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1874



THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA

THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA

OVER THE PAMİR TO INDIA.

By GABRIEL BONVALOT.

//

WITH 250 ILLUSTRATIONS BY

ALBERT PÉPIN.



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY C. B. PITMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LIMITED.

1889.

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Dedication.

TO

HIS EXCELLENCY

THE MARQUIS OF DUFFERIN AND AVA,

K.P., P.C., K.C.B., Etc.



MY LORD,

You made us feel happy indeed when you sent us such a gracious letter to Mastudj. At Simla, you gave us so kind a reception that the least we can do, in token of our gratitude, is to dedicate to you the English translation of the narrative of our travels. May we hope that you will read it with interest.

G. BONVALOT.

November, 1888.

PREFACE.

CENTRAL ASIA, through which I have just travelled for the second time, has always had a great fascination for me. It is not surprising that such should be the case. This region of the earth is made up of contrasts. You find there, in the midst of the dreariest deserts, oases of the greatest fertility, and you come upon towns full of life and animation as you emerge from solitudes upon which a profound silence confers something like grandeur. The traveller, whose mouth is still parched by the brackish waters drawn from the cisterns of the arid steppe, suddenly sees before him rivers with the majestic aspect of an inland sea, the water of which is delightful to the palate. After having wended his way over boundless plains, he reaches the foot of mountains, the peaks of which, rising high into the heavens, are barely visible to the naked eye. If he has the pluck to cross this barrier, climbing upwards along steep and rough paths, he finds himself in the midst of an ocean of mountains, out of which it seems a hopeless task to seek an issue; and if he climbs up and down for weeks and months together, sometimes seeing only a small blue corner of the sky, if he directs his course due east, he will eventually come out into a land where the watercourses are abundant,

where naked men cultivate, with the help of gigantic animals, lands of incredible fertility.

What adds to the interest of visiting a land, the configuration of which is so strange, is that it is inhabited by races of the most diverse types, that we are ourselves believed to have had ancestors there, and that the opinion prevails among men of science that the first of the human race felt in this country their first requirements and aspirations, and that our earliest ancestors found their way from there to the West, carrying in their trains a certain faculty of speech, certain creeds and aptitudes, which they shed as they moved westward, and the traces of which may be followed, so to speak, along the route they took.

Add to this that Central Asia has a very glorious past, by which I mean that it has been traversed by the most illustrious conqueror of antiquity, by the greatest of the Moguls, and that it has given birth to a formidable man who, lame as he was, made all Europe to tremble. It could not but be interesting to visit the arena upon which warriors such as these had made their evolutions and to follow the track of their armies; it was interesting, too, to see what remained of their work, and what had become of the workmen with whom they achieved such great things.

We were anxious, by means of a careful examination of the land and its inhabitants, to penetrate into the past of Asia, and to shed as much light as possible upon its history with the torch of geography. We wanted to see certain things in order to understand them better, and to ascertain how, in analogous circumstances, the men of the past, whose doings now take us by surprise, acted.

We started with the conviction that history had a continuous existence, that it was only necessary to go from one country to another to find one's self in a different age, and that the best way to understand the methods of the great masters of history was to be one of them upon a very humble scale.

We were imbued by this idea when we embarked at Marseilles for Batum, and, keeping our eyes open all the way, traversed the Caucasus, the Lenkoran, the Talich, inhabited by people with the customs of feudal times, then Persia, by the great historical way running from west to east, in the company of pilgrims bound at once on prayer and traffic as in the Middle Ages, and finally the land of the Turkomans and Bokhara. We had no sooner entered Afghanistan, than we were stopped by the same Ishak-Khan, who has just been in revolt against his master and friend, Abdur-Rahman-Khan. We then retraced our steps, following the route of Alexander the Great, the Arabs, and so many others, and at length reached the further end of the Ferghana, at the foot of "the roof of the world," where the civilization of the East on the one side and that of the West on the other expire, like the furthest eddies of two tides which run into each other. As all the routes through inhabited regions were barred to us, we determined to improvise one over the Pamir, where we were less likely to be stopped by man, and where the obstacles in our path were raised by nature. Upon the other side of "the roof of the world," we should find among the mountains the drift of the great shipwreck of the races which inhabited them in antiquity, and, beyond them, India.

Such was the object of our journey.

But while going to see what remained of the past in Asia

and what had become of the authors of such great deeds, we also had before us the spectacle of two peoples both engrossed in a work of no little grandeur.

We saw towns spring into existence, and grow to a good size in a few weeks' time; a railway made under unexampled difficulties and in a terrible climate, yet carried through the desert with such rapidity that one could almost see it lengthening out and reaching distant places almost as fast as a river which had been turned back into its usual channel.

Then we saw the vanquished of yesterday formed into a regular force and led to the combat by their conquerors against hereditary foes, pouring out their blood like water, in order to enable their masters to create more quickly the route which was to bind their earlier and later conquests more closely together. We saw, too, the vanquished, who had at first been treated with unflinching severity, and then with kindness, full of surprise at finding the new-comers so gentle with them, gradually gaining confidence as to the future, and forgetting their defeats, assembling in thousands upon holy-days and joining their shouts with those who only a short time before were driving them at the edge of the sword.

In the earlier conquests of Russia, we found great cities inhabited by emigrants belonging to the conquering race, people from the Volga and the Dnieper, cultivating the land, and humming an air as they stood at the door of village cottages. We were witnesses of the friendly relations which existed between the natives and their masters, the one joining in the family rejoicings of the other, the children with caps on their heads playing with those who wore the turban. We noticed wherever we went that the gentleness and patience of

the Slavs—down even to what in the West are their defects—served their purpose in the East. We witnessed the expansion of a nation spreading over the East its overflow of strength, of a people which at times spreads very slowly, at others pours in with the impetuosity of a tidal wave, but which never recedes; which takes root in these regions, which it regards as a prolongation of Russia.

We saw the roads which lead to those regions swarming with soldiers who were going to make a channel for the inundation to follow; soldiers who were sinewy, temperate, indefatigable, well disciplined, marching briskly to the music of accordeons and balalaihas, the sounds of which seemed to us very much more warlike than those of the lyre. These soldiers, who seem born for Asiatic fighting, are reconstituting, from west to east, the Mogul empire upon more solid bases; they are following, in the reverse direction, much the same route as those who started from Kara-Korum, and they can find quarters which were got ready by the troopers of Gengis-Khan. I can see nothing calculated to check the advance of a people whose sources of energy and action are increasing each day, as its population grows, and as it gains confidence in its own strength and knows how to use it. Besides this, the Russians do not disseminate their forces any more than a tree does when it drops its fruit and sows its seed, and they are ever pushing forward the same frontier, so to speak, by the irresistible pressure of an inward sap.

All this causes deep concern to those whom we encountered upon the other side of the mighty mountain range. They have not the same security as those who descend, from the west, the historical slope which leads to the countries governed

by them. They have not the same confidence in the future, the same carelessness as to the morrow.

The English endeavour to put back the hour for playing the game of which they will have to provide the stakes. They cannot afford to make a single false move, and those who are at the helm keep their eyes and ears open; the least thing startles them. They display admirable tenacity, intelligence, and activity. I would compare them, without wishing to speak disrespectfully, to the Chinese conjuror who keeps twenty plates twirling in the air at the same time. This is very much what, with a useful and at the same time remunerative aim, the masters of the richest country in the world are doing. They are but a small band engaged in this arduous work, but they quit themselves like men. They are not conquerors; they did not begin by invading the country with drums beating and flags flying. They crept into this land, where their task is very much more difficult than that of the Russians on the other side, and they maintain themselves there amid millions of men, and keep them under their rule by dint of their wonderful tact. They show what can be done by traders and men of business who know what they want and go straight to their purpose. Nevertheless, their power is, whatever they may say, more or less artificial; they are making their way up stream, which tires the boldest swimmer, whereas the others are following the current, which is far easier.

While among the native populations bordering on the countries subject to the Western powers, we were able to obtain an echo of the "public opinion" of Asia as to the respective situation of the two rival nations. Having been detained as prisoners in the Tchatral for six weeks, we had plenty of time

to cross-question the natives of that country. Ten years ago, they only troubled themselves about the English, but now they are interested in the Russians, and asked us all sorts of questions about them. According to the information which, as they told us, they had gathered from the pilgrims, the Russians were poor, but had a great many soldiers. They have doubtless heard about the insignificant skirmish at Pendjeh, and this, growing as it travelled, had developed into a great battle lost by the Afghans. In fact, while we were in the Tchatral, the news got abroad that the Russians had taken a large tract of territory from the emir, Abdur-Rahman-Khan, that they would soon seize Cabul, and that their warriors were already marching upon that city. The men of Tchatral were exulting in the defeat of the Afghans, their foemen, and, as they regard the latter as excellent soldiers, so much the more formidable do the Russians appear to them.

But the Afghans are far from being defeated, and it does not seem, moreover, that either of the two powerful rivals has any immediate interest in crushing a possible ally. Afghanistan has, therefore, a chance of retaining its independence as long as its neighbours are not of one accord. The emirs of Cabul endeavour to be on good terms with each side, but as the English have declared themselves to be their protectors, it is to them that they apply when there is a frontier to be rectified, or when they want to increase the strength of their battalions by the aid of rupees.

The construction of the Transcaspian railway has given them great concern. They fully appreciate its strategical importance; they understand that the Russians have thus taken definite possession of Bokhara, and that the armies of the

Caucasus and Turkestan can now easily combine their efforts. And while they declare that they are not afraid of the English, they do not speak so confidently about the Russians. They say that they would fight to the last drop of their blood, in the event of war with them, which does not betoken much hope of victory. The long negotiations of the recent Boundary Commission, in which the English had taken up the Afghan cause, having ended in a cession of territory to the Russians, the prestige of the English has not increased in Afghanistan, the people regarding the arrangement come to as a surrender and a mark of weakness. The Russians are thought to be made of better stuff throughout all Asia, and as their finances do not admit of their indulging in the prodigalities of the Anglo-Indians, the people are more struck by their military power, while with the English it is the depth of their purse which creates so much surprise. The peoples and tribes surrounding India have got to think that they have only to stretch out their hand to those who govern the country, and they are always surprised when they do not receive anything. It is easy to see by the way in which they ask that they consider themselves entitled to largesses, and they regard the English not as mighty warriors, but very rich merchants, who have built up the edifice of their power upon piles of rupees, than which nothing could be more fragile. They fully recognize the courage of the English, they admire their wonderful public works, their fine railways, and yet they keep their eyes fixed on the Russians, and expect something good out of them. It is difficult to win the gratitude of Asiatics, and to satisfy them; and even those of India are not satisfied. I don't know what they expect to get out of a change, and they are perhaps as childish

in this respect as certain other nations. But all I know is that many a discontented Hindoo says, "When the Russians are here, things will be different." When will they be in India, or will they ever be? I am not competent to answer these questions, not knowing what the future has in store; but I do know that their coming is eagerly awaited by not a few, and that a great many expect to see them arrive.

G. BONVALOT.

P.S.—In order to explain the frequent allusions which I shall make in the following pages to previous travels in Central Asia, it may be as well to explain that MM. Plon, Nourrit and Co. published three or four years ago two volumes entitled, "En Asie Centrale," which contained an account of the journey undertaken by M. Capus and myself in the years 1880–82. Starting from Moscow, we entered Turkestan by the north-east, that is to say by way of Siberia, and we traversed part of Bokhara in company with the family of the emir, Abdur-Rahman-Khan. We then explored the mountains of Kohistan and those of the Tchatral, which form the last spurs of the Trans-Chan. Upon our return home we started from Tashkend, and, after visiting Samarcand, Bokhara, and Tchardjui, we descended the Amu, stopping at Khiva, and crossing the desolate desert of Ust-Urt in the depth of winter. During the whole of this time we were north of the river Oxus, and it was in order to complete our travels in Central Asia that we undertook the journey related in these pages.

G. B.

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THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA.

(OVER THE PAMİR TO INDIA.)

CHAPTER I.

FROM MARSEILLES TO TIFLIS.

Marseilles—At sea—The Dardanelles—In a café—The school—Soldiers—Rumours of war—Recruiting—A word in favour of the Turks—The Bosphorus—Passengers—The low-lying lands—Trebizond—A naphtha city—A virgin forest—Scenery of the Rion—An old acquaintance.

BEFORE leaving Marseilles and France, we take a last look, from the summit of the Aix gateway, at that picturesque city, with its steep streets, its hills covered with houses, its quays swarming with people who gain their living out of the blue sea, upon which the church of Notre-Dame de la Garde looks down from afar. It is from the quay of La Joliette that we embark on board the *Anatolie*, a fine vessel, which is to carry us to Batum, together with tons of sugar, iron, blacking, soap, English stuffs, Marseilles coffee, nails, and what not. The *Anatolie* belongs to the company of Messrs. Paquet Brothers, who, in spite of the badness of the times, were kind enough to take us at reduced fares, for which we are glad to seize this opportunity of thanking them, as well as for the way in which we were treated while on board. The voyage was not to seem a lengthy one to us, for our captain, whose name

is Boschell, was a very cheery Breton, though that did not prevent him from being, as his men said, a thorough sailor.

But here we are under way. There is a slight mist along the coast. We pass the Château d'If, Frioul, and La Ciotat; Toulon lies hidden in a hollow of the coast to the left. The land gradually disappears, as if it was sinking behind the horizon. A few more revolutions of the screw and we can see nothing of France, not even a buoy. Even the gulls which have escorted us so far take wing back to the shore. We are unmistakably on our way to Central Asia, with the intention of travelling through the Caucasus, Lenkoran, Persia, Afghanistan, and, if possible, the Turkoman country and Bactriana. Perhaps we may reach the Kafiristan—unless, indeed, circumstances, which so often get the mastery of one, force us in some other direction. We are as much at their mercy as a nutshell upon the crest of a wave.

Upon the morning of March 1st, we enter the Dardanelles, having some cargo to land, and the *Anatolie* has scarcely had time to cast anchor before we are beset by a crowd of boatmen. Many of them are Greeks, and very free of speech. The Turks are more calm, and one old man, with a white beard, keeps on saying for a quarter of an hour, with praiseworthy pertinacity, "Mossou, embarcar? Embarcar, mossou?" He is imperturbable, while all the rest are shouting and gesticulating. Some of the passengers begin to bargain in a mixture of the Auvergnat, Italian, and Gascon dialects, plentifully interlarded with "Mossou" and gestures by way of explanation.

Despite the rain, we make up our mind to go ashore in one of the boats of the *Anatolie*, and, like the true land-lubbers that we all three are, we were delighted to feel our feet, muddy though the quay was.

Although we felt ourselves to be still in Europe, owing no doubt to the rainy weather, Dardanelles did not strike us as being

a very gay sort of a place, and I can quite fancy that the officers whom we saw seated on the worn divans of the Café de l'Hellespont do not have a very merry time of it. When we went there, they were smoking the chibook, drawing long whiffs, and the only sound one could hear was the rattle of the dice they were casting in silence. One of them was reading a paper, which he handed with a smile to the person sitting next to him, and pointed with his finger to a sentence which seemed to amuse him. This was the latest piece of news about the war supposed to be brewing between Greece and Turkey. We seated ourselves at a table, drawing up some heavy chairs, coarsely stuffed and painted blue. Coffee was then served us, and while the dregs were settling down at the bottom of the tiny cups, we had a look at the gaudy drawings which ornamented the dripping walls. First there was the Sultan, surrounded by his family—a man with a tremendous stomach and orders on his breast, a pointed beard, regular features, and a fez. Then there were coloured lithographs of different Turkish functionaries, with words in Turkish and in French describing their rank. Finally, there were four stout ladies, very lightly clad, meant to represent the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water. These ladies were represented in nonchalant attitudes, and smiled down from their frames upon the customers of the establishment. There was even a billiard table, with balls which had all the polish off them and wobbled about in the most uncertain fashion. I must not forget, moreover, some busts, with red paint on the cheeks and black moustaches. This is a faithful description of the best café in Dardanelles, where we waited for a break in the storm, to have a look at the town. Troy was not far off, but we had no time to go and offer a sacrifice upon the tomb of Achilles, and we walked about till the whistle of the *Anatolie* summoned us back on board.

We went in the direction of the barracks, passing on our way through the bazaar, where several of the merchants spoke our language but did not keep our goods for sale. I saw articles of English, German, Austrian and Bulgarian make, but those labelled as French were evidently counterfeit, as the mistakes of spelling proved. And when we asked the keeper of one shop to sell us something French, he offered us these imitations. We pointed out to him that even the label was incorrectly imitated, and his answer was, "I know that, but your goods cost too much." This was a reply which I was to get very often in the course of my travels.



STRAITS OF MESSINA.

Next we see some little girls going to school in the company of their brothers, each of them with a bag of books slung over their shoulders. They all of them looked dirty and untidy, but they had honest, ruddy faces, with strong athletic figures. They went one by one through the muddy roads, lifting their feet very high, and laughing at one another when they got splashed, full of life and spirits, like all young children.

The fort did not give one the idea of being impregnable, but the soldiers garrisoned in it looked hale and vigorous. Badly clad in the cast-off garments of European clothing depôts, they had, nevertheless, a martial air, and belonged to the proud race of Anatolia.

But our vessel sounded her whistle, and we had to go back on board, for in an hour she would have completed her cargo, and we should be continuing our voyage. Just as we are starting, an English vessel arrives from Syria with a body of recruits. The anchor is let down in a twinkling, and the cargo is at once landed. This consists of Arabs with long, thin faces ; still young, and concealing their tattered garments beneath a burnous which once was white. Some of them are to be left at Dardanelles, and they are poured out, so to speak, from the vessel into boats, where they are



STROMBOLI.

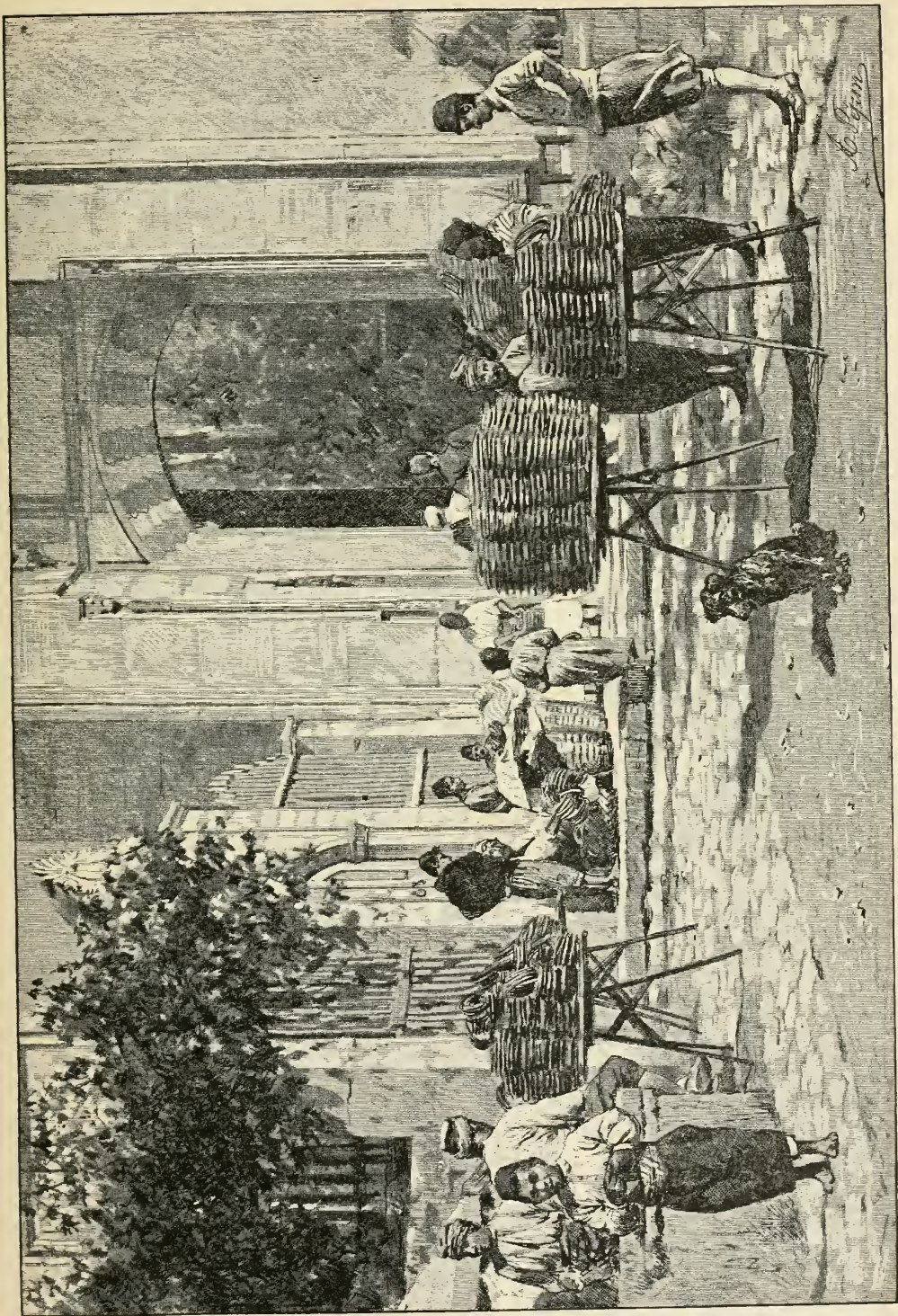
wedged in with their luggage, which is but scanty. Some of them carry a half-filled knapsack ; others have all their belongings tied up in a handkerchief, while their provisions consist of wheaten cakes, not bigger than the palm of the hand, and onions, the green stalks of which they seem to enjoy very much. Upon the deck are a number of cavalry soldiers and their horses, bound for Constantinople. When the boats make off from the side of the vessel, the Arabs utter discordant cries of adieu, raising their hands to heaven, placing them upon their mouth, pressing them to their heart, and gesticulating like lunatics ; as each boat puts off,

there is a fresh outburst of groans, and the tumult does not subside until all the white burnouses are seen to be safe on the quay. .

The remainder are crouched patiently beside their horses; the anchor is weighed, and the vessel, carrying the British colours, whistles and steams off with these Asiatics, who will be hastily initiated into the first principles of warfare before the conference is ended or the Greeks have invaded the peninsula with a courage derived from Leonidas of Lacedemonia.

We start in dull weather, and heavy clouds are passing over from Europe to Troas; in other words, the wind is blowing from the north. First we pass the fort of Dardanelles, with its guns pointed upon the strait, the passage of which is forbidden to all vessels at night. To the left is Gallipoli, which, with its white minarets, rises story above story close to the cliffs, great blocks of which are constantly slipping down into the sea. The wind brings us the strident notes of some trumpet practice. So we enter the Sea of Marmora, navigating, as we are told, in neutral waters, *à propos* of which we noticed a touching exchange of sympathies between the passengers. There was a Greek who did not like the Turks; a Genoese who liked neither the Greeks nor the Armenians; an Armenian who did not like the Greeks, the Armenians, or the Turks; Turks who did not say anything against anybody, and more than one Frenchman on board who shook them heartily by the hand. And we are told that we are all brothers!

We reached Constantinople in the rain, and it was no easy matter for our vessel to get a berth in the port, which was crowded with shipping and traversed by rapid currents. I am not going to attempt a description of Constantinople, which has already been so well done. Moreover, the landscape as we saw it, between two snowstorms, was not well lighted up, as a painter would say. It is true that we got a few sunbeams, which made the Golden Horn,



A STREET CORNER AT CONSTANTINOPLE.

Stamboul, Pera, and Galata to sparkle, but the magic spectacle scarcely lasted a moment.

We passed most of the time at our disposal wandering about the picturesque streets of Stamboul and exploring the bazaars. We noticed there strong men carrying enormous loads which bent them to the very earth. They would stop now and again and lean up against the wall to catch breath, then going painfully on their way, slipping upon the wet pavement, clogged by the thick mud, the sweat pouring from their foreheads, and yet, as soon as they had got rid of one load, going back to fetch another. There was no sign of discouragement to be read upon their placid faces, and they had in their eyes the same resigned and fixed look that may be seen in the eyes of the oxen yoked to heavy cars. They were very thin, and most of them spoke in Turkish. Other men, fat and well-liking, seated at ease in the shops, watched, chibook in mouth, these beasts of burden go by; some of them conversing in all kinds of languages; the majority with hooked noses, knit eyebrows, and sallow complexions. The first feed upon onions, cucumbers, rice, bread, and water; they live and die poor. The others are the foreign dealers, who have a well-spread table and grow rich. Eager to amass wealth, they lead a life of uneasiness and feverish agitation. They are unanimous in admitting that the Turks are honourable and trustworthy people, full of energy for work when they are sure of being paid. This is, in brief, typical of all Turkey.

