

CHAP. II.

*Reflections on the origin, rise, and progress of Depredations on the River Thames.—Causes assigned, viz. Smuggling pursuits generating Depravity—Impunity—The want of apposite Laws, and the means of carrying them into execution.—River Plunder felt as a serious evil about the middle of the Century.—The Bumboat Act of the 2d Geo. III. Cap. 28.—Its Provisions explained.—Bumboats greatly diminished since the passing of this act—Supplied by the Watermen's boats.—The inefficacy of the Bumboat Act explained.—Culprits support one another by raising a general Fund for Penalties. The injury to the Crown and the Subject, from this source in the Century, estimated at Ten Millions Sterling. An Inquiry instituted in 1797, with a view to the establishing a Police.—A detail of the evils which the adoption of the System developed, 1st. with respect to the Depredations of River Pirates—2d. Night Plunderers—3d. Light Horsemen—4th. Heavy Horsemen—5th. Journeymen Coopers—6th. Watermen—7th. Mud-larks—8th. Rat-catchers—9th. Game Lightermen—10th. Scuffle-hunters.—Pillage on the Quays.—Warehouses.—The Devil hogsheads explained.—The aggregate loss under pretence of drawing Samples, estimated at 70,000*l.* a year in West-India articles, exclusive of general plunder.—Concluding observations.*

No sooner had the Commerce of the River Thames arrived at that point of respectability, which rendered it necessary, from the peculiar situation of the Port, to remove Merchandise in large quantities from Ships and Vessels to Lighters, and from thence to the Landing-places, and *vice versa*, than it appears to have been afflicted by Criminal Depredation.

It is probable, however, (although the fact cannot be clearly ascertained) that this had not become a very serious evil, until after the commencement of the 18th Century.

The progress of evil propensities was slow, while a sense of Religion and Morality operated in a greater degree than at present, upon the minds of the lower orders of the people. In the moral, as in the physical World, the change of habit is gradual, and often imperceptible. In contemplating the magnitude of the abuses which are to be developed in this Work, the mind is naturally led to an inquiry into the causes which have produced a system of matured delinquency; which is perhaps, unparalleled in the criminal history of any other country.

It is not unlikely, that the disposition to pillage Commercial Property while afloat, derived its origin, in no inconsiderable degree, from the habit of Smuggling, which has prevailed ever since Revenues were collected.

The unpopularity which attached upon all Imposts levied on the Subject in the earlier periods of Society, when men's minds were less expanded and enlightened, rendered illicit transactions and frauds upon the State less an object of reproach than offences committed on the property of individuals: This indeed continues too much the case even at the present day, and hence the minds of the Offenders cease to be restrained by a sense of the moral turpitude of the action.

By degrees, probably (though the transition was easy) little distinction was made in illicit transactions between the *Adventure of the Individual*, and the *Property of the Merchant or Consignee of the Cargo*. The habit once acquired of removing the *one* in a clandestine manner, led by analogy to the removal of the *other*.—The mind thus reconciled to the action, the offence screened by impunity, and apparently sanctioned by custom, the habits of pillage increased: others seduced by the force of example, and stimulated by motives of avarice, soon pursued the same course of Criminalty, while the want of apposite Laws, and the means of carrying into execution those that existed, gave an extensive range to Delinquency. New Converts to the System of Iniquity were rapidly made. The mass of Labourers on the River became gradually contaminated.—A similar class upon the Quays, and in the Warehouses, caught the infection, and the evil expanded as Commerce increased.

Certain

Certain it is, that Depredations on the Floating Property in the River Thames were felt as a very serious evil, so early as the middle of the Century : since it appears that various efforts were used about that period, to put the then existing Laws in execution, for the purpose of suppressing the Thefts committed on the Tackle, Apparel and Stores, and also on the Cargoes, of Ships and Vessels lading and discharging in the Port of London : These efforts proving ineffectual from the deficiency experienced in the Laws, recourse was had to the Legislature, which at length produced the Act of the 2d of his present Majesty, cap. 28, “ *to prevent the committing of Thefts and Frauds by persons navigating Bumboats and other Boats upon the River Thames.*” — From the Preamble to this Act it is plain, that it originated from the evils then felt by Ship-Owners as well as Merchants. This Preamble recites “ *that many ill-disposed persons, using and navigating upon the River Thames, certain boats, commonly called Bumboats, and other Vessels, under pretence of selling Liquors of different sorts, and also Slops, Tobacco, Besoms, Fruit, Greens, Ginger-bread, and other such like wares, and things, to and amongst the Seamen and Labourers employed in and about Ships, Vessels and other Craft there, do frequently take occasion to cut, damage, and spoil the Cordage, Cables, Buoys and Buoy-ropes, and the Head-fasts, and other Fasts, belonging to such Ships, Vessels, and Craft,*”

“ *and*

“ *and fraudulently carry away the same,—likewise*
 “ *encourage such Seamen and Labourers to dispose of*
 “ *such Cordage, Cables, and Buoys, and such Goods,*
 “ *Merchandise, Materials and Stores, secretly and*
 “ *unlawfully, whereby great losses are sustained by*
 “ *Merchants and Owners of such Ships and Vessels,*
 “ *and other Craft trading in the said River.”*

The existence of the evil is here strongly depicted, and the object in view, seems to have been the protection of the Stores and Materials of Vessels trading to the Port of London, as well as their Cargoes.— Considerable pains seem to have been bestowed in attempting to reach the evils that existed, and a certain expence was incurred in obtaining this Act: Yet, perhaps from the circumstance of its being a *local Statute*, fourteen years actually elapsed after its passing, before any one of its provisions was carried into effect.

It has indeed been the case with many very salutary and wholesome Laws, that they have remained a dead letter to the great injury of the Community.

These, among numerous other inconveniences, which are suffered by the innocent part of the Public, clearly demonstrate, that an active principle is wanting in the Body Politic, not only to give effect to the Laws now in being for the well-ordering of Society, but to suggest others, as circumstances change, whereby the rapid strides of Delinquency
 may

may be impeded, and a greater portion of Security extended both to Life and Property.

