

I, THE KING

By WAYLAND WELLS WILLIAMS.

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(Continued from Yesterday.)

On regaining consciousness he decided that the first thing to do was to see this man Kak. And as he lay on his bed, searching in his dictionary for such words as "run," "carriage" and "shoot," Kak himself came in.

His real name was Kakaiwia, and he was a splendid specimen of South Sea masculinity at about twenty-five. He was muscular, tall and not yet corpulent. His face was beardless and rather coarse featured; from time to time it lit up with a naive and attractive smile. His position, as Kit presently discovered, was an anomalous one. He was the king of a kingdom or head chief, of Nairava who had died before the Germans left. In the ordinary course of things Kak would have succeeded him, but there was a difficulty, the old one of the bar sinister. His mother, a lady of noble family from a neighboring village, had been guilty of an indiscretion. The king had killed the offender and reprieved the erring spouse to his bed and board; but marriage is a serious matter in Micronesia and it had been perfectly clear to all concerned that the issue of her liaison would be no hereditary rights in the family. Still, he grew up in it, and as he was the only male member of it some people thought he might as well become king when his stepfather died. Others did not, and Kakaiwia remained a king and no king, a born leader but not born a leader.

His mission was one of peace; he came to offer the formal friendship obtaining between men in the South Seas. He brought presents: mats, coconuts, fishing materials and, dearer than all, a few yards of dirty but serviceable mosquito netting. Kit, touched, gave him his pipe and tobacco, feeling sure that the friendship of this man was cheap at the price of a few days' smoking.

They discoursed chiefly in Nairava, as Kit could actually by this time say more in that than any islander in beche-de-mer. (German. He had found, was spoken by no one except in a few isolated words.) The visitor smiled at Kit's frequent consultations in his dictionary, but he complimented him on his quick progress. The Germans, he said, had taken months to learn as much. In five minutes they were talking contemporary politics.

The Tenguans, to whom the islanders referred always as the uakana (these men here), the Nairavans themselves being nakal (these men here), were prompted by the not unnatural desire to restore Nairava to its former state of vassalage. They were the more numerous, and they had the advantage of unity under a recognized sovereign. The Nairavans were disunited as to leadership, and were further divided, though unequally, between the two sides of the atoll.

The western, less populous side was known as Naituvi, the other being Nairava proper. It was Naituvi, it seemed, that caused most of the trouble; Nairava had recognized Kak as king long ago. Every effort had been made to win them over; but they were apparently a highly moral people, and in any matter involving the Sanctity of the Home they were adamant. And the nakana burned and pillaged on both sides of the atoll whenever the fancy seized them, all but unresisted.

Kak, it was clear, chafed under these deprivations, and was soon talking excitedly about how easy it would all be if they could get at the guns the Germans had left in that little cove nearby. Kit was not surprised at this, but he was surprised on learning Kak's notion of what a foreigner could do about it. His reasoning was that white men had made the arsenal, filled it, guarded it, used it and opened it at will. One white man, he supposed, could as easily do this as another. The nature of a padlock was unknown to him, and he thought the Kit could simply open the iron door with a wave of his hand.

Kit informed him of his mistake, and saw his face fall in disappointment. Perhaps it was chiefly pity that made him add: "Even so, I can get into that place. I won't tell you how, but I can."

Kak's face dropped, his face lit up like a child's and he began imploring Kit to do it, then, and quickly. Kit was, of course, not to be persuaded; he was not going to open that Pandora's box of troubles unless it proved necessary. To prevent the murder and extinction of the Nairavans, yes; but that was absurd. Behold! the unknown, in itself, worst for years, and the uakana still lived and flourished. But he suggested that the threat might be of some use in bringing the Naituvians under Kak's leadership.

Kak shook his head vigorously and mournfully. "They will never call me king," he said.

And then his great idea struck him. His face grew radiant again, and he began babbling like a brook in flood, with a strong imploring note. Kit tried to make him stop and repeat it more slowly, but the man's excitement overcame him and every time he would rush on again, as though talking in a race. Kit lay back on his bed, laughing.

Kak, squatting unnoticed in the doorway, made his contribution. In a voice as eager as Kak's, and containing a suggestion of protest against Kit's mirth, he announced: "He speak, he make you fella being keeng."

Kit stopped laughing. He felt his face grow foolishly red. There was a pause; then he recovered himself, and made gestures, a quite serious one, did occur to him. As a responsible ruler he would be able to use the arsenal and its threat with an effectiveness impossible to him acting as a shipwrecked visitor. Then it flashed across him that perhaps this didn't matter so much, either; that the substance of power was his already, in his ability to open the arsenal. A disturbing thought. He made no mention of it, naturally.

