King of the Khyber Rifles By TALBOT MUNDY

The Most Picturesque Romance of the Decade

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KING IS LED TO VISIT A VAST CAVE THROUGH WHICH AN UNDERGROUND RIVER FLOWS, AND IN A GREAT CAVERN MEETS THOUSANDS OF FANATICS

Synopsis .- At the beginning of the world war Capt. Athelstan King of the British Indian army and of its secret service, is ordered to Delhi to meet Yasmini, a dancer, and go with her to Kinjan to meet the outlaws there who are said by spies to be preparing for a jihad or holy war. On his way to Delhi King quietly foils a plan to assassinate him and gets evidence that Yasmini is after him. He meets Rewa Guaga, Yasmini's man, who says she has already gone north, and at her town house witnesses queer dances. Ismail, an Afridi, becomes his body servant and protector. He rescues some of Yasmini's hillmen and takes them north with him, tricking the Rangar into going ahead. The Rangar deserts him at a dangerous time. He meets his brother at Ali Masjid fort. The disguise he assumes there fools even the sharp-eyed cutthroats composing his guard. He enters Khinjan caves, thanks to his lying guides.

CHAPTER XI.-Continued.

"Are there devils in Tophet? Fire

and my veins are one!" tues as assistant.

Khan," he boasted. "He can cure anything, and for a very little fee!" The man looked incredulous, but

King drew the covering from his row of instruments and bottles.

out the brave wins anything!"

Ismail and Darya Khan were new to his howls of rage did him no good, for "Hills." Ismall drove the hilt of a knife be-

stores consisted of morphia and co- did not catch, and within five minutes caine. He injected enough cocaine to after that, without a word of explanadeaden the man's nerves, and allowed tion, the cave was left empty of all ex-It time to work. Then he drew out cept his own five men. They carried three back teeth in quick succession, away the men too sick to walk and to make sure he had the right one.

Utterly without pain for the first time for days, the man was as grateful as "Why did they go? Who shouted?" a wolf freed from a trap.

"Are there any others in pain in Khinjan?" King asked him.

"Listen to him! What is Khinjan? Is there one man without a wound or a sore or a scar or a sickness?"

"Then, tell them," said King. The man laughed.

"When I show my jaw, there will be a fight to be first! Make ready, hakim!

King sat down to eat, but he had not finished his meal-he had made the last little heap of rice into a ball with his fingers, native style, and was mop- King asked him, trying a new line. ping up the last of the curried gravy with it-when the advance guard of the lame and the halt and the sick made its appearance. The cave's entrance became jammed with them, and no riot ever made more noise.

"Hakim! Ho, hakim! Where is the hakim who draws teeth? Where is the man who knows yunani?"

Ten men burst down the passage all together, all clamoring, and one man wasted no time at all but began to tear away bloody bandages to show his wound. King rolled up his sleeves and began, so that eagerness gave place to wonder. The desperate need of winning his first trick, made him horror-proof; and nobody waiting for the next turn was troubled because the man under the knife screamed a little or bled more than usual.

When they died-and more than one did die-men carried them out and flung them over the precipice into the waterfall below.

Ismail and Darya Khan became choosers of the victims. They seized a man, laid him on the bed, tore off his disgusting bandages and held their breath until the awful resulting stench had more or less dispersed. Then King would probe or lance or bandage as he saw fit, using anesthetics when he must, but managing mostly without

They almost flung money at him. He tossed money and clothes and every other thing they gave him into a corner at the back of the cave, and nobody wied to steal them back, although a man suspected of honesty in that company would have been tortured to death as an hergtic and would have had no sympathy.

For hour after gruesome hour he only battles and evil living can pro- there had been. duce, until men began to come at fast with fresh wounds, all caused by bul- it is night. Sleep against the toil to- and making ready against opportunity. lets, wrapped in bandages on which morrow. There be many sick in Khinthe blood had caked but had not grown | jan."

ber," somebody informed him, and he one thing he was so weary that his The second guard that afternoon the smoky lamplight. There were ten other until dawn, and flung himself sen his ennui, King began to whistle.

spoke.

"Fighting in the Khyber! Aye! We of Yasmini all night long."

them back into their fort! Ave! we

slew many!" "Not a jihad yet?" King asked, as if the world might be coming to an end. The man did not notice the eager- The words were startled out of him. ness beaming out of King's horn- Under other circumstances he would cimmed spectacles, but Ismail did; it never have asked that question so diseemed to him time to prove his vir- rectly; but he had lost reckoning of everything but these poor devils' dread-"This is the famous hakim Kurram ful need of doctoring, and he was like a man roused out of a dream. If a holy war had been proclaimed already. then he was engaged on a forlorn hope. But the man laughed at him.

