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THE NEW HAMPSHIRE GIPSY.

BY JOHN G. WHITTIER.

Hark! a rap at my door. Welcome any body; just now. One gains nothing by attempting to shut out the sprites of the weather. They come in at the key-hole; they peer through the dripping panes; they insinuate themselves through the crevices of the casement or plump down chimney outside of the rain-drops.

I rise and throw open the door. A tall, shambling, loose-jointed figure; a pinched, shrewd face, sun-browned and wind-dried; small, quick-winking, black eyes. There he stands, the water dripping from his pulpy hat and ragged elbows.

I speak to him, but he returns no answer. With a dumb show of misery, quite touching, he hands me a soiled piece of parchment, whereon I read what purports to be a melancholy account of shipwreck and disaster to the particular detriment, loss and damnification of one Pietro Frugoni, who is, in consequence, sorely in want of the alms of all charitable Christian persons, and who is, in short, the bearer of this veracious document, duly certified and endorsed by an Italian consul in one of our Atlantic cities, of a high sounding, but, to Yankee organs, unpronounceable name.

Here commences a struggle. Every man, the Mahometans tell us, has two attendant angels, the good one on his right shoulder, the bad on his left.—"Give," says Benevolence, as with some difficulty I fish up a small coin from the depths of my pocket. "Not a cent," says selfish Prudence, and I drop it from my fingers. "Think," says the good angel, "of the poor stranger in a strange land, just escaped from the terrors of the sea-storm in which his little property has perished, thrown half naked and helpless on our shores, ignorant of our language, and unable to find employment suited to his capacity." "A vile impostor!" replies the left hand sentinel. "His paper, purchased from one of those ready writers in New York, who manufacture beggar credentials at the low price of one dollar per copy, with earthquakes, fires or shipwrecks, to suit customers."

Amidst this confusion of tongues, I take another survey of my visitant.—His! a light dawns upon me. That shrewd, old face with its sharp, winking eyes, is no stranger to me. Pietro Frugoni, I have seen thee before! Si, Senor, that face of thine has looked at me over a dirty white neckcloth, with the corners of that cunning mouth drawn downwards, and those small eyes turned up in sanctimonious gravity, while thou wast offering to a crowd of half-grown boys an extemporaneous exhortation, in the capacity of a traveling preacher. Have I not seen it peering out from under a blanket, as that of a poor Penobscot Indian, who had lost the use of his hands while trapping on the Madawaska? Is it not the face of the forlorn father of six small children, whom the "mercury doctors" had "pisoned" and crippled? Did it not belong to that down-east unfortunate, who had been out to the "Genesee country," and got the "fever-nager," and whose hand shook so pitifully when held out to

receive my poor gift? The same, under all disguises—Stephen Leathers of Barrington—him and none other! Let me conjure him into his own likeness. "Well, Stephen what news from old Barrington?"

"O, well, I thought I knew ye," he answers, not the least disconcerted. "How do you do, and how's your folks? All well, I hope. I took this 'ere paper, you see, to help a poor furrier, who couldn't make himself understood any more than a wild goose. I thought I'd just start him for 'ard a little. It seemed a marcy to do it."

Well and shiftily answered, though ragged Proteus. One cannot be angry with such a fellow. I will just inquire into the present state of his gospel mission, and about the condition of his tribe on the Penobscot; and it may not be amiss to congratulate him on the success of the steam-doctors in sweating the "pizen" of the regular faculty out of him. But he evidently has no wish to enter into idle conversation. Intent upon his benevolent errand, he is already clattering down stairs. Involuntarily I glance out of the window, just in season to catch a single glimpse of him ere he is swallowed up in the mist.

He has gone; and knave as he is, I can hardly help exclaiming, "Luck go with him!" He has broken in upon the sombre train of my thoughts, and called up before me pleasant and grateful recollections. The old farm house nesting in its valley; hills stretching off to the south, and green meadows to the east; the small stream, which came noisily down its ravine, washing the old garden wall, and softly rooting up fallen stones and mossy roots of beeches and hemlocks; the tall sentinel poplars at the gateway; the oak forest, sweeping unbroken to the northern horizon; the grass-grown carriage path, with its rude and crazy bridge; the dear old landscape of my boyhood lies outstretched before me like a daguerreotype from that picture within, which I have borne with me in all my wanderings. I am a boy again; once more conscious of the feeling, half terror, half exultation, with which I used to announce the approach of this very vagabond, and his "kindred after the flesh."

