Hist! The Smugglers are out!

EAST WIGHT SMUGGLING YARNS

by

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of SEAVIEW, I.W.

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(transcribed 2012 -
a few obvious typesetting errors corrected;
hopefully, fewer new ones introduced
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INTRODUCTION

The present Government has for good or for ill - only time will tell - changed this country suddenly from one of free imports to one where practically everything is subject to an import duty. If history does repeat itself and who will aver that it does not, smuggling will again become one of the chief occupations of those living on our south coast, just as it was over one hundred years ago in the Napoleonic period.

There are many who say that already of recent years smuggling has been on the increase, not only by the mere introduction of a few cigars or bottles of scent by Cross-Channel passengers, or a smart silk frock spirited through the Customs at Dover or Newhaven in a handkerchief sachet: but real wholesale introduction of brandy, silk, tobacco, and dope by aeroplane and fast motor boats. This may well be so, for previous to 1923 there were more than 3,000 coastguard men stationed round our shores and it can be said in truth that practically every foot of the coast line was regularly patrolled in the interests of the revenue and for the safety of those that go down to the sea in ships.

Economy in the shape of the Geddes axe, decimated this fine body of men, and now there are not more than 850 men available for the hundred and one duties of the old coast-guard service, signalling, coast watching, shipwreck work, Customs duties and prevention of smuggling. Of those that are left some are under the control of the Board of Trade and some under H.M. Customs and Excise.

Is it any wonder then that from day to day evidence that "the smugglers are out" keeps cropping up? Recent cases like that of the stranded motor boat on St. Helens Ledge, crammed with tobacco leaf, are ocular demonstration to the sceptics that the days of the free traders are returning.

There is no danger, however, that we shall see again the old days of wigs and waggons, of pistols and pigtails, of cutlasses and cutters and all the paraphenalia of our great- grandfathers' smuggling days. A simpler procedure is possible - a few packages dropped from an aeroplane at a given point along the coast, or better still at sea, to he picked up by a speedboat ostensibly out for a pleasure cruise. Where is the man who can deny that modern conditions do not lend themselves to a revival of smuggling, in fact make it an easier matter than when a generation or two ago in nearly every village that could smell the salt of the sea, every other householder had a real and lively interest in the "trade." Few people realise that even to-day there are living in their midst persons who were active participants in this romantic byegone calling. The writer of these reminiscences may be termed such a man and it is confidently hoped that his tales will be widely read. Real names have, where it has been deemed wise, been either omitted or altered, but the truth of the tales can be vouched for. It is interesting to note that the printers and publishers of this book printed a volume of poems, Gems of the Island, by the author's father as far back as 1850, and it is confidently hoped that the success of that volume will be repeated with this.

CHAPTER I.

The smugglers wedding Party.

Smuggling was carried on at Seaview and at St. Helens as far back as I can remember, and I am now 83 years of age. This corner of the Island, as everybody knows, is a strategic point, and is a natural landing place for contraband. Here where the open sea ends and Spithead commences was the danger spot for encountering revenue cutters and His Majesty's ships of war, and generations before my time the neighbourhood had been a hotbed of "free traders."

Nine coastguardmen were stationed here at Seaview, four at St. Helens, and four more at Springvale, adjoining Ryde. They all met frequently, being fond of a glass of grog - at the Ferry Inn, St. Helens, now, alas, like many another house of refreshment but a ghost of the good old days and vanished. They were all zealous, active men in the prime of life, and the great thing - and often the only thing to do - was to square them by putting money under a tree or stone and not let anybody see the money pass. It was even fatal to let one coastguard see another handle a bribe.

It was in the year 1887 - I have good reason to know that all the coastguards had been well and singly "salted" - when the Tib, a St. Helens boat, manned by Jack R. - and Henry T. -, whom we always called Uncle, went to Cherbourg and brought back forty kegs or tubs of spirit. Being sighted by some busy body, the telegraph, a new thing in those days and deemed an uncanny thing by all smugglers, was set to work, and the coastguards were put on the "qui vive." Sensing some activity Jack R. cast all the tubs overboard in shallow water, took their bearings and anchoring off Seaview was immediately boarded by the chief coastguard officer, Mr. Bartlett, who said "Step lively, my lads. You're my prisoners." Finding the boat empty, however, he took her all the way to Ryde and put her in safe custody, walking all the way back in a glow of satisfaction, feeling sure he had only to sweep the bay to find the tubs. When he started to drag, with his men

aiding him, George S. —, a Seaview man, who had an interest in the Cargo, was nearly beside himself. He got his gun and making me go with him, we rowed off in his boat on the pretence of shooting birds. He looked all around and watched the dragging out of the corner of his eye. I remember well that he shot a poor innocent grebe, a pretty bird and an expert fisher - I can see to this very day the look in its eyes as it lay dying on the thwarts - when all of a sudden he agonisingly said ”Oh, my God. They’ve got ‘em,” but to his glee the drag came up - blank, and the search was abandoned.

Next day I asked Mr. Careless, one of the coastguards, why they had not pulled in the drag properly, and said “You had them.” To my surprise he replied “Didn’t I know that well? I told the officer so, but he told me to let go, so I did.” And to this day I have been left wondering if the salting had not even been extended to the chief officer and that there was some honour amongst them after all.

Anyhow, the next night the tubs were landed at Priory Bay, but not by the coastguards. They were carried away through Hill Farm to Rowborough where they were met by a two horsed carriage - or was it a Tilbury ? - I am not quite sure which but, in any case, I know it was a fine sight - two horses, white rosette, and the driver with a white rosette on his whip. A fine wedding party it seemed, and a Mr. Edward L. - of Shanklin dressed like a groom, stepped out of the carriage, paid 30/- for each of the tubs and 10/- to each man who had carried a tub - the usual price - and then drove away in fine style.

