specked carpet of aconites . . . a tuft of snowdrops reflecting the blue of neighbouring chionodoxa . . . croci quite at home amongst sprouting docks, or muscari ringing their bells over the young weeds of spring. The scene is ever-changing, for throughout the year cultivated flowers bloom among the wild growth.

This mixing of garden and wild flowers gives a splendid result, for the rarer flowers have a setting painted gay by Nature, which is surely far more effective than the dismal brown of the well-dug garden bed! And if the blooms are not quite as large as they might have been in other conditions . . . well, does it matter?

But I am rhapsodising about flowers when I should be telling My Lady's early history . . . so let us return to historical facts.

IV

The Smugglers' Walk can still be traced from Sissinghurst woods to the sea. The route passes down the lane, then crosses the orchard by the raised walk, and thence through fields and forests to the marshlands, and so to the coast. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries this route was freely used by smugglers who brought their contraband from the coast to hide it in Sissinghurst woods and the surrounding neighbourhood. Branden, too, was used as a hide.

About 1700 smuggling was a flourishing industry in Kent and Sussex. Smugglers called themselves "free-traders" and, as many of the magistrates were bribed when not active members of gangs, were able to defy the law fairly openly. Invariably, when caught and brought to trial, the magistrates would dismiss the cases. If this were not possible, they pronounced heavy sentences, and then ordered that the prisoners should be taken to Maidstone Gaol. But they always omitted to detail an armed guard to accompany the

cart that conveyed the prisoners, knowing that a rescue would speedily be made.

Men engaged to help in unloading and carrying contraband inland were paid half a guinea a journey, and given smuggled goods up to the value of twenty-five shillings—a very large wage for those days. Artisans and well-to-do craftsmen as well as labourers forsook their professions to join this lucrative business. As the smugglers became more powerful, their numbers rapidly increased, and soon they started to raid outlying farms, torturing and often killing those who offered resistance, or dared to condemn their sabotage. Peaceful residents of the countryside fled to the towns, deserting their homes, and leaving the land idle, before the wave of brigandry that swept the district.

The smugglers of the eighteenth century were as dangerous to the Weald as gangsters are to America to-day. Strangely enough, one of the most lawless and desperate of the Weald smugglers in the eighteenth century was named Jack Diamond. He was concerned in the famous attack on the Custom House at Poole in September, 1747, when the smugglers captured and bore away a cargo of tea that had previously been seized by the revenue officers. Diamond was afterwards caught and hanged, but some of his followers wreaked their vengeance on two men who were wrongly thought to have betrayed him—William Galley and Daniel Chater. These men were seized, and for three days were flogged and cut with knives, after which Galley was buried alive, and Chater was thrown into a disused well, where he was stoned and left to die.

These are typical examples of the atrocities perpetrated by the smugglers, and it is not surprising that law-abiding people lived in perpetual terror. The authorities were incapable of dealing with the banditry that then prevailed and, as so many magistrates were in league with the smugglers, no man knew to whom he could turn for protection, and the country people

were too frightened of the smugglers to expose them. True, regiments were sent from London to the Kentish coast to put down the smuggling, and a few leaders were hanged. But the reprisals that followed were of so heinous a nature that this tended to increase rather than to decrease the menace. By 1747 the smugglers had become a terrifying danger to the Weald and all legal commerce was endangered. In this year the inhabitants of Goudhurst and the neighbourhood formed themselves into a military body known as the "Goudhurst Band of Militia," to protect themselves from the smugglers. This band was led by a man named Sturt, who had previously been in the Army, but was then master of the Goudhurst poorhouse.

At this time, the "Hawkhurst gang," which for long had been the most powerful and ruthless of the smuggling gangs, was led by Thomas Kingsmill, a native of Goudhurst, who, though still in his twenties, had achieved notoriety through his dauntless bravery and callous cruelty. He was as devoid of fear as of pity, and the tortures he inflicted with his own hands were as atrociously cruel as human brain could devise. Yet as a leader he had masterly force, and compelled obedience from his gang. He had been the ringleader of the attack on Poole Custom House, as well as of many other notorious raids. As a native of Goudhurst, which is five miles north of Sissinghurst, he was well acquainted with the land round Branden, and often brought his contraband inland by the Smugglers' Walk. The owners of the farm at that time were undoubtedly in his pay, if not active members of his gang.

When Kingsmill heard of the formation of the Goudhurst Militia he was filled with rage, and waylaying one of the members tortured him into revealing the intentions of the band. He then sent the wretched man back to Sturt, with a message that he would attack Goudhurst on a named day, and burn the town

to the ground, after killing the inhabitants for daring to arm themselves against him.

True to his word, Kingsmill attacked at the stated time. But Sturt had acted on the warning, and, having sent the women and children out of the town, had entrenched the militia round the church, with the best marksmen at the windows and on the tower. Kingsmill had a gang of some hundred and fifty desperadoes with him, but their repeated attacks on the church were beaten off by the fire of the defenders. When four smugglers had been killed and a large number wounded, the remainder fled. The militia pursued them and some were caught and later hanged. Kingsmill escaped, but was captured in the following year, and hanged at Tyburn on April 26, 1749. His body was hung in chains at Goudhurst Gore.

After the Battle of Goudhurst, the forces of the law became more active in the suppression of smuggling. A regiment of Dragoons was stationed at Hythe, and parties were sent out to scour the countryside for members of the Hawkhurst and other gangs. Thus the towns and villages obtained protection, and the menace of smugglers rapidly ceased. Yet though the banditry ended, smuggling continued to flourish on the Kent–Sussex coast for many years.

Early in 1800 the owner of Branden was the possessor of a number of horses, which were stabled in a barn, long since demolished, near the Smugglers' Walk. From this man's great-grandson I learned that frequently the horses would be taken away during the night, to be returned to the stables some three nights later, when a barrel of brandy or rum would always be found with them. Evidently at this period smugglers were far more gallant than their predecessors had been, and paid for their "loans."

The quaint lie of the Smugglers' Walk lends a most enchanting view from many angles, but never does it look more beautiful than upon a moonlit night. Then

it takes a quite fantastic form, for pools of silver lie amongst the shadows on the banks, and mysterious wells of drenching blackness float round about the trees.

I love to watch this bank by night, and think of days gone by. And often I linger by my lattice window, gazing down upon the Smugglers' Walk, and visualise a silent cavalcade of hoof-padded horses and men alert for any sound, with Kingsmill at their head, cautiously tracing their way to Sissinghurst woods, with rich store of ill-gotten goods.