

Kerrigan's Christmas Sermon.

By L. FRANK TOOKER.

Knocking gently on the slide of the companionway, Kerrigan, at the sharp call of the captain, descended slowly into the cabin, with his cap in his hand. "Seeun' 's the b'ys 's gown' ashore, sir," he began in his caressing Irish speech, "I thought I'd like to tak' the run meself, sir. Me shoes is that bad, me toes is blushin' from the shame av their barefaced immodesty." He held up a huge foot, disclosing a shoe near to dissolution. "So, sir—"

"All right, all right," grunted the captain. "How much do you want?"

"Only a thrille, sir," Kerrigan answered, "fo me shoes, an' a shirt or two, an' some socks, seun' 's these is kapun' company wid me shoes in exposun' me fate. Tin dollars will do, sir, ef ye plaze, an' thank ye kindly."

It was half-past six and a December evening, and only a few lights were flickering along the water-front of the Southern city. The bark lay off in the stream, tugging at her chain. She had reached her anchorage too late that afternoon to haul into her berth, and the eyes of every man aboard were circled with dusky rims from their hard, sleepless battle with a three days' gale outside.

"It beats me why you boys want to go ashore to-night," the captain grumbled good-naturedly, as he leaned far back to take his wallet from his trousers' pocket. "Haven't slept much or any for two nights, have you? Haven't scarcely been dry for a week, either; and now you want to go carousing about town all night! Huh!"

Kerrigan shook his head in gentle sympathy, putting himself outside the captain's depreciation.

"Ut's the trut' ye're sayun', cap'n—God's trut'; but ut's the young blood av thim, sir, thot's cryun' for the fale av the land, an' will not let thim rist. But I'll kape an eye on thim, sir, an' hustle thim aboard in the airy avenun'. I've no mind to stand battun' me eyes on the strates, waitun' for a lot av callow b'ys, while me bunk is a-callun' me. Thrust to me to bring thim back airly an' sober, sir."

He took the money the captain gave him, and backed deferentially away, went slowly up to the deck and over the side of the vessel into the yawl, where his three companions on shore leave waited impatiently for him. Two of the crew who were to bring the yawl back sat listlessly on the thwarts, yawning sleepily.

As he sank to his place in the stern, he took his pipe from his pocket and proceeded to fill it.

"Now pull, ye devils, pull!" he said genially, as the boat splashed away toward shore. "Ut's me thot the ol' mon's putt over ye, to kape ye out av harm's way an' fetch ye off airly. 'Tom,' says he, 'get thim b'ys aboard as soon as they do be gettun' the kinks out av their legs. Ut's young an' tinder they are, an' I'm thrustun' to yer discretion.' 'Tis a sacred thrust, sir,' says I. 'Ut's faather an' mither an' all I'll be to thim, sir—the dirty sons av say-cooks.'"

Frithjof, the big-shouldered, silent Swede, looked over his shoulder and grinned, while the eyes of Nicolao, the Cape Verd islander, sparkled as he murmured: "Massa Kerrigan, nussa-maid for lit' child'en; bes' o' ref'ence." But Sam, the young New-Englander, scoffed back:

"Father and mother! And what do you know of that, you bog-trottin', back-door Moses, found on the steps of a windy mornin'?"

"A Moses, is ut?" answered Kerrigan. "'Tis the thrue word; for ut's me that will be i'adun' ye out av the Egypt yon." The yawl bumped against the landing-stairs, and he began to cough—a pumped-up sort of spasm that would not have deceived a child. "An' the dust av ut!" he groaned, as he climbed to the wharf. "Holy Mither! the Agypt dust av us, an' not an oasus in sight!"

The oases were found later in satisfying number. The swinging doors that opened to them had swung so often before their joyous progress that as the clocks of the city were striking nine

they came, in the pride of their strength, to the glittering front of one for the third time, only to have the doors slammed and locked in their faces.

The four looked at one another in grieved, incredulous surprise. Then Kerrigan's brown, good-natured countenance flattened itself against the glass of the door, and he tapped gently on the pane with his huge, tar-stained fingers.

"Whisht, me sons," he said to the grinning attendants inside; "the joke's on ye. 'Tis over-airly for the closun'. Ye're thot cross-eyed ye do be seun' the clock over yer shoulder an' i'adun' ut backwards. 'Tis nine o'clock, an' ye think ut a quarter past twelve. Turn yer backs to ut, an' pre-tind ye're comin' whin ye're gown'; 't will be aisier for ye." He shook the door with a touch of impatience.

"Open, I say! Are ye—"

An important-looking, round little man came strutting up, and jerked down the shades, stopping Kerrigan's speech like a blow in the face. He looked at the door blankly and then at his companions.

"Ye're not wantud, lads," he said harshly. "'Tis for yer betthers. 'Tis mistook ye are for naygurs an' little yellow min."

Now a sailor's mind is trained to the meeting of sudden emergencies with incredible swiftness, and with a unanimity that would have been impossible in landmen, the four seamen, without parleying, met the obstacle in their path.

Two doors below, a row of new buildings was going up, with lumber piled at the edge of the sidewalk. Hot with the insult, as they thought it, they hurried thither, seized a floor-beam, and swung back to the closed door. The next moment it fell inward before their battering-ram, with a jingling of glass and splintering of wood.

