

THE SMUGGLERS OF POLDREWYN!

All the old-time romance of smuggling and press-gang days is conjured up in this thrilling yarn

By GEOFFREY PROUT

THE FIRST CHAPTER The Free Traders I

"**H**IST, Rodney! There's someone!" Jack Winter's fingers tightened over Rodney Tremayne's forearm as he whispered the words. The boys were lying full-length on a flat rock, overlooking the beach at the foot of Kemyell Cliff, on the coast of Cornwall.

"I saw nothing," replied Rodney, under his breath.

"Watch!" said Jack. "I saw two dark figures flitting across the sand. I be dead sure of it!"

The boys watched intently, straining their eyes in endeavour to see shapes in the darkness before them. But there was no movement save the white wash of the surf. All around were gaunt, black rocks, silent and still, awe-inspiring.

The two friends worked together in a corn merchant's office at Poldrewyn, and to-night they were out on the watch for smugglers. Winter's father was an exciseman of the district, and that there *were* smug-

glers at work some nights he well knew. It was Mr. Winter's duty to find them out and convict them. But Jack and Rodney were anxious to have the rascally band caught for other reasons than that the men were cheating the revenue.

"I be sure that Kemyell Beach is where they land most of their runnings hereabouts," said Jack. "Father says little, but I know he rules out Kemyell Beach. I must have been mistaken just now. But I be dead sure we'll see them to-night. When I told father I overheard Dirk West-aways say 'Kemyell' he just laughed at me, and told me to leave the matter to those whose business it be. But— Rod, I be proper mazed if that be not figures moving along on the beach!"

Jack's voice had dropped to a hiss again, and his fingers once more clutched at his friend's arm.

"You needn't pinch a lump of flesh out of my arm, for all that," returned Rodney.

As he spoke he suddenly stiffened and watched, his limbs trembling slightly with

excitement. Jack, too, was keenly alert, and the breathing of the boys was heavy and slow, testifying to the strain of the moment.

For three figures had moved out across the beach, and now were standing close together. Hardly perceptible in the gloom, the boys almost doubted they were there till one of the men moved again. And then suddenly the little group was momentarily lit up by the sudden flare of a torch. The flame went out almost on the instant it was lit.

Instinctively the boys looked out to the blackness at sea, for well they knew the smugglers' methods. And there, sure enough, so fitting as almost to leave them doubtful that they had seen anything, a pinpoint of light had appeared, and as suddenly vanished.

The answering signal! They were to see something this night! So they huddled close together and watched, not now daring even to whisper.

It seemed an age before anything happened. Then movement on the beach was again seen. Men ran down to the line of ghostly surf, and as the friends strained their eyes they saw the men heaving in a boat.

More men ran down the beach from the shelter of the rocks, and formed up into a long line, as in single file. Then the men bent their backs and pulled. They were hauling on a rope silently, steadily. Hauling, hauling, and never a word was uttered.

The friends shivered slightly. It all seemed so uncanny. A rousing: "Yo! Y'ho, heave-ho!" would have relieved the tension. But there was none of it—just the black figures hauling, hauling.

And then something mysterious and ghostly was seen out in the blackness that was the sea. A pale green, shimmering light appeared, drawing nearer and nearer, and becoming stronger and stronger till black, round objects could be discerned in the phosphorescent glow.

"Barrels! Strings of them, being towed ashore!" breathed Jack. "Oh, if father could only know of this!"

"Hist!" breathed Rodney. "You don't know who is near! Keep quiet!"

The barrels were now in the surf, and the long string of them began to jumble together, the washing water lopping them about to right and left till they were all bumping on the sand. Then the smugglers dropped the rope and scattered, dashing into the surf and detaching the barrels from the towing-rope.

Rodney and Jack, as they watched, saw each dark form heave up two of the kegs, which were fixed together with ropes, slip his head between the ropes, then settle the kegs comfortably, one on the chest and one on the back. In this way they would carry the contraband up to one of their stores or to waiting carts, and by the morning the spirits would be distributed over twenty miles of country.

The fitful glare of a torch signal again was made from the beach, and the friends could just see the towing rope snaking back along the sand towards the surf, evidently being coiled in on the smuggling vessel, lying-to off the shore.

Before the rope had quite disappeared into the surf, the smugglers had gone, fitting off like the silent shadows they were.

Rodney put his lips close to Jack's ear. "News for your father!" he said, merely breathing the words. "What discipline! What perfect organisation!"

