The Man who would be King

Brother to a Prince and fellow to a beggar if he be found worthy.

THE Law, as quoted, lays down a fair conduct of life, and one not easy to follow. I have been fellow to a beggar again and again under circumstances which prevented either of us finding out whether the other was worthy. I have still to be brother to a Prince, though I once came near to kinship with what might have
The Man who
been a veritable King and was
promised the reversion of a King-
dom—army, law-courts, revenue
and policy all complete. But,
to-day, I greatly fear that my
King is dead, and if I want a
crown I must go hunt it for my-
self.

The beginning of everything
was in a railway train upon the
road to Mhow from Ajmir.
There had been a Deficit in the
Budget, which necessitated travel-
ling, not Second-class, which is
only half as dear as First-class,
but by Intermediate, which is
very awful indeed. There are
no cushions in the Intermediate
class, and the population are either
would be King

Intermediate, which is Eurasian, or native, which for a long night journey is nasty, or Loafer, which is amusing though intoxicated. Intermediates do not buy from refreshment-rooms. They carry their food in bundles and pots, and buy sweets from the native sweetmeat-sellers, and drink the roadside water. That is why in hot weather Intermediates are taken out of the carriages dead, and in all weathers are most properly looked down upon.

My particular Intermediate happened to be empty till I reached Nasirabad, when a big black-browed gentleman in shirt-sleeves entered, and, following the
The Man who

custom of Intermediates, passed the time of day. He was a wanderer and a vagabond like myself, but with an educated taste for whiskey. He told tales of things he had seen and done, of out-of-the-way corners of the Empire into which he had penetrated, and of adventures in which he risked his life for a few days' food.

'If India was filled with men like you and me, not knowing more than the crows where they'd get their next day's rations, it is n't seventy millions of revenue the land would be paying — its seven hundred millions,' said he; and as I looked at his mouth and
would be King

chin I was disposed to agree with him.

We talked politics — the politics of Loaferdom that sees things from the underside where the lath and plaster is not smoothed off — and we talked postal arrangements because my friend wanted to send a telegram back from the next station to Ajmir, the turning-off place from the Bombay to the Mhow line as you travel westward. My friend had no money beyond eight annas which he wanted for dinner, and I had no money at all, owing to the hitch in the Budget before mentioned. Further, I was going into a wilderness where,
though I should resume touch with the Treasury, there were no telegraph offices. I was, therefore, unable to help him in any way.

'We might threaten a Station-master, and make him send a wire on tick,' said my friend, 'but that 'd mean enquiries for you and for me, and I 've got my hands full these days. Did you say you were travelling back along this line within any days?'

'Within ten,' I said.

'Can't you make it eight?' said he. 'Mine is rather urgent business.'

'I can send your telegram within ten days if that will serve you,' I said.
would be King

'I could n't trust the wire to fetch him now I think of it. It's this way. He leaves Delhi on the 23rd for Bombay. That means he 'll be running through Ajmir about the night of the 23rd.'

'But I 'm going into the Indian Desert,' I explained.

'Well and good,' said he.

'You'll be changing at Marwar Junction to get into Jodhpore territory — you must do that — and he 'll be coming through Marwar Junction in the early morning of the 24th by the Bombay Mail. Can you be at Marwar Junction on that time? 'T won't be inconveniencing you
The Man who

because I know that there's precious few pickings to be got out of these Central India States—even though you pretend to be correspondent of the Backwoodsman.'

'Have you ever tried that trick?' I asked.

'Again and again, but the Residents find you out, and then you get escorted to the Border before you've time to get your knife into them. But about my friend here. I must give him a word o' mouth to tell him what's come to me or else he won't know where to go. I would take it more than kind of you if you was to come out of Central India in time to catch
would be King
him at Marwar Junction, and say to him: "He has gone South for the week." He'll know what that means. He's a big man with a red beard, and a great swell he is. You'll find him sleeping like a gentleman with all his luggage round him in a Second-class apartment. But don't you be afraid. Slip down the window and say: "He has gone South for the week," and he'll tumble. It's only cutting your time of stay in those parts by two days. I ask you as a stranger—going to the West,' he said with emphasis.

'Where have you come from?' said I.
The Man who

‘From the East,’ said he, ‘and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the Square — for the sake of my Mother as well as your own.’

Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers; but for certain reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.

‘It’s more than a little matter,’ said he, ‘and that’s why I asked you to do it — and now I know that I can depend on you doing it. A Second-class carriage at Marwar Junction, and a red-haired man asleep in it. You’ll be sure to remember. I get out
would be King

at the next station, and I must hold on there till he comes or sends me what I want.'

'I'll give the message if I catch him,' I said, 'and for the sake of your Mother as well as mine I'll give you a word of advice. Don't try to run the Central India States just now as the correspondent of the Backwoodsman. There's a real one knocking about here, and it might lead to trouble.'

'Thank you,' said he simply, 'and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about
The Man who

his father's widow, and give him a jump.'

'What did he do to his father's widow, then?'

'Filled her up with red pepper and slippered her to death as she hung from a beam. I found that out myself and I'm the only man that would dare going into the State to get hush-money for it. They'll try to poison me, same as they did in Chortumna when I went on the loot there. But you'll give the man at Marwar Junction my message?'

He got out at a little roadside station, and I reflected. I had heard, more than once, of men personating correspondents of
would be King
ewspapers and bleeding small Native States with threats of exposure, but I had never met any of the caste before. They lead a hard life, and generally die with great suddenness. The Native States have a wholesome horror of English newspapers, which may throw light on their peculiar methods of government, and do their best to choke correspondents with champagne, or drive them out of their mind with four-in-hand barouches. They do not understand that nobody cares a straw for the internal administration of Native States so long as oppression and crime are kept within decent limits, and the
The Man who

ruler is not drugged, drunk, or
diseased from one end of the year
to the other. They are the dark
places of the earth, full of unim-
aginable cruelty, touching the
Railway and the Telegraph on
one side, and, on the other, the
days of Harun-al-Raschid. When
I left the train I did business with
divers Kings, and in eight days
passed through many changes of
life. Sometimes I wore dress-
clothes and consorted with Princes
and Politicals, drinking from crys-
tal and eating from silver. Some-
times I lay out upon the ground
and devoured what I could get,
from a plate made of leaves, and
drank the running water, and
would be King slept under the same rug as my servant. It was all in the day's work.

Then I headed for the Great Indian Desert upon the proper date, as I had promised, and the night Mail set me down at Marwar Junction, where a funny little, happy-go-lucky, native-managed railway runs to Jodhpore. The Bombay Mail from Delhi makes a short halt at Marwar. She arrived as I got in, and I had just time to hurry to her platform and go down the carriages. There was only one Second-class on the train. I slipped the window and looked down upon a flaming red beard,
The Man who
half covered by a railway rug. That was my man, fast asleep, and I dug him gently in the ribs. He woke with a grunt, and I saw his face in the light of the lamps. It was a great and shining face.

'Tickets again?' said he.

'No', said I. 'I am to tell you that he is gone South for the week. He has gone South for the week!'

The train had begun to move out. The red man rubbed his eyes. 'He has gone South for the week,' he repeated. 'Now that's just like his impudence. Did he say that I was to give you anything? 'Cause I won't.'

'He did n't,' I said and dropped
would be King

away, and watched the red lights
die out in the dark. It was hor-
ribly cold because the wind was
blowing off the sands. I climbed
into my own train—not an In-
termediate carriage this time—
and went to sleep.

If the man with the beard had
given me a rupee I should have
kept it as a memento of a rather
curious affair. But the conscious-
ness of having done my duty was
my only reward.

Later on I reflected that two
gentlemen like my friends could
not do any good if they fore-
gathered and personated corre-
spondents of newspapers, and
might, if they black-mailed one
The Man who

of the little rat-trap states of Central India or Southern Rajputana, get themselves into serious difficulties. I therefore took some trouble to describe them as accurately as I could remember to people who would be interested in deporting them: and succeeded, so I was later informed, in having them headed back from the Degumber borders.

