

THE MER-MONKEY.

BY THE EDITOR.

WHILE visiting a jeweler of New York not long ago, I was shown the photograph of one of his recent works. It was a picture frame in the shape of an old-fashioned Dutch sailing vessel, the large sail affording sufficient space for the canvas; and in front of the ship's deck was a little life-boat turning on a hinge, underneath which might be seen two tiny silver monkeys. Mr. Dayton, the jeweler, whose ambition and delight it is to make unique and symbolical pieces of ornament, told me in explanation of this curious design the following story, which in my own words, I here faithfully repeat with full details, with his assurance that in so doing I shall betray no confidence.

Mr. De Lamar, a well-known millionaire of Rochester, who made his wealth mainly in mines, started in life as a poor boy. His home was in Holland and his first significant act consisted in running away and taking passage on a sailing vessel bound for the East Indies, upon which he obtained an engagement as a sailor boy. On his return he brought with him two silver-haired monkeys, of a kind which flourishes in the Sunda Islands. He knew that the captain had strictly forbidden the crew to bring any pets on board, and so he kept them concealed under one of the life-boats on deck.

It chanced, however, that the ship was caught in a terrible gale and one evening the life-boat had been so shaken as to allow one of the little creatures to escape from his prison. The mate happened to see him and, according to the nature of his type, started to chase him around the deck and threw the first heavy object at hand at his unexpected game. The monkey was badly hurt and now lay squealing at his feet. When he picked it up he discovered that its backbone was broken; so half in anger, half in compassion, he at once threw his victim overboard.

In the meantime the storm center came nearer, the hurricane

became more ferocious every minute, and threatened entire destruction to the ship. The crew worked hard to avoid disaster and the captain himself had been on deck for many hours. He had just retired leaving the first mate in charge, when he was suddenly disturbed by the latter who rushed into the cabin and threw up his hands with every sign of terror, shouting, "Captain, we are all lost! The little monkey has come back." The captain thought at first that his officer had lost his reason, but followed him at once on deck to see what could have caused such excitement. Here the mate explained to his mystified chief that a few days before he had killed a little monkey, broken his backbone, and thrown him overboard; and that now he had swum through the stormy seas back to the vessel. Thereupon he pointed to a silver-haired monkey (the remaining pet of our sailor boy which also had escaped from beneath the life-boat) and swore that it was a spirit, who in anger had brought on the hurricane to punish the ship for his own crime.

The captain was greatly affected by the story, even though he did not share all the superstitions of his subordinate. He made an investigation and the sailor boy confessed he had brought the monkey on board, not admitting, however, the double crime of having brought two originally; but, to the surprise of all, the captain did not kill nor take away the pet but turned sharply to little De Lamar saying: "Take good care of the monkey, and if any harm befall him I will hold you responsible."

The sky cleared, the storm passed by, the ship reached Holland without any accident, and our sailor boy brought his monkey home in safety. He continued, however, for some years to follow the sea and several years after the first voyage was again in the East Indies. There it happened that on one beautiful night, he sat on the deck of a vessel where he was a visitor among a jolly circle of old weather-beaten seamen who whiled away their time by telling sailors' yarns. One of the sailors not recognizing the former stowaway boy recorded in his own fashion the story of the little monkey.

He told his astonished audience, that he had been among the crew of the old "Provence of Dreut" on the voyage when the ghost of a monkey came aboard. He told how a stowaway boy had brought a monkey aboard from Java; how the mate, discovering the little creature, had broken its back with a belaying-pin and thrown it overboard; and then, he continued, "the storm grew worse and the little monkey continued to swim after the ship through the wild seas. We could not escape him and after three days he

caught up with us, climbed the rudder chains and came on deck, went to the wheel, pushed away the two sailors who were steering, took the helm into his own hands, and as we all watched in terror we saw the monkey grow bigger and bigger until he turned into an old man with a long white beard who steered the ship out of the storm and then disappeared."

"Strange though the story may be," he concluded, "I can vouch for its truth; for I not only know the mate to whom it happened, but was on the ship at the time and saw the mer-monkey myself."

With what interest Mr. De Lamar listened to the tale, we can easily imagine and I have only to add that he did not spoil the dramatic effect by telling that he himself had reason to know how much of it was true, and how much the imagination and credulity of the old sailor had added.

The psychological part of the development of the story is of great interest for it shows how easily fact and fancy intertwine so as to be indistinguishable except through keen self-analysis and severe critique.