-laws was the result not of the fractured attempts by the local councils but was rather due to the refusal of the Local Government Board and the Home Office to give their approval to the proposals. Likewise, the attempts by various councils to secure Private Bills met with the same obstacles. East Ham Council, in 1903, and Acton Council, in 1904, applied to Parliament in Private Bills for special powers to deal with the gypsies. Both were referred to the police and sanitary committee of the district to which they applied, and both were rejected on the grounds that the local authorities had not used their existing powers and that there was insufficient evidence of the nuisances caused.¹⁰⁷ In 1907 both York and Hull applied for special powers, but again both were refused.¹⁰⁸ Middlesex County Council had attempted to get an extension to their powers for dealing with the tent- and van-dwellers from as early as 1893,

107 Dptal. Cttee. on Vag., Appendix 34, p.167.

108 Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. Pedder (1909), p.51, para. 1056.

but the Home Office had repeatedly rejected the Council's proposals, with the latter, in their turn, rejecting the alternatives suggested by the Home Office.¹⁰⁹ But in 1906 they were successful in getting a Private Bill passed, the first of its kind. Clause 31 of the Middlesex County Council Bill inflicted a penalty on any tent-dweller, squatter, gypsy, or other person who used as a dwelling place any tent, van or similar structure situated within 100 yards of any street or house so as to cause annoyance, injury or disturbance to the residents. Furthermore, it was provided that a similar penalty would be imposed on any landowner who allowed his land to be so occupied.¹¹⁰ The Act is especially interesting in that it was the first time that Parliament had given legislative recognition of the different types of traveller living in tents and vans, by excepting from the provisions of the Act owners of vans attending fairs. Naturally, the Showmen's Guild was delighted:

"For many years we had been trying to evolve a clause that would effectively abate the nuisance and anger to the public health of the squatter and gypsy settlement, and yet be free from harm to the business interests of the travelling showmen".¹¹¹

The success of the Middlesex Council was something of an

109 P.R.O., HO45/10995/158231/36.

110 Middlesex County Council Act, 6 Edw.VII, c.174, 1906. See also Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Report, Appendix 3 (1909), p.88; Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.187 (1908), cols. 447-66. Note that this Act incorporates the finding of the High Court mentioned earlier (see pages 416-8).

111 Quoted in T. Murphy, A History of the Showmen's Guild, 1889-1948 (privately printed, Oldham, 1949), p.64.

exception as there is little doubt that the Home Office and the L.G.B. were reluctant to approve in wholesale fashion any extension of the powers already available to the local authorities. Part of the reason for the success has to be found in the different ways that these bodies treated applications from urban and rural district authorities. Bye-laws were approved only in districts which were urban in character and where the seriousness of the nuisance could be proven. The efforts of rural authorities to prove the latter were clearly made especially difficult by the apparent official attitude that the travellers were accommodated better in a rural than an urban environment. Although the Home Office and L.G.B. did not dispute that the gypsies were insanitary, paid no taxes and were a general nuisance, it was not felt that the solution to the problem was by "exterminating" them by local or general legislation.¹¹² Applications by councils for an extension to the powers already given them under, for example, the Public Health Act and the Housing of the Working Classes Act were considered unnecessary, unreasonable and invalid. It was realistically understood that this would result only in transferring the problem from one locality to another, and it was feared that the problem may then again become urban.¹¹³ The problem could be more effectively dealt with in the rural context by systematic action on the part of the police and local authorities effectively enforcing existing provisions.¹¹⁴

112 Reply from the Home Office, April 1904, quoted in 'Nuisances by Gypsies', a memorandum prepared by the Deputy Clerk of Essex County Council, 1904 (Su. R.O., CC 28/158).

113 Reply from the Secretary of State, July 1893 and March 1902, quoted in ibid.

114 Reply from the Home Office, 16 December 1902, quoted in ibid. See also Local Government Journal (2 January 1897), p.2; (9 January 1897), p.22.

Undoubtedly the most concerted and persistent attempt to secure both local and national legislation to deal with the gypsy 'nuisance' came from the Surrey County Council. It is this attempt that identifies best the various positions of local and national government, the practical problems caused by the presence of travellers at the immediately local level, and the felt need for more precise and uniform provisions to accommodate the problem.

It has been shown previously that the gypsy problem in Surrey was equally serious as anywhere in the country, if, indeed, it was not the most serious. The local council were well aware of this fact from an early date, and between 1894 and 1896 a series of bye-laws were proposed by the council against all tent- and van-dwellers. However, the Home Secretary refused to confirm these, demanding that before approval was given the council must provide clear evidence of the peculiar nature of the problem in Surrey, proving the existence of nuisances other than those of sanitation.¹¹⁵ This task occupied a not insignificant portion of the council's time and attention up to the outbreak of the First World War. Essentially, then, the council had to show that numerically the problem was of a serious nature and also that a general nuisance was being caused.

Reference has already been made to the various census figures concerning the nomadic population of Surrey. Although the Council took the census on a night between the Epsom and Ascot race meetings, the numbers were still not as high as would have suited their purposes. Reassurances were even demanded from the Chief Constable

115 'The Surrey Gipsies', loc.cit., pp.894-5.

of Surrey that the enumeration was accurate, doubt being expressed over the complete absence of travellers from certain parishes.¹¹⁶ Yet even the apparent scarcity of travellers in absolute numbers could be turned to the Council's advantage, as shown by the following table compiled from the census figures for 1911:

TABLE 5

DENSITY OF TRAVELLERS IN COUNTIES WITH A
NOMADIC POPULATION GREATER THAN 750, 1911

Order of Total Nomad Population	County	Area in Acres	No. of Nomad Population			% per Acre	Order of %
			Males	Fe- males	Total		
1	Lancashire	1,194,919	1,175	714	1,889	.16	5
2	Kent	975,966	1,156	645	1,801	.18	4
3	Yorkshire,W.	1,773,529	1,170	625	1,795	.10	9
4	Derbyshire	650,369	1,128	527	1,655	.25	2
5	Surrey	461,829	994	524	1,518	.33	1
6	Hampshire	958,947	801	586	1,387	.14	6
7	Essex	979,532	705	457	1,162	.12	8
8	Yorkshire,N.	1,362,285	784	277	1,061	.08	11
9	Lincolnshire, Lindsey	970,423	771	215	986	.10	10
10	Durham	649,244	633	247	880	.14	7
11	Monmouthshire	349,582	584	200	784	.22	3
<u>Total for England and Wales</u>		<u>37,337,537</u>	<u>19,948</u>	<u>10,694</u>	<u>30,642</u>	<u>.08</u>	

Source: Surrey Record Office, CC 28/249A.

By this the Council attempted to prove that the problem was most severe in Surrey owing to the density of the nomadic population. But even though they could claim to have the highest density nomadic population per acre of counties with a relatively large travelling community (greater than 750), it should not be forgotten that no amount of juggling the

116 Letter from the Deputy Chief Constable of Surrey to the Clerk of the Surrey Council, 4 September 1913 (G.M.R., 85/29/21).

statistics could hide the fact that the figure was nevertheless extremely small.

The second aspect of the campaign, to prove that a general nuisance was caused by the travellers, met with a greater degree of success, with many statements being collected from local residents eager to register their complaints about the gypsies. The impetus for the collection of county-wide evidence was provided by the unanimous feeling registered at a conference held in Kingston-on-Thames, in December 1897, for the local county authorities and other interested persons. The conference resolved, without dissent, that fresh legislation was required to regulate the tent- and van-dwellers both locally and nationally. To back these demands the many local authorities were instructed to collect all information about the nuisances caused by the travellers, which was then to be collated and forwarded to the Secretary of State.¹¹⁷ Many testimonies were assiduously recorded highlighting the gypsies' propensity towards dirt, destruction, thieving, begging, quarrelling and fighting.¹¹⁸ There is no indication whether the Secretary of State was presented with this evidence or whether the matter was allowed by the Council to rest dormant. But whatever the reasons there followed a period of eight years when the Council appeared silent and inactive over the question, and it was not until May 1906, on receipt of further complaints about the gypsy nuisance, that a Sub-Committee met to

117 Surrey County Council: printed notice re conference called to discuss regulation of Gipsies, Tent and Van Dwellers, &c., 14 December 1897 (Su. R.O., CC 28/154A).

118 Su. R.O., CC 28/101. Two such statements are reproduced in Appendix 8.

consider a possible remedy.¹¹⁹

The report of the Sub-Committee again stressed the insanitary and offensive conditions caused by the travelling way of life, and the difficulty of enforcing restrictions on a migratory population. Moreover, it was reported that property was frequently either damaged or stolen, the gypsies' children remained uneducated, and the local residents were generally intimidated by their presence. The need "for dealing definitely with the Nomad classes" was thus emphasised, to be achieved ideally by national legislation which would register and regulate tent- and van-dwellers. If the Government showed unwilling to initiate or facilitate such legislation then the Surrey Council were urged to promote a Private Bill for their own county. A new stage of the campaign had thus begun, with Surrey Council taking the lead in urging all county councils in England and Wales to press for new legislation.¹²⁰

In January 1907 circulars were sent out requesting information on the extent of the problem elsewhere and whether support would be given for general legislation. The Council received thirty-five replies, and of these only five confirmed that the problem caused by the nomadic

119 Typescript extracts from the Reports and Minutes of the County Council in reference to Moveable Dwellings, 1893-1911 (Su. R.O., CC 28/249A).

120 Report of Sub-Committee to the General Purposes Committee of Surrey County Council, 20 December 1906 (Su. R.O., CC 28/154A).

population was a serious one.¹²¹ The majority of counties said that there was no problem in their districts, and that regulation was either not necessary or was already covered by existing legislation, whether local or national. The small glimmer of hope for Surrey council to be obtained from the replies was that more counties demanded legislation than those who stated it was a problem, and the feeling was that it should be general and not confined to a particular county or counties. On the strength of this the matter was taken to the County Council Association, so that a Bill might be prepared.

In many respects the resulting Moveable Dwellings Bill was very like its predecessors. Clauses in the bill provided for registration, the separation of the sexes, "convenience of accommodation", cleanliness, the prevention of the spread of infectious disease, and the education of the children. But there was one very significant departure from the earlier Bills of George Smith. Clause 5 of the new Bill stated,

"Where it appears to the registration authority that the encampment of occupiers of moveable dwellings on any specified place or places within their area would be dangerous to the public health, or constitute a nuisance to the neighbourhood, the registration authority may by bye-law prohibit such encampment on such specified place or places; and any person acting in contravention of any bye-law made under this section shall be guilty of an offence under this Act".¹²²

121 These were: Hampshire, East Suffolk, West Suffolk, Essex, Worcester (Su. R.O., CC 28/158). The Surrey Times reported that thirty-seven replies were received (1 June 1907, p.4).

122 Reprinted in Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.187 (1908), cols. 449-52. See also W. M. Gallichan, 'The State versus the Gypsy', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.356-8.

This clause therefore covered all moveable dwellings which camped on private land or on land leased or hired, and not just with vans and tents situated on common land. The initiative to move on the gypsies, and to prosecute them, could thus now come from the local authority, and not only from the Lord of the Manor or the owner of the land. Mr. John Pedder, chief clerk in the Home Office, expressed his belief, in his evidence to the 1909 Select Committee, that this clause was unnecessarily harsh and worked against the remainder of the Bill, which could be seen to act in the interests of the van-dwellers:

"It does not help the gypsies or van-dwellers; it practically makes outlaws of them if the local authority decides that such and such a place is not to be entered by a van-dweller ... The effect of the clause ... seems to be that if a County Council thinks a van-dweller would be a nuisance (it is only 'would be', which is very vague), then and there a van-dweller is prohibited from 'being'; and although the van-dweller might be able to show that he was quite willing to conform to all the regulations and laws, and to prevent himself from being a nuisance, still, if the edict had once gone forth that that was a place where there would be a nuisance, he could not go there".¹²³

The logical extension of the application of this clause would be to exclude gypsies and van-dwellers from the whole of the county council area, effectively leading to the total suppression of the gypsies and their way of life.¹²⁴

The Bill was presented by Lord Clifford of Chudleigh to the House of Lords for the first time on 18 February 1908 and it passed a second reading but was eventually withdrawn because a major part of it was being dealt with more thoroughly in a Children's Bill then being

¹²³ Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. J. Pedder (1909), pp.48-9, para. 1021.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.53, para. 1074.

debated. It was reintroduced the following year, less the education clauses. Lord Clifford defended the proposals contained in the Bill by arguing that sentimental feelings about a nomadic way of life should not cloud the real issues of sanitary and hygienic rules, and he urged the need to control the gypsies by one set of uniform regulations. Clause 5 proved to be the most debated aspect of the Bill, and Lord Allendale, speaking in favour of the principle of the Bill but not of certain clauses which he considered unworkable, expressed his fear that

"... some of the provisions of the Bill, if passed in their present form, would have the effect of altogether exterminating gypsies and others who would come within the scope of the Bill".¹²⁵

He concluded that the Bill went further than was reasonable or practicable. It was then read a second time and referred to a Select Committee. Although the Committee sat and took evidence, much of it in relation to Clause 5, it did not report.

In 1910, when Lord Clifford presented the Bill yet again, it was moved that it be referred back to the Select Committee to allow it to report. This it did, concluding that a case had been made for further legislation regarding moveable dwellings. It was not prepared, though, to accept the Bill in its existing form, and certain aspects of it were considerably altered. Despite nearly every witness to the Committee speaking in favour of registration, this clause was struck out. It was thought that this matter was already adequately covered by the 1835 Highways Act, and it was argued that it was unreasonable

¹²⁵ Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.1 (1909), para. 1118.

and impractical to apply such a requirement to all moveable dwellings, thus including every tarpaulin stretched over stakes and every holiday-maker who took, temporarily, to the outdoor life. But the Committee did believe there ought to be power to prohibit encampments in places where it was thought they might endanger public health or be a nuisance, and the amended Bill amounted to little more than Clause 5.¹²⁶

This did not mean that the Committee favoured unreservedly such persecution of the gypsies as this would possibly lead to, for they also came out strongly in support of the proposals of Sir Reginald Bray that County Councils should provide camping grounds under conditions set out by the Local Government Board. In this way, the Committee could not be accused of sanctioning the persecution and harassment of the gypsies, while at the same time they favoured provisions that would bring the gypsies under the close supervision of the local authorities. This was incorporated into their amendments by imposing certain limits on the exercise of powers by the county councils. Any such powers had to be approved by the Local Government Board, and before they could be applied the council had to have already provided suitable, alternative camping grounds. The provision of such sites would necessarily limit the places where gypsies could legally camp, and so facilitate the process of supervision by the police, and sanitary and education officers. The argument that the amended Bill was a diluted version of the early proposals fails to recognise the importance of the new powers given

126 See Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Report (1910), pp. v, vi (hereafter, Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw.); Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.7 (1911), cols. 97-110.

to the local authorities and the police. The former could declare as unfit for encampments not only open spaces and common land, but private land also, and Clause 2 of the Bill involved a "... wide and rather questionable extension of the functions of the police ...", by allowing the latter to remove from commons and private lands any person who encamped there without authority.¹²⁷ Captain Sant's objections to acting outside the law by moving on the gypsies on behalf of private interests would thus have been removed. The amended Bill was presented in 1911, 1912 and 1914, but failed to pass both Houses.

On the one hand the Bill can be regarded as representing little more than a call for County Councils to provide camping grounds for the gypsies. But it was more than this, and has to be seen rather as an attempt to establish by law the further regulation and supervision of the gypsy way of life by the local authorities who were called on to deal with the problem on a day-to-day basis. County Council enthusiasm for the Bill waned with the realisation that the increased powers they were seeking to enable them to get rid of the gypsy nuisance would be granted only if they also accepted the responsibility for the supervision of controlled camps. For example, the progress of the Bill had been carefully monitored by the Surrey General Purposes Committee and a steady diminution in their enthusiasm for it is discernible. Not only was regret expressed that the provisions of the Bill had been amended in a way to remove the original intentions but it was also realised that it had little chance of being passed by both Houses. Surrey Council then resumed

¹²⁷ Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Mr. J. Pedder (1909), p.49, para. 1029.

their campaign for local and private legislation,¹²⁸ again unsuccessfully, while other local authorities seem to have accepted the official ruling that the correct and efficient application of existing powers was sufficient. The truth behind this ruling is especially apparent from a study of specific actions of various local authorities against the gypsies.

