

**RALPH; A LEGEND  
OF THE GIPSIES, IN  
4 CANTOS**

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Ralph; A Legend of the Gipsies, in 4 Cantos by William Bance

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**WILLIAM BANCE**

**RALPH; A LEGEND  
OF THE GIPSIES, IN  
4 CANTOS**



# RALPH;

A Legend of the Gipsies;

IN FOUR CANTOS.

BY

WILLIAM BANCE,

AUTHOR OF "HANGING WOOD, CHARLTON," &c.

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1845.

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## P R E F A C E .

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Most of the following pages were written some few years ago, at a time when, to use an homely proverb, "the shoe pinched rather tightly." They were the means of making many a dreary hour pass off lightly, and of dispelling many a bitter thought. For that, whatever reception they may meet with from the Public, the Author will never regret the time devoted to them; as he cannot think *that* time lost, which was often successfully employed, in subduing the evil spirit that, in the best of us, is too apt to reign predominant in the hours of adversity. That they will survive longer than the

many ephemeral productions of the present age, he does not expect: but if they add a few comforts to those who sit around his own fire-side, they will answer the end designed; and he is proud to say, through the kindness of the many friends who have so liberally supported his humble endeavours, and to whom he begs to return his most grateful thanks, he has very little fear of the result.

Charlton, July 3d. 1845.

# RALPH.

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## CANTO THE FIRST.

### I.

WHILE time journeys onwards, there never will be  
A people more happy, a people more free,  
Than we are, the sons of the dark race, who roam  
Throughout the proud nations, without a fixed home;  
Quite heedless of what the world says to our shame,  
Quite reckless, if man give us not a good name;  
We fear not his frowns, and we fear no disgrace—  
Save that which follows being false to our race.

We envy not others their wealth nor their state,  
With them, we've no portion—we bow to our fate:  
We want not their dwellings, our home-steads are placed  
In the thick tangled forest, or desolate waste;  
The solitude 'round us can never affright;  
The desert's familiar by day and by night:  
We fear not its terrors—we fear no disgrace—  
Save that which follows being false to our race. \*

Then stir up the blaze, and bring hither more wood,  
The cost is but small—let our fire be good;



And sit round it, boys, huddle closely together,  
 No harm then will come from the wind or the weather,  
 Not e'en though the tempest howls over each head,  
 That is nothing to children, who never have dread  
 Of the element's warring—who fear no disgrace—  
 Save that which follows being false to their race.

## II.

So sung a wild and lawless band  
 Of men—whose fathers, from that land  
 Of mighty pyramids, which rise  
 Majestically towards the skies,  
 Passed unto this; and, though old Time  
 Has swept by ages, since that clime  
 Was theirs, he never could efface  
 The mark peculiar to their race:  
 The hair of jet, the olive skin,  
 To prove what was their origin.

## III.

Beneath the cover of a hill,  
 O'er which the wild winds swept at will  
 Without resistance, for no cot  
 Nor tree was on that dreary spot,  
 Save, here and there, a stunted oak,  
 Not worth the woodman's sturdy stroke;  
 Which grew, but only grew to show  
 How barren was the soil below;  
 And nought that eye could well discern,

Grew there, but clumps of furze and fern,  
 And towering broom, and brambles low,  
 With heath, and some few plants which grow  
 Best in the wild; for small's the space  
 That bounteous nature does not grace  
 With vegetation. She has store  
 For garden, woodland, marsh, and moor:  
 There, in the hollow, close beside  
 A rough and almost trackless ride,  
 The sounds came forth of revelry,  
 And unrestrained festivity.

## IV.

Around a wood fire's glim'ring light,  
 Whose flick'ring flame at times shot forth,  
 Then quickly sunk again to earth  
 Making more drear surrounding night,  
 Dark objects sat, or lay at rest,  
 On nature's cold damp stony breast;  
 And lighter forms, as wild deer fleet,  
 In tattered rags, and shoeless feet,  
 Were there, and bounded in and out,  
 And round the ring with merry shout;  
 While hooded shadows also went  
 At times, within and from each tent.  
 Yet nothing worthy to be sty'd  
 A tent, was there upon that wild;  
 Except a few stakes laid across,  
 And covered o'er with blankets coarse;

Or bent in semicircled form,  
 Barely impervious to the storm,  
 Might thus be called: yet these were prized  
 By those rude, strange, half-civilized,  
 Mysterious children! Palace, hall,  
     Or cot, to them could never be  
     More dear than each small canopy,  
 Which held their loved ones, and their all.

## V.

Bright summer to our hemisphere,  
     Had bade good night: its work was done,  
     And pleasant eves, and hours of sun,  
 Had passed off for another year.  
 And nature looked no longer gay,  
 For yellow autumn waned away;  
 And rude and boist'rous winds that day  
 Had held a fierce triumphant sway;  
 Nor had their furious wrath expired,  
 Until the orb of day retired;  
 Then, all the tempest by His hand,  
 Who holds all Nature at command,  
 Was chained—save that at times the last  
 Expiring moanings of the blast<sup>1</sup>  
 In gusts across the desert burst,  
 The last still weaker than the first.  
 And light clouds passed in rapid flight,  
 Dimming the pale moon's silvery light;  
 Which in mid heaven held on her course,  
 Apparently with greater force