CHAPTER II.

The Week's Washing,

"Smuggler Bill is six feet high.
He has curling locks and a roving eye
He has a tongue and he has a smile
Trained the female heart to beguile."
-Ingoldsby Legends.

The winter of 1854 was, I remember, bitterly cold. It was the time of the Russian War and things were bad. All the water in Seaview froze. It was difficult to get drinking water, and ice was everywhere. The sea shore was even full of what looked like miniature icebergs to my young inexperienced eyes.

George C., a single, but singular man, lived at Springvale with his widowed mother. He was very fond of shooting the wild duck, which all that winter could be seen on the foreshore in large numbers and provided many a meal for the wily hunter with hardihood enough to stalk them just before daylight. One of the local gentry, knowing George's prowess, insisted upon accompanying him one morning, but it was so bitterly cold that they abandoned their walk along the desolate shore and started to tramp home. George, wearing heavy sea boots was carrying his companion across a channel of water left by the tide when he stood on something that threw both of them into the icy sea water. Cursing their luck they scrambled out, and went on their way, but George, not being satisfied, slipped back to investigate and there, to his great surprise, were nine tubs which had broken loose from a drag line. Keeping his own counsel - George was a quick witted fellow - he walked on homewards with his companion and there in the gathering light was the coastguard approaching. "Oh, it's you, George!" said he, "Any luck?" "Not a bird" said George, "and we're for home, for we're frozen and wet through."

Getting rid of his companion George doubled back and before the coastguard returned on his beat he had secured the tubs and hidden them in the long grass at

Puckpool point, close to where they had stranded. Then at intervals during the day he was busy transferring the tubs to holes he had dug in his mother's garden. Once buried they were safe, but how to dispose of them was a worrying problem until a Ryde publican promised to take the lot for £30, provided they were delivered safely. Getting them to Ryde was the next thing and George knew that was a big job for he had to work in secret and alone. The thing had him beaten till he remembered that every Friday afternoon he was in the habit of taking washing into Ryde that his mother did for a lady in the town, and in this way he disposed of his lucky find.

One night going into Ryde with his basket of washing and a tub concealed in it, he was overtaken by the coastguard who insisted upon walking with him as they were both going to Ryde. It was fortunate that George was a man of exceptional physique for he dared not put the washing down and rest as he was accustomed to do every hundred yards or so. As it was he had all his work cut out preventing the friendly coastguard from giving him a hand with his load, and arrived at the publican's house completely exhausted and in a bath of perspiration, not only from the protracted physical effort but from the mental agony of apprehension he had been suffering all the way. Never was a man more glad to say "Good night" to his companion of the road than poor George. It was all he had breath left to say.

This £30 kept George in clover all the rest of that hard winter. It was. I believe, the same winter that he boxed with Tom Sayers in Ryde and stood up to him for twelve gruelling rounds, no small achievement. It was the famous Tom Sayers that I mean and I remember his last great fight quite well. The ring was pitched at Famboro' and the Hampshire police raided the match but everybody escaped by merely moving into Wiltshire, for the ring had been artfully made on the borders of the two counties and the Hants police dare not make arrests in Wiltshire. This historic ring is fenced in to this day as a memento of the fight. A collection was made for the great Tom Sayers - £300 - and a whip round was made in

the House of Commons itself, then a home of sportsmen. Lord Palmerston, a great sportsman, who had witnessed the fight subscribed £20. There were giants in those days.

George in subsequent years became a bit of a local character. A handsome, upstanding man of over six feet, he became a favourite with everybody, but it was really his undoing. One tale of him goes that his fame as a fighter spread to the mainland and one day a bully of a man came to Seaview all the way from Portsea to make a match with him. Meeting George in the lane he said “I be come over to take a look at this fellow who thinks he can fight.” George promptly grasped him round the waist and with a mighty heave threw him on to the top of a yew hedge that was by, and then said. “Well, you can take a good look at him now,” and walked on. The match did not come off, the Portsea man had seen enough.

CHAPTER III.

The Sandown Bay Fatality.

> “Near his grave dash the billows, the winds loudly bellow.
> Yon ash struck with lightning points out the cold bed
> Where Will Watch, the bold smuggler, that famed lawless fellow.
> Once feared - now forgot - sleeps in peace with the dead.”

Unlike in other parts of the country where pitched battles between the smugglers and revenue men often took place and many lives were lost I can remember no serious melees taking place in East Wight, and this was entirely due, I believe, to the fact that the local free traders never carried firearms. Danger there was in plenty, however.

Sudden death often stalked the smugglers, but the knowledge that their calling, or profession as some put it, placed them in peril of their lives and their persons and purses in danger, did not deter or daunt them. They were the same stuff as the men who manned Old England’s

wooden walls, which so often lay at Spithead opposite to Seaview.

