

CHAPTER XIII

MOOTY 'OODGATE'S ADVENTURES

CONTINUED

THE whole extent of the shore that skirts the New Forest district is of a varied and interesting nature as regards its scenery. The frequent indentations in its outline formed by creeks, estuaries and bays, give the northern and eastern parts a very distinct appearance from the south-western. East of Hurst Castle the land undulates so gently down to the shore that the forest trees seem almost to bend their flexile branches into the sea, while the banks of the many lakes and little rivers are covered with the most luxurious verdure and foliage, producing an effect most charming to the lover of such scenery. The only drawback to this pleasure is that it must not be sought at low water. To the west of Hurst Castle the scenery is of a very different character. Here it changes to the wild, bold, and rugged. The whole extent of shore is bounded by a long line of shingly beach, while the cliffs which rise over it sometimes reach from one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet in height.

Through the whole extent of this division there is not a point adapted to the safe accommodation of any description of shipping. Reckless of life and law, as smugglers may be, there are times and seasons when the boldest - aye, even Cherbourg Jem - would not dare to attempt a landing. Still it was a favourite place with them. For nights would our adventurers hover round this locality and on the appearance of a signal that all was right, seize the opportunity of running their boat to the shore.

I have before observed that the indentations of the coastline frequently occur but in no instance is this the case to a greater extent than at Chewton Bunny, where a most magnificent division of the cliff occurs, producing a chasm of some considerable width, and running up to a very beautiful and well wooded neighbourhood. I cannot conceive a spot more adapted for the smuggler's purposes, and to it I would direct the reader's attention.



It was late in the autumn season, dark and at midnight. At such a time did Mooty 'Oodgate repair to the beach and anxiously wait for an expected and preconcerted signal-light. Three nights following had he kept his solitary watch, but to no purpose and he returned to his forest cavern, gloomy and disappointed. The fourth night arrived. The wind was up and the driving clouds flitted across the struggling moon, which gleamed fitfully upon the waters. There was a tumult in the air, the lengthened shore echoed back the roar of the huge billows as they rolled in long ridges and with gigantic force towards the beach, while the south-west blast whirled the foam on high, which fell again in showers on the troubled waves. The scream of the gull or the wild curlew, mixed with the howling blast, added to the terrors of the night. It was impossible a landing could be effected that night yet, in a hollow recess in the undercliff, anxiously looking out with his celebrated Dollond, might Mooty 'Oodgate have been seen, crouching his diminutive form, secure from detection. Ever and anon he would raise his glass to his eye and anxiously scan both sea and land for any object that might present itself. His anxiety was caused not only on account of the craft that contained his

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treasures but, should she arrive at a time when either of the revenue-cruisers were within sight, or the land-sharks be on the look-out, it was as much his duty to signalise that danger, as that the coast was clear for landing. Twice he fancied he saw the signal and eagerly again he looked, but in vain. The moon had now gone down when, crouching himself closely to the earth and applying his ear to the ground, he distinctly heard the tramp of a horse. The darkness of the night protected Mooty from observation. At this moment too, a dim light appeared in the distance which showed the horseman, who proved to be the local riding officer, as well as Mooty, that the free-trader was only waiting for the signal to send his boat ashore. Mooty observed that the officer then halted for a while and narrowly surveyed the country near him, as if he expected the appearance of a return signal but there was none to show this, save Mooty and *he* was by no means up to the mark. Indeed his consternation was intense. Here was a dilemma! It was evident that the officer knew the lugger was in the offing. The *Ranger* cutter was doubtlessly cruising in the channel and daylight would dawn in a few short hours! What was to be done he knew not but something must be done, and that immediately!