Jack nodded, the moisture dripping from the hard brim of his glazed cocked hat as he did so.

"Ay, and father shall know more!" he whispered back. "I be going to follow the smugglers and see what they do with the contraband!"

Cautiously, thrilling with excitement, the friends picked their way along the rocks till they came to the path that led to the top of the cliff. Up this they cautiously made their way, and when at the top they lay flat down on the ground to see the skyline beyond, and so be able to detect movement.

No sooner were they down than they gasped again with excitement, for the smugglers were moving to the left in a long,

ragged line, clear against the sky, the barrels on chest and back clearly outlined.

"They are making for Rush Bottom Lane!" breathed Jack. "There goes the last! Let us follow!"

The boys ran at the stoop across country, with the idea of lying in wait for the band half-way along Rush Bottom Lane, and so, perhaps, being able to recognise some of the smugglers as they passed. They got safely into position behind the hedge, and there they waited silently till the swift tramp, tramp, tramp! of burdened men at the double came to their ears.

Another sound came to their ears, too. That was the steady clop, clop-clop, clop! of a walking horse, and the horse was coming from the direction of Poldrewyn. The boys watched breathlessly, dividing their attention between the upper and the lower part of the lane.

The sounds grew stronger. The horseman, whoever he might be, was very near. At last they saw him outlined for an instant against the sky.

"Father!" gasped Jack. "'Tis father, out on his ride. But this be his night the other side of Poldrewyn."

"He believed more of your information about overhearing Dirk say 'Kemyell' than he made out," breathed Rodney in reply.

Jack was white as a sheet. Rodney could just see his face in the darkness.

"He'll hold them up! He'll— Ah!"

Mr. Winter had reined in his horse suddenly. The animal came to a stop, almost down on his haunches, and his forehoofs beat a sudden tattoo on the gravelly surface of the lane as he tried to turn away from the advancing smugglers.

The ride officer swung round, and the friends gasped as they saw a big horse-pistol in his hand, outlined with ghostly dimness against the sky. He was urging with rein and heels to make the horse face the band.

The smugglers suddenly became aware of an obstruction ahead. A low, weird call went down the line, and the men made a break for the hedge bordering the lane.

But Mr. Winter had spurred on by this

time, and came at the band at the gallop.

"Surrender, in the King's name!" ordered the exciseman, his ringing voice seeming to wake the echoes. And he dashed straight at the smugglers.

Rodney and Jack scrambled to their knees, watching breathlessly. All seemed a confused jumble of barrel-burdened men in the lane, covering their faces with their hands and trying to get away, the exciseman's horse plunging in the mêlée, and Mr. Winter towering above them all, the cocked pistol bobbing about above him.

"Scatter! Separate action! Every man for himself!"

The cry rang out, and the boys recognised Dirk Westaway's voice. And, the whole occurrence taking less time than the writing of it, a blinding flash sent a weird glare of colour lighting up the bush-tops, the smugglers and their barrels, the flying sleeves of the exciseman's great-coat, which he wore buttoned at the neck but with the sleeves free, as was the custom of the day. And then came the explosion.

There sounded a gasp or two, some muttering, a low moan, and the smugglers broke through the hedge and ran across the fields as the exciseman crashed to the ground and lay there, still and silent, while his horse caracoled about him for a second or two, then stood quietly, muzzling about at the body on the ground.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Brutal Vengeance I

JACK, reckless of danger, had sprung up. He leapt down into the lane and ran to his father, Rodney close on his heels.

The boys knelt beside the still form. Jack's trembling fingers were undoing the buttons at his father's throat. Rodney picked up the pistol, which Mr. Winter's nerveless fingers had dropped.

"Your father did not fire," he said. "'Twas the smugglers were armed. I thought at first 'twas your father's pistol, knocked up and fired at that instant."

"Here! Help me!" gasped Jack, his face white to the lips. "He breathes heavily. Where be the shot-wound?"

The lads searched about for signs of blood, and so anxiously intent were they on their work that they did not see the bushes bordering the lane part, and the cruel face of Dirk Westaways appear. The man looked down into the lane, and a smouldering fury appeared in his eyes. But he made no sound. He merely half turned to the rear and beckoned into the darkness.