One cold dark winter night in the year 1816 smugglers landed at Sandown. When their boat touched the strand, instead of the tub-runners meeting them, they were confronted by a strong posse of revenue men, and, so completely surprised, that they were all taken prisoners before they could make any semblance of resistance, Richard Matthews, a well-known Bembridge man, feeling cold, said, ”I want my coat,” but the officer in charge of the men shouted “Touch it and I’ll shoot you like a dog.” Matthews, however, in spite of the threat, took up his coat, whereupon the officer shot him through the head, dead on the spot. As there was in those days no burial ground at Bembridge the unfortunate victim of this severity was buried in St. Helens churchyard, where his tombstone may be seen to this day.
The inscription, carved in the old fashioned style of lettering, reads

> “Sacred to the memory of Richard Matthews
> who died November 20th, 1816.
>
> All you who pass by, pray look and see
> How soon my life was taken from me
> By the cruel officer, who as you’ll hear
> Spilt my blood, which was so dear,
> But God is good and just and true,
> And will reward to each his due:
> And, when you come my grave to see.
> Prepare yourself to follow me.”

Local indignation at this happening was such, however, that there was no living on the Island for the officer after it became widely known, so he secured a transfer to the main-land, but shortly afterwards met his death by falling overboard one night from the revenue cutter when it was running for shelter to a Sussex harbour.

There is in Binstead Churchyard, the other side of Ryde, a tombstone with exactly the same inscription to the memory of a man who was shot by the revenue officers

of Portsmouth, who were chasing his sloop in their cutter. This is in a better state of preservation and carries upon it a carving depicting the sloop being fired upon by the cutter. We do not call in the aid of poets nowadays to make epitaphs, and I do not know who penned these lines. Some local poet no doubt! My father was a poet and wrote several of these rhyming epitaphs, but I do not think that this was one of his attempts. He published a volume of his poems, and I treasure a volume to this day. Many discerning critics praised his rhyming facility and a second edition was printed in 1884. I, no doubt, get my itch to put pen to paper from him.

Another Richard Matthews, a Seaview man, and an uncle of my father, also came to a sudden end through being mixed up with the smugglers. A number of tubs had been successfully run and the smugglers sharing what had not been sold amongst themselves at Chery Gin, a hamlet near Seaview, began to quarrel and fall out violently over the spoils. In the altercation Richard Matthews was knocked down and seriously hurt. He was taken home, but so serious were his injuries that he lived only three days.

Strangely enough a third Richard of the Matthews family was murdered on the London Underground Railway, the case making a big stir at the time. So can you wonder that the Matthews never name any of their children Richard? The name seems too unlucky.

It is a well known fact that a smuggler was once killed whilst being hauled up Culver Cliff with two tubs, a piece of chalk becoming displaced and striking him on the head. Another is known to have fallen into a ditch with his two tubs hanging round his neck, and not being missed and being unable to extricate himself the tubs held him down till he was drowned.

CHAPTER IV.

A Trip to France.

One of my closest relatives was much given to smuggling and it was a great worry to us. One year he went before the mast as a deck hand on the yacht Margiana which was always laid up for the winter in St. Helens Harbour. When at Antwerp he took on board 1,600 good cigars and 16 lbs. of tobacco. Strangely enough the coastguards here were apprised of this fact by wire, for it is a fact that the foreign officials often communicate such shipments to the authorities here. A chum of his took my skiff and rowed to the Mother-bank to bring the smuggled goods ashore. A brother of mine when he heard of this said, “He’ll be caught and fined £100, and won’t have the money to pay it and knows his Father hasn’t got it. They’ll be compelled to mortgage their house like grandfather did.” We all understood what he meant for my grandfather lent his boat to some villagers who used it for smuggling and were caught red-handed. My father had to pay £300 in order to redeem the boat and meet the fine and to do this had to mortgage his house. So this brother of mine ran down to the Crown Slip, met the skiff and brought away the tobacco and cigars under his arm. On his way to the house he met the coastguard who was running down to the slipway to intercept the boat. He arrived too late however and could find no contraband. It was already spread out on the floor in our attic and when my aunt saw it she turned white in the gills and took to her bed. She knew to her cost what the penalties for smuggling were. We did not rest till the stuff was removed that night by its owner, who made a good thing out of it, for he bought the cigars at a 1d. each and sold them at 6d. I afterwards told the coastguard who lived in a house of mine how he had passed my brother on the road with the tobacco. He said, ”Well, he was the last person I suspected and I did not think he would do such a thing,” to which I replied, “It was our first and last chance with him.” This was quite true, for I know that my brother did not again interfere in the trade, but I cannot say the

same for the other relative of mine, and neither of myself as you will now learn.

It was in August of 1886. We had held the Annual Regatta at Seaview. I was chairman of the Committee and as a side line took photographs, a novelty in those early days. A lady saw me with my camera and persuaded my mother to get me to teach her the art. I did this and she gave me £2 for my pains. A few days later yet another lady, through my mother, became my pupil. She was three weeks in my studio and I obtained for her a splendid Ross lens with which she did some surprising work. She wished to pay me, but I did not like to name a sum, when much to my surprise I got a cheque for £50. It seems incredible, but I have the letters and envelope as proof to this day, but not, alas, the money. My mother explained it to me. My first pupil was a titled lady, and the second a rich commoner, who was so pleased that she could make better pictures than her rival that she was determined to reward me handsomely.

The story must have got around for my youngest brother said to me shortly afterwards, “Three of us have hired the Minnie for a cruise. Make the fourth. You’ve got the cash and you need the holiday.” I did not want much persuading. I remember it well, for it was Friday and we waited in the Bay till the iron tongue of midnight had tolled twelve, as, unlike to-day, no sailor would hoist anchor on Friday. We sailed right round the Island and put into Swanage for shelter on the Saturday night and on Sunday set sail due south by the compass. It was a broiling hot day, the sea like molten glass, no stir in the air, no stir in the sea, the ship was as still as she could be, and like landlubbers we neglected to cover up our water beaker lying on the fore peak and it burst - a terrible calamity it seemed. A London tug nosed along beside us with apparently nothing to do and refused my brother’s request to have the beaker filled, saying they had only condensed water themselves. I went aboard and took a walk with the skipper along his port deck and said “How much water, real water, can you give us?” To the surprise of my shipmates he said, “As much as you like!” It was not

till some time afterwards that I explained to them that I had succeeded where they had failed by the virtue of a Masonic sign.

