

THE FOLLY
OF
FORTUNE TELLING.



LONDON:
RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,
Instituted 1799.

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THE sun was darting his declining rays through the tall elms in the valley; the church clock was striking the hour; and the shadow of the old sun-dial in front of the school-house was resting on the figure five, as Arthur, William, and Clara Wilmore left their school-fellows, and crossed the village-green, on their way from school. Full of light-hearted gaiety, William and Arthur chased each other along the grassy

pathway, while their sister, a lively girl of seven years old, followed them as fast as she could. Her bonnet had blown back from her head, and, held as it was by the strings round her neck, kept nodding, first on one side, then on the other, as she ran or walked along, swinging her little bag of school-books by her side. The hair of her head was black as the plumes of the raven, and the colour of her cheek was that of the full-blown rose. To see young people happy without being foolish is one of the most delightful pictures in the world!

When the two brothers had got to the top of the lane, by the large ash-tree, they saw, on the borders of the waste land, a party of gipsies sitting under a tent. Two women were heaping bits of wood on a fire, over which, from three stout sticks, hung a pot, in which something was boiling. An old man was idly reading a ballad, and a younger man, half lying on the ground, playing a fiddle, while three or four children sat amusing themselves under the tent. A woman dressed in a blue cloak was gathering nuts from the brown boughs which hung from the neighbouring wood; but no sooner did she see the two boys coming along the lane, than, leaving her employment, she came forward to join them. Clara had overtaken

her brothers before the gipsy came up, and they all three gazed at the swarthy face, black hair, and sparkling eye of the stranger.

Now, it happened that Farmer Wilmore, who had walked out to meet his children coming from school, saw the gipsy making towards them, and, wishing unobserved to hear their conversation, he crept softly along behind the thick holly-bushes on one side of the lane, so that he could hear distinctly every word that was spoken.

Mr. Wilmore was a true christian: he looked forwards in humble hope, to a blessed inheritance above, through the merits and sacrifice of that Saviour who had died for his sins, and risen again for his justification.

Farmer Wilmore was a kind father, and watched carefully over his children. He wished them to become useful in their generation, and to live lowly disciples of Jesus Christ; and it was to prevent any ill consequences which might arise from their conversation with the gipsy, that he had hastened forward, to get behind the holly hedge.

“Good even to you, my young masters! Good even to you, my little miss!” said the gipsy, as she approached the young people; “you appear so clean, and so happy, and so good, that I should like to tell you your fortunes. I warrant you have got an odd

sixpence among you; and you shall all have your fortunes told you for that trifle. I can see clear enough that you two will be gentlemen all over, and your pretty sister will ride in a coach and six before she dies."

Neither Arthur, nor William, nor Clara, knew what to make of this address of the gipsy. They all had a faint impression that it was not right to tell fortunes, but, as their parents had never had any particular conversation with them on the subject, they were not impressed with the knowledge of its being positively wrong. Not knowing what to say, they all stood silent, looking timidly at the gipsy, who once more accosted them. "Come, young gentleman," said she, speaking to Arthur, the eldest of the three, "I am sure your fortune will be a good one, for I can see by your eyes that you are of a generous disposition; and generous people always prosper. I dare say that you have got a sixpence in your pocket."

The coaxing and wheedling manners of the gipsy had so far won upon Arthur, that he would willingly have had his fortune told, if he could have produced a sixpence; but this he said he could not do, having only two-pence in his possession. The cunning gipsy, willing to get a little, rather than nothing, agreed to tell Arthur his fortune

for two-pence; adding, that so generous a young gentleman would, she was well assured, give her something more if he should happen to meet her again.

The young group, as they gathered around the gipsy, presented quite a picture, though, when the object they had in view was considered, it was not of the most pleasing kind. Here were three simple children being deceived and led into folly by an artful woman.

The gipsy, after examining, an instant, the lines running in different directions across the palm of Arthur's hand, declared him to be a very fortunate young man, but that he would pass through many dangers, meet with many enemies, and have to travel into a far country. After this, she told him much nonsense, mixed with much apparent sage counsel how he ought to proceed.

While this was going on, Mr. Wilmore, on the other side of the holly-bushes, was noting down in his pocket-book, the principal part of the gipsy's observations.

The gipsy at last went away, telling Arthur that he would find every word she had spoken to be true; and the three young people pursued their walk homeward, talking of the wonderful things which had been said by the gipsy, and expressing their surprise how she could know one half what

she had told Arthur. There was no more galloping one after another; no more laughing and joking; their minds were full of what they had heard from the gipsy.

Mr. Wilmore took care to remain unobserved by his children, and thought, as he walked home, of the best way to impress their minds with the folly of fortune-telling.

By the time he had arrived at his own house, the adventure with the gipsy had been told to Mrs. Wilmore; for the young people always freely communicated to their parents whatever had happened to them.