By this Act it is provided “ That the Owners of, or Persons using Bumboats between London Bridge and the Hope Point, for the purpose of bartering their Wares with Seamen and Labourers in the River, should not be permitted to exercise their Trade until Registered, Marked, Numbered, and Licensed by the Trinity Corporation; (*u*) who are also authorised under their Common Seal (and the same authority is given to any seven or more Owners or Masters of Ships then wholly or partly in the River) to appoint persons who shall have authority to search and detain any Boat having goods on board, suspected to be part of the Cargo or Materials of any Ship or Vessel in the River Thames, and to have been stolen or unlawfully procured; and also, to apprehend the persons belonging to such boat, and to convey them before a Justice, having local jurisdiction, and in default of a satisfactory account being given, or the production of the person from whom the goods were obtained, then the Offenders to be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and the Boat, Tackle, and Lading to be forfeited.

“ Constables and Beadles, and Watchmen while on duty, are authorised to seize and apprehend per-

(*u*) For a List of the persons at present licensed, with which the Corporation obligingly furnished the Author,—See APPENDIX, No. II.

sons having Ropes, Stores, and other Goods, suspected to have been stolen, or unlawfully procured, from Ships and Vessels in the River Thames, and to bring the Parties in like manner before a Justice : The Offender, if unable to produce a person to prove the sale and delivery, or to give a satisfactory account, shall be adjudged guilty of a misdemeanor. The goods so seized are to be deposited with the Churchwardens of the Parish, or in any other convenient place, and if not claimed after due notice, they are to be sold, and the produce divided between the Informer and the Parish.

“ Justices are also authorised upon Information, on Oath, of a suspicion of the Concealment of Goods, stolen from Ships or Vessels, in any house or place, to grant a warrant to search ; and, if Goods are found, to convey the same with the occupiers of the house before a Justice : The Offenders refusing to give an account to his satisfaction, by what means they were obtained, or to produce, in a reasonable time, the Parties from whom they were purchased, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor.

“ The Penalty inflicted by the Act, in all the foregoing cases of misdemeanors, is 40s. for the first Offence, and 4*l.* for the Second, and every subsequent Offence, to be levied by Distress and Sale ; or, in default of such Distress, the Offender to be imprisoned for the first Offence one Month, for the second two Months, and for every subsequent Offence, till he shall be discharged by the Sessions.

“ Pawnbrokers and others are also authorised and required to stop suspected persons offering goods to sale, supposed to be part of the Cargo or Materials of Vessels, and to bring the Parties before a Justice to be dealt with as in the foregoing cases.

“ It is by this Act made an Offence punishable by 14 years’ Transportation, to buy or receive Goods stolen from Vessels in the River Thames; and with seven years’ Transportation, to cut, spoil, or damage any Cordage, Cables, Buoys, Buoy-ropes, or Headfasts, fixed to Anchors or Moorings in the River Thames, with an intent to steal the same; and the like Punishment of seven years’ Transportation, is inflicted for obstructing the execution of this Act.”

This is the only Statute which at present applies, in a direct manner, to the Depredations committed on the River Thames. The object of the framers of it appears to have been, to attach some punishment to cases where the actual Felony could not be proved, which was generally impossible, previous to the Establishment of the Marine Police.

It seems also to have been conceived at the time, that the chief part of the Delinquency which prevailed, was facilitated in an eminent degree, by persons trading in Bumboats among the Shipping; which suggested the very proper idea of placing this class of people under control, as a necessary measure of Police for the prevention of Crimes.

Whether

Whether the enforcing the penalties of this Act, had the effect to banish this class of River Hawkers from the Pool, or from whatever cause it has proceeded, certain it is, that their number is greatly diminished within the last 20 years, since it appears there are only at present 155 (x) upon the Registers, who have received Licences, and these chiefly carry on their traffic among the Shipping in the neighbourhood of Gravesend, where many of them reside, out of the view of those who are authorised to control them.

It is to be lamented that Successors to these Traffickers in Plunder, were soon found in the fraternity of Watermen, who appear to have given at least equal, if not greater, facility in the removal and disposal of Stolen Property; for the evil, instead of being lessened by the diminution of the Bumboats, has been gradually increasing every year. It is evident also, that the detection of Offenders, and the numerous convictions under this Act, (y) have been equally inefficacious:—On the contrary, it appears that the provisions of the Act have operated in a manner diametrically opposite to the views of the Legislature, and the zeal and exertions of the Magistrates. For the Culprits on discovering that the penalty in the first instance, and recourse was sel-

(x) Vide APPENDIX, No. II.

(y) The Bumboat convictions have exceeded 2500 since the Act was put in force, and the penalties and forfeitures could not amount to less than from six to seven thousand pounds.

dom had to the severer penalties, amounted only to 40s. and that, previous to the Institution of a River Guard under the Marine Police, even this penalty did not probably attach to *one offence in three or four hundred*, they established a *general Subscription Club*, for the purpose of defraying all expences arising from detections, penalties, and forfeitures. This Subscription the profits of their Plunder well enabled them to support : and hence, instead of a check, the Statute was made to operate as a kind of licence, and this mischievous and extensive Confederacy was encouraged to continue its enormous Depredations on Commercial Property without the dread of punishment ; for the common fund secured them against all expences in cases of conviction, and indeed against the possibility of suffering any material inconvenience. It is not to be wondered, therefore, that the evil in a very few years extended far and wide.

During this warfare upon Commercial Property, the *Crown* and the *Subject* participated in the loss sustained ; while the morals and the industry of the Nation were no less sufferers by the vice and the idleness which these abominable confederacies disseminated ; *and which, in the course of the Century, have subjected the Revenue and Commerce of the Country to an aggregate loss, which cannot be estimated at less than Ten Millions Sterling at least.*

Things were in this situation at the close of the year 1797, when an inquiry was instituted with respect

spect to this alarming evil in all its gradations, with a view to the formation of a System of *River Police*, which might stem the torrent of existing mischief, and overcome those difficulties which had heretofore baffled the united efforts of the Merchants; and finally, that by a mild and prudent application of the arm of legal authority, strengthened by a competent civil force, such measures might be adopted as should be effectual in subduing the enemy, and in protecting the Floating Property upon the River Thames, from a continuance of the unexampled Depredations to which it had so long been subject.