At Cherbourg, after many protests on my part, a small cargo of brandy was bought and I am afraid that, after my scruples had been overcome, it was my money that bought it.
It came on to blow on our way home and we were forced to put into Swanage again.

The same Customs officer who had seen us arrive from Seaview hailed us and when I saw him my heart sank into my boots. He shouted ”Where are ye from? Across from France?” but our skipper in a friendly, fatherly way, said in a rich Devon voice, “No, no, my laaad. We’em come up from down to Portland.” Imagine my relief when the officer seemingly satisfied, rowed away. Why, I do not know, unless it was the honest friendly tone of the answer he got or our skipper’s face that impressed him. At any rate we made tracks for Cowes as soon as we could and arranged to get there just after sundown, knowing that we should not then be boarded till daylight. It was next to a friendly yacht that we moored and in the dead of night transferred the stuff to their cabin and so the search officer found nothing suspicious about us next morning. Then at the next fall of dusk we made for Seaview, minus a few bottles left with the friendly yacht and, with a clearance from the Cowes authorities, were not disturbed when we arrived.

CHAPTER V.

Press Gang and smugglers.

Members of this generation may well be excused if they fail to understand how all the liquor that was smuggled in the early days of last century was disposed of, but in those days places that sold grog were as thick as sweet shops are to-day. In Seaview alone there were four licensed houses and a hundred in Ryde and around, all willing to buy the illicit spirit. One publican of Seaview named Webb was a great character. We called him Foot-

web or was it Webb-foot? At any rate he had six toes on each foot and when ripened with good old French brandy, that had paid no duty, of course, would display them for the edification of his customers. He was shipwrecked time and again, and the story runs that his deformity had once saved him from cannibals and I know that he had been mixed up in piracy. I have heard his aunt say ”It’s a wonder you were not shot, Tim” but he would chuckle and say, “Never fear, the lead’s not dug that will make the bullet to shoot me.”

My grandfather kept a Seaview public house, but when my father became a local preacher was persuaded to abandon it. I have heard that my father went to rob a sparrow’s nest in the roof of the house and found in it a scrap of paper, a piece of one of Isaac Watt’s hymns

> “Thou shalt not deprive thy neighbour
> Of his goods against his will.
> Hands were made for honest labour,
> Not to plunder or to steal.”

This set up the train of thought that led to my father becoming a leading local religious worthy.

You can imagine that this neighbourhood was a happy hunting ground for the press gangs from the ships lying at Spithead. On one occasion when Sir William Oglander invited all the neighbourhood to a feast, the local smugglers turned up in force and overdoing the hospitality, fell easy victims to a gang that happened to be prowling around. A clean sweep was practically made of them all, and they woke up to find themselves distributed among the fleet. One man pretended that he had never seen a ship before and pointed to the mast and said “Oh, what a big tree, and no branches! I can’t climb that.” A taste of the cat however soon persuaded him that he could. It was the same man who some years after saved his ship by steering her safety through the Needles passage when she was in danger and nobody else on the vessel had sufficient knowledge of the channel, which, as they were caught on a lee shore, had to be negotiated.

Knowledge gained in evading His Majesty's revenue was for once of help to His Majesty's navy.

The press gang took my grandfather and as a consequence he was on the Victory at Trafalgar. In the year 1850 the Government, in a generous mood - it was the year of the Great Exhibition - stated that all those who fought at Trafalgar and were still alive could claim prize money. My grandfather had died in 1840, but a nephew of his signed the old gentleman's papers and netted £60. It did him no good however for it all went down his neck in the form of liquor. I have by me a printed list of all the ratings that fought in the twenty nine ships on the glorious First of June, and I have vivid memories of one survivor of the fight, old Harry Sothcott, who lived to be over ninety. My father wrote his life story.

On the anniversary of Trafalgar old Harry would stand outside his cottage gate, dressed in his very best. The owner of Woodlands used to send him 5s. and a bottle of old port to drink his health on that day. This gentleman had been a middy on a ship that guarded St. Helena during the six years that Bonaparte languished there. Lord Rosebery wrote a book called "The last phase of Bonaparte," and I was able to give him some information that was news to him. I was interested because Lord Rosebery owned a yacht, the Zaida, which often lay off Seaview in the summer.

My grandfather sailed the Pilot cutter Neptune and one day they took a passenger off a frigate at Portland to be landed at Portsmouth. This man would not speak though he was aboard two days and nights, and brought his own food and even ale to drink. At Portsmouth however he did say as he went over the side, "How much?", and being told £3 handed it over in silence, he was the King's messenger with the news of Bonaparte's death and had received instructions to speak to nobody till he had delivered his message to Whitehall. A very efficient messenger, but he cast quite a gloom over the little vessel while he was aboard. Lord Rosebery wrote me a letter of

personal thanks from his house in Berkeley Square and I have it now. He was Prime Minister for three years and is remembered by me so well because he passed the Parish Councils Act. He was also the finest orator of his time, and a rare sportsman, winning the Derby three times, and what could a man want more?

CHAPTER VI.

Betrayed by the Frost.

"And many a heart grew sad that day,
That so much good liquor was thrown away."
-Ingoldsby Legends.

