

FURTHER DOINGS OF THE MAJOR.

By F. BLAKE CROFTON.

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

EXTREMES MEET.

"The Snake Swamp was unusually still," said the Major, who had been teased into telling a snake story; "there was not a sound nor a sign of life till I was almost through it. Then I saw what in the gloom I had thought the fallen trunk of a tree open at the near end and disclose four fearful fangs and an abysmal throat.

Now I understood the silence of the place. I had read how the South American jungle becomes a solitude at the coming of a box-constrictor, when the great snake wakens from its state of torpor, and how every bird of the air and beast of the field flees from its presence.

For a moment I was incapable of action; and before that moment was over I was caught in a python's folds, and saw fierce eyes glaring down into mine. If that tremendous coil were tightened around me, I knew that I might check my luggage for the undiscovered bourn.

One becomes tolerably calm when fairly caught by a wild animal or serpent. Dr. Livingstone in the clutches of the lion felt no fear or pain, as well as I remember, but only a sort of numbness. And in this crisis of my own fate, as I saw the great python's tail in close proximity to his mouth, I thought calmly of the proverb, 'Extremes meet.'

I had always recognized the wisdom of this proverb, and I recognized it then. I grasped the snake's tail and pushed a yard or two down his yawning jaws. Neither extreme seemed to shrink from the contact; the mouth was not unused to swallowing snakes, and to the tail the process of being swallowed was novel and soothing; for serpents seldom bite their prey, they lubricate it and suck it down.

With such a long and cold-blooded creature, I calculated that it would take probably over half a minute before the sensations of his tail could be conveyed to his head and render him conscious that he was committing suicide. And it would take a longer time for him to disgorge several yards of his tail. So it was with some sense of security that I slipped out of his loosening embrace and wended my weary way homewards. Whether the python swallowed himself to the bitter end, or threw up his tail, or died of indigestion or of disappointment, I did not pause to ascertain.

In that short squeeze my hair turned quite white."

"Why, it's nearly black now!" cried the boys.

"Yes," said Major Mendaxo; "in a day or two a worse fright made it dark again. Indeed, with my foils and sorrows and dangers, my hair has seldom kept the same colour long."

A SELFISH LITTLE NIGGER.

"Was that last story of yours founded on fact, uncle?" asked Bob.

"Why, of course, you little villain, it was just as true as that I was twelve years in Africa."

"But I thought no such big snakes had been discovered, except in ancient times," said Bill.

"They may have been discovered lots of times, but they have a bad habit of swallowing their discoverers," rejoined the Major. "In ancient times it was different, for some big snakes having imprudently swallowed men in armour and died of indigestion, the rest were probably scared of eating human beings. To-day I believe serpents prefer negroes to us whites because we wear too many clothes—just as we prefer eating our oranges peeled. And this quite accounts for the fact that I have been able to report more first-class snakes than any of the negroes among whom I lived, though there is no telling how many big serpents they may have discovered."

I once came upon a negro boy who had just had the misfortune to discover a python. When I first saw him he had begun to explore the interior of the reptile. I had fancied serpents always crushed the bones of their prey; but this one had excused the little nigger this part of the performance seeing he was so small and tender. The snake had commenced with his feet and had already got outside his legs when I came up. The little cuss wanted me to take him out at once; but I thought I would let him go down to his arm-pits at least, in the interests of science.

Besides, I was at the time African correspondent to *The Telegram*, which the sarcastic newsboys called *The Tell-a-Cram*. My correspondence had been declined by another American paper, *The Daily News*. The editor thought I was too fanciful or too realistic or not realistic enough (I quite forget which) for his journal, which diurnally treated its readers to the minute horrors of a true hanging, and which the sarcastic newsboys called *The Daily Nose*. But I cherished no vindictive feelings against the *News*. Indeed, I generally carried some copies of it about me, as a safeguard against wild beasts. There were some things in the editorial columns of that paper that no living creature could swallow. Here was a chance for an 'interview' that might never occur again, and so I got out my note-book and invited the little Ethiopian to report his sensations at every stage of the proceedings. But the ugly young beggar would not give me the first bit of information. He only shook and shook, and roared and roared, and called out 'Save me! Save me! Save me!'

I begged him to let me record his feelings for the benefit of education. I told him the doctors would be charmed to know whether he was in much pain, and if so, whether it became greater or less as he went further down. I tried to flatter him by saying his remarks would appear in *The Telegram*, and be read before the Vivisectionists Society. But it was no use—the young scamp was too blarneyed selfish. He only went on, 'Oh, save me boss! Save me now!'

I explained to him that the python was already half torpid, and that, as

it could not possibly bite me, I could cut it in two whenever I chose. But he never heeded or stopped his cries:—

'Save me now, boss! Do!'

Finding a certain sameness about these remarks of his, I cut the interview and the snake short at once. As I bisected the reptile it gave the youngster an extra squeeze, and ran its fangs into him; but he soon recovered from the injury, and felt better than he ever did in his life.

In fact, the little coward never had the chills afterwards. He shivered so much when he was inside the snake that he shook out all the shakes that were in his system."

(To be Continued.)

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