

FURTHER DOINGS OF THE MAJOR.

By F. BLAKE CROFTON.

(Author of "The Major's Big Talk Stories," "The Bewildered Quakers," &c.)

UP THE SPOUT.

"What a spout!" murmured little Bob reflectively.

"Waterspout!" did you say?" asked the Major, looking up from his newspaper.

"No," said Bob; I was thinking *what a spout* that one in Dacotah must have been."

"Pleaso excuse me," said the Major; "I really had no notion of making a silly pun; but the slightest thing always does remind me of waterspouts over since that awful day when I was down in the Maelstrom."

"Down in the Maelstrom!" exclaimed both boys.

"Down in the Maelstrom," repeated Major Mendaxo quietly and distinctly. "I felt a natural curiosity to explore that whirlpool. Besides, I thought that Poe's description of its interior needed to be verified by some thoroughly reliable person. So I availed myself of a friend's offer, and went with him in his yacht to see the midnight sun off the north-west of Norway. Returning, he kindly agreed to aid me in my project of exploring the Maelstrom."

We anchored the yacht a few miles away from the celebrated whirlpool, outside the influence of its suction. I put off in a small boat, connected with the yacht by a stout rope. I had taken care to provide a huge coil of bran new rope, and had seen by inspection that every inch of it was sound. They paid it out from the yacht as I increased my distance, and they were to cease doing so as soon as my boat began to disappear down the outward incline of the Maelstrom. Whenever I wanted to be pulled back I was to hold up a flag. I had little rowing to do, for I presently began to be drawn forward with ever-increasing speed. The motion, which was exhilarating at first, soon grew alarming.

Strange phenomena, too, appeared in the sky. A cloud overhead seemed dancing round and round, and another farther on seemed imitating it. Anywhere else I should have continued gazing at these novel spectacles. Then and there I fancied they were only optical illusions, reflections of the mighty whirlpool underneath.

Soon I was too close to the yawning mouth of the Maelstrom to spare another glance at clouds or horizon. The roar was growing terrific, and the boat was travelling at lightning speed. The rope, it flashed upon me, even now might fail to stand the strain when it should be drawn taut. I repented of my rashness in coming so far, and hastily raised my flag.

They saw my signal in the yacht. In a few seconds I felt a check, and the rushing water from behind began to dash over the stern. Then, with a sound like a groan, the iron staple to which the rope was fastened was dragged out of the wood; and the boat bounded down the outer slope of the whirlpool. Instinctively I threw myself after the retiring rope, in a mad attempt to grasp it. I only succeeded in placing myself some yards behind the boat, in whose wake I was sucked swiftly on to the abyss.

The boat, and I after it, described a few circles round the edge of the chasm without any very perceptible descent. Then the boat began to sink more rapidly, still following the circular eddy of the whirlpool. After a while increasing darkness, added to my own increasing dizziness, hid it from me, and I never saw it again.

I now began to look anxiously for Poe's reflex eddy, which carried his hero back to the light. But I saw no signs of it—it was unfortunately taking a recess that day.

I had given up hope, and the roar from the mysterious depths below had focused my failing senses. Suddenly the twisting tunnel in which I was spirally descending was completely darkened from above. The ocean had apparently closed over me. I was covered with a seething and bubbling mass of waters. My limbs were nearly dragged from their sockets by conflicting floods. I became unconscious. Then came a state of ecstasy. I seemed to breathe again, and be borne on water that was half air. I rather fancied I was dead, but I was quite happy nevertheless. My course was upward, in swift but gentle curves. I felt like Iris floating up a rainbow. Light glimmered and then flashed upon my eyes. A sunbeam sparkled through a hollow pillar of water around which I was floating upwards. It was like the electric light on a fountain in a transformation scene.

Was I dead? I asked myself again; or would I be rudely awakened from a too sanguine dream. I mused complacently on all my good actions in the world below. My musing was not long.

The upward motion ceased. For an instant I floated almost horizontally upon a dense cloud. Then I was whirled downwards on a funnel of vaporous water, like that in which I had mounted to the clouds. But I was on the outside now. I saw the sea below, and caught a glimpse of a vessel hundreds of yards beneath. In another moment I was whirled behind the revolving column of water; but I saw the vessel again every few seconds, and she seemed nearer and larger every time. When she last became invisible I was hardly higher than her topmast, and not much more than a hundred yards from her.

Just then I heard a loud boom, and the water that had buoyed me up yielded beneath me. The liquid column fell, shattered from its summit to its base. I descended in a cataclysm and struck the sea. When I came to my senses I was lying—

("So I should have fancied," whispered Bill.)

On the deck of the yacht, the Major went on, unaware of his oldest nephew's rudeness. "My friend Brown had wrapped me in hot flannel, and was pouring brandy down my throat."

"That was a good shot of ours at the waterspout," he said. "If we had missed it, it would have burst upon us. There were two of them; you went up one, I suppose, and came down the other. You must have sunk pretty deep when that near spout burst; for you were a good ten minutes under water before we picked you up. Hallo, what's that in your hand?"

It was a pretty little shell from the bottom of the sea."

"I should have thought waterspouts were rare visitors in those latitudes," observed Bill, with a slight elevation of both eyebrows.

"Your opinion quite tallies with mine," said Major Mendaxo; "I never saw another thereabouts. And I was not sorry for their absence either; for waterspouts do not always give a fellow a lift just when he wants one."

(To be continued.)

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