Narrow escapes from detection there were many, of course, and I recollect well the day Princess Louise was married to the Marquis of Lorne when over one hundred tubs and three flagons of eau de cologne - huge things they were - had been landed at Springvale. The coastguard had been to some festivities in Ryde and it was bright moonlight, about three o'clock in the morning, when this man - a fine handsome bearded fellow - came whistling home along the shore. There in the grass, sparkling in the rimy frost, were footmarks plainly to be seen. He traced them over the sea wall to the spot where the tubs had landed. The smugglers had made several careless slips. They had landed on a falling tide and then, instead of handling the tubs, they had rested them on the sands, leaving impressions which told a very plain tale. He followed the footmarks through the grass to Park Farm, and found that the smugglers had blundered still further for they had left the farmer's planks across the ditches and trenches in their hurry. Hot on the scent he ran and soon found the tubs covered over with fern and grass in a deep ditch. He reported his find to his chief without delay and this man turned out Mr. Nash and his son and between them they carried the whole of the tubs – one hundred and three - to Seaview. It was an exciting time. I have reckoned the weight of the tubs as at least three tons. Five of the nine coastguards were not teetotal and

they broached a tub. It proved to be strong undiluted spirit and they were quickly dead drunk. They were lifted off the ground on which they had fallen and carried into the station and flung on the floor to sleep off the effects. The tubs were laid in an orderly fashion in rows before the coastguard station flagstaff and a guard mounted over them, I can assure you it was a fine sight. People came for miles to see them and stood envying them for hours, like ragamuffins before a sweet shop window.

I was fixing a new fence in front of my father's shop when he said he would like to see the tubs. One of the Seaview watermen said, "I'd like to go with you, for I've never seen a tub." My father and l both smiled and did a dry grin for we knew that he had seen those selfsame tubs long before the lucky coastguard had hit upon them. What his thoughts were as we stood and looked at them that day I never knew. I cannot get the sight of them out of my mind even now.

A favourite ruse of the smugglers was to set one man of the gang to watch the patrolling coastguard. The duty of this man was to hold the coastguard in conversation when ever tubs were to be landed or to secure his attention by some means or another and draw him away from the scene of operations, much like a lapwing will lure the searcher for its nest away from its actual whereabouts by pretending to be winged.

It was during the winter of 1865 that Geo. S. stopped Mr. Hogg, the coastguard, by the sea wall at Woodside, and having manoeuvred him into such a position that his back was to the sea insisted upon telling him a yarn, which continued till all was right and the signal of safety had been given, denoting that all the tubs had been lowered from the side of the skiff and dragged through the tide by means of a tow line. When all was finished the runners found that they had forgotten to coil up the drag line and two coastguards were rapidly approaching along the shore. They were Mr. Bartlett and Mr. Dawson from St. Helens and, had they not been so earnestly engaged in conversation, they might have seen Tom J. run down to

the water's edge, crouching low and coiling the line as he ran, and when up to his knees in the sea, lie down with only his nostrils above water till they had passed. It was a very narrow squeak. The slightest delay or noise would have betrayed him and would have meant certain detection.

CHAPTER VII.

A Shanklin Incident.

> "The fire flash shines from Culver Cliff,
> And the answering light burns blue in the skiff
> And there they stand, that smuggling band,
> Some in the water and some on the sand,
> Ready those contraband goods to land."

I can relate many exciting adventures of the free traders some amusing, and some alas, tragic. I often smile when I remember how during the winter of 1867 the smugglers were trying to run the tubs for several nights, but as the coastguards, with a new chief officer - new brooms sweep clean - were unusually active, nothing could be done. Getting desperate they resolved one night to do or die, and whilst humping the kegs along they heard the revenue men coming. One always, for some reason or other wore woollen sabots. He was either afraid of getting his feet wet and bringing on lumbago or was of a saving turn of mind. He could be heard for miles in the frosty moonlight and never knew how the smugglers blessed his frugal fashion in footwear. This night however, they were reckless with impatience and were nearly surprised, having time only to throw themselves into the gorse bushes which abound there and which in the spring of every year make Nodes Point a symphony in yellow gold.

There, hugging their kegs, they had to stay till the coastguards had passed, all the while cursing their prickly lot beneath their breath. Then, picking as many of the thorns out of the softer parts of their anatomy as they could, the kegs were put for the night in the fruit house at the Castle. Nodes Point where this occurred was always a

favourite landing place. Julius Caesar is said to have landed there and also William the Conqueror when he divided the Island amongst nine of his knights.

The following day the tubs were disposed of in Shanklin, always a noted place for smuggling. When I was a young man I worked there as a carpenter and lodged with a coastguard officer named A –d. He was a local preacher and an admirable man, more efficient at his self imposed job of catching souls than smugglers I hope, for I know that he never caught a free trader red handed. Once, however, he came near enough to it.

The rendezvous of the smugglers was well known to be the Chine Inn and Jack B. one of the most notorious of the gang was one night carrying two tubs in the time honoured way - slung round his neck - he was making his way from Luccombe to the inn when out of the darkness he was confronted by this officer. Jack, a strong hefty fellow, his hands being free, promptly knocked his opponent down threw the tubs over the cliffside and then followed after them. He knew every tree and bough and ledge, and by clinging to them and trusting to Providence, which always looks after a brave if reckless man, came to no harm. He collected his tubs, and knowing all the short cuts, was in the Chine Inn refreshing himself with his cronies long before the poor officer could effectively raise the hue and cry.