Then I became respectable, and returned to an Office where there were no Kings and no incidents outside the daily manufacture of a newspaper. A newspaper office seems to attract every conceivable sort of person, to the prejudice of discipline. Zenana
would be King
mission ladies arrive, and beg that the Editor will instantly abandon all his duties to describe a Christian prize-giving in a back-slum of a perfectly inaccessible village; Colonels who have been overpassed for command sit down and sketch the outline of a series of ten, twelve, or twenty-four leading articles on Seniority versus Selection; missionaries wish to know why they have not been permitted to escape from their regular vehicles of abuse and swear at a brother-missionary under special patronage of the editorial We; stranded theatrical companies troop up to explain that they cannot pay for their
The Man who

advertisements, but on their re-
turn from New Zealand or Tahiti
will do so with interest; invent-
ors of patent punkah-pulling
machines, carriage couplings and
unbreakable swords and axletrees
call with specifications in their
pockets and hours at their dis-
posal; tea-companies enter and
elaborate their prospectuses with
the office pens; secretaries of
ball-committees clamour to have
the glories of their last dance more
fully described; strange ladies
rustle in and say: 'I want a hun-
dred lady's cards printed *at once,*
please,' which is manifestly part
of an Editor's duty; and every
dissolute ruffian that ever tramped
would be King
the Grand Trunk Road makes it his business to ask for employment as a proof-reader. And, all the time, the telephone-bell is ringing madly, and Kings are being killed on the Continent, and Empires are saying—'You're another,' and Mister Gladstone is calling down brimstone upon the British Dominions, and the little black copy-boys are whining, 'kaa-pi chay-ha-yeh' (copy wanted) like tired bees, and most of the paper is as black as Modred's shield.

But that is the amusing part of the year. There are six other months when none ever come to call, and the thermometer walks
The Man who inch by inch up to the top of the glass, and the office is darkened just above reading-light, and the press machines are red-hot of touch, and nobody writes anything but accounts of amusements in the Hill-stations or obituary notices. Then the telephone becomes a tinkling terror, because it tells you of the sudden deaths of men and women that you knew intimately, and the prickly-heat covers you with a garment, and you sit down and write: 'A slight increase of sickness is reported from the Khuda Janta Khan District. The outbreak is purely sporadic in its nature, and, thanks to the energetic efforts of
would be King

the District authorities, is now almost at an end. It is, however, with deep regret we record the death,' etc.

Then the sickness really breaks out, and the less recording and reporting the better for the peace of the subscribers. But the Empires and the Kings continue to divert themselves as selfishly as before, and the Foreman thinks that a daily paper really ought to come out once in twenty-four hours, and all the people at the Hill-stations in the middle of their amusements say: 'Good gracious! Why can't the paper be sparkling? I'm sure there's plenty going on up here.'
The Man who

That is the dark half of the moon, and, as the advertisements say, 'must be experienced to be appreciated.'

It was in that season, and a remarkably evil season, that the paper began running the last issue of the week on Saturday night, which is to say Sunday morning, after the custom of a London paper. This was a great convenience, for immediately after the paper was put to bed, the dawn would lower the thermometer from 96° to almost 84° for half an hour, and in that chill — you have no idea how cold is 84° on the grass until you begin to pray for it — a very tired man could
would be King

get off to sleep ere the heat roused him.

One Saturday night it was my pleasant duty to put the paper to bed alone. A King or courtier or a courtesan or a Community was going to die or get a new Constitution, or do something that was important on the other side of the world, and the paper was to be held open till the latest possible minute in order to catch the telegram.

It was a pitchy black night, as stifling as a June night can be, and the loo, the red-hot wind from the westward, was booming among the tinder-dry trees and pretending that the rain was on
The Man who its heels. Now and again a spot of almost boiling water would fall on the dust with the flop of a frog, but all our weary world knew that was only pretence. It was a shade cooler in the press-room than the office, so I sat there, while the type ticked and clicked, and the night-jars hooted at the windows, and the all but naked compositors wiped the sweat from their foreheads, and called for water. The thing that was keeping us back, whatever it was, would not come off, though the loo dropped and the last type was set, and the whole round earth stood still in the choking heat, with its finger on its lip, to
would be King

wait the event. I drowsed, and wondered whether the telegraph was a blessing, and whether this dying man, or struggling people, might be aware of the inconvenience the delay was causing. There was no special reason beyond the heat and worry to make tension, but, as the clock-hands crept up to three o’clock and the machines spun their fly-wheels two and three times to see that all was in order, before I said the word that would set them off, I could have shrieked aloud.

Then the roar and rattle of the wheels shivered the quiet into little bits. I rose to go away, but two men in white clothes
The Man who stood in front of me. The first one said: "It's him!" The second said: 'So it is!' And they both laughed almost as loudly as the machinery roared, and mopped their foreheads. 'We seed there was a light burning across the road and we were sleeping in that ditch there for coolness, and I said to my friend here, The office is open. Let's come along and speak to him as turned us back from the Degumber State,' said the smaller of the two. He was the man I had met in the Mhow train, and his fellow was the red-bearded man of Marwar Junction. There was no mistaking the eyebrows
would be King of the one or the beard of the other.

I was not pleased, because I wished to go to sleep, not to squabble with loafers. 'What do you want?' I asked.

'Half an hour's talk with you, cool and comfortable, in the office,' said the red-bearded man. 'We'd like some drink — the Contrack does n't begin yet, Peachey, so you need n't look — but what we really want is advice. We don't want money. We ask you as a favour, because we found out you did us a bad turn about Degumber State.'

I led from the press-room to the stifling office with the maps
The Man who

on the walls, and the red-haired 
man rubbed his hands. 'That's 
something like,' said he. 'This 
was the proper shop to come to. 
Now, Sir, let me introduce to 
you Brother Peachey Carnehan, 
that's him, and Brother Daniel 
Dravot, that is me, and the less 
said about our professions the 
better, for we have been most 
things in our time. Soldier, 
sailor, compositor, photographer, 
proof-reader, street-preacher, and 
correspondents of the Backwoods-
man when we thought the paper 
wanted one. Carnehan is sober, 
and so am I. Look at us first, 
and see that's sure. It will save 
you cutting into my talk. We'll
would be King
take one of your cigars apiece,
and you shall see us light up.'

I watched the test. The men
were absolutely sober, so I gave
them each a tepid whiskey and
soda.

‘Well and good,’ said Carne-
han of the eyebrows, wiping the
froth from his moustache. ‘Let me talk now, Dan. We have
been all over India, mostly on
foot. We have been boiler-fitters, engine-drivers, petty con-
tractors, and all that, and we have decided that India isn’t big
enough for such as us.’

They certainly were too big for the office. Dravot’s beard
The Man who seemed to fill half the room and Carnehan's shoulders the other half, as they sat on the big table. Carnehan continued: 'The country is n't half worked out because they that governs it won't let you touch it. They spend all their blessed time in governing it, and you can't lift a spade, nor chip a rock, nor look for oil, nor anything like that without all the Government saying: "Leave it alone, and let us govern." Therefore, such as it is, we will let it alone, and go away to some other place where a man is n't crowded, and can come to his own. We are not little men, and there is nothing that we are
would be King afraid of except drink, and we have signed a Contrack on that. Therefore, we are going away to be Kings.'

'Kings in our own right,' muttered Dravot.

'Yes, of course,' I said. 'You’ve been tramping in the sun, and it’s a very warm night, and hadn’t you better sleep over the notion? Come to-morrow.'

'Neither drunk nor sunstruck,' said Dravot. 'We have slept over the notion half a year, and require to see Books and Atlases, and we have decided that there is only one place now in the world that two strong men
The Man who can Sar-a-whack. They call it Kafiristan. By my reckoning it’s the top right-hand corner of Afghanistan, not more than three hundred miles from Peshawar. They have two-and-thirty heathen idols there, and we’ll be the thirty-third and fourth. It’s a mountainous country, and the women of those parts are very beautiful.’

‘But that is provided against in the Contrack,’ said Carnehan. ‘Neither women nor Liquor, Daniel.’

‘And that’s all we know, except that no one has gone there, and they fight, and in any place where they fight a man
would be King who knows how to drill men can always be a King. We shall go to those parts and say to any King we find—“D'you want to vanquish your foes?” and we will show him how to drill men; for that we know better than anything else. Then we will subvert that King and seize his Throne and establish a Dynasty.'

'You'll be cut to pieces before you're fifty miles across the Border,' I said. 'You have to travel through Afghanistan to get to that country. It's one mass of mountains and peaks and glaciers, and no Englishman has been through it. The people are
The Man who
utter brutes, and even if you reached them you couldn't do anything.'