The advent of wandering beggars, or "old stragglers," as we were wont to call them, was an event of no ordinary interest in the generally monotonous quietude of our farm-life. Many of them were well known; they had their periodical revolutions and transits; we could calculate them like eclipses or new moons. Some were sturdy knaves, fat and saucy; and when ever they ascertained that the "men-folks" were absent, would order provisions and cider like men who expected to pay for it, seating themselves at the hearth or table with the air of Falstaff—"Shall I not take mine ease in my own inn?" Others poor, pale, patient, like Sterne's monk, came creeping up to the door, hat in hand, standing there in their gray wretchedness with a look of heart-break and forlornness, which was never without its effect on our juvenile sensibilities. At times, however, we experienced a slight revulsion of feeling, when even these humblest children of sorrow somewhat petulantly rejected our proffered bread and cheese, and demanded instead a glass of cider. Whatever the temperance society might in such cases have done, it was not in our hearts to refuse the poor creatures a draught of their favorite beverage; and wasn't it a satisfaction to see their sad, melancholy faces light up as we handed them the full pitcher, and, on receiving it back empty from their brown wrinkled hands, to hear them half breathless from their long, delicious draught, thanking us for the favor as "dear good children!" Not infrequently these wandering tests of our benevolence made their appearance in interesting groups of man, woman and child, picturesque in their squalidness & manifesting a maudlin affection, which would have done honor to the revellers at Poesie-Nannies,—immor-

tal in the cantata of Burns. I remember some who were evidently the victims of monomania, haunted and hunted by some dark thought, possessed by a fixed idea. One, a black-eyed, wild-haired woman with a whole tragedy of sin, shame, and suffering written in her countenance, used often to visit us, warm herself by our winter fire, and supply herself with a stock of cakes and cold meat, but was never known to answer a question or to ask one. She never smiled; the cold, stony look of her eye never changed; a silent, impassive face frozen rigid by some great wrong or sin. We used to look with awe upon the "still woman," and think of the demoniac of Scripture, who had a "dumb spirit."

One—(I think I see him now; grim, gaunt, and ghostly, working his slow way up to our door)—used to gather herbs by the wayside, and call himself Doctor. He was bearded like a he-goat, and he used to counterfeit lameness; yet when he supposed himself alone would travel on lustily as if walking for a wager. At length, as if in punishment of his deceit, he met with an accident in his rambles, and became lame in earnest, hobbling ever after with difficulty on his gnarled crutches.

Another used to go stooping, like Bunyan's pilgrim, under a pack made of an old bed-sacking, stuffed out into most plethoric dimensions, tottering on a pair of small meagre legs, and peering out with his wild, hairy face from under his burden like a big bodied spider. That "Man with the pack" always inspired me with awe and reverence. Huge, almost sublime in its tense rotundity—the father of all packs—never laid aside and never opened, what might not be within it? With what flesh-creeping curiosity I used to walk round about it at a safe distance, half expecting to see its striped covering stirred by the motion of a mysterious life, or that some evil monster would leap out of it, like robbers from Ali Baba's jars, or armed men from the Trojan horse.

Often, in the gray of the morning, we used to see one or more of these "gaberlunzie men," pack on shoulder and staff in hand, emerging from the barn or other outbuilding, where they had passed the night. I was once sent to the barn to fodder the cattle late in the evening, and climbing into the mow to pitch down hay for that purpose, I was startled by the sudden apparition of a man, rising up before me, just discernible in the dim moonlight streaming through the seams of the boards. I made a rapid retreat down the ladder; and was only reassured by hearing the object of my terror calling after me, and recognizing his voice as that of a harmless old pilgrim whom I had heard before. Our farm-house was situated in a lonely valley, half surrounded with woods, with no neighbors in sight. One dark cloudy night, when our parents chanced to be absent, we were sitting with our grandmother in the fading light of the kitchen fire, working ourselves into a very satisfactory state of excitement and terror, by recounting to each other all the dismal stories we could remember of ghosts, witches, haunted houses and robbers, when we were suddenly startled by a loud rap at the door. A stripling of fourteen, I was very naturally regarded as the head of the household; and with many misgivings I advanced to the door, which I slowly opened, holding the candle tremulously above my head, and peering out into the darkness. The feeble glimmer played upon the apparition of a gigantic horseman, mounted on a steed of a size worthy of such a rider—colossal, like images cut out of the solid night. The strange visitant gruffly saluted me; and, after making several ineffectual attempts to urge his horse in at the door, dismounted, and followed me into the room, evidently enjoying the terror which his huge presence excited. Announcing himself as "Dr. Brown, the great Indian doctor," he drew himself up before

