

THE LAST OF THE SMUGGLERS.

AN INTERVIEW.

BY S. BARING-GOULD, M.A., AUTHOR OF "JOHN HERRING," "MEHALAH," ETC.



“THAT there darned telegraph was the end o’ we. It killed honest trade.”

With these words an old smuggler concluded his tale of the good old times of “free trade.”

He is aged ninety-one, a Cornishman; still able, as he assured me, to do as good a day’s work

as can any young man of the present generation. I had come on him after he had spent a day in the harvest field, and there most certainly in binding sheaves and in tossing into the waggon he kept pace with men fifty years his junior.

He was never married. “My sister,” said he, “her kep’ house for me sixty year; and when her died, I were too old to marry—leastways, I reckon the maidens ’ud say so.”

“Have you asked any?”

He shook his head. “I didn’t want to be made a fule of—by one takin’ me.”

Wisdom Penaluna—I do not give his real name, as I am not sure he would like it—spent a twelvemonth in prison the year that King William was crowned. “All along o’ free trade,” as he explained. In fact, he had been caught smuggling. That was in 1830, consequently when he was a lusty young fellow of twenty-six.

“Them was brave times,” said Penaluna.

“What? when in prison?”

“No—out of it,” he answered sharply.

“Tea sold in England at eight shillings a pound, and we could buy in Guernsey or Jersey at sevenpence. That was tidy profits. The year of the breaking out of the Revolution in France (1830) I was over at Cherbourg, and I and my mate we bought a score of tubs of Hollands—that is to say, twenty-one to the score—for seven pounds. We brought them back safe to England and sold them there for three guineas a tub. Made by that transaction £26. That’s what I call fair trading. We got ’baccy at Jersey for sevenpence a pound, same as tea, and sold it at half-a-crown. That weren’t quite the profits as there was on tea, but it was easier to dispose of. And one-and-eleven on a pound ain’t to be sneezed at.”

The old man smiled; his face glowed with conscious pride. Not a shadow of a suspicion that there was anything of blame, morally, attaching to his conduct passed over his conscience. I am quite sure he reckoned up his successful runs with contraband goods as some men would count up their good deeds.

“At times,” continued he, “there was rough dealings. I mind in February, 1816, there was a bit of a scratch. The chaps had brought over a famous lot o’ spirits and got all safe ashore. The Customs men heard of it somehow, and two riding officers came out and called to their aid two light horsemen, and tried to stop the goods as they were being carried from shore to the distributing place. But the farmers all round came to the aid of the smugglers, and there was some fighting. One officer was thrown from his horse and had an arm broken; some of our men were severely wounded. Search was made for them after the affair, but they were not to be found; they’d been

hid away, and were kept hid till their wounds were healed. I reckon there was a hundred and fifty men out that day—our fellows and the farmers and their men.”

“I suppose you were not always successful?”

“No; I were cotched that year George IV. died. The worst of it was, we had to do with informers. The Government they had paid spies everywhere: they had spies in France, they had spies on our own Cornish coast—more shame to Cornishmen for doing the dirty work! But, bless you, sir! there will always be tares among the wheat; we are told that in *Scriptur*!”

Then the old fellow flushed up, reared himself, and said—

“Did you ever hear of the Hoopers of Looe Island?”

“Never.”

“Well, the first o’ the Hoopers was a banished man to the Mewstone off Plymouth. Why he wor sent there I cannot tell; but if he were to be ketched ashore on the mainland, he’d ha’ been hung. So he lived till he died on the Mewstone, and there the Hooper I knowed and will tell ’ee about he were reared. The Hooper I knowed he left the Mewstone, and takin’ kindly-like to an island,