This inquiry has developed the scene of iniquity which is now to be detailed, and brought under the review of the Reader; which will serve at once, as an irrefragable proof of the policy and necessity of timely expedients, to prevent that multiplication of Crimes, which are the never-failing attendants of opulence; and as a beacon to the Commercial World against the evils resulting from this source.

After travelling over Volumes of Documents, exhibiting the various devices to which Delinquents had recourse for the purpose of obtaining Plunder on the River Thames, it has been thought expedient to arrange the details respecting this extensive mischief under the following heads:—

I. RIVER PIRACY.

THIS species of Depredation was carried on by the most desperate and depraved class of the fraternity of nautical Vagabonds, aided by Receivers (equally noxious and hostile to the interest of Society) who kept Old Iron and Junk Shops, in places adjacent to the River, ever ready to deposit and to conceal the nocturnal Plunder of these hostile Marauders, who were generally armed and equiped with Boats, either kept or stolen for the particular object they had in view.

It was the practice of these Free-booters, to select dark nights for committing Depredations ; having previously reconnoitered the River during the day, for the purpose of marking the particular Ships, Vessels, and Craft, most likely to afford a prolific harvest, either from the nature of the Merchandise, Stores, or Materials, which were accessible, or from the circumstance of their being without the protection of a nightly Watch.

In a Port where, as we have seen, there are seldom less than 1000 Ships and Vessels, lading and discharging valuable Merchandise, and from 200 to 500 Craft, in which a part of this Merchandise is deposited in its transit to or from the Vessels lying in the Pool, it is easy to conceive how daring and audacious those Miscreants would become, unrestrained by any Police, or any hazard of apprehension ;

sion ; emboldened by the force of their Gangs, and the total want of a River Guard. Well authenticated instances have been adduced of their cutting bags of cotton, and other valuables, from the quarters of Ships on their first arrival ; and even of their weighing anchors, and getting clear off with these heavy materials, together with the Cables and every portable article upon the deck of a Ship : One instance in particular occurred a few years ago, where an American and a Guernsey Ship were plundered in this manner, by the actual removal both of Anchors and Cables, ultimately in the view of the Masters of the Vessels, who were alarmed time enough to get upon deck, to learn the fact from the River Pirates themselves ; who, as they rowed off, told them that they had got their Anchors and Cables, at the same time wishing them a good morning.

They are no less adroit with respect to Lighters having cargoes on board, wherever they are, either unprotected, or where they are able to bribe or overawe the watch. Their practice has been to cut Lighters with valuable cargoes a-drift, and to follow them until the tide carries them to convenient situations to be pillaged, and then to remove as much of the cargo as their strength, and the opportunities they possess of concealment, will admit. By such means have the ponderous and bulky articles of Tallow and Hemp been plundered to a considerable extent ; while the Tackle, Materials, and Stores, of
E 2 Vessels,

Vessels, of all dimensions, have suffered severely. Not seldom also have the portable Packages landed from Ships under discharge, as well as Bales, Boxes, and Trunks of merchandise, in their transit to outward-bound vessels, been the object of similar attacks.

Previous to the war, this class of audacious plunderers was very numerous. The impress-service diminished them considerably, but unless the vigour of the present River Police system is continued, and improved by apposite Legislative Powers, and its force considerably increased, they will become extremely formidable on the return of peace, when so many depraved characters will, of course, be discharged from the Navy and Army.

II. NIGHT PLUNDERERS.

This class is chiefly composed of gangs of the most dissolute of the Watermen, who prefer idleness to labour, and indulge in every kind of low extravagance. They are in general exceedingly depraved and audacious, and (like the River Pirates) are all in connection with different Receivers, some of whom are opulent. Being also in the practice of associating with the stationary watchmen upon the Lighters, and of seducing them over to their views, they have had abundant scope for carrying on their nefarious designs. Their depredations are chiefly confined to unprotected Lighters, which are generally pointed out to them by watchmen who are associates in the same
criminal

criminal pursuits, and share in the booty. On discovering by this means where plunder is to be obtained, their practice has been to provide themselves with a lug-boat, seized on for the purpose, to proceed to these unprotected Lighters at midnight; and to remove such parts of their cargoes as are accessible and portable: This they convey immediately to the place settled by the Receiver, or criminal purchaser, and there deposit the spoil. One instance of this kind occurred in January 1799; when a gang of these miscreants were detected in the act of lading a lug-boat with Hemp, from a Lighter near St. Catharine's. The Hemp was secured, and one of the culprits at the same time apprehended by the Marine Police Surveyors; this man, becoming afterwards an evidence for the Crown, developed a scene of iniquity which, from its nature and extent, attracted particular notice; especially as the measures which these adepts in this species of River plunder resorted to, appeared not to have been before enrolled in the catalogue of devices practised by such criminals. It turned out on a full investigation, that five boat loads of Hemp, averaging about 15 cwt. each, had been stolen in the course of a few weeks, and conveyed through London Bridge to Ranelagh Creek; two of which were sold to a twine spinner in that neighbourhood. Three of the five boat loads, were carted down in the day time openly to the warehouse of a Receiver in the City; while the other two, were conveyed up to a wharf near the premises of the
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same Receiver, and delivered by the thieves themselves, with every appearance of its being a fair transaction, and without any suspicion being excited to the contrary; although the goods were actually stolen the night before.

The mode, however, which is practised in conveying these articles, differs according to the nature of the Goods which are stolen. While in some cases delinquents are less liable to detection, from the great extent of the Metropolis, in removing their plunder to the repositories of the Receiver in open day; so in others, where articles are subject to seizure by Officers of the Revenue, a nocturnal expedition is planned. The fraudulent purchaser is apprised of the design. He remains up during the night, with open doors, ready to receive his associates in criminalty. The Watchmen in the tract through which they are to pass, being generally his neighbours, or perhaps under his immediate influence and controul, are seduced by a small gratuity to allow the smuggling transaction to pass unnoticed, and the plunder is, by this mean, secured in its transit, and is speedily out of the reach of danger.