Are we as much entitled as we fancy to reproach with lack of initiative, idleness, and sloth these Turks, who work to pay the debts of extravagant sultans, whom the tax-gatherers would not leave enough to live upon were it not that the raias must be kept alive to supply the treasury of the European bankers? If the bankers are justified in demanding repayment of the sums they have advanced, are the raias of Asia Minor to be blamed

if they are content to live from hand to mouth? Have we not ourselves experienced lassitude of the same kind, less than a century ago? Can we blame a man for not caring to cultivate a field, the produce of which will not repay him for the toil of ploughing and sowing it? We are so in the habit of "letting the Turk have it" that I feel almost compelled to apologize for having in some measure spoken in his defence.

We leave Constantinople at daybreak. The clouds have cleared, and the city stands out in the sunlight. We pass in front of palaces reflected in the water, and rising upon the shores of Stamboul like screens put to hide some dirty object, like a rich and gorgeous mantle covering rags. The sun gives a smile to all this, but it is the feigned smile of sorrow. We indulge in these metaphors as we follow the windings of the Bosphorus, with its well-wooded shores, where the cypress and the pine tree form a mass of verdure around the palaces and villas of the rich. The channel winds about, so that one imagines one's self to be first in one lake and then in another. Right and left, we see villas and palaces, meeting steamers which emit guttural cries, and barks with sails swelling like the wings of white swans, and long boats with many oarsmen gliding through the water like a spider moving its legs by automatic short strokes. Then there are the ruins of fortresses, the white tents of the soldiers, and retrenchments above which the cannon stretch their long headless necks. As we emerge from the Bosphorus we can feel the swell of the Black Sea, angry and agitated, lashing the shore with its waves. We make eastward, and the continent seems to open out to our left, and then the coast is lost in mist to our stern. Upon our right is the land of Asia Minor, parallel with which we are steaming, with undulating mountains of no great height skirting the shore, but here and there a snowy peak behind them piercing the clouds. We have some fresh passengers on deck—shepherds



A SAMSUN SHEPHERD.

who have brought flocks of sheep to Constantinople, and who are going back to Samsun with their master, a big Turk with a heavy drooping moustache. They have with them enormous long-haired dogs, very surly-looking, and always ready to show their wolfish fangs. The young man who has them in hand looks like a brigand, with the arms in his belt, his kindjal, and his pistol. There is nothing of the *opéra comique* about him as he calls his dogs to order. He is a handsome, well set-up young fellow, dressed in grey frieze, with a yellow handkerchief rolled like a turban around his determined-looking head. His face is broad and bony, with a hooked nose coming out between two prominent cheek-bones, and when he raises his eyelids, which he keeps constantly lowered over his black eyes, he has the look of some startled wild beast. Upon questioning his father, an old man with a white beard, he tells us: "We live two days' journey from Samsun, but we only remain there during the winter. As soon as there is any grass, we wander with our flocks over the plains, and then on the mountains."

Upon the deck there are some Turks, who either sleep or gossip as they lie curled up amid their garments. They spend their time with apparent satisfaction in playing together like children, or relating stories to one another. Their meals, which are very frequent, always consist of bread, onions, and water. They seem quite happy.

Persians going to Trebizond with a small cargo of English cotton goods form a bivouac to themselves. They are well-to-do, and have brought plenty of provisions with them. They keep offering one another cups of tea, and hand them with a great deal of smiling and bowing all round. The ghalyan is kept constantly alight, and passed round, each person to whom it is handed drawing a few whiffs and handing it on to his neighbour, taking care, as he does so, to display his fingers covered with

jewelled rings. A young merchant, whose eyes are fringed with antimony, with a very languishing look about him, seems to be the object of general consideration. He plays upon a guitar after the manner of his country, nodding his head very expressively.

One of the officers of the ship observes to us that these Turks are very uncivilized.

We ask him why, and he says because they are such fanatics. This answer does not satisfy us.



DECK PASSENGERS.

The ship's pantryman says, when the officer has moved away, "The reason is a very simple one; they have so few wants."

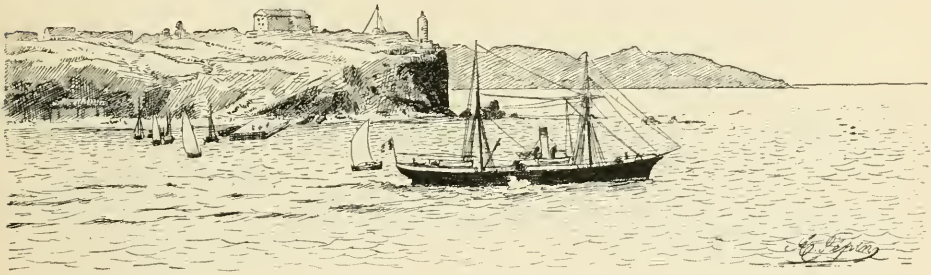
He looks at the matter from another point of view, and to our mind he is right. Yes, a barely civilized people is one which has few wants; a more civilized people has more wants, and so on.

We shall soon get in sight of the lowlands of Samsun, so dreaded by navigators, if only the rain stops. The clouds break, and one can just catch a glimpse of something at the foot of the forests, the trees of which seem to have their roots in the water. It is but the line of a floating mass, and then we see in succession

the lighthouse and the white cottage of the keeper. But the difference of level between the sea and the continent is so slight, the land lies so low, that, even when one gets nearer, it looks rather like a floating mass than solid soil.

The next day we reach Trebizond in fine weather.

The sun is shining, and the bells of the Greek church ring out cheerful sounds which put us upon good terms with ourselves. We climb with brisk steps the steep streets of Trebizond, where we are brought to a stop now and again by Herculean Hammals carrying between four of them a heavy load of sugar. The weight must be enormous, and I know of no one but Turks capable of such a task. The town is fairly clean, and it even has



THE CAPE OF TREBIZOND.

a square, around which are a number of native *cafés*. We remark that there are a great many weavers in the bazaar. The population and aspect of the city remind us both of Auvergne and Aragon, and one view of it reminded us of the French town of Épinal.

When on the bridge, the view to the left is a purely Eastern one—a ruined fortress with crenulated towers standing between it and the sea, the blue waters of which may be seen through its battlements. The route which, upon the other side of the bridge, winds along the heights to the east, leads direct to Teheran, and it is the route for the caravans, several of which we see starting. We meet a number of men in dark costumes and sandals, wearing

light breeches and jackets, with black bachliks made of fine wool and a narrow silver braid. They have a very energetic and commanding air, and we are told that they are Kurds.

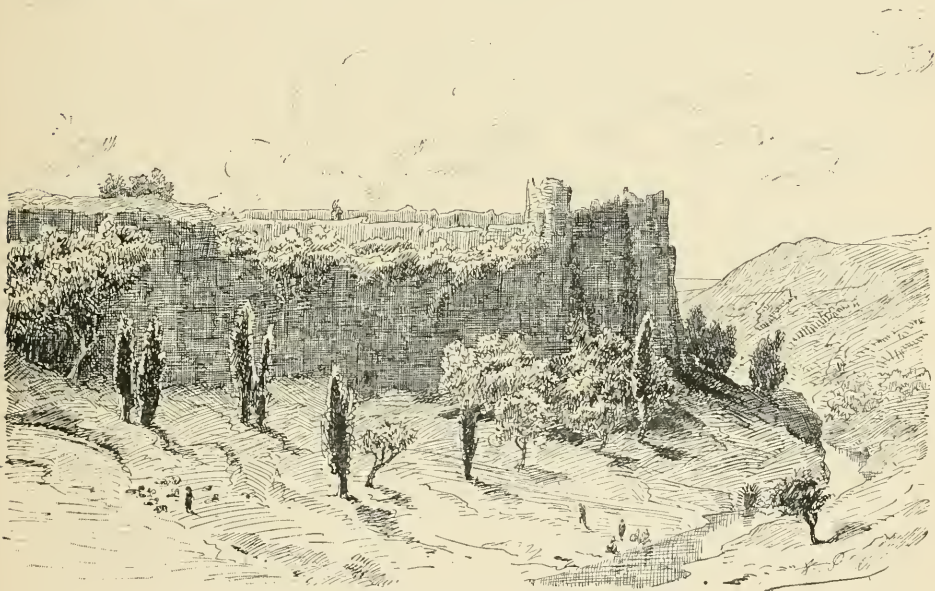
We next go to the workshop of a Turkish smith near the bazaar, who is noted for making cash-boxes which he fits with very ingenious locks. He tells us that he sells a great many,



TURKISH PORTERS AT TREBIZOND.

doubtless because there are so many thieves in the country. The master of the establishment, who receives us with the usual affability of the Turks, is about sixty years of age and very intelligent. He has four sons who execute all the finer work. The eldest has worked at Constantinople with Europeans, and he shows us some English illustrated catalogues of machinery. We see some of this machinery in the workshop. They wanted to buy some in France, having seen a model which they liked, but they could not do so, as the manufacturer to whom they wrote did not take the trouble to answer. I was shown his name and

prospectus. Our intelligent fellow-countryman no doubt expected that this worthy Turk, who is quite solvent and enjoys a very good character, would come to Paris and fetch the machine he wanted. The eldest son would very much like to go and see the French workshops, for he has formed a very high idea of our country from what he heard about it from a Marseilles mechanic at Constantinople, but he has not the small capital required, and he is resigned to spend the rest of his days at Trebizond without satisfying his desire to gain instruction.



ANCIENT FORTRESS AT TREBIZOND.

Having drunk the small cup of coffee which the Turks never fail to offer their guests, we returned on board, carrying away with us a very pleasant impression of our visit. We had found in these people tenacity, initiative, and common sense, which is equivalent to saying that all they wanted to make a large fortune was a favourable opening.

In the course of the day, our ship discharged a large quantity of sugar from Marseilles; coffee from the same place, which may

be taken as a proof that one must go to Constantinople to taste it good; blacking from Lyons; nails from Paris, and bales of English cotton taken on board at Constantinople; these latter being hooped with iron, and of such a weight that two cannot be placed on a beast of burden.

We start at nightfall, and the petroleum lamps of the inhabitants, dotted over the town, built like an amphitheatre, shine like so many sparks in the flanks of some dark mass of rock. Then they all disappear in the deep darkness. We remain on deck with our eyes fixed upon the revolving light of the port, which seems to be ever dying out and flaming up again, just as a watchman overwhelmed with fatigue falls nearly asleep and closes his eyes, only to open them wide again at the call of duty, for the salvation of those afloat.

Upon the morning of March 8th, we get a dim view of Batum, at the foot of wooded hills rising the one above the other, the loftiest lost in the mist. The town is not picturesque like Trebizond; for it is not spread over an amphitheatre of hills as one comes upon it from the sea, all that one can see being the front of its houses built in regular order, as befits a modern town.

The first thing we see is the top of the masts, rising above the sombre quadrilateral of the fortress which commands the entrance to the port, and then the old Turkish town in the background, to the left. As we get nearer, we can clearly make out the bodies of soldiers, with their pickaxes and barrows, busily engaged upon making an embankment. But just then we put about to the right and enter the port, where the vessels are crowded together in a very narrow piece of water.

There are ships of every trading nationality in Europe—Russian, French, English, and Austrian steamers, sailing vessels from Italy, Russia, Turkey, and Greece, which come to fetch the petroleum from Baku.

And what an endless number of casks, some lying in rows upon the quay, others being rolled along it, while others, again, are being raised or lowered by the cranes and disappear in the capacious holds of the vessels. The boats which put off from the shore are filled with them, and the carts passing through the streets carry a full load. Some are full and others empty, but they have all held at one time or another the *naphtha*, as the Russians call petroleum, the smell of which is abominable. The planks of the vessels, the sailors' clothes, the land, the very sea, are impregnated with it. There is a sort of oily coating which undulates upon the surface of the sea with the bluish tints of damaskeened work.

To the north-east, the hovels of the Turkish village, with their blackened façades, seem deserted. The new town, which is full of life and commercial activity, appears to be disdainfully turning its back to the old town, for it is spreading in a westerly direction. It is upon this side of the town that are to be found the railway stations, the shops, the warehouses, the agencies of the different companies, and the countless *doukanes* (taverns) in which men of all nations come to drink together. The appetite for gain has not been long in making Batum a cosmopolitan town.

What has made the fortune of this small town, which was quite an insignificant place a few years back ?

Simply the fact of its having become Russian. In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is king, and while the Black Sea possesses very few ports, this small place happened to have one—not a very large or good one, but still a port. Whereas Poti, the neighbouring town, the terminus of the Caucasian railway, which has a bar often rendering the port inaccessible for weeks together, was naturally destined to be abandoned as soon as a branch railway to Batum enabled the merchants and traders of the Caucasus to receive and deliver their goods there. If I add

that Poti is very unhealthy, and Batum rather less so, you will understand why the one is decaying and the other flourishing.

Batum is very animated, and the population goes in for plenty of amusement, as is often the case with people who are making, or who think they are going to make, their fortune.

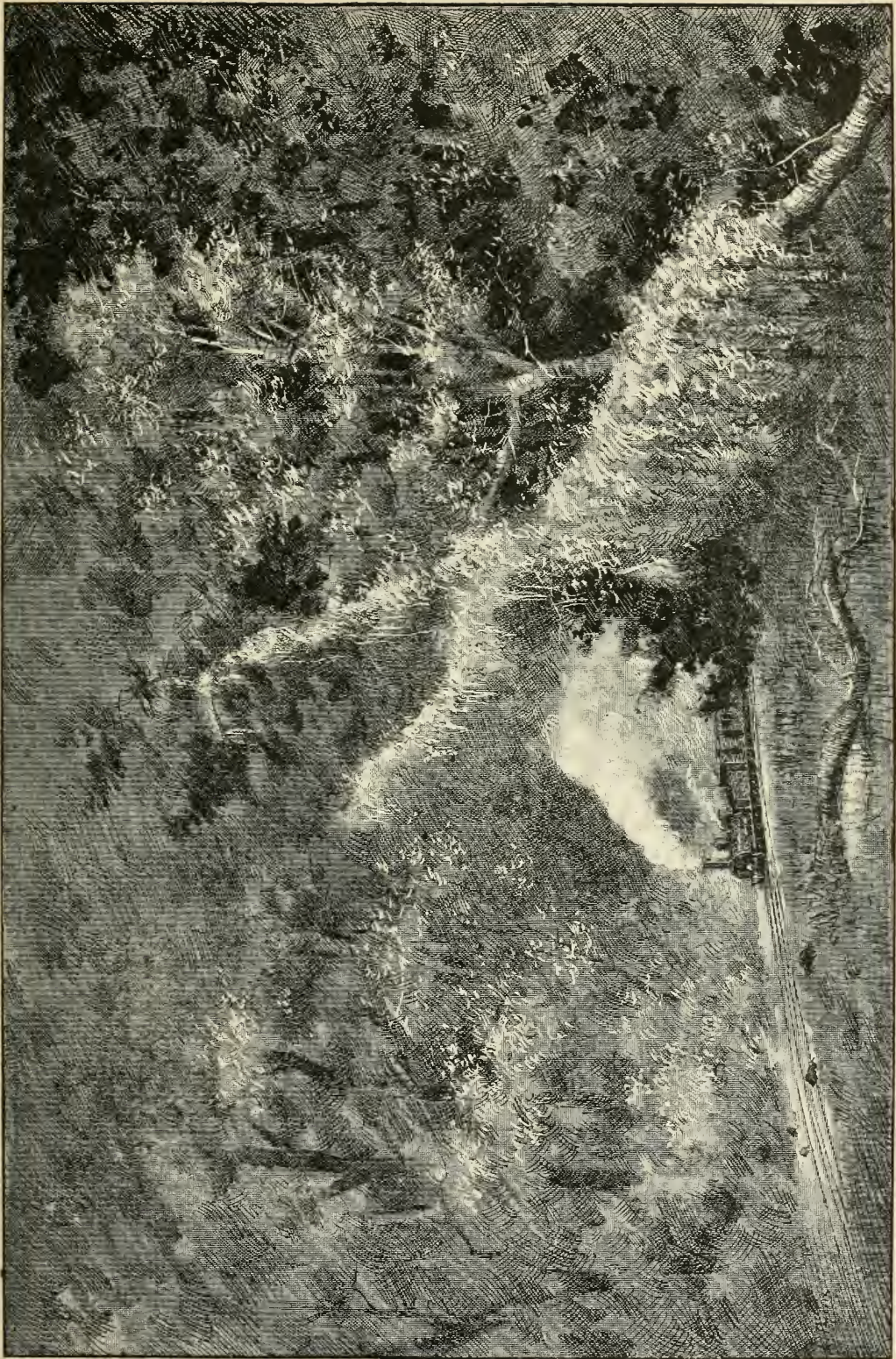
We remained in the town just long enough to receive a visit from the Custom House officers, who were remorseless in their examination, making us pay for all our instruments, and even for a few sticks of chalk. Our boxes were unpacked with much less care than they had been packed.

Upon the 10th of March, we took the train for Tiflis, starting half an hour late, in accordance with what, it appears, is the general custom. The forcing of a motley crowd into the carriage gives rise to something like a riot, and the nonchalance of a stout colonel sauntering up to the train with a cigarette in his mouth, after the bell had rung three times, formed a striking contrast with the agitation and excitement of the Caucasians.

The line skirts the sea for a little way, and we remained for some time at the window, looking at the *Anatolie* which had been decked with flags in our honour by Captain Boschell, the French standard flying from the masthead. Then we entered the virgin forest, and lost sight both of sea and flag.

What a tangle of trees we passed through, nearly all of them intertwined with creepers, and in many places we saw growing out of the dead trunks lying on the ground vigorous young trees thriving upon the mouldering remains of their ancestors. Upright oaks and hornbeams rose erect over the death and the resurrection at their feet, standing firmly upon their roots which were out of the ground. All these trees formed an inextricable thicket, and in some of the densest parts we saw the wild boars feeding in perfect security.

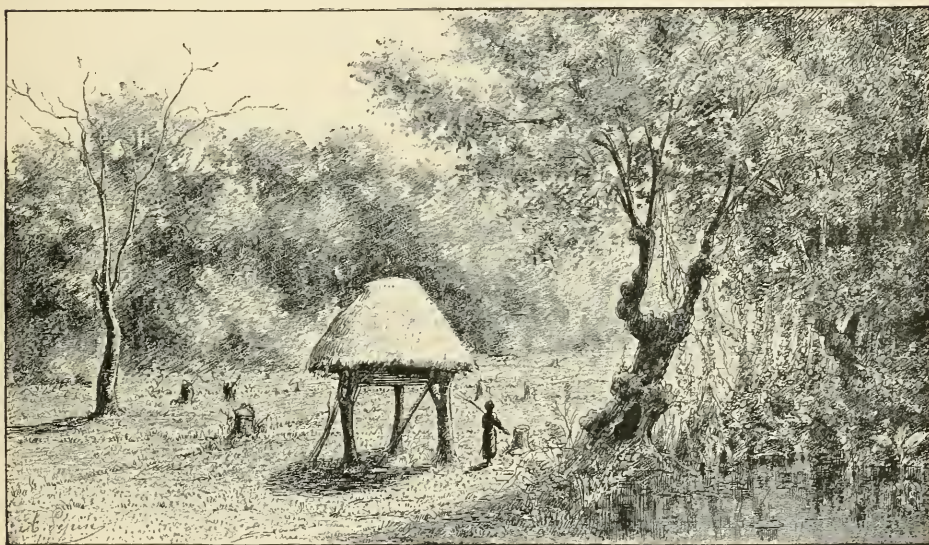
Here and there, thatch-roofed huts were to be seen in the



LEAVING BATUM.

glades, while tracts of ground were covered with Indian corn, growing around trunks which it had not been thought worth while to root up. Moreover, as there was no lack of wood, it was wasted as much as water is in countries like France and England. The huts are built upon four trunks of trees placed just as they had fallen. In some places, the forest had been cleared by setting it on fire, and the ground around the blackened trunks of the trees had been cultivated.

As we get nearer Rion, there is less forest, and gradually



A CLEARING IN THE FOREST.

we come out upon a bare plain, with mountains tipped with snow upon either side. There were a number of pigs to be seen near all the stations, some of them black and just like domesticated wild boars. They often got under the train while it was in the station, not moving till the bell had been rung for the third time.

While the train was stopping, we noticed many passengers and spectators walking up and down the platform in very picturesque costumes, with any number of bourkas and bearskins, cartridge-cases of enamelled silver, kindjals in brilliant sheaths richly gilded,

the carriers of them looking very proud, while even the wearers of rags bore themselves with no little swagger.

Just before reaching Rion the valley becomes narrower, and we ascend the incline slowly with the aid of a second engine, so that we have time to get a good view of this picturesque route.

In one direction and another we see a crumbling tower standing out like a sentry; a village perched upon some rock like an eagle's nest, a castle in ruins, men on foot shod in sandals, marching with long paces behind their heavily loaded horses, horsemen fully armed for war riding along the river's bank upon lean but high-couraged steeds, a grave-looking shepherd, with his chin leaning upon his staff, enraptured in thought amid his goats, while the numberless pigs with their long bristles are too busy feeding to bestow a look upon us. Vehicles, with very low wheels, drawn by small oxen, descend the hills, and as the front part touches the ground, they are a sort of a cross between a sledge and a cart. They are used for the carriage of timber and fragments of rock.

We still continue to ascend, and the forests reappear, with snow lying in the hollows. We twist and turn about, go through many tunnels and cross the boiling, bubbling, noisy and impetuous river at least twenty times. Azaleas and rhododendrons are to be seen nearly all along the route. Another engine helps to push us from behind, and at last we reach the watershed about sunset. Here we are confronted by a splendid piece of Alpine scenery, and at night we descend to Tiflis, skirting the Kur, which is a large stream even when we first see it.

We remained at Tiflis until we had received from St. Petersburg some papers which were intended to facilitate our entrance into the Transcaspian provinces. Upon the 20th of March, all our papers being in proper order and the indispensable purchases made, we left Tiflis, and, having been so lucky as to meet M. de

Balloy, the French Minister at Teheran, who was returning to his post with his wife, we obtained his permission to let our baggage go on with his. The baggage is to be sent by rail to Baku, by sea to Reshd, and by mules to Teheran, where we are to meet it. This enables us to go to Reshd overland. We are urged not to do so, being assured that we shall have to traverse a land of robbers who live in impenetrable forests; that we shall find nothing but rough footpaths, and that there are no inns or resting-places on the road. But the country is very little known, and as



THE STEPPE.

we have plenty of time before us, we take the opportunity of seeing some very interesting scenery. We only take with us what is strictly necessary, enough to load two horses, and our arms.

Having said good-bye to our friends in Tiflis, we join the train and gradually ascend the illuminated valley of the Kur.

The next morning, we wake up and find ourselves once more in the familiar steppe. To the left are the undulating grey mountains; while to the right, as well as in front of us and behind us, the

plain stretches as far as the horizon. Horsemen are dotted about here and there, while sheep and camels can be dimly made out standing around black specks near the surface of the ground, which are tents. The day grows, the sun shines out, the mountains are radiant with a thousand hues, and the illuminated steppe becomes full of animation. The pools glitter in the sunlight, and the transformation scene has been a very rapid and complete one. But the living images which we fancy that we can touch with the finger retreat before us; and at the approach of the engine the water seems to evaporate. We look behind us, and again we seem to see it sparkling in the light. We are passing full speed through an immense mirage. There can be no doubt about our being in the deceitful steppe; while, to complete the illusion, we see in the distance immense columns of smoke twisting and twirling like some umbelliferous plant upon a crooked stalk.



A GAZELLE.



SALIANE.

CHAPTER II.

FROM TIFLIS TO RESHD.

On wheels—Saliene—Native types—Rain and its effects—Sectaries—The land of mud—Upon the sea-shore—More virgin forests—On the Persian frontier—The population ; its mode of living and idleness—Feudalism—Scenes of feudal life—Scenery in the Talich country ; dwellings, custom, education, serfage, music and medicine.

IN the afternoon we leave the train at Hadji Cabul, the station for which is in the middle of the steppe. We are in the Tartar country, the population of which is Turkish. This side of the Caspian Sea is very like the other. The types, however, differ, for on this side the mixture of Caucasian and Persian blood is very distinct, and the men are tall, with fine features and straight noses. You can see that a short and stunted race of men has been fined down by crossing with an elegant and sinewy race.

