

THE KING

By WAYLAND WELLS WILLIAMS.

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(Continued from Yesterday.)

When he woke he saw faces peering in at the door. Two of them belonged to girls, not pretty, but almost, one of them wore white flowers in her hair. Kit gave an involuntary spring toward his uniform; he was in his underclothes, and his underclothes for the moment consisted of drawers, he having left his shirt in the dory. The girls laughed, and he sank back on the bed. There must be no foolishness about modesty. He was as well clothed as any of the native men he had seen.

He dressed and, followed by the girls, went into the other room, where Mason had retired. He discovered him sitting on his bed, clad only in his trousers, his arm about the waist of a native girl, leaning. "Oh, Lord, so we're in for that sort of thing," muttered Kit, turning on his heel.

He called Etera and went forth on a walk of exploration. He told himself he was looking for other white men's dwellings, but was not deceiving himself. He inspected the lagoon; it seemed to be several miles long, narrowing considerably at the northern end. The opposite, or western, side of the surrounding atoll was lower and thinner than the one he was on; it was a mere string of palm-fringed islets connected by stretches of bare coral sand. With a detached interest, he noted the colors of the lagoon in the sunlight, its hues of amethyst, sapphire and emerald—as useless to him, under these conditions, as the jewels themselves would be.

Returning to the coral path which stretched up and down the middle of the island, they walked northward for perhaps two miles. They passed through one or two tiny villages; people came out and stared at them, fat brown women with babies at the breast, men, mostly corpulent if over thirty, old crones with absurd leathery breasts, small children sucking their fingers, mother-naked. Very few wore anything above the waist; one or two of the women wore old and bedraggled holokus, long-sleeved wrappers reaching to their ankles;

but the vast majority wore either the platted waist-mat or the cincture of pandanus straw strung from a cord—the be or the rivi. All were curious, good-tempered, garrulous and incomprehensible. All had a strange oily smell and all were interested in tobacco.

At length they came to a point of land; open water surged between them and the next tongue of white coral. Kit could see the northern point of the atoll curving away out to sea in a reef punctuated by a few small islets bearing wind-beaten palms. And at the end of that, eight or ten miles distant, a swell of land, much higher than that on which he stood; another island.

"Why, of course!" he cried when he saw it. "I understand—that's the main show over there! It's not just one island, it's two or three, perhaps a whole bunch! They're over there— whoever they are. Hi, Etera! See, over there, Germans? Deutsch over there, Germans, Ingales, yes? White men?"

Etera shook his head, and was volubly sure, in his obscure beche-de-mier, that no one lived on the island who would interest Kit. "No fellow white man," he kept repeating, omitting or perverting most of the consonants. "He no stop. He walk away, along boat."

"I'll go over there and take a look, all the same," said Kit. They were overtaken by a shower on the way back, and took shelter under what Etera called a maraiba in one of the small villages. This was simply a rectangular thatched roof sweeping nearly to the ground from a height of perhaps thirty feet, in an arresting and pleasing outline. Kit had seen a larger one in the main village. It was apparently used as a council hall and plaza, a place both to convene and lounge in. Some people were dozing in it now. Kit sat down on the earthen floor and watched the rain beat down outside. He noted certain fauna; crabs, a tree-climbing variety of a bright pure blue. Hardly the color for a crab. There were also rats, reddish, and smaller than American ones, and somewhat less unattractive. A few chickens strolled about, mangy and dispirited-looking fowl, mostly cocks.

He also noticed rain water tanks, bowls carved from tree trunks placed under particularly large palms, with a leader of a coconut frond deftly fixed so as to divert the water from tree to tub. He reflected that he had drunk no water since landing, only coconut juice. Yet there must be fresh water; he had seen one or two muddy pools.

They reached the Residenz at sundown. Etera brought supper, also a lamp consisting of a coconut shell filled with coconut oil, and a wick of some informal fibrous material. Kit was interested to see the boy make fire with a fire drill; but the lamp when lit gave a poor light and stank to heaven. Also there was nothing to stay up for, and soon after Etera had installed himself on his mat in the hall Kit retired to his own hard but clean couch. Of Mason there was nothing to be seen.

IV. The next morning he devoted to study. There were a few books in the Residenz, all mildewed and written in German, but priceless. (It was then that he gave thanks for the ministrations of Fraulein Rock.) There was a little paper-bound German-Nairavaese dictionary, worth its weight in diamonds, and two or three Colonial Office pamphlets. From these latter, and from the information he picked up as the result of familiarity with the language, he was able to learn something about the island and its history.