The Jane, a pilot vessel, had been to France, and was returning with a cargo of fifty tubs when the Revenue cutter “Stag” sighted her off Portland, spoke-her, but getting no reply, gave chase. The landlord of one of the local hotels was skipper and was steering. His crew was a local bricklayer, well known to me, and the third hand was a St Helens longshoreman. The latter developed cold feet and wanted the skipper to give in when the first shot came flying over their heads, but the skipper promptly booted him into the foc’s’ile and closed the hatch, saying ”You take a spell below. She’ll sail closer to the wind with you as ballast.” The next shot holed the mainsail but the steersman stuck to his post and so skilful was he with the

tiller that he was able to dodge about till darkness set in. Then daylight came the cutter was nowhere in sight, so Seaview was reached in safety and the tubs landed the same night. So pleased was this landlord with his escape that open house was kept for a week and little work was done by anybody in the village. I remember it well. This man was a good shot with his gun and used to shoot sparrows released from a trap much the same as in pigeon shooting. My employer and he would often pit themselves against each other at this curious form of sport.

CHAPTER VIII.

Fire and Wrecks.

There are many tales of shipwreck that I can remember. One of the most fearsome sights was a large Fast lndiaman named the Eastern Monarch, which caught fire at Spithead. She was a homeward bound ship with a general cargo, and remained at anchor there like a pillar of fire burning for three days. The masts finally fell by the board and the watermen from Seavicw managed to secure one of them. What a fine spar it was too, and as the ship was built of Rangoon teak, a valuable wood, there was a rich harvest of salvage. This wood never shrinks or rots, and it is hard work to plane or shape it. I know that well, for there are several front doors made of it by me in Seaview to-day, placed in houses that I built. There is romance in every front door to my way of thinking, but I never pass these I made without thinking what a wealth there is of romance in these in particular.

It was March in the year 1867, just as daylight came, after a very stormy night that had kept many villager awake, when a ship was seen stranded on the Ledge at Bembridge. She was a very fine barque, a three masted ship, loaded with loose barley from Odessa, and the crew could be seen clinging to the remains of the rigging in their extremity. There was no lifeboat at Bembridge in those days, so a large boat belonging to the contractor, who was at that time building Palmererstons pups - as the forts off Spithead were called - was manned. She was a

strong boat easily capable of carrying at least two tons of cement and was being used luckily at St. Helens. It was not difficult to get volunteers, for more than twice the number of men needed were willing to risk their lives and practically fought for places in the boat. James Tracy steered, and Joe Albid pulled the stroke oar, the position of floilour. AIf Mursell had the bow oar and John Caws had another. Jim Baker and Walter Attrill had another each and one man was stationed in the bow with a bucket to bale out the seas that they knew would pour aboard. We could stand at Seaview and see the wreck. The boat made the first journey and with much difficulty brought off nine of the crew. How the crowd cheered when they arrived ashore all wet through and completely exhausted! Captain Macdonald and the Reverend Mesurier said “can you go again?” thinking that they would be glad to let the other volunteers take a turn, but like true men they all shouted “Yes,” and would not hear of the idea of a rest. After the teetotallers - yes, there were such men amongst them - had been given coffee as hot as they could drink and the others had gulped down stiff nips of brandy the boat was launched into the boiling seas. Back they rowed to the wreck, but she had shifted slightly and they were only able to back towards her so that the rest of the poor fellows could slide out on the yards one by one and drop into the boat. Risky work this was too, and all had been taken off in this way except three hanging to the main yard, a heavy spar, when it suddenly fell into the water, missing the boat by inches, a lucky miss, for otherwise all would have perished. Even then these three men were snatched from the jaws of death. James Tracey told me of it afterwards. “How l did it l do not know,” he said. “I lifted one in and held on to the other as he floated by like grim death. Then a wave dashed the third right on top of me and we had them all.” Nine were saved on each trip and the Royal Humane Society awarded them all medals and they were richly deserved.

A lifeboat was soon afterwards put at Bembridge, and she has since saved many lives, for it is a dangerous spot.

Often at Seaview have we heard the gun fired to call her to go to the aid of some ship. And strangely enough, it was in this self same spot that the motor boat so recently found to be engaged in smuggling, was stranded in a fog and was captured, the incident calling all these tales of smuggling to my mind.

The episode of this wreck is locally known as “The wreck of the barley ship.” The cargo, swelling, eventually burst her into little bits, and the captain, who was amongst those saved, stayed at Bembridge all the summer. He could not bring himself to leave the sight of her till every vestige of her had disappeared.

A true sailor, that!

CHAPTER IX.

Seaview Besieged.

It is well known that much sympathy is often displayed for law breakers whose exploits appeal to the romantic spirit of the public.

The people of Seaview were no exception to this rule. One incident stands out in my memory illustrating how the villagers sympathised with the free traders and could on occasion unite and with much ingenuity completely outwit those who were endeavouring to see the law carried out and not broken, or at least not too openly flouted, for after all even the coastguards were human.

Many years since a vessel had gone from here to France and had brought back a cargo of tubs which had been sunk off the village. As the coast was clear the smugglers were audaciously bringing the tubs ashore in broad daylight, when round Horestone Point the cutter came sailing. Through their telescope the officers could see what was going on quite well, so they took to their boat and made for a point which they knew the smugglers must eventually pass, a real cutting out expedition. Fifty villagers who had been curiously watching, realising the danger, ran to the rescue, seized the tubs and planted them inconspicuously, in as many gardens and potato

patches as they could, ran the smugglers boat up the street and hid it away in the chapel. Then when the revenue men arrived at the place where they expected to cut the smugglers off and catch them redhanded, every person in the village was apparently pursuing his or her lawful occupation. Search as they would, nothing wrong could be found and no trace of illicit goods could be seen, and even the smugglers skiff had vanished. It was some hours later that, to the smothered grins and suppressed giggles of the villagers, they returned to their vessel, chagrined and nonplussed and sadder and wiser men, but too good sportsmen to feel bitter over their hood winking.