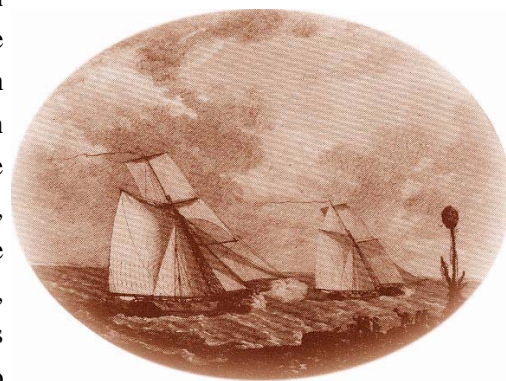
Now, all that Mooty 'Oodgate cared for in this world was himself and such things as immediately appertained thereto, his money, his merchandise and his ponies. *His* cargo only safely landed, and Cherbourg Jem, his crew and fast-sailing lugger might be all at the bottom of the sea and Mooty not a mourner on their account. But now he foresaw the certain seizure of what was his as well as Jem's and he groaned in spirit at this deathblow to his hopes. Fear exaggerated the seeming danger and as the officer rode off again, he formed a rapid resolution, founded on the principle that where a heavy loss is inevitable, it is best to lighten it by all possible precautionary means.

So Mooty crept stealthily from his lurking-place and hastened up the chine towards the high road where, from a group of his ponies, he selected one of the fleetest and galloped off on its back in the direction which had been taken by the riding-officer. Mooty was soon by his side and a few minutes conversation sufficed to acquaint him with all that Mooty was desirous of communicating. The miserable recreant, for an expected premium, had lent himself to the betrayal of his comrades and if the shedding of their blood ensued from his treachery, why some of the cargo might still come to his share - to him a grave and primary consideration.

Morning broke and its bright dawning seemed to quell the boisterous wind and soothe the raging sea. The ocean waves danced in the golden light that now burst forth upon them. The silver sands of the beach sparkled in the rays of the rising sun and all the terrors of the night had passed away. The fishermen were busy in their little boats and in the offing might be seen the *Ranger* cutter with all her sails set, towing in the lugger beloved of Cherbourg Jem. Yes, reader, Mooty's treachery has brought the seabird into the snare of the fowler! See, how she seems to *feel* her captivity, how reluctantly to follow in the *Ranger's* wake! Light as she is in structure, she is overwrought as with grief and goeth heavily; nay, there is a gloomy, suicidal air about her capable of this interpretation that, but for yonder pestilent towing-rope, she would sink herself to defy her foes. How deeply too she lies in the water. Surely she could not have crossed the channel and lived in the gale of last night, so heavily freighted as she now is? Where is her anchor? Where her boats? Where, moreover, is her late master Cherbourg Jem and where are his merry, merry men?

It may be an unexpected relief to the reader to know that neither Jem nor his crew are on board the crest-fallen lugger, but are growing oblivious of her loss at that favourite rendezvous of seamen, called The Jolly Sailor, conveniently and snugly situate at—, and, recollecting Mooty's villainy, it is rather pleasant than otherwise to know that it is upon Mooty's cargo that Jem and his crew have been making merry. The fact is that Jem's insight into Mooty's character had engendered distrust and unexpressed, but still unqualified aversion. And having, in the cruise just ended, beaten about much longer than the watchful Mooty was aware of, inviting a signal from the land and having besides been closely followed by the cutter, his suspicions of

Mooty's fidelity were excited. So, watching an opportunity, he ran into the back of the Isle of Wight and landed his cargo just before daybreak. The Ranger soon after hove in sight and was quickly in chase of the lugger, for Jem in his cunning, had immediately on landing the goods, set sail from the spot to avoid suspicion. The Ranger soon overhauled them for, as the lugger needed ballast, they could not manage to get her away in her accustomed style and Jem, seeing there was no chance of escape from his pursuers, adopted the most laudable plan to save the lives and liberty of his crew. Contention would have been vain yet he determined not to let her be taken if possible.



Accordingly, the boats having been got ready, one of the lower planks was staved and, immediately on rounding the Needles Point, they run into the shore in their boats and thus entirely eluded the cutter's men. The poor old lugger struggled hard with the increasing weight of water which was filling her and Jem, who stood on the shore watching her, with tears in his eyes, felt almost as much regret as he would have done had he seen a fellow-creature struggling with a similar fate. Anxiously did he hope to see her go down before the cutter reached her but in this he was disappointed and no sooner was she boarded by her captors than they set all hands to the pumps and succeeded in towing her along. They were grievously chagrined however, at not finding the expected booty and that the crew and cargo were both gone. All that remained was the old vessel and, damaged though she was, if they could once get her into port she was a prize worth taking. Jem and his crew with reviving hearts and plenty of money, made their way to Portsmouth, while Mooty was disappointed of his reward and bitterly cursed the partners who had thus lured him.