'That's more like,' said Carnehan. 'If you could think us a little more mad we would be more pleased. We have come to you to know about this country, to read a book about it, and be shown maps. We want you to tell us that we are fools and to show us your books.' He turned to the book-cases.

'Are you at all in earnest?' I said.

'A little,' said Dravot sweetly. 'As big a map as you have got, even if it's all blank where Kafiristan is, and any books you've
would be King
got. We can read, though we are n't very educated.'

I uncased the big thirty-two-miles-to-the-inch map of India, and two smaller Frontier maps, hauled down volume INF-KAN of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and the men consulted them.

"See here!" said Dravot, his thumb on the map. 'Up to Jagdallak, Peachey and me know the road. We was there with Roberts' Army. We 'll have to turn off to the right at Jagdallak through Laghmann territory. Then we get among the hills — fourteen thousand feet — fifteen thousand — it will be cold work
The Man who
there, but it don't look very far on the map.'

I handed him Wood on the Sources of the Oxus. Carnehan was deep in the Encyclopaedia.

'They're a mixed lot,' said Dravot reflectively; 'and it won't help us to know the names of their tribes. The more tribes the more they'll fight, and the better for us. From Jagdallak to Ashang. H'mm!'

'But all the information about the country is as sketchy and inaccurate as can be,' I protested. 'No one knows anything about it really. Here's the file of the United Services' Institute. Read what Bellew says.'
would be King

'Blow Bellew!' said Carneh-an. 'Dan, they're a stinkin' lot of heathens, but this book here says they think they're related to us English.'

I smoked while the men pored over Raverty, Wood, the maps, and the Encyclopaedia.

'There is no use your waiting,' said Dravot politely. 'It's about four o'clock now. We'll go before six o'clock if you want to sleep, and we won't steal any of the papers. Don't you sit up. We're two harmless lunatics, and if you come to-morrow evening down to the Serai we'll say good-bye to you.'

'You are two fools,' I answered.
The Man who

“You’ll be turned back at the Frontier or cut up the minute you set foot in Afghanistan. Do you want any money or a recommendation down-country? I can help you to the chance of work next week.’

‘Next week we shall be hard at work ourselves, thank you,’ said Dravot. ‘It is n’t so easy being a King as it looks. When we’ve got our Kingdom in going order we’ll let you know, and you can come up and help us to govern it.’

‘Would two lunatics make a Contrack like that?’ said Carnehan, with subdued pride, showing me a greasy half-sheet of note-paper on which was written the
would be King following. I copied it, then and there, as a curiosity—

This Contract between me and you persuing witnesses in the name of God—Amen and so forth.

(One) That me and you will settle this matter together; i.e., to be Kings of Kafiristan.

(Two) That you and me will not, while this matter is being settled, look at any Liquor, nor any Woman black, white, or brown, so as to get mixed up with one or the other harmful.

(Three) That we conduct ourselves with Dignity and Discretion, and if one of us gets into trouble the other will stay by him.

Signed by you and me this day.

Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan.

Daniel Dravot.

Both Gentlemen at Large.
The Man who

‘There was no need for the last article,’ said Carnehan, blushing modestly; ‘but it looks regular. Now you know the sort of men that loafers are—we are loafers, Dan, until we get out of India—and do you think that we would sign a Contrack like that unless we was in earnest? We have kept away from the two things that make life worth having.’

‘You won’t enjoy your lives much longer if you are going to try this idiotic adventure. Don’t set the office on fire,’ I said, ‘and go away before nine o’clock.’

I left them still poring over the maps and making notes on
would be King
the back of the ‘Contrack.’ ‘Be
sure to come down to the Serai
to-morrow,’ were their parting
words.

The Kumharsen Serai is the
great four-square sink of human-
ity where the strings of camels
and horses from the North load
and unload. All the nationalities
of Central Asia may be found
there, and most of the folk of
India proper. Balkh and Bok-
hara there meet Bengal and
Bombay, and try to draw eye-
teeth. You can buy ponies,
turquoises, Persian pussy-cats,
saddle-bags, fat-tailed sheep, and
musk in the Kumharsen Serai,
and get many strange things for
The Man who nothing. In the afternoon I went down to see whether my friends intended to keep their word or were lying there drunk.

A priest attired in fragments of ribbons and rags stalked up to me, gravely twisting a child's paper whirligig. Behind him was his servant bending under the load of a crate of mud toys. The two were loading up two camels, and the inhabitants of the Serai watched them with shrieks of laughter.

'The priest is mad,' said a horse-dealer to me. 'He is going up to Kabul to sell toys to the Amir. He will either be raised to honour or have his
would be King
head cut off. He came in here this morning and has been behaving madly ever since.'

'The witless are under the protection of God,' stammered a flat-cheeked Usbeg in broken Hindi. 'They foretell future events.'

'Would they could have foretold that my caravan would have been cut up by the Shinwaris almost within shadow of the Pass!' grunted the Eusufzai agent of a Rajputana trading-house whose goods had been diverted into the hands of other robbers just across the Border, and whose misfortunes were the laughing-stock of the bazar. 'Ohé, priest,
The Man who
whence come you, and whither
do you go?'

'From Roum have I come,' shouted the priest, waving his whirligig; 'from Roum, blown by the breath of a hundred devils across the sea! O thieves, robbers, liars, the blessing of Pir Khan on pigs, dogs, and perjurers! Who will take the Protected of God to the North to sell charms that are never still to the Amir? The camels shall not gall, the sons shall not fall sick, and the wives shall remain faithful while they are away, of the men who give me place in their caravan. Who will assist me to slipper the King of the
would be King

Roos with a golden slipper with a silver heel? The protection of Pir Khan be upon his labours!’ He spread out the skirts of his gaberdine and pirouetted between the lines of tethered horses.

‘There starts a caravan from Peshawar to Kabul in twenty days, Huzrut,’ said the Eusufzai trader. ‘My camels go there-with. Do thou also go and bring us good-luck.’

‘I will go even now!’ shouted the priest. ‘I will depart upon my winged camels, and be at Peshawar in a day! Ho! Hazar Mir Khan,’ he yelled to his servant, ‘drive out the camels,
The Man who

but let me first mount my own.'

He leaped on the back of his beast as it knelt, and, turning round to me, cried: 'Come thou also, Sahib, a little along the road, and I will sell thee a charm—an amulet that shall make thee King of Kafiristan.'

Then the light broke upon me, and I followed the two camels out of the Serai till we reached open road and the priest halted.

'What d' you think o' that?' said he in English. 'Carnehan can't talk their patter, so I 've made him my servant. He makes a handsome servant. Tisn't for
would be King

nothing that I've been knock-
ing about the country for four-
teen years. Did n't I do that
talk neat? We'll hitch on to
a caravan at Peshawar till we
get to Jagdallak, and then we'll
see if we can get donkeys for our
camels, and strike into Kafiristan.
Whirligigs for the Amir, O Lor!
Put your hand under the camel-
bags and tell me what you feel.'

I felt the butt of a Martini,
and another and another.

'Twenty of 'em,' said Dravot
placidly. 'Twenty of 'em and
ammunition to correspond, under
the whirligigs and the mud dolls.'

'Heaven help you if you are
caught with those things!' I
The Man who said. 'A Martini is worth her weight in silver among the Pathans.'

'Fifteen hundred rupees of capital — every rupee we could beg, borrow, or steal — are invested on these two camels,' said Dravot. 'We won't get caught. We're going through the Khai-ber with a regular caravan. Who'd touch a poor mad priest?'

'Have you got everything you want?' I asked, overcome with astonishment.

'Not yet, but we shall soon. Give us a memento of your kindness, Brother. You did me a service, yesterday, and that
would be King
time in Marwar. Half my
kingdom shall you have, as the
saying is.' I slipped a small
charm compass from my watch
chain and handed it up to the
priest.

'Good-bye,' said Dravot, giv-
ing me hand cautiously. 'It's
the last time we'll shake hands
with an Englishman these many
days. Shake hands with him,
Carnehan,' he cried, as the
second camel passed me.

Carnehan leaned down and
shook hands. Then the camels
passed away along the dusty road,
and I was left alone to wonder.
My eye could detect no failure
in the disguises. The scene in
The Man who

the Serai proved that they were complete to the native mind. There was just the chance, therefore, that Carnehan and Dravot would be able to wander through Afghanistan without detection. But, beyond, they would find death—certain and awful death.

