Not guilty

Customs Officers are quite tolerant these days, but they can still stop you when you are going through the Green Channel and have nothing to declare. Even really honest people are often made to feel guilty. The hardened professional smuggler, on the other hand, is never troubled by such feelings, even if he has five hundred gold watches hidden in his suitcase. When I returned from abroad recently, a particularly officious young Customs Officers clearly regarded me as a smuggler.

‘Have you anything to declare?’ he asked, looking me in the eye.

‘No,’ I answered confidently.

‘Would you mind unlocking this suitcase please?’

‘Not at all,’ I answered.

The Officer went through the case with great care. All the thing I had packed so carefully were soon in a dreadful mess. I felt sure I would never be able to close the case again. Suddenly, I saw the Officer’s face light up. He had spotted a tiny bottle at the bottom of my case and he pounced on it with delight.

‘perfume, eh?’ he asked sarcastically. ‘You should have declared that. Perfume is not exempt from import duty.’

‘But it isn’t perfume,’ I said. ‘It’s hair gel.’ Then I added with a smile, ‘It’s a strange mixture I made myself.’

As I expected, he did not believe me.

‘Try it!’ I said encouragingly.

The Officer unscrewed the cap and put the bottle to his nostril. He was greeted by an unpleasant smell which convinced him that I was telling the truth. A few minutes, I was able to hurry away with precious chalk marks on my baggage.