Mrs. Wilmore, who was a judicious pious woman, explained to them the presumption of artful people pretending to know what could only be known to God; and their wickedness in deceiving those who were silly enough to believe them, in order that they might cheat them out of their money.

Mr. Wilmore, when told by Mrs. Wilmore that Arthur had been persuaded by a gipsy to have his fortune told, observed, that, had he known that Arthur desired to be informed of future events, he would have gratified his curiosity himself, being quite as well qualified as the gipsy to peep into futurity.

“What, papa!” cried Arthur, “can you tell fortunes? If I had known that, I never would have given my money to the gipsy.”

“If you doubt it,” replied Mr. Wilmore, “after tea I will convince you of my ability; and if I happen to differ from the gipsy in my communications, you will at least be convinced that one of us must be an impostor.”

Little else was talked of, or thought of, during tea, than the fulfilment of Mr. Wilmore’s promise; and no sooner were the tea-things taken out of the room, than Arthur went up to his father, and held out his hand, that the lines on the palm of it might be examined. “Keep your seat, Arthur,” said Mr. Wilmore; “for my method is very different from that of the gipsy: I can tell what will happen to you quite as well by looking on your face, as at your hand.”

This seemed to astonish Arthur, as well as his brother and sister; but, seating himself once more on his chair, he looked at his father, that he might proceed.

Mr. Wilmore. You will do well, Arthur, to be on your guard, for you are surrounded with many dangers.

Arthur. Why, the gipsy told me the same.

Mr. W. If I mistake not, a letter has been sent to you.

A. The gipsy told me that, too.

Mr. W. Did she tell you that you would meet with trouble of various kinds?

A. Yes; those are her very words that she spake. I never knew the like before!

Mr. W. She might also have told you that you had a deceitful friend.

A. She did; and that if I was not on my guard, he would do me a mischief.

Mr. W. She ought to have warned you that you were about to do a very foolish thing.

Clara. I heard her say that, myself, papa; I am certain of it.

Mr. W. Very likely. One thing, however, Arthur, I must remember to tell you of; and that is, that you do not know enough of your best friend.

A. If you had been there, you could not have told us more correctly her very words.

Mr. W. So far, then, we appear to agree; but I will proceed. You have not in all things been treated as you deserve; and you must not expect to live a long time in this habitation.

A. The gipsy told me these things, too, and said she was quite confident of them.

Mr. W. I told you before, I believe, that you would have to contend with trouble; but there is one who dwells nearer you than you imagine, who is ready to assist you.

A. I wish I knew who he was; but the gipsy would not tell me, though I asked her three times over.

Mr. W. I must not forget to mention that

you have secret enemies on the watch to injure you.

A. The gipsy frightened me, by telling me the same thing; but I shall find them out, I'll be bound for it.

Mr. W. There is a friend who has suffered much on your account.

A. Who is it, papa? for you seem to know every bit as much as the fortune-teller.

Mr. W. By and by, perhaps, I may tell you; meanwhile, the hope of conquering your enemies will be some comfort to you.

A. Ay, that is good news, and so I told the gipsy.

Mr. W. You will go a long journey. Did not the gipsy give you that information?

A. O yes! Every word you have spoken she told me before: did not she, William?

William. Yes, every syllable; and if she was here, she would say the same thing.

Mr. W. It would be a formidable thing to be summoned on a trial; and yet it is very certain that such an event will take place.

A. I thought they would not let any one so young as I am have any thing to do with trials: the gipsy, however, bid me be prepared for it.

Mr. W. It is not my wish to flatter a child of mine, for flattery is sinful in itself, and injurious in its influence; but I may

hope that you will come to high honour, notwithstanding the difficulties you have to pass through.

W. Ay, that is good news; the fortune-teller told every one of us the same. Arthur and I were to be gentlemen all over, and Ciara was to ride in a coach and six.

Mrs. W. But, children, are you quite sure that all your papa has told you, was told you by the gipsy?

A. We are certain that papa and the fortune-teller said the same things; and it is so wonderful, that I cannot tell what to think about it. Nobody shall ever convince me, after this, that gipsies know nothing about what is to happen.

Mr. W. I hope to convince you of that, myself, Arthur: indeed, it was with that very intention I undertook to do what I have done.

W. What, papa! do you not believe in fortune-telling?

C. I always knew that papa could do almost any thing; and now I feel certain that he can tell fortunes.

Mr. W. No, my dear Clara, your papa can do but little; and as to telling fortunes, if you were to use the same means, you would soon be able to tell what would happen to others quite as well as myself.

C. Should I? Oh, I would give any

thing to know all about it. Do tell me, papa, and I will love you so.

A. And tell me, too. It must be a capital secret, I am certain.

W. Yes, that it must. Do tell us all, papa.

Mr. W. Well, as you all wish so much to know how you may read future events, I will instruct you, as well as I am able: but, are you all satisfied that I know as much about the matter as the gipsy?

A. and W. Yes, yes.

C. I should think papa knew a great deal better than the fortune-teller, for she was obliged to look on the lines of Arthur's hand; but papa tells every thing when only looking in a person's face.