Out of the uproar of the room the little round man came, furious to confront the four. Kerrigan gave the sign to his shipmates, and the beam dropped to the floor with a crash that sent the man into the air with a leap that he probably had not equalled for years.

"Me card," said Kerrigan, smiling sweetly and pointing to the beam; "putt ut in yer card-resaver. I'm the descendant av kings in me own right, but not too proud to know ye."

Choking with rage, the little man turned to his waiters, crying, "Call the police! Do you hear? Call the police!"

"The police!" echoed Kerrigan. "'Tis nadeless an' too great an honor. I'm travelun' incognatho, as we say,—which is our custhom among infariors,—an' shunnun' the poms an' thrappun's av courts. Let the police be; they do be overworked an' too dom extraneous."

Two white-aproned waiters slipped past him, making for the door; but Frithjof blocked the opening, with Sam and Nicolao at his shoulders. All the Swede's normal good-nature was gone. Flushed with anger at what he considered an insult, his face had an ugly look. Nicolao was smiling, but he stood like a cat ready to spring, and the New-Englander's eyes were dancing with the joy of battle. Behind them, the watching crowd in the street momentarily increased, and it shouted with ecstasy of joyous expectation when two policemen pushed through the door, shouldering the huge Swede from their path.

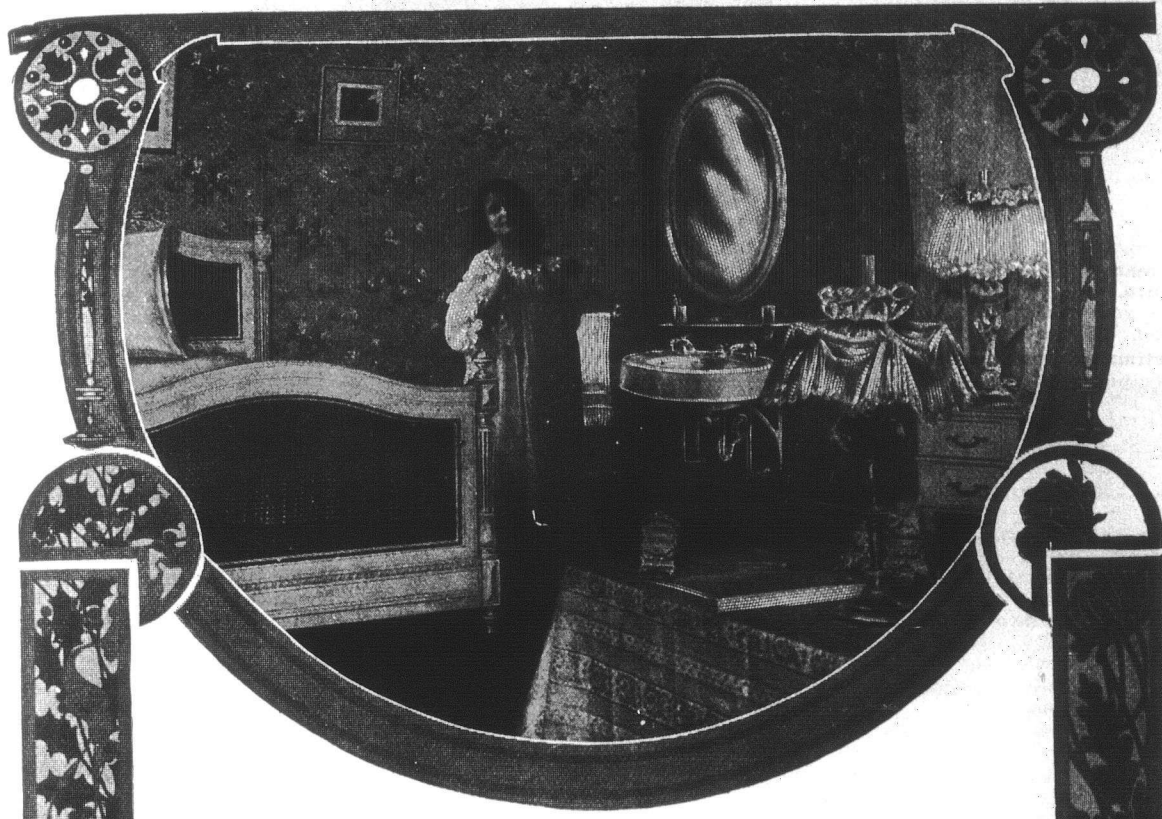
Now Frithjof was not a man to be shouldered when in a rage, and discretion was not his foible. Like the arms of a windmill, his great paws swung wide and crashed down upon the heads of the guardians over the peace, smashing their helmets over their eyes.

Kerrigan, turning, saw it all, and the faces of the officers before they went into eclipse.

"Naygurs!" he roared, with a beautiful simulation of horror. "They're naygurs! The shame av ut!" Then he rushed joyfully into an entangling alliance with his friends.

It was an unequal struggle, and the officers were already down when some excited creature turned out the lights. In the sudden darkness Kerrigan kept his head.

"'Tis the fanally," he whispered hoarsely to his shipmates. "Kape together, but run!"



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