the fire, stretched his arms, clenched his fists, struck his broad chest, and invited our attention to what he called his "mortal frame." He demanded in succession all kinds of intoxicating liquors; and, on being assured that we had nothing to give him, he grew angry, threatened to swallow my younger brother alive, and seizing me by the hair of my head, as the angel did the prophet at Babylon, he led me about from room to room. After an ineffectual search, in the course of which he mistook a jug of oil for one of brandy, and, contrary to my explanations and remonstrances, insisted upon swallowing a portion of its contents, he released me, fell to crying and sobbing, and confessed that he was so drunk already that his horse was ashamed of him. After bemoaning and pitying himself to his satisfaction, he wiped his eyes, and sat down by the side of my grandmother, giving her to understand that he was very much pleased with her appearance; adding, that, if agreeable to her, he should like the privilege of paying his addresses to her. While vainly endeavoring to make the excellent old lady comprehend his very flattering proposition, he was interrupted by the return of my father, who, at once understanding the matter, turned him out of doors with ceremony.

On one occasion, a few years ago, on my return from the field at evening, I was told that a foreigner had asked for lodgings during the night; but that, influenced by his dark repulsive appearance, my mother had very reluctantly refused his request. I found her by no means satisfied with her decision. "What if a son of mine was in a strange land?" she inquired, self-reproachfully. Greatly to her relief, I volunteered to go in pursuit of the wanderer, and taking a cross path over the fields soon overtook him. He had just been rejected at the house of our nearest neighbor, and was standing in a state of dubious perplexity in the street. His looks quite justified my mother's suspicions. He was an olive-complexioned, black-bearded Italian, with an eye like a live coal—such a face as perchance looks out to the traveller in the passes of the Abruzzo—one of those bandit visages which Salvator has painted. With some difficulty I gave him to understand my errand, when he overwhelmed me with thanks, and joyfully followed me back. He took his seat with us at the supper table; and when we were all seated round the hearth, that cold autumn evening, he told us, partly by words and partly by gestures, the story of his life and misfortunes, amused us with descriptions of grape gatherings and festivals of his sunny clime, edified my mother with a recipe for making bread of chestnuts; and in the morning, when, after breakfast, his dark, sullen face lighted up, and fierce eye moistened with grateful emotion, as in his own silvery Tuscan accent he poured out his thanks, we marveled at the fears which had so nearly closed our door against him; and, as he departed, we all felt that he had left with us the blessing of the poor.

It was not often that, as in the above instance, my mother's prudence got the better of her charity. The regular "old stragglers" regarded her as an unfailing friend; and the sight of her plain cap was to them an assurance of forthcoming creature comforts.—There was indeed a tribe of lazy strollers, having their place of rendezvous in the town of Barrington, N. H., whose low vices had placed them even beyond the pale of her benevolence. They were not unconscious of their evil reputation; and experience had taught them the necessity of concealing, under well contrived disguises, their true character. They came to us in all shapes, and with all appearances save the true one, with most miserable stories of mishap and sickness, and all "the ills which flesh is heir to." It was particularly vexatious to discover, when too late, that

our sympathies and charities had been expended upon such graceless vagabonds as the "Barrington beggars." An old withered hag, known by the appellation of "Hipping Pat,"—the wise woman of her tribe—was in the habit of visiting us, with her hopeful grandson, who had a "gift for preaching," as well as many other things not exactly compatible with holy orders. He sometimes brought with him a tame crow, a shrewd, knavish looking bird, who, when in the humor for it, could talk like Barnaby Rudge's raven. He used to say he could "do nothin' at exhortin'" without a white handkercher on his neck and money in his pocket; a fact going far to confirm the opinions of the Bishop of Exeter and the Puseyites generally, that there can be no priest without tithes and surplice.

These people have for several generations lived distinct from the great mass of the community, like the gypsies of Europe, whom in many respects they closely resemble. They have the same settled aversion to labor and the same disposition to avail themselves of the fruits of the industry of others. They love a wild, out-of-door life, sing songs, tell fortunes, and have an instinctive hatred of "missionaries and cold water."