Two more men crept up. They were ruffianly-looking fellows, with squat glazed hats on their heads. A tarred pigtail stamped one as a sailor. But Dirk Westaways was a man of far different stamp. He stood there between his companions, his arms akimbo, his dirty canvas trousers split at the bottom, six inches short of the rusty buckles of his shoes, his woollen jolly-bag of a hat pulled over a shock of matted hair which was like a lump of oakum.

"At 'em, mates!" ordered Dirk hoarsely. "Blindfold—lash their hands behind 'em! We'll teach childer not to break away from their mothers' apron-strings and spy on free traders! Ah, do ye?"

Rodney, hearing the hoarse order, turned suddenly. But before he could see anything, a great, knotted fist shot out and caught him full in the face, sending him flying backwards, half-blinded by the force of the blow.

Jack swung round, with a cry. But his arms were pinioned to his sides. He yelled, and kicked and struggled, and gnashed with his teeth at the cloth which someone was trying to tie round his eyes.

Rodney heaved himself to a sitting position, then to his feet, swaying there like a drunken man. He could see blurry forms before him, heaving and surging in a tremendous struggle. And, his brain clearing and a sudden rage gripping his heart, he leapt in with clenched fists and struck out at the dark, brutal faces he could see before him.

Muttered curses came from the men. Then, as one held Jack in a firm grasp, the two others came for Rod. The lad went down, fighting gamely. He was kicked and jerked about, and a bandage was lashed

round his eyes. Then he felt himself being hauled to the side of the lane.

The men did not speak. The friends could hear them breathing heavily. But evidently they did not intend to disclose their identity.

Rodney felt himself smashed against a tree, a sudden pain shooting down his back as his spine came into rough contact with the trunk. A rope was now passed round him and the tree. And Rodney felt another form beside him. Jack, of course! And what did the ruffians intend to do?

Cowardly blows were dealt at the defenceless boys. Then merciful unconsciousness came just as Rodney heard the words, as if uttered from far, far away:

"That'll do, Dirk, I reckon. Ye don't . . . kill 'em! They . . . marked enough." Then, louder: "Hold up, ye fool! If 'tis murder . . . whole countryside agen us!"

Rodney heard no more. He was past hearing anything now.

The people of Poldrewyn found the maltreated boys and the wounded excisemen just after dawn. And the farm labourer who discovered them discovered also a note, pinned to the tree above the boys' heads: "*For spying on smugglers!*"

Poldrewyn had been loudly indignant when Mr. Winter, Jack, and Rodney were carried in.

"'Tis the reign o' terror!" said one old woman, clenching her fist and shaking it at various doors in the row of quaint houses that fronted the water at Poldrewyn. "If they think they can frighten we, they be mistaken. Sech brutality! Poor young Rodney Tremayne, and poor young Jack Winter, too, son of the exciseman, with it all!"

"Us'll dassen't look out of window soon, for fear be we might see a smuggler in the street."

"'Tis awful!"

Loud were the threats uttered against the smugglers. But after the first outburst of feeling all lips were sealed, and people held their tongues, for the fear of the smugglers was great.

The whole town knew the men who smuggled, of course; or, rather, some of them. There was Dirk Westaway, supposed to be a

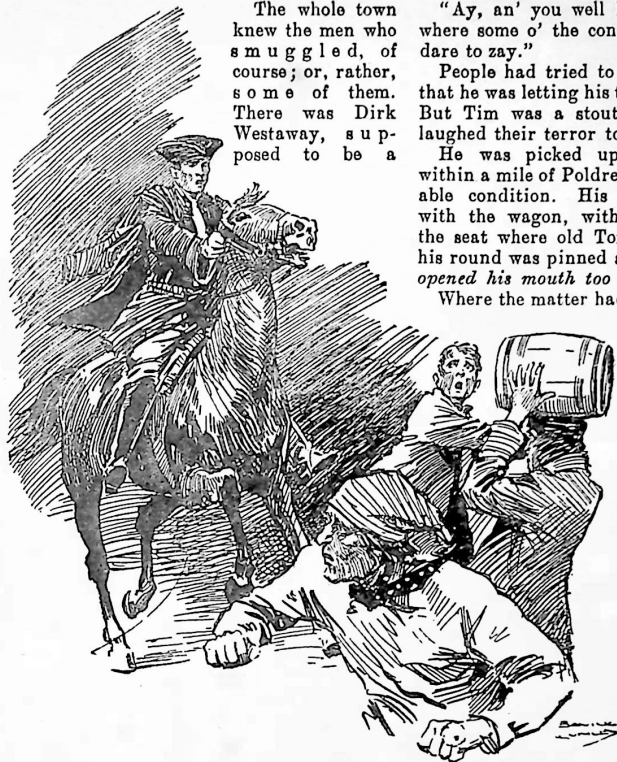
"Ay, an' you well know, Tom Wheelan, where some o' the contraband be run to, I dare to zay."