Ten days later a native correspondent, giving me the news of the day from Peshawar, wound up his letter with: 'There has been much laughter here on account of a certain mad priest who is going in his estimation to sell petty gauds and insignificant trinkets which he ascribes as great charms to H. H. the Amir of Bokhara. He passed through
would be King Peshawar and associated himself to the Second Summer caravan that goes to Kabul. The merchants are pleased because through superstition they imagine that such mad fellows bring good-fortune.'

The two, then, were beyond the Border. I would have prayed for them, but, that night, a real King died in Europe, and demanded an obituary notice.

The wheel of the world swings through the same phases again and again. Summer passed and winter thereafter, and came and passed again. The daily paper continued and I with it, and upon
The Man who

the third summer there fell a hot night, a night-issue, and a strained waiting for something to be telegraphed from the other side of the world, exactly as had happened before. A few great men had died in the past two years, the machines worked with more clatter, and some of the trees in the Office garden were a few feet taller. But that was all the difference.

I passed over to the press-room, and went through just such a scene as I have already described. The nervous tension was stronger than it had been two years before, and I felt the heat more acutely. At three o'clock I cried, 'Print
would be King

off,' and turned to go, when there crept to my chair what was left of a man. He was bent into a circle, his head was sunk between his shoulders, and he moved his feet one over the other like a bear. I could hardly see whether he walked or crawled — this rag-wrapped, whining cripple who addressed me by name, crying that he was come back. 'Can you give me a drink?' he whimpered. 'For the Lord's sake give me a drink!'

I went back to the office, the man following with groans of pain, and I turned up the lamp.

"Don't you know me?" he gasped, dropping into a chair, and
The Man who

he turned his drawn face, sur-
mounted by a shock of gray hair, to the light.

I looked at him intently. Once before had I seen eyebrows that met over the nose in an inch-
broad black band, but for the life of me I could not tell where.

‘I don’t know you,’ I said, handing him the whiskey. ‘What can I do for you?’

He took a gulp of the spirit raw, and shivered in spite of the suffocating heat.

‘I’ve come back,’ he repeated; ‘and I was the King of Kafiristan — me and Dravot — crowned Kings we was! In this office we settled it — you setting there and
would be King
giving us the books. I am
Peachey — Peachey Taliaferro
Carnehan, and you 've been set-
ting here ever since — O Lord!'
I was more than a little as-
tonished, and expressed my feel-
ings accordingly.

' It 's true,' said Carnehan, with
a dry cackle, nursing his feet,
which were wrapped in rags.
'True as gospel. Kings we were,
with crowns upon our heads—
me and Dravot—poor Dan—
oh, poor, poor Dan, that would
never take advice, not though I
begged of him!'

'Take the whiskey,' I said,
'and take your own time. Tell
me all you can recollect of every-
The Man who
thing from beginning to end. You got across the border on your camels, Dravot dressed as a mad priest and you his servant. Do you remember that?

‘I ain’t mad — yet, but I shall be that way soon. Of course I remember. Keep looking at me, or maybe my words will all go to pieces. Keep looking at me in my eyes and don’t say anything.’

I leaned forward and looked into his face as steadily as I could. He dropped one hand upon the table and I grasped it by the wrist. It was twisted like a bird’s claw, and upon the back was a ragged, red, diamond-shaped scar.
would be King

‘No, don’t look there. Look at me,’ said Carnehan. ‘That comes afterwards, but for the Lord’s sake don’t distract me. We left with that caravan, me and Dravot playing all sorts of antics to amuse the people we were with. Dravot used to make us laugh in the evenings when all the people was cooking their dinners — cooking their dinners, and . . . what did they do then? They lit little fires with sparks that went into Dravot’s beard, and we all laughed — fit to die. Little red fires they was, going into Dravot’s big red beard — so funny.’ His eyes left mine and he smiled foolishly.
The Man who

‘You went as far as Jagdallak with that caravan,’ I said at a venture, ‘after you had lit those fires. To Jagdallak, where you turned off to try to get into Kafiristan.’

‘No, we didn’t neither. What are you talking about? We turned off before Jagdallak, because we heard the roads was good. But they wasn’t good enough for our two camels—mine and Dravot’s. When we left the caravan, Dravot took off all his clothes and mine too, and said we would be heathen, because the Kafirs didn’t allow Mohammedans to talk to them. So we dressed betwixt and between, and such a sight as Daniel
would be King

Dravot I never saw yet nor expect to see again. He burned half his beard, and slung a sheepskin over his shoulder, and shaved his head into patterns. He shaved mine, too, and made me wear outrageous things to look like a heathen. That was in a most mountaineous country, and our camels couldn't go along any more because of the mountains. They were tall and black, and coming home I saw them fight like wild goats—there are lots of goats in Kafiristan. And these mountains, they never keep still, no more than the goats. Always fighting they are, and don't let you sleep at night.'
The Man who

'Take some more whiskey,' I said very slowly. 'What did you and Daniel Dravot do when the camels could go no further because of the rough roads that led into Kafiristan?'

'What did which do? There was a party called Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan that was with Dravot. Shall I tell you about him? He died out there in the cold. Slap from the bridge fell old Peachey, turning and twisting in the air like a penny whirlgig that you can sell to the Amir. — No; they was two for three ha'pence, those whirligigs, or I am much mistaken and woeful sore. . . . And then these camels
would be King

were no use, and Peachey said to Dravot—"For the Lord's sake let's get out of this before our heads are chopped off," and with that they killed the camels all among the mountains, not having anything in particular to eat, but first they took off the boxes with the guns and the ammunition, till two men came along driving four mules. Dravot up and dances in front of them, singing—"Sell me four mules." Says the first man—"If you are rich enough to buy you are rich enough to rob;" but before ever he could put his hand to his knife, Dravot breaks his neck over his knee, and the other party runs away.
The Man who

So Carnehan loaded the mules with the rifles that was taken off the camels, and together we starts forward into those bitter cold mountaineous parts, and never a road broader than the back of your hand.'

He paused for a moment, while I asked him if he could remem-
ber the nature of the country through which he had journeyed.

'I am telling you as straight as I can, but my head is n't as good as it might be. They drove nails through it to make me hear better how Dravot died. The country was mountaineous and the mules were most contrary, and the inhabitants was dis-
would be King.

persed and solitary. They went up and up, and down and down, and that other party, Carnehan, was imploring of Dravot not to sing and whistle so loud, for fear of bringing down the tremenjus avalanches. But Dravot says that if a King could n't sing it was n’t worth being King, and whacked the mules over the rump, and never took no heed for ten cold days. We came to a big level valley all among the mountains, and the mules were near dead, so we killed them, not having anything in special for them or us to eat. We sat upon the boxes, and played odd and even with the cartridges that was jolted out.
The Man who

'Then ten men with bows and arrows ran down that valley, chasing twenty men with bows and arrows, and the row was tremenjus. They was fair men — fairer than you or me — with yellow hair and remarkable well built. Says Dravot, unpacking the guns — “This is the beginning of the business. We’ll fight for the ten men,” and with that he fires two rifles at the twenty men, and drops one of them at two hundred yards from the rock where he was sitting. The other men began to run, but Carnehan and Dravot sits on the boxes picking them off at all ranges, up and down the valley. Then we goes up to the
would be King
ten men that had run across the
snow too, and they fires a footy
little arrow at us. Dravot he
shoots above their heads and they
all falls down flat. Then he walks
over them and kicks them, and
then he lifts them up and shakes
hands all round to make them
friendly like. He calls them
and gives them the boxes to
carry, and waves his hand for all
the world as though he was King
already. They takes the boxes
and him across the valley and up
the hill into a pine wood on the
top, where there was half a dozen
big stone idols. Dravot he goes
to the biggest—a fellow they
call Imbra—and lays a rifle and
The Man who

a cartridge at his feet, rubbing
his nose respectful with his own
nose, patting him on the head,
and saluting in front of it. He
turns round to the men and nods
his head, and says "That's all
right. I'm in the know too,
and all these old jim-jams are my
friends." Then he opens his
mouth and points down it, and
when the first man brings him
food, he says — "No;" and when
the second man brings him food
he says — "No;" but when one
of the old priests and the boss
of the village brings him food,
he says — "Yes;" very haughty
and eats it slow. That was
how we came to our first vil-
would be King lage, without any trouble, just as though we had tumbled from the skies. But we tumbled from one of those damned rope-bridges, you see, and—you could n’t expect a man to laugh much after that?’