"The proper study of mankind is man;" and, according to my view, no phase of our common humanity is altogether unworthy of investigation. Acting upon this belief two or three summers ago when making, in company with my sister, a little excursion into the hill country of New Hampshire, I turned my horse's head towards Barrington, for the purpose of seeing these semi-civilized strollers in their own home, and returning, once for all, their numerous visits. Taking leave of our hospitable cousins in Old Lee, with about as much solemnity as we may suppose Major Laing parted with his friends, when he set out in search of the desert-girdled Timbuctoo, we drove several miles over a rough road, passed the "Devil's Den" unmolested, crossed a fearful little streamlet, noisily making its way into a valley, where it turned a lonely, half-ruinous mill, and climbing a steep hill beyond, saw before us a wide, sandy level, skirted on the west and north by low, scraggy hills, and dotted here and there with dwarf pitch pines. In the center of this desolate region were some twenty or thirty small dwellings grouped together as irregularly as a Hottentot kraal. Unfenced, and unguarded, open to all comers and goers, stood that city of the beggars—no wail or pining between the ragged cabins to remind one of the jealous distinctions of property. The great idea of its founders seemed visible in its unappropriated freedom. Was not the whole world their own, and should they haggle about boundaries and title deeds? For them, on distant plains, ripened golden harvests; for them, in far-off work-shops, busy hands were toiling; for them if they had but the grace to note it, the broad earth put on her garniture of beauty, and over them hung the silent mystery of heaven and its stars. That comfortable philosophy which modern Transcendentalism has but feebly shadowed forth—that poetic Agrarianism, which gives all to each, and each to all—is the real life of this city of Unwork. To each of its dingy dwellers might not be inaptly applied the language of one, who, I trust, will pardon me for quoting her beautiful poem in this connection:—

"Other hands may grasp the field or forest,
Flood proprietors in pomp may shine;
Thou art wealthier—all the world is thine!"

But, look! the clouds are breaking.
"Fair weather cometh out of the north."
The winds had blown away the mist; on the gilded spire of John street glimmers a beam of sunshine. And there in the sky again, hard, blue, and cold in its eternal purity, not a whit the worse for the storm. In the beautiful Present, the Past is no longer needed. Reverently and gratefully let its volume be laid aside; and when

again the shadows of the outward world fall upon the spirit, may I not lack a good angel to remind me of its solace—even if he comes in the shape of a Barrington beggar.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

While this distinguished statesman and patriot was Vice President of the United States, it was customary for the individual holding the said high office to attend to business more in person than the refinements of more modern times will allow. It happened on one occasion that some important matter required his attention in Philadelphia, and some other places distant from the capital. In these days a journey to Philadelphia was not to be performed in a few hours—it was two or three days travel, and not of the most pleasant sort either. On his return he stopped in Baltimore. It was four or five in the afternoon when the Vice President rode up, suitless and unattended, to the tavern. A scotchman by the name of Boyden kept the hotel, of late so much improved and now so handsomely sustained by our worthy townsman Beltzhoover. The bucks of the town were assembled in the large hall, smoking, stutering, cracking jokes, and otherwise engaged in the et ceteras of the day. Boyden was at the bar examining the books, and doubtless making calculations respecting his future prospects. Jefferson had delivered his horse into the hands of the ostler, and walked into the tavern in order to make arrangements in regard to his fare. Some one touched Boyden upon the elbow, and directed his attention to the stranger, who stood with his whip in his hand, striking it occasionally upon his muddy leggins. Boyden turned around and surveyed him from head to foot, and concluding him to be an old farmer from the country, whose company would add no credit to his house, he said abruptly:

"We have no room for you sir."
Jefferson did not hear the remark, and asked if he could be accommodated with a room. His voice which was commanding and attractive, occasioned another survey of his person by the honest proprietor of the house, whose only care was for its reputation. He could not find, however, in his plain dress pretty well covered with mud, anything indicating either wealth or distinction and in his usual rough style he said:

"A room?"
Jefferson replied, "Yes sir, I should like to have a room to myself, if I can get it!"
"A room all to yourself? No, no—we have no room—there's not a spare room in the house—all full—all occupied—can't accommodate you!"

The Vice President turned upon his heel, called for his horse, which by this time was snug in the stable, mounted and rode off. In a few minutes one of the most wealthy and distinguished men of the town came in and asked for the gentleman who rode up to the door a few minutes before.

"Gentleman!" said Boyden. "There has been no gentleman here on horse back this afternoon, and no stranger at all; but one common looking country fellow, came in and asked if he could have a whole room; but I asked him out of that mighty quick, I tell you. I told him I had no room for such chaps as him!"

"No room for such chaps as him?"
"No, by the pipers, no room for anybody that don't look respectable," said the landlord.

"Why, what are you talking about, man? He's the Vice President of the U. States!"

"Vice President of the United States!" exclaimed Boyden, almost breathless with astonishment.

"Why, yes sir, Thomas Jefferson, the Vice President of the United States, and the greatest man alive."

"Murder, what have I done!" cried Boyden. "Here Tom, Jim, Jerry, Dick, Jake—where are you all! He's fly, you villains—fly and tell that g