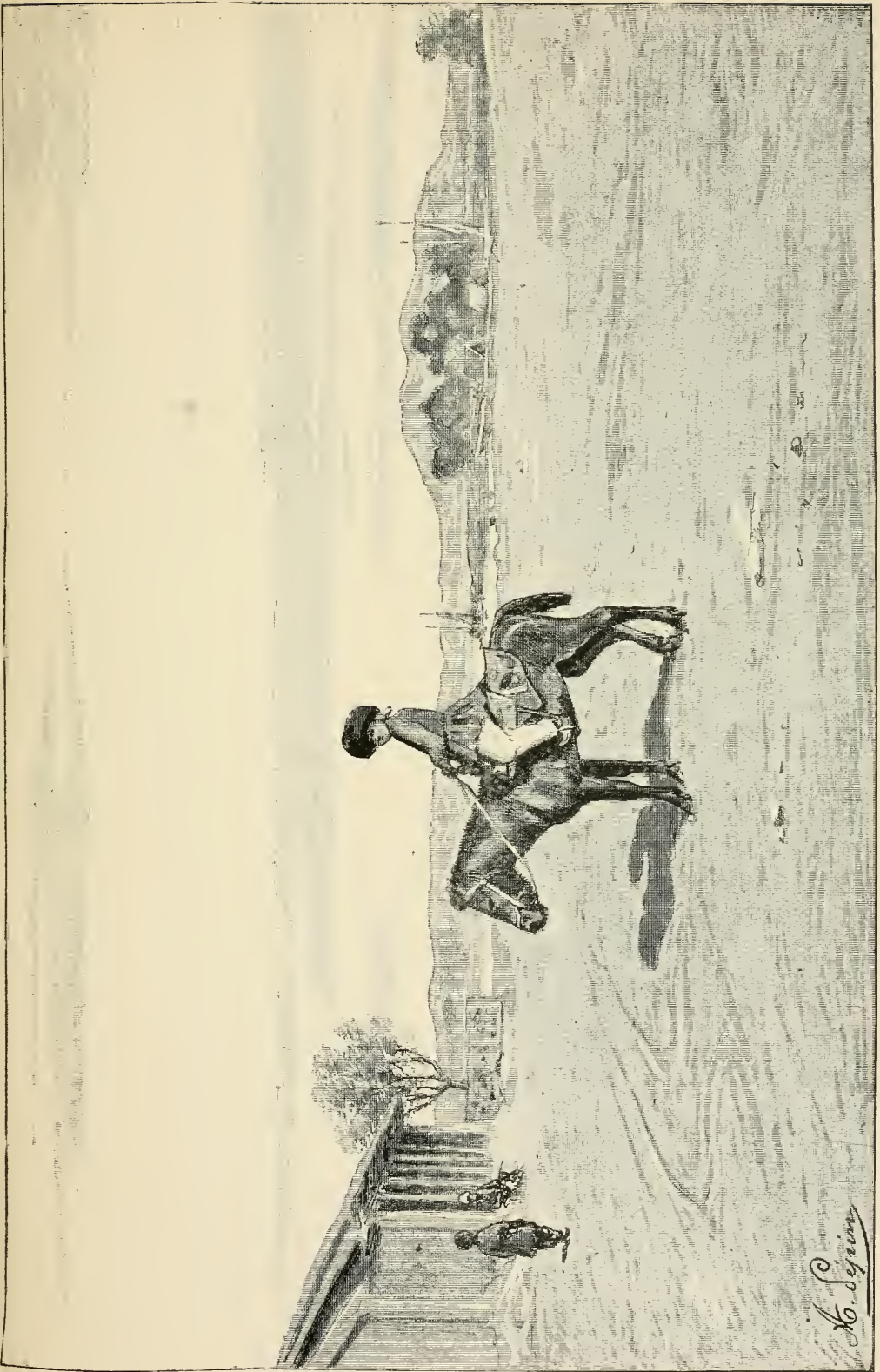
We send to the posting-house to order horses, and after a meal, we take our seats upon numerous bundles of hay and start

off to the music of the bells on the collars of the horses, which are excellent and go a very good pace. The perikladnaïa in which we are taking our ease is as comfortable as it was when we tried it at the time of our first visit; it is still devoid of springs. The roads have got their full allowance of ruts, and some of the jolts are heart-breaking. But our sojourn in Paris has not deprived us of all agility, and so we can keep our balance and still watch the glorious sunset.

The "open letters," it appears, entitle us to an escort, which is quite useless, and we are accompanied by three horsemen, armed with a sword and a gun. They gallop alongside of us, and from time to time treat us to the spectacle of a "djiguitovka," a Turkish word, which is equivalent to cutting figures on horseback.

Reaching Saliane on the 22nd of March, and finding that rain threatened, we purchase some felt manufactured by the Tartars. It is not equal to that made by the Khirgiz people. With this felt we covered our two large flasks. Saliane is built along a bend of the Kur. The wooden houses are built around large squares. The bulk of the population is Tartar, though there are a good many Persians, Armenians, and Russians. They nearly all make their living by fishing for sturgeon, with which the river abounds, and which are smoked and exported.

The Mussulman bazaar is closed, and we see only a few fruit-sellers seated under their straw shelters, and vendors of salt brought, as we are told, from Khiva and the Turkoman country. In the shops kept by Armenians or Russians, cotton stuffs and earthenware goods from Russia, both of inferior make, are offered for sale. This is the Mahometan New Year's Day, and that is why the bazaar is closed. The inhabitants are walking about arrayed in their best clothes. The tight-fitting tcherkeskas, with their long skirts, are not so often to be seen; they are worn shorter and in many cases open at the breast, not coming lower



A YOUNG TARTAR ON A PONY.

than the knee. Upon the other hand, the sheepskin headdress is higher and broader at the top. The people are shod differently, too, for instead of wearing high boots, they have a sort of broad slipper, curling up at the toe, with a wooden heel coming in under the hollow of the foot, so that the heel projects. The feet are bare or encased in woollen socks, many of which have coloured figures on them. It is necessary to acquire the habit of wearing these shoes, for, as one of my friends observed, they give one the sensation of walking upon potatoes.

Upon the occasion of this great festival of the *Nourouz* (New Year), the Shiite Mahometans dye themselves with henna; nearly all their hands, beards, and hair being flaming red. There are a great many people in the streets, and there is an air of joy and gaiety among them all.

It was with the greatest difficulty that we induced a native saddler to sew the felt around our flasks. He was very anxious to take part in the rejoicings, but as soon as we offered him a good sum for his work, he sat down with a smiling face, and when we came back to the posting-house for our meal, he had finished. We determine to go and sleep at Tisiakent, which is only a village. The steppe commences near the Kur, and at rare intervals we see hamlets with houses surrounded by a great many hedges. There is no lack of land, but the inhabitants are very few, though there is no fear of drought, not at least this year, for rain has been falling in torrents.

The rain continues to fall when we start the next day (March 23rd), and continues all along the route. This is why the mud-built houses have steep thatched roofs, in order that the water may run off very quickly. This is an indispensable precaution wherever rain is frequent. These roofs lend a singular appearance to the landscape, which reminds me of the French Bocage (a district in Brittany), though I do not for a moment want to

argue that there is any similitude of race or character. It is simply due to the laws of gravity and the desire to keep dry.

Here we are in a country where the Turkish language is spoken, but at Andreieff, Prichip, and the succeeding stations, we enter quite another world. It is only in the gigantic empire of the Czars that one comes upon such surprises as this. Here we see houses constructed after the Russian fashion, with straight streets, fields carefully cultivated, green fields with herds of cattle, and sturdy Russian horses. This country is inhabited by the descendants of sectaries named Malakanes. I question our Tartar postilion as to why these Russians had left their country. His reply was, "Because they were required to make the sign of the cross three times, and they would only make it once."

The country is very fertile, but unhealthy; the roads are abominable, but our excellent teams pull us out of this sea of mud, which tells us that we are getting into the Guilan. Guilan means the "land of mud," and very appropriately is it named. At Andreieff, a good woman asks us for medical advice. She is old, eaten up with fever, and very weak. To use her own phrase—she feels death coming.

"There is a great deal of fever in the country," we observe.

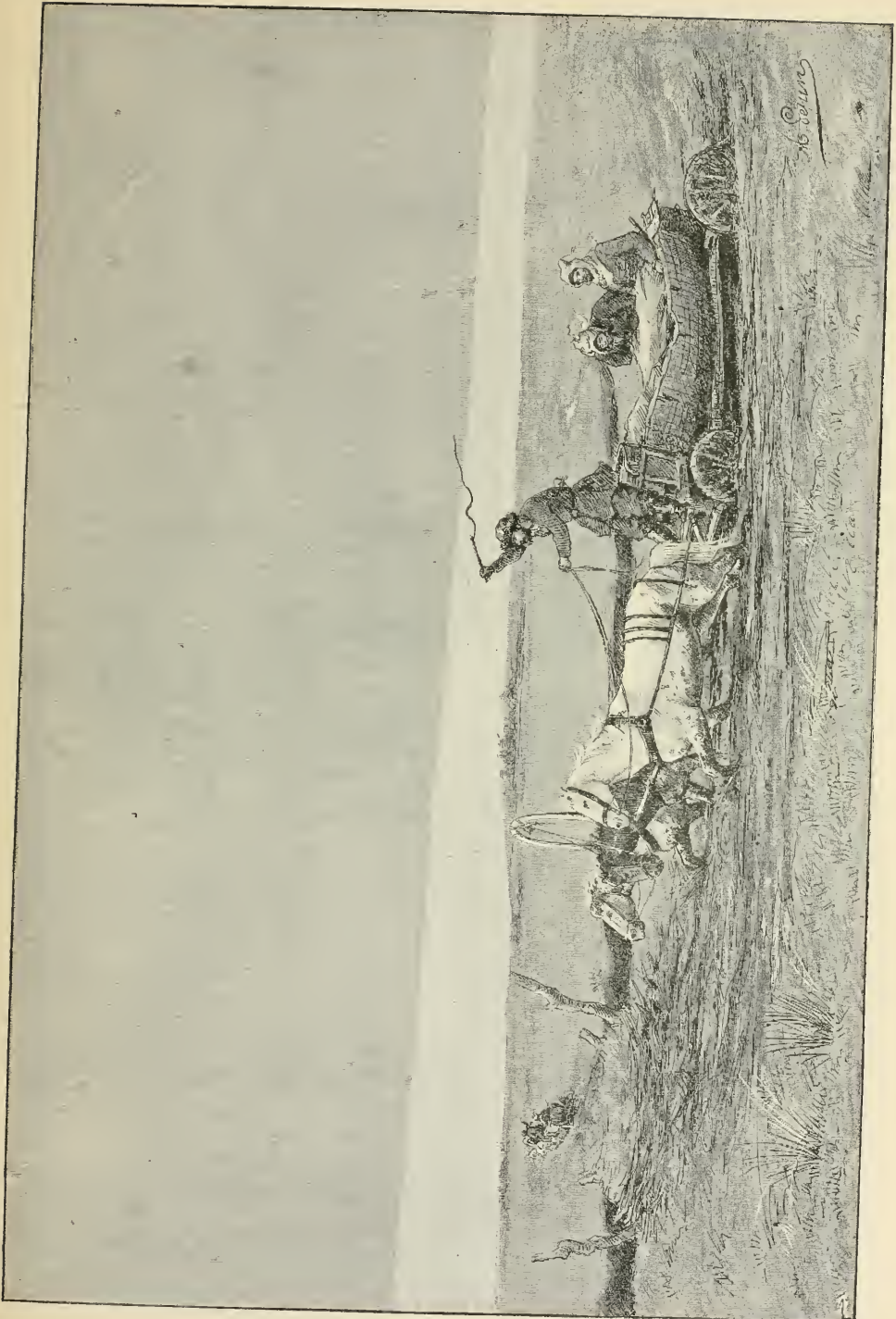
"A great deal. Many people die of it."

"Why do you remain here?"

"I was born here, and the land is very rich."

Through habit, man lives in climates which are fatal to him, and in poverty; he cannot even console himself with the thought that the soil is good, and illness, combined with the atmosphere in which he moves, takes from him all idea or ambition of improving his condition.

From Prichip, a village of wealthy Malakanes, we make our way across country, but we should not have got very far had it not been for our excellent horses. What mud! What jolting!



IN THE MUD.

What ups and downs! The postilion is constantly losing his seat and falling back on to his horse's quarters. He only laughs, and whips them on the more. All the way to Kizil-Agatch we jump rather than drive. We come to some ponds, and on the right we see mountains covered with forests. We are descending towards the Caspian, whence comes this very trying rain.

We leave Kizil-Agatch in better weather, the rain having stopped, though the sky is still dark, and there is a likelihood of fresh storms. The mud is still very deep. To our left is the plain, to our right mountains covered with forests and obscured by the mist, and in front the gaping void of the Caspian Sea. We drive along past pools which swarm with water-fowl, including ducks, teal, herons, cormorants, etc., with eagles swooping overhead. Then we go through some gorse, where there are plenty of foxes. We still continue going downhill towards the sea, through lowlands which are the home of fever.

Then we come to some sands, which tell us that the station is not far off—as it is named Kum, which means sand—nor the sea either for the matter of that. The posting-house is in the middle of a rose bank, at the edge of a small bay, where we see fishermen bringing live fish to shore and taking on board boxes of smoked fish.

From Kumbachi we go to Lenkoran by a sandy road. We are in full view of the open sea, with the extremity of the Bay of Kizil-Agatch to the north, while the steamer from Baku is visible in the distance when we enter Lenkoran, with its houses all built along the shore. There are a great many fishing-boats about, but the bazaar is closed, as the holiday is still being observed, and the Tartars, all dyed with henna, are sauntering about in their best attire.

Lenkoran is only famous for the fever engendered by the marshes to the west of the town.

We get out at the posting-house, which is the last on Russian territory, for further on there are only pathways, and we shall have to continue our journey on horseback. We pay our respects to the chief of the district, who places at our disposal one of his policemen who speaks Russian and Turkish. He promises to bring us the next day a man who will supply us with as many horses as we want. The interpreter is an asthmatic Mussulman, wearing the tcherkeska with much grace. He attributes his illness, which he treats sometimes with talismans, sometimes with indifference, to the climate.



LENKORAN.

He comes to us on the 25th of March, about eight in the evening, with a very small Tartar, wearing a very high caftan, and very obsequious. He warmly recommends him, and overloads him with praise. The Tartar listens with a very demure air, and whenever I look at him, he makes a profound bow and has his hands crossed over his stomach.

“You can put all confidence in him,” said the police officer; “he is an honest man, well known all along the route you are travelling, and universally respected. As a proof that I am not deceiving you, I may add that he is allowed to go into the women’s rooms.”

“Surely not?”

“Yes, into the women’s rooms. Moreover, he is rich, and has a fine house at Lenkoran. He is the most honest man of my acquaintance,” etc.

How could one fail to be satisfied with so rare a jewel? And thereupon we enter into a discussion upon the subject of horses, coming to an agreement after an hour of feints, attacks, retorts, and bargaining. At noon, we make a start with five horses, three for riding and two for carrying baggage. We purchase a few



TARTAR HOUSES AND DRESSES.

provisions in the bazaar, three bourkas, and three whips. We hurriedly write three letters which we take to the last post-office, where we see a new portrait of the new Czar in an old frame.

About noon, the little Tartar arrives in the company of three or four lanky fellows, their hands red with henna, with long faces like the Persians, who make us a profound bow and look very lugubrious.

“These are the men who are to accompany me,” observed the little Tartar.

After we have made their acquaintance, they stand aside, in a very respectful attitude.

“You can load the baggage, and then we will start.”

All four bow in token of assent, whereupon the little Tartar remarks in a very insinuating tone—

“But that will be rather difficult, for we have only two horses ready. The others will not be so till this evening.”

“Why this delay?”

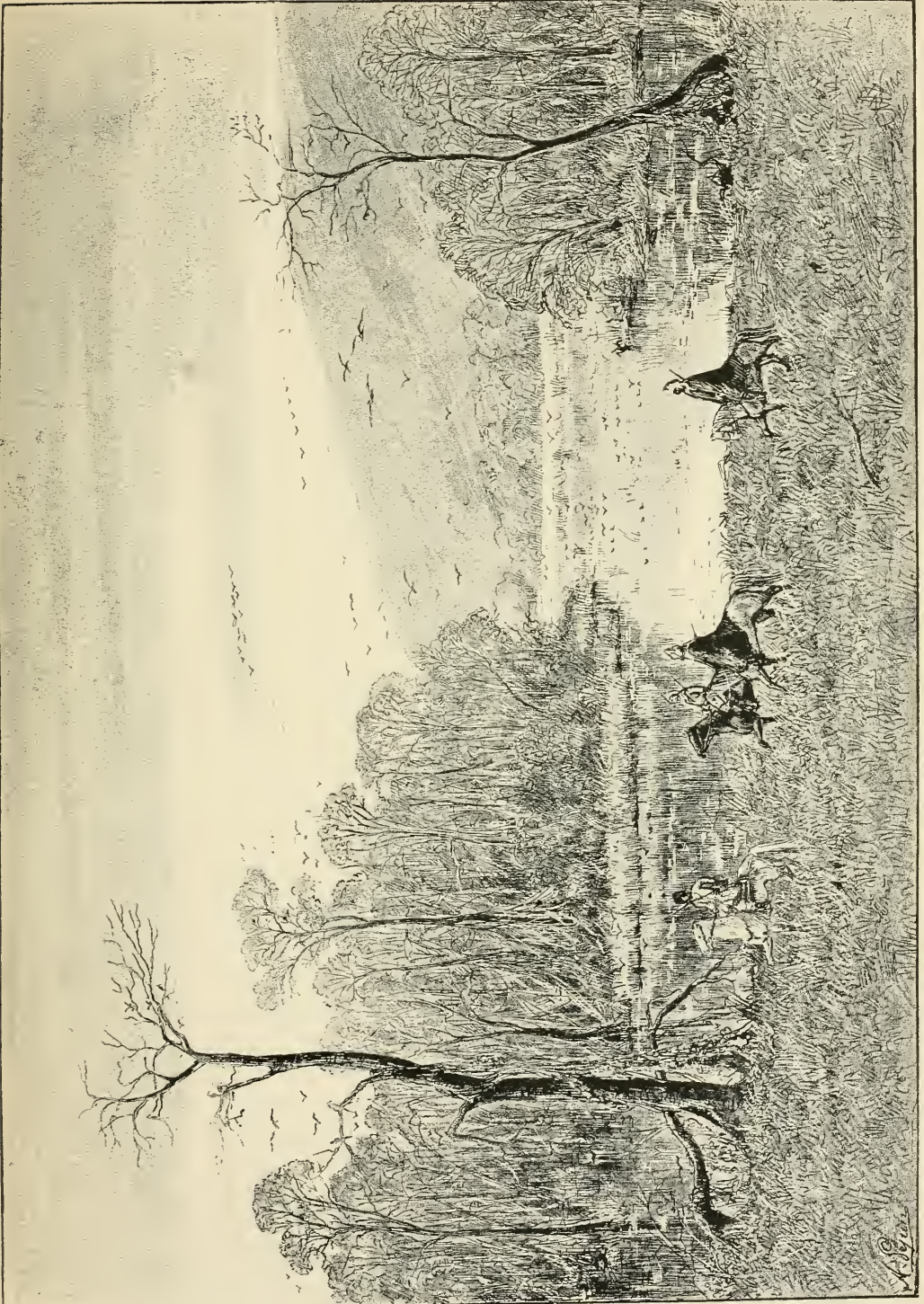
“They are not shod. By daybreak to-morrow, everything will be in readiness, and we shall reach Astara about noon. And if it is not done as I have said, you can cut off this ear, and the other one too. Vallah!”

As we know that the road, after leaving Lenkoran, is either sandy or muddy, and that at no part is it stony, we conclude that the horses do not want shoeing, and that the Tartar is lying.

“Will you pay to-morrow ten roubles for each horse not shod, and then I will believe that the reason you allege is the real one?”

The little Tartar, with his tall head-gear, sees that I do not take him on trust, and he begins to smile, while his companions laugh outright. In reality, they want to enjoy the holiday, and they eventually admit it is so, saying, “To-morrow will be less holiday, and then all will be for the best.” We give way to their wish; because there is no help for it, and they take themselves off, after making a profound obeisance, laughing and joking among themselves.

This little incident is a warning to us that the journey has begun in earnest, for here is an unexpected delay. When one starts, it is advisable to say to one's self that not a minute shall be lost on the way, just as if one had made a bet to go round the world in eighty days, and, in the course of the journey, one finds that it is necessary to have patience and not be in more of a hurry than if one had eighty years to do it in. There is no good



IN THE LENKORAN MARSHES.

in making a fuss, either; for those who are passionate learn to be calm and become astonished at the easy way in which they take matters, while persons usually calm will find it impossible to keep their temper. One may conclude from this that travel forms the mind and character to some extent.

We take advantage of the leisure which the commencement of the Mussulman year enforces on us to purchase some little luxuries, such as Caucasus raisins and dried apricots from Mazendéran.

After that, we go and try our luck in the marshes, but we only get very dirty, and fail to kill a single duck or cormorant. From there we go and get a mouthful of pure air upon the sandy shore of the raging Caspian, which is kind enough to wash all the mud off our boots. Thus man utilizes the forces of nature.

The Tartar had undertaken to be ready before daybreak, but at six o'clock the horses had not arrived. At the last moment, it turned out that six would be required, and not five as it was agreed yesterday. The Tartar laments his hard fate, and his comrades try to make us believe that we have too much luggage, and that six, or even seven horses will be required to carry it. This was the usual comedy, the *dénouement* of it being that we had to pay for an extra horse.

We remind the Tartar that he had offered us one of his ears yesterday if he was late, and that late he was. But he is so obsequious, and praises our goodness in such flattering terms, that we do not deprive him of his ear. We start amid driving rain, and upon leaving Lenkoran, we have to cross a river swollen by the floods. We follow our guide with precaution, for our little horses are up to their chests in water, and we up to our knees.

As our long cloaks are immersed in the water, they form quite a heavy weight upon our shoulders, and we feel as if we were crossing a river of glue, or as if some capricious water-sprite was

pulling us from behind and inviting us to descend with her into her fairy abode. The truth is that we are entangled in our accoutrements, that the stream is rapid, and that if our horses slipped, we should be carried off like so many leaves.

The forest commences on the other side of the river. After floundering about in some sticky mud, we reach the sand on the river bank and follow it as long as we can.

Our horses trot gently along, the water just washing their hoofs, and then all of a sudden they start off and begin to jib, those who are riding in the rear getting quite wet with the water their heels throw up. Upon the summit of the steep bank, the thatch of a Tartar hut may be seen at intervals, and then we come to deep cavities in the bank, and to marshy pools surrounded by virgin forests. We can discern willows, acacias, and elms all bound together by gigantic creepers; the timber caught in the toils of a net formed by the refuse of vegetation.

Here may be seen all the birds of creation. Some of the branches are covered with clusters of cormorants, crows, and magpies; upon the summit of the elms may be seen quantities of vultures and eagles; in the marsh are flamingoes, cranes, spoon-bills, and long-legged herons; falcons and stone falcons, with their long claws, are eating the fish which they have caught perched on a branch, or are skimming the surface, with open beaks, and ready to harpoon anything within their reach. Above our heads are flying the swans and the pelicans, all in a line, and with necks like travelling bags. A shot at a duck elicits cries of terror from this tribe of birds, and there is such a concert of croaking, quacking, screeching, and cawing as never was heard. The din quite deafens us, and it is all in vain that the Caspian beats time with her swell, regulated by the north-easter. Then, as the noise faded away, there was nothing to be heard but the hissing of the cormorants, and the gulls chattering like Turkish women at a

well; the pelicans with their protuberant crops had lapsed into silence, and were to be seen winging their flight through the air.

After passing by several woodmen's huts, close to the path we were following, we cross a plain and two streams with ferries; one at Chak-Agatch, and another at Kaladagni, where fishermen were waiting for a return of fine weather, encamped under canvas which had been dipped in tar to make it rain-proof. They were Russians, Cossacks, and Kalmucks, easy of recognition by reason



ON THE SHORE OF THE CASPIAN SEA.

of their Mongol features. They were smoking to pass away the time. The rain, which had stopped for a time, began to come down again in torrents, and the sea was very high. We march away from it in order to shorten our route.

After having crossed several torrents, and floundered out of one morass into another, we reach Astara in pouring rain, at night-fall. We can just see the square brick house with zinc roof of the Customs, and we knock at the door of the next house, where the Merkur and Kavkas Company has its counting-house. Our

arrival had been expected, and we find snug quarters, that is to say, benches to sit upon, and wooden planks to lie full length upon, and a roaring stove to dry our clothes. A dozen eggs and as many glasses of tea apiece soon make us feel ourselves again.

The agent of the company, a very pleasant man, tells us that we shall probably be unable to cross the swollen river to-morrow ; but that with a very short spell of fine weather the ferry will be practicable. There is no large boat, nothing but very rickety canoes, hewn out of the trunks of trees.