Mr. W. Yes, but it is not my looking either on the hands or the face that enables me to tell you what will happen to you. I get it all from a famous book in my possession, a book which contains more knowledge than all the rest of the books in the world.

A. Do let us see the book. I can fancy that it is very large, and very thick, with a red cover, and brass clasps to it.

Mr. W. Sit still, then, and I will go for the famous book that I spoke of.

The children all sat still; but no sooner did they hear the sound of their father's feet, than they turned their eyes anxiously

towards the door. Mr. Wilmore entered the room, placing a large book on the table, which they knew to be the family Bible.

Mr. W. Now then, I shall be enabled to give you every necessary information.

A. But, papa, is that the great book you spoke of? Why that is the Bible.

Mr. W. It is the book that I spoke of, Arthur, and the only book, too, that may be relied on in telling us of future events. Now, listen attentively to what I have to say.

My dear children, fortune-telling, as it is called, is both foolish and wicked; and the idle and artful people who go about the country to practise it, not only deceive, but frequently lead into folly and sin the silly people who have no more sense than to believe them. Fortune-tellers generally speak of such things as are pretty sure to happen; such as, "You will hear of some news;" "Something will happen to please you;" or, "Before long a friend will pay you a visit."

A. The gipsy said so.

Mr. W. Now, there can be no great wisdom in telling us of that which is happening continually. We are sure to hear news of some kind or other. Something happens most days to please us: and it is nothing uncommon for a friend to pay us a visit; therefore we must be very silly to give any one

credit for wisdom in predicting such things as these. No doubt, you have thought it very wonderful that I should tell you the same things as the gipsy did; but you will no longer wonder when I explain to you that, all the time the woman talked with you, I was standing behind the holly-bushes, hearing every word that was spoken.

A. Oh, oh, papa! that never entered my head at all: no wonder that you should know all about it.

Mr. W. When the gipsy told you what she did, it was done to deceive you into a belief of her knowledge; whereas, she knew no more of the future than you did. Her remarks were all of a general kind; and she might just as well have told you that to-morrow morning you would eat your breakfast, and that when you went to bed at night, you would put on your nightcap.

A. I begin to think the gipsy was not so wise as I took her to be, and that there was nothing very wonderful in what she told me.

Mr. W. But, though the gipsy had no meaning in what she told you, I had a great deal of meaning in what fell from my lips; for I had the authority of the word of God, for believing that what I said was true; and this I will now more fully explain.

I told you that you were surrounded with danger: now, the Bible says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," 1 Pet. v. 8.

I told you that a letter had been sent to you. Now, if you look at this blessed book, you will find that many letters have been sent to you. All the epistles are letters written by the Holy Spirit, to teach us heavenly wisdom; and you will do well to read them more attentively than you have done.

I said that you would meet with trouble, because the Bible has said the same thing before me: "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward."

I warned you that you had a deceitful friend, and so you have; "the heart is deceitful above all things."

I gave you to understand that you were about to do a foolish thing; and my reason for thinking so, was, because "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child."

I said you did not know enough of your best Friend, and I said right; for the Bible declares, "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." As it was with Israel, so it is with us all.

Did I not tell you that you had not been treated as you deserve? The scriptures say,

“God hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.”

Did I not say, you must not expect to remain long in this habitation? Alas! the longest life is short; for “Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble: he cometh up like a flower, and is cut down.”

I mentioned that one dwelt near you, ever ready to assist you. What says the word of God? “The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him: to all that call upon him in truth.”

I spoke of your secret enemies; these are the world, the flesh, and the devil. I said that a Friend had suffered much on your account: this Friend is the Saviour, the Friend of sinners. “He was wounded for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed,” Isa. liii. 5.

I said I hoped you would conquer all your enemies; and I trust that, through Christ, you will be enabled to do this: for the apostle Paul, in speaking of the followers of the Redeemer, says, in the midst of trial and persecution, “In all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loveth us.”

I told you, you would go a long journey;

and so you will, and how soon you cannot tell. You will pass from this world to another; and happy will it be if you can say with the apostle, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain: having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better."

I said you would be summoned on a trial; and this is a solemn truth; for the scriptures say, "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ!" 2 Cor. v. 10.

Lastly, I spoke to you about coming to high honour; and this all the followers of Jesus Christ, redeemed by him from all iniquity, shall receive. "When Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

And now, my dear children, having given you such good authority for all that I have advanced, you will perhaps pay the more attention to my concluding remark, which is, that the word of God is the only source of true knowledge respecting future events. The gipsies know no more of what will happen than yourselves; and among human follies, there is scarcely a greater one than the folly of fortune telling; while you cannot do a wiser or a better thing than to search the scriptures, and listen to the word of God.



JESUS, Lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly,
While the billows near me roll,
While the tempest still is high:
Hide me, O my Saviour, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide,
O receive my soul at last!