‘Take some more whiskey and go on,’ I said. ‘That was the first village you came into. How did you get to be King?’

‘I was n’t King,’ said Carnehan. ‘Dravot he was the King, and a handsome man he looked with the gold crown on his head and all. Him and the other party stayed in that village, and every morning Dravot sat by the side of old Imbra, and the people
The Man who came and worshipped. That was Dravot's order. Then a lot of men came into the valley, and Carnehan Dravot picks them off with the rifles before they knew where they was, and runs down into the valley and up again the other side and finds another village, same as the first one, and the people all falls down flat on their faces, and Dravot says—“Now what is the trouble between you two villages?” and the people points to a woman, as fair as you or me, that was carried off, and Dravot takes her back to the first village and counts up the dead—eight there was. For each dead man Dravot pours
would be King

a little milk on the ground and waves his arms like a whirligig and "That's all right," says he. Then he and Carnehan takes the big boss of each village by the arm and walks them down into the valley, and shows them how to scratch a line with a spear right down the valley, and gives each a sod of turf from both sides of the line. Then all the people comes down and shouts like the devil and all, and Dravot says—"Go and dig the land, and be fruitful and multiply," which they did, though they did n't understand. Then we asks the names of things in their lingo—bread and water and fire and idols
The Man who

and such—and Dravot leads the priest of each village up to the idol, and says he must sit there and judge the people, and if anything goes wrong he is to be shot.

'Next week they was all turning up the land in the valley as quiet as bees and much prettier, and the priests heard all the complaints and told Dravot in dumb show what it was about. "That's just the beginning," says Dravot. "They think we're Gods." He and Carnehan picks out twenty good men and shows them how to click off a rifle, and form fours, and advance in line, and they was very pleased to do so, and
would be King
clever to see the hang of it. Then
he takes out his pipe and his
baccy-pouch and leaves one at
one village, and one at the other,
and off we two goes to see what
was to be done in the next valley.
That was all rock, and there was
a little village there, and Carne-
han says—"Send 'em to the old
valley to plant," and takes 'em
there and gives 'em some land
that was n't took before. They
were a poor lot, and we blooded
'em with a kid before letting 'em
into the new Kingdom. That
was to impress the people, and
then they settled down quiet, and
Carnehan went back to Dravot,
who had got into another valley,
The Man who
all snow and ice and most moun-
taineous. There was no people there and the Army got afraid, so Dravot shoots one of them, and goes on till he finds some people in a village, and the Army explains that unless the people wants to be killed they had better not shoot their little matchlocks; for they had matchlocks. We makes friends with the priest and I stays there alone with two of the Army, teaching the men how to drill, and a thundering big Chief comes across the snow with kettle-drums and horns twanging, because he heard there was a new God kicking about. Carnehan sights for the brown of the men
would be King

half a mile across the snow and wings one of them. Then he sends a message to the Chief that, unless he wished to be killed, he must come and shake hands with me and leave his arms behind. The Chief comes alone first, and Carnehan shakes hands with him and whirls his arms about, same as Dravot used, and very much surprised that Chief was, and strokes my eyebrows. Then Carnehan goes alone to the Chief, and asks him in dumb show if he had an enemy he hated. "I have," says the Chief. So Carnehan weeds out the pick of his men, and sets the two of the Army to show them
The Man who drill and at the end of two weeks the men can manoeuvre about as well as Volunteers. So he marches with the Chief to a great big plain on the top of a mountain, and the Chief’s men rushes into a village and takes it; we three Martinis firing into the brown of the enemy. So we took that village too, and I gives the Chief a rag from my coat and says, “Occupy till I come;” which was scriptural. By way of a reminder, when me and the Army was eighteen hundred yards away, I drops a bullet near him standing on the snow, and all the people falls flat on their faces. Then I sends a letter to Dravot
would be King wherever he be by land or by sea.'

At the risk of throwing the creature out of train I interrupted—'How could you write a letter up yonder?'

'The letter?—Oh!—The letter! Keep looking at me between the eyes, please. It was a string-talk letter, that we'd learned the way of it from a blind beggar in the Punjab.'

I remember that there had once come to the office a blind man with a knotted twig and a piece of string which he wound round the twig according to some cipher of his own. He could, after the lapse of days or
The Man who

hours, repeat the sentence which he hadreeled up. He had reduced the alphabet to eleven primitive sounds; and tried to teach me his method, but I could not understand.

'I sent that letter to Dravot,' said Carnehan; 'and told him to come back because this Kingdom was growing too big for me to handle, and then I struck for the first valley, to see how the priests were working. They called the village we took along with the Chief, Bashkai, and the first village we took, Er-Heb. The priests at Er-Heb was doing all right, but they had a lot of pending cases about land to show me.
would be King
and some men from another
village had been firing arrows at
night. I went out and looked
for that village, and fired four
rounds at it from a thousand
yards. That used all the car-
tridgcs I cared to spend, and I
waited for Dravot, who had been
away two or three months, and
I kept my people quiet.

‘One morning I heard the
devil’s own noise of drums and
horns, and Dan Dravot marches
down the hill with his Army and
a tail of hundreds of men, and,
which was the most amazing, a
great gold crown on his head.
“My Gord, Carnehan,” says
Daniel, “this is a tremenjus
The Man who
business, and we’ve got the whole country as far as it’s worth having. I am the son of Alexander by Queen Semiramis, and you’re my younger brother and a God too! It’s the biggest thing we’ve ever seen. I’ve been marching and fighting for six weeks with the Army, and every footy little village for fifty miles has come in rejoiceful; and more than that, I’ve got the key of the whole show, as you’ll see, and I’ve got a crown for you! I told ’em to make two of ’em at a place called Shu, where the gold lies in the rock like suet in mutton. Gold I’ve seen, and turquoise I’ve kicked.
would be King
out of the cliffs, and there's garnets in the sands of the river, and here's a chunk of amber that a man brought me. Call up all the priests and, here, take your crown.”

‘One of the men opens a black hair bag, and I slips the crown on. It was too small and too heavy, but I wore it for the glory. Hammered gold it was — five pound weight, like a hoop of a barrel.

“Peachey,” says Dravot, “we don’t want to fight no more. The Craft’s the trick, so help me!” and he brings forward that same Chief that I left at Bashkai — Billy Fish we called him after—
The Man who
wards, because he was so like Billy
Fish that drove the big tank-
engine at Mach on the Bolan in
the old days. "Shake hands with
him," says Dravot, and I shook
hands and nearly dropped, for
Billy Fish gave me the Grip. I
said nothing, but tried him with
the Fellow Craft Grip. He an-
swers, all right, and I tried the
Master's Grip, but that was a slip.
"A Fellow Craft he is!" I says
to Dan. "Does he know the
word?" — "He does," says Dan,
"and all the priests know. It's
a miracle! The Chiefs and the
priests can work a Fellow Craft
Lodge in a way that's very like
ours, and they've cut the marks
would be King on the rocks, but they don't know the Third Degree, and they've come to find out. It's Gord's Truth. I've known these long years that the Afghans knew up to the Fellow Craft Degree, but this is a miracle. A God and a Grand-Master of the Craft am I, and a Lodge in the Third Degree I will open, and we'll raise the head priests and the Chiefs of the villages."

"It's against all the law," I says, "holding a Lodge without warrant from any one; and you know we never held office in any Lodge."

"It's a master-stroke o' policy," says Dravot. "It means
The Man who
running the country as easy as a four-wheeled bogie on a down grade. We can't stop to enquire now, or they'll turn against us. I've forty Chiefs at my heel, and passed and raised according to their merit they shall be. Billet these men on the villages, and see that we run up a Lodge of some kind. The temple of Imbra will do for the Lodge-room. The women must make aprons as you show them. I'll hold a levee of Chiefs to-night and Lodge to-morrow."

'I was fair run off my legs, but I wasn't such a fool as not to see what a pull this Craft business gave us. I showed the
would be King
priests' families how to make aprons of the degrees, but for Dravot's apron the blue border and marks was made of turquoise lumps on white hide, not cloth. We took a great square stone in the temple for the Master's chair, and little stones for the officers' chairs, and painted the black pavement with white squares, and did what we could to make things regular.