People had tried to hint to the old man that he was letting his tongue wag too freely. But Tim was a stout old fellow, and he laughed their terror to scorn.

He was picked up that very evening within a mile of Poldrewyn in a most deplorable condition. His horse had come in with the wagon, without its master. On the seat where old Tom nodded as he did his round was pinned a note, reading: "*He opened his mouth too wide!*"

Where the matter had been serious before,

it was now well-nigh desperate. And the stoutest hearts in Poldrewyn quaked at the thought of what might happen to them should they by chance learn something of the smugglers. People were afraid to walk abroad at night, for fear of seeing So-and-so going out of the town. Nobody breathed a word about the mysterious light that was often seen to flare up, then go out, 'way out



"Surrender, in the King's name!" ordered the exciseman, dashing straight at the smugglers. (See Chapter 1.)

fisherman. Nick Travers, too, and Dan Holt. But they had not been caught in the act yet.

Old Tim Farrow, the carter, had been loud-voiced about the smugglers' reign of terror. Once, outside the Ship and Plough inn, he had reeled off the names of the men whom he suspected of smuggling. And he turned on the landlord of the Ship and Plough as he banged his tankard on the table.

on the sea to the south-west.

Rodney and Jack, still bearing the marks of their terrible experience in Rush Bottom Lane, were out and about within a week. They met at the office on Monday morning, and Mr. Carryn, the corn merchant, was pretty sour with them.

"Come along! We have a week of the receipts to check up with the books," he said.

Rodney and Jack got busy, and kept busy

till Mr. Carryn went out. Then they pushed the mass of old dusty receipts aside, and propped their elbows on the desk.

"I'm glad your father is getting on all right, Jack," said Rod. "You know, something must be done to clear these smuggling rats out of Poldrewyn."

Jack made a gesture of disgust.

"What can be done?" he said. "The coastguards are in deadly fear of the band, and they shut their eyes when they see smuggling done under their very noses."

"The Government ought to send a naval sloop down if the revenue cutter is always kept so busy on the Dorset coast."

"What the Government ought to do and what it will do are two very different things, Rod," said Jack. "Here we have an excise-man all but murdered, and yet no extra help is forthcoming. What we be coming to I don't know."

"I do know this—I'll not be muzzled by any reign of terror!"

"No, nor I! But we'd best keep inside the town."

Rodney nodded.

"No need for us to go out—except in secret. Look, there's that cur, Dirk Westaways, walking along as if he was land-owner, magistrate, and justice of the peace!"

"So he be!" said Jack bitterly. "Our magistrate be as scared of the smugglers as anyone. He lives in deadly fear he'll have to deal with a smuggling case, I do believe."

"Well, he'll have one, if we can see to it. Dirk is passing close by our door. Why, by Heaven, Jack, he's coming in here!"

The boys swung round and stared, half in fear, half in indignation, as the big ruffian came in.

Rod was the first to pull himself together.

"No place here, Dirk!" he said, with acid sharpness. "You couldn't store a half-bottle in these premises."

Dirk Westaways scowled savagely. He clenched his fist.

"Careful how ye go——" he began.

But Rod broke in:

"Or you'll give us another smashing up, like you did in Rush Bottom Lane."

The smuggler looked daggers.

"I dunno what ye be talkin' about," he said. "But I have heard as ye've been tellin' folk as 'twas me consarned in your bit trouble the other week. Well, I say, careful how ye go!"

Jack laughed bitterly.

"My father's still a-bed," he said. "But when he is out again, and this relief officer is gone, I'd say the same to you."

Dirk Westaways looked so threatening that the friends got down off their stools, and looked at him in some alarm.

"Listen you here!" roared Dirk. "I be a peaceful fisherman, an' I'll not have my name coupled wi' smugglin', and so I tell 'e. And as for your father—why, odds, if he dares to bother me, I reckon he'll find he's on a losing tack."

Rodney was standing with the stool between himself and Westaways. The boy was breathing heavily, and a wild anger surged in his breast. He thought of the brutal attack on himself and Jack, of the cold-blooded shooting of Jack's father, of the worse than brutal attack on the old carrier. He threw discretion to the winds, and he pointed at Dirk, his face white with fury.