"Nay, not yet. Bull-with-a-beard "Take a chance!" he advised. "None holds back yet. This was a little fight. The jihad shall come later!"

"And who is 'Bull-with-a-beard'?" the business and enthusiastic. They King wondered; but he did not ask had the man down, held tight on the that question because his wits were door to the huge amusement of the awake again. It pays not to be in too rest, before he could even protest; and | much of a hurry to know things in the

As it happened, he asked no more tween his open jaws to keep them open. questions, for there came a shout at A very large proportion of King's the cave entrance whose purport he vanished, snatching the last man away Ismail let the victim up, and Darya almost before King's fingers had fin-Khan gave him water in a brass cap. ished tying the bandage on his wound. "Why is that?" he asked Ismail. he

"It is night," Ismail answered. "It was time."

King stared about him. He had not realized until then that without aid of the lamps he could not see his own below the waterline in Nelson's fleet.

"But who shouted?" "Who knows? There is only one had robbed him. here who gives orders. We be many who obey," said Ismail.

"Whose men were the last ones?" "Bull-with-a-beard's."

"And whose man art thou, Ismail?" The Afridi hesitated, and when he spoke at last there was not quite the



A Man Whom He Had Never Seen Before Leaned on a Magazine Rifle

"There has been fighting in the Khy- cave, but the task was hopeless. For soon!"

photograph the general had given him and saw then a blood-soaked bandage in Peshawur-and that the cave be- on the right of his neck, not very far came filled with the strange intoxicating scent that had first wooed his senses in her reception room in Delhi.

He dreamed that she called 'im by name. First, "King sahib!" Then "Kurram Khan!" And her voice was strange things."

presently. "It is good that he sleeps!" shadowy Ismail grunted an answer. When he awoke at last it was after dawn, and light shone down the passage into the cave.

"Ismail!" he shouted, for he was thirsty. But there was no answer.

"Darya Khan!" Again there was no answer. He with the same result. He decided to unplundered! Not a throat of an ungo to the cave mouth, summon his men, who were no doubt sleeping. But there was no Ismail near the entrance-no out of my sight!" Darya Khan-nor any of the other men. The horse was gone. So was the mule. So was the harness, and everything he had, except the drugs and instruments and the presents the sick the guard leaned far into the cave had given him; he had noticed all mouth and hurled adjectives at him, those lying about in confusion when he the mildest of which was a well of in-

his lungs, thinking they might all be outside.

He heard a man hawk and spit, close to the entrance, and went out to see. A man whom he had never seen before leaned on a magazine rifle and eyed him as a tiger eyes his prey. "No farther!" he growled, bringing

his rifle to the port. 'Why not?" King asked him.

Khyber do the kites ask why? Go in!" He thought then of Yasmini's bracelet, that had always gained him at The bracelet had disappeared!

He turned back into the cave to hunt for it, and the strange scent greeted him again. In spite of the surround- him, following in silence out on to the ing stench of drugs and filthy wounds, dark ledge above the waterfall and nothere was no mistaking it. If it had ticing that the guard with the boils Saunders swore it was, and her special evilly out of a shadow as King passed. scent on the note Darya Khan had carried down the Khyber, then it was hers hakim, before a worse thing happens!" now, and she had been in the cave.

hand held out in front of him; his eyes and his cartridges, but not the dagger, neck and so inadvertently to hurt his had grown used to the gloom, like wrapped in a handkerchief, under his boils. He cursed, and there was pity those of the surgeons in the sick-bays shirt. The money, that his patients in King's voice when he spoke next. had brought him, lay on the floor untouched. It was an unusual robber who

"Who's 'Bull-with-a-beard'?" he wondered. "Nobody interfered with me until I doctored his men. He's in oppothis? And why does 'Bull-with-a-beard,' fingered his sores and wondered, mutwhoever he is, hang back?"

CHAPTER XII.

bolls all over the back of his neck. He lastingly urging him to hurry.

so wide. There is an end to pain!" he prisoned all the noises in the world. went on, adjusting his horn-rimmed | "Earth's Drink!" he announced, wavlast night, and it hurt him, but he must | mouth tight, as if afraid to voice sacri-

be well today." "Go in!" growled the guard. "She

to let thee touch them!" day Yasmini sent him food by silent able. and Eyed Him as a Tiger Eyes Its and eat heartify at one and the same toiled over wounds and sores such as same assurance in his voice as once sers and proceeded to clean the cave. But Ismail dragged him back, "I am hers! Be thou hers, too! But drugs and instruments, repacking them din his shout was like a whisper.