Nairava lies at the southern end of an isolated reef rising out of the vast waste of water between, roughly speaking, Hawaii and the Gilberts. It is small, as coral atolls go, measuring only a little over four miles in its longest direction. Many atolls measure thirty. The Gilberts are about as near as any inhabited group, and it appears that from them the first Nairavans came. Some southwest storm threw them, in their long outrigger canoes, on its strand with the same casual restlessness that it had thrown Kit. There are traces, linguistic and otherwise, of additions from other races further south, but the language and physique are predominantly Micronesian. In Nairava and its sister island Tengulu the castaways settled and thrived, and probably no friend who saw them depart ever learned of their survival.

Lying far from all the main trade routes, and offering no particular advantages for trade or colonization, these islands remained long unknown to the world, and when known, disregarded. Cook visited them on his last voyage and described the inhabitants as "neither intelligent nor tractable." For nearly a century they remained neglected, damned by that phrase, visited only by the rarest whalers and traders. But these last inevitably taught the natives how to make copra, and at last the great house of Godeffroy, of Hamburg, established an agency there.

THE NEBBS

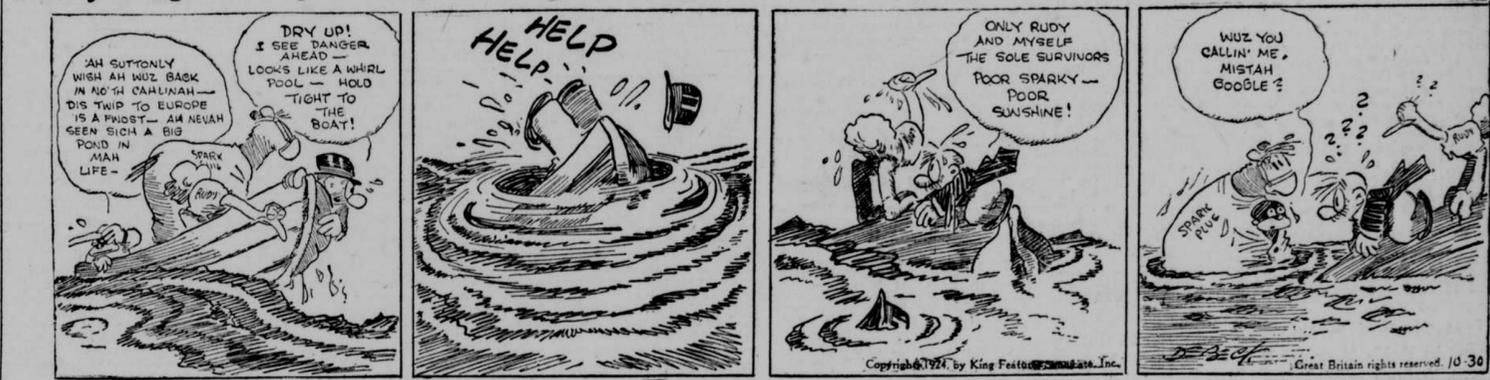


Directed for The Omaha Bee by Sol Hess (Copyright 1924)

A LONG, LONG WAY FROM HOME.

Barney Google and Spark Plug YOU CAN'T KEEP TWO GOOD ONES DOWN.

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Billy DeBeck (Copyright 1924)



BRINGING UP FATHER

Registered U. S. Patent Office SEE JIGGS AND MAGGIE IN FULL PAGE OF COLORS IN THE SUNDAY BEE

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by McManus (Copyright 1924)



JERRY ON THE JOB

THE TIRELESS WORKER.

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hoban (Copyright 1924)



Movie of a Man Trying to Park a Cigar

ABIE THE AGENT

Drawn for The Omaha Bee by Hershfield

My experience with the "hot dog" has been anything but pleasant. Years ago at Coney I fell asleep on the train coming home. A pickpocket got my watch and purse and I awakened with an attack of indigestion that kept me to my bed for three days.

The purse by the way carried the only picture of my mother I had. I advertised for it in all newspapers asking the thief to return it and even offered to pay a reward. Several years later from Sing Sing he wrote he had pawned the purse in a Bowery pawn shop. I recovered it and asked him why he had not let me know at the time. He replied he had seen the advertisement but wasn't taking chances on being traced. "My liberty," he said, "was worth more to me than I thought the picture would be to you."

Now and then I drop into the Hadley Mission at the Bowery which is conducted by John Callahan. The last time I was there Callahan asked me to speak. Among the flotsam and jetsam of humanity cast up there was a ruddled fellow who once worked with me on a copy desk of a newspaper. He had gone down through drink, lost job after job, his health and his family. Afterward I sought him out and we went to a restaurant. He was recovering from a spree and was shaking like a leaf. "I've made a botch of my life," he said, "and I may as well tell you frankly I don't want your advice or sympathy. When I get hold of some money I'm off on another one. There is one lesson I have learned. If you lose your self-respect you are gone."

