

had eyes and ears apparently for everything and everybody else. He watched him for ten minutes, until at last their eyes met. Then he sat down and kicked the box back to its owners.

He looked again at Ismail. With teeth clenched and eyes ablaze, the Afridi was smashing his knuckles together and rocking to and fro. There was no need to fear him. He turned and touched the Pathan's broad shoulder. The man smiled and bent his turbaned head to listen.

"Opposite," said King, "nearly exactly opposite—three rows back from the front, counting the front row as one—there sits a man with his arm in a sling and a bandage over his eye."

The Pathan nodded and touched his knife-hilt.

"One-and-twenty men from him, counting him as one, sits a man with a big black beard, whose shoulders are like a bull's. As he sits he hangs his head between them—thus."

"And you want him killed? Nay, I

think you mean Muhammad Anim. His time is not yet."

The suggestion was as good-naturedly prompt as if the hakim's need had been water, and the other's flask were empty. He was sorry he could not offer to oblige.

"Who am I that I should want him killed?" King answered with mild reproof. "My trade is to heal, not slay. I am a hakim."

The other nodded.

"Yet, to enter Khinjan Caves you

had to slay a man, hakim or no!"

"He was an unbeliever," King answered modestly, and the other nodded again with friendly understanding.

"What about the man yonder, then?" the Pathan asked. "What will you have of him?"

"Look! See! Tell me truly what his name is!"

THE Pathan got up and strode forward to stand on the box, kicking aside the elbows that leaned on it and laughing when the owners cursed him. He stood on it and stared for five minutes, counting deliberately three times over, striking a finger on the palm of his hand to check himself.

"Bull-with-a-beard!" he announced at last, dropping back into place beside King. "Muhammad Anim. The mullah Muhammad Anim."

"An Afghan?" King asked.

"He says he is an Afghan. But unless he lies he is from Ishtamboul (Constantinople)."

Itching to ask more questions, King sat still and held his peace. The direr the need of information in the "Hills," and in all the East for that matter, the greater the wisdom, as a rule, of seeming uninquisitive. And wisdom was rewarded now, for the Pathan, who would have dried up under eager questioning, grew talkative. Civility and volubility are sometimes one, and not always only among the civilized. King—the hakim Kurram Khan—blinked mildly behind his spectacles and looked like one to whom a savage might safely ease his mind.

"He bade me go to Sikaram where my village is and bring him a hundred men for his lashkar. He says he has her special favour. Wait and watch, I say!"

"Has he money?" asked King, apparently drawing a bow at a venture for conversation's sake. But there is an art in asking artless questions.

"Aye! The liar says the Germans gave it to him. He swears they will send more. Who are the Germans? Who is a man who talks of a jihad that is to be, that he should have gold coin given him by unbelievers? I saw a German once, at Nuklao. He ate pig-meat and washed it down with wine. Are such men sons of the Prophet? Wait and watch, say I!"

"Money?" said King. "He admits it? And none dare kill him for it? You say his time is not yet come?"

More than ever it was obvious that the hakim was a very simple man. The Pathan made a gesture of contempt.

"I dare what I will, hakim! But he says there is more money on the way! When he has it all—why—we are all in Allah's keeping—He decides!"

"And should no more money come?"

THIS was courteous conversation and received as such—many a long league removed from curiosity.

"Who am I to foretell a man's kismet? I know what I know, and I think what I think! I know thee, hakim, for a gentle fellow, who hurt me almost not at all in the drawing of a bullet out of my flesh. What knowest thou about me?"

"That I will dress the wound for thee again!"

Artless statements are as useful in their way as artless questions. Let the guile lie deep, that is all.

"Nay, nay! For she said nay! Shall I fall foul of her, for the sake of a new bandage?"

The temptation was terrific to ask why she had given that order, but King resisted it; and presently it occurred to the Pathan that his own theories on the subject might be of interest.

(To be continued.)



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