Our men confirm this view ; and they exaggerate the condition of affairs, being in no hurry to start again in such bad weather. They are very disappointed at not being able to go and spend the night in the Persian village on the other side, as they have many acquaintances there.

This part of the country is partially cultivated, and the Tartars grow rice in it. They are, it appears, incredibly lazy, scarcely taking the trouble to till the soil, and lying in the fields while their women-folk are sowing the seed ; and when the harvest comes round, rather than reap it themselves, they make over a third to the mountaineers, who come down and do the work. When the time comes for transplanting the rice, the women and children are left to do it, the men going to fish or to sleep, which is their favourite occupation. The Armenian told us that they are too lazy even to steal. One could hardly have thought that laziness could be an incentive to honesty. Though why not, seeing that moralists tell us that all faults have their corresponding virtues !

It is very true that the Tartars are lazy, for we had ocular as well as oral evidence of the fact. They live in miserable mud huts, with thatched roofs, or huts made of reeds with a thin facing of mud ; and yet there is plenty of timber to be had close at hand. They are shivering with cold and damp for want of a combustible,

which it would give them so little trouble to procure. It is often the case that wood is dearer at Astara, in sight of splendid forests, than it is at Baku, where it is imported from Persia. They are very badly fed, living chiefly on rice, gherkins, and melons, and yet the soil is rich. They are badly clad and sickly, eaten up by fever; and they have the reputation of being more inclined to anger than tenacity of purpose. They are free with their formidable long knives (kindjals), but they do not care to use the pickaxe. Their temperament is that of a race with high-strung nerves, whose blood has been impoverished by an unwholesome climate.

It is raining when we awake, but not so hard as the day before. Our tcharvadars (muleteers), who are paid by the day, tell us that it is the finger of Providence, that the river is impassable, and that it will be better to wait till to-morrow. To-day, the water would be up to a man's neck; and a horse with a load on his back would be entirely submerged. They add that it is impossible to start, "unless we wish for the death of the Mussulmans." And they swear by their beards that they are honest men. We annul the agreement, and send to hire horses in the Persian village. We intend starting the next day, whatever the weather may be. We have engaged a man named Amman, a former sailor, inspector of works, and fisherman; but at present a smuggler and so forth. He speaks Russian, and is by no means devoid of intelligence. He understands Persian, and can speak it fairly well; while Turkish is his national tongue. So he makes a good interpreter.

The rain stopped for a little during the morning, so we were able to ferry across the river. We had no need to entrust our persons to the herculean Kurđ, with his broad, savage face, who with great dexterity guided his *koulasse* (canoe) with a pole. We had more difficulty in getting through the mortar with which the

road through the bazaar leading to the residence of the village chief is made. We find the chief a charming little man, very smartly attired, with white socks, blue trousers, an open black tunic, and an astrachan head-dress. He is extremely polite, very dignified, and very effeminate in his manners; and he has a way of bending his little finger, upon which he wears a turquoise ring which a milliner showing off lace to a customer might envy. After waiting three-quarters of an hour, a guide arrives, and we take leave of him, much, apparently, to his regret. He says, "What a pity that you are leaving. My district is at your orders. I would have executed all your wishes. If I was not expecting one of my superiors, I would accompany you. May God be with you!" and so on.

His residence was a thatched house, at the extremity of a large courtyard, shut in by a reed fence. The entrance was by a low doorway, and the first apartment was the drawing-room, in which the chief sat cross-legged in the midst of his assessors; one of them handing him the pen, another ink, and the third the paper he was to sign.

He had scarcely time to bring himself back into a perpendicular position, after having bent himself double to bow us out, when the rain began to fall again in torrents. What mud, and what a quantity of it! At a distance of about a mile and a half, we came to the somewhat important river of Khodjikara. The horses are unloaded, and the baggage placed in canoes; the horses, having been unsaddled, swim across, while the men undress and get into the water so as to gain time and not pay anything for the ferry. We cross several fever-breeding marshes, and we then skirt the sea for some distance, partly on the sand, partly on the high ground above it.

The rain continues to fall. Our men run along with their bare feet, going faster than our horses, which are but sorry steeds.

At many points the road is intersected by watercourses. To our right a chain of mountains, all about the same height, shut in the horizon with their wooded slopes. At a distance, these mountains seem as if they had been planted with trees which had been regularly trimmed by the hand of man; something like the toys made in Germany for children, only upon a larger scale. In places, the trees are so covered with snow that they look as if their tops had been powdered.



IN A CANOE.

Entering the forest, we reach Visna, where, as our guide informs us, the authority of his chief at Astara ends. He obstinately refuses to go any further, in spite of threats and promises. We request him to take us to the chief of the village, and, after going through marshes, trees, and a sea of mud, we manage at last to reach a glade, where stands a thatch-covered house, with a long gallery, each pillar of which is formed of the trunk of a tree scarcely stripped of its bark. Long-haired wolf dogs greet us with barking which is not by any means friendly, and they

bite our horses in the legs. A few good blows with a stick drive them off, and from the thickets emerge a number of tattered-looking individuals, each with a long pruning-hook in his hand. They have very little clothes of any kind, and they appear more surprised than alarmed at our appearance.

From the door of one of the rooms emerge the heads of women of all ages, with a tribe of children between their legs. In another very large room, grouped around a brazier, are a number of men squatting in a circle.

We ask for the chief. First one man speaks, then another, and then a third; but none of them is the chief. We insist upon seeing him, and at last an aged man thinks fit to leave his place by the fire and come forward. He has a white beard, and is very laconic in speech. We ask him for a guide, and offer to pay for his services. But he will not listen to us, and goes back to warm himself. We threaten him with Chah, a neighbouring chief, but this does not intimidate him, and he declares that he is not afraid of any one. The thirty men around him appear to share his views, and we leave, after having told the old savage that we shall inform the khan how the chief of Visna despises him. If any unpleasant consequences follow, so much the worse for him.

The old man has evidently been impressed by what we have said, for a man soon overtakes us and goes on in front, cutting off with his pruning-hook the branches which came in our way. It appears that we made a blunder in invoking the authority of the Khan of Karganrud, who is hated in this district, which is subject to the Khan of Khevir.

We only got a guide when it was found that we were going to the latter's residence that same evening.

We reach Khevir, in the midst of the partially cleared forest, before nightfall, Rakim-Khan offering us hospitality in one of his houses, which was made cheerful by a bright fire.

We were wet to the skin, and glad to swelter in the heat and smoke. The fire was burning in one of those chimneys peculiar to the country which are not, properly speaking, chimneys at all, inasmuch as the draught is created by the door. The faggots are piled up in an earthen niche, very like those in which the figures of saints are placed, and, when they are alight, a tongue of flame springs up, licks the side of the niche and reaches up above the summit, so that, as there is no fire without smoke, the volume of smoke is such that it compels those who are standing up to sit



KHEVIR.

down, and sometimes those who are seated to lie flat on the floor, this being the case when the pressure of the atmosphere is very great, as on the present occasion. It is in this posture that the khan finds us when he comes to pay us a visit, in the company of his cousin, and has served for us a simple but very delicious meal, consisting of enormous salmon trout, stewed to perfection, rice done in fat, cream, and dried grapes.

Rakim is a man of middle height, with regular features, and brown hair, wearing the astrachan hat of the country, an open tunic with brass buttons, breeches of gray frieze, and leather

abarcas kept in their place, like the "carbatinæ" of antiquity, by thongs of plaited wool. His cousin, a younger man than himself, wears the official blue tunic of the Persians. Both of them have a kindjal in their belts.

Rakim returns us with interest the compliments we pay him, and he informs us that he goes down each winter into his fief to inspect his property, receive his due, hear any complaints, and settle any squabbles. In the winter, he lives up in the mountain. His cousin has spent two years at Teheran, but he found life very dull there, and he has now returned to Khevir.

The khan has difficulties with a neighbour, one of his relatives, who is constantly trying to pick a quarrel with him, and who wishes, to use our servitor's expression, "to buy his land without money." He complains bitterly of his enemy's want of respect, and says that he has just insulted him very much, *à propos* of the New Year, by not coming to pay him the first visit, as, being the younger of the two, it would have been etiquette for him to have done. The serfs of Rakim are being continually ill-treated, and he cannot avoid reprisals. Matters are becoming envenomed, and will end badly.

When the khans send their servitors to each other, these latter are badly received, and the breach becomes wider each day. Rakim knows that we are going to Teheran, where he has an elder brother attached to the shah's household. He would be much obliged if we would tell his brother that the land of Khevir, for a hundred years in his family, is in danger of being lost, and that the intervention of the shah would be of great service.

I asked him why he did not write a letter to this effect, and he told us that his letters were always intercepted before they reached Teheran.

The khan asks us to give him advice as to his eyes and those of several of his attendants, and he then withdraws. To-morrow he is to accompany us to the frontier of his domain. We leave for Karganrud in the morning, with the sun for once condescending to shine. A few men, carrying Peabody rifles and long knives (kindjals), precede us. The khan on horseback, with two running footmen, also goes on in front. They are all well armed, the khan's young cousin having a revolver in his belt. We plunge into the depths of the virgin forest, and the route, by a winding pathway, is a charming one. An hour or two like this, spent amid a beneficent and smiling nature, is enough to compensate for weeks and months of fatigue and disappointment.

We are in a wood of wild pomegranate trees and wild briars, which grow beneath the tall acacias and beeches all covered with creepers, while many other large trees, which have been split in half by thunderstorms and bent to the ground have, like Antæus, shot up afresh from the soil, with renewed vigour, upright and full of life. They are like the peoples whom misfortune only casts down, to raise them up again and rejuvenate them. On the ground, anemones, violets, and Easter daisies are revelling in the sun like us; the moss is getting green, the birds are singing, and all is calm and bright. But, in our enjoyment of being alive, we cannot hear the dull roar of the sea on our left; yet it is very close to us—so close, that through the branches we can catch a glimpse of its foaming waves. The horsemen go in single file through the wood, and they stoop down when the khan, with his knife, has not cut off the prickly branches which threaten to scratch the faces of his guests. There is a succession of ferries, and, as we pass one of them, we see a fisherman land a fine salmon very cleverly by hooking him under the stomach. The khan offers us the fish, as he is master of everything which swims in the water as well as what flies in the air. We refuse the gift;

and the serf continues his fishing, while the lord goes on his way, not a word having been exchanged.

We emerge from the forest and follow the sea-shore, along which millions of shells have been thrown up high and dry. Our horses, as they step upon them, make a clatter with their hoofs like the sound of distant bells ringing a merry peal. We are not the only travellers, for there are long lines of pelicans and swans overhead, but they are flying northward. Each one goes his own way in this world. The khans accompany us as far as the limit of their domains, near a river. Upon the other side we see a reed hut, with armed men outside it.

The khans bid us good-bye, after having alighted from their horses; and Rakim begs us not to forget the commission he gave us for Teheran.

Whereupon, we cross the ferry, and are upon the territory of our late host's enemy. The armed men come to see us across, as their duty is to exact toll from those who enter their master's territory, forming a post of Customs officers, with the faces of brigands. They exchange a few words with our interpreter, and having learned who we were, they salute us respectfully.

About five in the evening, we reach Karganrud by a route which would not be a bad one for horses of rather a better stamp than ours. Horsemen sent by the khan invite us to repair to the "castle," where we are expected. We do not arrive there until it is pitch dark, after a march of two hours through a terrible slough of mud, and after having crossed the river, the bed of which is very broad and covered with rough stones, one of which makes our servant's horse stumble and sends him over its head to take an involuntary bath. We are shown to a bedroom, the walls of which are whitewashed, with recesses to serve as hanging cupboards or wardrobes, while a table and three chairs, of European shape, tell us that the master of the house has been in

contact with the West. We are surrounded by a host of servants, all with the long knife suspended from their sides ; and it is with difficulty that we shake ourselves free of their unwelcome attentions. At last they go off to bed, after having announced that the khan will come and pay us a visit in the morning.

He comes, as a matter of fact, almost before we are dressed,



A TALICH MAN-AT-ARMS.

with a numerous suite in attendance. He presents us to his brother-in-law and a cousin who accompany him. He asks us where we are going, and what is the object of our journey ; and he is delighted to have the opportunity of getting in a word of French now and then. He even contrives to frame a few rude

phrases, but he scarcely understands the plainest replies. He has recourse to our interpreter, who speaks the Talich Turkish to him. The khan remarks that our man has the accent of the country, and asks him how he comes to be a Russian subject, and whether he is not Talich. He reproaches him with having left his country; and when Amman tells him that he is a native of Ardebil, the khan knits his eyebrows, for he detests the men of that tribe.

The khan is small, thin, and sinewy; he has a head like a vulture, with a long neck, aquiline nose, large black eyes, and bad expression. He smiles a good deal, and displays small, pointed teeth. He is very much master of himself, puts very insidious questions, and replies to ours without any hurry. He is evidently a very suspicious man, with the feline ways of a tiger, and he makes Amman very uncomfortable. Every one who comes near him is afraid of him.

We ask him to breakfast with us, and he replies, "Yes, if you will allow me," with a most obsequious smile. While breakfast is being got ready, he proposes that we should take a walk, and he profits by the opportunity to ply us with questions.

"Why have you no majesty in your country?"

"I don't know."

"You know, but you won't tell me."

"Perhaps because the people will not have one."

"Why will they not have a majesty?"

"Because they prefer to be the majesty themselves."

"That is impossible. There can only be one majesty. I do not understand."

I take good care not to try and explain to him what he does not understand.

"MacMahon is the chief in France."

"No; he is not so any longer. He has been succeeded by Grévy."

“What did Grévy do with MacMahon? Did he turn him out of France?”

“No; they both live in Paris.”

This is too much for the khan, who communicates to his brother-in-law the astonishment this statement causes him. It is evident that he does not believe me.

“And MacMahon does nothing? He does not attempt to avenge himself?”

“No.”

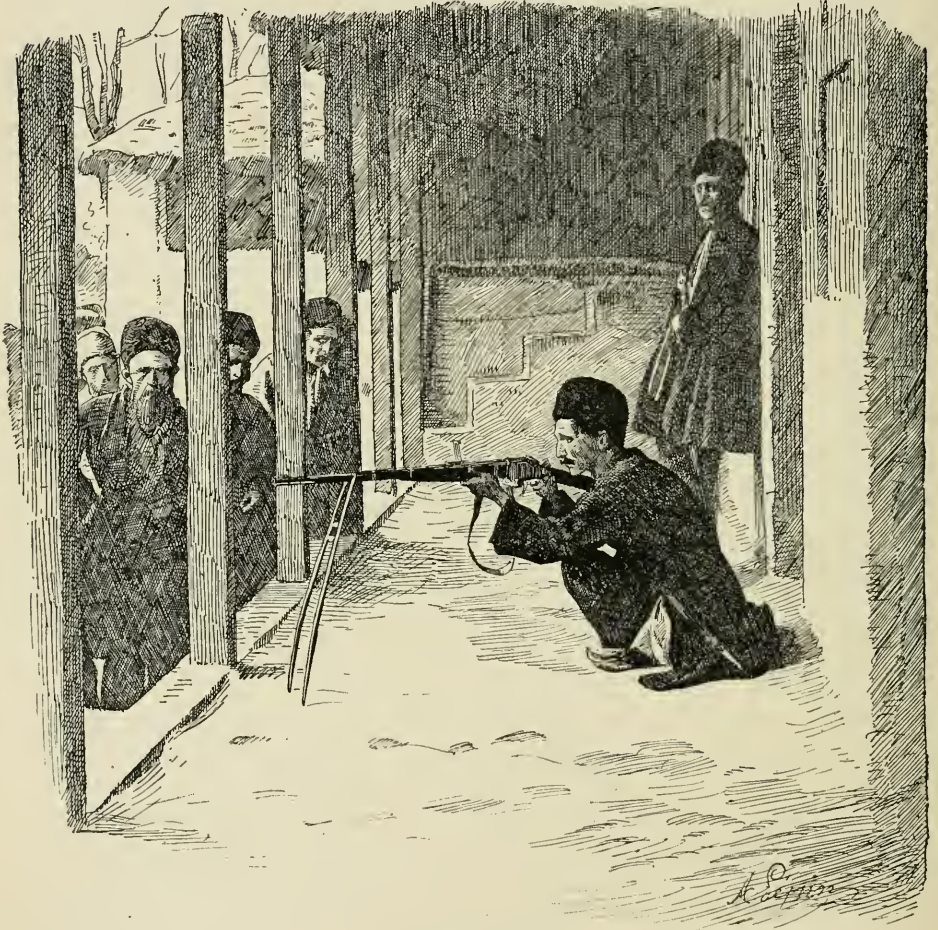
This ends the subject. We have just reached the summit of a hill, some way from our dwelling-place, and to the left we see a large house, which appears to be uninhabited. This is a prison. Lower down, about two hundred yards away, is the residence of the women, consisting of a house with one story and a balcony running round it, under the guard of armed men. This house starts from the riverside, forming a square, with immense stables and a kind of barracks.

Above the hill, to the top of which we have climbed, upon a natural platform from which the sea is visible, the khan is building a brick palace. He will show it to us to-morrow, and will be very pleased if we will take a “likeness” of it.

Followed by a numerous group, preceded and flanked by men with a rifle on the shoulder, we reach the bath by a road carefully laid with flints. Near the door a man with a white turban and swarthy face, with an axe on his shoulder, rises at our approach, bends low and salutes the khan—who waves his hand to him in recognition—and then proceeds to chant in a loud tone the praises of his master, who seems quite to appreciate this. While we are going down the steps into the bath, we can still hear the loud but droning tones of the herald. He is, it appears, an illustrious dervish, and he comes to spend a few days with the khan every winter.

The bath is very clean and well arranged. We compliment the architect on his good taste, and the khan is highly delighted, for it is he who has designed the plans and superintended the works.

We ask the khan why the country is called Talich.



TALICH MARKSMEN.

“It is,” he tells us, “in memory of a son of Gengis-Khan, from whom my family descends. We have been masters of the Talich country for four centuries. It was formerly a very large one, but the Russians have taken part of it, and only a small corner is left us.”

We ask him if he has resided at Teheran, and he replies in the affirmative, saying, "that it was there that he learned French, and served in the shah's army, and that he had the rank of general, with the duty of supplying four hundred horsemen in case of war."

Above our heads, at a height of perhaps seventeen hundred feet, a flock of pelicans is flying northwards. One of the attendants offered the khan a rifle, knowing his master's fondness for shooting. The khan then took a pair of glasses from the hands of the attendant who always carried them, took a look at the pelicans, and then fired. Of course, he did not touch any of them. But he was determined to show his skill; so discovering a cow, which was grazing in the bush about five furlongs off, he aimed carefully at her and fired two shots. After the second shot, the cow made off, and the khan gave us a very self-satisfied look, as much as to say the bullet could not have struck very far from the mark.

"Do you often kill anything?" we asked.

"Yes, very often."

The kings of Assyria used to have lions and human beings brought to shoot at by way of practice, but cow-shooting is a less royal quarry.

Seeing a crow on one of the roofs, the khan issues his order, and five or six vagabonds go off full tilt to drive it, by throwing stones at it, in our direction; but the crow makes off. A few wretched sparrows are still left in the mulberry trees, and the chief of the guards who takes part in the expedition shakes the trees himself; and as the sparrows fly out, the khan, who has arrived himself with a shot-gun, brings one down amid a murmur of applause from the assembled company. We pay him some fresh compliments. The khan is wreathed in smiles, and the promenade continues. We notice large rice fields, many cottages,

and an abundance of all kinds of live stock. The whole of this country is very rich. The gorge from which the river descends is well wooded, and snow is still visible in the distance.

Merchants come in with presents; and having thus paid for their patent to sell, they will be free to dispose of their merchandise to-morrow, which is market-day at the Karganrud bazaar. Serfs have come from their huts, and are drawn up in line along the road by which the lord is to pass; and with great humility, and their heads turned upon one side, they show him the object which it is their desire to present to him. One has a handsome horse-whip (*gamtchi*), another an elaborately embroidered carpet, a third a pair of beautifully made slippers. The serf is honoured by a look from his master, and his gift is taken over by a guard, who appears to be told off for this purpose.

It is now time for breakfast, and we return to our lodgings, where we find a well-spread table, with spoons, forks, and plates, all of English make. The dishes are very varied, as are the condiments and the dessert. We try dish after dish, not without a certain amount of satisfaction. There are pistachio-nuts, skim milk cheese, onions, pimentos, pomegranate seeds from the Mazendéran, fowls, kabab (roast mutton), ragout of mutton with sauce and dry rice, mutton broth with green peas, pheasants roasted in oil, palao with saffron, dates, raisins, pomegranates, and stewed prunes. All these dishes are served anyhow, and with no fixed order, so that the disciples of Brillet-Savarin would have a fit if they saw us eating all together the dishes which are supposed to be spoiled by mixing. We eat on unconcernedly and I must confess that, for my own part, I had a little of everything, and found it very good. Life in the open gives one an appetite, and then in travelling one soon acquires a barbarian palate.

We wash down our breakfast with some white wine of Enzeli,



Talyche Type
Karganaroud
30.3.86

A SERVANT OF THE KHAN.

which is nothing but brandy, with an addition of water. The cousin of the khan and his brother-in-law prefer the brandy because it is stronger; and before the meal is over, the former staggers to his feet and disappears, leaning for support upon two of the attendants. The host smiles with satisfaction. There is a good deal of laughing and joking at the table, and the khan, who is a very close questioner, asks us—

“What is the moon? What is the sun? What is the earth? Is there nothing in the moon? I have been told that it is inhabited by men like ourselves. What do you think? I have heard it said that, but for the sun, there would be no life upon the earth. I do not believe a word of this. One can do very well without it. I remain ten days at a time in my room without seeing it, and I am none the worse on that account. In the rainy season, the sun does not show himself during the day, nor does he at night. Is it true that the earth is heated by an internal fire?”

Then, suddenly, like a man who recurs to an idea which has already given him a good deal of thought, he said—

“Do you know how to make gold? Why should it not be made when one knows what it is composed of? Water is made without much difficulty.”

At this moment, a courier is announced with letters. The khan reads them off and hands them one by one to his chief of the scribes, who receives them with the utmost respect. One of these letters puts him in a terrible rage. His face becomes convulsed, he tears up the letter and throws it to the ground, spits upon it, and uses blasphemous language; after which he drinks a glass of brandy, and, being again master of himself, continues his questions.

“Where is Bokhara? Where is Tashkend? Where is Kashgar? Are they large cities? Are they rich countries?”

Do they furnish good soldiers? I am told that China is a very large country, and the most powerful empire in the world. Do the Chinese speak Turkish?"

We answer the best we can both these questions and others, which keep us at table more than two hours. Glass succeeds glass, and the bottles are soon emptied. The khan is constantly drinking to the health of one or other of us, and insists upon our drinking. This we are obliged to do, but we do not take enough to prevent our seeing how crassly ignorant he is. This man in a tunic, murdering French and trying to pass himself off for a European, reminds one of a Frank in a toga trying to stutter out Latin.

When the khan gets up, I notice beneath his tunic the plated butt of a revolver, which shows how much confidence he puts in his *entourage*.

The khan rises and retires, followed by his armed retainers. He goes off to his castle with its wooden tiles, where, we are told, he will take his customary nap.

While the master is resting, we go for a walk, accompanied by his three sons, whose acquaintance we had made in the morning. The eldest is sixteen, the second thirteen, and the youngest eleven. They are rather short, with good figures, and very agile. Their education is very simple. A mollah teaches them to read the Koran and form Arab characters, while they spend the remainder of their time roaming over their father's domain, riding, and playing with the children of their own age. The khan had refused to send his eldest son, who resembles him, it appears, in every particular, to Teheran, whither he had been summoned. We can only testify to the physical resemblance between the father and this youth, who is already treated with much consideration by his father's attendants, and takes a great interest in our weapons which he examined with the air of

a connoisseur. He is already a very good shot; and whenever the opportunity occurs, and one of his companions discovers a magpie on a tree, or a stork in a rice field, he picks up the first gun he can find and has a shot at it. After he has fired, he goes into the question of whether he has shot too low or too high, so that he will no doubt become a good marksman. It is thus that his education is being completed; and the obsequiousness of those around him, when he gives expression to an opinion, gradually accustoms him to being self-willed, and he unconsciously becomes impregnated with the idea that he is born to exercise mastery.

Passing in front of the residence of the serfs attached to the glebe, he stops and goes in by the low doorway, and one can hear the rippling laughter of women and girls. And when the young master leaves, a head crowned with dark hair and two large black eyes may be seen peering inquisitively out of the window.