'At the levee which was held that night on the hill-side with big bonfires, Dravot gives out that him and me were Gods and sons of Alexander, and Past Grand-Masters in the Craft, and was come to make Kafiristan a
The Man who

country where every man should eat in peace and drink in quiet, and specially obey us. Then the Chiefs come round to shake hands, and they were so hairy and white and fair it was just shaking hands with old friends. We gave them names according as they was like men we had known in India — Billy Fish, Holly Dilworth, Pikky Kergan, that was Bazar-master when I was at Mhow, and so on, and so on.

'The most amazing miracles was at Lodge next night. One of the old priests was watching us continuous, and I felt uneasy, for I knew we'd have to fudge
would be King
the Ritual, and I didn't know
what the men knew. The old
priest was a stranger come in
from beyond the village of Bash-
kai. The minute Dravot puts
on the Master's apron that the
girls had made for him, the
priest fetches a whoop and a
howl, and tries to overturn the
stone that Dravot was sitting on.
"It's all up now," I says.
"That comes of meddling with
the Craft without warrant!"
Dravot never winked an eye, not
when ten priests took and tilted
over the Grand-Master's chair—
which was to say the stone of
Imbra. The priest begins rub-
bing the bottom end of it to
The Man who clear the black dirt, and presently he shows all the other priests the Master's Mark, same as was on Dravot's apron, cut into the stone. Not even the priests of the temple of Imbra knew it was there. The old chap falls flat on his face at Dravot's feet and kisses 'em. "Luck again," says Dravot, across the Lodge to me, "they say it's the missing Mark that no one could understand the why of. We're more than safe now." Then he bangs the butt of his gun for a gavel and says: "By virtue of the authority vested in me by my own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand-Master.
would be King of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o’ the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with Peachey!” At that he puts on his crown and I puts on mine—I was doing Senior Warden—and we opens the Lodge in most ample form. It was a amazing miracle! The priests moved in Lodge through the first two degrees almost without telling, as if the memory was coming back to them. After that, Peachey and Dravot raised such as was worthy—high priests and Chiefs of far-off villages. Billy Fish was the first, and I can tell you we scared the soul out of him. It was not in
The Man who

any way according to Ritual, but it served our turn. We didn't raise more than ten of the biggest men, because we didn't want to make the Degree common. And they was clamouring to be raised.

"In another six months," says Dravot, "we'll hold another Communication, and see how you are working." Then he asks them about their villages, and learns that they was fighting one against the other, and were sick and tired of it. And when they was n't doing that they was fighting with the Mohammedans. "You can fight those when they come into our country," says
would be King

Dravot. "Tell off every tenth man of your tribes for a Frontier guard, and send two hundred at a time to this valley to be drilled. Nobody is going to be shot or speared any more so long as he does well, and I know that you won't cheat me, because you're white people—sons of Alexander—and not like common black Mohammedans. You are my people, and by God," says he, running off into English at the end—"I'll make a damned fine Nation of you, or I'll die in the making!"

'I can't tell all we did for the next six months, because Dravot did a lot I could n't see the hang
The Man who

of, and he learned their lingo in a way I never could. My work was to help the people plough, and now and again go out with some of the Army and see what the other villages were doing, and make 'em throw rope-bridges across the ravines which cut up the country horrid. Dravot was very kind to me, but when he walked up and down in the pine wood pulling that bloody red beard of his with both fists I knew he was thinking plans I could not advise about, and I just waited for orders.

'But Dravot never showed me disrespect before the people. They were afraid of me and the
would be King
Army, but they loved Dan. He
was the best of friends with the
priests and the Chiefs; but any
one could come across the hills
with a complaint and Dravot
would hear him out fair, and call
four priests together and say what
was to be done. He used to call
in Billy Fish from Bashkai, and
Pikky Kergan from Shu, and an
old Chief we called Kafuzelum
—it was like enough to his real
name—and hold councils with
'em when there was any fighting
to be done in small villages.
That was his Council of War, and
the four priests of Bashkai, Shu,
Khawak, and Madora was his
Privy Council. Between the lot

93
The Man who

of 'em they sent me, with forty men and twenty rifles, and sixty men carrying turquoises, into the Ghorband country to buy those hand-made Martini rifles, that come out of the Amir's workshops at Kabul, from one of the Amir's Herati regiments that would have sold the very teeth out of their mouths for turquoises.

'I stayed in Ghorband a month, and gave the Governor there the pick of my baskets for hush-money, and bribed the Colonel of the regiment some more, and between the two and the tribespeople, we got more than a hundred hand-made Martinis, a hundred good Kohat Jezails
would be King

that 'll throw to six hundred yards, and forty man-loads of very bad ammunition for the rifles. I came back with what I had, and distributed 'em among the men that the Chiefs sent in to me to drill. Dravot was too busy to attend to those things, but the old Army that we first made helped me, and we turned out five hundred men that could drill, and two hundred that knew how to hold arms pretty straight. Even those cork-screwed hand-made guns was a miracle to them. Dravot talked big about powder-shops and factories, walking up and down in the pine wood when the winter was coming on.
The Man who

"I won't make a Nation," says he. "I'll make an Empire! These men aren't niggers; they're English! Look at their eyes—look at their mouths. Look at the way they stand up. They sit on chairs in their own houses. They're the Lost Tribes, or something like it, and they've grown to be English. I'll take a census in the spring if the priests don't get frightened. There must be a fair two million of 'em in these hills. The villages are full o' little children. Two million people—two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men—and all English! They only want the ifles and a little drilling. Two
would be King

hundred and fifty thousand men, ready to cut in on Russia's right flank when she tries for India! Peachey, man," he says, chewing his beard in great hunks, "we shall be Emperors — Emperors of the Earth! Rajah Brooke will be a suckling to us. I'll treat with the Viceroy on equal terms. I'll ask him to send me twelve picked English — twelve that I know of — to help us govern a bit. There's Mackray, Sergeant-pensioner at Segowli — many's the good dinner he's given me, and his wife a pair of trousers. There's Donkin, the Warder of Tounghoo Jail; there's hundreds that I could lay my hand on if I
The Man who was in India. The Viceroy shall do it for me, I'll send a man through in the spring for those men, and I'll write for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for what I've done as Grand-Master. That—and all the Sniders that'll be thrown out when the native troops in India take up the Martini. They'll be worn smooth, but they'll do for fighting in these hills. Twelve English, a hundred thousand Sniders run through the Amir's country in driblets—I'd be content with twenty thousand in one year—and we'd be an Empire. When everything was shipshape, I'd hand over the crown—this
would be King
crown I'm wearing now — to
Queen Victoria on my knees, and
she'd say: 'Rise up, Sir Daniel
Dravot.' Oh, it's big! It's
big, I tell you! But there's so
much to be done in every place
— Bashkai, Khawak, Shu, and
everywhere else.'

"What is it?" I says.
"There are no more men com-
ing in to be drilled this autumn.
Look at those, fat, black clouds.
They're bringing the snow."

"It is n't that," says Daniel,
putting his hand very hard on
my shoulder; "and I do n't wish
to say anything that's against
you, for no other living man
would have followed me and
The Man who made me what I am as you have done. You’re a first-class Commander-in-Chief, and the people know you; but—it’s a big country, and somehow you can’t help me, Peachey, in the way I want to be helped.”

"Go to your blasted priests, then!" I said, and I was sorry when I made that remark, but it did hurt me sore to find Daniel talking so superior when I’d drilled all the men, and done all he told me.

"Don’t let ’s quarrel, Peachey," says Daniel without cursing. "You’re a King too, and the half of this Kingdom is yours; but can’t you see, 100
would be King

Peachey, we want cleverer men than us now—three or four of 'em, that we can scatter about for our Deputies. It's a hugeous great State, and I can't always tell the right thing to do, and I have n't time for all I want to do, and here's the winter coming on and all." He put half his beard into his mouth, all red like the gold of his crown.

"I'm sorry, Daniel," says I. "I've done all I could. I've drilled the men and shown the people how to stack their oats better; and I've brought in those tinware rifles from Ghorband—but I know what you're
The Man who

driving at. I take it Kings always feel oppressed that way.'

"There's another thing too," says Dravot, walking up and down. "The winter's coming and these people won't be giving much trouble, and if they do we can't move about. I want a wife."

"For Gord's sake leave the women alone!" I says. "We've both got all the work we can, though I am a fool. Remember the Contrack, and keep clear o' women."