On another occasion I was working in the dark room of my studio when the door was burst open, spoiling all my plates, and a voice shouted, “Henry, what will we do? They’re going to search my Tom’s house and they’ll catch him red- handed.” It was the chief coastguard’s daughter who had listened at the door and heard plans made for searching houses at St. Helens, her sweetheart’s among them. I soon had word sent to the village, the messenger borrowing the first horse he could find in the first field he came to. The casks which had been hidden in the houses were all, except in one solitary instance, placed in a straw stack. In this one case they were saved as they were placed in the bed with the man’s wife and her new baby, but so thorough was the search, however, that all the other casks were found by probing the stack. Nobody, however, got into trouble and that was the main thing, but the farmer to whom the stack belonged, never forgave the villagers for the damage done to his stack and for the suspicion thrown upon him of being in collusion with them.

Punishment was severe for the offender caught red-handed. Fines were heavy then as they are now. The fine of one man caught in the recent case of the stranded motor boat was, I see, £15,000. I remember that the father of a friend of mine spent a long time at Winchester gaol because he could not pay a fine of £100 for a smuggling offence. This friend of mine, had a curious

second name – Liberty - given him by this lawless father and he inherited from the same parent a taste for good liquor as well.

Years ago in Ireland, I believe, whenever an illicit still was found the townland where it was found was fined. So stills were generally set up near the boundary of a parish so that it could, just before certain detection, be placed quietly over the border, leaving the ratepayers of an innocent place to foot the bill. And in something like the same way the tubs when they were run were seldom put under the roof but on top of it, for if they were not found on premises there could be no prosecution of the person on whose land they were seized, and to this day I can point out marks of damage to certain roofs caused by this practice of hiding tubs on convenient house tops.

I remember that I often took good cigars to the soldiers at Puckpool Fort and they had paid no duty. This was when I was a boy. One soldier whom I thought a great hero used to tell me how at Sebastopol he carried Sir Hedley Vicars to safety when he was sorely wounded, and would act the whole episode with great gusto for me. The place had a great fascination for me, with its great guns and conical cannon balls weighing as much as 600lbs. Years afterwards, when out of my time as a carpenter, I worked there and my money was 4/- a day and I was lucky to get that princely sum.

CHAPTER X.

> “Merrily now in a goodly row,
> Away, away the smugglers go
> Threading their way by hedge and ditch,
> Though the night is dark and black as pitch.”

Many tales of the smugglers exploits occur to me illustrating the difficulties under which they worked and how they carried out their runs. I do no remember pack horses being used as in other parts of the coast, especially on the mainland. It was all foot slogging and hard work with two tubs slung round the neck.

One night tubs were landed on the St. Helens Duvver, near the old church, and all hands were on the look out when they heard Mr. Dawson, the coastguard officer who wore wooden shoes, coming along. They took the tubs back to the vessel silently and landed them next night at Bembridge near where the lifeboat house now stands. They carried them round the shore to the harbour across the old oyster bats and locked them in Major B.'s shed until the next night when they disposed of them around St. Helens. Sometimes they were hidden in holes dug in the garden. Major B. told me of this himself, I worked for him often and he said that in the dead of night he would often see men carry tubs past his gate and he knew that he would not be expected to look in his garden shed for tools the next day, or the gardener would swear the key was lost.

It was this spirit in village life of those days that was so admirable. Nobody wished to he definitely mixed up in the business and nobody, except a few, knew how much his neighbour or friend was involved. Neither did he dare enquire. Kipling expresses this well when he says in his poem, "Turn your face to the wall, my darling, when the gentlemen go by."

Fear of the consequences would often get the better of those engaged in the running. One night tubs were being carried at dawn through Park Farm, when a cock crowed. One man, nervous and scared, dropped his tubs and ran. The others tried to stop him, but it was of no use. He had reached breaking point and was too frightened. He was a baker in the village. The boys of my time used to shout after him whenever they saw him with his basket of new, sweet smelling loaves, "Bob the baker." and then imitate the chantideer in their very best manner and take to their heels. It was not for many years that I realised the significance of this greeting, and I could crow with the best of them. Poor man, he was chaffed in this way to the day of his death. To those in the know there was always a glass of good stuff for those who called at the bakehouse, but the local constable never found it out, so loyal was everyone.

One night a crop of tubs was landed at Priory Bay, and had been carried to the woods that there run down to the water's edge. One man flung his tubs away and ran for it, but the rest of the procession had to go on and work to the schedule, which had been mapped out for its success. Next day a friend of mine, William T. was told by his master to follow him to the woods with two sacks of straw and the tubs were placed in one and William was told to can it. They then proceeded along the shore till the coastguard was seen to be approaching, whereupon Will's master made for the woods, with the coastguard after him. This enabled Will to get home with the tubs as he was not a suspected person.