The two younger sons still amuse themselves like children. With branches of willow, they cut out whistles, as French children do, wetting the bark and tapping it with a round stone till it peals off. In this way, they make *tapperiaux*, or air-guns, which they use like a syringe. They throw stones, join in a scuffle with other lads, jump about and roll on the ground, playing as becomes children of their age.

The second, a good-looking boy, who, by his resemblance to his uncle, must be like his mother, is learning to smoke with a cigarette, which he has made one of his attendants give him. Seated behind a thorn tree, he is puffing out clouds of smoke with a very grave air. The youngest boy looks at him quite enviously, and would like to imitate his example; but he cannot get any one to give him one. This little fellow is very capricious; he has fits of temper, and sometimes is very rough with the

favourites who try to caress him. He has already his favourites, being a prince into whose good graces far-seeing persons, with an eye to the future, are anxious to enter.

All the people whom we meet bow to the ground to these young princes, who do not even deign to give a nod in return. It never occurs to them to do so; they feel themselves to be of a different clay from the wretched beings who till the soil to supply them with food.

The khan possesses the soil which the serfs cultivate, and the serfs themselves, for the latter cannot leave the soil on which they are born, nor the land which surrounds it. They owe a tribute to the khan, which they never succeed in paying to the day, and their debt puts them entirely in his power. The unmarried men can take to flight, but their relatives are punished for it; the married men are kept to the soil by their families and by their feeling of resignation, while habit deprives them of all initiative, and suffering comes quite naturally to them. Any attempt at escape is severely punished; armed men watch at the cross-roads to arrest the fugitives and take them back to their master, who has them beaten, cast into prison, and fined. Having no money to pay the fine, they are condemned to forced labour, so that, after trying to improve their position, they make it worse, for they get extra labour, which they dread more than anything else.

Badly fed, weakly, having drunk in at their mother's breast, so to speak, the taste for servitude, they have no courage; and, with no future or hope before them, are very lazy. They feel that they are powerless, and they are content to prolong their existence, and to die as late as possible upon the soil towards which they are bent all the day long. What is the use of their flying from this gehenna? Ten leagues away the land is an unknown one, and few people care to leave themselves in the hands of chance. They cannot muster up courage to throw off the yoke which they

find so heavy, and their purely animal feelings are satisfied as long as the yoke does not chafe their backs too much. And they only hope that they may have handsome children, who will attract the notice of the khan, and whom he will attach to his person. There is nothing better than to be the father of a pretty daughter, because she will be honoured with the favour of the master, and then married to one of his favourites, to the great advantage of all her family.

The young khans come to wish us good-bye, as they are returning to their house, together with their tutors and attendants. A man remains behind to show me the way, and I go down towards the river. Sunset is drawing near, and the croaking crows began to gather together, and the miasma of fever rises out of the rice fields. Not far from a brick kiln, with the shape of a paper bag, I remark a hovel which is inhabited, a thin column of smoke issuing from above. The walls are of crumbling mud, and over them is a roof made of branches of trees about seventeen feet high, with a few wooden tiles kept in their place by stones. Two openings have been made in the façade, which is about seventeen feet long, one for letting out the smoke, the other for the inhabitants; this second one facing south, from which direction very little rain ever comes. I stoop down and manage to enter the hut. The room is about ten feet by seven. A frayed piece of matting is laid over the earthen floor; but beyond a tray and an earthenware jar there is no furniture, not even a bed or a blanket. Close beside a fire made of straw and sticks, which fills the room with smoke, an object begins to move and then to cry. This turns out to be a little girl, five or six years old, half naked and very dirty. The mother comes in, all in rags, still young, with handsome black eyes, which are full of sadness. She carries on her back her youngest born, a girl two years of age, shaking all over with milk fever. She clings closely to her mother's neck, as

if to a forlorn hope. She lets her head droop on her mother's shoulder, and does not even open her eyes. She is as thin as a skeleton, with delicate features, and looks at death's door.

The mother says, "The child has been ill for three months, and we have given up all hope of curing her."

"Do you do anything for her?"

"When the sun is shining, I take her out to get her warm. Can you suggest a remedy?"



A SERF'S WIFE.

"She ought to be well clad. She has only a linen chemise on."

"I have nothing else to clothe her with. I fold her in my arms."

"What! have you not been able to obtain a bit of blanket for her?"

"We have no money. Who is going to give us anything? Fire is of no avail against the fever chill. Good gentleman, give us some remedy."

The husband comes back from the rice field, with his spade over his shoulder, his naked legs crusted with mud. He is tall, sunburnt, lean, and deeply pitted with the small-pox. He confirms what his wife has said; and she, too, has a good deal of fever about her, while he suffers from rheumatics. I make him a present, and tell him to come in the morning for some medicine. He thanks me with a low bow and enters into his den. The woman stands staring open-mouthed at us, looking the very picture of misery. The crows have ceased cawing, and night is falling fast.

Amman has got unused to all this misery since he has been in contact with the Russians. He confides his impressions to me, and, pointing to some cows, observes—

“They are better off than these people; they go and feed where they please. When grass fails in one place, they go to another. These people cannot. Truly, it is better to be stock than men in this country.”

He grumbles at the khan, but in Russian, of course. “In his country, no one dares to be rich. He lays hands upon everything. This is why he never lies down to rest in peace. He will have the same end as his father.”

It appears that in the family of the khan most of the members die a violent death; and he was near being murdered when a lad. Amman tells the story as follows:—

“His father was a very proud and ruthless man, hard to every one, with no regard for those about him, and sticking at nothing to gratify his whims. Upon the other side of the mountain, not far from Ardebil, live the Chaksevem Tartars. The khan of this tribe gave a grand festival on the circumcision of his eldest son, and invited his neighbour at Karganrud. The rejoicings lasted several days. The invited guest offended his host by his haughty demeanour. He maltreated his servants; and, when the worse for drink, made fun of one of his neighbours at table.

“He then started off without even condescending to address the customary expression of thanks to his host. While passing through the Chaksevem territory, he behaved as if he was in a conquered country. Those whom he had insulted are of Turkish race, very courageous, and ready to wipe out an offence in blood. Hospitality being the most sacred of all duties, they swallowed the insult and contained their anger as long as the khan's guest was on their soil. But they at once met and resolved to exact a terrible revenge for the uncalled-for insult. They kept their intention secret until the time came for ‘tasting blood.’ The opportunity soon came. For a whole night fifty men, mounted upon excellent horses, rode onward; and during the day they concealed themselves in a wood near Karganrud. At a time when men are usually in their first sleep, and least likely to awake, they surrounded the dwelling of the khan, slew his servitors, and, having surprised him in bed, hacked him to pieces. In their fury, they determined to annihilate his race; and they searched everywhere for his two sons, whom they failed to find, as well as his wife, who was away from home. A female servant had carried off the two boys under cover of the darkness, and had taken refuge in the house of a serf, hiding them in a large chest.

“The widow of the khan had her two children fetched, and went with them to Teheran, where they were brought up with other young nobles. Some time after, these young men entered into possession of their domain.

“The present khan, now that he is master, continues the traditions of his ancestors. He is despotic, proud, and vindictive; and he is full of suspicion, for he has never forgotten the murder of his father. He surrounds himself with ruffians of every nationality, whom he retains in his service; and he has thus a small force of determined men upon whom he can count for any enterprise, there being scarcely a crime which they have not committed.

“The shah insists upon being master in his kingdom, and he is resolved to crush the least symptoms of independence among the khans who inhabit distant provinces. So when he returned from his last journey to Europe, and was beset at Reshd by petitioners from the Talich, beseeching for justice, he was very incensed. His first impulse was to give orders to have the khan got rid of. But the latter is said to have gained the ear of the



THE KHAN AND HIS SUITE.

prime minister, by means of liberal presents, and the shah deferred his revenge.”

This was the story which, as Amman told us, was generally believed in the country ; and he added that he should not be sorry when we were out of it.

After hearing this story, we laid down to sleep in the beds which were similar to those which are to be found all through

Asia, simply because there are none more primitive. They do not differ in the slightest degree from the pallets of the Roman and of the Greek world. A rectangle upon four feet is consolidated by ropes, which form a net, and a by no means springy mattress, but one very much ventilated, upon which you spread your blankets. If my memory does not deceive me, Homer's heroes slept upon beds made out of the skins of oxen, which were not so hard to the back.

Upon our waking, we were told that the khan was going to pay us a visit. It had been arranged the day before that he should be photographed, as well as the castle he was building; and he arrived wearing the full uniform of an Austrian general, minus the epaulettes.

He had put on the kula, or Persian head-dress. He had a dark blue tunic, light blue trousers, a sword, and the so-called Neapolitan shoes, which, I believe, are made at Marseilles.

We follow the khan, who comes to a halt in front of his palace, where we photograph him in all his splendour. After that, we are shown over the building, which has nothing remarkable about it except its thick walls, numerous rooms, its baths, and an immense reception room, from which the Caspian may be seen across the shrubberies and rice fields. The khan seems to be particularly proud of a white stone encrusted in the bricks at the level of the first story, in the corner of the wall. He pointed it out to us, and was anxious to know whether it would come out in the photograph. When he answered in the affirmative, his face beamed with smiles; and we wondered whether he had had all these bricks put up so as to set this stone in them, as one orders a ring so as to set off a fine diamond.

Upon our return to breakfast, the khan begins to talk to us about music, and points to a man squatting near the door. Upon a sign, this man enters the room and kneels down by the fireplace

at the corner where the brush and the wood basket are kept in European houses. He is an artist of some mark, nevertheless ; and this way of receiving him shows that our host has not the same consideration for tenors which they enjoy in France and England.

A tray is cleared of its nuts and almonds, and is handed to the singer, who is very tall and thin, with a very modest demeanour.



THE KHAN'S MINSTREL.

This would surprise any one who had never been in the East, for, it may be asked, "what is the use of this tray?" As a matter of fact it is indispensable, for it will serve both as a piano and as a screen to conceal the contortions of his mouth, as well as a sort of speaking trumpet.

Thereupon, the singer begins to beat the tray with his fingers, keeping it poised upon the palm of his hand, resting it on the

thumb when he is using his fingers. He raises and lowers the tray, balances himself on his haunches, and finally pours from the throat formidable, piercing notes, which are quite dangerous for delicate ears. The khan asks us what we think of him, and we reply that he has a superb voice. He then asks us if it is the custom to sing very loud in France; and when we say "Yes," the khan urges the artist to raise his voice, which he does with a vengeance.

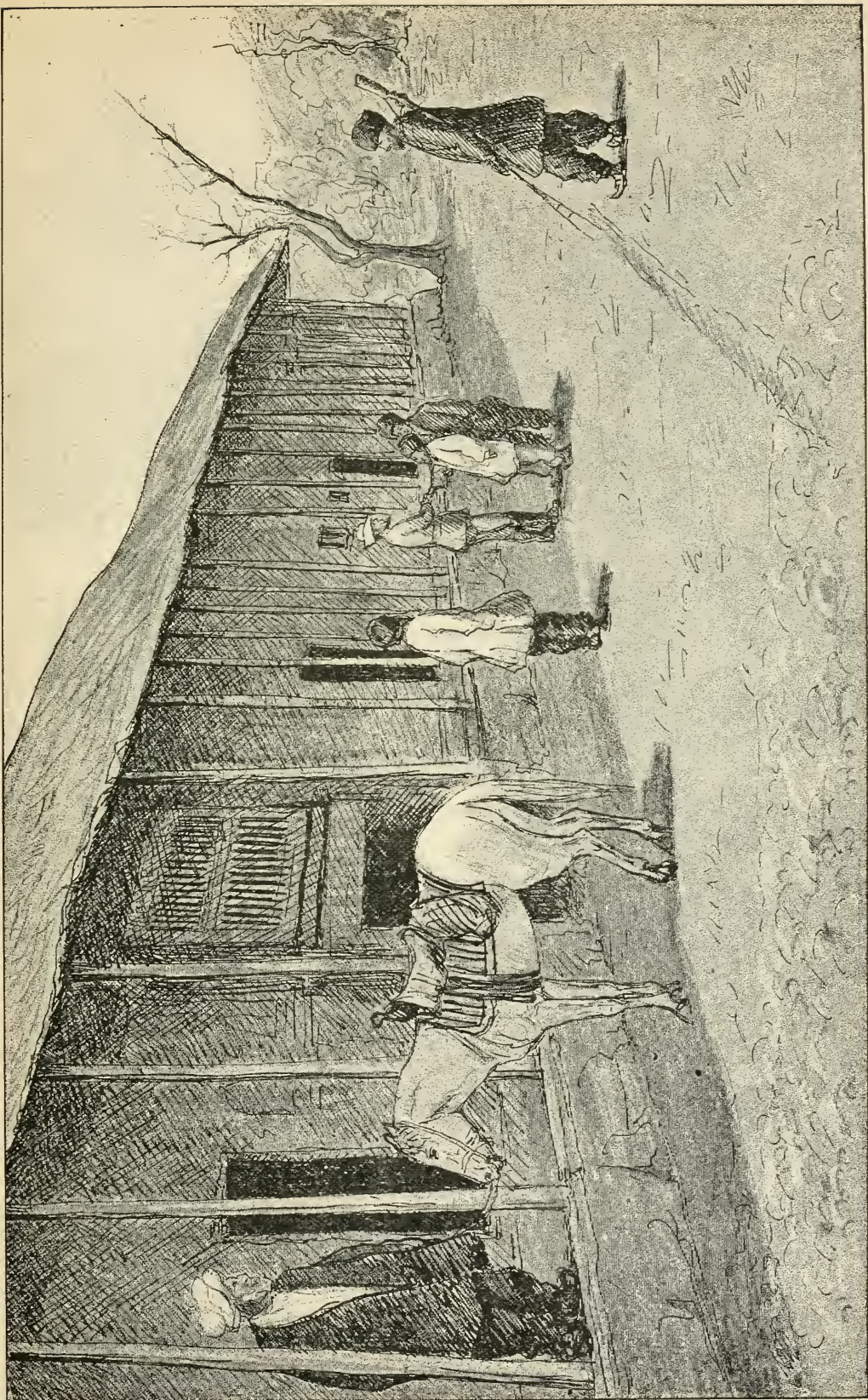
"Can they get as high as that in France?" the khan asks us.

We express our doubts, and our compliments produce the expected effect; for during the whole time of the meal the poor wretch wriggles about with his tray, and when he does not sing as his master likes, the latter speaks very sharply to him, and even calls him "dog," ordering him to change his tune and sing over and over again. He rolls them out as from a musical box. Then the khan forgets all about him, just as one might forget to stop an engine, and the singing goes on for two mortal hours. The tenor does not dare to stop, despite the sweat which is trickling down his forehead, despite the hoarseness of his voice, due to the complete drying up of the vocal cords. At last the khan makes a sign for the concert to cease, and the poor famished minstrel withdraws with many profound reverences.

I doubt whether any one of my friends has been "executed" as carefully, even by pianists.

One of us happens to take out a leather tobacco-pouch, made to imitate crocodile skin, and this leads to a scientific and naturalist discussion between the khan, his brother-in-law, and his first cousin, who is not yet thoroughly drunk.

One of them asserts that he has seen the animal in the sea, the other has seen him in a river. They enumerate the most peculiar animals they have seen or heard of, and come to the conclusion that it must be the hippopotamus or the seal.



A CONSULTATION.

Amman, who acts as interpreter, insinuates that this leather must belong to the same country as the khan's negro. The discussion having been closed, we rise from the table, and the khan settles into a seat in front of our lodging, and the scribes take their places on a carpet in front of him, while he transacts some current business.

Amman, who is anxious for information, returns to the charge ; and we draw for him the shape of a crocodile, which he defines as " a large lizard, with big teeth, living in rivers in the land of the negro."

We ask him what is the use of this negro, and he tells us that it is considered the right thing for a great man to have one to amuse him. He gets cuffed and kicked, and has to make grimaces which afford his master much amusement. But our host does not appreciate jokes, so the black man is of no importance in his eyes. He might have become a favourite, but as it is he only affords sport to the servants, who make a butt of him. His face does not denote much intelligence.

According to Amman, these black men are caught like birds in a snare. Once they are caught, they give up to despair, wish to die, and refuse food. As they are known to be gluttonous, they are offered jam as a temptation, and it is one which they can rarely resist. After this they are given the same food as their companions. Some of them fetch a very high price.

While the khan is signing papers, he is also listening to complaints, dealing out justice in the open air, like St. Louis under his oak. Several persons throw themselves at his feet to thank him, and kiss his knees. He does not like this exuberant politeness, and his guards seize hold of them and eject them brutally among the crowd of inquisitive spectators. But the business is soon transacted, the crowd disperses, and the khan returns home, preceded and followed by his men-at-arms.

It is our turn to be beset by such persons of every kind. The rumour has got abroad that one of us possesses the art of healing and of administering drugs; and this rumour refers to Capus, who has some notions of medicine. He has quite a crowd at his door. Cases of rickets are not rare; there are frequent traces of syphilis, while the number of victims to fever are innumerable, so that our medicine-chest would soon be exhausted. We only administer medicine, therefore, to those who are absolutely in want of it. We must confess that the success of the European doctor is not due to the high idea which the natives have of a wise man of the West. If he "took" so well from the first, it was because he



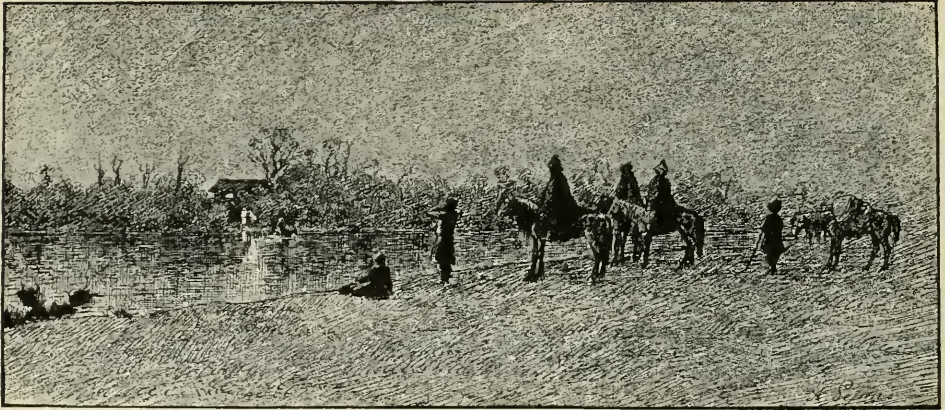
OUR ATTENDANT, AMMAN.

did not sell his remedies. Thus the regular doctor of the khan, who resides close to us, is, we are told, very vexed to find himself so neglected, and he has a smile of contempt for the credulous people who allow themselves to be imposed upon by charlatans who happen to be passing that way.

Capus would not be sorry to be rid of these very troublesome customers, and he advises them to consult his neighbour. But no one listens to his advice; and when we repeat it, one of them says—

“What is the use of our going to the khan’s doctor? We are poor, and he sells everything at an exorbitant price; his drugs rarely effect a cure. It is no use asking for his aid, if you do not bring the money with you; he will not even trouble himself to give you advice. He allows the poor to die off like flies; he is only a doctor for those who can pay.

The doctor might perhaps allege as an excuse that the gratitude which would be due to him, in default of a fee, is even a scarcer commodity at Karganrud than in Paris. A St. Vincent de Paul is an exception in all countries. We all like to be repaid for the trouble we take on behalf of others.



BY THE WATER'S EDGE AT NIGHT.

CHAPTER III.

FROM RESHD TO TEHERAN.

The wine—No bread—The reason why—Nearing the Guilek country—Reshd—A governor taking his departure—Prefectoral movement in Persia—The departure of the great lady—Refuge—Merovingian period—No more rain and no more forest—Central Asia begins—The plain of Iran.

April 21.

THE khan has procured us some saddle and pack horses to reach Enzeli; and he has kept us two days with him. We are not sorry to continue our journey; we have had enough of his excessive politeness, and it may be presumed that he is not sorry to see us start.

We are in his way, as our presence imposes a certain restraint upon him. In spite of the offer which he makes for us to prolong our visit, we say good-bye to the khan on the 1st of April, and start for Chifa-Rud.

The route is a pleasant one in the sunshine, following the course of the river as far as the Caspian, sometimes in the pebbly

bed of the stream and sometimes climbing up to the banks. Then we thread our way through woods, with the sun's rays filtering athwart the foliage and falling in a golden shower as through the stained glass of some cathedral window. We notice, as we ride along, some very fine bushes of box-wood.

At the village of Karganrud, we alter our course and bend southwards, towards Alalan, the mud and sand alternating. There is still a good deal of forest ; and at a long distance from any dwelling places, the gleditschias, bristling with prickles, are trimmed like the poplars on a French roadside. As they grow, the branches are cut off for firewood, and the trunks stand short and stunted, twisted by the high winds from the sea. We meet a Talichi carrying something under his arm like an umbrella, which proves to be merely a wooden ploughshare. Amid the prickly bushes we can see a number of reed huts, and they remind one of the villages of the African bushmen. These hovels are inhabited by woodmen employed in the forest, who manufacture charcoal and various wooden utensils. We catch a sight of some of them who have been attracted by the barking of their dogs. They are very dark-complexioned, and with their hatchets in their hands and their legs enveloped in animals' skins to protect them from the thorns, they look like savages.

Alalan is a village of very little importance, with a bazaar, where we make a vain effort to get some wine. No one will sell us any ; and though one of the khan's men tells us that they all drink it in secret, they declare that they have not got any.

“ Why,” we ask, “ do they deny having any ? ”

“ Because they are ashamed to let a stranger see that they are bad Mussulmans, and also because you are accompanied by the khan's men, being afraid that we should tell our master of it, and that he would force them to supply him when necessary.”

“ You mean that he would not pay for what he took ? ”

The horseman answered with a smile.

Upon leaving Alalan, after a brief halt on the sea-shore, the khan's men retrace their steps, only one remaining with us as a guide.

We are still in the forest at nightfall; and though it is pitch-dark, there is no rain, and the ride is a charming one.

When darkness sets in, the only sounds audible are the constant roar of the sea, the hoofs of the horses, the sound of the whip upon their quarters, and the cry of the men to attention. The path is narrow, and it is necessary to be very careful not to get the boughs of the trees flying back in one's face.

The leader gives a word of warning, and this is passed all along the line. It is the same when crossing a ferry; the words "right" and "left" being called out, as the occasion may require.

But the beasts of prey are not long in issuing from the retreats in which they have slept away the day, like the malefactors of a large city, and the forest soon becomes animated. They prowl about in quest of something to devour, and the jackals cry, inviting one another to a feast, while the birds of prey utter their lugubrious notes, some as if calling piteously for help, others as if issuing a sharp word of command.

There is a whole world of animated life, struggling, shrieking, and pinched by hunger—a true type of the beings that nature, who puts them upon the stage, has divided into strong and weak. And suddenly, like the Greek chorus of ancient tragedy, the toads and frogs in the marshes begin to croak, reminding one of the chatter of listless and indifferent crowds. One would almost fancy that there must be relays of these frogs to keep up the chatter.

For the last few minutes we have been wading in the mud, and can feel the damp and fever coming up. The horses begin

to slip about, and before us extends a vast sheet of dark water, with not a star reflected in it.

“Chifa-Rud,” observes the guide.

“Upon the other side?”

“Ha! ha!”

Thereupon he hails the people on the other side, as one of them is wanted to point out the ferry. The sky is clouded over, and the night inky black. After several calls, a voice answers, “Who goes there?”

“The guests of the khan.”

“Welcome to you.”

And we hear the sound of a body plunging into the water, then the peculiar chafing sound of a horsemen moving through the water, and finally one cannot make out the motion of the legs, so that the water is evidently deep. At last the ferryman arrives.

“Salamaleïkon!”

“Valeïkomassalam!”

And we follow the phantom who shows us the way without saying a word. He spoke just now, so he cannot be a shadow, and we are not crossing the Styx.

We make the other side without mishap, and then cross the fields, feeling our way as best we can, so as to avoid the prickly hedges. We hear the barking of dogs; a gate is opened, and some one comes towards us with an immense lantern, covered with squares of paper, and bids us get off our horses.

By the light of this gigantic lantern, which has very little candle inside, like the large bodies which contain very petty souls, we settle ourselves down for the night. The room offered us is not very large; a carpet from Meshed, or elsewhere, is spread upon the floor, the door closes fairly well, and there is no fear of catching cold. We get off our muddy boots, and drink some

excellent milk while listening to the first raindrops of the storm, with the satisfaction of people who are under cover.