"I tell you, Dirk Westaways, we know you for a smuggler!" he cried. "There's a nest of rats in Poldrewyn to be worried out, and somewhere there are terriers game enough to do it. The people be not so set against the smuggling as against being bullied and terrified into keeping still tongues. Their patience will break soon, then you and your band may look out for trouble! I——"

"You cub!" snarled Dirk Westaways, lurching towards Rod.

But the boy skipped clear, and hopped round the office-desk, Jack with him.

"That's what I say, too," shrilled Jack. "You don't shoot my father without my having a say in the to-do!"

The smuggler was beside himself with fury, and he snarled like a wolf as he grabbed at the boys. Jack and Rodney skipped clear. They were panting with excitement, and it might have gone hard

with them if Mr. Carryn had not at that second come into the office.

"Hallo, what's this——" he began.

Then he recognised Dirk, and the ruffian pulled up in his stride towards Jack and Rod.

"They be angerin' me, Mr. Carryn," said Dirk. He looked Mr. Carryn straight in the face with his piercing, glittering eyes. "They been tellin' me I be a smuggler. They say as I be the man who let into them the other week. You don't believe that, do ye, Mr. Carryn?"

Jack and Rodney, still breathing heavily, watched their employer's face. Mr. Carryn seemed taken aback. The blood had left his usually ruddy countenance.

"I—I——" he began.

But Dirk Westaways repeated his question, and there was something terribly menacing in his tones.

"You don't believe I be a smuggler, do ye?"

Mr. Carryn moistened his dry lips. He ran a finger round the inside of his high white collar, and slapped his tight pantaloons nervously with his cane.

"I—I—— No, of course not," he said.

Westaways favoured him with a twisted grin, then scowled at the boys as he turned to go.

"There be too much talk as to who be the smugglers and who bain't in Poldrewyn to-day," he said.

Then he left the office.

Mr. Carryn was about to speak to the boys, thought better of it, and went into his own office, slamming the door hard behind him.

Rod and Jack looked at each other, and smiled as they climbed on their stools again.

"And he said he would not rest till he had Dirk Westaways by the heels!" whispered Jack across the desk.

"Yes, but that was to you and me when we were in bed, and Dirk Westaways wasn't anywhere near," returned Rodney sarcastically. "I don't know what Poldrewyn is coming to, do you?"

Jack shook his head.

"There's one thing I know, Rod, and that



Two more men crept up and joined Dirk Westaways. They were ruffianly-looking fellows, with squat, glazed hats on their heads. (See Chapter 2.)

is, unless Poldrewyn becomes a place we can live in in peace and quietness, we'd best get away."

THE THIRD CHAPTER Prisoners I

IN the days of which we write, the conviction of smugglers was a very hard task indeed, unless the smugglers were actually caught in the act. And Rodney and Jack decided that their only course to rid Poldrewyn of its bullying band was to find out when some big running was to be made, and have the right authorities warned in plenty of time, so that they could have representatives there in strength, and call upon the smugglers to surrender.

But this all presented very great difficulties. The chief difficulty of all was to arrange for raids in sufficient strength when runnings were to be made.

The boys well knew how dangerous it was for them to stray very far from the little fishing town. So they embarked on their little excursions with the very greatest care. They shadowed Dirk Westaways, and knew that while shadowing him he could not be shadowing them.

They found out quite a lot. And one dark night they were close on the heels of the band, and very excited because this night it appeared as if they were to discover one of the secret hiding-places for the contraband. Could they but rout out these places one by one, and so arrange to have them raided and the contraband confiscated, smuggling would, perhaps, cease to be profitable at Poldrewyn, and the practice, as a regular thing, would cease.

With the cessation of smuggling on a large scale, the people were of opinion that the bullying and threatening would cease, and honest folk would then be able to live without fear.

As the boys followed the smugglers inland from Kemyll Cliff they were strung up with excitement, for obviously the band did not intend to scatter this night. That meant that they were bound for one of their biggest hiding-places.

Keeping under cover all the time, Rod and Jack followed fairly closely. And Rodney dropped flat in the ditch they were scouting along as he saw the last of the file ahead halt and unsling his kegs of spirit, placing them on the ground. Then he rubbed his shoulders where he had felt the weight of the kegs on the shoulder-ropes.