Kak was arguing at a great rate about how the whole atoll, Naituvi and Nairava alike, would obey a white king. There had never been any difficulty about their obeying the Germans. And a united atoll, backed by the arms in the arsenal, could simply wipe Tenguau off the map, etcetera. Kit hardly listened to him. He said "No" with various inflections of firmness and lightness, and went on to ask more about Tenguau.

Kak, disregarding him, heard by now of the white men's arrival. They would sail over, bring presents, take a look at the newcomers and find out how the land lay.

"And I'll tell them," said Kak uncontrollably, "that the white men have shown us how to get at the guns, and next time they come over we'll shoot them all dead!"

"You'd do nothing of the kind," said Kit, smiling. "They'd kill me at sight, if you did that. And I want to get it you did that. And I want to go over and see their island, and make friends with them, if possible."

"Not with them, not with those dogs, Nuel." (This was the version the letter L. had made of Newell. Masson, similarly, was known as Mat-ton.)

"The dog," Kit wanted to say, "is man's best friend." But his ignorance of the language interfered, and the apothegm was not impressive. Kak, after some further desultory conversation, departed.

VII.

Kit's mood changed. The sense of business and life which Kak's presence had given now abandoned him. He forgot the arsenal and the war and Kak's strange proposition, and knew only that he was alone on a desert island, with very little hope of ever getting off. The future was a sour thought in his brain, the present a dream from which he yearned to wake.

He walked idly down to the ocean beach. It was sunset, and the eastern clouds were radiant with a uniform pink, the rich luminous nameless pink found only in sunsets. The southeast trade barely breathed in the sensitive palm fronds overhead; barely, for once, murmured the reef that broke with a long gash of white the encrimsoned waters. He drew a deep breath and stared over them, toward home. A crab scuttled down the sand,

a tern bleated; from the land came a faint tuneless singing.

The sand, that in the noon burned through heavy shoe soles, was now smooth and cool under his bare feet. He poked them down into it till he stood ankle-deep. Sand. It gave one some notion of infinity. A grain of sand on the beach of eternity; that was a man's life. Just as distinct, just as representative, just as unconsidered. Who minded the destiny of one grain of sand?

(To Be Continued Monday.)

PRESIDENT COOLIDGE SAYS:
Laws do not make reforms, but reforms make laws.

THE NEBBS



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CUTTING UP THE EXPENSES.

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And Then He Took Up Golf

By Briggs ABIE THE AGENT

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New York --Day by Day--

By O. O. McINTYRE.

New York, Oct. 31.—Manhattan is filled with vivacious, foolish little women who make fashion the prevailing influence in their lives. They have nothing particular to recommend them so they effect an arrant snobbishness.

They want to be known as "smart." They drift from tearoom to cafe with impoverished monocled noblemen and hand-kissing princes. Their husbands are merely convenient, like the slave mostly in Wall street so that they may have charge accounts.

These are the types who are bacon for dressmaking establishments. Flattery makes them buy extravagantly. A mere telephone call that a new frock from Paris was made just for them causes them to come on the run. A male milliner tells me of one that came into his place for one hat. He went into ecstasies over some bonnets he couldn't sell as he tried them on her and she went away with a round dozen. Their age is usually between 40 and 50.

There is another who gives "at homes" to long-haired poets and mediocre dabblers of the Village attic. Her husband is a wizened little man with pale blue eyes and a melancholy expression. He came home one night and found his house filled with cadging artists.

That day he had faced bankruptcy and he went to his bedroom and put a bullet through his head. In his farewell note he wrote: "I came home for a little sympathy, but could not get it. Had you encouraged me when I needed it instead of these polite wasters this would not have happened."

Very few of these women have been glorified by motherhood. Home ties mean nothing. Gadding is their métier. They read the latest book and their conversation is made up of quotations from it until the next one is published.

Reading over the above convinces me I am only a few inches behind my doings and crawling slowly. It sounds as though it were written by a querulous old man with wrinkled face, a touch of gout and an asthmatic wheeze.

As a matter of fact only yesterday I bloomed out in a scarlet tie that would shame a tinhorn gambler. The effort obviously was to appear "smart." And I'm panning the ladies for the same ambition. So if there is such a thing as "doing a split" in writing I have achieved it as well as the most accomplished revue kicker.

Speaking of the split, one of the dramatic dancing schools has a teacher who gives lessons in this phase of acrobatics. I saw a class of about 50 beginners. They were in bloomers and sweaters and after their first lesson all went home limping. The teacher tells me it takes several months to achieve the desired result.

As a boy I was proficient in walking on my hands. I used to do it in front of the homes of girls I admired in the hope they might be peeping from behind some window curtain. Before writing this I tried to see if I had lost control of the art. In a word, I had. I landed on my back with a thud and upset a reading lamp. My wife came running in from the next room and inquiring if I had lost my mind—if any. I tried for a reply freighted with dignity and falling, took on an air of injured innocence. As a matter of fact more than my innocence was injured—and don't ask questions.

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