There are many instances of the two agencies of local authority officers and the police acting together against the travellers or against those who allowed them to camp on their land. The threat of prosecution was often sufficient to secure the successful removal of the gypsies.

The owners of the land on which the gypsies encamped were legally required to provide certain minimum sanitary arrangements, and failure to do so could result in their prosecution. The threat of this may often have been sufficient for the owner to refuse the gypsies permission to stay or to move them on by his own methods if warned by the relevant authorities. At times this was neither practicable nor possible. By way of example, in 1888 Thomas Cuffey was summoned for not abating a nuisance in one of his yards in Handcroft Road, Croydon, which contained seven caravans and two tents. The Sanitary Committee had instigated the proceedings in an attempt to discourage landowners from allowing gypsies to camp in the neighbourhood. The owner's defence was that the gypsies were away for the fruit-picking season and he had no way of contacting them to get them to remove their horses and dwellings.

128 Draft circular letter from Surrey County Council, undated, 1911? (Su. R.O., CC 28/249A).

The case was adjourned until 19 June to allow him to take other steps. He somehow managed to comply with this deadline by clearing the yard of all the vans, and further consented to a future order of prohibition.¹²⁹

The most common method, though, was to proceed against the gypsies, and this was done in many places under a variety of pretexts. In 1879 four gypsies who camped on waste land in Walton Breck Road, Everton, were summoned for failing to supply themselves with water, as required by the Public Health Act.¹³⁰ The Health Committee had been prompted into securing the summons by the landowners, who were attempting to avoid the trouble and cost of removing the gypsies by passing the matter into the hands of the local authority. The magistrate decided strongly in favour of the complainant and gave the gypsies seven days to "clear out" of the district, and told them that if they had not gone of their own free will by the end of that time they would be removed.¹³¹ At Eastwood, in 1909, they were prosecuted for neglecting to dwell in a tent in a reasonably watertight condition, for not having sufficient privy accommodation or a sufficient water supply, not having a covered ash-pit and a dustbin, and for failing to have a suitable dry floor in the tent.¹³² Overcrowding, sleeping-out and the charge that they

129 Croydon Chronicle, 2 June 1888, p.2; 23 June 1888, p.2.

130 'Mr. Raffles and the Gypsies', Porcupine, Vol.21 (1879), p.409.

131 Ibid.

132 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs ... 1909', loc.cit., pp.114-5.

were likely to cause a nuisance were also used against them. Repeatedly the gypsies were moved on by either the sanitary inspectors or the police and successful evictions were secured throughout Berkshire,¹³³ at Limehurst,¹³⁴ Reigate,¹³⁵ Bedminster Down (Bristol),¹³⁶ Hartlebury Common (Stourport),¹³⁷ Neath,¹³⁸ and Nottingham.¹³⁹ Additionally, the matter was discussed in many other places, with authority being delegated to various officials, who presumably took very similar steps.¹⁴⁰

These various methods of treating the gypsy problem were taken one step further, and reached their logical conclusion, when the councils,

133 Dptal. Cttee. on Vag., Minutes of Evidence, of Major A. F. Poulton, Chief Constable of Berkshire, p.166, paras. 4818-22.

134 H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1907', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.2, No.2 (1908), pp. 122, 129; Manchester Courier, 17 May 1907, p.8.

135 Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, Vol.7 (1911), col. 108; Surrey Mirror and County Post, 15 May 1908, p.2.

136 Bristol Health Committee, Minutes of Meetings, 3 November 1908; 4 January 1910; 1 February 1910; 1 March 1910; Bristol Echo, 3 November 1908, p.3.

137 H. T. Crofton, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1908', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.3, No.4 (1910), p.282.

138 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs ... 1909', loc.cit., p.122.

139 Ibid., p.121.

140 For example, in Worcestershire (Sel. Cttee. on Mov. Dw., Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. G. Haynes Fosbroke, County Medical Officer for Worcestershire, 1909, pp.25-6, paras. 471-84); at Oldham (Oldham Chronicle, 30 November 1907, p.8; 7 December 1907, p.9; 11 January 1908, p.9); in Cardiff (Cardiff Watch Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 11 December 1889; Cardiff Property, Markets etc. Committee, Minutes of Meetings, 1 March 1893, 1 May 1906); in Depwade, Norfolk (Depwade Rural District Council, Minutes of Meeting, 15 March 1909); and at Cheddar (Cheddar Parish Council, Minutes of Meetings, 17 November 1911; 1 December 1911).

their agents, the police, landowners and local residents moved together and brought about the successful evictions of gypsies from long-established encampments at Epping Forest, Blackpool, Birmingham and elsewhere. In these instances legality and illegality merged together and the depth of the antipathy shown to the gypsies expressed itself in violent language and actions.

The effectiveness of such concerted actions in removing the gypsies was seen in 1894 in Epping Forest. Although the Home Office rejected the application of local legislators for bye-laws making it illegal to camp in the Forest, the local councils were not deterred. In any case, new powers were not needed. Under existing laws the gypsies were required to have a satisfactory water supply and proper sanitary accommodation in their camps. But the provision of such facilities would have contravened Forest laws, and so the gypsies were caught in an impossible situation, bound to break the law whichever path they chose. Notices were served on the gypsies stating that if the minimum sanitary requirements were not met then they would be expelled. When the first of the notices expired a body of police, forest keepers and local residents proceeded to evict the gypsies, and eventually they were all forced to pack their caravans and were driven to the edge of the forest.¹⁴¹

A similar eviction took place at Black Patch, Handsworth, in Birmingham, in the early years of the twentieth century.¹⁴² The

141 Clarion, 20 August 1897, p.279.

142 A rather fanciful portrait of the eviction is reproduced in Appendix 9, illustration 21.

gypsies had been camped on waste land there for more than half a century, and were such a permanent feature of the landscape that their presence had even come to be regarded as a recognised section of the community. Moreover,

"... their presence in the parish was certainly in keeping with the traditions of the locality; for till the era of Boulton and Watt had transformed the appearance of the place, old Handsworth Heath had been dotted with a number of miserable huts, the homes of an idle beggarly people who lived a precarious life by doing as little work as possible, eking out their existence by thieving and poaching all over the country side ...".¹⁴³

However, between 1904 and 1905 the gypsies were engaged in a series of tangles with the local authorities and with the owners of the land. The former wanted to transform part of the area from waste land into pleasure grounds, contemporaneously described as "... public lungs and children's playground", while the landowners thought in terms of property building.¹⁴⁴ The gypsies had to be removed before either objective could be achieved.

By October 1904 there had already been five attempts at eviction. The first of these had been thwarted by the actions of the gypsy women who threw their children in front of the horses and wagons and dared the drivers to trample on them. The fifth of this wave of attempts came at the beginning of October when fifty navvies, escorted by half a dozen policemen, attacked the camp. They were defeated again by the ferocity of the gypsy women's response.¹⁴⁵ The next

143 F. W. Hackwood, Handsworth Old and New (Birmingham, 1908), p.64.

144 Ibid.

145 Daily Graphic, 13 October 1904, p.4.

assault was not until June 1905 when both the High Sheriff and Chief Constable of Staffordshire visited the camp with more than fifty sheriff's officers and policemen. Many of the gypsies were away pea-picking and so the task of eviction was made much easier. Some of the gypsies were secure as the land had been rented, but this applied to only a few. Of the remainder, some left peaceably, fearing violence, but others were more reluctant. One gypsy was reported to have shouted at the would-be evictors:

"I don't want to use no violence, but I shan't allow you to do this. I've been here long enough to claim this land. Why didn't you come before? I've had no summons. If you wanted the land that bad, why didn't you behave like gentlemen and summons us? You don't frighten me, mind you".¹⁴⁶

Such determination and despair was answered by the sheriff's men moving in to remove the gypsies by force. Five gypsies were arrested as the aggressors, and they soon realised that they were heavily outnumbered and that further resistance was futile. All traces of the encampment were removed, except for a few vans remaining on the land rented by a gypsy called Smith.¹⁴⁷ In February 1909 the Park Committee watched over the eviction of these remaining gypsies.¹⁴⁸ The land was eventually opened as a recreation ground on 20 June 1911.

146 Quoted in the Birmingham Daily Post, 27 July 1905, p.11.

147 Ibid.; Penny Illustrated Paper, 5 August 1905, p.1.

148 T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs ... 1909', loc.cit., p.118.

The gypsies camped on the South Shore, Blackpool, suffered a similar fate. It was said that they had camped there for more than eighty years, and many of those on the sands in 1908 had been there for around half a century.¹⁴⁹ They followed a variety of occupations from bookmakers and waiters to labourers, scissor-grinders, hawkers and attendants at the fairground. Their camp was a local attraction to the many holiday-makers and the miniature railway operated a circular route around the camp, with a stop at Gipsyville station.¹⁵⁰ Regular prosecutions for fortune-telling and other offences had proved ineffective in either removing the gypsies or preventing the offence from being repeated. Yet in April 1908 the Blackpool Corporation reversed the decision of the previous year and, by a majority of one and several abstentions, the decision was taken to remove the gypsies.¹⁵¹

Pressure was put on the landowners to evict the gypsies by refusing to pass plans for buildings on other parts of the owners' holdings. The owners had little choice but to agree to cooperate, and by March 1909 many of the gypsies had already moved, while the remainder were preparing to do so. This they did with a great deal of reluctance, and were still there some six weeks later, the last not leaving until April 1910. One of their number even addressed an appeal to the King:

149 Blackpool Gazette and News, 25 December 1908, p.3; Lancashire Post, 23 April 1908, p.4.

150 B. Turner and S. Palmer, The Blackpool Story (Blackpool, 1976), p.98.

151 The Standard, 17 April 1908, p.7.

"To his Majesty - I am very sorry to have to trouble you, but it is for a cause of necessity. It concerns all the gipsies at Blackpool. We have been resident here for the past forty years, and have always been encamped on one plot of ground. We all pay £20 to £25 for the season, and also pay rates and taxes. Our tents were the first thing on the show ground, and now they want to get rid of us by giving us only one week's notice.

It is very hard for us all. It is driving us from our homes after being here for so many years. Most of our children have been born, christened and educated here. We appeal to His Majesty for his kind help and sympathy. We are English gipsies, and we look to our King for justice".¹⁵²

The King's Secretary passed on the appeal to the Local Government Board and no more was heard of it. As elsewhere, the gypsies' fate was sealed. Some went to live in houses in Blackpool, others rented land on which they were entitled to encamp on the outskirts of the town, while others moved on to Preston. Although many returned to the showgrounds each summer to ply their trades, the South Shore was no longer available to them as a site for their tents and vans.¹⁵³ A roller-coaster was later built on the site.¹⁵⁴

The eviction of the gypsies from Llanelly in 1912 provides a final instance of local authority antagonism towards the gypsies. At the meeting of the local Health Committee, on 23 February 1912, the gypsy camp on the Robinson Estate excited much discussion, and a resolution was passed that the Council apply for an injunction to prevent the owners of the land from letting the land to the gypsies so as to cause "a nuisance and menace to the health of the community".¹⁵⁵

152 Quoted in T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs ... 1909', loc.cit., pp.115-6.

153 Ibid.

154 B. Turner and S. Palmer, op.cit., p.100.

155 Llanelly Health Committee, Minutes of Meeting, 23 February 1912.

By March there was still a large number of vans and tents on the property and pressure was being put on the Council by local inhabitants to take more effective action. They had been annoyed by the Council's apparent powerlessness, and had threatened to take proceedings against them for neglecting their duty.¹⁵⁶ It was thus resolved that the gypsies be given notice to quit within 24 hours, or suffer to be forcibly removed, "by steam-roller, if necessary".¹⁵⁷ Some gypsies heeded the notice, but about sixty, comprising a camp of some fifteen vans and twelve 'wigwams', did not. On the expiration of the notice the Superintendent of the Police, constables and county officials arrived at the camp and threatened to turn the hose-pipe on the gypsies if they did not remove themselves willingly. The preparation of the hose-pipe in readiness for such an occurrence left the gypsies in no doubt that the threat would be carried out, and little opposition was shown. With a matter of a few hours all the gypsies had been removed from the estate.

The position of the gypsy in society is thus perhaps nowhere made more clear than when the responses to this nomadic group are considered in the specific and local context. From the foregoing pages it is apparent that the gypsy has always been treated as a problem and a nuisance. Although the individuals concerned with

156 Llanelly Mercury, 7 March 1912, p.3.

157 Ibid. See also Llanelly and County Guardian, 7 March 1912, p.4; Llanelly Mercury, 14 March 1912, p.3; South Wales Echo, 8 March 1912, p.4; 9 March 1912, p.2.

remedying the problem may have held to a belief in the 'real', Romany gypsy, it was widely believed that this group was rapidly disappearing. The cause of the problem came from travellers who, each year, were "... less and less real gipsies",¹⁵⁸ and who conformed to the opposite stereotype of the gypsy as the dirty and depraved itinerant. An editorial which appeared in the Romanitshels', Didakais' and Folk-Lore Gazette at the time of the Llanellyeviction expressed this latter picture of the gypsy in a desperate attempt to ridicule it:

"... he is regarded as a marauding robber, wholly without morals of any kind, as one who lives the life of a savage, in fine, something not far short of a cannibal. At best he is a filthy leper who never washes, and suffers from half the diseases to which flesh is heir. Therefore he is hunted from pillar to post ...".¹⁵⁹

When stereotypes such as this persisted with such vigour then it was little wonder that the response to travellers was usually one of vitriolic antipathy. Always regarded as a pest to society, and increasingly so from around the mid-century on, the laughter that greeted the suggestion put forward at a meeting of the Llanelly Rural District Council that steam-rollers and hose-pipes should be turned against the gypsies is but a single example of the general contempt in the way they were viewed and treated.¹⁶⁰ There were some instances of the gypsies being tolerated, but these were few. More commonly they met hostility and pressures to move from wherever they appeared.

158 Letter from Bray to the Secretary of State, 30 March 1910 (P.R.O. HO45/10995/158231/9).

159 Vol.1, No.2 (1912), pp.35-6.

160 See Llanelly and County Guardian, 7 March 1912, p.4; 'Affairs of Egypt', Folk-Lore Gazette, Vol.1, No.3 (1912), p.95.

whether from lords of the manors, local residents, local authorities or the police. The picture is of everyone moving against the gypsies, through a variety of means, to carry out an effective persecution. The methods varied from gentle persuasion to the threat of prosecution and forcible eviction; legal justification and backing were mixed at times with illegal methods. In practice these methods were not alternatives but rather were complements.

The intentions of these various bodies and agencies were, though, somewhat contradictory. Although the general feeling was that the travellers must be made to settle in order to curb and control the many offensive habits of which they were accused, an equally strong feeling was that their settlement should be encouraged and situated elsewhere. Their presence in large camps on the urban periphery could not be, and was not, tolerated by local authorities concerned with concepts of health, sanitation, and the efficient use of valuable land resources. Their antipathetic response was further guided by age-old stereotypes which surrounded the traveller as a vagrant and as a degenerate race. Essentially, though, their response to the problem was not to solve it but to move it on. A problem that animated all to violent language and gestures was often speedily forgotten when the gypsies had moved out of the district.

In all this the gypsies had no means of redress, and could turn to virtually no body, agency or law for support. Laws and bye-laws were to protect sedentary society from the travellers, and not the reverse. The Gypsy Lore Society and other gypsy lorists were the

only voices, apart from the occasional statement of support in the local press, that spoke out in favour of the gypsies, and then only for the topmost part of the travellers' hierarchy. Even so, by the early twentieth century the travellers had been under such prolonged assault for two or three decades, culminating in revived demands for registration and "definite" solutions to the problem, that even the reluctant and defensive lorists were provoked into a verbal assault against the gypsy protagonists. Such forceful action on the part of the police and local authorities was, though, merely one of the peaks of an almost continuous drive against the nomadic population. Although the grossly severe legislation of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries had been repealed and replaced by apparently more temperate measures, the response of those responsible for the gypsy problem in the local context had shown a remarkably consistent persecution, rooted chiefly in the conflict between the settled and travelling ways of life, but on top of which were imposed scales of differentiation between tramps and travellers and didakais and Romanies.