In the month of October, 1798, a Lighter was robbed of five casks of American Ashes, of the value of £.50 and upwards, which were carried at midnight in bags to the house of an opulent Receiver, who sat up two different nights to receive the booty. He remunerated the thieves, by paying them about a quarter of the value, besides regaling them with

with a supper and liquor. The watchman received half a crown for his civility in taking no notice of the transaction.

In addition, however, to the plunder of the Lighters, there has for a considerable time existed a most extensive and alarming system of depredation upon the cargoes of outward-bound ships, in various ways, by this class of River Thieves. Here the amount of the plunder is by no means the most serious evil; for in addition to the loss of property, which the ship-masters are always obliged to make good, they frequently, at the same time, have an undeserved stigma fixed upon their character, productive of consequences the most calamitous to themselves and families, as they are unjustly divested of the trust reposed in them, and thereby deprived of the very means of subsistence.

Not long since, a Boat with two trunks of printed Muslins of considerable value, was overtaken and seized about midnight, together with two of these nightly plunderers, by the Marine Police Surveyors. On examination before the Magistrates, it appeared, that one of the culprits had entered as a mariner for the voyage on board the vessel, merely for the purpose of affording him the means of plundering the cargo while in the progress of stowage. With this evil intention in his mind, he placed the two trunks in question in an accessible situation, close to the fore-scuttle, the key of which (for it was always locked in the night) he took on shore during the day to the Receiver,

Receiver, who had agreed to purchase the booty when procured. The Receiver got a similar key made; the original being returned to the place where it usually hung in the binacle, early in the afternoon, to prevent suspicion. A little before midnight, the two thieves went on board, opened the scuttle-hatch, with the key which the Receiver had procured to be made, and the two trunks being placed in a situation to be handed up at once, they were removed into the boat without discovery; and the property would probably have never been heard of, had there not at the time been a vigilant guard upon the river.

One of the prisoners made a candid confession, and stated various other robberies which had been committed by similar devices. In the course of his examination, he mentioned a particular ship, from which he and others had taken property to a considerable amount. A gentleman present at the time, immediately mentioned that he perfectly recollected the circumstance, and the unhappy consequences attending the robbery; for the unfortunate master, who now appeared to have been perfectly innocent, lost both his situation and his character.

When great evils are suffered to accumulate, and culprits allowed to proceed in their mischievous courses with impunity, they at length become so adroit, so hardened, and so audacious as to stop at nothing; and hence it has followed, that this last specified mode of plunder, had like that upon homeward-bound cargoes, become a much more serious evil than
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has been generally conceived ; for the actual felony could rarely be discovered, and indeed, was seldom or ever suspected, until the ship discharged her cargo at a distant port. Deficiencies of this nature, which frequently were imputed to inaccuracies and *mistakes* in shipping the cargo, were, in fact, the result of deliberate acts of villainy, committed under circumstances where no clue to a discovery could be found, and where the Owners or Shipmasters were saddled with the ultimate loss.

Encouraged in this manner by the security against detection, and the resource for plunder, which was afforded by the transit of perhaps not less than two millions of packages, composing outward-bound cargoes in the course of a year ; it is certain that this species of depredation has, for a length of time, been gradually increasing ; and the River plunderers, perhaps from the extent and value of the booty which is obtained, appear, of late years, to have preferred this mode of robbery ; particularly since the establishment of the River Police, which has, in so great a degree, destroyed the system of pillage which prevailed in the homeward-bound West-India cargoes.

Indeed, when the state of morals among the various classes of individuals employed upon the River is considered, it ceases to be a matter of wonder, that men, who may be said to have been regularly trained to acts of delinquency, whose expensive mode of living, in consequence of depraved habits, increases their wants, and who are no longer restrained

strained by any sense of the turpitude or injustice of the action, should be driven from one criminal conspiracy to another, to secure a continuance of their nocturnal depredations.

III. NIGHT PLUNDERERS, DENOMINATED LIGHT-HORSEMEN.

Among the various classes of depredators on the West-India Trade in the Port of London, those denominated *Light Horsemen* seem to have been by far the most pernicious, inasmuch as the pillage they obtained, by the variety of their artful practices, was generally extensive and valuable.

The Receivers who resided in the vicinity of the River, on both sides, were the chief leaders in this peculiar system of plunder; and it was always carried on by the connivance of the Mate and Revenue Officers, in consequence of a preconcerted plan, and agreement to pay them a certain sum of money, for the liberty of opening and removing from such casks and packages, as were accessible, as much Sugar, Coffee, and other articles, as could be conveyed away in four or five hours during the dead of night.—For such a Licence to plunder, from 20 to 30 guineas per night were usually paid to the Mate and Revenue Officers, who generally went to bed, while the mischief was going forward, that they might not see it.

These infamous proceedings were carried on according to a regular system.—The gangs, denomi-
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nated *Light Horsemen*, were generally composed of one or more Receivers, together with Coopers, Watermen, and Lumpers, who were all necessary in their different occupations, to the accomplishment of these iniquitous designs.—They went on board completely prepared with *Iron Crows*, *Adzes*, and other utensils, to open and again head-up the casks—with shovels to take out the Sugar, and a number of Bags made to contain 100 lb. each.—These Bags were denominated *Black Strap*; having been previously dyed black, to prevent their being seen in the night, when stowed in the bottom of a wherry.

The different members of the Gang had each a peculiar province assigned.—The Receivers generally furnished the money necessary to bribe the Officers and Mate in the first instance, and also provided the *Black Strap*. The Watermen procured as many boats as were wanted. The Lumpers unstowed the casks in the hold. The Coopers took out the heads, and all hands afterwards assisted in filling the bags, dispatching one boat after another to an appointed place, and making the best use of the infamous licence they had purchased, in removing as large a quantity of property as could be carried off by the utmost exertions of excessive labour; which seldom amounted to less than the value of from 150*l.* to 200*l.* a night. It has been stated upon oath, in the course of Judicial proceedings, that in the progress of the delivery of a Ship, from 10 to 15 Tons of Sugar have been removed by these nocturnal expeditions,

ditions, exclusive of what was obtained by the Lumpers during the day, which was always excessive and uncontrolled wherever Night Plunder had taken place. This indulgence was generally insisted on and granted to Lumpers, to prevent their making discoveries of what they called, the *Drum Hogsheads*, which they found in the hold on going to work in the morning; by which is understood, Hogsheads from which from one-sixth to one-fourth of the contents had been taken out the night preceding.

