

John Topp, Pirate.

By Weatherby Chesney
and Alick Munro.

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(Continued).

As the party drew up in the open Willie Trehalion saluted them with a shrill mocking laugh, which had the effect of making the rank and file turn round as if preparing to bolt. But the two officers dealt such hearty buffets right and left with the flat of their swords that the fellows had evidently thought that the danger of being run through by the fiery Don Miguel was a more pressing one than that of being devoured by a mere stone serpent. They stood their ground, therefore; the five arquebusers unslinging their crutches and blew their matches, the two bowmen fitted an arrow apiece, and the rest crammed their bonnets well down over their foreheads and waited for they knew not what.

"Come up, good senores all," croaked the serpent's grating voice, when Don Miguel gave the word for advance. "Come up and defile this holy court and commit any indignity that pleases you. Come and build your signal fires on my wall and make my stones ring with your impious cursing. Ha, ha, ha! Pluck up your faint hearts, caballeros. I will not hinder while you work your wicked wills. Batter down these stones and hurl them into the sea if you wish. I will not harass you in the work, but afterward—then—ha, ha, ha!"

The serpent said no more, but the pause and the wild yell of laughter were sufficiently suggestive.

The Spaniards stood for a moment aghast. He of the bassinet was apparently the most scared of the lot, for his bandy legs shook visibly under him and his sword clattered to the ground as he clasped his hands and began to call upon the saints to shield him. Had he been in command every man would have used his heels as soon as his quivering muscles gave him strength to do so. But Don Miguel was different. He stormed, he cursed, he ground his yellow teeth, he all but foamed at the mouth in his frenzy of rage, and yielding to the greater terror of the two each man stood his ground.

"Miserable coward!" yelled Don Miguel at his lieutenant. "What do you fear?"

"The devil," said the bandy legged man, taking off his bassinet and wiping the perspiration from his brow with the sleeve of his doublet.

"The devil, you poor fool! Where's your wit? Is not the devil clever beyond all human learning?"

"Aye, surely. We believe so," replied the other, crossing himself devoutly.

"Good! Then how do you account for his speaking such villainous Spanish as came from up yonder? Full half of the words were not understandable, and in those which did bear some faint resemblance to Castilian there was, or my ears deceive me, a strong flavor of the barbarous English tongue. Bah! Don Sancho, you're little short of a poltroon."

"Hard words, Don Miguel, and I may call upon you to prove them," said the other sullenly.

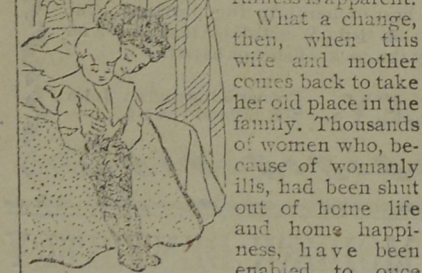
"Do it then. My sword is ever ready to back up my tongue. But first follow me on this steen, and if I see you be-

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have as a man against the English devil whom I will unearth for you perhaps I will take back part of what has been said. Forward!"

And up they came with all their following. The serpent sent down a perfect rain of warnings and curses, but they were not to be stopped again.

"Well," said I, when from sheer lack of breath Willie Trehalion had ceased his outcry, "they've got the better of us now, I fancy. Don Miguel will soon find the entrance to our snail's home. What are we to do, Willie?"

"There's two ways o' getting at a snail's body, Master Topp," replied Willie sententiously. "One is by boiling the shell, the other is by crushing it. Don Miguel can do neither."

"A pinch of salt or a whiff of smoke will make him show his horns."

"Don Miguel bain't able to get nigh us to plant the salt—leastways I pities the man as tries to come up them stairs, an as for the reek they may build as big a fire as they like below, but we shall always be able to get fresh wind at the chimney top here."

"And with our store of bananas we can stand a considerable siege on short rations? Exactly so. But I was not thinking of our own skins. I was figuring out how we might manage to trap Don Miguel, and now I think I see a way. You noted a small dark cell just at the foot of the stair leading up here? Well, my plan is this: You stay where you are, and I'll go below and hide in that cell. Don Miguel will enter—if he doesn't come of his own accord, I'll venture to send him a hail of invitation—he will pass me and go up the stair. Then I shall step out and deal with all who try to follow, and as two men cannot advance abreast it will be an easy enough task. As for the senior commandant, we have him between two swords and ought to be able to take him alive."

"Master Topp," said the boatswain, saluting with hook and forehead, "your

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brain's sharpening right wonderful. The first jacket o' honest ale that wets my lips shall be drained to your health. But," he added eagerly, "let me fill the cell an hold the lower alley."

"No. It is my plan and so my choice. You have the post of honor, for it will be yours to tackle Don Miguel, and a tough customer you'll find him. But do not kill him, Willie, if you can avoid it."

"H'm! I'm thinking I shall thrust guard plate deep, Master Topp. You would yourself if you'd suffered one-half o' what I have."

"Still, spare him. He's of more worth to us alive than dead at present. Afterward"—I stopped. Great heavens, it was of Inez's father that I was speaking thus!

"Aye, afterward!" growled Willie. "Afterward, Master Topp! There'll be a bitter reckoning when Captain Ireland comes. You may lay your last tester on that. But in the meanwhile I'll thrust as daintily as the don will let me."

I picked my way down the windings of the passage in the serpent's body with the intention of finding out what the Spaniards were doing up above and if possible of enticing them to come down from the wall and attack me in the narrow path. But when I reached the entrance I heard the voices of Don Sancho and a couple of others just above me, so I crept into the cell to listen.

He first of all suggested to the soldiers that they should go first, but they hung back and seemed inclined to argue the question. Now, the chasm was far too uncanny for the bandy legged don to enter himself, so he settled matters by sending off one of the men for the superior officer, while he himself pluckily remained on guard with the other.

Presently Don Miguel came and, snapping out a few caustic words about poltroonery, cowardice and the like, dropped, sword in hand, through the opening and strode along the alley. It would have been easy to run him through as he passed had I been so minded; but, hoping that Willie Trehalion would take him at his leisure and with a reasonably whole skin, I lay quiet and let him pass.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

A lady who heard "the sounds of revelry by night" at the famous hall on the eve of Waterloo, is reported dead in England. She was 104 years old.

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