We swallow a few bits of roast salmon and some cold rice, with a cup of excellent tea on the top of them. They are very comfortable, these primitive houses built of mud, covered with thatch, and having a wooden gallery running all round the inner courtyard. We have scarcely made these reflections, when Pepin jumps up and points with his finger to a black spot on the wall—two black spots—several black spots. He puts his finger close to one, and the spot moves. Why, it is an insect—a bug, hundreds of bugs, which are devouring us with their eyes from the wall and the ceiling, preparatory to devouring us in another way.

Pepin does not like the bugs; the bugs do not like Capus; and for my own part I am not very fond of them. Capus remains in the room, and the two others spread their blankets out on the balcony, covering themselves over with an oil-cloth, and lying down at a safe distance from the enemy. The upshot is that I sleep comfortably, despite the rain which is splashing at my feet; while Pepin, lying close beside me, is tormented the whole night by these wretched bugs, which have followed him, but leave me in peace. It is odd how, in this world, misfortune pursues certain people, while it spares others for no better reason than these bugs could have given.

Upon awaking we find that Chifa-Rud is upon the sea-shore, forming a very pretty landscape with the wooded mountains capped with snow. We take some photographs, to the great delight of the inhabitants, who are much amused at the box resting on three legs, and the artists hiding their heads under a piece of black cloth. They call for their neighbours to come and look, laughing and staring after the manner of people who don't understand what is going on.

At Chifa-Rud, the Talichi, which is a peculiar Turkish

dialect, is still spoken ; but Guilek is also spoken by some of the people. The population is a mixed one ; and side by side with the tall and elegant figure of the Talichi may be seen the heavier and bigger-boned type of the better-fed Guilek. The soil is fertile and well cultivated, and there are abundant rivers ; but the use of bread is unknown. When we ask for some to eat with the excellent salmon-peel, of which we never seem to get tired, they bring us a sort of rice-cake baked the day before.



STARTING FROM CHIFA-RUD.

“ Why do you not eat bread ? ”

“ We prefer rice.”

“ Why ? ”

“ Because we should want four times as much bread as rice to ‘ fill our stomachs ; ’ because we have good land for growing rice, plenty of water and inundations, which are not favourable for wheat. Moreover, the streams and the sea supply us with an abundance of fish, and we can insure a good supply of food with very little trouble.”

“ Don’t you enjoy eating bread occasionally ? ”

“No, we don't care for it. Another reason why we prefer rice is that it takes such a time to make bread. First of all the land must be sown, then there is the harvest, the threshing of the wheat, the kneading of the flour, and the baking; whereas rice, once it has been gathered, has only to be decorticated, and cooked in the pan, with water or fat, with or without saffron. It is eaten hot, and the rest is allowed to cool and is eaten hard the next day. If it is grilled before the fire in lumps, it forms a nice golden crust. You see that it is better to eat rice.”

“Yes, indeed.”

It would, I think, be difficult to make these people see that they are mistaken in doing without bread.

Passing through clumps of wild pomegranate trees and rice fields, we arrive at Tcharpatchal, a large village in the midst of marshes, not far from the *murdab* (stagnant water).

It might be taken for an African village, with its dazzling sunshine, its huts and summer-houses built on pillars, its threshing-floors and barns, to which access is gained by trunks of trees with steps hewn in them. There is an exuberance of life and light about the place.

We make a brief halt here, and it is the last place where Talichi is spoken. Henceforth, we hear only Guilek, though many of the people understand Persian.

From Tcharpatchal we proceed to Enzeli, a town of little interest, and with a port of no importance, situated upon the road to Reshd and Kazvin.

The influence of the Russian agent appeared to be very great; and he was at once obeyed by the servitors of the governor, who was absent. Yet this agent was a Persian, though, as he kept repeating at every opportunity, “a Russian subject, monsieur.” This is a title much sought after here, just as that of ally was in the days when Rome was constantly pushing further back the

limits of her frontier, extending her protection to the peoples, and making their kings obey her.

The next day (April 4th), in pouring rain, a covered bark conveyed us in a very short time to Peri-Bazar. From there to Reshd the road is, it appears, a very good one in fair weather; but when we travelled over it, our horses were up to their chests in water and could hardly extricate their feet from the mud.

We pay a visit to the governor, who is busy signing a quantity



FROM PERI-BAZAR TO RESHD BY A FLOODED ROAD.

of papers. He is very affable, and offers us a lodging in his house, in some buildings at the further end of his residence. He is just about to leave, for he tells us that he is at variance with the court, and prefers abandoning his post to submitting to the exactions of the minister of finance. He was very kind to us.

His palace, forming one side of a square, is a pile of buildings with galleries running round several rectangular courtyards. Standing a little way off the façade, the tumbledown condition of the buildings is very apparent. We are shown to a room looking

on to a garden planted with willows, with a fountain of dirty water, from which the host of servants came to fetch water for the kitchen, and perform their ablutions, much to the disgust of our body-servant, who calls them ——

The rooms next to ours have floors upon which one dare not venture unless one is good acrobat. The beams in many places have no boards over them, and one can see the heads of the people on the floor below. There is no end to the number of holes, and they serve for very various purposes.

A venerable Persian, with a beard as black as jet—thanks to the liberal use of dye—is told off to look after us, and we confide to him our astonishment at seeing the house in such a deplorable state.

He tells us that the shah allows a certain sum each year for keeping the palace of the governor in repair; but governors are constantly changing. They look upon the palace as an hotel in which they will spend a short time, and do not care to see after its being repaired. The credit is spent in other ways.

This worthy old gentleman, who carefully conceals his age, drinks, in the space of about two hours, twenty glasses of native brandy, and smokes about thirty cigarettes. He is accompanied by a young officer, and by two boys of from twelve to thirteen, who imitate him to the best of their ability, and are soon quite tipsy. There can be no doubt about it, drunkenness is one of the curses of the country.

The young officer tells us that he has studied, and the way in which he handles one of our maps, representing the west coast of the Caspian Sea, shows that this is the case. He takes his bearings carefully, and explains to the old man, who listens to him while smoking placidly, where Khorassan, Bagdad, India, Teheran, France, and Constantinople are. He thought that he had got hold of a map of the world, which he rearranged in the coolest

fashion. Constantinople was on the top of a mountain, Teheran became a seaport, and the Khorassan took the place of Batum. The young officer was a major, and his listener was, or had been, a general.

The major had studied our language, and could speak it a



A PERSIAN GENERAL.

little. Perhaps the four melancholy lines which follow, and which I read on the wall of the room, were his—

“Moi, puvre Abdullah kan que je suis,
Tombé ici malourément,
Suis élève du gouvernement.
Sortons de cette pays.”

At Reshd, we had to hire horses to pursue our journey; for the post had run short of them, and we had baggage which could only be carried slowly. By the intermediary of the Russian agent, the consul being absent with all his family, we got into negotia-

tions with a muleteer. Bargains are not concluded rapidly in this country, and the vali had started before we were ready. It was advisable to let him get on some way in advance, for he had such a numerous suite that the road was very crowded, and we should have had much difficulty in finding room at the posting-stations, or getting a horse in case of accident.

This delay gave us the opportunity of witnessing some curious scenes very typical of the country.

The vali started on the 5th of April. He had been very popular in the country, and there was an immense crowd in front of the palace, thousands of horsemen having assembled to escort him. The piteous wails of the common people were to be heard in all directions, for the vali had never refused alms to a poor man. The lamentations were general.

The master having departed, the scene suddenly changed. The women who had remained behind, and were only to start on the following day, could scarcely get served. All was disorder in the palace, for the attendants, who do not follow the fortunes of the vali, are quite indifferent as to what happens, and the confusion is indescribable.

The following morning, the outside of the palace resounds with cries of a different kind from those of the previous day. There are no longer any sentinels, or men armed with long staves, who keep any one from coming near. The tradesmen have all flocked into the square, and are confiding their troubles to one another. "That so and so owed him so much." "So he does me." "Do you think he'll pay?" "I am afraid that we shan't get a sixpence." "I intend to go and ask for what he owes me." And so, mustering courage, they make their way into the first courtyard, where the discussion begins again, and we can hear shouting and strong language. But, to judge by what we can see for ourselves, no one can be got to pay anything.

The garden upon which our room overlooks is invaded by a crowd of people in a great state of mind. Groups are formed, and we can see people whispering to one another very mysteriously, while others are gesticulating. Some of the invaders are left by themselves and keep apart, while others, who are known to be influential, and to have friends at court, have quite a crowd around them.

Two or three more particularly, who have just arrived from Teheran, and who are easy of recognition, with their frock coats of a European cut and their patent leather shoes, are greeted very respectfully. They look very dignified and consequential. Every one is anxious to have the honour of offering them a cigarette and a glass of tea. A few merchants have elbowed their way so far, the commoner people remaining outside. They are treated with much consideration, and they carry a writing-book at their belt, from which they take out small bits of paper, which they present more or less respectfully, according to the opinion which they have of their debtor. One of these merchants accosts an important personage, and humbly presents him with the bill which he has been hiding in his sleeve. The latter does not discuss the details of the bill, but makes all sorts of promises to his creditor, who crosses his hands over his stomach with a profound obeisance and lowers his head in confusion, when the important official lays his hand in a friendly fashion upon his shoulder, before dismissing him. Mollahs, in white turbans, are sitting down, listlessly regarding all these petty discussions. They do not miss a single glass of tea or cigarette, which are handed round, not by a handsome boy, but by some dirty youth, with one foot bare and the other thrust into a worn-out shoe, which lets in the daylight at several places.

A great quantity of tea is consumed, and cigarettes are smoked by the hundred, while men are coming to the fountain to fetch

water for their coffee-pots, or to clean the mouthpieces of their pipes. Others come to wash their hands or their feet, and Amman may well be furious and compare them to the most unclean of animals.

All of a sudden, the crowd clears out of the garden and makes for a square adjoining the harem. There is a chorus of cries and groans, and we imagine that some great public misfortune must have occurred. We ask what it is, and are told that it is the vali's wife, who is leaving and saying good-bye to the population. Upon the square there is a crowd of poor people in rags, women and children predominating, who stoop down, pick themselves up again, and rush towards a travelling chaise drawn by two splendid horses, which men with long staves have great difficulty in protecting from the wave of the populace. Armed horsemen endeavour to make some impression upon the mass, and to clear the way for the palanquins placed upon the backs of gigantic mules. These palanquins are filled with the female followers of the great lady, who thrusts her hands through the curtains of the carriage to distribute small coin to the people.

This furnishes us with the explanation of the din, which dies away for a moment, only to break out again with renewed force when a fresh shower of coins comes from the carriage. There is a desperate struggle for the money, and all decorum is forgotten. The women unveil and tear each other's clothes; grown-up men struggle with mere children, and even the greybeards join in the fray. A thousand throats give hoarse utterance to their gratitude.

But as there is a limit to the greatest generosity, and as the rain begins to fall, the convoy moves on and threads its way through the tortuous streets. The palanquins swing to and fro, and have great difficulty in forcing their way through the crowd, as the noble lady starts on her journey, with her armed escort. The din and the cries of discontent begin again, the common

people soon forgetting her largesses. The touching wails of those who wished her good-bye are succeeded by the shrieks and disputes of those who are struggling for the coins which have not been picked up, reminding one of how gulls fight for the morsels of food thrown out in the track of a vessel.

Although we are in a great hurry to reach Teheran, I cannot leave Reshd without saying a word about its "best," which is close beside the vali's palace, like a remedy close beside a disease.



DEPARTURE OF THE VALI'S WIFE.

The name of "best" is given to a place of refuge where a man is sacred from the pursuit of a powerful enemy, just as many places in Western Europe were during the Middle Ages. The "best" at Reshd is a mosque of very little outward show, with a balcony overlooking a terrace. No one has the right to drag from it any man who has taken refuge there, and this custom, which we regard as outlandish, now that we have just laws, is of great benefit in a country where justice is very loosely administered, and where punishments are often very unfairly inflicted.

We then start for Kudum, the next station, in the driving rain and mud. But for the ruts, we should never get there, the mud in them being liquid, and so enabling our horses to lift their feet out of it. All the way we see rice fields, poplar-trees, with, here and there, an elm-tree, the branches of which are very few, as they are lopped every year. The tops of these trees are very disorderly, but they are like the heads of those who do not like to appear bald and conceal their denuded pates by a careful arrangement of their few remaining locks. Then we get into the wood, and it is night-time when we reach the station, which is a miserable place, and overrun by a host of travellers of every description. With scarcely enough fire to dry our clothes, a concert of frogs to send us to sleep, and with the wind howling through the ill-closed doors and windows, and whistling round our heads, we are not likely to forget Kudum.

Upon the 7th of April we start, with the sun shining, for Rustemabad, slowly climbing through the forest of beeches, willows, box-trees, and maples, till we see the Kizil-Uzen, very broad and swift, flowing below. We are unmistakably on the mountain, for the road comes to an end, and there is nothing but a steep, stony path, along which our sorry steeds trace their steps with wonderful care. My horse, however, indulges in a fall upon the edge of the river, which is flowing three hundred feet beneath. He falls upon me, but, as he has a horror of the void and is careful not to budge, we escape without any accident. The path winds, following the course of the river; but, to my great surprise, I come upon a squad of fifty workmen making a road. There are about sixty yards done, and, to judge by the rate at which they are progressing, it will take several centuries to complete it as far as Reshd.

Rustemabad is a picturesque station, with the forest in the distance, the country well cultivated, and plenty of rice-fields,

while to the south begins the land of desolation. Here the Caucasus forests end, and at the same time we get quit of the rain. We leave our muleteer's horses, which are pretty well done up, and we engage others at the posting-house.

In the morning of the 8th of April we reach Rudbar, in the centre of an olive grove; the mountains are very bare and remind



A FALL UPON THE EDGE OF KIZIL-UZEN.

me of Andalusia. We still follow the course of the Kizil-Uzen, which takes the Persian name of Safid-Rud at Rustemabad, where the Turkish domain ends. We cross the picturesque bridge of Mendjil, where we see a goatherd driving his goats across large fragments of rock, and we feel with a vengeance the well-known Mendjil wind, which twists about the few trees in this region, which has all the appearance of Central Asia. We are

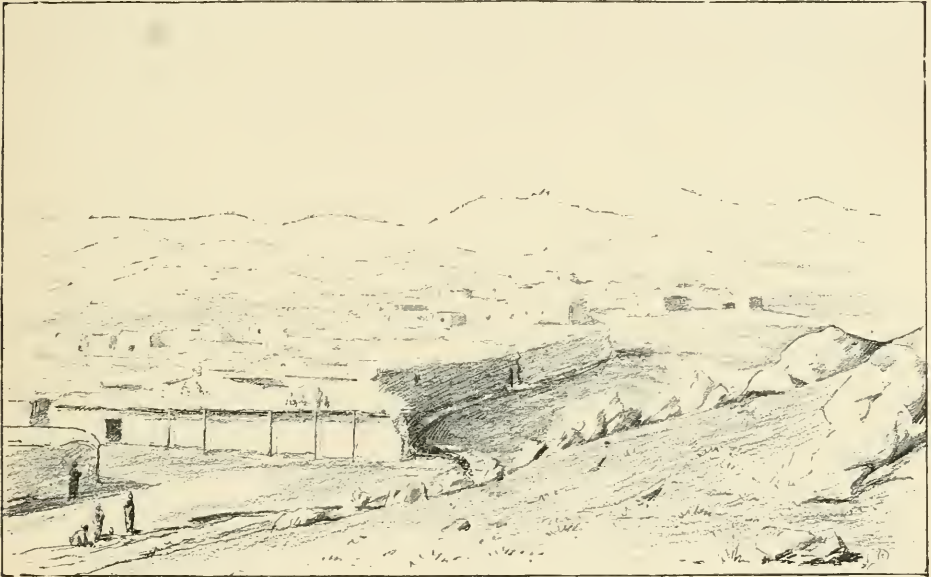
not surprised, therefore, to see near Mendjil a winter encampment of men of Turkish race—the Kurds—who have erected some reed huts in the midst of a plain, where their half-starved flocks find but a meagre pittance. The scenery is wild and grand, the setting sun lights up the clouds, and the barren slopes assume the brightest of tints. In the midst of the darkness we cross the bridge over the Safid-Rud, and we pass the night in the miserable hovel which does duty for a station. It is far from clean, and is kept by two Kurds who are brothers.

Upon the 9th of April we start, with the sun shining brightly. The Safid-Rud has to be waded across, and the river is broad, with a very strong current. A horde of half-starved wretches rush to our horses' heads, under the pretence of lending us their aid. We do not in the least want them, but this gives them the opportunity of asking us for alms with the pertinacity of crows or jackdaws. Begging is a national concern. We then begin to climb the mountain again, and the ascent is easy and the scenery charming. From the summit of the pass of Karzan the view is superb, in the distance being seen the snowy peaks, the bare mountains with their variety of tints, and the sea with its white-crested breakers.

We descend towards Mazraa, and as the deep snow is melting our progress is much impeded. The mountains from which we are emerging have all the geological aspect of the chains of Central Asia, and they precede the steppe and the plain which extends as far as Kamtchatka.

If you happen to visit Mazraa, where Persian is spoken, ascend the hill at the foot of which the road passes, climb as high as you can get, and cast a farewell look northward to the white mountains where you have passed so many toilsome hours, supposing that you have come through them, as we did, in the midst of a thaw, and then turning your back upon them contemptuously, as upon

the past, wrap yourself in contemplation and look to the future. It will be the hour when the sun is setting, and if you have taken the precaution of bringing a cloak to wrap round you, you need be in no hurry to come down. You will have a grand piece of scenery before you. At your feet the plain is enclosed between two moles, as if it were the sea, receding towards the east, where it forms the sky-line. To your left there is a lofty chain of mountains covered with snow, with summits which stand out like



MAZRAA.

watchmen over the gates of a universe. One of them is visible and seems very lofty, despite the perspective, being not impossibly the Demawend. To the right, the chain is lower and seems to get smaller in the distance, gradually diminishing in hills which allow of a road running through them towards the desert of Iran. These two chains form part of the Karzan mountains, like two wings of an army following in their rear.

You see no trees anywhere. In the steppe there is nothing but occasional columns of smoke to indicate the abode of man, or

of villages huddled together in the valleys, like specks of grey upon a greenish ground. But the distant tents are of every variety of hue, so much so that you cannot take your eyes off them, and everything which you cannot make out distinctly is charming, and has all the attraction of the unknown, tempting the traveller on and on.

When daylight fades, the distance is enveloped in mist, fades away, and you alight from your horse. You then remark that there is a stir of men in the square-built village, constructed in imitation of a fortress. You hear the cries of children, the chatter of women with pitchers on their heads, going to or coming from the brink of some limpid stream, in the bed of which carrion maybe is rotting, and you hear the bells of the caravan tinkling merrily as it comes in. You see some beautiful flowers growing out of perhaps a bit of horse dung, which has dropped on the road and has had some water fall upon it; while the lark sings blithely, as light-hearted Frenchmen will do amid all their trouble and distress. And you lie down to rest, resolved to get up early, mount your horse, and see for yourself what are these specks dotted over the steppe; the molehills of men, towns no doubt.



PERSIAN WOMAN.



THE ROYAL HIGHWAY FROM KAZVIN TO TEHERAN.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM TEHERAN TO BOSTAN.

The start from Teheran—The great historical road—In the company of pilgrims—Desolation of the salt desert—The Caspian Pylæ—Our chance companions: Hadji Baba the philosopher—A village in a small oasis: the sort of life led there—Manufactory of saltpetre at Aouvan—Piety of Sadik the van-driver—Peace and ventilation—Life underground—The karys—The Turkomans close at hand—A night in a caravansary.

FROM Kazvin there is a post road to Teheran, the journey being performed in carriages of Russian build, with the douga, and drawn by three horses. By feeding the driver well, one can get along at a good pace, the road running straight across the steppe. We remained only long enough at Teheran to make our preparations, but we paid a visit to Rages and Veramine, about the interesting ruins of which I shall have something to say later on.

In the meanwhile I must not forget to mention one marvellous sight at Veramine, and that is the Djuma Mosque, built by Abu-

Said Khan, in the year 722 of the Hegira. It was, of course, during the reign of a Mogul that this great work was carried out, the Moguls and their descendants having covered Asia and India with marvels of architecture. This mosque is a beautiful one, but it will soon have disappeared. There still remain many stuccos of the most elaborate richness of decoration, while the delicately carved door-posts and the exquisitely wrought doors are remarkable for their great wealth of ornament without being overloaded. The cupola soars lightly and yet boldly above the building, which is a masterpiece of elegance and grace. Yet it is being taken to pieces and demolished bit by bit by a lot of savages, who are inundating it in order to shake its foundations and bring it to the ground. And all this to get its bricks for building a wall for some garden or stable.

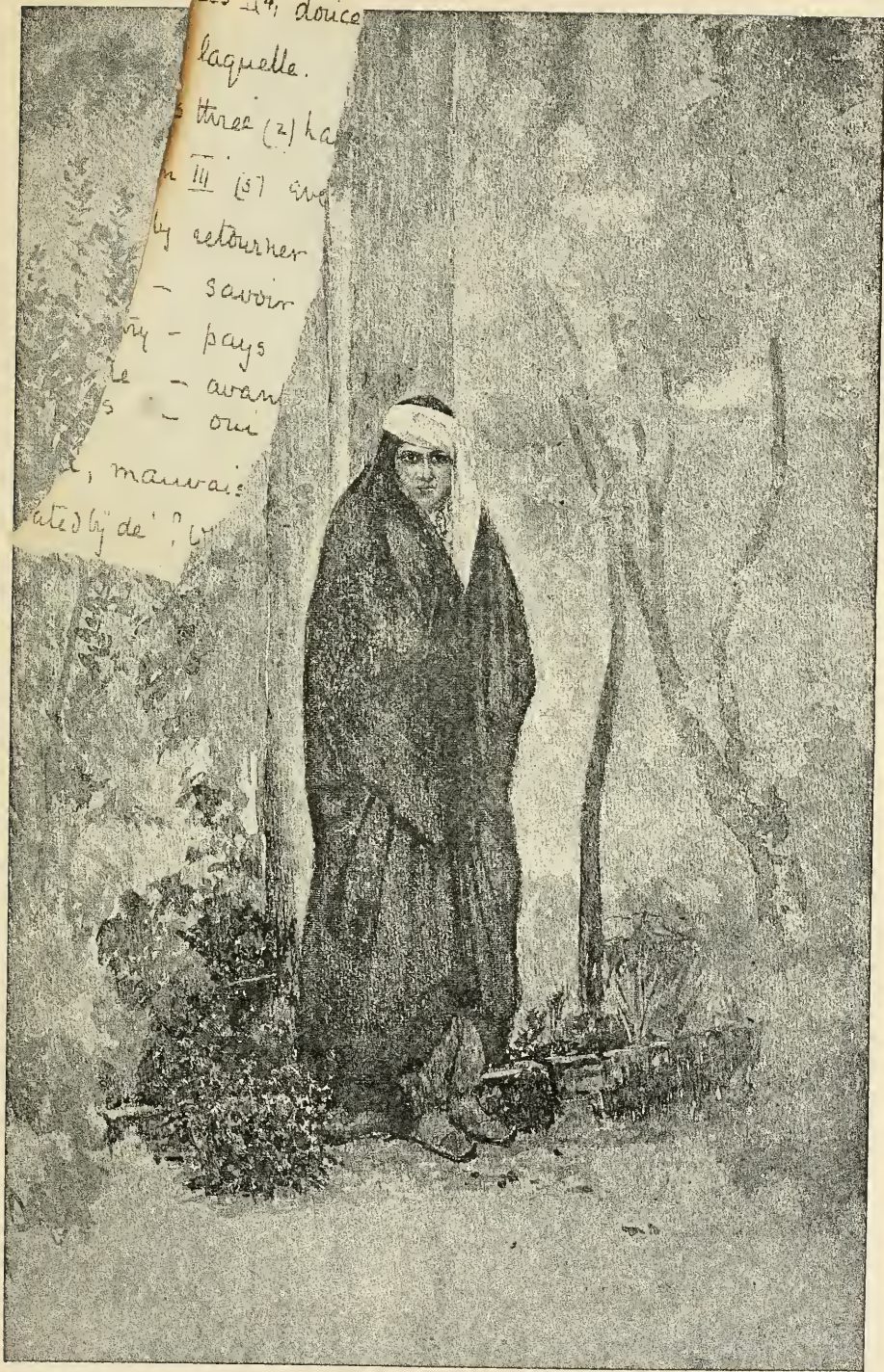
At Teheran, we are the guests of our minister, M. de Balloy, and his charming wife, whose kindness and hospitality we shall never forget. We start for Meshed in a van with our luggage, taking with us letters of recommendation for the English and the Russian agents. We have resolved to try and make our way into Afghanistan.

The van has been hired from two Tartar Russians, who undertake to convey us in twenty-eight days to the holy city of the Shiites, of which the tomb of the Imam Riza is the principal attraction.