"Titheridge's Barn!" hissed Jack.

"For sure!" Rodney returned, in a breath. "Ah, they are moving on again!"

The lads listened intently, and distinctly heard the dull thumping as the kegs were stored. Doubtless the contraband was to be left there the next day, to be collected by a cart or another carrying party the next night.

"We will have that lot confiscated, at all

events," said Jack softly. "My father is well enough to see to it himself——"

Jack broke off with a half-smothered cry as a heavy hand fell on his shoulder. He was jerked round suddenly, and he started back against the side of the ditch, eyes wide with alarm, and staring straight into the little glittering eyes of Dirk Westaways.

Rodney was by this time struggling in the hands of two other ruffians, and he broke clear just as Jack was collecting his wits. With a cry, he leapt at Dirk.

Back went the ruffian, thudding against the wall of the ditch with stunning force. In a flash, Rodney and Jack jumped on him, Rodney giving the brutal smuggler a heavy blow on the ear.

Westaways roared in fury, and the other two ruffians jumped in to drag off the friends.

"Run!" gasped Jack.

Like a flash, the lads were out of the ditch, but the men were after them, and close on their heels.

Over a ploughed field they tore, the smugglers thudding along behind them. Through a hedge they went, recking nothing of the thorns, and the crash of the smugglers breaking through came to their ears the moment they were free.

Could they outrun the men? They stood a good chance. And would Poldrewyn rise up against the smugglers that very night, and go and confiscate the cargo before the band could have a chance to get it away?

The lads' thoughts were running too far ahead of them, for the thundering of the chase ceased suddenly, and the voice of Dirk Westaways was heard:

"Shoot now, or we'll lose 'em!"

The boys ducked as the blackness of the night behind them was torn with a savage glare of flame. Rodney uttered a piercing cry, and crashed down on his face. He felt a burning pain, as if a red-hot iron had been run through his shoulder.

A second report sounded, and Jack spun round as he was in the very act of leaping to Rodney's aid, then crashed to the ground with stunning force. The ball had entered his fore-arm.

The smugglers ranged up. One of the men was cursing softly.

"If we've killed 'em, Dirk, we'd best clear!"

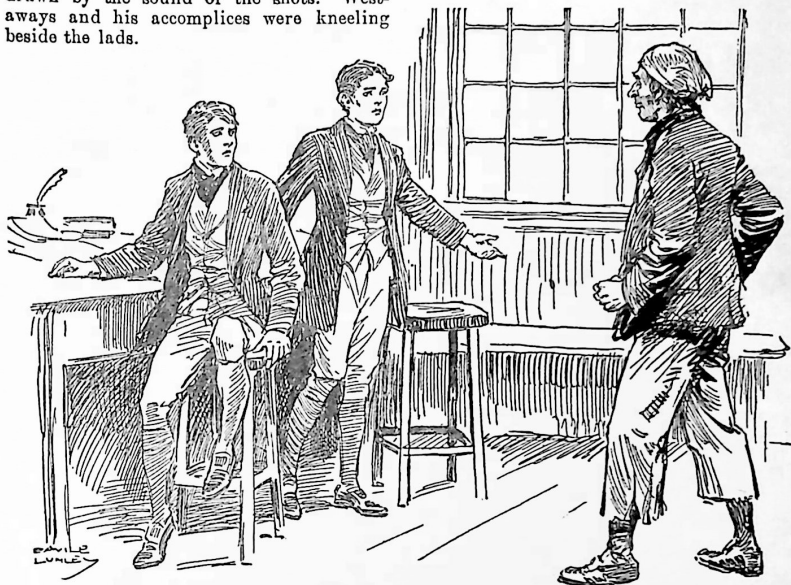
"What's the fear, ye fool? There be no proof!"

As the ruffians drew near to where the boys were lying, a fresh group ranged up, drawn by the sound of the shots. Westaways and his accomplices were kneeling beside the lads.

sea in the lugger and sink 'em good and deep?"

"I'll stand for no murder, Dirk. If they must be kept quiet, I'll run 'em to Holland in the lugger. 'Twill be a few tidy months or ever they could get back here."

"Well, take the ferretty little swabs along of 'e, Evan. Ye could land 'em somewhere



The boys swung round and stared, half in fear, half in indignation, as the big ruffian came in.
(See Chapter 2.)

"What's to do?" demanded one of the newcomers. "If 'tis murder, I'm finished wi' this part o' the coast."