CONCLUSION

Travellers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a distinctive group, marked off from settled society by their types of employment and the nature of their way of life. Although, in general terms, visibly separate as an identifiable group, they were, more specifically, varied according to the details of their way of life.

All travellers were united by standing outside the dominant economic and social institutions of society, though also necessarily interacting with them to some extent, and being influenced by them. The three chief ways in which they remained marginal to settled society were by their migrancy, the mobility of their dwellings, as opposed to permanency, and by their reliance on family-based self-employments rather than on participation in the system of wage-labour. But to point to their independence from the 'formal' economic system should not be taken to mean either that their own system was chaotic and unstructured, or that changes in the wider system did not affect them.

Far from being the spontaneous and care-free roving that some commentators would have us believe, their migrancy was in fact regulated and systematic, organised partly around a cycle of temporary seasonal labour, partly by the regular feasts and fairs, and partly by maintaining the same circuits for their hawking ventures. The extent of migrancy varied greatly among the travellers. Some travelled

great distances while others restricted themselves to the immediate vicinity of their homes. The summer months witnessed the peak of the migrancy range, with more travellers being on the roads covering extensive areas than at any other time. During the months of bad weather travelling was curtailed and the travellers migrated inwards to the cities, living either in rented accommodation, alongside the sedentary "street-gutter rabble", in slum regions, or in the many, semi-permanent van towns, where they continued to maintain themselves, on the whole, by following the various street-trades.¹ Related, then, to the extent of itinerancy was also variation in the type of encampment lived in and of dwellings used, which ranged from tents to disused tramcars to caravans, and the type of site from temporary halts by the roadside to the regular and semi-permanent locations on urban waste-land.

In their different ways this heterogeneous group was able to contribute significantly to the economic and social life of the host society. Indeed, in their special relationship with the rural community can be seen reasons for the qualified tolerance accorded the travellers in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In order to ensure the continued existence of a market for their goods, services and, occasionally, labour, they necessarily had to maintain some degree of good relations with the settled society. This was made possible when they were able to form one element in the social life of the village, perhaps as conveyors of news from one village to the next, and perhaps as the talented musicians at village feasts

1 G. Smith, *Gipsy Life: being an account of our Gipsies and their Children, with suggestions for their improvement* (1880), p.21.

and fairs. By this means the country dwellers came to know better the gypsies, who were joined, economically and socially, in a reciprocal relationship with the rural community. Added to this, they did not interfere with or threaten the established trades of the community, nor did they establish any rights. Moreover, their stay was temporary: here today, there tomorrow. Contact was therefore limited, and overt persecution was not necessary to remove them.

The traveller thus fitted, if not entirely comfortably then at least without too much apparent force or conflict, into the rural economic and social structure. Naturally, antipathy and fear were also elements, though in the early part of the century they did not have the forceful dominance they were to achieve when the balance in society had shifted from the rural to the urban sector. Whereas the early nineteenth-century travellers could have been tolerated as an integral part of the wider mechanisms operating within a developing industrial society, by the latter decades, when their functions were thought to have been superseded, and when their structural relations within settled society had changed, the balance turned violently against the unwanted, parasitical and anachronistic traveller. When based in urban van towns, and so more noticeable to greater numbers, contact with city dwellers was of a different type from that which existed in the country, and did not contain the same elements of reciprocity, having been reduced to one of irregular economic transactions.² Even so, it would be misleading to suggest

2 Select Committee of the House of Lords on the Moveable Dwellings Bill, Minutes of Evidence, of Dr. H. M. Chester (1909), p.40, para.840.

that the relations with country dwellers had been anything other than one of functional necessity and tolerance, and certainly not of positive acceptance. In the country and in the city antipathetic responses were never far from the surface of any contact or relationship with the gypsies.

Despite being self-employed, then, travellers were definitely not self-supporting, and depended for their livelihood on maintaining a close relationship with settled society, from which were to be found the buyers of their various goods and services. Thus, any changes affecting the ability to buy, the nature of demand, and alterations in the market conditions in which the goods and services were offered, would clearly have had repercussions in the travellers' camps. General features and trends in the economy and society thus had an important bearing on the travellers' occupations and way of life. By way of example, they came to be replaced as temporary, seasonal labourers by the tendency of farmers to employ regular, permanent labourers and by technological developments which slowly transformed agriculture into a capital rather than a labour intensive sector of the economy. Likewise, the growth of retail outlets, which provided cheap, industrially-manufactured, non-durable goods, encroached on the gypsies' traditional market, thereby making hawking more difficult, less remunerative and progressively anachronistic. The travellers were, then, pushed from dependence on the rural sector by increased competition for their goods, and because their services as, for example, tinkers and entertainers, were no longer in such demand when tinware could be cheaply replaced from local shops and when altered leisure

pursuits and social intercourse had reduced the numerical and cultural significance of fairs and feasts to the country-dwellers. From living in and around the cities in the winter months, which was made attractive by the large population concentrations and so mass markets to be found there, to setting up a more or less permanent urban base was, therefore, a short, inevitable and necessary step.

Other general changes, not directed specifically at the travellers, also acted to circumscribe their mobility and activities. Perhaps the most notable of these was the enclosure movement, which had the effect of taking from the gypsies many of their traditional camping grounds. In London the process began at Norwood at the beginning of the century and progressed steadily through to the eviction of the gypsies from Epping Forest at the end.

This, then, is to consider the position of travellers in settled society and the effects on them of wider developments and pressures occurring within society as a whole. However, this is to look at only one part of the picture. Equally important in terms of their relations with settled society was how members of that society perceived the travellers and how that brought about differing though considered responses from them. There thus emerged a complete range of other pressures aimed directly at the travellers, intended specifically to solve the problem of the existence of a travelling group in a sedentary-based society, a group whose

condition of life was considered to be in "... direct contradiction to what you suppose every man's life in England must be".³ Essentially, these pressures resulted from a response conditioned by the stereotypes which revolved around the perennial conflict between the travelling and settled ways of life, and is illustrated by antipathy to travellers coming from all classes and sections of society:

"These are the people who hate them, and would control and banish them, the officials, the prose people, the mechanical minds. The law-givers hate them, the stationary powers hate them, the people who wear uniforms and take wages hate them ... that is to say the main part of the civilised world, hate them".⁴

In the capitalist political economy of nineteenth-century England and Wales it was inevitable that arguments demanding control over this group would take on the tone and moral force of the complaint that the travellers and their itinerant life-style were incompatible with the ideology and organisation of that system. Itinerant groups were unproductive labourers, overtly rejecting hard toil, thrift and permanency:

"John Bull dislikes keeping the idle, bastard children of other nations. He readily protects all those who tread upon English soil, but in return for this kindness he expects them, like bees, to be all workers ... If the Gipsies and others of the same class in this country will begin to "buckle to", and set themselves out for real hard work, instead of cadging from door to door, they will find, notwithstanding they are called Gipsies, John Bull extending to them the hand of brotherhood and sympathy, and the days of persecution passed".⁵

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- 3 C. G. Ieland, The English Gipsies and their Language (1874), p.8.
- 4 A. Symons, 'In Praise of the Gypsies', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society (hereafter, J.G.L.S.), New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), p.294.
- 5 G. Smith, op.cit., pp.11-12.

It was the responsibility of the formal and informal agencies of that ideology to ensure conformity and bring about the effective control of the travellers.

In the early part of the century travellers were grouped together as rogues and vagabonds, living a criminal and irreligious life. The association of gypsies and travellers with gangs of marauding robbers was commonly made, and it was even suggested that they were united for this purpose into a closed brotherhood, a criminal Masonic-type lodge, entered into by swearing oaths of allegiance and maintained in its secrecy and exclusiveness by the use of cant language, sometimes called Romany, by its members.⁶ Such a belief was possible as the traveller was thought to flout flagrantly the conventional notions of law and order, especially in regard to property rights. Anything that grew naturally or lived in the wild was considered by them as belonging to no man, and was the property of all. Raw materials for the making of craft items were taken without conscience from forests and roadsides, and contents for the cook-pot were taken freely from the fields. In this the travellers, allegedly, saw no wrong, with property rights over plants and animals being an anathema to them. This disrespect of rights of ownership was then said to extend also to the property of individuals.

6 See D. V. Jones, 'A Dead Loss to the Community: the criminal vagrant in mid nineteenth century Wales', Welsh History Review, Vol.8, No.3 (1977), pp.312-44.

The responsibility for controlling this 'free-wheeling' and 'menacing' itinerant population fell, naturally, to the many associations for the prosecutions of felons, the magistrates, and the rural constabulary, the latter unorganised and highly parochial, at least up to 1839 but also afterwards to some degree. Generally, their response was to come down hard on these roving vagabonds, applying with vigour such persecution as permitted by, for example, the 1824 Vagrancy Act.

Coexisting with this police surveillance and control was that work undertaken by the various missionaries and religious reformers. Not only were travellers considered to be hardened criminals, but they were also completely lacking any sense of religion or morality for to the 'common-sense' Englishman, "... eccentricity and unconventionality smack ... of moral obliquity".⁷ Various individuals and organisations, motivated by a sense of evangelistic duty, sought to remedy the appalling state of affairs thought to exist in the camps of these "savages" who lived on the fringes of settled society. Not only did the travellers have to be taught the word of God but they had also to be settled, and be made virtuous, respectable and industrious. Clearly, then, religious agencies and those representing law and order were working towards identical ends.

But although making some progress the results were meagre and not readily apparent, and this, comingled with the changing structural position of travellers in settled society and with the growth and rapid development of scientific enquiry and knowledge, meant that the

7 A. Compton-Rickett, The Vagabond in Literature (1906), p.3.

emphasis of the argument began to shift. New perspectives became dominant and other agencies entered into the fray. The age of religion and superstition gave way to the age of science. Myths and stereotypes developed, allegedly based on empiricist objectivity derived from fact-finding missions to the gypsies' camps. Travellers were not seen mainly as criminals and as morally and religiously deficient, though these remained important elements, but were now 'proved' to be dirty, illiterate, insanitary, a threat to health, and generally an affront to the principles of civilised society. Indeed, living in tents was described as "... the crown of all crime against respectable society".⁸

The method of attack likewise changed with the emphasis moving away from a stated desire to convert and rather more overtly towards attempting to bring travellers within the accepted standards and conventions of the settled population. Thus, although the intention in both cases had been to enforce conformity and sedentarisation, the arguments to justify this had been modified. No longer was the gypsy a tolerated component of the rural economy. His position had been substantially transformed by wider changes in such a way as to make his existence entirely unacceptable:

"The old order of gipsy life has, in England at any rate, become something of an impossibility and everything of a nuisance. It has ceased to be even picturesque".⁹

8 A. H. Japp, 'The Gypsies as seen by Friendly Eyes', Gentleman's Magazine, Vol.255 (1883, Vol.2), p.576.

9 Editorial, Daily News, 6 October 1879, p.4.

Romantic notions about a healthy, outdoor, rural existence had given way to a realisation that urban-dwelling travellers lived mainly in appalling, insanitary conditions. The developing machinery of the state thus began to extend its influence to control the 'problem':

"... local government operates without any sympathy for their picturesque past, and is driving them bit by bit within the pale, insisting on certain hygienic regulations, ordering the children to school, and searching the law-books for a pretext to deprive them of their pitching-ground ..."¹⁰

A more efficient and effective police force assisted in this endeavour.

Yet on top of these responses to a travelling population there emerged with great force and conviction the notion of a hierarchy among travellers. This may have been expressed in terms of a distinction between bona fide travellers pursuing some ostensible employment and the unworthy tramp. More frequently, and apparently more persuasively given the numbers who conformed to this interpretation, differences were also established according to racial origins, between the 'pure' blood Romany and others with varying degrees of mixed blood. Growing from the roots of Romanticism and of the new biological sciences, notions about racial purity came to provide the basis for constructing a hierarchy among travellers dependent on the possession of 'true'

¹⁰ 'Gipsies in Hainault Forest', The Outlook (20 August 1898), p.76.

blood, with each stage in the construct having its own distinctive characteristics, way of life and culture. The Romany gypsies were placed at the top of the pyramid. No longer the rogues and vagabonds of former years they had now been transformed into an exclusive race. Elusive to all, especially the police and other agencies of persecution, except the gypsy lorists, they were deemed the aristocrats of the road, yet inevitably doomed to extinction by marriage outside the tribe.

To attempt to impose rigid characterisations on a travelling population divided according to degrees of racial purity is to misconstrue and simplify the evidence. Any catch-all terms for occupational groups or social classes mislead more than they assist by the implication of the existence of easily observable and definable boundaries. No such convenient criteria were able to be applied to the nineteenth-century 'gypsy' except in terms of romanticised, mythically-constructed, ideal images of a separate race of Romanies. Such an association of a 'gypsy' with a member of a clearly-defined homogeneous race of people, identifiable by reference to notions of blood purity and ethnic distinction, was one that rested on false assumptions, weak methodology, factual inaccuracy and general inapplicability. Moreover, in terms of actual experience and contemporary descriptions of the gypsies such a racial definition was adopted mainly by the romantics and gypsy lorists, with the remainder of settled society being unwilling or unable to concern themselves with the practical problem of identifying hierarchies among travellers constructed in terms of racial purity. Preconceived notions of gypsies may

have accommodated the concept of race, but practical responses to travellers rarely did. Nineteenth-century travellers derived from indigenous tinkers, pedlars, basket-makers and the like as much as from an oriental race, and to become obsessed with tracing pedigrees or identifying a separate race is to be diverted from the key issue of the relationship between travelling and settled societies.¹¹

However, it should be noted that the method and arguments of the gypsy lorists were very much in keeping with their time, reflecting the then current Victorian obsession with questions of origins, race and 'alien' cultures. Too often, though, theories of race and culture were crude and simplistic, having been perverted by a desire to reduce people and cultures to easily definable and controllable categories.¹²

We are left, then, with a three-fold definition of the gypsy, as a traveller, a romantic race and a degenerate race. Stereotypes from each of these coexisted and complemented each other, with any contradictions being explained by reference to arguments of blood purity. 'Real' gypsies excited a certain sentimental pity and sympathy, but the rest of the travellers were simply the off-

11 See 'Gypsies', New Edinburgh Review, Vol.1 (1844), pp.11-12.

12 See C. Bolt, Victorian Attitudes to Race (1971); B. Street, The Savage in Literature: representations of primitive society in English Fiction, 1858-1920 (1975); G. Watson, The English Ideology: studies in the language of Victorian Politics (1973), ch.11; M. D. Biddiss, 'Myths of Blood: European Racist Ideology, 1850-1945', Patterns of Prejudice, Vol.9, No.5 (September-October 1975), pp.11-18; B. Zawadzki, 'Limitations of the Scapegoat Theory of Prejudice', Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology (1948), pp.127-41.

scourings of society, and so needed sweeping away. The existence of contradictory stereotypes was thus not only possible but was highly likely and was perpetuated by the various sources which formed an individual's impressions, from poetry and fiction to newspapers, nursery rhymes and hearsay:

"... it is to be remembered that so little has been written of gipsies which did not in the main tend to fortify the popular prejudice, that it was next to impossible to form any opinion as to their character in which the evil elements did not preponderate over the good".¹³

Mixed stereotypes worked together to outrage standard and accepted moral and religious sentiments, to appeal to nationalistic and xenophobic feelings, to challenge conventional ways of life and norms accepted by the majority of settled society, to strengthen psychological needs such as the scapegoat mechanism, and to arouse hatred, jealousy, and fear of an unknown and peculiar group.¹⁴ The plethora of impressions constructed around the gypsy, as a traveller and as an alien race, gave rise to a variety of cultural and racial stereotypes that hindered the practical expression of sentiments and responses other than those of suspicion and general antipathy.

It should be apparent, then, that although responses to gypsies,

13 'In Gipsy Tents', Chambers's Journal, No.882 (20 November 1880), p.737. See also J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales (1849; Michigan, 1968), p.131; W.C., 'Transformation of the Gipsies', Once a Week (22 October 1864), p.498.

