

I, THE KING

By WAYLAND WELLS WILLIAMS.

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(Continued from Yesterday.)

Kit, first shocked, then indifferent, began to participate, in a distant and impersonal way, chiefly because this seemed to be the new vehicle of social intercourse. More than once, in the course of a miscellaneous evening, he lost the power of directing his actions and thoughts, and, without ever being drunk, in any strict sense of the word, sustained the inhibition of a number of inhibitions. There was one unbelievable session in a Broadway hotel, composed of two women and a wildly assorted group of men: Flash Merwin (Jen Cobb's former roommate and an ex-private in the Signal Corps), two other college classmates, a middle-aged, heavy-mustached New York man-about-town, two junior Marine officers picked up out of nowhere. It should, next morning, have been hard to believe that God was in his Heaven; but it wasn't. Or rather, the thought seemed too irrelevant to bother about.

"It's a phenomenon of war," Jen replied to one of Kit's comments on the affair. "You had it after Waterloo—you had it during Richmond. Think of the Duchess of Richmond's ball!"

"Why on earth should I bother about the Duchess of Richmond's ball?" said Kit pettishly. "What I ought to bother about is Flash Merwin making a hyena of himself, and I can't get the steam for that. Neither can you, apparently, with all your piety and wit."

"No," said Jen, "I can't. I suppose that's why I prefer to think about the Duchess of Richmond's ball. I want to be soothed, and diverted. That's what we all want. And hang it, why wouldn't we, after what we've been through?"

There was Maud Hoffington to be seen about. He thought exasperatedly over it for some time, and then decided to call about five in the afternoon till he found her in the afternoon. He would not make an appointment by telephone, as that would be misleading, and he would not leave cards in case he found her out, as that would be brutal.

He found her in the second time of calling. She was pouring tea for some friends of her mother's in an absurdly perfect Louis Quinze drawing room. The faded tans and pinks and greens of the Aubusson rug were skillfully echoed in the tapestries and hangings, and everything in the room to the very wall panels, to the very

parquet, designed in an elaborate pattern, was old and out of France. Hundreds of thousands must have been spent to provide a place for the bored Maud to pour tea for her mother's bored friends in.

She was very cordial, giving the effect of remaining noncommittal only by an effort. Presently she abandoned the tea table and took him off to the library, the very room where, in an expansive moment, he had made pledges for this moment. And he had no idea of fulfilling them, not the slightest.

They talked about the war and Dick's gas and social events and the kinship of Narayana and Tengulu. He could assume a certain levity about that now. "Yes," he said, "it's a funny feeling, being a king, and I don't know as I've got over it yet. And having Maud—Maud—I was married, you know. Twice."

"(There, was that enough for her?) 'You don't mean it!' said Maudie, with rather hectic enthusiasm, the telltale pink flushing her shell color. 'Tell me about them. Were they attractive?'"

"Oh, yes, only..." (He must be careful here; a false step would mean ruin.) "Only that was so secondary a sort of. There were more important things to think about. There general things are, don't you find?"

"Was that enough?"

Maudie sat staring at the floor; she could not move forward, but she was standing firm. Poor little thing, if he were really disappointed! But there was no kindness except in cruelty.

"And then," he went on, "there was this business about Jack. I suppose that's why I haven't been around 'em since you before. I just haven't been able to take an interest in anything. You see, I put—I gave more to Jack than I ever have to any one. That being wiped out leaves me sort of lost, without anything more to give. I—I can hear to think of any one, or think of thinking of any one, as I thought of him."

(There, would that do? It would have to.)

He rose and held out his hand. "Goodby, Maudie. It's awfully nice to see you again. I'm opening my house, and I suppose after a while I'll be giving some parties. Will you come—properly chaperoned, of course?"

She stood biting her lip; he could not be sure whether it was a real blow or not; but he felt sure that she would play up, in any case. "Yes, indeed, I'd love to. Goodby, Kit. I'm so glad you're back."

"Not 'Call me up soon,' or 'Lunch with us tomorrow,' or any of the normal, forward-looking things of old. Yes, she understood, poor child. And he knew that, whether it was a blow or not, he could have taken her up where he had left her.

"Well, it's the only way," he told himself between clenched teeth as he walked down the avenue. "Nothing else would have done with the best intentions in the world. Small kindness to Maud in giving her a corpse. —Small kindness or joy to any one, in this world."

Every one seemed miserable, even those who were amusing themselves the hardest, but that was no reason for not amusing one's self. Soon after opening his house he got up a dinner party for a dozen or so of his most intimate friends. He called it a bachelor party because, as he grimly said, it announced his intention of remaining a bachelor for life. There was a new butler and plenty of champagne and chips and—a last sudden thought—a small roulette wheel; and that was more than enough to make a party in the spring of '19.

They drank his health, Jen Cobb giving it felicitously as King of Narayana. He was adept at such things and soon had the group bubbling with laughter. The health was drunk amid cheers; some one extemporized a song, in which all joined. "Old King Tut was a jolly old wit, and a brace of wives had he..."

"To the Princes and Princesses!" shouted some one else. "Many of them—or reason to have been!"

