

Lifting the Veil of the Future



Typical Seer of India

Fortune Tellers of Many Lands and their Superstitious Clients.

TO PEER into the dim, mysterious future, seeking to learn one's fate or fortune during the coming days; to satisfy curiosity and prepare for evil or rejoice in promised good—in all countries and among all people this desire was uppermost in the minds of men long before Saur consulted the Witch of Endor.

Today, in the East and the West, the fortune-teller still holds sway, as of old.

In China the geomancer is consulted regarding every act and event of life; in India the fakirs are sought for knowledge of the future, their help is asked in inspiring laggards with love or inflicting harm on enemies; in Egypt sorcerers are consulted both by natives and travelers just as they were in the days of the Pharaohs.

Strolling gypsies still find a profitable avocation, in Europe and America, in reading the future for credulous visitors, while at seaside and other resorts palmists, card readers, clairvoyants and Hindu astrologers ply a paying trade.

A study of the fortune-tellers of various lands is a never-failing source of interest to the tourist.

THERE is, more or less, an element of superstition in most persons, no doubt, but while many would not pay a debt on Monday or begin an undertaking on Friday, few of the Western world entertain the fanatical belief in the necromancer as do the people of the East.

In the Orient his prognostications are devoutly believed; so devoutly, in fact, that if they do not come true the people attribute the failure to their own lack of faith rather than to the fault of the seer.

The Oriental regards his soul as a possession for which good and evil spirits are continually waging battle.

He feels the atmosphere permeated with mysterious influences. He is tempted—he can feel the wicked spirits forcing their way into his heart. He suffers misfortune; there is a day of ill-luck—the evil ones have been victorious. They must be placated.

With the faith of a child in fairies and goblins, the simple Oriental seeks the assistance of the fortune-teller. Both good and evil spirits must be worshiped; he must keep the good will of both; he must obey their wishes, meet their desires. But how is he to know their will?

About the streets of any city in China are strolling fortune-tellers. They are regarded as arbiters of good and evil; as men in communion with the unseen; with eyes that can see into the distances of time.

Mighty lord and lowly coolie alike consult the fortune-teller. His advice is asked on any contemplated action. He names lucky days for business ventures. He tells a sick man the name of a physician who can cure him. It is believed that he can locate stolen property. He tells a son when to bury the body of his father, so that the spirit of the decedent may have an auspicious passage to happiness.

THE WAY OF THE CHINESE SEER

He sits before a table covered by a cloth bearing cabalistic letters and designs, a sagacious looking individual, wearing huge, tortoise-shell glasses.

Trembling with fear, a pig-tailed coolie approaches. He prays to be told how he can satisfy the evil spirit which has been haunting him. He would do anything. Giving the seer the required coin, he awaits eagerly the words of the wise man.

On the table are a number of bottles, jars and boxes. Over these the seer slowly, solemnly raises his hands. He closes his eyes and moans an incantation. He moves the boxes, looks into the bottle—and smiles. The omen is propitious.

Then, with rolling eyes, he speaks in am-

biguous phrases. Like the oracle of old Delphi he speaks so that one can never tell exactly what he means. Usually the credulous one interprets the words to suit himself; if the predictions fail to come true, the ignorant coolie becomes convinced that he took the wrong meaning.

No one doubts the fortune-teller in China. His word is regarded as infallible. When he becomes rich on the offerings of the credulous, the Chinese reader of the future installs himself in luxurious apartments. There, in a darkened room, the wealthy visit him just as the coolie did on the street.

Even a Westerner becomes impressed with the sense of mysticism when he enters one of these chambers. About the wall hang red or black curtains, embroidered with Chinese characters. Strange, hideous faces of bronze idols peer from dim recesses; wavering lights flicker and cast portentous shadows. Spiral rings of incense ascend and evolve into mysterious shapes.

In the centre of the room sits the spectacled oracle. Before he talks some one in the distance begins beating tom-toms; there are ghostly cries as he consults the spirits, but as he begins to speak in a monotone other sounds discontinue, and one can almost hear the knees of the superstitious patron knocking together in the semi-darkness.