It was ascertained by evidence at the Old Bailey and the Assizes, that from three Ships discharged in 1797, a quantity of Sugars, equal to the usual weight of 30 hhds. was thus removed in the night, besides excessive daily pillage; by the whole of which a loss was sustained of nearly three thousand pounds to the Planters and the Revenue.

By such iniquitous practices one Sugar-house near the scene of action was wholly supplied, and another in part.—The proprietors were said to be the chief leaders of the gangs, and it was through the medium of Revenue officers, with whom they had been long in habits of criminal intimacy, that Mates, not formerly initiated in this species of villainy, were seduced.

This dreadful system of Nightly Robbery was not confined to Sugar alone. Wherever Coffee made a part of the cargo, the plunder of that article, from its being more accessible, was always enormous.

Rum also was pillaged in considerable quantities.—

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This was obtained by means of a regular system, immediately applicable to the nature of the article.—*Skins and large Bladders, with wooden nozles*, were secretly conveyed on board.—A Bribe was given, as in the case of Sugar and Coffee, to the Mate and Revenue Officers for a Licence to draw off a certain quantity from each cask, for which purpose a pump, usually denominated a *Jigger*, was previously provided, and also *tin tubes* calculated to render the booty accessible in every situation.—By such devices the Skins and Bladders were filled, and large quantities removed to the Houses of the Receivers during the night. All the Ships thus circumstanced, were denominated *Game Ships*.—It is not possible to ascertain what proportion, in a Fleet of 370 or 400 Sail might be in this unfortunate predicament.—The information of persons who had access to know much of what was going forward, state it at *one-fourth*; while others do not suppose that this species of systematic depredation could extend to more than *one-fifth*.—Certain however it is, that the Plunder through this medium was excessive, and went to an extent in Sugar, Coffee, Rum, Pimento, Ginger, and other articles, which exceeds all credibility.

IV. HEAVY-HORSEMEN, OR DAY PLUNDERERS.

Under the description of *Heavy Horse*, is comprised that class of labourers called Lumpers, who are chiefly employed in the lading and discharging of Ships and Vessels in the River Thames.—They consist of a body of about seven hundred men, who, from long habit, have acquired both a knowledge of the means of committing depredations on Commercial Property, and the inclination, wherever opportunities offer, of reducing it to practice.—To this phalanx of delinquents may be added about seven hundred more, who are also occasionally employed in the same line, when the Port is crowded with Ships, and are generally well disposed to follow the example of the more regular Lumpers in acts of pillage and depredation; though they have seldom shared to the same extent in the Plunder which has been obtained.—Those who became the greatest adepts in the art of spoliation, and resorted to peculiar devices for the purpose of extending their resource for booty, were distinguished from the general mass, by the appellation of *Heavy Horse*.—These never failed to provide themselves with habiliments, suited to the purpose of secreting and removing whatever they could pilfer and steal of the Ship's cargo during the discharge.—Many of them were provided with an under dress, denominated a *Jemmy*, with pockets before and behind: also with long narrow bags or pouches, which, when

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filled,

filled, were lashed to their legs and thighs, and concealed under wide trowsers.—By these means they were enabled to carry off Sugars, Coffee, Cocoa, Ginger, Pimento, and every other article which could be obtained by pillage, in considerable quantities.—And as the mistaken parsimony of Ship Owners and Ship Masters, in not victualling these Lumpers on board, furnished them with an excuse to go on shore, in many instances, three times a day, they generally endeavoured to be completely laden each time; more especially in cases where Night Plunder took place, for then (as has already been observed,) they had an unrestrained Licence to Plunder *ad libitum*; and under such circumstances, in the cant language of these miscreants, the Ship was denominated *Game*: and the Contracting Lumper had their labour without pay, by which means he pocketed the whole of the money received for delivering the cargo.—Indeed, it has been clearly established by the testimony of not a few of the parties themselves, that when Ships were* known (from the character of the Mate and Officers, a fact easily ascertained by their connection and intercourse with Receivers,) to be *Game*, interest was made with the Contracting Lumper to be admitted to work on board without any pay, trusting to the chance of Plunder for remuneration; which often enabled the criminal labourers to divide from one to three guineas a-piece every night; while the class of irregular Lumpers, who were not in the same confederacy,

federacy, might share about half as much.—In such cases, the evil example which universally prevailed, contaminated the whole mass, and *Coopers, Revenue Officers,* and the Ship's Crew, all participated in the spoil, while the injured Proprietors were all the while unconscious of the losses they suffered.

Volumes of evidence, upon oath, could be adduced of the shocking lengths to which this pillage extended, and the wide range it embraced; but as the detail would be too tedious, it may be only necessary to mention that it has been ascertained by the voluntary confession of one of the principal leaders, that out of ten Ships discharged in the River Thames, in the Autumn of 1797, the Sugar alone stolen by a particular Gang, although sold near fifty per cent. under its real value, produced no less than 3972*l.*

The plunder thus obtained was not, like the nightly depredations, confined to a particular class of ships. It extended in a greater or less degree to every ship, without exception, from the West-Indies. Where extreme vigilance was exercised by the Ship-master or Mate, the loss was of course greatly diminished. Where no extraordinary attention prevailed, which was generally the case with the major part of the Ships, the pillage was always *considerable*, while in the *Game-ships* it was *excessive*. This state of the case does not rest on vague information. It is confirmed by the evidence of those who were in a situation, for a great length of time, to witness the

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the whole of the iniquitous practices which prevailed in the discharge of the Fleets from the West-Indies.(a)

The Lumpers however, do not appear to be the only class of delinquents who have profited by the system of depredations which has been explained, since no inconsiderable portion of the pillage fell to the share of

V. JOURNEYMEN COOPERS.

The labour of this class of Mechanics being necessary to repair casks and packages, which have suffered injury in the stowage; about four hundred are supposed to be employed in different vessels under discharge, when the Port is crowded. A large proportion of these men were accustomed to convey on shore considerable quantities of *Sugar, Coffee,* and other articles, on leaving West-India ships after they quitted work in the evening; and they have been even known to break hogsheads wilfully to obtain plunder, when it was not accessible from the general bad condition of the cargo. It has also been understood, that they were even permitted to take greater liberties than the Lumpers, and to pillage larger quantities, as they were seldom challenged or restrained, while on some occasions it was customary to check the rapacity of the Lumpers.(b)

(a) For the classes and number of these Labourers, denominated Lumpers, and the probable proportion of the corrupt to the honest see *post* Chapter IV. (Div. 4.)