he took to living on Looe Island—that’s about eight acres, and off the coast of Looe; it belongs to Sir William Trelawny—always did belong to the Trelawnys, ever sin’ it wor created. He gave ten shillin’ an acre for the island; in all four pound. I hear tell it lets now for forty or fifty. Hooper, he and his sister, Black Till they called her, and a boy, they lived there. Black Till were the clever one. Sometimes her dressed as a man, and her’d work like a sailor; but she’d put on petticoats sometimes—Easter Day, like enough. There was once a black man on that island—his head has been found, and is put in a glass case now. But there!—I’m ramblin’ away. Hooper and the boy they went over to Roscoff in a fourteen-feet boat and brought away a lading of tubs. ’Twere cruel rough weather, and they was balin’ all night long to keep the open boat afloat. They couldn’t make Looe Island, so they runned into the mouth of Fowey Harbour, and up the little creek to the mill. They was that terrible tired out that they crep’ into the straw in the barn and fell dead asleep. I reckon that was in 1827. What do ’ee think now of the miller? He went off same night and betrayed ’em, and Hooper and the boy was took sleep-drunk as they lay in the straw, and all the tubs were seized. What do ’ee think now should be done wi’ such a villain as that there miller? Hangin’ would be too good for the likes of he!”

“What did become of him?” I asked.

“Well, you sees, there be a Providence over all; and the face o’ Heaven turned agin him after that, and he never prospered, but went down, down.”

“I suppose the good folk gave up dealing with him?”

“Aye; ’twas so, I reckon. A chap as acted as did he, all the honest men were agin him, and he wor lucky that he didn’t get trun’led over the cliffs.”

A pause, and then—

“I reckon he knowed it mightn’t be over-safe for he to go along the edge o’ the cliffs after that.”

As mention has been made of Roscoff—a little place in Brittany that flourished on the illicit trade with Cornwall, and has languished since that trade has ceased—it may be mentioned that there was a notorious man of the name of Coppinger, who had a small estate near St. Austell, and another at Roscoff. He had a lugger of his own, and during the European war was employed by the British Government to convey communications between England and their agents in France. The man was well known to be engaged in the contraband trade, and it was for that reason that he was received without suspicion



WISDOM PENALUNA.

(From a photograph.)

in a French port. Of course, during the war the French were only too willing to damage the British revenue by the encouragement of smuggling. But the English Government, knowing the man to be a smuggler, connived at his proceedings for the sake of having

The farmhouse was old, ramshackle, and was surrounded with barns and outhouses. The house itself has been since pulled down and a new one built on its site. One of the great barns remains.

As the island grew nothing save rabbits,



"BLACK TILL SAT OVER THE FIRE SMOKING."

a means of carrying on secret communication with their agents in the enemy's country.

Coppinger must have done well, for he married a daughter to a Trefusis, son of Lord Clinton, and a son married the daughter of Sir John Murray, Baronet, of Stanhope. On the occasion of the marriage of his daughter, he gave her as a portion the sum of £40,000.

To return to the Hoopers.

As already said, they had a house on Looe Island. This became an emporium for smuggled goods. The brother and sister were so clever and so daring that the revenue officers were continually baulked by them. At last the Government resolved on planting a station upon the island itself, close to the farmhouse of the Hoopers, where it was to be as a cat watching a mouse. It was a cottage surrounded by a ring wall.

It was obvious that these outbuildings could only be used for merchandise, not for agricultural produce. The boy was now employed to watch the one preventive man who was planted to watch the farm.

All the business done was done when the officer was asleep. The lively traffic of the Hoopers was hampered, not stopped.

On one occasion a smuggling vessel ran boldly to the island and discharged her cargo. The one preventive officer could not approach. A ring of men kept him at a distance. However, the proceeding had been observed from the shore, and a preventive boat was manned and run out, but did not reach the island till the vessel had spread sails and departed.

The premises of the Hoopers were searched—nothing was to be found. Black Till sat over the fire smoking; Hooper himself stood

listless, with his hands in his pockets. The officers ransacked the barn, the outhouses, every portion of the dwelling—and found nothing. They could not swear that the ship had discharged run-goods, and nothing savouring of contraband was to be detected. Annoyed and angry, they departed.

