

SMUGGLING AS A BUSINESS

CAPPY RICKS

AS tariffs throughout the world have since the War soared to unprecedented heights, so too has the gentle art of smuggling, until to-day it is conducted on a scale previously undreamt-of, by organisations having behind them very many millions of capital, and able by reason of the enormous profits which accompany success to employ the smartest brains of the nefarious underworld, which is, almost always, just one short step ahead of law and order. Captures are of frequent occurrence in all the ramifications of the illicit trade, in which pitched and bloody battles are not unknown, but it cannot be doubted that these are but eddies on the bosom of the tide which runs on—in the main, unchecked.

The principal traffic lies in narcotics, of which Turkey alone in 1934 manufactured some £10,000,000 worth. Of this less than one-twentieth went into circulation *via* the ordinary channels of trade, and perhaps an equal amount was confiscated, leaving some £9,000,000 worth as successfully smuggled, the profits of which probably ran from 1,000 to 2,000 per cent, sufficient to enable a successful smuggler to retire in affluence on the operations of a few months.

In the constant battle of wits between the world's Customs and Excise authorities and the smuggler, the odds are heavily against the former, whose efforts are dictated only by duty and the hope of a usually meagre reward if successful, while the latter has the incentive of immense emoluments, and is in addition fighting with his back to the wall, with 100 per cent efficiency, in the knowledge that failure of his efforts will mean loss of liberty for a term of years at best and, conceivably, his life.

The ways of the smuggler are, of course, known only to himself, though many of his ingenious methods have been detected. Cocaine and hashish have been found embedded in lumps of coal, necessitating once the crushing of an entire cargo to slack; in apparently innocuous grindstones which on careful scrutiny were found to be made of cement, each containing 2½ lb. weight of the drug sealed in airtight tins; a grey-haired man had two ounces washed from his head, while his hollow heels yielded as much more; a consignment of lump sugar yielded some 15 per cent of its weight as hashish, while in another case the tubes of a boiler were found to be double, each tube yielding some pounds weight of the drug!

This was the seventh boiler shipped to one consignee over a period of six months. On examination of the six that had already been permitted entry, it was found that they were in service and behaving as all perfectly behaved boilers should, but this was not to say that they had been so innocuous at the time of their passage through the Customs. Incidentally, the consignee was not to be found when searched for; he had doubtless taken the alarm when the boiler was detained for closer examination.

Other known methods of smuggling drugs have included hollow aluminium crutches stained to represent wood, 5¼ lb. from one pair, and an artificial leg which yielded 7 lbs. It was said that this one-legged man had made £80,000 in one year pandering to the tremendous desire that exists for this contraband product.

Smuggling is done by both professionals and amateurs, the latter ordinary passengers and ships' crews, who, however, rarely "get away with it", although in the aggregate the sum lost to the Customs must attain fair-sized proportions. The former possess their own vessels, usually fast motorboats in the disguise of fishing boats, or harmless cruising yachts, which land their cargoes by night in unfrequented spots around the coast; it would require a huge army of coast-watchers to defeat these gentry, and this is quite out of the question. The only attack in such case is through espionage at the point of departure, if such can be discovered. The amount of drugs, silks, tobaccos, etc., taken into Britain annually by this means is enormous: the passage from the Continent entails little risk in selected conditions.

Diamond smuggling into the United States of America has always been a favourite occupation with those out for large profits and quick returns at the expense of the Customs revenues. A recent case where the chief steward of a great Atlantic liner was found to be a professional of some years' standing will be well remembered, and rumour, not always a lying jade, has it that millions of pounds worth of gems, and these are not the only articles smuggled, have been illicitly taken into that country since the War.

Heroic methods have sometimes been adopted in this unlawful, yet to many people alluring, occupation; men and women too, perhaps, have had parts of their bodies incised for the secretion of gems, and generally, no doubt, "got away with it", although they should scarcely have done so perhaps, for the method has been known at least in South Africa for very many years, though not often practised.

A less heroic method is that of swallowing the gems at the ast moment favourable to the purpose and trusting to emetics

for their subsequent recovery. The remedy for the latter evil is obvious, but although it is resorted to where almost certain conviction of guilt exists, it is not one that can be generally practised, for a millionaire or an impoverished Prince may be as anxious to get a gem through free of duty as anyone else, while the result of failure in such a case may be attended by very unpleasant, if not serious, consequences.

Into the country in question one forlorn young man took his poor dead father for interment in his native heath on no fewer than 16 occasions, but at the 17th and last attempt an acute Customs officer recollected that the same sad young man had, some two years previously, appeared before him on the same melancholy errand at another port; one of the gang, a surgeon "gone to the pack", had turned the dead bodies into gem-depositories during embalment. The sad young man will take in his poor dead father no more; he is otherwise engaged, for life.

The Australian officials, as those of all countries possessing a considerable Chinese population and where importation of opium is sternly prohibited, are perpetually engaged in a battle of wits, for the Chinese will have his narcotic at any cost, and, so far, supply has never failed to meet demand, at a price. Here the ships' crews, all Chinese except for a sprinkling of Malays, are nothing but professional smugglers by instinct and lifelong occupation. They are not in the ships for wages, which might be less than £1 per month, but for what they can make by their unlawful occasions, with opium bringing sometimes £10 an ounce.