"The Contrack only lasted till such time as we was Kings; and Kings we have been these months past," says Dravot, weighing his crown in his hand.
would be King

"You go get a wife too, Peachey—a nice, strappin', plump girl that 'll keep you warm in the winter. They're prettier than English girls, and we can take the pick of 'em. Boil 'em once or twice in hot water, and they 'll come out like chicken and ham."

"Don't tempt me!" I says. "I will not have any dealings with a woman, not till we are a dam' side more settled than we are now. I've been doing the work o' two men, and you've been doing the work o' three. Let's lie off a bit, and see if we can get some better tobacco from Afghan country and run in some good liquor; but no women."
The Man who

"Who's talking o' women?" says Dravot. "I said wife—a Queen to breed a King's son for the King. A Queen out of the strongest tribe, that 'll make them your blood-brothers, and that 'll lie by your side and tell you all the people thinks about you and their own affairs. That's what I want."

"Do you remember that Bengali woman I kept at Mogul Serai when I was a plate-layer?" says I. "A fat lot o' good she was to me. She taught me the lingo and one or two other things; but what happened? She ran away with the Station Master's servant and half my month's pay.
would be King

Then she turned up at Dadur Junction in tow of a half-caste, and had the impudence to say I was her husband—all among the drivers in the running-shed, too!"

"We've done with that," says Dravot, "these women are whiter than you or me, and a Queen I will have for the winter months."

"For the last time o' asking, Dan, do not," I says. "It'll only bring us harm. The Bible says that Kings ain't to waste their strength on women, 'specially when they've got a new raw Kingdom to work over."

"For the last time of answering, I will," said Dravot, and
The Man who

he went away through the pine-trees looking like a big red devil, the sun being on his crown and beard and all.

‘But getting a wife was not as easy as Dan thought. He put it before the Council, and there was no answer till Billy Fish said that he’d better ask the girls. Dravot damned them all round. “What’s wrong with me?” he shouts, standing by the idol Imbra. “Am I a dog or am I not enough of a man for your wenches? Have n’t I put the shadow of my hand over this country? Who stopped the last Afghan raid?” It was me really, but Dravot was too angry to remember. “Who
would be King

bought your guns? Who repaired
the bridges? Who's the Grand-
Master of the sign cut in the
stone?" says he, and he thumped
his hand on the block that he
used to sit on in Lodge, and at
Council, which opened like Lodge
always. Billy Fish said nothing
and no more did the others.
"Keep your hair on, Dan," said
I; "and ask the girls. That's
how it's done at Home, and these
people are quite English."

"The marriage of the King
is a matter of State," says Dan, in
a white-hot rage, for he could
feel, I hope, that he was going
against his better mind. He
walked out of the Council-room,
The Man who
and the others sat still, looking at
the ground.

"Billy Fish," says I to the
Chief of Bashkai, "what's the
difficulty here? A straight an-
swer to a true friend."

"You know," says Billy Fish.
"How should a man tell you
who knows everything? How
can daughters of men marry Gods
or Devils? It's not proper."

I remembered something
like that in the Bible; but if,
after seeing us as long as they
had, they still believed we were
Gods, it wasn't for me to unde-
ceive them.

"A God can do anything,"
says I. "If the King is fond of
108
would be King

a girl he'll not let her die." —

"She 'll have to," said Billy Fish.

"There are all sorts of Gods and Devils in these mountains, and now and again a girl marries one of them and is n't seen any more. Besides, you two know the Mark cut in the stone. Only the Gods know that. We thought you were men till you showed the sign of the Master."

"I wished then that we had explained about the loss of the genuine secrets of a Master-Mason at the first go-off; but I said nothing. All that night there was a blowing of horns in a little dark temple half-way down the hill, and I heard a girl crying fit
The Man who to die. One of the priests told us that she was being prepared to marry the King.

"I'll have no nonsense of that kind," says Dan. "I don't want to interfere with your customs, but I'll take my own wife." — "The girl's a little bit afraid," says the priest. "She thinks she's going to die, and they are a-heartening of her up down in the temple."

"Hearten her very tender, then," says Dravot, "or I'll hearten you with the butt of a gun so you'll never want to be heartened again." He licked his lips, did Dan, and stayed up walking about more than half the
would be King

night, thinking of the wife that he was going to get in the morn-
ing. I wasn't any means comfortable, for I knew that dealings with a woman in foreign parts, though you was a crowned King twenty times over, could not but be risky. I got up very early in the morning while Dravot was asleep, and I saw the priests talking together in whispers, and the Chiefs talking together too, and they looked at me out of the corners of their eyes.

"What is up, Fish?" I says to the Bashkai man, who was wrapped up in his furs and looking splendid to behold.

"I can't rightly say," says he;
The Man who

"but if you can make the King drop all this nonsense about marriage, you’ll be doing him and me and yourself a great service."

"That I do believe," says I. "But sure, you know, Billy, as well as me, having fought against and for us, that the King and me are nothing more than two of the finest men that God Almighty ever made. Nothing more, I do assure you."

"That may be," says Billy Fish, "and yet I should be sorry if it was." He sinks his head upon his great fur cloak for a minute and thinks. "King," says he, "be you man or God or Devil, I’ll stick by you to-day."
would be King
I have twenty of my men with me, and they will follow me. We’ll go to Bashkai until the storm blows over."

‘A little snow had fallen in the night, and everything was white except the greasy fat clouds that blew down and down from the north. Dravot came out with his crown on his head, swinging his arms and stamping his feet, and looking more pleased than Punch.

‘“For the last time, drop it, Dan,” says I in a whisper. “Billy Fish here says that there will be a row.”

‘“A row among my people!” says Dravot. “Not much. Peachey, you’re a fool not to
The Man who
get a wife too. Where's the girl?” says he with a voice as loud as the braying of a jackass. “Call up all the Chiefs and priests, and let the Emperor see if his wife suits him.”

‘There was no need to call any one. They were all there leaning on their guns and spears round the clearing in the centre of the pine wood. A lot of priests went down to the little temple to bring up the girl, and the horns blew fit to wake the dead. Billy Fish saunters round and gets as close to Daniel as he could, and behind him stood his twenty men with matchlocks. Not a man of them under six
would be King

feet. I was next to Dravot, and behind me was twenty men of the regular Army. Up comes the girl, and a strapping wench she was, covered with silver and turquoise but white as death, and looking back every minute at the priests.

"She'll do," said Dan, looking her over. "What's to be afraid of, lass? Come and kiss me." He puts his arm round her. She shuts her eyes, gives a bit of a squeak, and down goes her face in the side of Dan's flaming red beard.

"The slut's bitten me!" says he, clapping his hand to his neck, and, sure enough, his hand was
red with blood. Billy Fish and two of his matchlock-men catches hold of Dan by the shoulders and drags him into the Bashkai lot, while the priests howls in their lingo, — "Neither God nor Devil but a man!" I was all taken aback, for a priest cut at me in front, and the Army behind began firing into the Bashkai men.

"God A'mighty!" says Dan. "What is the meaning o' this?"

"Come back! Come away!" says Billy Fish. "Ruin and Mutiny is the matter. We'll break for Bashkai if we can."

I tried to give some sort of orders to my men—the men o'
would be King

the regular Army—but it was no use, so I fired into the brown of 'em with an English Martini and drilled three beggars in a line. The valley was full of shouting, howling creatures, and every soul was shrieking, "Not a God nor a Devil but only a man!" The Bashkai troops stuck to Billy Fish all they were worth, but their matchlocks wasn't half as good as the Kabul breech-loaders, and four of them dropped. Dan was bellowing like a bull, for he was very wrathy; and Billy Fish had a hard job to prevent him running out at the crowd.

"We can't stand," says Billy Fish. "Make a run for it down
The Man who

the valley! The whole place is against us.” The matchlock-men ran, and we went down the valley in spite of Dravot. He was swearing horrible and crying out he was a King. The priests rolled great stones on us, and the regular Army fired hard, and there wasn’t more than six men, not counting Dan, Billy Fish, and Me, that came down to the bottom of the valley alive.

‘Then they stopped firing and the horns in the temple blew again. “Come away — for Gord’s sake come away!” says Billy Fish. “They’ll send runners out to all the villages before ever we get to Bashkai. I can
would be King

protect you there, but I can’t do anything now.”

