

cover that our guns were of no great size; and then possibly he might turn on us, and give us more of his quality than would be desirable. Still we kept on peppering away at him as fast as we could, in the hopes of bringing down one of his masts, and enabling the frigate to come up. The lights of the convoy were, however, by this time almost lost sight of. In vain we looked out for a signal of the approach of the frigate. No gun was heard, no light was seen. We were afraid of losing the convoy altogether, and certainly it would have been against the spirit of our instructions to have attempted to deal single-handed with our opponent. Giving the enemy a parting shot most reluctantly, Captain Hassall therefore ordered the helm to be put up, and we ran back in the direction in which we expected to find the convoy.

PETTY CHEATING.

We lately read in a morning paper an account, all too brief and generalised, of more than three-score tradesmen, some of them occupying prominent and "respectable" positions in a certain district of London, all of whom were had up before the magistrates in one day, and fined for using false and fraudulent weights or measures! It is satisfactory to find that the rogues were brought to book and punished; but it is not satisfactory, and not at all right or just, that the names and addresses of these dishonest people should be suppressed. All such offenders should be posted ignominiously in sight of all men, in order that those who deal with them should know with whom they have to do.

It is mortifying to learn that this method of cheating is continually on the increase, and one's indignation fires up on reflecting that it is the humbler and struggling classes who are for the most part the victims of it. One article in which the poor man is victimised continually is that of tobacco. Buying his tobacco in very small quantities, he gets it handed to him ready packed and weighed—in ounces, or half or quarter ounces. But does he often get fair weight in these minute packages? For the sake of information on this point, we lately entered a shop much frequented by labouring men on Saturday night, and brought away three half-ounce packages of "bird's-eye." On weighing them scrupulously without the envelopes, it appeared that, according to shopkeepers' reckoning, there are three half-ounces to an ounce—the whole of the tobacco barely balancing an ounce in the scale. We might be told, perhaps, that all tobacco is moist when taken from the barrel, and dries in paper packets; but fifty per cent. is a rather large allowance for moisture. We might be told, also, that the purchaser of any quantity, however small, can see it weighed if he chooses; but what if the weights are false, like those of the three-score offenders mentioned above?

Then, in the matter of his beer, the poor man is cheated both as to quality and quantity. In the first place, the London publican is given to poisoning the beverage with drugs—doctoring it, as it is professionally termed—by which process it is increased largely in quantity, and so altered in its constituents as to excite thirst instead of quenching it. In the second place, it is often drawn from the tap in pots of short measure—either in the shape of fancy pots that never pass beyond the bar, or in others ingeniously, though to all appearance accidentally, bulged inwards, so that their containing capacity is profitably diminished.

The peripatetic trades of London find their customers

for the most part among the lower middle classes and the poor; and of many of these traffickers it may be said that cheating in some form or other is their normal system of doing business. It would seem that the weights and measures of the out-door traders, are not subject to the supervision of the inspectors—at any rate, we never hear of these gentry being brought to account for their exploits. A pound of cherries bought from a handcart in the street is rarely found to weigh a dozen ounces; oftener, indeed, it may weigh eight or nine. The so-called pound weight of the street fruit-seller is a nondescript lump of metal, manufactured for the purpose, and has no definite relation to a pound *avoirdupois*, unless in appearance. In selling fruit by measure there is the same sort of sophistication. False wooden bottoms are common, as the buyers of nuts know well. If the measure is correct, which is assuming a great deal, the method of filling it is a delusion. A practised hand will fill a quart pot with a pint of plums or gooseberries, and make it appear as though it were brimful and running over. Watch him narrowly, and you will see how he does it. He lays the measure horizontally, and covers the lower side with fruit; then raising the measure gradually, he heaps a handful of fruit over the top with his left hand; at the same time having a good-sized plum, say between the finger and thumb of his right hand, he ingeniously inserts that as a kind of key-stone to prevent the crowning heap from falling into the hollow beneath: thus the measure appears choke full and filled up, though something like half the due quantity is lacking. This clever piece of cheatery is executed with astonishing rapidity—two seconds, we should say, affords ample time for it. When the measure, as in the case of strawberries and raspberries, goes with the fruit, the cheating, as everyone knows, consists in filling the lower half or more of the pottle or punnet with some worthless material—grass, hay, fern leaves, or anything that comes to hand—so that half a pint of the fruit shall look like a pint, or a pint like a quart. It would appear that the summer fruits never have been honestly sold in the London streets. We can remember well the occasion on which we bought our first pottle of strawberries in a street in Paddington—*O mihi proteritos!*—it was more than fifty years ago—and the grievous indignation we experienced on finding that the middle and lower strata of the deceitful measure consisted of nothing but fusty grass. It was our first introduction to the rascality of trafficking human nature. Would it had been the last!

But we can trace this phase of cheating much farther back than fifty years ago. There is an old book known by curious readers as the "Diary of Henry Machyn, Merchant Taylor of London," written in 1552, in which there is a record of a man who was placed in the "pelere" for "selling potts of straberries, the whych the pott was not alf fulle, but fylled with ferne (fern)." This brief record is more creditable to our ancestors than any truthful record of similar matters in our day would be to us. The cheat of three hundred years back, it is evident, was regarded and treated as a rogue, and his cheating punished as a crime. We moderns have changed all that, and should no more think of punishing the trader who cheats than the member of Parliament who bribes—though why both of them should not be well trounced is not so clear.