In fact, there were numerous subterranean passages, so carefully concealed that to the present day only one has been discovered, and that by the giving way of a portion of the floor of the barn.

Now, although the smack had landed her cargo, there was another proceeding to be gone through before the cargo was safe. It had to be conveyed on shore on the mainland.

One day Black Till ran in despair to the preventive man, with tears in her eyes and wringing her hands.

"Oh, lor!" cried she, "what iver shall us do? There is our boat hev broke away, and be now carried out to say. Do 'ee now help me, there's a dear man. If that 'ere boat be lost, I'll go and drown myself."

The obliging officer ran to the cliff and saw the black speck of the boat tossing on

the waves, and being swept out to sea by the tide. He at once jumped into his own boat and rowed hard in pursuit of her, and after some time succeeded in recovering her.

Whilst this was going on on one side of the island, a party of smugglers was clearing the hiding-place and carrying away the tubs of spirits as fast as they could on shore. The officer returned, bringing the rescued boat with him. Whether he ever found out how he had been befooled I could not learn.

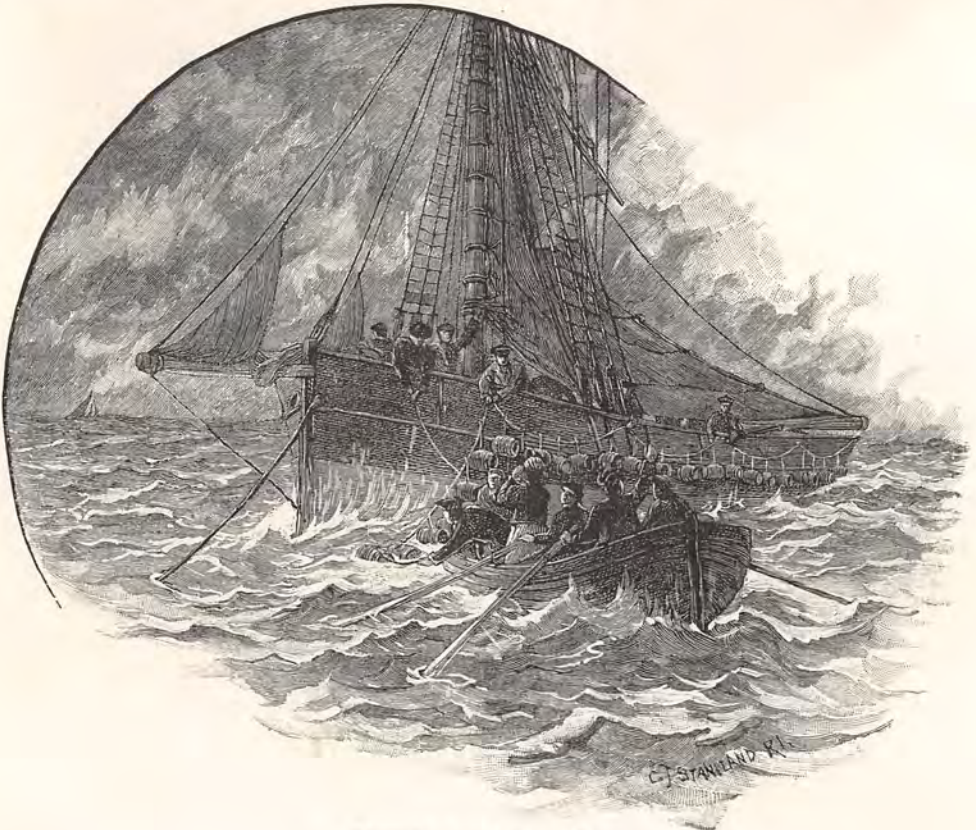
At one time the officer who patrolled the shore at Looe was in the pay of the smugglers. He rode a white or grey cob. On reaching Looe, a man would come up to him and say—

"That's a nice cob you have; is he for sale?"

"That depends," the officer would answer. "I ain't inclined to sell him dirt cheap."

After a little haggling a price was agreed on. Then the officer would say: "Now, I can't walk home, you see, so you must lend me the cob for my return."