Most revered of the craft are the astrologers. Their charges are the highest. The Emperor of China has a staff of fortune-tellers attached to his court. To interpret the meaning of his dreams is the duty of the chief.

PALMISTRY RULES IN JAPAN

A Japanese fortune-teller wears a white towel about his head and carries with him a sword and a fan. He burns incense, regards the palm of the applicant, and consults a book of divination. Upon the advice which is given the uneducated Japanese regulate the doings of their daily lives.

One thinks of India as the land of the occult—a land where wise men have learned the secrets of life and explored the mysteries of the grave. From India have come exalted philosophies and deep expositions of the development of the human soul; yet in India flourishes a system of augury and fortune-telling that has been productive of much harm among the ignorant.

By maltreating themselves the Indian fakirs pretend that they attain spiritual powers. Some lacerate their flesh and fill the sores with ashes. Others wear heavy chains about their bodies, which cut them as they move about. Many sever parts of their limbs, burn their flesh with fire. The power of these "holy men" over the people is almost absolute.

Recently an Indian fakir took his stand under a tree outside the house of an American in Calcutta. Wearing little clothing, his body covered with sores, and his brown face with an unkempt mat of hair, the old man was anything but an attractive sight.

Trade was bad; few persons visited him. To add to his discomfort the American ordered him away. Turning in wrath to the servant who gave him the word of the master of the house, he declared: "Before the sun sets the third day hence this tree will die and nevermore bear fruit."

Several Indians who stood nearby heard him. Taking up his chair the fortune-teller moved to another quarter of the city. The day afterward the leaves of the tree began turning yellow. Those who heard the prophecy of the old man told others; and to their dismay saw the tree withering, the leaves falling. On the third day only a few leaves remained on the limbs.

Whether the old man secretly administered some drug to the tree or not was a question;

however, his fame spread through the city; rich and poor consulted him. His help was sought by the sick; of amulets he sold hundreds; his talismans were treasured as sure proofs against evil.

Sorcery in India has been developed to an art; the tricks of the fakirs are reduced to a science. There is no power which they do not claim, from expelling evil spirits to introducing a legion of devils into a body.

Many of the Brahmin priests pretend to tell the future by reading the stars. There are soothsayers who wander the streets smoking long pipes. By the shapes taken by the smoke as it ascends they claim to foretell the future.

In some Oriental countries—Turkey, Persia, Egypt—the soothsayer booms business by walking the streets, moaning lamentations, and prophesying evil for all who do not consult him.

If he is a prosperous prophet, he wears an elaborate gown of many colors; if his means are meagre, he adopts a monk's robe and a tall sheepskin hat.



The Gypsy Still Holds Sway



An Egyptian Prophetess

has received an offering she begins to rant like an ancient priestess. While she is regarded with amusement by foreigners, the fellahs consult her on all matters of importance.

In Italy public letter writers usually tell fortunes as a "side" trade. Sitting behind a table on a street corner the scrivener is a unique looking character. He wears a black coat and a high silk hat.

Perhaps some young girl, wishing to send a letter to her lover, employs him. She pays him for writing the letter and gives an odd centesimo to have him predict her future. The wily scrivener, who heard her secrets while inditing the letter, tells her all about her lover, reads her heart and promises a speedy marriage.

In Italy, too, flourish many of the old-time witches—witches of the kind that were visited by the Lord of the Burning Belt in Bulwer Lytton's "Last Days of Pompeii." You will find them in ill-smelling back alleys in any Italian city. You will find them with a pet owl, sometimes a snake, and you will see them brewing strange concoctions.

GYPSIES IN MANY LANDS

Best known of the fortune-tellers are the gypsies. In all countries—Russia, Greece, Turkey, England, France, the United States—the old ear-ringed woman in her gaudy shawl is a familiar figure.

During the summer, no doubt, there will be a gypsy encampment near your home—and your home may be in almost any part of the civilized world.