A singular phase of cheating, which makes its appearance in London about the fall of the leaf, and is at its height in the mellow month of October, is one known among adepts as "coming the double," which is effected by a kind of sleight of hand, so cleverly managed as to

deceive the most watchful eye. Some fine morning in October, you hear a sonorous voice in the street bawling out "Fine bilin' happles! yaa! fine keepin' happles—russetin's yaa! half-a-crown a hunder!" You know you would like a winter stock of apples, and you send Betty to the door to see what sort of fruit the man has got. She brings you in a sample in her apron—good plump specimens, big enough for dumplings. You decide on buying a hundred of them, and while Betty goes in search of a basket to contain them, the man and boy lug their huge hamper into the hall in readiness. Then, as you sit at your work or book, you hear them counted out—"five, ten, fifteen, twenty," and so on, till the hundred is told, the money is paid for them, and the hawker goes roaring on his way. Now if you are not a very thrifty personage, and do not count over these apples yourself before you store them away, you will hear very soon that they are all gone, and will be puzzled to imagine what has become of them. If you do count them, however, you will find that, instead of one hundred apples, you have little more than half the number—the ingenious messenger of Pomona has been "coming the double" over you, and for every apple he has given you has made you pay for two. Nay, we have known instances in which the double has been so dexterously done that the total result of the counted-out hundred was not one over fifty—but such a case is exceptional, and may be regarded as a touch "beyond the reach of art." You are, perhaps, inclined to blame Betty for her stupidity in suffering herself to be defrauded; but allow us to assure you that the result would have been precisely the same had you consummated the transaction yourself. The exploit is accomplished in the following way:—The accomplished "doubler" adjusts the edge of his hamper over the purchaser's basket, and, bending over the wares, takes five apples in the hollow of both his palms: the first five go into the basket, and the second and subsequent fives appear to follow with astonishing rapidity; but so dexterous are the man's movements, and so delusive is the swift motion of the fruit, that although one half or more of the apples he takes up go back again into his own hamper, you are not only not aware of it, but, when the thing is well done, have not the remotest suspicion of the fact.

The grocer may be regarded, in all districts where the poorer classes most abound, as the poor man's provision merchant—the commerce of poor families with the butcher being but comparatively small. But grocers' wares are unfortunately subjectible to admixtures and falsifications to a greater extent than almost any other. Sugar will carry a rare amount of moisture as well as of solid matters not saccharine; tea may be subjected to infusion, and dried and rolled and infused again a dozen times over—a capacity which has created a race of industrials, known as tea-leafers, who live by preparing it again for the market after all its strength has been exhausted; and coffee may be imitated by a dozen roasted substitutes, and made saleable by flavouring with chicory. It is the same with condiments and provocatives: the poor man's pepper is often half dust; his mustard is three-fourths maize or lentil-flour; his vinegar is half water; his pickles are gone dead and artificially preserved from corruption; and his anchovies, if he thinks of indulging in anchovies, are manufactured from a redundant overflow of sprats. The wholesale cheating practised upon the poor is sometimes rebuked in an indignant strain by editors of newspapers: while we write, a paragraph is going the round, exposing the tricks of the butter trade, from which we learn that a large proportion of the so-called

butter sold to the poor, and sold nominally as the over-plus of the market, at a comparatively low price, is not butter at all. It is, in fact, a preparation of beef suet, beaten up with a liberal per-centage of water, and coloured with anatto, the mass being well salted to save it from putrefaction.

In towns where large numbers of working men are employed, and where their families form the major portion of the population, the provision-dealers usually assume a sort of vested right in them, fleecing them systematically, and supplying them with wares often of the very vilest quality at high prices. In a town, which for this time shall be nameless, where the intolerable peculations of the retail shopkeepers had risen to a shameless height, and where some thousands of workers are employed on Government work, certain influential friends of the artisan established small stores on the canteen system, where the workmen and their wives could purchase goods of fair quality at a fair price. It is no wonder that not only the Government workmen, but other inhabitants of the place, took advantage of a just market, and flocked to the canteens to purchase their daily supplies. But mark a characteristic fact: the shopkeepers, finding themselves deserted by those whom they had been accustomed to regard as their lawful victims, actually sent one deputation after another to the Minister of War, to represent to his lordship the injury which would thereby be done to their vested interests in the servants of the British Government, and they made special complaints of the unfairness and impropriety of allowing civilians also to deal at the canteens, with the object of obtaining better weight and better wares at a fairer price than they could do at the small shops of the town. We do not hear that his lordship, who must have derived from the deputations some novel ideas of commercial morality, complied with their joint requests; but we do hear, on the contrary, that the traders, finding they could do no better, reformed their system, and, by selling honest wares at a fair price, were enabled to compete successfully with the canteens, and thus to recover their lost trade, at least in part.

With regard to other necessities of life there is the same complaint to be made. Whenever the poor man has to be served, the "shoddy" principle comes into play: his furniture, though when new it may shine with lacquer and French polish, is often made with "slab" and refuse timber: the inferior leather, which will not do for the average market, is made to do for him; the coarse garments of the slop-seller, who supplies him with clothing, are in good part manufactured from materials which have already run their course in some other shape; and we all know that, while he pays more for house-rent, in proportion to the accommodation he gets, than the rich man does, he is housed in the vilest way, and has to brave pestilence in a thousand shapes, because he is deprived of the commonest safeguards against it.

For a large proportion of the cheating and impositions of which they are the victims, the humbler classes have themselves to blame. They have allowed themselves too easily to become the dupes of the dealers, tallymen, and others who exact unreasonable profits; they spend their money, even in their prudential purchases, with far too much recklessness and haste, and usually without knowing or caring to know the real characters of the parties with whom they transact business. In a word, they do not take that care of their own interests which they might take, and which people in the ranks above them usually do take.