

'Colorful Romanies'

THE COMPLETE GYPSY FORTUNE-TELLER. By Kevin Martin. Putnam's. Illustrated with drawings and charts. 315 pages. \$6.95.

"The Complete Gypsy Fortune-Teller" is obviously aimed at the general public.

But I think the gypsies themselves stand to gain more from it than the public will. I think our colorful Romanies would do themselves a big favor, broaden their scope, and increase their take if they would buy Kevin Martin's fat compilation—and then, as their caravans head out into America's hinterlands this spring, stick their noses in it and speed-read it.

They'll find in it, I think, things undreamt of in their philosophy.

Putnam's: "In this volume is everything you've always wanted to know about fortune-telling—a priceless king-size compendium on the use, in divination, of cards, crystal balls, dice, dominoes, tea leaves, palmistry, and phrenology."

Kevin Martin: "Fortune-telling in its many forms is inseparably tied to these fascinating, elusive, and unique individuals—the gypsies—particularly the Romany women. In preparing this work I have met with, and spoken to, many gypsies. I have also consulted innumerable old books and manuscripts dealing with the gypsy secrets—and now I offer you a most comprehensive collection of gypsy lore. In these pages we find the gypsy lifting the veil from the future; that is to say, showing us how it is done."

Well, I too, in my day, have met with, and spoken to, many gypsies, and have written yards of copy about them. In substantiation thereof, let me mention here that my favorite gypsy trick of the trade is the one called, in Romany, *hokkaga bard*, which means "The Great Game." It consists, quintessentially, of making your wallet disappear. I have no intention of explaining how it's done; gypsies, on general principles, don't like to have their secrets revealed.

Let's also consider, for a moment, their fascinating but little-known "chalk-writing." It's called *patrin*. Gypsy caravans use it to advise and warn other caravans. A cross chalked on the side of a house means: "Here they give nothing." Circle with a dot inside: "Generous folk." Three slanted lines: "Keep moving—we have already robbed these people." And so on, in a large vocabulary of signs. Translate from gypsy chalk-writing, if you feel you must, but never, never lift the veil from the abstruse workings of "The Great Game."

Well, Martin doesn't. In fact, and surprisingly, he doesn't even mention the art of wallet-dematerialization. Nor does he mention chalk-writing—or tinsmithing, peddling, and general thievery, which, in addition to the basic swindling occupation of fortune-telling, are

well-known present-day gypsy crafts—as bear-training and horseshoeing used to be.

But frankly I was impressed by what he did find out from these ordinarily reserved people. Reserved? Tight-mouthed, lip-zipped, clammed-up says it better.

Martin gives ample space to the use, in the gypsy art of augury, of playing cards, Tarot cards, crystal balls, dice, dominoes, tea leaves, palmistry, phrenology, and dream-interpretation. All these are drawn upon by the colorful nomads in their encampments, or when, in towns, they move into vacant stores, hang bright blankets in the windows, and display occult signs promising far-seeing insight into your future.

But I had never even heard of several of the super-esoteric sciences, or pseudo-sciences, described by the author: "Planetary Signs in the Face," the "Coiled Serpent Chart," the "Magic Heart Drawing," the "Floral Oracle," or half a dozen others. My reluctant thought is that any gypsies reading this book will be more surprised by all this than I was.

Let's look at "Planetary Signs in the Face."

It's called metoposcopy, according to Martin, and it's actually the occult study of your forehead lines—all seven of them. They are sometimes called, but not by Martin, "worry lines." (For years, when watching movies starring David Niven, I used to count compulsively the lines in his corrugated forehead. Seven, exactly.)

Well, metoposcopy teaches that the top line, next to your hairline, is called the Saturn Line. A broken, that is to say discontinuous, Saturn Line means "great misfortune coming." And so on down to the Mercury Line, above the bridge of your nose; if broken, it presages "despair, heartache, and a long string of lovers." (I can't help remarking that the foregoing sequence ought, by rights, to be reversed.)

Am I a meanie to suspect that rare is the gypsy, among the five million roaming the earth today, who ever heard of metoposcopy?

But the fact is—Martin's book is overwhelmingly complete—perhaps, one might say, too complete.

A final case in point is his concluding chapter entitled "The Floral Oracle"—a fortune-telling reference list "used in gypsy encampments throughout the world."

This chapter divinationally interprets each and every flower in Ophelia's pathetic mad-scene bouquet, from rosemary ("Your presence will revive someone dear") through pansies, fennel, columbine, and rue to daisies ("Unconscious thoughts will force failure").

Power to you, Kevin Martin; and to gypsies generally; and to any *gojos*, or non-gypsies, who, with "The Complete Gypsy Fortune-Teller" as their guide, undertake to "lift the veil from the future."

—Charles Cooke.

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