And the officer persistently watched the vegetation on the banks and the inland landscape as he rode home, and never by any



TOWING A SUNK "CROP."

chance cast a look to sea. That cob was believed to have been sold over some half-a-hundred times.

The story was told me that when old Hooper lay a-dying he was offered as much as sixty pounds if he would reveal the secret of the hiding-places. He steadfastly refused. "I'll die as I've lived—an honest man," he said.

The farmers were in league with the "free traders." As soon as it was made known to them that a vessel was about to discharge in the nearest cove, they would assemble their men. The farmers kept donkeys, which were ostensibly employed to carry loads of sand from the beach for the manuring of the fields. On the occasion of the landing of a cargo these donkeys were put into requisition. But the men were all accustomed to carry kegs. Indeed, at Cherbourg, Roscoff, and elsewhere the "tubs" of brandy were provided suitably furnished with slings. These slings consisted of a piece of small rope secured round each end of the tub, so as to leave the two "tails" of rope of equal length. A cargo was not always carried on board a vessel, but was frequently sunk and towed, and when so, a chain of tubs was formed by tying one of the sling-ropes to the sinking rope. When the "crop" was brought ashore the rope end was untied or cut, and then tub carriers took one tail over each shoulder, and tied the other tails together. Thus each man carried two tubs.

When a smuggling vessel towed a number of tubs a heavy stone was slung between each, so as to keep them under water and invisible. Moreover, on reaching the coast, if it were not possible to at once remove the "crop," it was customary to sink it. This was done by fastening each rope end to a small anchor, which prevented the crop from drifting away. Then the smugglers could take their own time to remove the sunken spirits. The revenue officers were, however, well aware of this, and if they had observed a suspicious-looking vessel moving about the coast, and

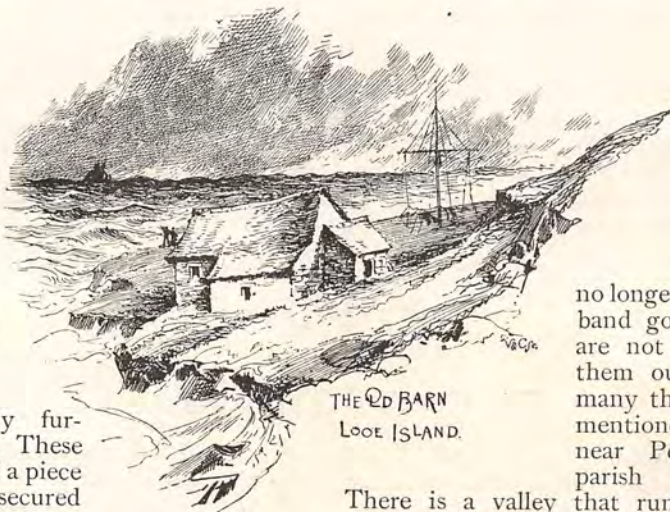
then run in, they would feel or "creep" for the cargo with crooks, and raise the sunken kegs if able to light on them.

Signals at night were given with flint and steel. A code of flashes was agreed upon. Also windows that commanded the sea were eminently useful as a means of communication. The smugglers had their agents on shore shadowing the preventive men, and they had a lingo of their own, by means of which they were able to give information, even before their enemies, without being understood. Whistling certain tunes was also a means of conveying instructions or giving warning. "Jenny to the Fair" meant

that the coast was clear; "Baalam" was a caution that a watch was kept. Along the coast at various points were—and are still—places of concealment.

They are now no longer used for contraband goods, and people are not shy of pointing them out. Among the many that exist may be mentioned the "Vouga," near Penrose, in the parish of St. Eval.

THE OLD BARN
LOOE ISLAND.



