

FURTHER DOINGS OF THE MAJOR.

By F. BLAKE CROFTON,

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

A LITTLE GAME OF BLUFF.

"It seems that Pip, the wicked king of Lotoli," said Major Mondaxo, "at first mistook me for a missionary, owing doubtless to my innocent aspect. Now Pip did not like missionaries, for they made him feel uneasy in his mind. In order therefore to get rid of an unpleasant visitor, and amuse himself while doing so, he gave me a choice well calculated to embarrass a divine—to win an eating, sleeping, or talking match—or to die. Murder in his code of morals was a very slight offence, and a little fun connected with it would not make it worse, and might as well be enjoyed as not. His servile courtiers chuckled loudly at what they called the richness of the idea.

Put more exactly, I was to outsleep the champion sleeper of the tribe, outeat the champion eater, out-talk the most abusive of Pip's wives—or be executed on the spot. I chose to sleep, and expressed my choice promptly and cheerfully, for this was part of my game.

'Guess I can sleep some,' I observed—'just a few, as we say in New England. And with your Majesty's permission I'll put a little wager on the svent—my waggon load of beads against your Majesty's diamonds.'

As I made this proposal it occurred to Pip, as he afterwards admitted, that I might not be a missionary after all, and that he had, anyhow, condemned me for an unproved offence. But his enlightenment came too late to save me. His curiosity and covetousness were aroused; and he fancied he had a pretty soft thing.

'Done!' he said promptly—'play or pay.'

I had placed some reliance on a bottle of —'s patent sleeping powder that I had about me. I thought I might put myself to sleep with it, and perhaps swallow some more as often as I awoke, without being observed. But I abandoned the latter idea when I learned that my competitor had slept ten whole days at a stretch! To keep myself asleep for ten days by the aid of drugs I should have to make my slumber perpetual—"to die, to sleep no more," as Dr. Pangloss neatly observed.

By the terms of the bet, then and there agreed upon, my competitor and I were to be asleep in half an hour. This period he employed in gorging himself to repletion.

I spent the first fifteen minutes in carrying a number of blankets and a waterproof tarpaulin from my waggon to the ring where our sleep was to take place in public view. These preparations roused the curiosity of the king.

'What are those things for?' he asked through an interpreter. 'The weather is sultry, and it is the dry season.'

'Yes,' I replied; 'but the rainy season begins in less than two months. If I neglected these simple precautions, I might be awakened by rheumatic pains within six weeks.'

I then rolled myself up in several blankets, with the tarpaulin outside, and laid my head on a bundle of clothes under the shade of an umbrella that I had planted in the ground. The king's eyes, I noticed, were very wide open as I closed mine. Having taken a dose of my sleeping powder, I was sound asleep in three minutes.

In a very short time I was awakened by a violent shaking. The umbrella was gone, and the sun was streaming on my eyes. The interpreter, who stood beside me, had applied this test to make sure that I was really sleeping. He looked terribly hot, for I had not opened my eyes at once when I awoke. I thought a little more exercise would do him good.

'The king wants to know what you will take and cry quits,' he whispered.

Pip did not evidently understand the great American game of bluff.

'Seeing it is his gracious Majesty,' I said, 'I will take the biggest diamond and a free pass home, and call it off.'

'It is a go,' said the interpreter; 'but mind this is your own proposal, for his Majesty is very scrupulous about keeping his agreements.'

'He is willing to take the *ten* biggest diamonds and a free pass,' were the words in which he misrepresented my proposition to the king; for this interpreter was an American freed-man, and had been a coloured member of the South Carolina Legislature soon after the war. And in that learned assembly he had picked up the following poetical truth:

One and one give us two—
One for me and one for you.'

Before I left the capital of Lotoli I had to witness the execution of my unhappy competitor. It was not only my extensive preparations that had made the king tremble for his diamonds, but also the fact that his man could not come to time at the beginning of the match. The more he tried to sleep the more he shivered, for at the last moment Pip had very imprudently threatened to smother him if he failed to win. It seldom pays to murder sleep.

Perhaps I ought to mention that the interpreter who was so fond of simple addition and division nearly fell a victim to a similar misconception of his character, when he first appeared at Lotoli. For, before he took to politics, he had been a waiter in a Southern hotel, and was ever afterward given to wearing a white and clerical-looking tie, which he found as good as an introduction to fresh and credulous strangers. Pip, who possessed a certain sense of humour, learning from its wearer that the said tie was named a white choker, observed that a missionary's garment should be true to its name, and forthwith ordered the new-comer to be throttled with his own cravat. But the profane nature of the terms applied by the condemned man to his executioner entirely dispelled the king's suspicion as to his clerical character, and procured him an immediate pardon."

(To be Continued.)

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