"'Tis nothin'!" replied Dirk Westaways. "One has a ball in the shoulder. The other be wounded in the forearm."

"'Tis matter enough. This be the second act o' violence wi' firearms!"

"And what of it? If so be ye're afraid o' these cubs talking—and they know too much, that I'll allow—why not take 'em to

desolate on the coast o' Zealand, an' they needn't know which ship carried 'em."

Thus Rodney and Jack, when they came round to their senses, found themselves in a tar-smelling hold, with the heave of the sea under them, and the mournful wash of water sounding close to their throbbing heads where they had brought up against the ribs of the vessel to leeward, after having been bundled into the hold by the crew of the free-trading lugger.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Smugglers' Snare !

MASTER REUBEN TREEN, commander of the 100-ton cutter which was tender to the 74-gun ship *Granville*, spread his forearms over the little table in the cabin, and regarded Rodney and Jack critically.

"Ye look sick an' ill," he said, "and that'll be due to the untended pistol-shot wounds ye have had. Well, lads, my captain wouldn't thank me for taking you aboard as new hands for the crew, so I'll be able to put ye ashore on the coast of Cornwall somewhere. We're due down that way at the earliest."

Master Treen was thoughtful as he tapped the surface of the table with a horny forefinger. The boys knew all the details of their rescue from the lugger. War had just been declared with France, and the *Lark*, as the cutter was called, had boarded the lugger in mid-channel, and had searched her to see if she was carrying arms. The friends had been discovered in the hold, well-nigh dead with loss of blood and lack of food. Master Treen, being a man of justice, had rescued them, and, to punish the villainous captain of the lugger, he had impressed all his crew save one for service with the *Granville*. Thus the lugger was allowed to go free, minus its prisoners, and with only two hands to work her to port.

Master Treen suddenly turned to the boys again.

"So they were smugglers, eh? And they shot ye down like rabbits? Bad cess to them! And that lugger was a free trader? Ah, well, we cannot be bothered with the likes of them just now. But we want men.

"Ye know, of course, that we're at war with France? Well, the *Granville* set off with orders to search for ships bearing arms. A frigate would ha' done for that—better than the 74-gun *Granville*. So we in the Navy reads orders crossways. We read it that, having been sent off short-handed and to search for ships bearing arms, that, translated, means: 'Go off recruiting for men of brawn, and shake them down to discipline, and then we'll want ye for the war.'

"That means impressing men, as ye know, the sons of sea-cooks ashore not having a liking for the Navy to-day. That's why I was sent off with the *Lark*—not to search small craft, but to take my fifteen jolly tars ashore and show young fellows what sort o' a life would suit 'em best."

"Press gangs?" asked Rodney breathlessly.

Master Treen nodded, and hitched his sword up across his knees.

"Ay, and that and nothing more! Well, lads, we have combed the Dorset coast, and a poor lot it has brought. The *Granville's* complement is 650 men, for war strength, and we be well 250 short o' that. The *Granville* would look well agen a French liner o' 80 guns, under-manned as we be, wouldn't she? Thus, we have to make up our complement for the defence o' Old England. And yet there be curd-livered folk who prate at the press-gangs!

"Now, my lads, I'm going to land ye near your own home. I have the *Lark* for three weeks, and I must take 200 men back to the *Granville*. For my kind treatment of ye, I'd like just a bit o' information. Be there any lusty lads about Poldrewyn as would make passable sailors?"

Jack gasped as the officer talked, and Rodney, too, looked suddenly eager. Flushed with excitement, they told Master Treen all about Dirk Westaways and his smuggling band, how he led them all in bullying and brutality, to keep the people silent about the smuggling, and so let them carry on with the free trade.

"And how many men be there?" demanded the master.

"In a good running, twenty-five stout fellows could be rounded up," said Rodney. "Nor could they squeal too loud, because of the nature of their work when impressed."

Master Treen slapped his thigh.

"If I land ye handy, could ye find out when there will be a good running, and let me know?"

"We surely could," exclaimed Jack excitedly. "But, sir, they be great fighters—and bullies—"

"And so be we! My fifteen jolly fellows,

me at the head, all wearing the King's uniform and all, could tackle any band of twenty-five clodhopper smugglers. Ay, and 'twill be handy marching them back, rum and all. A goodly haul both ways!"

Master Treen bellowed for his boatswain, and forthwith they settled down to a plan for impressing Dirk Westaways and his gang of ruffians.