(b) For the probable number of this class who may be considered as Delinquents see *post* Chapter IV. (Div. 6.)

VI. WATERMEN.

In all large Societies, more especially among the lower ranks of mankind, there is generally a certain proportion of *impure morals* and *loose conduct*.—Experience has shown in a great many instances, that not a few of the Watermen who seek their living on the River Thames are of this description.^(c)

Wherever they assist in Smuggling transactions, it is well known that the payment they receive is far beyond what is obtained for ordinary labour.—The same is the case with respect to articles pilfered, where they are not themselves immediately concerned.—Whether prompted by idleness, prodigality or avarice, a certain class, who are denominated *Game Watermen*, prefer this species of employment to all others.—Their system has been to begin by offering their services as soon as a Ship arrives, to Smuggle the private adventures of the Officers and Crew.—An acquaintance by this means takes place, and hints are given that they will afford equal facilities in conveying on shore, and also in finding purchasers for, any part of the cargo that can be obtained.—Thus encouraged, the Crews of the vessels are induced to follow the evil examples before them, in adding to the number of the Plunderers.—And where Watermen become their agents, these latter generally enjoy a full moiety of the profit.

(c) For an estimate of their numbers see *post* Chap. IV. (Div. 7.)

In all West-India Ships, where Plunder was likely to be obtained, several of this class were accustomed to assemble with their boats round the Bows and Quarters, ready to receive bags and parcels of stolen articles, with which, in consequence of a preconcerted plan, they immediately rowed on shore and secured the booty.—In every instance where they were not themselves the actual thieves, they were able and alert auxiliaries; and in a course of years previous to the establishment of the Marine Police, obtained very large sums by the assistance they thus afforded to every class of Depredators on the River.

A Ship-Master who had been a stranger in the River, finding himself beset by a gang of audacious Lumpers, who insisted on carrying away Plunder in spite of all his exertions to prevent it, while he was engaged upon deck in searching these miscreants, a barrel of Sugar (his private property) which stood in the cabin, was in the course of a few minutes, emptied and removed in bags through the cabin windows, under which a Waterman with his boat lay to receive it, and got clear off without discovery, to the surprize of the Captain when he returned to his cabin.

In the various ramifications of this extensive and nefarious system, the next in order of the criminal auxiliaries were a class of low and miserable beings, who are accustomed to Grub in the River at low water for old Ropes, Metals and Coals; and from

that circumstance generally were known by the appellation of

VII. MUD-LARKS.

In all cases where any West India or other Vessel under discharge was known to afford a resource for Pillage, and was from that circumstance denominated a *Game Ship*, these Grubbers were accustomed to prowl about in the Mud under her Bow and Quarters, for the purpose of receiving from the Lumpers, and others who were employed in the delivery, bags and handkerchiefs of Sugar, Coffee, and other articles, which they conveyed to the houses and shops of the Receivers, according to the plan which had been preconcerted by the confederates in this general conspiracy.—And as the receptacles for the Plunder, conveyed in this manner, were seldom at any great distance from the River, they were enabled to make many trips in the course of a tide.—It has been also a practice with these Mud-Larks to prowl about in the vicinity of the Dock Gates, under pretence of Grubbing for Nails; but the principal object is to receive sheets of Copper, and Copper Nails, which are thrown to them by artificers and labourers on the stages, with whom they divide the booty.

VIII. RAT-

VIII. RAT-CATCHERS.

The ingenuity of men, devoid of the principles of moral rectitude, is ever fertile in devising the means of acquiring support by criminal expedients.—Among the various classes of delinquents, who have contributed to the removal of Plunder from Ships and Vessels in the River Thames, are to be included a set of individuals who pretend to follow the profession of *Rat-Catchers*.—Many ships being infested with rats—recourse is had to persons who pretend to have a knowledge of the means of destroying them.—They are permitted with this view to go on board in the night to set their traps, and afterwards to visit them at such hours as they choose to prescribe to themselves.—In this situation they become useful auxiliaries to Lumpers and others, who have concealed Plunder in the hold, until a convenient opportunity occurs for removing it, which they generally are enabled to accomplish without suspicion.—It has been said that in some instances, they not only commit depredations themselves, but for the purpose of getting access to different ships, and to increase the demand for their *professional labours*, they have even been accustomed to convey the Rats alive from one ship to another, as a means of receiving payment for catching the same animals three or four times over.

Such were the various devices which had been resorted to, for the purpose of obtaining and conveying

ing away the Plunder from Ships and Vessels, under discharge, in the River Thames.—This system however, extensive as it appears to have been, did not comprise the whole of the mischief; since it is known that the Cargo was no sooner removed into the Lighters, than it became a prey to a new class of River Plunderers, generally denominated

IX. GAME LIGHTERMEN.

This class of aquatic labourers are stiled *Journeymen*.—They comprise a very large body of men, part of whom, it is to be hoped, are not of the criminal fraternity. (*d*)

In addition to the Pillage which these Journeymen Lightermen were accustomed to obtain in the Lighters, in their passage from the Ships to the Quays, and afterwards while they lay for their turn to discharge, they were in the habit of acting as auxiliaries to the Mates, Lumpers, and others, by concealing in their Lockers, *Sugar, Coffee, and other articles*, comprising part of the general Pillage, which they conveyed on shore, in consequence of a previous agreement to receive a certain share of the booty.—The capacity of the Lockers, which are generally about five feet long, and from three to four feet wide,

(*d*) The whole probable amount of their number, and the proportion of Delinquents among them is more fully stated in the 8th Division of the 4th Chapter,

and calculated to hold considerable quantities of goods, not only enables these Lightermen to remove bulky and valuable articles, whether stolen or smuggled, but also to conceal them instantly from public view; by which means whole bags of *Coffee, Ginger, Pimento*, and other articles, including large quantities of *Sugar*, have been frequently conveyed unnoticed from West-India Ships. The stolen property which was thus concealed and locked up; generally remained until the Lighter was discharged of her Cargo, and afterwards until removed to the usual station for empty Craft, off the Custom-house Quay. Suspicion being then at rest, means were found by the assistance of Skiffs to land the Goods, and convey them to the houses of the Receivers.