"As I told that heathen with a gun back. out there, there's an end to every-King made a little effort to clean the thing!" he reflected. "May this come

the cave-she, the woman of the faded | dog's. So King stopped at the entrance

from the jugular. "Hah!" said King. "Was that wound got in the Khyber the other day?"

"Nay. Here in Khinjan." "A man told me last night," said King, drawing on imagination without in the Khyber was because a jihad is

"He sleeps!" said the same voice launched already." "That man lied!" said the guard.

> "So I told him!" answered King. "I told him there never will be another jihad."

to talk too much.

"Then thou art a greater liar than will be a jihad when she is ready, such ple an one as never yet was! India shall called each of the other men by name | bleed for all the fat years she has lain believer in the world shall be left unslit! No fihad? Thou Har! Get in

So King retired into the cave, with something new to think about. Was she planning the jihad! Or pretending to plan one? Every once in a while formation. If his temper was the tem-"Ismail!" he shouted at the top of per of the "Hills," it was easy to read disappointment for a jihad that should have been already but had been postponed. King let him alone and paced the cave for hours.

He was squatting on his bed-end in the dark, like a spectacled image of Buddha, when the first of the three men came on guard again and at last Ismail came for him holding a pitchy torch that filled the dim passage full "Allah! When a camel dies in the of acrid smoke and made both of them cough. Ismail was red-eyed with it.

"Come!" he growled. "Come, little hakim!" Then he turned on his heel least civility from every man who saw at once, as if afraid of being twitted it. He held up his left wrist and knew with desertion. He seemed to want to that instant why it felt uncomfortable. get outside, where he could keep out of range of words, yet not to wish to seem unfriendly.

But King made no effort to speak to en her special scent in Delhi, as was back again on duty. He grinne "Make an end!" he advised. "Jump,

To illustrate the suggestion he He hunted high and low and found kicked a loose stone over the cliff, and try to measure it. It was the hollow

"Do they hurt thee?" "Aye, like the devil! Khinjan is a nince of plagues!"

"I could heal them," King said, passing on, and the man stared hard. "Come!" boomed Ismail through the sition. That's a fair guess. Now, who darkness, shaking the torch to make in thunder-by the fat lord Harry- it burn better and beckoning impatient-

can 'Bull-with-a-beard' be? And why ly, and King hurried after him, leaving fighting in the Khyber so early as all behind a savage at the cave mouth who tering, leaning on a rifle, muttering and muttering again as if he had seen a new light.

Instead of waiting for King to catch They came and changed the guard up, Ismail began to lead the way at two hours after dawn, to the accom- great speed along a path that descendpaniment of orders growled through ed gradually until it curved round the the mist, and the crash of rifle-butts end of the chasm and plunged into a grounding on the rock path. King went tunnel where the darkness grew to the cave entrance, to look the new opaque. For thirty minutes he led man over; he was a Mahsudi-no swiftly down a crazy devil's stairway sweeter to look at and no less treacher- of uneven bowlders, stopping to lend ous for the fact. Also, that he had a hand at the worst places, but ever-

was not likely to be better tempered | Then the hell-mouth gloom began to because of that fact, either. But it is grow faintly luminous, and the wateran ill wind that blows no good to the fall's thunder burst on their ears from close at hand. They emerged into "There is an end to everything," he fresh wet air and a sea of sound, on a remarked presently, addressing the rock ledge like the one above. Ismail world at large, or as much as he could raised the torch and waved it. The see of it through the cave mouth. "A fire and smoke wandered up, until they hill is so high, a pool so deep, a river | flattened on a moving opal dome, that |

It was the river, million-colored in says it is sorcery! She says none are the torchlight, pouring from a half- above water level. mile-long slash in the cliff above them "I can heal boils !" said King, retir- and plunging past them through the

until his senses reeled. Then he sleeves and native-made cotton trou- ledge's brink and tried to peer over. finns, armed to the teeth.