We must suppose a short period of time to have elapsed, during which Jem had clearly ascertained the villainy of his worthy co-mate Mooty, who had also become acquainted with the fact of Jem's having safely landed the goods. However, as it frequently happens in such iniquitous transactions, there was no redress for either party. Mooty regretted the seizure of the lugger, as it prevented any further speculation for the present, though had Jem and the goods been taken with her, he would have rejoiced as the amount promised for the information, in case of a successful capture of the whole, would have covered his present loss. Jem, on his part, was indignant at the treachery which would have sacrificed him and his followers and he began to hate Mooty most cordially, swearing that he would yet be "even with him". In other words, that he would surely compass his ruin by *some* means.

At the first interview of these two worthies, Mooty cringed and crouched before the man whose life he had so treacherously risked while Jem put on a friendly nonchalant air, regretted the loss both had sustained, himself in the lugger and Mooty in the goods. Each was fool enough to hope and think that the other knew nothing of the fraud that had been practised against him or it might be that, under such circumstances, both thought themselves perfectly justified in what had occurred and tacitly acknowledged it by avoiding any further allusion to the subject. Now had the opportunity arrived for Jem to carry into operation the plan he had resolved on whereby he might "make" himself, and utterly ruin the victim of his revenge. Of the two rogues, it resulted that Cherbourg Jem proved to be the most cunning. He boasted of having money enough left to take a share in another venture, but still he didn't know how they could manage without the lugger. Another, he supposed, must be bought but for himself, he didn't care much about it. Mooty caught at the chance of recovering his losses and offered, if it were absolutely requisite, to assist in the purchase of another vessel.

He also, might perhaps have sufficient left for that purpose and, provided Jem could give him any security, he would endeavour to advance the necessary amount. This was precisely what Jem desired and the pair were well satisfied with the arrangement, particularly the seaman.

A certain amount of goods was to be placed in the secret receptacle of the forest and once secured there, the money should be forthcoming. Accordingly, in the darkness of the night, bale after bale of goods arrived to the evident satisfaction of Mooty, who congratulated himself on the bargain he had made. Here he was safe and ample security was stored away in the stronghold. Mooty knew that many of the articles now received were of the very stock his money had paid for before but it did not suit his purpose to observe it - he was too intent on the future to notice the present.

It was on an early spring morning that our hero, mounted as usual, took his way to the shore for a final interview with Jem and his crew. The appointment had been made at the very place from which the riding officer had formerly observed the signal given from the lugger. The object of Mooty's visit was to see the new lugger under sail and she did, as she neared the point, comport herself most gallantly under an exhilarating breeze. There were Jem and his trusty crew, the well-set forms of upwards of twenty men. Command was given to come to anchor, the boat was sent on shore. Mooty had to receive payment from the captain, who was under an engagement to pay for upwards of twenty of the handsomest and best-bred ponies Mooty had in his possession, a mere *ruse* of Jem's to obtain all he could from him. But Mooty felt too secure in the goods secreted in his forest-store to suspect any such finesse. His money having been advanced to purchase the present venture, he surveyed with satisfaction the bales of cotton goods stowed away in the hold, his own darling ponies too, crowded the orlop-deck, whilst a few crates of English cutlery, glasses, &c. were carefully arranged on the main-deck. It was a glorious consideration for Mooty, that he was the principal proprietor of the whole and that in return for it he would get more gold! And then the consolation that, let the worst happen, let them be taken, let the ship, the crew, the captain, the goods, all go to the bottom or if she were burnt, if blood were to deluge the decks now covered with his property, the lives or liberty of all be forfeited to the law. Oh! It was delicious to think that *he* was safe! What cared he for others peril? Particularly as he had received satisfactory security. So he rubbed his hands with delight and chuckled for very glee.