14 See W. M. Gallichen, 'The State versus the Gypsy', J.G.L.S., New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.350-2.

or travellers, were consistent in their objectives, they were justified and explained in many different ways, with the 'reformer' able to approach the problem from a variety of paths. The range of pressures working on the gypsies to conform to a sedentary way of life, general and specific, formal and informal, was thus extensive. The effects of these on the travellers were uneven, and were felt with various degrees of force in different areas and according to different perceptions by the travellers of the actual threat to their travelling way of life. What in fact resulted was a mixture of adaptation, evasion, conformity and conflict. Some yielded to the logic of the pressures and gave up travelling in favour of conformity with a sedentary way of living. Others continued much as before, though continuously adapting their specific life-style and employments to fit in with demand, others fled to America, while many compromised, continuing to live in vans and tents and still following nomadic employments, yet rarely, if at all, moving from one location. That they survived at all is a tribute to their adaptability to a changed environment and resilience to a variety of pressures.

The failure of the various attempts to achieve a more effective circumscription of the travellers and their way of life must be attributable to defects in the form and methods of the enterprise as well as in the handling of the pressures by the travellers themselves, and the obvious difficulties of controlling a moving population. To begin with, persecution must have been qualified by the realisation that the gypsies did perform a significant economic and social function. When the importance of this function diminished, the

onus for solving the problem rested among a number of agencies, between whom disputes arose over where the chief responsibility lay. The perceptions of the gypsies were remarkably consistent in their antipathy, but proposals for a solution were greatly at variance: whether to secure legislation or to harass them, to stay within the confines of the law or to exceed it, to remove the problem forcibly or to wait for them voluntarily to move on. Inconsistency was thus a qualification to persistent persecution. Although, then, considered an undesirable anachronism, a malignant plague-spot, no workable solution was found that answered satisfactorily the fundamental problem of how to accommodate a travelling population within a sedentary-based society. The nomadic way of life, now as then, was thought to conflict with and challenge fundamental structures of the settled society and so had to be curtailed, but beyond this no uniform agreement was reached.

Travellers, therefore, pursued an alternative way of life that presented them as a readily identifiable group. They received virtually no support or sympathy from members of settled society and lacked any political or economic 'muscle' of their own, thereby permitting an antipathetic response, fed and conditioned by a host of (mostly adverse) stereotypes, marked by an almost continuous ferocity. Such opposition was rooted in the general threat travellers posed to the ways and values of a sedentary-based society as well as in the common belief that a gypsy presence promised only dirt, disease, begging and stealing. Such threats were perennial and, unlike responses to other minority groups, appear to have been

little affected by specific changes in the economy and society, such as periods of high unemployment.

The exaggerated and often apparently contradictory claims of contemporary commentators contributed to the formation of stereotypes that mixed fact with hearsay, romanticism with condemnation. Such impressions give some indication of the nature of the travelling way of life if read critically but, perhaps more important, they tell us a great deal about the aspirations and intentions of those who voiced them. The picture presented was one that distorted reality by imposing on the travellers a general character, temperament and appearance, drawn from specific cases and limited experience. Only in rare instances were travellers able to challenge such stereotyping and antipathy to any effect.

Numerically the travellers represented only a tiny proportion of the total population. But while this perhaps goes some way to explaining their powerlessness in relation to settled society, it was not the case that hostility was conditional on absolute numbers. The question of the size of the travelling population was always raised when the issue of travellers was discussed, yet the problem of definition and the absence of reliable statistics meant that figures were usually no more than wild 'guesstimates'. Even this, though, could not hide the fact that numbers were small, and so the argument moved on to claim that absolute size was not as important as the travellers' concentration in certain areas and that their numbers

were increasing, a tendency that had to be reversed.¹⁵

These questions concerning the power relationship between the minority and majority groups; the source, nature and validity of stereotypes; and recourse to a 'numbers game' to highlight a threat, problem or tendency, are themes that recur in all minority studies. Although the central purpose of this work has been the reconstruction of the way of life of the travelling community in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is hoped that this necessary groundwork can form a basis for a fuller discussion of these major issues.

15 For a discussion of 'the numbers game' in relation to immigrant minorities see C. Holmes, 'Immigration' in M. Drake and T. C. Barker (eds.), The Population Factor (forthcoming, 1982?).

APPENDIX 1

LIST OF GYPSY LODGERS (WINTER) IN WESTMINSTER, BOROUGH, &c.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Residence</u>
Lovell, John	Chair-bottomer	Tunbridge Street
Lovell, James	Tinker	Church Lane
Lovell, Joseph	Chair-bottomer	New Street
Lovell, Thomas	Chair-bottomer	Banbridge Street
Lovell, William	Knife-grinder	Church Street
Cooper, Lussha	Rat-catcher	Tottenham Court Road
Lovell, Corrie	Knife-grinder	Bolton Street
Lovell, Uriah	Chair-bottomer	Bolton Street
Lovell, Thomas	Knife-grinder	Paddington
Lovell, Solomon	Chair-bottomer	New Street
Jones, Solomon	Basket-maker, wire-worker	Battle Bridge
Lee, John	Chair-bottomer	Tothil Fields
Taylor, Richard	Wire-worker	New Street
Lovell, Betsey	Supported by her son, Joseph Lovell	?
Lovell, Joseph	Bellows-mender	Shoreditch
Lee, Diana	Sells earthenware	Shoreditch
Lee, Mansfield	Tinker, grinder	Shoreditch
Lee, Zachariah	Fiddler	?
Smith, Thomas	Chair-bottomer	Lisson Green, Paddington
Porter, Thomas	Canal-worker	Paddington
Allen, Charlotte	Sells earthenware	Kent Street, Borough
Cole, James	Lamplighter, grinder	Kent Street, Borough
Martin, Edward	Street-seller of fruit	Kent Street, Borough
Martin, Samuel	Journeyman saddler	White Street
Sinfield, John	Street-seller of fish	White Street
Taylor, John	Street-seller of fish	White Street

Source: J. Hoyland, A Historical Survey of the Customs, Habits and Present State of the Gypsies (York, 1816), pp.84-5.

APPENDIX 2(a)

REGIONAL AND COUNTY POPULATIONS OF DWELLERS IN BARNES AND SHEDS,
AND IN TENTS, CARAVANS AND THE OPEN AIR (ENGLAND AND WALES), 1891-1901

	BARNES AND SHEDS						CARAVANS, TENTS, OPEN AIR					
	Per- sons	Per- sons	Male	Male	Fe- male	Fe- male	Per- sons	Per- sons	Male	Male	Fe- male	Fe- male
	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901
ENGLAND AND WALES	3149	1645	2548	1317	601	328	12834	12574	6921	6858	5913	5716
London	16	-	13	-	3	-	676	406	330	224	346	182
SOUTH EASTERN	1536	984	1182	699	354	285	2995	3110	1624	1685	1371	1425
Surrey	368	162	304	136	64	26	874	649	465	344	409	305
Kent	627	647	448	428	179	219	517	820	290	438	227	382
Sussex	249	106	196	83	53	23	581	554	311	319	270	235
Hampshire	65	32	49	25	16	7	860	895	471	475	389	420
Berkshire	227	37	185	27	42	10	163	192	87	109	76	83
SOUTH MIDLAND	400	111	320	102	80	9	1101	1195	619	641	482	554
Middlesex	129	42	93	36	36	6	417	519	245	280	172	239
Hertfordshire	32	23	30	23	2	-	108	152	60	86	48	66
Buckinghamshire	173	7	142	5	31	2	61	23	27	7	34	16
Oxfordshire	25	20	20	19	5	1	99	102	55	55	44	47
Northamptonshire	8	11	8	11	-	-	166	170	88	99	78	71
Huntingdonshire	11	2	6	2	5	-	15	36	8	21	7	15
Bedfordshire	12	4	12	4	-	-	149	80	89	39	60	41
Cambridgeshire	10	2	9	2	1	-	86	113	47	54	39	59

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	BARNs AND SHEDS						CARAVANS, TENTS, OPEN AIR					
	Per- sons 1891	Per- sons 1901	Male 1891	Male 1901	Fe- male 1891	Fe- male 1901	Per- sons 1891	Per- sons 1901	Male 1891	Male 1901	Fe- male 1891	Fe- male 1901
EASTERN	114	85	85	82	29	3	1642	1279	888	702	754	577
Essex	45	54	40	52	5	2	872	649	472	337	400	312
Suffolk	8	8	8	8	-	-	214	262	115	140	99	122
Norfolk	61	23	37	22	24	1	556	368	301	225	255	143
SOUTH WESTERN	122	41	94	39	28	2	1049	991	577	533	472	458
Wiltshire	26	18	24	17	2	1	200	241	106	125	94	116
Dorsetshire	8	6	6	5	2	1	243	164	130	68	113	96
Devonshire	17	3	14	3	3	-	311	210	179	119	132	91
Cornwall	1	2	1	2	-	-	155	128	87	73	68	55
Somersetshire	70	12	49	12	21	-	140	248	75	148	65	100
WEST MIDLAND	199	133	176	108	23	25	1113	1244	591	707	522	537
Gloucestershire	28	14	25	14	3	-	180	205	99	117	81	88
Herefordshire	35	37	29	24	6	13	104	49	57	29	47	20
Shropshire	44	6	42	6	2	-	122	58	63	35	59	23
Staffordshire	40	32	35	32	5	-	376	550	198	337	178	213
Worcestershire	20	37	19	26	1	11	190	185	101	89	89	96
Warwickshire	32	7	26	6	6	1	141	197	73	100	68	97
NORTH MIDLAND	129	50	118	49	11	1	541	1030	295	570	246	460
Leicestershire	24	1	19	1	5	-	94	177	55	84	39	93
Rutlandshire	2	-	2	-	-	-	19	8	11	4	8	4
Lincolnshire	14	14	13	14	1	-	89	318	46	206	43	112
Nottinghamshire	19	20	15	19	4	1	119	331	62	173	57	158
Derbyshire	70	15	69	15	1	-	220	196	121	103	99	93

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	BARNs AND SHEDS						CARAVANS, TENTS, OPEN AIR					
	Per- sons 1891	Per- sons 1901	Male 1891	Male 1901	Fe- male 1891	Fe- male 1901	Per- sons 1891	Per- sons 1901	Male 1891	Male 1901	Fe- male 1891	Fe- male 1901
NORTH WESTERN	187	72	171	72	16	1	1083	952	611	481	472	471
Cheshire	62	27	58	27	4	1	298	143	202	72	96	71
Lancashire	125	45	113	45	12	1	785	809	409	409	376	400
YORKSHIRE	93	73	83	71	10	2	810	791	435	420	375	371
West Riding	39	58	34	58	5	1	585	677	308	354	277	323
East Riding	12	5	9	5	3	1	106	40	57	26	49	14
North Riding	42	10	40	8	2	2	119	74	70	40	49	34
NORTHERN	157	29	141	28	16	1	683	552	347	326	336	226
Durham	65	5	59	5	6	1	387	400	213	231	174	169
Northumberland	70	22	60	21	10	1	233	101	102	64	131	37
Cumberland	18	2	18	2	-	1	38	29	18	19	20	10
Westmorland	4	-	4	-	-	1	25	22	14	12	11	10
WELSH	196	67	165	67	31	1	1141	1024	604	569	537	455
Monmouthshire	55	9	55	9	-	1	188	230	108	117	80	113
SOUTH WALES	80	45	58	45	22	1	639	685	339	393	300	292
Glamorganshire	38	5	23	5	15	1	427	486	233	274	194	212
Carmarthenshire	1	-	1	-	-	1	90	60	41	41	49	19
Pembrokeshire	3	-	3	-	-	1	46	21	27	12	19	9
Cardiganshire	26	1	22	1	4	1	47	66	24	39	23	27
Brecknockshire	11	13	8	13	3	1	23	52	12	27	11	25
Radnorshire	1	26	1	26	-	1	6	-	2	-	4	-

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	BARNs AND SHEDS						CARAVANS, TENTS, OPEN AIR					
	Per-	Per-	Male	Male	Fe-	Fe-	Per-	Per-	Male	Male	Fe-	Fe-
	sons	sons	1891	1901	male	male	sons	sons	1891	1901	male	male
	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901	1891	1901
NORTH WALES	61	13	52	13	9	1	314	109	157	59	157	50
Montgomeryshire	11	1	11	1	1	1	84	10	43	7	41	3
Flintshire	1	3	1	3	-	-	7	21	5	11	2	10
Denbighshire	26	2	26	2	1	1	176	34	83	19	93	15
Merionethshire	20	6	11	6	9	1	27	24	16	10	11	14
Carnarvonshire	3	1	3	1	1	1	11	20	6	12	5	8
Anglesey	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	1	4	1	5	-

Sources: Census of England and Wales, Area, Houses and Population, 1891, Vol.2, Table 8 (1893), p.xxxv;
Census of England and Wales, Summary Tables and Index, 1901, Table 23 (1903), p.137.

APPENDIX 2(b)

REGIONAL AND COUNTY POPULATIONS OF DWELLERS IN BARNs, SHEDS,
TENTS, CARAVANS AND THE OPEN AIR (ENGLAND AND WALES), 1891-1911

	PERSONS			MALE			FEMALE		
	1891	1901	1911	1891	1901	1911	1891	1901	1911
LONDON	692	406	910	343	224	564	349	182	346
SOUTH EASTERN	4531	4094	5988	2806	2384	3841	1725	1710	2147
Surrey	1242	811	1518	769	480	994	473	331	524
Kent	1144	1467	1801	738	866	1156	406	601	645
Sussex	830	660	939	507	402	641	323	258	298
Hampshire*	925	927	1401	520	500	815	405	427	586
Berkshire	390	229	329	272	136	235	118	93	94
SOUTH MIDLAND	1501	1306	2460	939	743	1575	562	563	885
Middlesex	546	561	530	338	316	325	208	245	205
Hertfordshire	140	175	427	90	109	303	50	66	124
Buckinghamshire	234	30	296	169	12	211	65	18	85
Oxfordshire	124	122	260	75	74	140	49	48	120
Northamptonshire	174	181	264	96	110	156	78	71	108
Huntingdonshire	26	38	64	14	23	44	12	15	20
Bedfordshire	161	84	250	101	43	158	60	41	92
Cambridgeshire*	96	115	369	56	56	238	40	59	131
EASTERN	1756	1364	2151	973	784	1291	783	580	860
Essex	917	703	1162	512	389	705	405	314	457
Suffolk	222	270	307	123	148	188	99	122	119
Norfolk	617	391	682	338	247	398	279	144	284

... continued

	PERSONS			MALE			FEMALE		
	1891	1901	1911	1891	1901	1911	1891	1901	1911
SOUTH WESTERN	1171	1032	2214	671	572	1315	500	460	899
Wiltshire	226	259	396	130	142	243	96	117	153
Dorsetshire	251	170	443	136	73	257	115	97	186
Devonshire	328	213	511	193	122	306	135	91	205
Cornwall	156	130	459	88	75	250	68	55	209
Somersetshire	210	260	405	124	160	259	86	100	146
WEST MIDLAND	1312	1377	2696	767	815	1658	545	562	1038
Gloucestershire	208	219	594	124	131	362	84	88	232
Herefordshire	139	86	265	86	53	165	53	33	100
Shropshire	166	64	182	105	41	113	61	23	69
Staffordshire	416	582	717	233	369	421	183	213	296
Worcestershire	210	222	557	120	115	372	90	107	185
Warwickshire	173	204	381	99	106	225	74	98	156
NORTH MIDLAND	670	1080	3884	413	619	2664	257	461	1220
Leicestershire	118	178	312	74	85	181	44	93	131
Rutlandshire	21	8	18	13	4	11	8	4	7
Lincolnshire	103	332	1296	59	220	943	44	112	353
Nottinghamshire	138	351	603	77	192	401	61	159	202
Derbyshire	290	211	1655	190	118	1128	100	93	527
NORTH WESTERN	1270	1024	2184	782	553	1380	488	471	804
Cheshire	360	170	295	260	99	205	100	71	90
Lancashire	910	854	1889	522	454	1175	388	400	714

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	PERSONS			MALE			FEMALE		
	1891	1901	1911	1891	1901	1911	1891	1901	1911
YORKSHIRE	903	864	3019	518	491	2078	385	373	941
West Riding	624	735	1795	342	412	1170	282	323	625
East Riding	118	45	163	66	31	124	52	14	39
North Riding	161	84	1061	110	48	784	51	36	277
NORTHERN	840	581	1342	488	354	921	352	227	421
Durham	452	405	880	272	236	633	180	169	247
Northumberland	303	123	245	162	85	156	141	38	89
Cumberland	56	31	197	36	21	119	20	10	78
Westmorland	29	22	20	18	12	13	11	10	7
WELSH	1337	1091	3794	769	636	2661	568	455	1133
Monmouthshire	243	239	784	163	126	584	80	113	200
SOUTH WALES	719	730	2328	397	438	1632	322	292	696
Glamorganshire	465	491	1547	256	279	1065	209	212	482
Carmarthenshire	91	60	439	42	41	322	49	19	117
Pembrokeshire	49	21	130	30	12	81	19	9	49
Cardiganshire	73	67	49	46	40	35	27	27	14
Brecknockshire	34	65	125	20	40	93	14	25	32
Radnorshire	7	26	38	3	26	36	4	-	2
NORTH WALES	375	122	682	209	72	445	166	50	237
Montgomeryshire	95	11	107	54	8	68	41	3	39
Flintshire	8	24	157	6	14	105	2	10	52
Denbighshire	202	36	244	109	21	146	93	15	98
Merionethshire	47	30	62	27	16	44	20	14	18
Carnarvonshire	14	21	79	9	13	68	5	8	11
Anglesey	9	-	33	4	-	14	5	-	19

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* In the 1911 Census report the Isle of Ely, Peterborough, Southampton and the Isle of Wight were listed separately. The data for the former two have been included in the statistics for Cambridgeshire, and the latter two for Hampshire.