"Allah! Ask him who made it!" scanning a hundred faces swiftly in two-hour watches, to relieve one and the first, up to the point when, to less trotted after him. After ten minutes he had seen before anywhere! men who held lamps for him, one of on a clean bed. He was asleep before Each time he came near the entrance be level with the river, in a tunnel run- scious of brute strength and special them a newcomer, and it was he who his head had met the pillow; and for the new guard could catch a few bars ning nearly parallel. Ismail kept look- favor. When any man trespassed with all he knew to the contrary he dreamed of the tune. After a little while the ing back to bid King hurry and never so much as a toe beyond the ring of

leads to the 'Heart of the I s'!" And fender would scurry tho is after that King had to do his best to the jeers of any who had seem

keep the Afridi's back in sight. The sound of slippers clicking and seemed no room anywhere in front. rutching on the rock floor swelled and Then a guard threw his shield down died and swelled again as the tunnel with a clang and deliberately fired his ed from cavern into cavern.

every man beat out his torch and ered stone and stalactite, and he tossed it on a heap. After that there grinned as he watched the crowd dodge was a ledge above the height of a to avoid it. man's head on either side of the tunnel, and along the ledge little oil-burn- different directions and raced for the ing lamps were spaced at measured arena, each with a curved sword in intervals. A quarter of a mile farther either hand. The yelling changed back along there were two sharp turns in into the chant, only louder than before, the tunnel, and then at last a sea of and by that much more terrible. Cymnoise and a veritable blaze of light.

surprisingly familiar. But dreams are any compunction at all, "that the fight very womb brayed a music-box, such Afridi sword dance, than which there steam. It was being worked by inex- of the "Hills." And in his sleep he thought that a shifting position uneasily, as if afraid pert hands, for the time was something jerky; but it was robbed of its tinny meanness and even lent majesty by the hugeness of a cavern's roof, as proved him not to have been altogether well as by the crashing, swinging music he!" the guard answered hotly. "There for lawless hours and a kingless peo-

"Marchons!-Citoyens!-" time to it, and the rock shook. They deployed to left and right into a space



"Come!" He Urged Fiercely. "This Leads to the 'Heart of the Hills!"

so vast that the eye at first refused to to see between them. ed and flung back a thousand colors at supposing he's here." the flickering light below. Across the Reasoning along that line, he tried cavern's farther end for a space of two to see the faces on the far side, but th hundred yards the great river rushed, problem was to see over the dance plunging out of a great fanged gap and heads. He succeeded presently, hurrying out of view down another one, the Orakzai Pathan saw what he w licking smooth banks on its way with ed, and in his anxiety to be agree a hungry sucking sound.

There were little lamps everywhere, from between the ranks in from perched on ledges amid the stalactites, owners offered instant fight, bu and they suffused the whole cavern in no further objection when the golden glow. In the midst of the cay- who wanted it and why. Kin ern a great arena had been left bare, dered at their sudden change of mind. and thousands of turbaned men squat- He found a man soon who was no platform, about fourteen Teet above the The man smiled and bent his turbaned floor, and the broad track thence to head to listen. the arena, as well as all the arena's "Opposite," said King, "nearly exwind among the stalactites.

King whispered to himself, but he them. Look! See! Tell me truly wasted no time just then on trying to what his name is!" explain how Greek lamps had ever got there. There was too much else to ward to stand on the box, kicking aside watch and wonder at.

No steps led down from the bridge was blind. But from the bridge's farspectacles. "I lanced a man's boils ing the torch and then shutting his ther end across the hurrying water stairs had been hewn out of the rock hand to check himself. wall and led up to a hole of twice a

On either side of the bridge end a passage had been left clear to the ing into the cave. Then, from a safe gloom toward the very middle of the river edge, and nobody seemed to care distance down the passage, he added a world. Somewhere it met rock bottom to invade it, although it was not word or two to sink in as the hours and boiled there, for a roar like the marked off in any way. Each passage went by. At intervals throughout the sea's came up from deeps unimagin. was about fifty feet wide and quite straight. But the space between the messengers. It is not easy to worry He watched the overturning dome bridge end and the arena, and the arena itself, had to be kept free from like one to whom a savage might safetime. Having eaten, he rolled up his crawled on hands and knees to the trespassers by fifty swaggering ruf-