The Foam, a Shanklin vessel, once brought back forty tubs from Cherbourg and while landing them at Springvale the revenue men appeared. Roland S. stepped into a ditch and filled his big sea boots with water and not being able to run was caught by Mr. Bennett, a strong runner. Poor Roland, a man of substance in the village, and a yacht captain, was made to stand his trial on the following Saturday and was fined £100 or in default ten months. He did ten months, for the sentence was not hard labour, but merely confinement as in the case of debt. My eldest brother, who was the Court shorthand writer, said that the Court was full of Roland's friends who cheered him. This angered the chief officer of the coastguards who singled one of them out in the court and accused him of being with the gang, and tried to fix it upon him by a cap that had been snatched from the head of a smuggler in the melee. This man was only able to wriggle out of it by proving that the cap had been bought in Ventnor whereas he was a Seaview man.

The real owner of the cap had managed to get away and make for his home at Ventnor. He saw a light in a window knocked at the door and appealed for help, offering the tub he was carrying as a reward. The tub was buried in the garden and the smuggler was driven into Ventnor under some straw in a van with some pigs, a story that reminds me of the traveller who called to see a farmer and was told that he was down in the five acre field with

the pigs, and could not be mistaken as he was the one with a cap on.

Sometimes visitors took a hand in the game. Once, one staying at the Seaview hotel ran up a big bill, hired the hotel wherry at a charge of £6 per week including the two crew, ran a cargo of brandy successfully, disposed of it and then absconded leaving a bill of £100 unpaid. I remember it well, for the landlady of the hotel called on my mother for help in the matter. Poor woman, she did not live long after that. I am sure that the grief over her bad luck affected her health.

CHAPTER XI.

The East India Man's Find.

> "The cargo's lowered from the dark skiffs side,
> And the tow line drags the tubs thro' the tide,
> Now pray ye all that the luck may bide,
> And no revenue men may this way stride."

I have already made it plain that, in spite of many temptations, I have kept clear of the trade and only once, and then unwillingly, whilst on a yachting holiday, can I be said to have been guilty of defrauding the King's revenue. I had seen too much suffering at first hand to run the risk others did.

It was in the year 1876, when I lived in High Street, that runs down to the sea in our old fashioned village, that Geo. S came to me and said, "Put £10 into a crop of tubs we are going to fetch across," but I said firmly and determinedly "No, George, my family has suffered enough through it already. I'll lend you £10." He replied at once "Thanks. I've put my last penny into it and I'll take it." So the £10 passed there and then as I told him that my grandfather was pilot and owned a little boat, "The Rose," besides his pilot cutter, "The Neptune." He lent the Rose once to some villagers who said they were going hovelling, a term for helping vessels up Channel and landing pilots. The fee for landing a pilot was £3 and in

those days such a sum of money was worth earning. Whether these men set out with the intention of going to France for contraband is not known, but go they did and on the run home a fog found them just off Whitecliff Bay, and when it lifted there lay Fate right longside them in the shape of the revenue cutter. There was no escape and they were all caught red-handed. The Rose was taken in tow and my grandfather was fined £100 and the vessel forfeited. To pay the fine my grandfather was compelled to mortgage his house, Fuchsia cottage, and this remained till a few years ago when luckily it could be paid off.

I did not see George for at least a fortnight but in the meanwhile I read in the Daily Telegraph that a P. and O. steamer had picked up forty tubs on a line in the English Channel and had taken them on to Gravesend where they had been handed over to the authorities. A Seaview man was a bosun on the steamer and had helped to pick up the tubs. They were those that his old chum George had fetched across the water, such is the irony of fate.

George related to me how they had been lost. The boat had put into Chile Bay, on the south of the Island, to land them, when the stray line to which the tubs had been secured, parted. They searched about for the tubs in the darkness till dawn began to break and they were that perforce compelled to abandon their search. Those in the small boat could not get back to the yawl and had to pull their boat up on the shore and hide it a mile inland leaving the others to sail for St. Helens and themselves to scatter as best they could. I lost my £10, of course, but I was not the only one in the village sadder and wiser after that trip to France.

I can recollect, however, very few incidents where such complete disaster overtook the free traders, for as a rule elaborate precautions were taken to ensure the success of the venture, every link in the chain having been designed to fit in properly. Sometimes, however, a link would snap and quick measures had to be taken to secure success. A friend of mine was very fond of a dip in the sea

in the warm summer evenings, and relates how one night, long before the Chain Pier was built, he went, later than usual for a bathe at Seagrove Bay, when old Ned M. stepped out of the darkness and said “Young man, you must come. We are short handed. It is 10s. and a drink for each journey.” Knowing that he dare not refuse Robert, my friend shouldered two tubs and joined the procession till they came to the Farm where they all halted for a rest and incidentally for a drink. A man was sent ahead to see if the coast was clear and after what seemed hours of waiting, the procession proceeded in Indian file till they arrived at the Road by the Priory Lodge. Then on through Park Farm they marched and out of the Galleyhorn Gate by the large oak tree on which history says Oliver Cromwell’s Roundheads hanged one hundred Isle of Wight Royalists, and finally skirting the pond into which their bodies are said to have been thrown. This friend of mine was a man with an active imagination and was by this time ready to scream and run with the eeriness of the whole thing, but he had to keep on till the tubs were put in a waiting van, and then, just as he thought his enforced task was finished, found that he had to repeat the whole thing. This he managed to do but he never went bathing at night time again. In this case the free traders had evidently been short of helpers and had to resort to press gang methods. It is one of the few cases also where a cargo was run when the nights were short, for the long dark winter nights were as a rule essential to success.

Envol.

> “And now gentle reader one word ere we part.
> Just take a friend’s counsel and lay it to heart,
> IMPRIMIS, don’t smuggle! If, bent to please beauty,
> You must buy French lace - purchase what has paid duty.”
>
> -Ingoldsby Legends.