

# Autobiography

GIPSY SMITH

1902

## 1 HIS LIFE AND WORK

### 1.1 CHAPTER 7

#### CHRISTMAS IN THE TENT

##### A STORY OF THREE PLUM-PUDDINGS

WHEN my father and his brothers travelled about the country, all their families accompanied them. By this time my father had prayed my sisters Emily and Lovinia and my brother Ezekiel into the kingdom. They came in the order of their ages. I was the next, and in my heart I, too, was longing for God. My father used to pray continually in my hearing, "Lord, save my Rodney!"

All this time my father was very poor, and one winter at Cambridge we were in the hardest straits. My father was sitting in his van, looking solemn and sad. That day one of my aunts, I knew, had been buying provisions for the Christmas feast on the morrow. This had excited my interest, and, boy-like, I wanted to know what we were going to have for Christmas, and I asked my father. "I do not know, my dear," he said, quietly. There was nothing in the house, and he had no money. Then the devil came and tempted him. His fiddle was hanging on the wall, and he looked at it desperately and thought to himself, "If I just take down my fiddle and go to a public-house and play to the people there, my children, too, will have a good Christmas dinner." But the temptation was very soon overcome. My father fell on his knees and began to pray. He thanked God for all His goodness to him, and when he arose from his knees he said to his children, "I don't know quite what we shall have for Christmas, but we will sing." He began to sing with a merry heart:

In some way or other The Lord will provide: It may not be my way, It may not be thy way; But yet in His own way The Lord will provide."

Just then, while we were singing, there was a knock at the door of the van. Who is there?" cried my father.

It was the old Cambridge town missionary, Mr. Sykes.

"It is I, Brother Smith. God is good, is He not? I have come to tell you how the Lord will provide. In a shop in this town there are three legs of mutton and

groceries waiting for you and your brothers.”

A wheelbarrow was needed to bring home the store. The brothers never knew who gave them these goods. But the word of God was verified:

”No good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.”

I remember one of my pranks in these days very vividly. My sister Tilly and I were out selling our goods. By this time the gipsies were very well known in the town. Going from door to door, we came to the house of Mrs. Robinson, a Baptist minister’s wife. She knew my father and his brothers well, and she bought some things of us. Then, after the business transactions were over, she began to speak to us in a kindly way, and it ended by her giving us three parcels, one for each of the three brothers. We carried them off in triumphant glee. But we could not resist the temptation to open the paper parcels and see what they contained. To our delight we discovered three plum-puddings. Each of us started on one. But we found out to our disgust that they were only partly cooked, and then it occurred to us—if we had been older and wiser it would have occurred to us earlier—that we really must not take home to our uncles these puddings that we had begun to eat. The one we had left untouched we carried home like dutiful children to our father and there we thought the matter ended. A few days afterwards Mrs. Robinson met Uncle Bartholomew and asked him how he liked his plum-pudding? He stared at her vacantly. What plum-pudding? He did not know of any plum-pudding. Would she kindly explain herself? Mrs. Robinson told him that she had given Cornelius Smith’s children three puddings, one for each of the brothers. Uncle Bartholomew was forced to declare that his had never come to him. He spoke about the matter to my father, and I will sum up the situation by saying that my father explained it very clearly to us.

Never since that day have I had the least appetite for plum-pudding, and I believe that my sister Tilly shares this unnatural peculiarity with me.

Quite recently Miss Robinson, the daughter of Mrs. Robinson, and a prominent worker in connection with the YWCA, met me at a mission and asked, ”Are you the gipsy boy who knows something about plum-puddings?” At once the incident came back to my memory and we laughed together heartily. But let me say to all my young friends, ”Be sure your sins will find you out. You cannot even eat your uncle’s plum-puddings without being discovered and punished for it.”

And this recalls to my recollection how, before my dealings with Mrs. Robinson, I had palmed off a nest of sparrows as a nest of young linnets, and got paid for it as if they were the latter.