The business on hand having been arranged, the two friends parted most affectionately. Jem accompanied Mooty to the ship's side and assisted him into the boat winking to the men as he moved off, but as if in enthusiastic esteem of Mooty, he proposed "Three cheers for the governor" which the crew gave lustily amid laughter! Mooty heard with pride the acclamations of the men and not observing their merriment, received them as a token of allegiance and respect. Self-satisfied he reached the shore and jumping on his pony, made his way with all speed to his solitary cavern, that he might enjoy the inspection of its valuable contents. Oh! most crafty and avaricious Mooty, count thy moneys again, man! Turn over bale by bale, to re-number them, see that thy spirit casks be safely stowed away, look to thy silks and shawls and delight thyself in the survey of thy boxes of French lace and gloves, enjoy the sight of them to-day, while they are thine, for, like riches, they may take wings and flee away and sooner than thou dreamest of, O sage and cunning Mooty!

The boat which conveyed him to the shore had no sooner rejoined the lugger than Cherbourg Jem right merrily told his men that it was now *their* turn. "Now," said he, "now will we serve the scoundrel out in his own coin. Put her about boys and we'll have a jolly night at Portsmouth!" And in this manner was Mooty 'Oodgate "sold" to the benefit of the revenue of Great Britain, for immediately on the arrival of the lugger at Portsmouth, the cargo was unshipped and disposed of, the person from whom the vessel had been hired was paid; and Jem gave information at the custom-house, which led to the discovery of Mooty's forest store-room, and also to the apprehension of that gentleman.

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The next morning all he had was taken from him - his silks and spirits, French lace and forest ponies. All went to the aggrandisement of his most gracious majesty King George the Third and Mooty the martyr was incarcerated for his misdoings, during the royal will and pleasure. Perilous are great heights, both to the mind and body of poor man and often so little concord is there in this uncertain world between hopes and events, that (as says the philosophic poet,)

**“As high as we have mounted in delight,
In our dejection do we sink as low.”**

and suddenly, of the subject of this story, we may add,

“To him that morning did it happen so!”

Mooty had, perhaps, never been in a mood so complacent and self congratulatory as on the very eve of his ruin, had never felt himself on such an eminence while looking down on his illicit wealth as he did within a few hours of his utter downfall. Whether he dreamt at all, or what he dreamed upon this the summit-night of his greatness, I am sorry to have no authentic information to give. But had the “coming event cast its shadow before” and had Mooty been forewarned by dream or vision, of the approaching invasion of the king's men, they would no doubt have secured the greater part of his goods but would not, I think, have found the sly old fox squatting at ease in his burrow.

Several years had passed and the name of Mooty 'Oodgate was almost forgotten. Children who had heard the story of his cavern-life and the circumstances under which he resigned it for a prison-cell, had grown into manhood and forgetfulness. The gang had dispersed and government continued to improve the efficiency of its protective force. Many who had been Mooty's associates were dead and all had left the district, when the crown took pity on the captive and released him. Upon his liberation he returned to his native forest, an old man and desolate with no sympathising soul on earth. His strength was gone but he crawled late one night to the spot that once held all his treasures. How had he longed, in durance vile, to revisit this dear old haunt which by night and day had scarcely ever been dissociated from his thoughts. Ah! His thirst for gold, does it still live? Still burn in that attenuated body? Nay, but Mooty has not been vainly groping in that corner of his ancient home, he has evidently *touched* something to awaken that odd ecstasy, something that is animally magnetising his time-worn frame! Yes, safely there through all these years of prison-life had rested his buried gold and now he vowed it should never leave him more! Then it was that he sowed it piece by piece into his garments and whenever he needed comfort under trouble, or to re-assure himself that he was not the *needy* wretch whose supposed want had opened the charitable heart, then would the touch of his much-loved gold set his mind at ease, or rather excite in it that hysterical movement, whose outward development was in a chuckle or a grin.

But there was one creditor whose claims pressed with increasing heaviness on Mooty, and while he chafed thereunder and dreaded the exactions which Infirmary might make upon his wealth, he never yet would use his wealth to ward off disease by securing for himself the common cares and comforts which Old Age requires to sustain it in the battle of life. So, as his feebleness increased and charity was at the best precarious, he sought at last the protection of the Poor Law, before the time when workhouse inmates were first compelled to change their wardrobes for a settled pauper costume and thus he clung to his old “habits” to the last. There was no quality in him that any fellow-man might love and therefore he went down to death unregrettedly. His money was found after his decease secreted in his clothing and more than reimbursed the parish for the relief which had been thus fraudulently obtained by Mooty 'Oodgate.