They confine their activities almost entirely to this drug, and are notoriously successful in the morale-sapping and sordid business; quite large quantities of opium, sometimes cocaine, are enclosed in floatable watertight containers and weighted by a bag of salt or sugar, the contents of which will melt in a known approximate time, dumped overboard at prearranged points on the coast, preferably where the water is not too deep nor the currents too strong (and there are 1200 miles of such conditions inside the Great Barrier Reef which skirts the long Queensland coast) for "harmless" fishing boats to pick up when the solvent make-weight has vanished, long after the ship has passed out of sight.

This practice is one almost impossible to defeat, with a coastline 3,000 miles in length, and again counter-espionage presents the best known method of putting an end to the grave evil, for grave it certainly is. Chinese are not the only people on the continent who are slaves to the drug.

Lesser quantities are smuggled in a hundred ways, most of them difficult and sometimes impossible to detect; a line of cheap clocks

was once imported from an Eastern country which it is not necessary to name, in which the works only half filled the case, opium occupying the remainder. The detection of this method was the result of an accident, a case fell from a sling as cargo was being discharged and crashed on its corner; one of the clocks was shattered to pieces, and the secret disclosed to the lynx-eyed watcher on the wharf. In this case, too, the consignee made a successful escape; he was doubtless at the wharf, and saw the accident.

Pieces of timber have been found, again by accident, with cores bored out and "stopped", after refilling, in a manner to defy detection. Tins of jams, butter and other preserves have not always been so innocent as outsides indicated; on one occasion a cooked ham hanging on a pantry hook was found, by the simple expedient of the Customs guard helping himself to a slice of it, to contain a fair-sized package of cocaine; of course, none of the culinary staff knew how the stuff got there; one could scarcely expect them to.

In the same country prohibited goods have been found in the hollow masts of ships, even in the look-out's crow's nest up in the blue; under tons of chains in the cable lockers; in empty fresh-water and ballast tanks; in the copper airtight flotation tanks of lifeboats; under flour and grain in provision rooms bins; in drums of oil and tar being "returned as unsatisfactory" to the firm of shipchangers, Chinese, which supplied the goods, and in loaves of bread thrown to a "beggar" outside the Customs railings, not to mention the hundred and one odd corners of the ship's construction.

Some years ago a well known firm of Clyde shipbuilders innocently provided, at considerable profit to themselves, a medium for smuggling that even yet has not attracted the close attention it deserves at the hands of the rummagers in the various countries. The firm in contracting to build certain ships undertook to provide "satisfactory means" of stowing away the large quantities of lubricating and other oil required over the period of a long voyage. The usual method is the installation of tanks in the otherwise unutilised spaces in the engine-room, but the expedient in this instance was the provision of hollow cylinder columns, some 20 ft. long by as many inches square. It was an "entirely satisfactory means", and one just as satisfactory for the purpose of smuggling should engineer officers (although such may all be unfledged angels, I don't know) choose so to utilise them.

The smuggling of arms into Far Eastern countries is another extremely profitable occupation, when successful, for a revolver

costing less than 10s. will bring as many pounds in the Chinese ports where trading in such instruments is strictly prohibited in these days of piracy; where even the largest and best manned steamers are no more immune than the smallest one which may happen to be carrying sufficient inducement in the shape of specie, valuable cargo, or passengers wealthy enough to pay ransom to make her seizure and looting appear profitable.

Some two years ago a cadet in one of the Blue Funnel liners complained that he was not able to sleep at nights because something in the (hollow) iron mast just outside his berth kept rolling from side to side. Investigations resulted in the finding of 2,000 revolvers and a large quantity of ammunition. This was quietly dropped into the sea just a few hours before Penang, and the Customs, was reached; had it been still on board and found by the searchers, the ship would have been confiscated.

No further arms were found on board, and it was concluded that no contraband remained, but such was far from being the case; for while the ship lay at Hong-Kong some weeks later, certain members of the crew were caught in the act of dropping overboard into sampans ammunition that had been baked into loaves. The lawbreakers all received long terms of imprisonment; but, happily for those in the high places of the ship, the vessel herself was not penalised.

And now for the reactions to this crime wave which is sweeping the world. During the Great War, Britain in her protracted search for contraband utilised to a considerable extent X-ray photography, and, incidentally, improved this until it was able to disclose even the slightest departure from the homogeneity of any package or body photographed. Then she, and the U. S. A. seemingly, "forgot all about it" for years, reviving it only a short time ago in an effort to check the evil in review with, it is said, entirely satisfactory results. Now a person stepping on a small platform may be photographed by X-ray instruments set at right angles, and in a very few minutes be either released or apprehended as occasion dictates. It is futile now to secrete contraband on the person; for nothing, we are told, can evade the lynx-eye of the X-ray camera, so "private" smugglers must devise other action. This, of course, is only one of many facilities at the command of law and order, and these forces will win in the end, so long as the laws are just and wise, and appreciated by those they are designed to protect. For this is the acid test of all laws.