A respectable Officer of the Customs confirmed what is thus stated to have been the practice. In 1795, he seized 109lb. of Sugar and a bag of Coffee, in the act of being removed from a Lighter by means of a Skiff.—In the same year he seized another bag of Coffee in a similar situation, weighing 78 lb. and a bag of Sugar, weighing 58 lb.

In addition however, to these Partnership Concerns, the Game Lightermen traded to a considerable extent on their own account, and seldom failed to avail themselves of every opportunity that offered, whereby they could abstract a part of the Cargo under their charge; for which purpose they resorted to those various devices in which the minds of men,
in

in a course of Criminal Turpitude, are but too fertile.

Among other contrivances when the Cargo in trust, and other circumstances (such as a good understanding with the Revenue Officer) offer a resource for Plunder, measures are taken for the purpose of losing the tide, that time may be given to effect the object in view. The Lighter is removed to a convenient situation. Casks and packages are opened, and a Skiff attends for the purpose of conveying on shore, in the night, the Plunder which is obtained.

A Lighter having taken on board a cargo of Oil from a Vessel, which had arrived from the British Colonies in America, the Lightermen who had her in charge, wilfully contrived to lose the tide in her way up the River. Having thus obtained time for the nefarious design which they had meditated, they employed it in turning all the Casks with the bungs downwards, with a view to profit by the Leakage which should run into the hold of the Lighter, and under the Cieling. Fortunately the Proprietor, who had suffered much by unaccountable deficiencies on former occasions, was upon his guard.—He attended upon the Quay, while the Lighter was discharged, and his suspicion being excited by the Casks appearing to have been removed from their original position, and discovering a deficiency, his attention was directed to the hold of the Lighter, where perceiving a vast leakage of Oil, he ordered a part of the Cieling to be taken up, and filled no less than 15 Casks with

with the Oil which had thus been purposely abstracted. The Lightermen had the effrontery to claim it as their perquisite, and seemed highly offended at being deprived of it. This discovery however, clearly explained by what means he had been plundered on former occasions.(e)

When Sugars, Coffee, Pimento, and Ginger are thus circumstanced, not a few of the Casks and Packages are reduced considerably in their contents before they reach the Quay, where they are to be discharged.—Of this species of Pillage many instances have occurred, and it has generally been felt as a very serious evil :—not confined to the West-India Trade alone, but *pervading the whole Commerce of the River* :—even Staves and Timber of different kinds have been purloined in this manner.

A case occurred about four years ago, where a quantity of American Staves were stolen from the Cargo of the Lighter, concealed in one of those Lockers, and afterwards disposed of clandestinely at an under price. Logwood and Fustic, and all Dye-woods, have been generally subject to excessive Plunder, both in the Lighters and on the Wharfs, from the ease with which they can be removed. It is not uncommon to throw Logwood and Fustic over board, for the purpose of picking it up when the tide ebbs.

The truth in fact, is, that nothing escapes the

(e) See Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis.

rapacious grasp of these aquatic Carriers; and their ingenuity has ever been on the stretch to devise the means of converting *Pillage* into *Perquisites*.

In spite of the greatest attention on the part of the Master Lightermen, who are generally very respectable, it has been found impossible to control their Journeymen, or to keep them within the bounds of honesty.

While their Lighters are at the Quays, instances have occurred, where the Journeymen have entered into a conspiracy with the Watchman (who, on many occasions, in the throng of the Season, is said to be a man of their own appointment) to plunder their own Lighters for several nights successively, which is the more easily effected, as pretences can never be wanting to go on board at all hours of the night, without exciting the least suspicion, inasmuch as these men belong to the Lighter, and are supposed to be on board for a useful purpose, to watch the tides, when, in point of fact, these visits are actually to commit Depredations.

Having thus traced Commercial Property through all its stages of danger, while moving in transit on the River Thames, it remains now to follow it to the Landing Place: Here it is discovered to be again assailed by an assemblage of banditti who pass by the name of

X. SCUFFLE-HUNTERS.

These are literally composed of that lowest class of the community, who are vulgarly denominated the *Tag-Rag* and *Bobtail*.(f)

When Goods are shipping or landing upon the Quays, they are ever ready to offer their assistance to work as porters by the day or the hour, and they generally come prepared with long aprons, not so much as a convenient habiliment to enable them the better to perform their labour, as to furnish them with the means of suddenly concealing what they pilfer, with which, when obtained, they generally disappear. The number of these Miscreants, who are annually punished by the Lord-Mayor, for pillage upon the Quays, sufficiently demonstrates the extent of the evil; especially when it is recollected, that previous to the Establishment of the Quay Guards by the Marine Police, and during the total want of a competent force upon the Wharfs, not one in fifty who committed acts of Delinquency was punished. The fact is, that the pillage they committed on the Quays was *excessive*, and it will cease to be a matter of wonder, since the general answer of most Vagabonds, to the interrogatory of Magistrates as to their means of subsistence is, that they *work at the water-side*.

(f) Their numbers are estimated in Chap. IV. (Div. 11.)

It is to be lamented, that in developing this wide extended System of Pillage, the Delinquency which attaches to Commercial Property, must be still farther followed, even to

THE WAREHOUSES.