We are to meet them beyond the station of Kabut-Gumbaz, where we are to go with our post-horses, while they go by way of the shrine of Shah-Abdul-Azim, which we have already visited, and from which they are to start with a second van loaded with merchandise and pilgrims.

The road which we are about to follow is the great highway of armies and conquerors. Alexander went this road in the past—how many have trodden his footsteps—and it was at Rages

swante ⁽²⁾
 es (4) douce
 laquelle.
 three (2) ha
 n ii (5) and
 y retourner
 - savoir
 ny - pays
 le - avant
 s - ou
 t, mauvais
 ated by de' ?



A JEWESS OF TEHERAN.

that he halted, when, having resolved to strike a final blow at Darius, who was flying before him, he made his preparations to attack him. At each step, we encounter cities which are mentioned in history and aggrandized by the perspective of centuries. The opinion which one has formed of them undergoes a great change when once they are seen, despite the ruins which encumber the soil, and which, we are told, are the dry bones of vanished cities. And these are traces of civilizations which have not disappeared but have shifted from one place to another. In a land where the buildings are of earth, man migrates and abandons his abode more readily than elsewhere. Close beside the ruins, there are life and animation to be seen ; Teheran, near Rages ; Meshed, near Tous ; and Shahroud, near Bostan.

But this is not the place to discuss such questions, and I should have said that we started from Teheran for Meshed on the 27th of April, in a whirlwind of dust. We leave to our right the ancient Reï with its battered walls, the white tower of the cemetery of the Guebres (fire-worshippers), who are in the habit of exposing their dead to the open air. We cross the low chain of mountains at the foot of which Reï is built, and from the summit of the pass, we cast a farewell glance at Teheran, spread out upon the plain, the white walls of the shah's residences being visible on the spurs of the mountains. Thence we descend to Meshed, the "pearl of Islam," as the Shiites call it. We pass a dome, glittering like that of the Invalides, and it is that of the large mosque of Shah-Abdul-Azid, beyond Reï. Though it is dark, we gallop across the steppe, and Capus is thrown from his horse, which stumbles in the obscurity, and strains his arms very badly. Fortunately, we are to join the van to-morrow.

To-day (April 28) no sign of any van, though we should be glad to continue our route, having got tired of contemplating Demawend, who has sported his turban. The chief of the station

is a very amiable Kurd, and he tells us that his family has been at the station ever since the days of Nadir-Shah, and has always had the posting-house. He advises us to keep our patience, telling us that the road is in a bad condition, and that the vans must have been delayed.

Soon after, a foot-messenger comes in with a message from our attendant, asking us to follow the former. We cross, not without difficulty, the Kabut-Gumbaz river, which is much swollen, and has a very rapid current, and near the bank we see our clothes which have all been put out to dry, a horse badly hurt, and the van which has just been pulled out of the river, where it had upset. No great damage had been done, and we go by way of the steppe to Sherifabad. In the second van, which follows, perched upon the luggage, are three young mollahs, who come from the same country as the drivers. They have just completed their studies in the Medressés of Teheran, and they are about to set the seal upon them by a pilgrimage to the holy places—thereby earning from their co-religionists a higher opinion than young men as a rule can command.

April 29th.

We start for Eivani-Keif, which is a continuation of the bare and monotonous steppe, following the chain of the Elburz, and distinguishing to the left its last spurs, which look like sand furrowed by streams of water. The sun is already very scorching, as we follow a valley which narrows near Eivani-Keif, with a torrential river running through it. We do not lodge in the caravansary attributed to Shah-Abbas, but in a caravansary of the town, where we meet a young dancing man, who goes through a performance by comparison with which the dances of central Asia are chaste. We are agreed that we have never met so obscene a people as the Persians; this spectacle quite scandalizes the young mollahs, who at sunset had said long prayers, with

their foreheads resting upon a box which contained holy earth from Kerbela. It was there that Ali suffered martyrdom. The van-driver of these young mollahs, endeavours to ingratiate himself with them by his reverential attitudes, and when he has done his work, he tells his beads with a very devout air, but he is rather absent-minded, for every now and then he rubs the inside of his ear with them.

April 30th.

We go on, with the intention of encamping at Kishlak, about twenty-five miles away. For about a third of the distance we go through the Khevir steppe, which is covered with salt, while to our right the hills seem like heaps of sand that have preserved the impress of the waves of the sea which have evaporated and left them with a layer of salt. The heat is very great as we approach the mountains which bar the way before us, and which seem spangled with silver, while patches of gypsum reflect the rays of the sun.

We find ourselves in a regular defile, undulating like a gigantic reptile along the bare mountains, which are streaked and hollowed out at their base by the rapid and muddy waters of the river, which are full of the crumbling earth. Our progress is delayed by the deep channels which the heavy rains have made, and it is as much as the eight horses can do, with all of us putting our shoulders to the wheel, to get the van across. The road is a very bad one, and the heat most trying; there is no vegetation, nothing but stones and salt. There is not a bit of shade save that of the telegraph poles, which strike you as an anachronism amid this savage and primitive nature. The river Tchai threads its way along the valley, or defile, which is scarcely fifty feet broad, and the van, which has no other road to travel, jolts over the stones. Fortunately, this wooden vehicle gives, and it keeps its equilibrium where any other would upset.

In this region everything is motionless and dead except the water, which hurries off in haste from such a scene of desolation. But do not drink of it, for it is very salt. Such are the Caspian Pylæ, according to certain historians, though I myself believe that they are to be looked for elsewhere.

Upon emerging from this gorge we go down towards Kishlak, the wheels of our van breaking through the Khevir salt crust. To our left are still visible a chain of bare mountains, looking quite grey under the deep blue sky, while in the south, far away to the right, beyond the brilliant glitter of the plain, other undulating mountains are seen as in a mirage. Straight in front of us, before reaching the village, are a few square yards of cultivated ground and five or ~~six~~^{six} black tents belonging to nomads. Upon the ridge of the hills and along the canals for irrigating the land are to be seen some women in white veils working in the fields of green barley, and then we find our way into streets with garden walls on each side, above them being visible the top of a glacis and the battlements of a fortress.

It was time we did arrive, for the storm comes rushing down from the mountain, raising a cloud of dust which hides both sky and earth, and we had hardly got under the caravansary when the thunder began to roll and the tongues of flame to light up the sky. The women come down so quickly from the roofs that they seem to fall into the houses, and the young men hurry homewards with their flocks. The clouds are very high, and the wind drives them before it, so there is scarcely any rain and much ado about nothing. The northerly wind lasts, and it howls the whole night.

Our numbers increase every day, for the solitary travellers whom we meet join our caravan. They accompany the vans and do small jobs in return—lending a shoulder to the wheel, cleaning the plates and dishes, fetching water, etc., in return for which they are allowed to climb up behind and rest themselves when



*Kurdish Postilion
at Kavout, Goumruz*

A KURDISH POSTILION.

they are tired. Two of them afford us a good deal of amusement, one of them a Turk from Trebizond, a handsome young man of five and twenty, very brawny, jovial, and unconcerned, always ready to lend a hand, with a constant smile on his face, and calling to the horses when they are inclined to jib in such a loud tone that we cannot help laughing. He is styled "Hadji" because he has been to Mecca. He has travelled a good deal, but he rarely pronounces properly the names of towns, though he can write them correctly. He does not want to burden his head with useless knowledge.

"What is the good of it?" he says. "You read the books; you travel to look about you. I travel to find bread. When I have found it, I eat it, and when my work is done, I go to bed and sleep, because I am tired. I care little about anything else."

"Are you going to pray at the tomb of the Imam Riza at Meshed?"

Hadji smacks his tongue and shakes his head, saying—

"I have not even the time to pray; and, besides, I rarely think of doing so."

"Where are you going?"

"To Askhabad, to fetch ten tomans which are owing to me. I know there is a good deal of building going on there, and I am certain to find work."

"Is the old man you call the Baba also on the look-out for employment?"

"No fear of him! He is a Persian, whom I met before getting to Teheran, on his way from Kerbela to Meshed, where he is going to pray. This is how he spends his time. But when he is on the road, never a prayer does he say."

The Baba is a man of middle height, thin, with legs which do not know the meaning of fatigue, for he never gets up to ride a little way. At times he is pensive and gloomy; at others an

intolerable chatterer to himself. He eats opium and has a very sallow complexion and wild look. For all that, he is an excellent



BABA.

cook, and likes being over the saucepan, though he eats very little. He gets into a terrible passion when the fire does not burn properly, and when the fat does not melt quick enough; and if he is told that the rice is not properly cooked, he apostrophizes the rice and the saucepan in the funniest manner imaginable. He always visits his displeasure upon inanimate things.

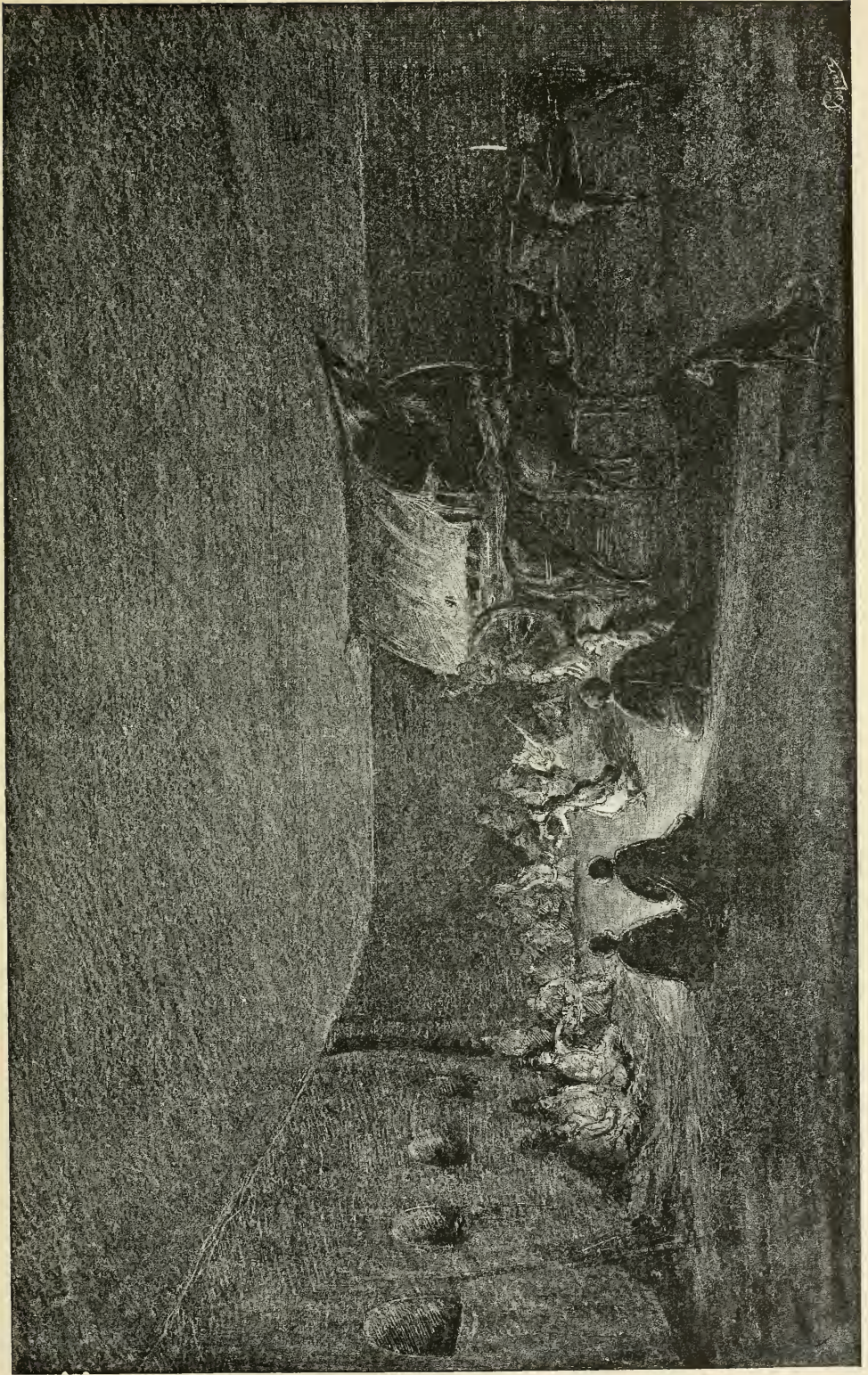
We have surnamed him "the philosopher," perhaps because he carries all his worldly goods in a bag; and his

figure is one which really ought to be carved out in boxwood when he puts on his visor and twists it round his head in the direction of the sun.

May 1st.

From Kishlak to Dehinemek (village of salt) the landscape remains unchanged, for the steppe still stretches in front of us, with the mountains to the left and the white strips of salt to the right. Upon nearing Ardaban, a village with a picturesque fortress, we begin to flounder among the irrigating canals.

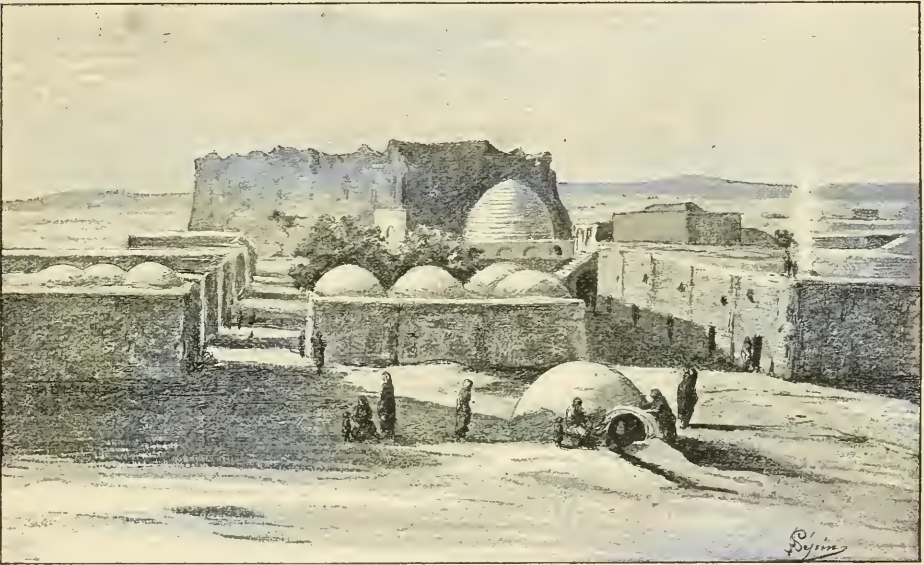
As on the previous days, it is necessary to use the spade and fill up the ruts, for nothing has ever been done to keep these roads in order save by the sun and the wind. At the caravansary of Ardaban, Amman, our attendant, encounters one of his uncles, who is returning to Ardebil. He has come from Askhabad, where he has been employed upon the railway works, upon a capital little Kirghiz horse. It is his intention to stop at Teheran a little, and then return home by the mountain. He complains very much



EIVANI-KEIF—A BATCHA DANCE.

of the Persians, who sell him everything very dear, and never give him any change out of a piece of silver when he is alone.

After a pleasant halt under three mulberry-trees, we make a fresh start. We are brought to a stop upon leaving the village by a very deep watercourse, and it is found necessary to turn the water off and fill up the breach, so as to render the passage possible. We call in the aid of the inhabitants of a neighbouring village, and after two hours' hard work we get over. The villagers



DEHINEMEK.

only work under threat of punishment, and then very slowly—a promise of money not having had the slightest effect upon them. They seemed very much surprised when we did pay them at the end of it. We then found ourselves upon a stony plain, and before sunset we arrived at the “village of salt” on foot, leaving our vehicles behind us, to come on as best they could.

Dehinemek consists of fifteen or sixteen houses; and, as in all the villages we pass through on this dreary road, the inhabitants cultivate just enough land to feed their families, and sell flour,

barley, and forage to the passing pilgrims and travellers. They make very handsome profits in this way, and some of them are very well off. The whole of this region is one great bed of salt, which is visible everywhere—on the banks of the rivers, along the walls of the houses, and upon the very walls and bricks, while the water one drinks is made sickly by it. We pass along by the most fertile portion of the Khevir, the soil of the plain being covered with a crust which rises like dough as it dries.

The village presents a rather animated scene in the morning, with the sound of the blacksmiths' forges, the shouts of the ploughmen urging on their oxen, cocks crowing, children crying, frogs croaking, and fowls cackling as they peck about for food. Women are spreading out their linen on the flat roofs, or going off, with their shoes down at heel, to the wheel, dressed in short blue petticoats, loose red jackets, with a many-coloured veil dropping over their shoulders. They are to be seen in the streets and roadway, dressing their children, some of whom are quite naked. I noticed one who was sitting upon his mother's knee while she picked the insects out of his hair and scratched his back, much to his manifest satisfaction, a mangy dog and a still more mangy donkey being mute spectators of the scene. A good many dogs are asleep on the roofs, the swallows just skimming over them, while the sparrows fly off to the green spots in the wheat-fields. Close to the caravansary, with its high brick walls, there is an ice-house and an abandoned fort, the latter recalling the days when there was constant danger of attack, and the former being a proof of how hot the climate is and that the garrison enjoyed cool drinks. The village is surrounded by solitudes like those we have previously traversed, and the mountains are still bare and arid, while the Khevir salt glistens in the distance.

This will never be more than a land of passage. The requirements of trade and the accidents of history have caused it to be

traversed by a road along which halting-places have of necessity been established, but nothing less than the imperious will of a king of kings could people the neighbourhood of the caravansaries, unless, indeed, it was the prospect of robbing the caravans and the pilgrims.

From Dehinemek, the road leads to Abdullah-Abad, and then to Lazguird, a village perched upon a hill, noted only for its immodest women and its delicious pomegranates. So Sadik, the conductor of our vehicle, is very fond of Lazguird. Sadik is a small Tartar, very lithe and vigorous, with no eyes to speak of, and a large nose; always vociferating to his groom Ali; insolent, rough of speech, noisy, and reckless; very full of fun, very dirty, and devoted to his Cabardian horses. He is the antithesis of his friend Abbas, who is portly and sedate, with the pretension of being very well dressed, walking with his head thrown back, and with his turban on one side, whereas Sadik wears his on the back



SADIK.

of his head. At Lazguird, Sadik, stimulated thereto by the young mollahs, his compatriots, makes up his mind to say his prayers. He has been told that Khorassan is very close, that he will soon arrive at Meshed, and that it would please the Imam Riza that he (Sadik) should fulfil the duties of his religion. So Sadik settles himself, with bare feet, into one of the large niches in which travellers sleep outside the caravansaries. He spreads out a small piece of carpet, and begins a prayer. But what a prayer it is! While he is mumbling very fast, he scratches his head and takes a look at his groom Ali, suddenly calling out to him, "Give the grey horse more straw. Curry the quarters of the white mare." He continues his prayer, scratches himself

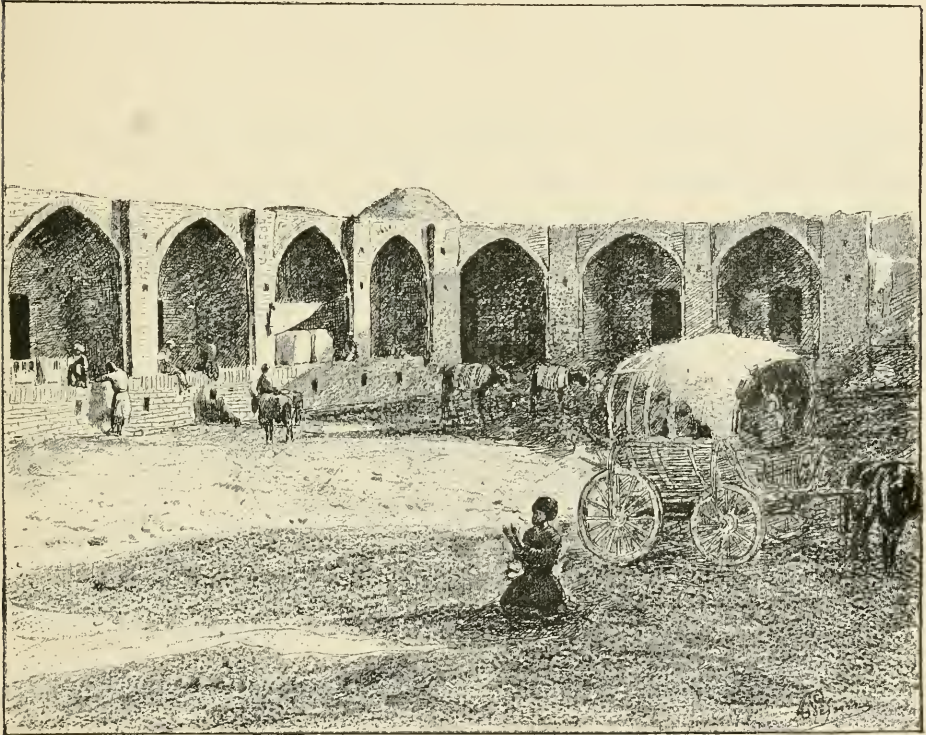
more energetically than before, blows up Ali a third time, and then, getting tired of so much piety, and taking advantage of the temporary absence of the mollahs, gets up before he is through his prayer, proffers a sigh, utters imprecations upon the Imam Riza, pulls out his pipe, fills it, and lights up with an air of satisfaction as of one who has done his duty.

In the Simnan bazaar, we meet men of Turkish race who come from the shores of the Caspian; one of them is of fair complexion, so Russia is not far off.

After having crossed the stream, with many mills along its banks, which supplies Simnan with water, the road ascends through a bare and mountainous steppe. There is no trace of vegetation upon the heights, which are a regular desert. Our stage is a long one, and we break it by a halt near a small spring from which ripples a tiny stream of water, flowing down the hillside and forming a grateful belt of green on each of its banks. The nor'-wester brings us a little rain, and we go on, the rain still falling, as far as Aouvan, which lies hidden in a valley. Near the caravansary rises an abandoned fortress, in which the shepherds have for many years been in the habit of placing their flocks to protect them from bad weather, and the dung has accumulated in thick layers, from which saltpetre is extracted by men who have established their factory by the roadside, in the open air. These saltpetre-makers are nomad, and during the summer they go from place to place, wherever they can find materials to work upon.

Holes made in the earth serve as vats and boilers, and they excavate beneath these holes an oven, in which they make their fires. The steppe supplies them with firing in the shape of brushwood, and they form a wall to protect themselves from the wind by piling up this brushwood behind the heaps of compost which is to make the saltpetre. Their method is as follows:

First they soak it for twenty-four hours, then filter it, then boil it for another twenty-four hours, then cleanse the boiled residue by placing it in reservoirs, and finally let the sun evaporate the water. They make in a day about fifty pounds (English), which they sell for a penny a pound. They express themselves as being quite satisfied with the result of their work, which, as two middle-aged



A CARAVANSARY.

men, with five of their children around them, tell us, has been carried on by their family for a very long period.

At Lazguird we had been told that the Turkomans were the terror of Eastern Persia, from Khorassan to Aouvan. Some shepherds tells us that the Yumud Turkomans had recently stolen eight hundred sheep, and if the figures are exaggerated, the fact itself is probable enough. These are episodes in the struggle still going on between Turan and Iran.

After leaving Aouvan we make a steep ascent, and then down hill again, going from one basin to another by a sort of waste-weir, so to speak.

The sea is not far off, and this is why to our left the sky is paler on account of the moisture, and the horizon is lined with grey clouds, while but for a strong north-west wind the outlines of the mountain would not be so distinct. There is no variety in the scenery as far as Kacha, where we encounter some Afghans. They describe themselves as servitors of Ayub-Khan, and are on their way to Teheran. They are men of proud mien, not at all like the Persians.