Every man of the thousands there After that he overhauled his stock of "Come!" he howled; but in all that had a knife in evidence, but the arena guards had magazine rifles as well as "How deep is it?" King bellowed Khyber tulwars. Nobody else wore firearms openly. Some of the arena guards bore huge round shields of pre-The fear of the falls was on the historic pattern of a size and sort he Afridi, and he tugged at King's arm in had never seen before, even in mua frenzy of impatience. Suddenly he seums. But there was very little that stopped with lancet in midair to listen, very bones were water. He appointed proved even less communicative than let go and broke into a run. King he was seeing that night of a kind that

hurrying uphill he guessed they must | The guards lolled insolently, con-"Fighting in the Khyber! Aye! We of Yasmini all night long. hook-nosed ruffian began to sing the paused once to rest. were a little lashkar, but we drove It seemed to him that she came into words to it, in a voice like a forgotten "Come!" he urged flercely. "This until the swivel rattled, and the oflamps, a guard would slap his rifle-butt

Shoving, kicking gid elbowing with They began after a time to hear set purpose, Ismail forced a way voices and to see the smoky glare made through the already scated crowd and by other torches. Then Ismail set the drew King down into the cramped pace yet faster, and they became the space beside him, cose enough to the ast two of a procession of turbaned arena to be able to catch the guards' men, who tramped along a winding low laughter. But he was restless, He tunnel into a great mountain's womb. wished to get nearer yet, only there

rifle at the roof. The ricochetting bul-In one great cave they came to let brought down a shower of splint-

Instantly a hundred men rose from bals crashed. The music box resumed Part of the noise made King feel its measured grinding of the "Marseithomesick, for out of the mountain's laise." And the hundred began an as the old-time carousals made use of is nothing wilder in all the world. Its before the days of electricity and like can only be seen under the shadow

Ismail seemed obsessed by the spirit of hades let toose-drawn by it, as by a magnet, although subsequent events without a plan. He got up, with his it played-wild-wonderful-invented eyes fixed on the dance, and thrust himself and King next to some Orakzai Pathans, ethowing savagely to right and left to make room. And patience The procession began to tramp in proved scarce. The nearest man reached for the ever-ready Pathan knife, but paused in the instant that his knife licked clear. From a swift side glance at King's face he changed to a full stare, his scowl slowly giving place to a grin as he recognized

"Allah!" He drove the long blade back again. "Well met, hakim! See-the wound

heals finely!" Baring his shoulder under the smelly sheepskin cont, he lifted a bandage gingerly to show the clean opening out of which King had coaxed a bullet the day before. It looked wholesome and

ready to heal. "Name thy reward, hakim! We Orakzai Pathans forget no favors!"

(Now that boast was a true one.) King nodded more to himself than to the other man. He needed, for instance, very much to know who was planning a jihad, and who "Bull-witha-beard" might be; but it was not safe to confide just yet in a chance-made acquaintance. A very fair acquaintance with some phases of the East had taught him that names such as Bullwith-a-beard are often almost photographically descriptive. He rose to his feet to look. A blind man can talk, but it takes trained eyes to gather informa-

The din had increased, and it was safe to stand up and stare, because all' eyes were on the madness in the middle. There were plenty besides himself who stood to get a better view. and he had to dodge from side to side

"I'm not to doctor his men. There no bracelet. His pistol was gone, too, the movement caused him to bend his core of a mountain, filled by the sea- fore it's a fair guess that he and I are sound of a human crowd and hung with | to be kept apart. Therefore he'll be as huge stalactites that danced and shift- far away from me now as possible.

reached forward to pull back

ted round it in rings. At the end interested in the dancing, but who had where the river formed a tangent to eyes and ears apparently for everythem the rings were flattened, and at thing and everybody else. He watched that point they were cut into by the him for ten minutes, until at last their ramp of a bridge, and by a lane left eyes met. Then he sat down and to connect the bridge with the arena, kicked the box back to its owners. He The bridge end formed a nearly square | touched the Pathan's broad shoulder.

boundary, had been marked off by actly opposite-three rows from the great earthenware lamps, whose greasy front, counting the front row as onesmoke streaked up and was lost by the there sits a man with a black beard. whose shoulders are like a buil's. As "Greek lamps, every one of 'em!" he sits he hangs his head between

The Pathan got up and strode forthe elbows that leaned on it and laughing when the owners cursed him. He end to the floor; toward the arena it stood on it and stared for five minutes, counting deliberately three times over. striking a finger on the palm of his

"Bull-with-a-beard!" he announced man's height, more than fifty feet 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 the hakir Kurram Khan-blinked

mildly behind his spectacles and looked ly 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 favor. Wait and watch, I say I" "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.

King witnesses wild doings in the cavern and sees harrowing sights. Yasmini appears, a lovely vision, and the army of fighters go wild with enthusiasm.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

TAN .