That went all right, not transgressing the bounds of harmless fun. But when they sat down again Dick Hoffington, looking neither pale nor nervous, got the floor; he stood swinging his glass, with a hard shine in his eyes, and spoke elaborately.

"Gentlemen, I think we're taking this rather lightly. There's a serious side to everything, being a king as well as anything else. Especially, I may say, being a white king in a nation of blacks. A king, such a king, has tremendous duties to his subjects, more particularly to one-half of them, the female half. But what about the other half? Poor fellows, they gave their all! By which

I mean they gave their women. Gentlemen, for the next toast I propose those unfortunate men, the husbands of King Newell's island, often deceived and always deserted—but they also served their king!"

It was not very funny, and it was going too far. Resentment clamored in Kit; it was all very well for these

people to think of those months of labor and effort as being consumed in pleasure, but not as being summed in communal bestiality. It was—well, it was damnably unfair to Naouea, for one thing.

"Wait!" he cried sharply, as the glasses went up amid rather perfunctory laughter. "I don't like that

toast! Our friend means well, but he doesn't know the facts." Eyes turned on him in surprise and some relief; Dick Hoffington drew, reddening: "Why, what's the matter? Don't mind a little fun, do you?"

"No," said Kit, eyeing him disparagingly. "But you overestimate my attractiveness to the sex. In simple

modesty, I can't allow it." That was by way of letting Dick down easily; a thing he was quite willing to do if Dick would go. He did, without any display of resentment. The merriment sustained a cooling; recovered, and was in full swing again when they left the dining room.

The card tables were laid out in the drawing room, where there was sweeping twenty dollars off the roulette table, yawned and called out: "Who? This is getting dull. What do you say we move on to one of the cafes?" or bring a few Janes in here and dance? What do you say, Newell?"

(To Be Continued Monday.)

THE NEBBES



SOCIETY—PHOOEY.



Directed for The Omaha Bee by Sol Hess

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Barney Google and Spark Plug

BARNEY DOES A BIT O' BROADCASTING.

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Billy DeBeck

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New York

--Day by Day--

By O. O. MINTYRE.

New York, Nov. 21.—Crimes in New York is at its lowest ebb between midnight and dawn. This is contrary to popular notion. The highest peak is between 6 and 9 in the morning and 4 and 6 in the afternoon.

Criminals follow crowds. Vice blooms in congestion. Four girls recently murdered in their apartments were slain between 7 and 10 o'clock in the morning. When pedestrian traffic boils the criminal has the best chance to escape.

Police records show the crook who operates when people have gone to bed is the easiest caught. He hasn't the advantage of what the underworld knows as "mass play." If one man sees him on a lone street he faces detection.

Crooks Max, who specialized in snatching jewels and furs from women, committed more than a hundred successful depredations in the crowds. He was caught when he snatched a purse from a woman in a deserted subway station after midnight.

In a like manner a cabaret dancer was successful when the dance floor was filled and the jazz band glared fortissimo but was untrussed when one of his haunts was almost deserted in the early morning.

Times Square on account of its movement and size is the most prolific of all fields for the pickpocket. He can lift a leather, hand it quickly to his confederate and face his accuser with all the gland equanimity of a country bumpkin.

Central office men say most crooks who have real skill are in bed early unless they have finished some job and are off on a carousal. They are early risers. Even the burglar now does his best work in daylight hours.

Since Robert C. Benchley gained fame as a humorist, he, like Irvin Cobb, is besieged by those who want him to grace the festive board and make after dinner speeches. At first Mr. Benchley took on all comers and it became an endurance contest between work and play with the latter winning. Then he decided on drastic measures. Now when he is asked to speak he immediately accepts. He is asked to send his subject. He announces his topics as "Through the Almirante Canal With Gun and Camera." And then at the last moment he wires he cannot attend because he is in bed with a touch of leprosy.

Silent comedians are riding on the top wave of success. There is even talk of a "Dumb Revue" wherein all drolleries will be mute. Harpo Marx, of the Four Marx Brothers, who won the Rialto hordes never speaks a word. Bert Melrose whose clownish innocence on a stack of tables convulses crowds in an unintelligible way to him, and James Barton a skilled comic, talks very little. Until last season W. C. Fields was silent. And Buster West, the youthful Merrydrew, propelled from the halls to near stardom performs his goings-on almost noiselessly. Of course, when silence fails the "Dumb Revue" may resort to the usual revue dodge of "bringing on the gals" but even with them coming on the performance will as a rule still have a dumb cast.

The best acts of vaudeville, I believe, are so-called dumb acts. What is more entrancing to the receptive eye than Alf Loyal's dog stars—Chiquita and Touze? Or Marcel's trained seals. Power's elephants are far more interesting to me than Elese Janis and the Four Readings on their pedestals doing superb acrobatics hold me breathless. Ruth Budd swings it over the audience hanging by one toe to her trapeze is adorable. But when she sings, dances or talks she is—well, not so elegant.

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BRINGING UP FATHER



Drawn for The Omaha Bee by McManus

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JERRY ON THE JOB



DELAYED ALTERATIONS.

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hoban

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Me and Mine

By Briggs



ABIE THE AGENT

From Bad to Worse.