Sources: Census of England and Wales, Area, Houses and Population, 1891, Vol.2, Table 8 (1893), p.xxxv; Census of England and Wales, Summary Tables and Index, 1901, Table 23 (1903), p.137; Census of England and Wales, Administrative Areas, 1911, Vol.1, Table 22 (1912), pp.614-645.

APPENDIX 3

LIST OF TENT-DWELLERS IN THE NEW FOREST,
AND THEIR TRADES AND HANDICRAFTS, 1911

Chirn	Bramble basket and beehive makers
Cooper, Mary Ann	Fortune-teller
Doe	Day-labourer
Green, Steven	Vendor of cottons, threads, etc. and the usual 'swag'
Greene, 'Kekka' (Jim Hillesley)	Scissors-grinder, china-mender, umbrella-mender
Gregory, Eli	Mender of chairs and door mats; painter of carts and vans, rag and bone collector
Gritt, Bob	Maker of scarf and finger-rings, and of furze sticks and umbrella handles
James	Day-labourer
Jeff, Matty	Maker of bramble and bent beehives and baskets, and of heather brooms
Lamb, Ned	Maker of wooden and rushen tables and chairs
Lamb, daughters of Ned	Hawkers of tables and chairs aforesaid, in season, field-workers up and down the country, dancers at fairs and rural gatherings
Pateman	Day-labourer
Penfold, Chris	Horse-dealer
Peters	Safety-pin makers, makers of wire flower-stands and baskets
Pidgely, George	Mender of rush-bottomed chairs
Richardson, Charley	Saucepan-lid maker, maker of pins, brooches and earrings
Ripley, Mose	Chair and mat mender
Sherred (1)	Maker of wooden tables from cheese-lids and plaited rushes
Sherred (2)	Chimney-sweep

Sherred, Celia	Vendor of shell-work boxes, &c.
Sherred, Emily	Maker of potato and cabbage nets
Sherwood, Robert	Kettle lids and clothes-prop maker
Sherwood, Sunny	Scissors, razor and knife-grinder; mender of saucepans and solderer of milk-buckets; ring maker
Wallace	Mender of harness and sail cloths
Whicher, Bill	Maker of rings out of silver coins and old silver spoons
White, Walter and Sammy	Makers of bamboo-tables
Willet, George	Horse-dealer
'Whistling (Kentish) Bill'	Maker of small copper kettles

Source: Note from A. E. Gillington, Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, 3rd Ser., Vol.4, No.2 (1925), p.95.

APPENDIX 4

REPLIES OF WILLIAM BOS TO A SERIES OF QUESTIONS PUT TO HIM
 BY MR. GODDARD JOHNSON OF EAST DEREHAM, NORFOLK,
 3 JULY, 1822

1. That they bury always in consecrated ground. Several of his family lie at Rounds /Rawnds/ Church, Northamptonshire. If any place is desired by the dying, they convey the corpse to it.
2. They mostly have their children christened, and get a certificate of it. Many, however, do not so.
3. We have no Gipsy prayers: we say the Lord's Prayer and Belief. There are records belonging to certain families, but not to all.
4. I have no notion whence we come; nor what number we are now in England; nor how many songs we have. I never heard of Faw's gang, Borthwick's gang, etc. /The latter were well-known gypsy gangs of the Border regions.
5. We travel in Norfolk and Suffolk, but are not limited. Sometimes we go farther; but do best where we are known. In winter we lodge in Yarmouth or Norwich.
6. We sometimes meet together with those we know for drinking, feasting, dancing and music. I do not know how numerous we are in Norfolk.
7. Children are of the same trades as their parents mostly. The women wash, mend, beg old clothes, and tell fortunes.
8. We come our rounds to certain places regularly.
9. We camp in the same places as others, and do not know who has preceded us.
10. All Gipsies use the same language; and my father is one of the few who can write. Our society has no regular laws, nor king.
11. My family marries at Church by licence; but not one couple in 50 is so married. Very few can read. Most of us 'house' in winter.

12. I could not be happy if any of my children were taken from me; so they are not taught. We have many forms of 'patran' to show the way to stragglers. /Patran: a system whereby signs were left by one group of travellers to indicate to another the direction they have taken. For example, clumps of grass by the roadside were bent in a particular direction, or left on the road pointing a particular way/.

Source: 'Notes and Queries', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, New Ser., Vol.2, No.3 (1909), p.279.

APPENDIX 5

TABLE OF GYPSY CRIMES, 1907-11

	Apr.- Dec. 1907	Jan.- Dec. 1908	Jan.- Dec. 1909	Jan.- Dec. 1910	Jan.- Dec. 1911
1. Sleeping out	10	-	6	2	2
Damaging turf, etc., by camping	19	27	60	25	30
Camping on highway	30	35	27	29	40
Allowing horses to stray	43	74	64	61	92
Obstructing road, van unattended, etc.	9	6	8	18	10
Making fires within 50ft. of road	11	5	-	2	7
Setting fire to gorse	4	-	-	-	-
Want of water supply or sanitary accomm.	18	13	3	13	6
Overcrowding	-	4	-	-	-
2. Careless or furious driving	6	1	1	3	3
Cart or van without lights	4	4	2	7	10
No name on cart or van	6	1	5	4	6
Dog without name on collar	5	-	-	-	-
Hawking without licence	1	2	2	6	7
Dog without licence, or collarless	-	6	7	9	5
Dog at large during pro- hibited hours	-	1	-	1	-
Damaging new-made road by driving on it	-	4	-	-	-
Under Children's Act: school attendance	-	-	4	12	8
Under Children's Act: children in hotels	-	-	2	-	-
Gun and trap without licence	-	-	-	-	2
Drinking when not <u>bona</u> <u>fide</u> travellers	-	-	-	-	2
3. Poaching	15	11	18	27	33
Taking wood, sticks, ferns, etc.	21	26	23	8	22
Breaking pound	2	-	2	2	-
Fortune-telling	1	3	14	7	7
Hoaxing, with fortune- telling	2	12	8	10	4
Taking fruit, hay, etc.	-	7	-	-	-
Assisting at prize fight	-	6	-	-	-

... continued

	Apr.- Dec. 1907	Jan.- Dec. 1908	Jan.- Dec. 1909	Jan.- Dec. 1910	Jan.- Dec. 1911
Damaging crops, etc., by trespassing	-	10	6	-	-
Breaking lock of gate	-	2	-	-	-
Gaming	-	-	5	5	-
Discharging catapult	-	-	1	-	-
Discharging gun	-	-	-	1	-
4. Cruelty to horses	6	15	10	7	10
Begging, or causing children to beg	8	3	1	1	10
Cruelty to, or neglect of children	3	6	4	7	4
Disgracing His Majesty's uniform	-	-	-	1	-
Deserting or not main- taining wife	-	-	-	-	4
5. Assault: vicious	(35	11	28	28	21
family	(	29	13	8	7
Drunkenness: simple	(	38	29	36	31
horses	(11	9	7	1	4
children	(	1	3	5	2
Disorderly conduct	6	-	-	-	-
Obscene language	8	17	19	12	20
Using threats	5	4	1	-	3
Obstructing police	-	3	1	2	2
Selling improper post- cards	-	-	1	-	-
6. Small thefts, less than 10s.	28	33	10	26	15
Large thefts, more than 10s.	2	21	25	20	18
Obtaining goods by fraud	1	-	-	-	-
Stealing by ruse (not fortune-telling)	2	7	16	22	17
Receiving stolen property	-	3	7	1	2
Unjust scales	-	-	-	1	-
Horse stealing	-	-	-	-	2
House breaking	-	-	-	-	1
7. Abduction	1	1*	-	1	-

* Prisoner discharged

... continued

	Apr.- Dec. 1907	Jan.- Dec. 1908	Jan.- Dec. 1909	Jan.- Dec. 1910	Jan.- Dec. 1911
Attempted suicide	1	1	-	-	-
Lunatic at large	-	1	-	-	-
Libel	-	2	-	-	-
Highway robbery, robbery with violence	-	1*	-	6	-
Criminal assault	-	1	1	-	-
Arson	-	-	1**	2	-
Murder	-	-	1**	2	-
Firing at man	-	-	1**	-	-
Child murder	-	-	-	-	1

* Prisoner discharged

** Dismissed

Sources: 'Notes and Queries', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society,
New Ser., Vol.1, No.4 (1908), pp.391-3;
Vol.3, No.3 (1910), pp.239-40;
Vol.4, No.2 (1910), pp.157-8;
Vol.5, No.2 (1911), pp.147-8;
Vol.6, No.1 (1912), pp.70-1;

T. W. Thompson, 'Affairs of Egypt, 1909', Journal of
the Gypsy Lore Society, New Ser., Vol.5, No.2 (1911),
pp.114-30.

APPENDIX 6

LIST OF MAJOR LEGISLATION RELATING TO GYPSIES,
ENGLAND AND WALES, 1530-1914

<u>Statute Reference and Year</u>	<u>Short Title</u>	<u>Description</u>
22 Henry VIII, c.10 1530	Egyptians Act	Imposed ban on the immigration of 'Egipcions' and notice given to all Egyptians in England to leave the country
5 & 6 Edw.VI, c.21 1551-2	Pedlars Act	Forbade tinkers, pedlars and such like vagrant persons, 'who are more hurtful than necessary', to travel from place to place without licence from the justices, under penalty of 14 days imprisonment
1 & 2 Philip and Mary, c.4 1554	Egyptians Act	Gipsies forbidden to enter the country. Made provisions for the capital punishment of Egyptians if they remained in the country for more than one month
5 Eliz., c.20 1562	Egyptians Act	Extended the penalties of 22 Henry VIII, c.10 and 1 & 2 Philip and Mary, c.4
39 Eliz., c.4 1596	Poor Law Act	Declared as rogues and vagabonds "... all tynkers wandering abroad ... and all such p'sons, not being Fellons, wandering and p'tending themselves to be Egipcians or wandering in the Habite Forme or Attyre of counterfayte Egipcians".

... continued

Statute Reference
and Year

Short Title

Description

17 Geo.II, c.5
1743

Justices Commitment Act

"... all persons pretending to be Gypsies, or wandering in the habit and form of Egyptians, or pretending to have skill in palmistry, or pretending to tell fortunes", were to be dealt with as rogues and vagabonds

23 Geo.III, c.51
1783

Egyptians Act

Repealed previous laws re gypsies

23 Geo.III, c.83
1783

Rogues and Vagabonds Act

Extended provisions dealing with rogues and vagabonds

50 Geo.III, c.41
1810

Hawkers and Pedlars Act

Necessitated the purchase of licence for hawkers and pedlars

3 Geo.IV, c.40
1822

Vagrancy Act

Simplified previous laws re vagrants, rogues and vagabonds, &c., and consolidated them into one Act. Repealed former Acts but re-enacted most of their provisions

3 Geo.IV, c.126, s.121
1822

Turnpike Roads Act

Any gypsy encamping on side of turnpike road was liable to a fine of 40s.

5 Geo.IV, c.83
1824

Vagrancy Act

Any one pretending to tell fortunes by palmistry, or otherwise to deceive; any one wandering abroad and lodging under any tent or cart, not having any visible means of subsistence, and not giving a good account of himself, liable to penalty of 3 months imprisonment. Removed by statute the reward which 3 Geo.IV, c.46 gave to a constable or other party who apprehended a vagrant.

... continued

<u>Statute Reference and Year</u>	<u>Short Title</u>	<u>Description</u>
5 & 6 Will.IV, c.50, s.72, 76 1835	Highway Act	Penalised gypsies who camped on the highway. Liable to a fine of 40s.
34 & 35 Vict., c.96 1871	Pedlars Act	Extension of 50 Geo.III, c.41
34 & 35 Vict., c.112, s.15 1871	Prevention of Crimes Act	Made applicable to Scotland the section re gypsies of 5 Geo.IV, c.83
38 & 39 Vict., c.59, s.9 1879	Public Health Act	Provisions re accommodation for hop-pickers. See 48 & 49 Vict., c.72, s.9
39 & 40 Vict., c.56, s.29 1876	Commons Act	Empowered local authorities to make bye laws effectively closing Commons to gypsies
44 & 45 Vict., c.45 1881	Pedlars Act	Extension of 34 & 35 Vict., c.96
45 & 46 Vict., c.23 1883	Public Health (Fruit Pickers Lodgings) Act	Extended Public Health Act re accommodation for pickers of fruit and vegetables.
48 & 49 Vict., c.72, s.9 1885	Housing of the Working Classes Act	Applied provisions of 38 & 39 Vict., c.59 to nuisances in tents, vans, &c. District Councils empowered to make bye laws in this respect.
51 & 52 Vict., c.33 1888	Hawkers Act	Extended previous Acts re hawkers.

<u>Statute Reference and Year</u>	<u>Short Title</u>	<u>Description</u>
52 & 53 Vict., c.72, s.13 1889	Infectious Diseases (Notification) Act	Provisions of Act apply to moveable dwellings just as it applies to houses
52 & 53 Vict., c.50, s.57 1889	Local Government Act	Allowed County Councils to make bye laws for the prevention of vagrancy
54 & 55 Vict., c.76, s.95 1891	Public Health (London) Act	Sanitary regulations re vans, tents, &c.
56 & 57 Vict., c.73 1894	Local Government Act	Parish Councils empowered to regulate village greens and open spaces
62 & 63 Vict., c.30 1899	Commons (Inclosure) Act	District Council can apply to Board of Agri- culture to make bye laws for the regulation of Commons
8 Edw.VII, c.67, s.118 1908	Children's Act	Enforced compulsory education for children of travellers

Sources: Sir F. M. Eden, The State of the Poor (1797; abridged and edited by A. G. L. Rogers, 1928), pp.55-6; L. O. Pike, A History of Crime in England (1876), pp.75-7; C. J. R. Turner, Vagrants and Vagrancy (1887), pp.905-6; W. Axon, 'Laws relating to the Gipsies', in W. Andrews (ed.), Legal Lore: curiosities of laws and lawyers (1897), pp.171-2; H. T. Crofton, 'Early Annals of the Gypsies in England', Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, Old Ser., Vol.1, No.1 (1888), pp.5-24; 'The Law as to Gipsies', Local Government Journal (18 July 1896), p.465; H.M.S.O., Chronological Table of Statutes (1979).