There is a valley that runs down to the sea, forming a small cove, with a beach. Opening out of this valley is a lateral coombe—all moor—covered with heather, gorse, and brambles. In the side of this coombe, hidden behind briers, is the mouth of a cave that has been cut out of the rock. It forms a passage or gallery, and has marks in the side where a door and beams were placed to secure the entrance. A lateral gallery is said to have run a mile under ground, and to open into the back yard of a cottage on the cliffs. Much of this has fallen in, but both entrances remain, and the places where the roof has given way can also be traced. There are still alive people who can recall when this was used.

"Ah, sir," said my man to me, "in them glorious days us didn't count gold, us measured it out."

I have seen a china imperial quart mug in which the gold was thus measured. At Maker there lived a handsome woman—she is now dead—who used to go up and down the street, carrying a baby in long clothes. Somehow the baby never got out of long

clothes. One day a preventive man in passing greeted her—

"Well, Mrs. Lee, a quiet baby yours—never cries!"

"No. I reckon her don't cry terrible, but her's got a lot o' spirit for all that in her."

And so the "baby" had. It was a keg of contraband brandy.

It was a favourite practice to press well-known smugglers for the navy. One such was thus taken and run on board a man-of-war lying in Cawsand Bay. He waited his time. One evening, when he thought the opportunity was come, he jumped overboard and swam to a fishing-smack anchored hard by, cut her adrift, and hoisted sail.

The wind blew strong inshore, and he was speedily making for land. The alarm was given and a boat sent in pursuit. The smuggler waited till he got near another boat, then again went overboard, and watched the man-of-war's men rowing in pursuit of the empty smack, which, with sail spread, ran ashore. When he deemed himself safe he made for the land in another direction, and

was never retaken. The man died a few years ago.

The condition of mind in which the State is regarded as the natural enemy, to be resisted, overreached, defrauded, is not one which we can at present readily comprehend. And yet it is quite possible that such a condition of mind may again occur should the State unduly tax and oppress any class by laying excessive burdens upon it; or, again, should it become so Socialistic in its all-embracing activity as to threaten individualism with extinction.

It was a favourite belief among the smugglers that the Customs duties were laid on goods by the Government for the purpose of maintaining a fleet to protect the shores of Great Britain from the incursions of Algerine pirates. The necessity ceased, yet the Customs were maintained. The smugglers justified themselves by pretending that the Government had not kept faith with the nation, and that in consequence no moral obligation weighed on them to respect the law in this matter.

THE WRONG BAG.



OW annoying!" said Mrs. Crompton, laying down the letter that the one o'clock post had just brought. "Mr. Dupont cannot come."

"Mr. Dupont can't come?" echoed her daughter Sybil, in dis-

may. "Why, he was the star. What shall we do?"

"And the day is so near," went on Mrs. Crompton; "and as we've undertaken the concert, it *must* be a success. I don't know what we shall do. Of course, it isn't his fault. He's down with that dreadful influenza."

"Why don't you ask Will Harding to sing?" inquired Reggie Crompton, in the would-be indifferent voice that people assume when introducing a forbidden topic.

His mother frowned.

"I couldn't think of such a thing," she said. "He wouldn't do at all."

"He sings a great deal better than Mr. Dupont," said Sybil, her quiet tone contrasting strangely with the heightened colour of her cheeks.

"It would be out of the question," returned Mrs. Crompton shortly.

"And he would be much more popular with the people of Southborough," said Reggie, getting up and going out of the room.

Mrs. Crompton fidgeted about for a few minutes, and then she too went out, leaving Sybil alone with her father, who had been reading during this conversation, and had apparently taken no notice of it. However, he now looked up.

"I wish you to remember, Sybil," he said slowly, "what I told you a few weeks ago. I do not wish Mr. Harding's name to be mentioned in my presence."

"But I didn't mention it," answered Sybil, with a little touch of defiance. "I only agreed with Reggie in thinking that he could fill the vacant place."

"But you know what I mean. And after the impertinent way Mr. Harding behaved a month ago, I do not wish to have anything more to do with him."

"I don't think he was impertinent."

"There I must differ from you. And when you are a little older, I think you will see that a penniless young doctor, with only a