IN these receptacles it might reasonably have been expected, that the danger would have ceased. But here too the evil appears to be equally prominent, and the effect it produces, even more severe, as it applies to Commercial Property; since the loss not only comprises the original value of the Property purloined, but also the Revenue of the Crown, either paid or secured, upon all Merchandise thus deposited.

If the universal admission of all persons engaged in the Trade of the River Thames, as to the deficiencies which are uniformly experienced, far beyond what can arise from natural waste or shrinkage, should not be considered as a sufficient proof of the evil practices which prevail in the Warehouses, recourse might be had to the evidence given before the Committee of the House of Commons, and to the Records of the Courts of Criminal Justice, as an indisputable confirmation of the existence of the evil to a very great extent.

In addition to the evidence which these Documents furnish, specific details have been given upon oath, by persons who have long worked as Labourers in the different Warehouses, which tend in a very eminent

eminent degree to develop the cause of the uniform deficiencies which are discovered, particularly in the article of Sugar.

These details state, that the Plunder in the Warehouses is carried on to a very great extent, and that the chief instruments are the Journeymen Coopers, and, in some instances, the Gangsmen : That as often as these Coopers attend for the purpose of drawing Samples, they are followed by a person who is called a Sweeper, whose duty it is to sweep the sugar from the top of each hogshead, from which samples have been drawn : Each sample generally consists of four or five pounds of Sugar, which is carried off by the Journeyman, supposed to the house of his Master,⁽ⁿ⁾ while nearly an equal quantity generally remains on the head of each hogshead, from which samples have been drawn: this is swept into a basket, and when full conveyed to a general Receiving Hogshead, called a *Devil*, which is placed for that purpose in one corner of the Warehouse, and to which every hogshead or cask deposited in the

(n) By the 13th Regulation of the West India Merchants, at a General Meeting, held on the 27th of April 1790, it is recommended, that sugars be drawn only once, and then for Lotting; and that the quantity then taken be only one pound and a half, in order to furnish two Lotting Samples.—One for the Seller and one for Buyer. By the 15th article, the Wharfingers are desired to inspect the samples occasionally, and to stop all Coopers conveying away Samples, exceeding the weight which is thus allowed, or the number contained in the order for that purpose.

Warehouse is said to contribute more or less—When full, this Devil-Hogshead is removed to the Purchaser, and replaced by another.—There is said to be generally one, and sometimes two of these Receiving Hogsheads in each Warehouse.—If it be discovered, that any one or more Hogsheads weigh one quarter or half an hundred above the landing weight, the overplus is taken out and deposited in the Devil Hogshead. It is asserted to be the practice of the Labourers who work under the Gangsmen, to draw from four to ten pounds of sugar, from as many hogsheads as are accessible, taking care to attend to the moist or dry state of the sugar, so as not to occasion a deficiency, for which the Wharfinger can be rendered accountable. By these various Systems of Pillage, a great aggregate loss is sustained by the West-India Planters and Merchants; which, including the Plunder of the inferior Labourers and Scuffle-hunters, who are occasionally employed in these Warehouses, has been estimated to average, exclusive of *the pound and a half allowed for two samples*, to sixteen pound weight a hogshead, which upon a medium importation of 130,000 hogsheads of sugar, at the present price of sugars, would amount *to about seventy thousand pounds sterling a year!* and this, independent of the Pillage on other articles of the growth and produce of the West India Islands.

According to the evidence of a respectable Revenue Officer, the Plunder of the Warehouses by
Journeyman

Journeyman Coopers, under the pretence of taking samples, is very enormous. He has traced them frequently to the shops of known Receivers, particularly a noted one in St. Mary's Hill, but has been discouraged from following up these detections, from the circumstance of his having found upon one occasion, when directed by the Board of Customs to prosecute a Journeyman Cooper, that he was protected by his Master.

There are several Public Houses in the neighbourhood of Thames-street, to which the Journeyman Coopers resort with their Boards of Sugar.—In these receptacles a kind of market is held, where the small Grocers attend, and by means of fictitious Bills of Parcels cover the stolen Property to their respective houses. A vast deal of Sugar plundered in the Warehouses, and also double samples of Rum are sold in these houses.—The parties who form this criminal confederacy, are said to be great adepts in eluding Justice.—They have established a principle with regard to judicial oaths, affecting the security or tending to the acquittal of their companions in iniquity.—Oaths by which Public Justice may be defeated are called, *Non-compulsive Oaths*, which, although false, are not considered to be of a criminal nature.

It may, perhaps, be pleaded in behalf of some of those who benefit by this enormous pillage, that a considerable proportion, has been sanctioned by cus-

tom, or assumed the feature of a perquisite from the circumstance of the Commercial Body passing it over in silence, and suffering such things to exist: But when to this is opposed the Regulations of the 27th of April 1790, and the subsequent exertions of the Committee of Merchants, it is impossible to consider it in any other light than that of *a bold and audacious System of Plunder* (o)—not to be vindicated or defended upon any ground of right, and contrary to every principle of morality and justice.(p)

Having thus developed the multiplied practices of the different classes of Criminals, whereby Commercial Property in the Port of London, has been a prey to regular and systematic Depredation; it naturally becomes a subject of interesting inquiry, in what manner and to what extent each distinct branch

(o) The 16th Article of the Regulations of the 27th of April 1790, prohibits the allowance of Sweepings or Molasses to the Gangsmen.—Also, Tubs or other receptacles for Sugar or Molasses in the Warehouses, except by order of the Wharfingers, who are desired to take all Sweepings and Molasses under their care, and to sell the same to defray the expence of keeping the Warehouses clean.—This clearly demonstrates, that no perquisite is allowed to any person whatsoever. From what source therefore, do the Emoluments of the Gangsmen arise?—They are said to receive several hundred pounds a year, and yet their wages are only 16s. or 18s. per week.

(p) For further information as to the number of Labourers in the Warehouses, and the proportion of Criminals among them, the Reader is referred to Chap. IV. (Div. 12.)

of Trade and Navigation carried on, to and from the Port of London, has been affected by these noxious and destructive Confederacies. The details however, which relate to this part of the Work, being numerous and extensive, they will form the subject of the succeeding Chapter.