While the men trade horses the women will reap coins by foretelling events. As she follows the lines of the hand with her finger, the gypsy woman tells of "dark-haired" men and "light-haired" women, of persons bearing familiar initials and faces of certain physical characteristics.

She tells of trips which one is to take, of persons making trouble in the family. So general are her statements that the superstitious woman who has her fortune told makes it apply to her personally; she will seek among her acquaintances for friends with initials to correspond and foes with blue, black or brown eyes.

Gypsies, as a rule, especially those of Europe, scorn a nationality and know no native country. Each is a Bohemian by heritage and a rover by choice.

Being reluctant to give information about themselves, a census of these people is difficult to effect. Careful estimates, however, place the number at 300,000 in Austria-Hungary; 100,000 in Turkey; 10,000 in Greece; 20,000 in Bosnia; 150,000 in Russia; 50,000 in Italy; 200,000 in Portugal and Spain; 10,000 in France; 8,000 in England and 10,000 in the United States.

It is stated that there are 50,000 members of this nomadic race in Asia and Asiatic Turkey.

The gypsies travel at any season of the year that the spirit happens to move them. In this country they wander from New England to the Pacific coast; from the Great Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, their homes and families being always with them.

Some of the more prosperous own houses, and, perhaps, land, in the North, and live there during the winter.

Many others, however, winter in the Southern States, where the climate is not severe enough to drive them indoors.

ROUTES CAREFULLY MAPPED OUT

When gypsies start out upon the road they usually follow a course that has been mapped out in advance. One band, leading the way through a country, will leave along the roadside signs that may never be noticed by the ordinary traveler, but which catch the eye of the Bohemian rover and convey to him a plain direction.

This "patteran," or road sign, is usually a little, carefully arranged pile of sticks, grass or stones, placed at cross roads. The gypsy sees this pile, reads its meaning, and thus has a message from a hand that has preceded him.

Sometimes visitors to the gypsy camps have marveled at the seeming accuracy with which the roving soothsayers have told fortunes. The truth is that palmistry plays little part with most of them.

They have wonderfully retentive memories, and accumulate a store of information regarding localities upon which they can draw at any time.

Gypsies have their own language, which they guard zealously, and only speak when they are together. In this country the "kalo jib," the "black language," spoken by one of these people to another, is in purer form and nearer to the original speech of the old wandering Aryan tribes than in any other country.

In the cities of the United States superstition is by no means dead. Palmists and card readers thrive. Of course, many appear in the records of the police annals rather than in magazines. Their methods fail to interest members of societies for psychical research.

In country towns old women who read cards or tea leaves in cups are quite common. Many believe in themselves as sincerely as their credulous clientele.



A Dentist Seer



In China Fortune Tellers are Consulted in Every Event of Life

With bowed head he walks about, moaning dimly. Perhaps he sees a native approaching him.

"Poor man, miserable man, unfortunate man," he groans, tears dropping from his eyes, "woe unto thee! Woe unto thee! I would thou wert in the depth of the sea—woe unto thee! I would thou wert dead on a waste plain—woe unto thee! Unlucky the day thou wert born, unfortunate man."

Terrified, the native stops before the man of evil power, and on his knees begs him to avert the threatened doom.

Having intercourse with the spirits, the soothsayer—after coin has passed his palm—makes intercession.

"Rise, fortunate one," he cries joyously. "The gods will be lenient unto thee. The gods have heard my prayer. The doom that was

destined has been averted, O fortunate, most happy one."

Then he tells the beaming native what the golden future holds for him.

There are many women fortune-tellers in Egypt. Some are really beautiful women. Their features are regular, their skin dusky, their eyes large and dark, bright as beads. From under a red turban their black hair flows over their shoulders.

About the hotels of Cairo they carry on their trade. Of course, their greatest harvest is reaped from travelers whose great desire is to scratch their names for the first time on the face of the Sphinx.

The seeress usually wears a long robe. Her face is unveiled. She tells fortunes by throwing a handful of coins, then bending to the ground and regarding their position. After she