APPENDIX 7

A GIPSY DIARY OF FIVE WEEKS AND A DAY - 1911

Saturday, November 25

This morning a number of gipsies arrived at Newlands Corner. I counted at least four children of school age among them and some younger children. They had with them three large vans, two tilt-carts, seven horses and a number of dogs, these latter of a sporting breed, rather like a rough-haired greyhound.

Sunday, November 26

The gipsies have not gone from the main encampment, and today we noticed two independent camps east and west of them. None of these people are real gipsies; they are at best what Borrow would have called "half-breds", and some of them are, I am sure, trampers pure and simple.

Monday, November 27

This morning the main camp had not moved. The gipsies had lighted large fires and strewn the ground with their refuse. The ground will, I am afraid, be very foul for some long time to come, or at least until we get heavy rain.

My father and I riding to the east along the ridge of the Downs, saw a large encampment near Sir H.R.'s house (about two and a half miles from Newlands Corner). It consisted of three vans and three or four tilt-carts. Judging from the number of blanket tents we saw (at least half a dozen) there must have been a great many gipsies belonging to it. We only saw the "camp guards", however, for no doubt the "main body" of gipsies were out begging, hawking clothes-pegs, telling fortunes, or otherwise furthering the "affairs of Egypt". We did see five children of school age, however, and some toddling babies who looked extremely dirty and unhealthy. This afternoon the main camp moved from Newlands Corner.

A propos of the health of gipsy children, I was told at a hospital that gipsy children suffering from diseases resulting from dirt, exposure and underfeeding, have of late been fairly frequently admitted. On one occasion, I was told, some gipsies brought in an unfortunate child suffering from severe bronchial-pneumonia and in a high fever, but the gipsies could not be induced to leave the child in hospital for so much as one night but insisted on taking it to almost certain death in the caravans or tents.

Tuesday, November 28

Today I went out walking and tried in vain to prevent my two dogs from sniffing round some old gipsy camping-ground where there were

a number of dirty rags, bits of mouldy food, burnt-out fires, &c. I am afraid that they may pick up some infection, as the gipsies' dogs, and apparently the gipsies themselves, may have had almost anything the matter with them, and any disease, from mange to plague, might be spread in this way.

Wednesday, November 29

Out riding this morning I saw a new encampment near Newlands Corner, consisting of three large blanket tents and one small cart. Two dogs guarded the camp and there were two horses grazing near by. I saw two children of school age returning to the camp with water.

Thursday, November 30

Today the camp, which was pitched near Newlands Corner on Wednesday, trekked on to the east and I saw the whole ménage. There were two particularly dirty and forbidding-looking men, three lads of about fifteen years of age, a young girl of perhaps seventeen or eighteen, a boy of ten and two other children. They cannot possibly all belong to the same family and I cannot help feeling sorry for the young girl, who is rather pretty and not as brutalised looking as these women often are. She will not have much chance, poor thing.

Friday, December 1

I was in London all day and therefore saw nothing of these poor travesties of Borrow's Egyptians. One cannot help wondering what Mr. Petulengro or Tawno Chickno, "The World's Beauty", would have thought of calling these tramps gipsies simply because they had tents and vans.

Saturday, December 2

Today out riding we saw a family encamped in a thick "bosky" or clump of trees and undergrowth near Newlands Corner. They had got a rather large blanket tent with them and had lighted a particularly big fire. Fortunately the undergrowth is very wet and there is therefore not much danger of its catching alight. Had the weather been frosty and dry it might easily have set that part of the Downs on fire. There were three children among the party, two of them of school age.

Sunday, December 3

A new encampment has been made further along the Downs to the east than Newlands Corner. It consists of two tents and a small cart, the bushes near-by are absolutely covered with clothes, or rather pieces of stuff apparently hung there to dry, and the gipsies have lighted a large fire.

Monday, December 4

The gipsies of the "washing" moved on today, but we saw another small camp in a little hollow about a mile and a half from Newlands Corner (more exactly about half-way between Newlands Corner and One Tree Hill). We noticed no less than four children of school age among the party* and we also observed that they had chosen, apparently because they preferred it, a particularly foul site for their camp. Whole generations of gipsies have camped in this hollow, the floor of which is by now covered with horribly evil-smelling rags, hay which has been originally used for bedding, and is now sodden with the rain, old worn-out boots, their leather cracking and mouldy, brims of straw hats, hunks of gnawed bread, old bones, horribly greasy tins blackened by the fire and smelling of rancid fat, cinders of burnt-out fires, and mouldering horse-dung. These are the kind of surroundings which the gipsies and trampers seem to like best as they almost always camp on an old site. We also saw a man and woman today with a perambulator (a favourite substitute for a cart), the woman with a very young baby in her arms. I saw another of the children from the bosky a long way away with a woman. They have all therefore probably moved on.

Tuesday, December 5

I did not see any gipsies today, having been for a walk in the morning in a district which is always fairly free from them. Last year, at about this time or a little later, gipsies were encamped in quite extraordinary numbers at Newlands Corner. I remember counting no less than thirteen separate encampments (not single vans but groups of two or three) at one time. It was one of the most remarkable sights that I have ever come across to see all the children playing together. They must have numbered from fifteen to twenty of all ages, all extremely ragged and dirty and apparently in a large proportion suffering from diseases of the eyes and skin.

Wednesday, December 6

I was in London all day and so saw no gipsies.

Thursday, December 7

A remarkably wet day today. Walking down the road to the Silent Pool we met a tramping man and woman who had a very young baby in a perambulator with them. We also met another tramp, a man, who did not like the look of our bull-terrier at all.

* Two of these children are those who have moved on from the bosky, I think.

Friday, December 8

This afternoon the turf was too hard and slippery after the frost for riding and I did not go near the gipsies' haunts. In the morning, however, we had a great deal of trouble with the bull-terrier, who, puppy-like, will go and smell out all the decaying food which the gipsies leave about, and lick the horrible rags and filth. One thing is particularly disgusting about their old camps, that is that after they have struck their tents, they leave their beds of dried grass or hay scattered about on the ground, and these must literally swarm with vermin.

Saturday, December 9

Today my father and I rode along the top of the hill to Netley Heath where we saw two gipsy camps. The first consisted of two large blanket tents and a four-wheeled cart; and the second appeared to consist of tents also. We did not happen to pass very close to the latter and so did not see it very clearly, but it was probably larger than the first as we saw two horses belonging to it.

Sunday, December 10

It has been extraordinarily wet all day and although we went for a walk, we saw no gipsies. The hill seems too exposed for them in this bad weather.

Monday, December 11

A number of gipsies arrived this afternoon. This morning my father and I rode out and not a gipsy was to be seen at Newlands Corner, only the usual dirty rags, &c. By the afternoon, when my mother and I went out for a stroll, a large camp was established at Newlands Corner, consisting of three big vans with probably three but certainly two horses. We also saw another smaller camp a little further along to the west, consisting of two blanket tents. There are belonging to this encampment one woman, two men, a baby and two large dogs.

Tuesday, December 12

This morning I started for Yorkshire and I shall be away for nearly a week.

Last year the gipsies did an extraordinarily annoying thing. Whilst we were away they turned a number of horses into the garden (I am told about six). All the gates were, I believe, shut as usual, so that it would have been impossible for the horses to have strayed in. The gipsies must have intentionally opened one of the gates and driven them through. Fortunately the horses did not get into the main part of the flower garden, which is mostly up one or two steps, but they did considerable damage to grass paths, &c., before the gardener discovered their presence and drove them out.

Wednesday, December 13

I have not heard if any gipsies were seen today. Where I am staying in Yorkshire they seem to be quite free from them.

Thursday, December 14

I hear that there were a party of gipsies at Newlands Corner today consisting of two women, three men, and three small children, who all appeared to be exceedingly ragged and dirty.

Friday, December 15

I do not know of any gipsies being seen today. Probably my informant did not go farther than Newlands Corner. I wish that I could hear when the encampment of Monday was moved but I cannot find out.

Saturday, December 16

Today my father tells me he saw a small party of gipsies about a quarter of a mile west from Newlands Corner. They had pitched a blanket tent and had a horse with them.

Sunday, December 17

I came home late yesterday evening. Today it was extremely wet and we happened to take our one walk on the Merrow Downs, which are "regulated" and have a "common" keeper, who sees to it that the gipsies are prevented from contaminating these Downs with their squalid leavings. The contrast between the two stretches of land is most remarkable.

Monday, December 18

Today was exceedingly wet and the Downs soaking. My father and I, therefore, kept to the roads during our ride and we saw no gipsies.

Tuesday, December 19

My mother and brother saw a small encampment about a hundred yards east of Newlands Corner. It consisted of one horse, one small van, and one large blanket tent. They strangely enough saw no people belonging to it.

Wednesday, December 20

This afternoon we saw a large encampment at Newlands Corner. There were no less than four vans, a cart, a blanket tent, and four horses, and we saw three children of school age and several men and women. Tuesday's small camp was still there and apparently the whole of the washing of the two communities was spread to dry upon the adjacent

bushes, I suppose that it was washing, for although not immaculately clean, the garments, or portions of garments, of which it consisted were not really dirty,

Thursday, December 21

Some of the gipsies have moved from Newlands Corner, but although two of the four vans have gone, curiously enough there seem to be the same number of horses as before. The place where the van stood is now extraordinarily filthy considering for how short a time it remained. Two of the children begged from us and so did some of the women.

Friday, December 22

One van still remains at Newlands Corner though the others have apparently gone away. I hope that they really have gone and have not just moved on further.

Saturday, December 23

Today the one van was moved on about fifty yards, I suppose in order to be out of sight of the road that the gipsies might be disturbed by no passing policeman. Every time they move they leave the ground in a most horrible condition, and I expect that if those that are left go on thus, moving a very little at a time, they will make an almost continuous track of dirty rags and sordid refuse along the Downs, for their dirty patches will soon be linked up with other rubbish-strewn areas.

Sunday, December 24

The gipsies have not moved on again but I find that there are many more people belonging to the van than I had supposed; especially I noticed about six very villainous looking men collected near the camp east of Newlands Corner. The gipsies of Thursday the 21st had not moved far. I find they had only gone a little way along the Downs to the west. We saw three horses grazing about but could not at first see their owners. Then we turned a corner and came upon them - a van with a patched and dirty canvas cover drawn up by the side of the green track under an old yew tree, with a fire burning in the door of the van; a dirty smoke-stained sacking tent also with a fire inside it, numberless rags, tin cans, and old boots strewn about, and amongst it all the half-clothed, unhealthy, grimy, uncared-for children running and tumbling. Half concealed in a thick clump of trees was another tent, the bright fire within it lighting up the interior. I hear that there are yet more gipsies in the little hollow between One Tree and Newlands Corner.

Monday, December 25

All the gipsies remained on today. There is now a line of them at regular intervals of about 200 yards for a mile or so along the hill top.

Tuesday, December 26

Today as we rode to the meet eastwards towards Dorking, we saw a number of gipsies besides those encamped near Newlands Corner. There were two tents and one van at "The Ladies' Mile", which is about three miles from Newlands Corner, and four large vans and a very large number of gipsies on Ranmore Common about five miles away.

I was told the other day by a neighbour why it is that gipsies are specially fond of mutilating and spoiling holly trees. It is because they provide the best kind of wood for making skewers, which commodity the gipsies sell to butchers in the neighbourhood. Not that gipsies by any means confine their depredations to hollies. They also tear branches from small oaks, beeches, ash trees, &c., but they seem to be always hacking at the unfortunate hollies. The same neighbour, an authority, also told me that the gipsies do a great deal of ferreting on dark nights, much to the annoyance of the local farmers. He says that the gipsies threatened to kill one farmer because he had caught them poaching. According to local report, they are very fond of threatening people and using bad language.

Wednesday, December 27

Today my brother and I rode along the ridge of the Downs to the west. We counted no less than four separate encampments within one mile from Newlands Corner. The first consisted of one van, a cart, and a tent; the second consisted of three vans and one tent; the third of one tent, and the fourth of one tent and one cart. We noticed in all five children of school age. Two of these encampments have been there since yesterday and the third and fourth have been in their places certainly since Saturday, and possibly since Friday. The filth has become dreadful, and lately the caravans have moved on a little every day or two and have thus covered an enormous amount of ground with their leavings. We saw two carts with ponies and a large number of gipsies coming up the hill in the evening. They were obviously going to camp.

Thursday, December 28

A policeman and a keeper by their united efforts succeeded in "moving on" most of the gipsies today. We saw them "like the sands of the sea for multitude" pouring down off the hill top. Two vans passed our gate on their way towards Clandon (north). Three or four caravans went down towards Merrow (west) and two (south) to Albury. The gipsies who went to Albury were sitting by the side of the village street when we went down, and had their van drawn up on the road and were apparently begging of each person who passed them. We went on to Albury Heath where a tramping gipsy woman with a baby in her arms

begged of us in a most piteous way, It is very difficult to resist a woman with a baby, but I believe if one once begins to give these people either food or money, one tramp tells another that you are "good for a copper", or its equivalent, and your house is besieged by a set of thieving and bullying vagrants. We have been specially warned by the police that, living far away from any village in a very lonely situation, we must not give anything to tramps. If we do, the word will be passed down and we shall be worried out of our lives by vagrants of all sorts.

Friday, December 29

There are still some gipsies walking about at Newlands Corner today, though I saw none who had camped. I hear that a week or two ago there were some gipsies encamped just outside the coachman's house. His wife tells me that their language was extraordinarily lurid. I wonder if they were really talking Romany or Jargon?

Saturday, December 30

I did not see any gipsies today, but I hear that some came to Newlands Corner in the afternoon.

Sunday, December 31

This morning we saw the gipsies who came here yesterday. They have camped just by the side of the road. The encampment consists of four large vans and four horses. There are a number of children, three or perhaps four of an age to go to school; a younger child and a baby. There are a good many people belonging to it; three or four women and apparently about six or more men and a girl of about fourteen. Further along the Downs to the west we saw another camp, this time a small one, consisting of one tent and a little cart. Later on in the morning we saw a van and a cart being driven over the Downs by some gipsies, the cart hung with rabbit skins and with a furtive and predatory dog running near it.

Source: Reproduced from J. Strachey, 'The Gipsy Scandal and the Danger to the Commons', National Review, Vol.59 (1912), pp.469-71.

APPENDIX 8

STATEMENTS OF SURREY RESIDENTS AS TO
THE NUISANCE CAUSED BY GYPSIES, 1898

(A) Statement of M. W. Poole, huntsman to the
West Surrey Staghounds, 2 June 1898

"... owing to my present house being isolated and abutting on Epsom Common we have a lot of trouble with the gypsies who have often mustered in considerable numbers with as many as eight or nine vans and tents pitched at our very gates for three weeks at a time, and when I am absent from home they are very bold and cause my wife a great deal of trouble and annoyance by begging for water hot and cold (and we have to fetch our drinking water from a distance), food, money, and even milk for their babies, which if she refuses she only meets with abuse.

My children attend school at Epsom and their journeys to and fro are a source of anxiety to my wife and myself because of the gypsies. They have often begged the children's pocket pence and the gypsies' children do the same; they even try to obtain from my children the dinner they take to school. When the gypsies are about my little ones are really afraid to go to school.

My wife is afraid of the gypsies when I am away.

This road to Epsom and Chessington is a favourite walk especially on Sundays but I have often seen pedestrians obliged to turn back on coming to the gipsy encampments.

My wife and daughter are accosted and begged from when returning from Church by gipsy women with babies and on a refusal their begging is quickly followed by curses and bad language.

The vans and tents of these people (being pitched as they are in our parish, close to the roadside) and the smoke from their fires are dangerous to drivers of young or restive horses. I have experienced much difficulty in this respect myself - many horses shy whenever they pass them.

We have often been kept awake all night when the gypsies have pitched near our house owing to the quarrelling, and their language is too abominable to hear; their general behaviour is disgusting; their women have changed their clothes in sight of my house, and neither sex trouble to go to cover to relieve themselves.

When the gypsies have made a move the place where they have been is generally strewn with rubbish, rags, filthy old garments, broken tins, utensils as well as vegetable refuse, whilst the turf has been destroyed by their fires.

I have to get up at night when the gipsies are about, being warned by my dog that they have been prowling round the premises.