‘My own notion is that Dan began to go mad in his head from that hour. He stared up and down like a stuck pig. Then he was all for walking back alone and killing the priests with his bare hands; which he could have done. “An Emperor am I,” says Daniel, “and next year I shall be a Knight of the Queen.”

“All right, Dan,” says I; “but come along now while there’s time.”

“It’s your fault,” says he, “for not looking after your Army better. There was mu-
The Man who

tiny in the midst, and you didn’t
know — you damned engine-
driving, plate-laying, mission-
ary’s-pass-hunting hound!” He
sat upon a rock and called me
every foul name he could lay
tongue to. I was too heart-sick
to care, though it was all his
foolishness that brought the
smash.

“‘I’m sorry, Dan,” says I,
“but there’s no accounting for
natives. This business is our
Fifty-Seven. Maybe we’ll make
something out of it yet, when
we’ve got to Bashkai.”

“‘Let’s get to Bashkai, then,”
says Dan, “and, by God, when
I come back here again I’ll
would be King

sweep the valley so there isn't a
bug in a blanket left!"

"We walked all that day, and
all that night Dan was stumping
up and down on the snow, chew-
ing his beard and muttering to
himself.

"There's no hope o' getting
clear," said Billy Fish. "The
priests will have sent runners to
the villages to say that you are
only men. Why didn't you
stick on as Gods till things was
more settled; I'm a dead man,"
says Billy Fish, and he throws
himself down on the snow and
begins to pray to his Gods.

"Next morning we was in a
cruel bad country—all up and
The Man who
down, no level ground at all, and no food either. The six Bashkai men looked at Billy Fish hungry-way as if they wanted to ask something, but they said never a word. At noon we came to the top of a flat mountain all covered with snow, and when we climbed up into it, behold, there was an Army in position waiting in the middle!

"The runners have been very quick," says Billy Fish, with a little bit of a laugh. "They are waiting for us."

"Three or four men began to fire from the enemy's side, and a chance shot took Daniel in the calf of the leg. That brought
would be King
him to his senses. He looks across the snow at the Army, and sees the rifles that we had brought into the country.

"We're done for," says he. "They are Englishmen, these people,—and it's my blasted nonsense that has brought you to this. Get back, Billy Fish, and take your men away; you've done what you could, and now cut for it. Carnehan," says he, "shake hands with me and go along with Billy. Maybe they won't kill you. I'll go and meet 'em alone. It's me that did it. Me, the King!"

"Go!" says I. "Go to Hell, Dan. I'm with you here.
The Man who
Billy Fish, you clear out, and we
two will meet those folk."

"I'm a Chief," says Billy
Fish, quite quiet. "I stay with
you. My men can go."

The Bashkai fellows did n't
wait for a second word but ran
off, and Dan and Me and Billy
Fish walked across to where the
drums were drumming and the
horns were horning. It was
cold — awful cold. I've got
that cold in the back of my
head now. There's a lump of
it there.'

The Punkah-coolies had gone
to sleep. Two kerosene lamps
were blazing in the office, and
the perspiration poured down
would be King
my face and splashed on the blotter as I leaned forward. Carnehan was shivering, and I feared that his mind might go. I wiped my face, took a fresh grip of the piteously mangled hands, and said: 'What happened after that?'

The momentary shift of my eyes had broken the clear current. 'What was you pleased to say?' whined Carnehan. 'They took them without any sound. Not a little whisper all along the snow, not though the King knocked down the first man that set hand on him—not though old Peachey fired his last cartridge into the brown of 'em. Not a single
The Man who
solitary sound did those swines make. They just closed up tight, and I tell you their furs stunk. There was a man called Billy Fish, a good friend of us all, and they cut his throat, Sir, then and there, like a pig; and the King kicks up the bloody snow and says: "We've had a dashed fine run for our money. What's coming next?" But Peachey, Peachey Taliaferro, I tell you, Sir, in confidence as betwixt two friends, he lost his head, Sir. No, he didn't neither. The King lost his head, so he did, all along o' one of those cunning rope-bridges. Kindly let me have the paper-cutter, Sir. It tilted...
would be King

this way. They marched him a mile across the snow to a rope-bridge over a ravine with a river at the bottom. You may have seen such. They prodded him behind like an ox. “Damn your eyes!” says the King. “D’you suppose I can’t die like a gentleman?” He turns to Peachey—Peachey that was crying like a child. “I’ve brought you to this, Peachey,” says he. “Brought you out of your happy life to be killed in Kafiristan, where you was late Commander-in-Chief of the Emperor’s forces. Say you forgive me, Peachey.”—“I do,” says Peachey. “Fully and freely do I forgive you, Dan.”—“Shake
The Man who
hands, Peachey," says he. "I'm
going now." Out he goes, look-
ing neither right nor left, and
when he was plumb in the mid-
dle of those dizzy dancing ropes,
—"Cut, you'beggars," he shouts;
and they cut, and old Dan fell,
turning round and round and
round, twenty thousand miles, for
he took half an hour to fall till
he struck the water, and I could
see his body caught on a rock
with the gold crown close beside.
'But do you know what they
did to Peachey between two pine-
trees? They crucified him, Sir,
as Peachey's hand will show.
They used wooden pegs for his
hands and his feet; and he did n't
would be King
die. He hung there and screamed, and they took him down next day, and said it was a miracle that he was n't dead. They took him down — poor old Peachey that had n't done them any harm — that had n't done them any — —

He rocked to and fro and wept bitterly, wiping his eyes with the back of his scarred hands and moaning like a child for some ten minutes.

'They was cruel enough to feed him up in the temple, because they said he was more of a God than old Daniel that was a man. Then they turned him out on the snow, and told him to go home, and Peachey came home
The Man who

in about a year, begging along the roads quite safe; for Daniel Dravot he walked before and said: "Come along, Peachey. It's a big thing we're doing."

The mountains they danced at night, and the mountains they tried to fall on Peachey's head, but Dan he held up his hand, and Peachy came along bent double. He never let go of Dan's hand, and he never let go of Dan's head. They gave it to him as a present in the temple, to remind him not to come again, and though the crown was pure gold, and Peachey was starving, never would Peachey sell the same. You knew Dravot, Sir!
would be King
You knew Right Worshipful Brother Dravot! Look at me now!

He fumbled in the mass of rags round his bent waist; brought out a black horsehair bag embroidered with silver thread; and shook therefrom on to my table—the dried, withered head of Daniel Dravot! The morning sun that had long been paling the lamps struck the red beard and blind sunken eyes; struck, too, a heavy circlet of gold studded with raw turquoises, that Carnehan placed tenderly on the battered temples.

'You be'old now,' said Carnehan, 'the Emperor in his 'abit as he lived— the King of Kafiristan
The Man who

with his crown upon his head. Poor old Daniel that was a mon-
arch once!

I shuddered, for, in spite of defacements manifold, I recogn-
ised the head of the man of Marwar Junction. Carnehan rose
to go. I attempted to stop him. He was not fit to walk abroad.
‘Let me take away the whiskey, and give me a little money,’ he
gasped. ‘I was a King once. I’ll go to the Deputy Commis-
sioner and ask to set in the Poor-
house till I get my health. No, thank you, I can’t wait till you get a carriage for me. I’ve ur-
gent private affairs—in the south—at Marwar.’
would be King

He shambled out of the office and departed in the direction of the Deputy Commissioner's house. That day at noon I had occasion to go down the blinding hot Mall, and I saw a crooked man crawling along the white dust of the roadside, his hat in his hand, quavering dolorously after the fashion of street-singers at Home. There was not a soul in sight, and he was out of all possible ear-shot of the houses. And he sang through his nose, turning his head from right to left:—

‘The Son of Man goes forth to war,
   A golden crown to gain;
His blood-red banner streams afar—
   Who follows in his train?’
The Man who

I waited to hear no more, but put the poor wretch into my carriage and drove him off to the nearest missionary for eventual transfer to the Asylum. He repeated the hymn twice while he was with me whom he did not in the least recognise, and I left him singing it to the missionary.

Two days later I enquired after his welfare of the Superintendent of the Asylum.

'He was admitted suffering from sun-stroke. He died early yesterday morning,' said the Superintendent. 'Is it true that he was half an hour bareheaded in the sun at midday?'

'Yes,' said I, 'but do you hap-
would be King
pen to know if he had anything
upon him by any chance when
he died?'

'Not to my knowledge,' said
the Superintendent.
And there the matter rests.