

The Skipper's Masquerade

(Concluded from page 8.)

some bickering. The completed picture doubled up the cook, while Nat gave way to uncontrolled mirth. With his jack knife, Nat fashioned a hat-pin from a piece of stick, and after three attempts to run it through the skipper's head as well as the hat, attempts which called forth language of a special kind from the victim, Nat was satisfied with his handiwork, and suggested moving towards the brig.

The little procession started. A group of small boys left their paddling to join, and a fox terrier accompanied with his presence and his yelping. This brought other dogs on the scene, with their respective owners. Dogs and men seemed to find something strangely exhilarating in the spectacle.

"Lean on me and put your 'and over your beard. It's alright," assured Nat. "We look like man and wife out for the day!"

The cook not to be outdone said, "I'll call you ma!" And gave the disguised man a dig in the ribs, and received in return a whack over the ear, which caused him to see and say many things. Along the parade by way of the Beach gardens, they made their way to the river side and the quay, accompanied by a gathering crowd whose joy increased at each step. School boys regarded it as a new departure in the game of hare and hounds. Friends of many years, stopped Cutting from time to time, and put the question to him squarely as to why he masqueraded in that attire. A policeman remonstrated with him, and had his helmet knocked off by the crowd, who would not have their pleasure interrupted. The skipper's walk became a trot, then a double. Men who could not leave their job, entered into the fun by casting what were meant to be languishing glances at him. A blind man who stood near the boat landing, forgot straightway his infirmity and his occupation, and deserted his post to join the throng that went laughing along. He brandished his stick and officered the throng, happy for once in his life. The humbled man marked him for future reference.

NAT and Charlie stuck nobly to their chief, the latter from time to time putting out a leg which brought many unsuspecting citizens to the ground. Near Battison's works a grimy coal heaver paused for a moment, gazed at the scene, then entering into the fun of the thing tried to snatch a kiss from Cutting, to the gratification of his black faced companions. The distracted skipper swore loudly; breaking away from his dusky lover, he gathered up his skirts and ran.

A roar of greeting came from the Anchor Inn, where a crowd had gathered to discuss his death. The sudden change from the tragedy to comedy intoxicated some of the men and women. A blue jacket rushed out of the bar, seized Cutting by the waist, held him in close embrace and began to foot it bravely to the tune of a barn dance whistled by a companion.

Nobbs the policeman made two mistakes, he drank another man's beer in his excitement, and then picked up a fresh pint placed for the perspiring blue jacket, thinking it was his own. He had swallowed the beverage before the barmaid could tell him the fact, then he said it was her fault.

Dogs barked joyously; the tug whistled shrilly and continuously. A red whiskered captain of a collier steamer, in ordinary circumstances a sober, staid seaman, came to the side of his bridge and wafted amorous kisses with both hands. By a superhuman effort of the pilot the steamer only bumped a dredger, instead of running her down. A gold laced harbour master remonstrated, but the red whiskered captain had abandoned himself to the whole enjoyment, and he did an impromptu dance.

A couple of firemen shouted hilarious enquiries and advised Cutting to lift his skirts a little higher.

"You are showing all your ankles,

Angela," a mate warned him.

With rankling, accumulating fury, the skipper ran on.

The owner had arrived, he was holding solemn conclave with the mate, assisted by some idlers, when an exclamation from Mr. Murray caused him to look in the direction of the quay.

"Why, it's the skipper! is it not, Mr. Murray?"

Words failed the mate but he made a gesture of assent.

"Has the man taken leave of his senses?" he demanded angrily.

Then the humour of the situation seized him. "Here, boy, quick," he called to a youngster, "here's a penny, run and tell my missus to come here, she's in a pony cart, just down the lane, you stay and hold the pony."

The crew received their chief with a rousing cheer, as he leaped upon the bulkhead of the brig, his skirts over his knees, the beehive hat still clinging nobly to his head, and his face aflame with rage.

The owner had intended to be stern, instead he fell heavily against the cat head where he had gone to get a better view, and leaning over that projecting piece of timber, he confided his sense of joy to the anchor. Then with tears in his eyes he helped his wife on board, and they made their way to the poop, where the skipper was answering all questions in nautical terms containing many damnatory clauses.

What England Did

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code that gentlemen, and the nations they represent, set for themselves; and this was taken into account. She did, indeed, decline to make an agreement which would bind her to neutrality under all conceivable circumstances; but she was willing to make a declaration that none of her agreements with other powers had any designs hostile to Germany, and that she herself had no hostile intentions, and would cherish none. Her previous attitude towards Germany was sufficient guarantee of this declaration; but, lest that should not be enough, she laboured strenuously to avert war between Russia and Austria over the question of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1911; and she commenced negotiations for the settlement of questions of mutual interest, such as the Bagdad railway. These were conducted to a final arrangement which conceded to Germany many very substantial advantages.

EVEN that cheerless pour-parler did not deter England from making further efforts for an agreement. The British Government offered to sign the following declaration:

"The two powers, being naturally desirous of securing peace and friendship between them, England declares that she will neither make, nor join in, any unprovoked attack upon Germany. Aggressive Germany is not, and forms no part of any treaty, understanding, or combination to which England is now a party, nor will she become a party to anything that has such an object."

Still, that was not enough for Germany. She held to her aim of dealing a fatal blow to any friendly understanding between England and her friends of the entente; and she demanded a pledge of British neutrality in the event of Germany being at war. That pledge, for reasons already stated, England would not give; and so the negotiations failed once more.

England now made her last effort for accommodation and arrangement. In 1912 and 1913 Mr. Churchill made his famous proposal for a naval holiday. If, in any year, Germany decided to relax her shipbuilding programme, England would do the same; by which device, as he put it, relief might be obtained "without negotiations, bargaining, or the slightest restriction upon the sovereign freedom of any power." Germany, with a steadily growing disdain, made no response to the suggestion.

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