I have suffered damage by broken hedges and fences which damage is without a doubt caused by the gipsies but one can never catch them at it.

I have had fruit and vegetables stolen by them. On one occasion I missed some choice apples that I intended for show, and - strange to say - we never got any windfalls when the gipsies are near us."

(B) Statement of Mr. E. F. Langdale,
2 January 1898

"As I live quite close to the high road and at one corner of crossroads, I unfortunately have great opportunities both of hearing and seeing gipsies when they are encamped and "at home". Such opportunities as cannot possibly be obtained by many of the neighbouring gentry whose premises are extensive and so well closed in that the inmates of their houses cannot be subjected to the same annoyance than their less well to do neighbours are.

I have found that gipsies, although in many instances, appearing to wish to keep within bounds of the law, are often really very lawless. They will graze their cattle in your fields at night, pull stakes out of your hedges, cut your trees down for green wood to make clothes pegs of and ride when it suits them on the pathway and not get off it to let pedestrians pass. I have however never missed anything but wood, though I keep fowls. At certain seasons of the year gipsies become very numerous in the neighbourhood of Kingswood and they are accustomed to encamp on a delta of grass right opposite and within twenty yards of my house. The windows of which even in the height of summer, have often to be closed to prevent my family hearing the foulest language that could be uttered. As regards this part of my evidence I feel I should certainly not generalise; I therefore affirm that the staple words used are f---, s-d, b-----, b-----, not any of them at all desirable to be heard, specially by womenfolk and children.

Gipsies make frequent requests, not to say demands, for water, boiling water for preference, and if refused, as they sometimes must be at homes whose supply of water is entirely dependent upon the rainfall, they become insolent and abusive. But of course not all are alike; many appear to be grateful and are civil and I wish to avoid confounding with the ordinary gipsy horse coper, the vendor of "fairings" (gifts bought from fairs) and sweets who also travels about in a caravan. The former class are a great source of annoyance and very often unintentionally or not frighten women, by importuning them for assistance and children by their rough manner towards them.

Gipsies seem to be less audacious in stealing than they were some few years ago, and I do not think they would come into anyone's garden now and not mind the owner seeing them dig up her potatoes and cut her cabbages as they once did do at my servant's mother's house near Banstead.

I have usually found the police most prompt, when informed of the annoyance, in moving on gipsies who encamp opposite my house but as the local constable lives two miles off and has a good long beat I cannot always obtain his assistance quickly.

Surrey has long been the favourite ground of gipsies, but I am informed on good authority that in Reigate, particular encouragement is given them by the servants at large houses, for they purchase so many little things of gipsy women who come round to hawk their wares. Is a hawker's licence necessary, and if so is it strictly enforced?

Whilst fully recognising the fact that the gipsy class must rest somewhere by the side of the road, if, as I believe to be the case, they are not permitted by County Councils to encamp on common lands, I would with all deference suggest that they should not be permitted to go within three or four hundred yards or earshot of houses.

I think too that all gipsies' caravans, carts and tents should be conspicuously numbered so that in the event of any cause for complaint arising the public can assist the police in identifying the offenders, who under the present system get clear off very often; being here today and gone tomorrow miles away.

Further, I might suggest that as gipsies, no doubt, map out their itinerary they should be compelled or required to report to the nearest police station where they encamped the previous 24 hours and where they intend to do so during the next 24 hours."

Source: From a file containing circular letters, statements and other items re tent dwellers, gypsies, etc., 1897-8 (Surrey Record Office, CC28/101).

APPENDIX 9

ILLUSTRATIONS

Although some of these illustrations have not reproduced entirely satisfactorily, they nevertheless have been included here to show how gypsies were portrayed in the press and elsewhere. It is interesting to quote in full the text that accompanied these representations. Firstly, then, the description of the camp portrayed in illustrations 6 and 7:

"Another sketch of the singular habits and rather deplorable condition of these vagrant people, who hang about, as the parasites of civilisation, close on the suburban outskirts of our wealthy metropolis, is presented by our Artist, following those which have appeared in the last two weeks. Mr. G. Smith, of Coalville, Leicester, having taken in hand the question of providing due supervision and police regulation for the gypsies, with compulsory education for their children, we readily dedicate these bad illustrations to the furtherance of his good work. The ugliest place we know in the neighbourhood of London, the most dismal and forlorn, is not Hackney Marshes or those of the Lea, beyond Old Ford, at the East End; but it is the tract of land, half torn up for brick-field clay, half consisting of fields laid waste in expectation of the house-builder, which lies just outside of Shepherd's Bush and Notting-hill. There it is that the gipsy encampment may be found, squatting within an hour's walk of the Royal palaces and of the luxurious town mansions of our nobility and opulent classes, to the very west of the fashionable West-End, beyond the gentility of Bayswater and Whiteley's avenue of universal shopping. It is a curious spectacle in that situation, and might suggest a few serious reflections upon social contrasts at the centre and capital of the mighty British nation, which takes upon itself the correction of every savage tribe in South and West Africa and Central Asia. The encampment is usually formed of two or three vans and a rude cabin or a tent, placed on some piece of waste ground, for which the gipsy party have to pay a few shillings a week of rent. This may be situated at the back of a row of respectable houses and in full view of their bedroom or parlour windows, not much to the satisfaction of the quiet inhabitants. The interior of one of the vans, furnished as a dwelling-room, which is shown in our Artist's Sketch, does not look very miserable; but Mr. Smith informs us that these receptacles of vagabond humanity are often sadly overcrowded. Besides a man and his wife and their own children, the little ones stowed in

bunks or cupboards, there will be several adult persons taken in as lodgers. The total number of gypsies now estimated to be living in the metropolitan district is not less than two thousand, Among those are doubtless not a small proportion of idle runaways or "losels" from the more settled classes of our people. It would seem to be the duty of somebody at the Home Office, for the sake of public health and good order, to call upon some local authorities of the county or the parish to look after these eccentricities of gipsy life."

Similarly, George Smith described the Mitcham Common site (illustration 10) thus :

"Inside this tent - with no other home - there were two men, their wives, and about fourteen children of all ages; two or three of these were almost men and women. The wife of one of the men had been confined of a baby the day before I called - her bed consisting of a layer of straw upon the damp ground. Such was the wretched and miserable condition they were in that I could not do otherwise than help the poor woman, and gave her a little money. But in her feelings of gratitude to me for this simple act of kindness she said she would name the baby anything I would like to choose; and, knowing that gypsies are fond of outlandish names, I was in a difficulty. After turning the thing over in my mind for a few minutes, I could think of nothing but 'Deliverance'."

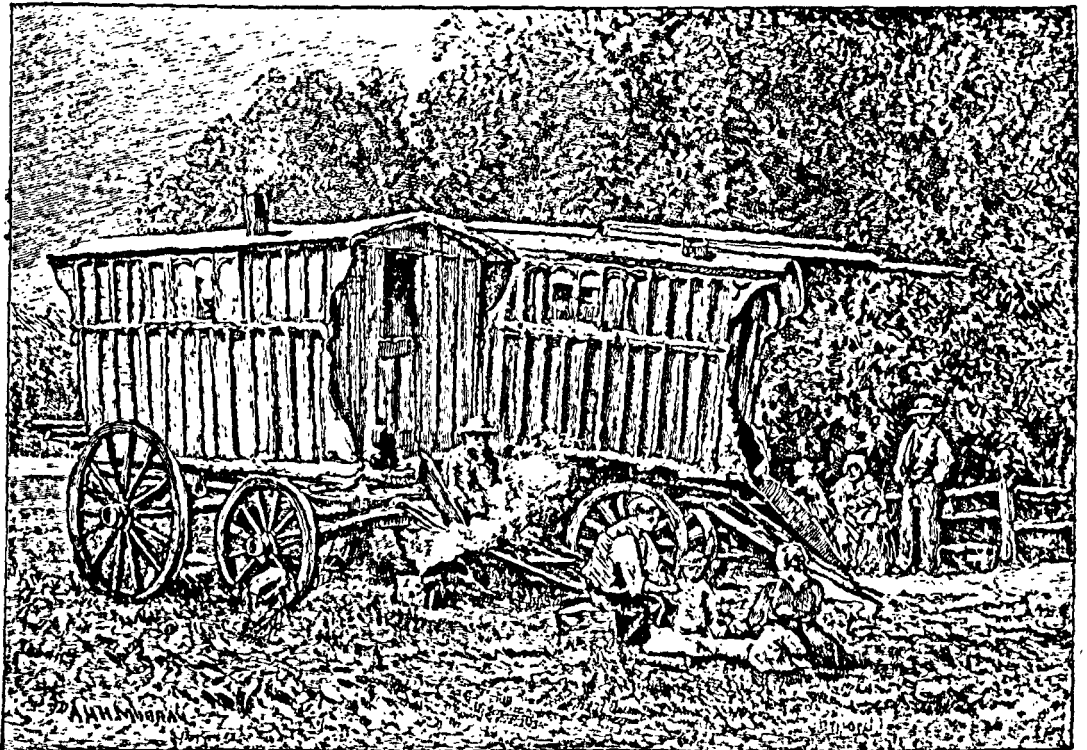
Smith therefore used vivid illustrations to support his written descriptions of the squalid, filthy and degrading conditions in which the van-dwellers lived. He borrowed pictures from the Illustrated London News, cut them in two to suggest the generality of the image, and added captions missing from the originals, suggesting pigs would rather flee than enter a gypsy tent, already overcrowded with humans of both sexes. Although Smith relied on exaggeration and extreme generalisations to convey a picture of privation and depravity it was nevertheless the case that for the majority of the urban van-dwelling population the conditions of existence were not far removed from those which Smith described.

The paintings of the evictions at Surrey and Birmingham (20 and 21) have to be seen as rather fanciful representations, but nevertheless are of interest. Note for example the number of women participating in the fight at Birmingham, and also the policeman in the background setting fire to property. In contrast, the policeman present at the Surrey eviction stays discreetly in the background, in line with the instructions of the Chief Constable, while the two main protagonists confront each other in verbal assault.