"'Tis our dooty to our country," the master said virtuously. "And no one shall ever say as the men of the King's Navy ever failed in their dooty!"

So Jack and Rodney, their wounds properly dressed, and made well and strong again with good food, were landed to the north of Poldrewyn, the *Lark* taking cover in the Helford River till news could come from the lads as to the next big running of contraband at Kemyll Beach.

The friends, according to plan, went back to Poldrewyn. And a great welcome they had! Their disappearance had caused a fresh outburst against the smugglers, and new and more brutal reprisals had been taken by the cowardly Dirk and his ruffians. The people were already cowed into silence. But now Jack and Rodney were back, their indignation at the friends' story was opened afresh.

The boys met Westaways. They had lingered at the most populous part of the town when they saw him coming, for fear of trouble. Dirk accosted them near a sullen and silent group of men by the quay.

"They smugglin' rats should be cleared out o' Poldrewyn," said Dirk, with his usual leer. "I've allus said so. And you yourselves ha' said as there be terriers enough to do it—somewhere!"

Rodney and Jack nodded.

"That's so," said Jack.

The bully switched his glance on the knot of men near by as he spoke, and many eyes were dropped to the ground. With that, the ruffian laughed harshly, and continued his lurching way along the street.

The friends kept a close watch on Dirk. And one night a laughing and joking group

of Navy men, headed by Master Treen, skirted Poldrewyn, and, meeting Rodney and Jack, posted themselves along the top of Kemyll Cliff.

The pinpoint of light appeared out at sea. After a wait of an hour, the smuggling band was heard coming along at the double for Rush Bottom Lane.

The tars, chuckling, drew their cutlasses and cocked their pistols.

"Master, better place for an ambush no man ever found," whispered the boatswain.

But Master Treen curtly ordered silence.

The smugglers came on. And just at the right second Master Treen gave the order:

"At 'em, bullies!"

There was a fight that satisfied even those jolly jack tars; but Rodney and Jack, to their great disappointment, on account of their wounds, could not join in. But Master Treen, after he had the twenty-odd smugglers in a subdued group, called on the friends to have a look over them. Dirk Westaways was not amongst them!

One of Dirk's cronies shook his clenched fist in the air.

"He be gone to Poldrewyn!" he cried. "He ha' left us to bear the brunt o' it. He'll be in the back parlour o' the Ship and Plough."

"March off, lads!" ordered the master. "Ten o' ye will march the band to the *Lark*, in Helford River. You others will come along with me to wet our whistles at the Ship and Plough."

Just after dawn, the people of Poldrewyn were roused by laughing and jesting in the street. They looked out of their windows, to see Rodney and Jack with a group of five naval men, one a real officer, moving at the double towards the Ship and Plough.

"The press-gang! The press-gang!"

The word went round like wild-fire, and young men slammed their windows and bolted their doors. But straight to the inn went the naval men.

They found Dirk skulking in the back parlour. They ran him through the yards, and, with cutlasses brandished in the air, shouting and hallooing, they hunted him along the water-front.



The smugglers came on. At the right second Master Treen gave the order: "At 'em, bullies!" Then there was a fight that satisfied even those jolly jack tars! (See previous page.)

Rodney and Jack, panting, could not keep up with the chase. Mr. Winter, his arm in a sling, came hurriedly out of his house to see what was to do.

Dirk turned at the quay-head, and, with head lowered, charged the naval men. But a neat blow with the flat of a cutlass felled him to the ground. Then he was caught and hauled roughly to his feet.

The press-gang marched him through the town, and people were out at their gates in all manner of dress, cheering the Navy on.

Never before, in the history of Poldrewyn, had a press-gang been cheered. But this last raid the Navy seemed to know how to manage things properly. And Poldrewyn knew no more of Dirk Westaways, Dan

Holt, Nick Travers, and the rest of the ruffianly band.

Rodney and Jack, when again sound of limb, joined the Navy without the aid of the press-gang. And what a send-off they got from Poldrewyn!

"Go on and become an admiral, Jack!" cried a well-wisher. "And then sail on a ship that carries Dirk Westaways!"

Jack and Rodney laughed as old Tim Farrow, all smiles, cracked his whip, and the carrier wagon rumbled them off towards Helston.

The friends were launched off on a new life, and they would be well content never to meet ruffians like Dirk Westaways again—except in an equality of brawn and muscle!

THE END