

**THE MAN WHO
WOULD BE KING**

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The Man Who Would Be King by Rudyard Kipling

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RUDYARD KIPLING

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The
Man who would be King



Brother to a Prince and fellow to a
Begg^r 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 un-
der circumstances which pre-
vented 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

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been a veritable King and was promised the reversion of a Kingdom — 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 myself.

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 travelling, 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

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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

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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

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chin I was disposed to agree with him.

We talked politics — the politics of Loafedom 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,

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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.