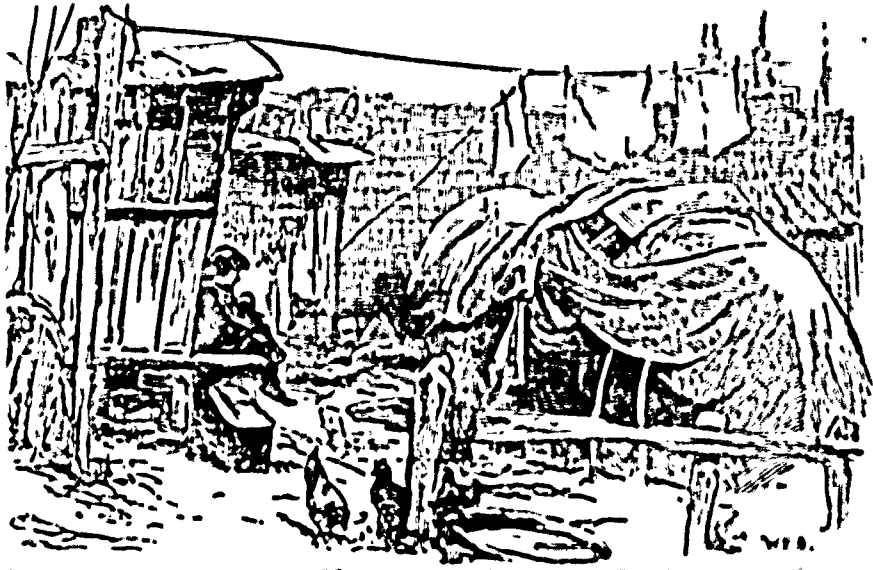
1. NEW FOREST GYPSIES



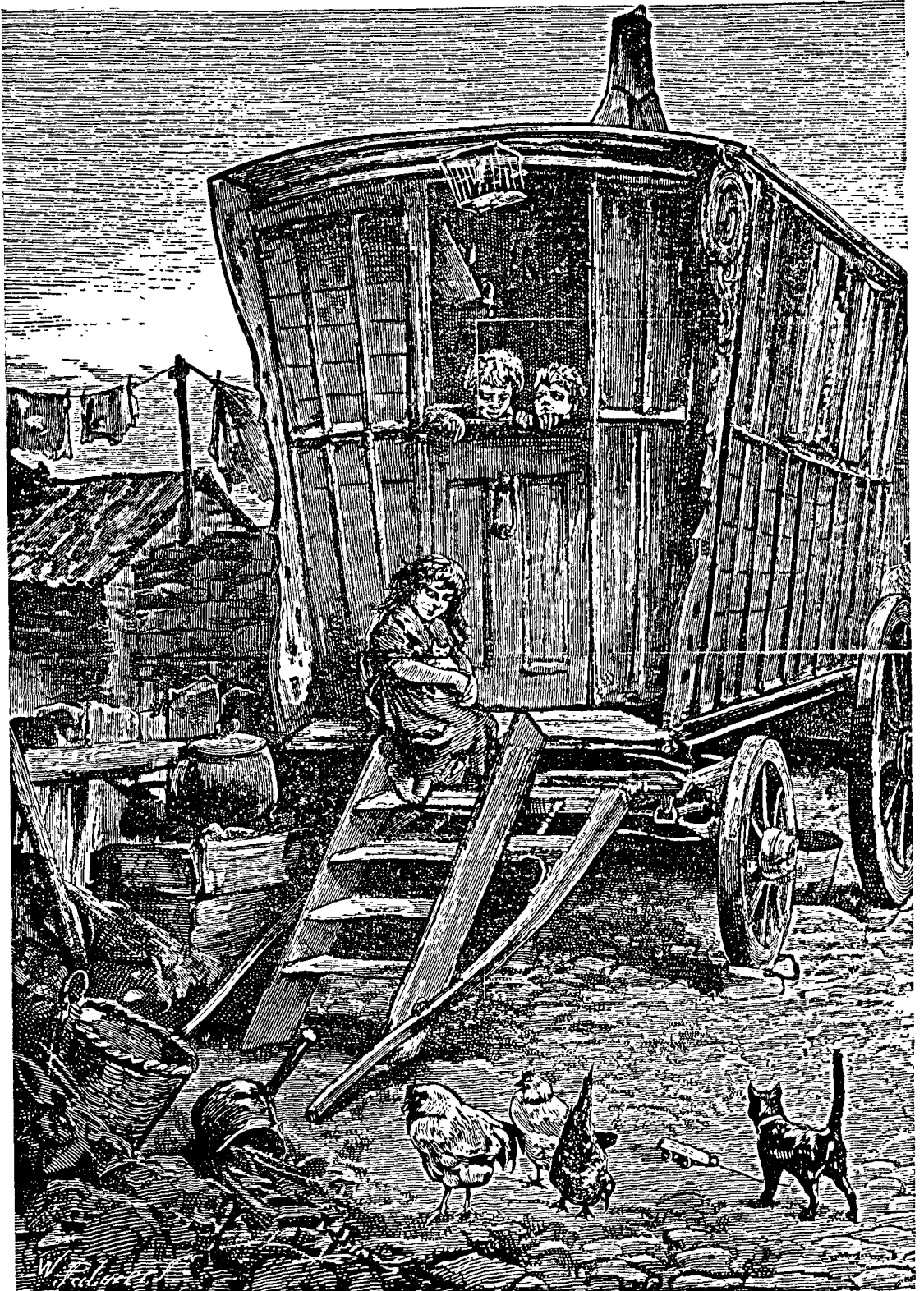
2. NEW FOREST GYPSIES



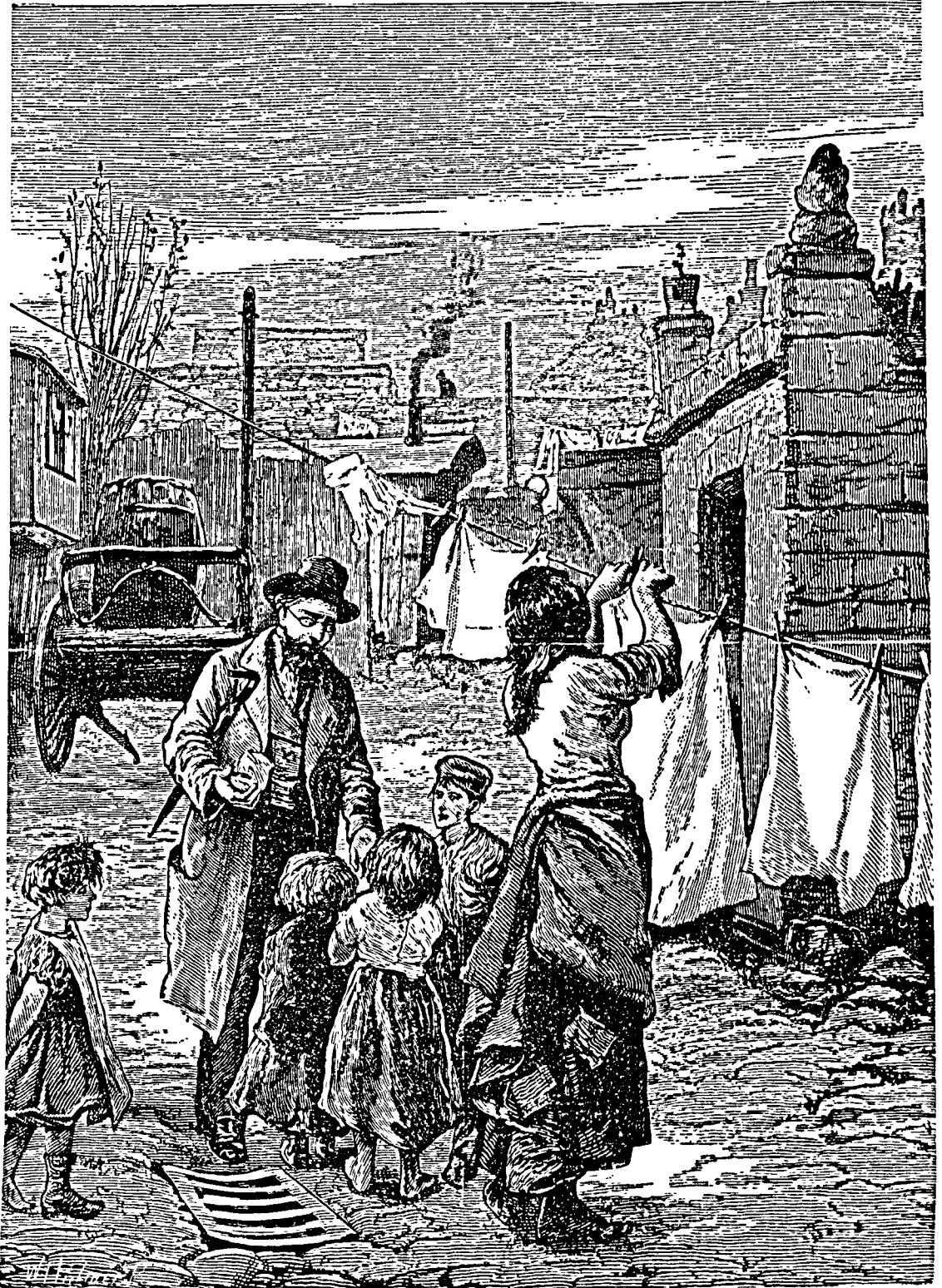
3. GYPSY CAMP NEAR LATIMER ROAD, NOTTING HILL



4. GYPSY CAMP NEAR LATIMER ROAD, NOTTING HILL



5. GYPSY CAMP NEAR LATIMER ROAD, NOTTING HILL



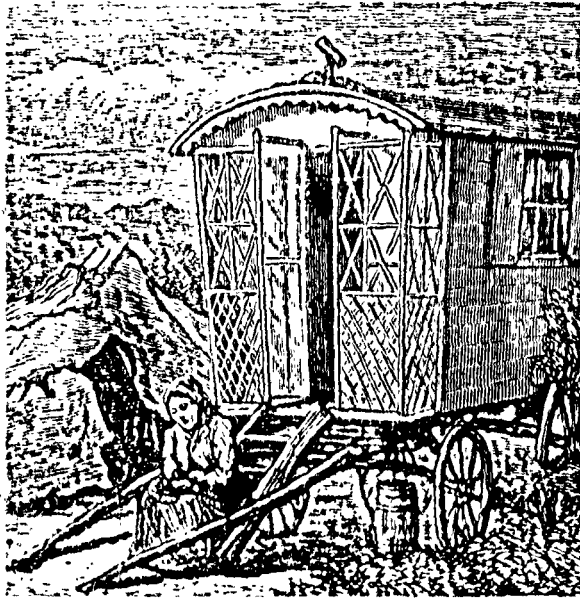
6. INSIDE A GYPSY VAN, NOTTING HILL



7. INSIDE A GYPSY VAN, NOTTING HILL



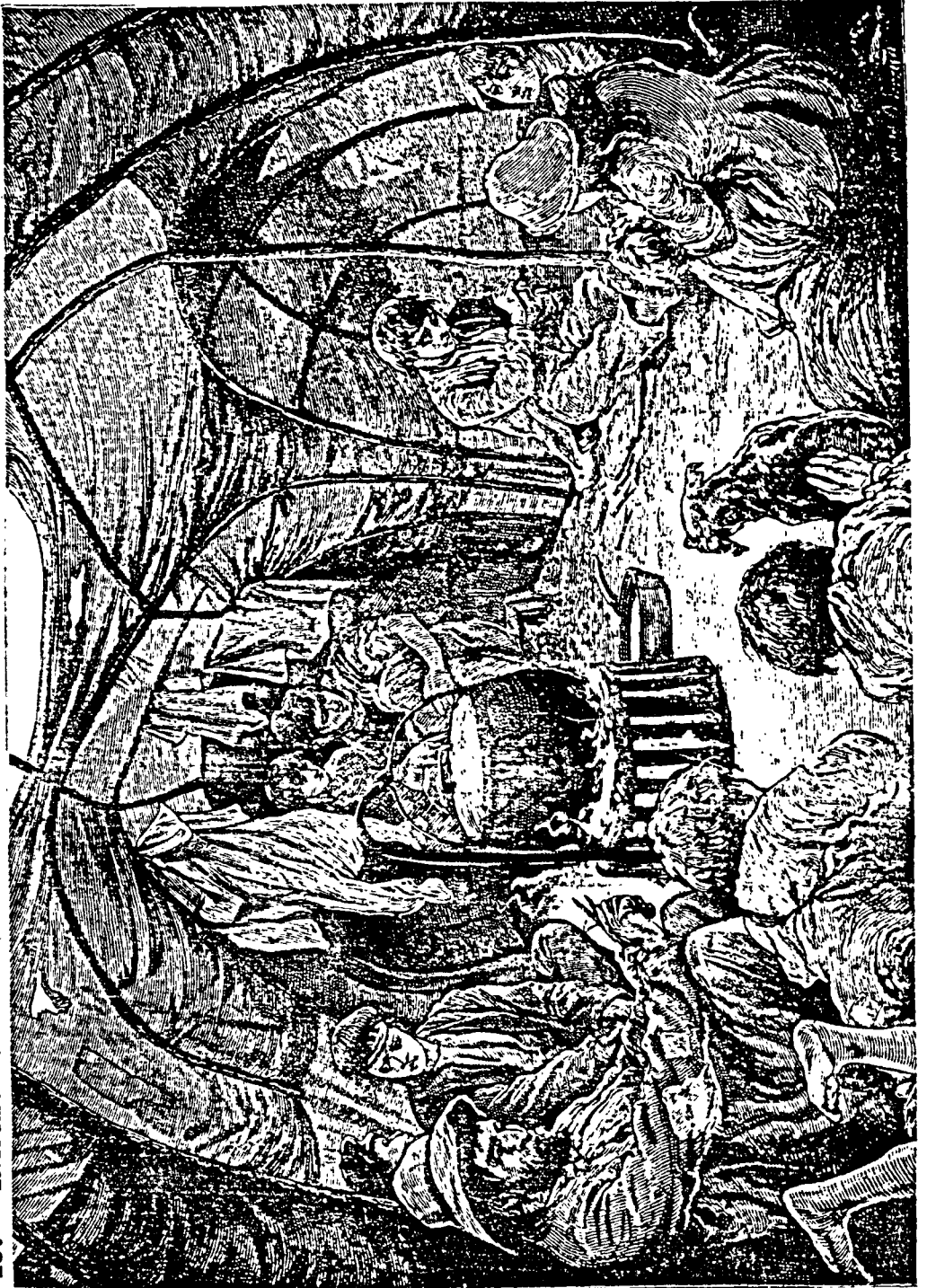
8. A CHRISTIAN GYPSY'S VAN



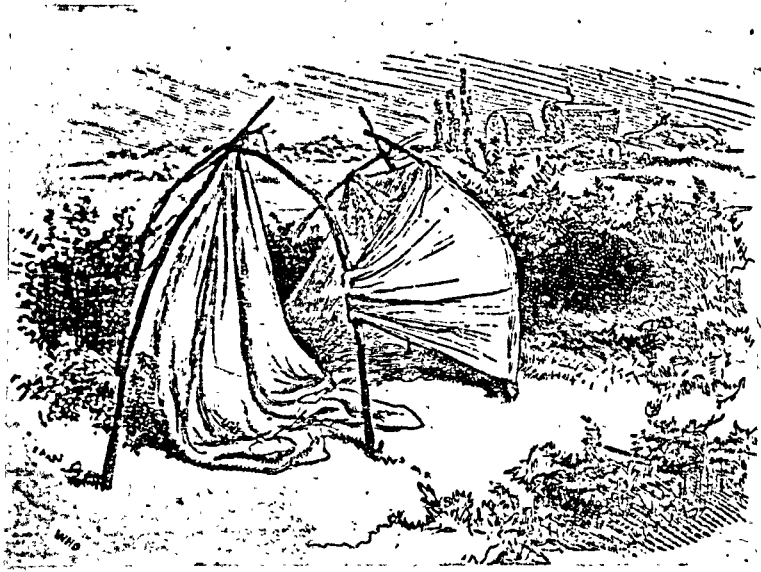
9. INSIDE A CHRISTIAN GYPSY'S VAN



10. INTERIOR OF A GYPSY TENT ON MITCHAM COMMON



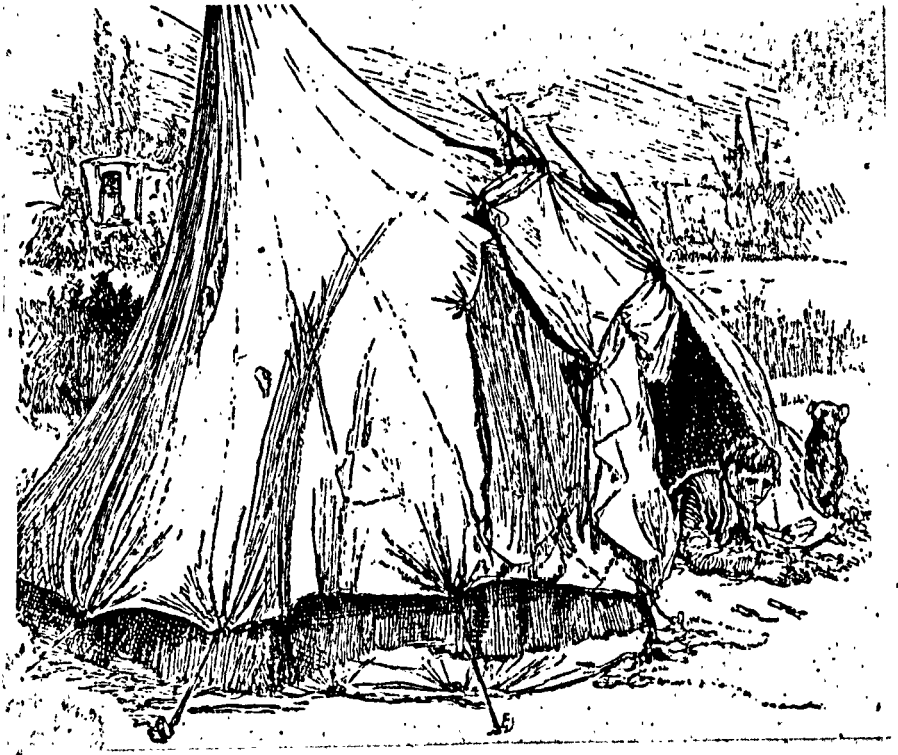
11. GYPSY TENT ON MITCHAM COMMON



12. "A FARMER'S PIG THAT DOES NOT LIKE A GYPSY TENT"



13. GYPSY TENT ON HACKNEY MARSHES



14. GYPSY TENT ON HACKNEY WICK



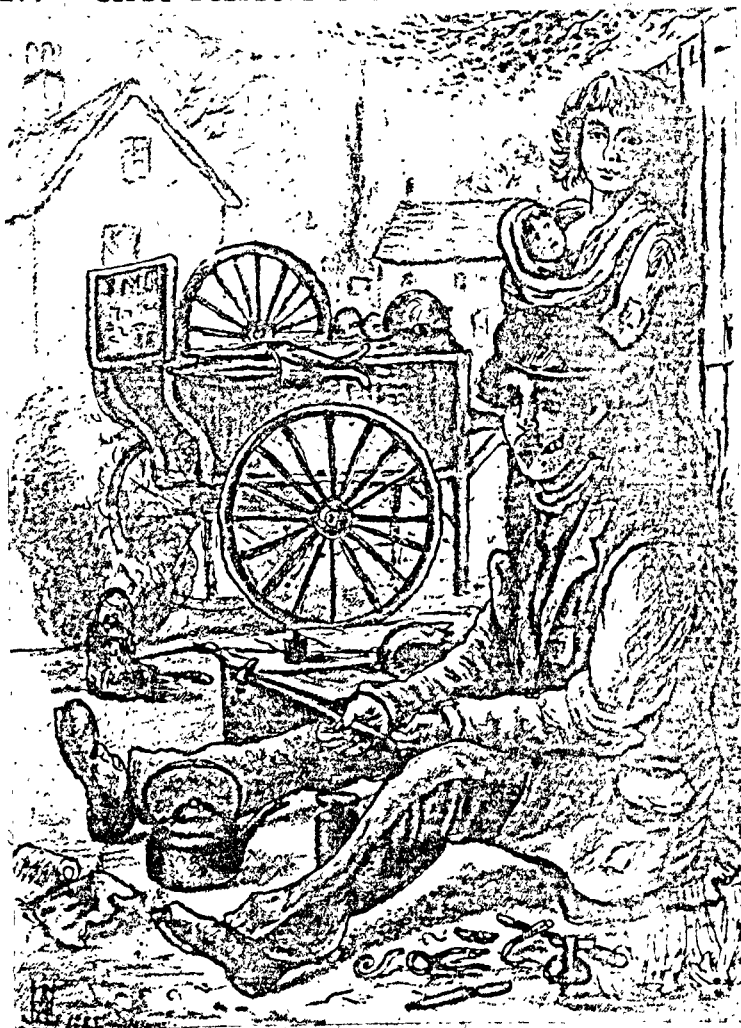
15. GYPSY BROOM-SELLER



16. GYPSY KNIFE-GRINDER



17. GYPSY SCISSORS-GRINDER



18. GEORGE SMITH AND GYPSY CHILDREN





19. A LONDON ENCAMPMENT, 1856

20. LORD OF THE MANOR BREAKING UP THE GYPSY CAMP IN SURREY



21. EVICTION OF GYPSIES FROM BLACK PATCH, BIRMINGHAM



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Daily Mirror
Daily News
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Evening News
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Globe
Graphic
Guardian
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Hampshire Courier
Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle
Illustrated London News
Illustrated Times
Jackson's Oxford Journal
Labour News and Employment Advertiser
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Lancashire Post

Leeds Mercury
Leicester Journal
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Manchester Courier
Manchester Examiner
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Morning Leader
Morning Post
Newcastle Daily Chronicle
Newcastle Weekly Chronicle
North Mail
Northampton Mercury
Northern Echo
Northern Whig
Oldham Chronicle
Pall Mall Gazette
Penny Illustrated Paper
Preston Herald
Primitive Methodist
Reading Mercury
School Guardian
Scotsman
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Sheffield and Rotherham Independent
South Bucks Standard
South Wales Echo
Spectator
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