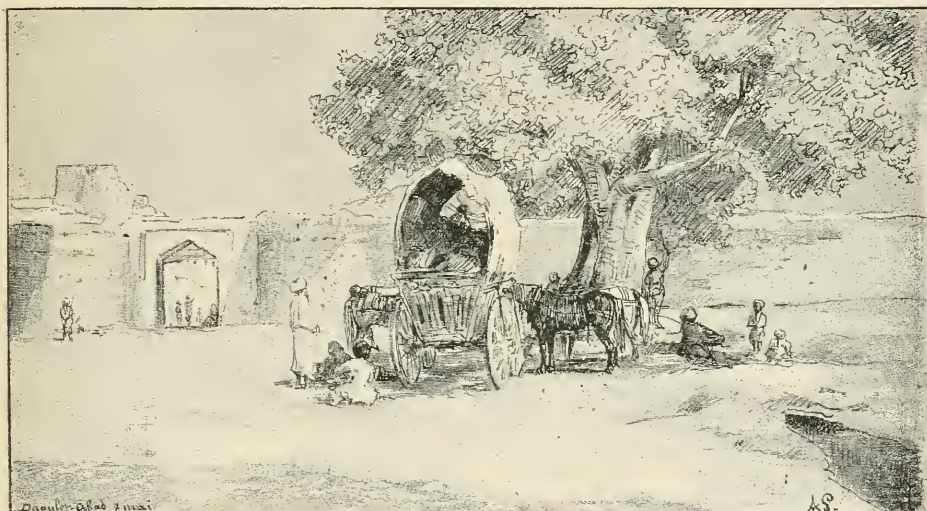
After Kacha comes Daouletabad. One has only to get a distant view of Daouletabad to perceive that one has got into the province of Khorassan, and that the Turkomans are close at hand. The village bristles with fortifications, and nothing has been neglected to guard against attack and secure the safety of the inhabitants by a multiplication of walls and towers.

Daouletabad is made up of a square fortress facing north, and of the long rectangle of gardens and cultivated fields to the south.

The fortress consists of a deep ditch and three parallel lines of crenulated walls, with four towers at the four corners, these towers increasing in height the further they are from the ditch. Entering this fortress through two gateways, one after the other, both defended by double towers, one notices that low houses and stables are built up against the walls, so that the inhabitants and cattle may be placed there when an attack is apprehended. In the centre of the fortress are the residences intended for the chief, his wives, his servants, and his soldiers. The present khan has not a very warlike aspect, being a man with an enormous stomach, whom his corpulency has made rather asthmatic. He can neither read nor write, but he tells us that he is "a descendant of the builder of the fortress, Motallib-Khan, who lived in the early

part of the century. His brother was called Zulfagar-Khan, and I am his son."

He is busy fitting up and restoring his abode, but he is not building up the crumbling walls nor putting the gates in a state of defence, for nothing has been seen of the Turkomans for twenty years. And as the heat is extreme, on this day, May 7th, the thermometer is 113° F. in the sun—our good friend, dressed in a very airy costume, is closely superintending the construction of a high tower, the use of which we do not at first understand. It



DAOULETABAD.

cannot be a watch-tower, for the country is in a peaceful state, and there is no staircase to the top.

The khan, who is bathed in perspiration, says that it is a ventilator.

The fortress has only one entrance. On the small square, access to which was formerly closed, several tradespeople have opened shops, in which they sell miscellaneous goods and tea. Their booths are erected against the wall which encloses the gardens and cultivated fields, from which the inhabitants gain

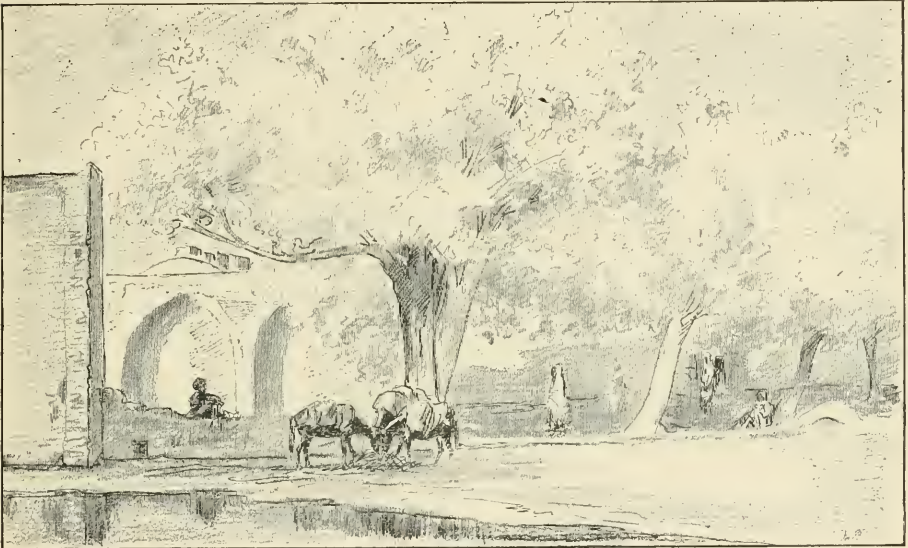
their means of existence, thanks to a shallow stream of potable water. Now that all fear of attack has disappeared, the walls of the enclosure are allowed to fall into disrepair, and the inhabitants have even been tempted to cultivate the open ground, living in the gardens by preference to the fortress, where they had not much breathing-space.

Our day's journey terminates at Damgan, which precedes the ruins. Inside the town there are a few monuments, some minarets, attributed to the Sultan Hussein, a mosque, also in ruins, said to have been built by Shah-Rukh, the son of the Emir Timour. It is an insignificant town, with narrow and dirty streets, but it is associated with the names of Timour and Shah-Rukh, which is a sign that we are approaching the Turan country. Moreover, after leaving Damgan, the mountains to our left get lower and lower. At the extremity of the chain, Chirabad might be discerned on a clear day. This reminds us of Turkestan; and before us spread the plain, the salt fields, and the arid steppe. However, to the right of the road we can see two or three hamlets, some greenery, and various signs of life. A white eagle is hovering in the air, so there must be some birds for it to prey upon; and soon after we see some pigeons, rooks, and larks; while nearer to the ground are ants and other insects, with lizards to devour them.

Looking in the direction of the cultivated fields, we can see, between them and the mountain, a row of orifices extending almost in a straight line. They are the mouths of the karys, those veins which may be said to float down their streams life in the midst of death. I need hardly explain that a karys is an underground canal, by means of which a spring is secured and conveyed to a piece of low ground that has been brought into cultivation. The course of the karys is perforated with shafts, through which the soil is removed when it is being constructed or cleaned. The *débris* is heaped up around the openings, which have the appear-

ance of a succession of craters, but craters which do not vomit forth any lava and from which a delightful coolness is emitted.

In order that the caravan men may be able to draw water for themselves and their animals, charitable persons, or governors with a certain amount of foresight, have in some places had built, near the roadside, an arched staircase leading down to the underground stream. Travellers halt at these spots, where they find, when they require it, a shelter in the house of the keeper of the building,



DAMGAN.

who will also supply them with provisions, if they care to pay a high price for them. Such is the case at Kurian, where we made a halt.

There is a staircase at Kurian going down a depth of nearly fifty feet, with very high and awkward steps, but they lead to a spring of very cold water. One passes from the furnace above ground into complete shade, and then, sitting upon the lowest step, one feels that one is quaffing ambrosia—for ambrosia must certainly have been spring water—and that one would

willingly dig for months into the bowels of the earth if one could be sure of opening a way for this treasure of liquid pearls, which moistens the earth and arrays it in greenery and harvests, while all around the pitiless sun is burning up the ground.

From Kurian we go on to Dehimollah, where we are to pass the night. Before arriving there we have to climb a hill and clear several ravines, and while Abbas, the first van driver, gets over safely, our man Sadik gets stuck in the mud.



WELLS.

We ask him why he did not follow the same route as Abbas, instead of trusting to chance.

“What is the use of so many precautions?”

“Because you would have less trouble.”

“Well, the roads are as it were an image of life.”

“I do not quite follow you.”

“Vallah! I speak truly. Roads are the image of life. Whether they are good or bad, one must follow them to the end; whether you are rich or poor, you will see out the end of your days.”

After this, we have no choice but to go on foot to our caravansary; it is some little distance from the village, so it is advisable to send in there for some drinking water.

The place is crowded with Tartar and Arab pilgrims, women, and merchants. Several dervishes came to beg, and get anything but a pleasant reception from Sadik and Hadji. The "Baba" himself grumbles not a little at seeing these men put out their hands to us for alms when he himself has not got all he wants.

One gradually gets accustomed to this nomad kind of life, and when the vermin are not too plentiful, the nights pass pleasantly.

It is nice, when rolled up in one's blankets, to watch the stars as they glitter above the walls, while thoughts flit through the brain more rapidly than the clouds driven before the storm. There is a certain feeling of repose derived from hearing the dogs as they prowl about, and the wind chanting the grand and simple music of nature, while even the snoring of your tired companions is not altogether unpleasant. You see a pair of bright eyes gleaming; it is a cat coming after food. The horses, half asleep, munch their fodder with a regular motion of the jaws, and the mules, as they turn over from side to side, rattle their bells. Then, again, those who enjoy the fresh air get up before it is light, having gone to rest before the sun went down. The lanterns are seen crossing the yard like wills-o'-the-wisp, and the muleteers are running to and fro after their animals which have got loose, shouting to and swearing at one another. At last the mules are loaded, farewells are exchanged, and amid many "salamats," the caravan starts on its journey, the drivers gradually calming down, and the bells ceasing to tinkle.

The large door opens and creaks on its hinges, when there is one, as at Dehimollah; a light crosses the courtyard. This is probably the superintendent of the caravansary going back to bed after a tour of inspection.

In their turn the van-drivers get up in order to groom their horses, and the curry-combs are heard as they pass them over the animals' quarters with a sound like that of raking stones, while the stallions neigh and plunge, regardless of the alternate coaxing and threats of the stablemen.

Then, perhaps, one may have to drive off another cat which has come prowling after the meat, and finally you get to sleep.

The road continues to be quite as monotonous, but the plain has a physiognomy of its own. You fancy that you know where you are and that you are about to see again spots which you have already visited. You think that there is a town down below there,



A PERSIAN GIRL.

at the elbow of the mountains. Going further on you see below a valley reminding you of the approach to Teheran. You make the descent, and you remark that there is a great deal of animation, people working in the fields, carriages (arabas), gardens surrounded with walls, canals, a cool breeze, men wearing turbans, not so many black head-dresses and more small Turkish eyes than before, a stronger and better-fed race, living upon a fertile soil.

The town is intersected by a large stream, there are several caravansaries, a bazaar full of animation, a busy trade, English and Russian goods, and Armenians, who are to be met with everywhere in Persia where money is to be made. The very fact of their presence would almost suffice to prove that Shahroud is a town in which plenty of business is transacted.

It is true that these Armenians are chiefly engaged in selling



TARTAR PILGRIM.

the wine and alcohol which they make themselves, and that, in accordance with their precise numbers, one might infer as to how many drunkards there were in the town.

Shahroud is upon the trade route for merchants coming from Russia by way of the Caspian Sea and Asterabad. Its situation is a good one geographically; there is no lack of water, and the town is the converging point of many roads, for, whether you are coming from the west, the north, the east, or Afghanistan, you must pass through Shahroud, and the sea is not far off.

It is easy to see that a sense of security now reigns in the Khorassan, for the fortress is falling into ruins. The ditch is being converted into gardens, and now that there is no longer anything to be feared from the Turkomans, the town is extending. People are selecting the best places for building and cultivating the ground, whereas formerly they selected the safest, always assuming that there was water. The sense of danger made them huddle close together. It is interesting to observe and easy to see that the natives of the Khorassan had mainly in view, when laying out their towns and villages, their protection from the Turkomans. They studiously avoided all places where a surprise could easily be effected, perching themselves upon heights which commanded a good view of the horizon, in preference to the amphitheatre of the mountains from which there were not many issues. This, no doubt, was the chief reason for the abandoning of Bostan, the neighbouring town, which is overlooked by heights, which is reached by deep defiles, and which is deficient in exits. Whereas Shahroud is upon the ridge of the plain, and there is no lack of space.

Bostan is a good hour's journey distant. It is situated in a circular valley about six miles in diameter, shut in by mountains with several depressions which admit of a passage through them.

And if the Greek Πύλαι is taken to mean defiles, this must be the site of the Hecatompylos of the ancients.

Bostan is at present no more than a petty village surrounded by walls, its houses grouped around a pretty mosque and a tottering minaret. We are not allowed to visit the mosque, because we are infidels; but, upon the other hand, we are permitted to ascend the minaret about thirty feet, which is as far as we care to go, for it is very unsteady. The postilion who accompanies the horses which we have borrowed for this little excursion is very loquacious, and he is full of stories about the Turkomans of whom I speak to him. He can remember the terror of the population when their approach was announced. No one ventured to leave the place, especially at Bostan. The gates of the town were closed, and a watch for them was kept from the top of the walls, the inhabitants only breathing freely again when they had disappeared.

They often carried off flocks, and women, and children. The people who had occasion to travel in the direction of the Atruck, took every possible precaution beforehand. They were careful to provide their horses with shoes and nails purchased from the Turkomans, and when they reached dangerous passes, where an ambuscade might be looked for, they put their horses into a gallop.

The greatest danger was to be apprehended from the plunderers who came in small numbers on speedy horses. It was impossible to capture them, as they had no difficulty in concealing themselves, and in twenty-four hours they got over a great deal of ground. When I point out to my interlocutor that Shahroud is a large town, that the Persians are strong in numbers, that their army is a large one, and that it would be easy to pay these Turkomans back in their own coin, he tells me that no one had ever thought of doing this, that a few troops with guns were occasionally sent out to encamp near Bostan, but that this was of no use, as the Turkomans waited till they were gone.

Patriotism does not exist in this country, and the inhabitants do not seem to possess that kind of instinct of self-preservation which is the characteristic of nations with any life in them, and from which is derived that spirit of initiative, which in turn leads people to seek a remedy for evil, to band themselves together and be of good cheer; to put upon one side, in the hour of danger, individual interests, and think only of those of the country. At times like these, man, instead of wrapping himself up in his egotism, rushes forward to the defence of a flag or a frontier;



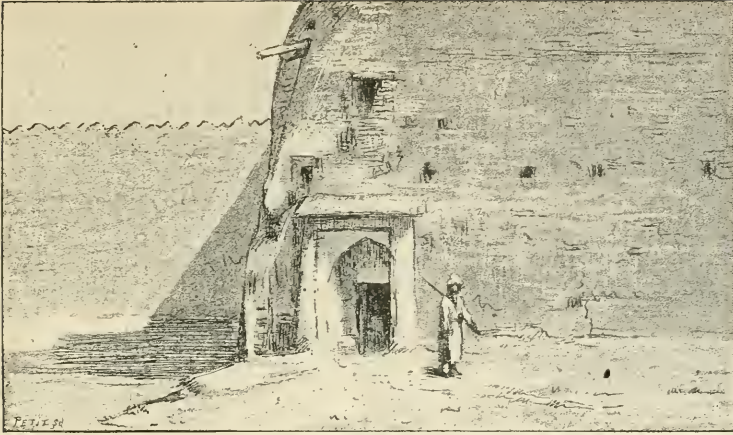
GIPSIES.

but the Persians have never been attacked with this “sublime fever.”

Outside the walls of Bostan and Shahroud, we see a number of gipsy encampments. These gypsies tell us that they are natives of Seistan, and that they gain their living by making brass-wire, and working on metals. They are tributaries of the chief of the shah’s running footmen (Tchater-Bachi), to whom each family pays an annual sum of fourteen krans (about nine shillings).

They live either in tents or in huts made of mud, with a felt roof.

When they move their camp, they roll up their roof and carry it off with them. They are never slow to beg, and they look upon us as very fair game, the old women of the tribe coming to us with outstretched hands, though not until they have taken the precaution of throwing some live coals on to the ground to propitiate the fates. They are of very much the same type as the natives, with the exception that they are dirtier; more swarthy, for they live in the open air; and thinner, because their table is not a plentiful one.



ENTRANCE TO THE VILLAGE OF SADERABAD.

CHAPTER V.

FROM BOSTAN TO MESHIED.

The land and water—Expatriated radishes—Abundance of water at Sabzevar—Consecutive upsets—A Persian emigrant—His views—No *res publica*—The caravansary in the day time—The Arabs—The witch of Endor—Diplomacy—The print of Imam's footstep—The fear of Turan—The watch towers—The Turkomans as slave dealers—Persian pusillanimity—Before the holy city of the Shiites—Religious enthusiasm—Its various manifestations—"Distance lends enchantment to the view."

May 12th.

THE spring is coming, and the steppe is all in flower, but this does not suffice to break the monotony of the route. The horses are bleeding at the neck and near the shoulder; several small veins burst, and this is a natural blood-letting, which will do the poor beasts good. They may well be congested after so many long marches in the sun, without a drop of water. Our van-driver says that it is because they want to eat fresh grass, after having been fed so long on barley and dry hay. The same thing is noted in Algeria.

We are twelve hours on the road before reaching Meïamei, a pleasant oasis where there is an abundance of water, where the mulberry-trees, poplars and willows afford such abundant shade that one may fancy one's self in paradise, though the infernal regions, as represented by the steppe, are not far off.

At less than a mile from Miandecht, we see the ruins of a fortress, said to date from the time of Shah-Ismail.

One might imagine that the men of this country would like to migrate, but imperious nature does not allow them a choice of dwellings, and thus they build. One circumstance urges them to go away, while another prompts them to return, and so they leave ruins close to the water, from which in no case can they move far away. They are prisoners tied to a long but very stout chain, and the links of it are closely soldered.

From Miandecht we get to Alhak, halting near a fortified caravansary in ruins and a rivulet of salt water. The few woe-begone inhabitants of the hamlet come to see us. Their existence is a pastoral one. When they are not abusing one another, they spin some poor kind of rope out of old pieces of felt. They are very kindly disposed, and are anxious to offer us a treat by giving us something of European origin. So they bring us a few green stems, which, if there was any root at the end of them, would be radishes. We look at the man who brings them to us as



LITTLE GIRL AT ABBAS-ABAD.

much as to ask what they are, and he, much surprised at our ignorance, begins to munch the leaves, and says, with an air of superiority, "This is how you eat them."

As we emerge from the hills, we catch sight of the caravansary of Abbas-Abad, and to the right is a vast sheet of white, which

might be taken for snow, though in reality it is the Khevir salt shining in the sunlight.

At Abbas-Abad, we give a few medical consultations, among others, to a Persian who has been stabbed in the hand while disputing with some Tartar pilgrims about payment for a measure of barley.

The caravansary of Saderabad is in a very tumbledown state. Opposite to it is a ruined village fortress, inhabited by people of Asterabad, who had been brought there to defend the fortress, keep the cisterns in order, get forage ready, and lend a hand to the caravan men and pilgrims. In return, the government paid each of the ten families seven toman (a toman is worth about 7*s.* 6*d.*) a year, and a hundred measures of flour. But the government does not keep its word, for though it sometimes pays the money, it never provides the flour, and the poor wretches are in deep distress. They live like lizards in the midst of ruins, and whenever one of them finds an opportunity of seeking fortune elsewhere, he disappears for good. So their number is decreasing every day.



A SPINNER AT SADERABAD.

We go to pass the night at the new Mazinan, standing rather higher than the old village, which was destroyed by a flood about twenty years ago. The ruins of the abandoned village seem several centuries old; the houses are built of earth containing a certain quantity of salt, and as they are exposed to very severe frosts, to furious winds, and a pitiless sun, they soon fall to pieces.

After leaving Mazinan, there is less salt, and we renew acquaintance with the saxaoul, a shrub which has been of great service to us in the Ust-Urt. What an excellent fire we make with this shrub! At Sutkar, the caprices of fortune throw other

acquaintances in our path, viz. Afghans, conducting Ayub-Khan's wives to Teheran. Exile has not abated the pride of these men, who think so much of their descent; they are disdainful and insolent to the natives, as if they were in a conquered country.

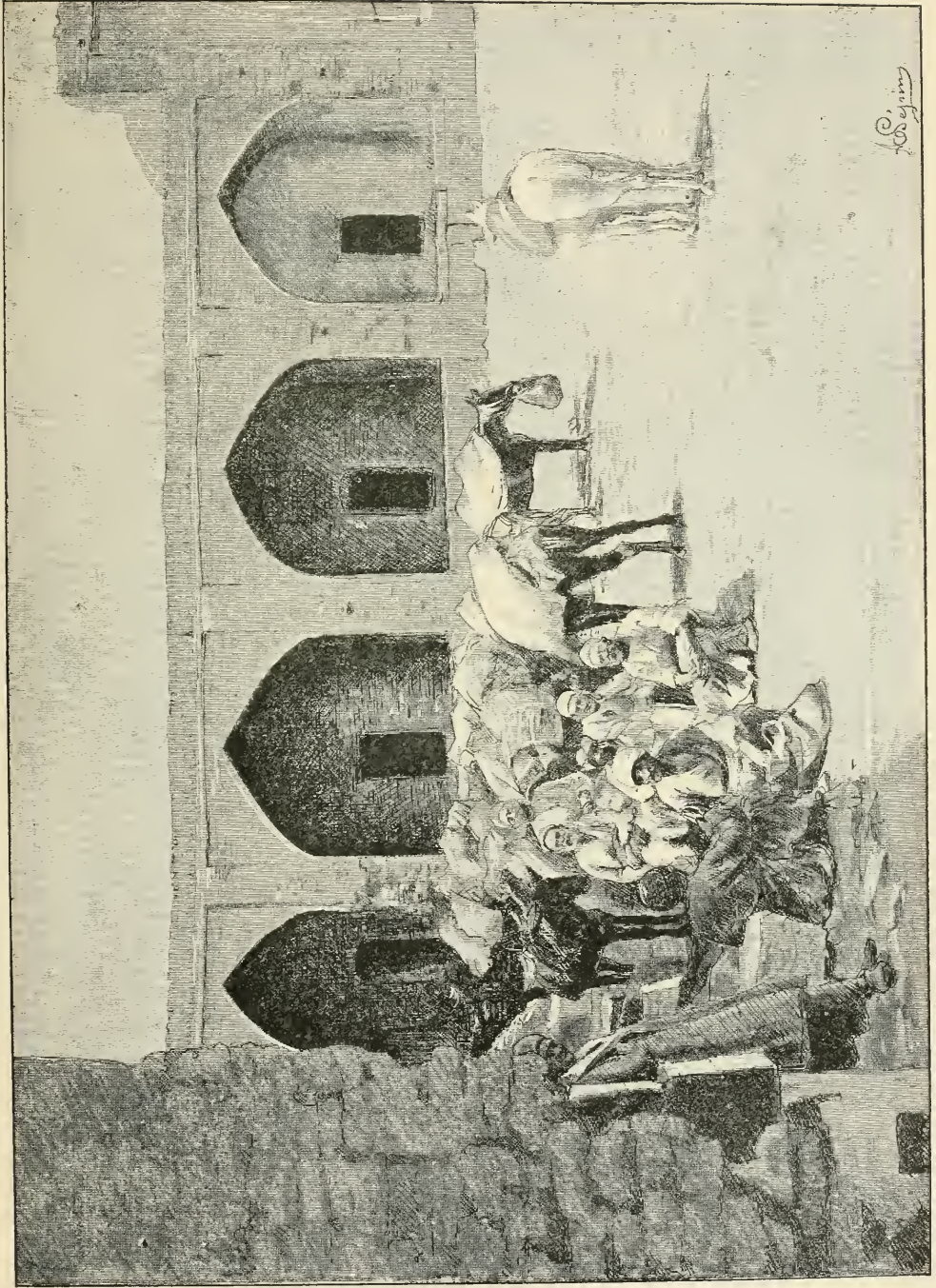
From Sutkar, we go to spend the night near an *abambar* (water cistern), in a ruined caravansary. The next day sees us at Sabzevar, on a fertile plain bounded to the north by the mountain. There is an abundance of water, the karys are numerous, and the villages surrounded by cultivated fields, while there are water-courses by the roadside. We notice many fields of poppies, a proof that opium is made and sold. So the rich countries provide the poor ones with the means of intoxication. The population is mainly Persian, but the race is a heavier one than in the west.

As the caravansary where we are to pass the night is in the east of the town, we go through the narrow street of the bazaar, where our vehicle has only just room to pass, causing a good deal of alarm to the shopkeepers, who are afraid that their goods and trays will be upset. They may well be anxious, for the enormous van rolls to and fro upon the rough pavement, just grazing the doors and windows, and threatening to crush people right and left.

We sleep in the caravansary, which is crowded with pilgrims and merchants, for there have been a great many travellers about since we have been upon this high road from the East to the West, which makes a bend at Shahroud towards Asterabad and the Caspian.

The caravansary is surrounded by tombs, and has not a comparison often been made between a caravansary and human life?

From Sabzevar to Rabat-Sarpuch there is an abundance of water, but it is salt, as Hadji has an opportunity of discovering at Hussein-Abad, before reaching Rabat. We had gone some way



H. P. Jones

PILGRIMS AND MULETEERS.

from the van in order to look at a field of poppies, where men were feeling the heads in order to see if it was time to extract the sap. A limpid stream was flowing at the roadside, and as Hadji was thirsty he asked some old men with beards half white from age, half red from henna, whether it was good. They declared, "by Allah, that it was excellent."

Hadji then took a draught, but soon spat it out in disgust, and began to curse the old men for deceiving him, declaring that "Persians could never speak the truth even when they were white-bearded."

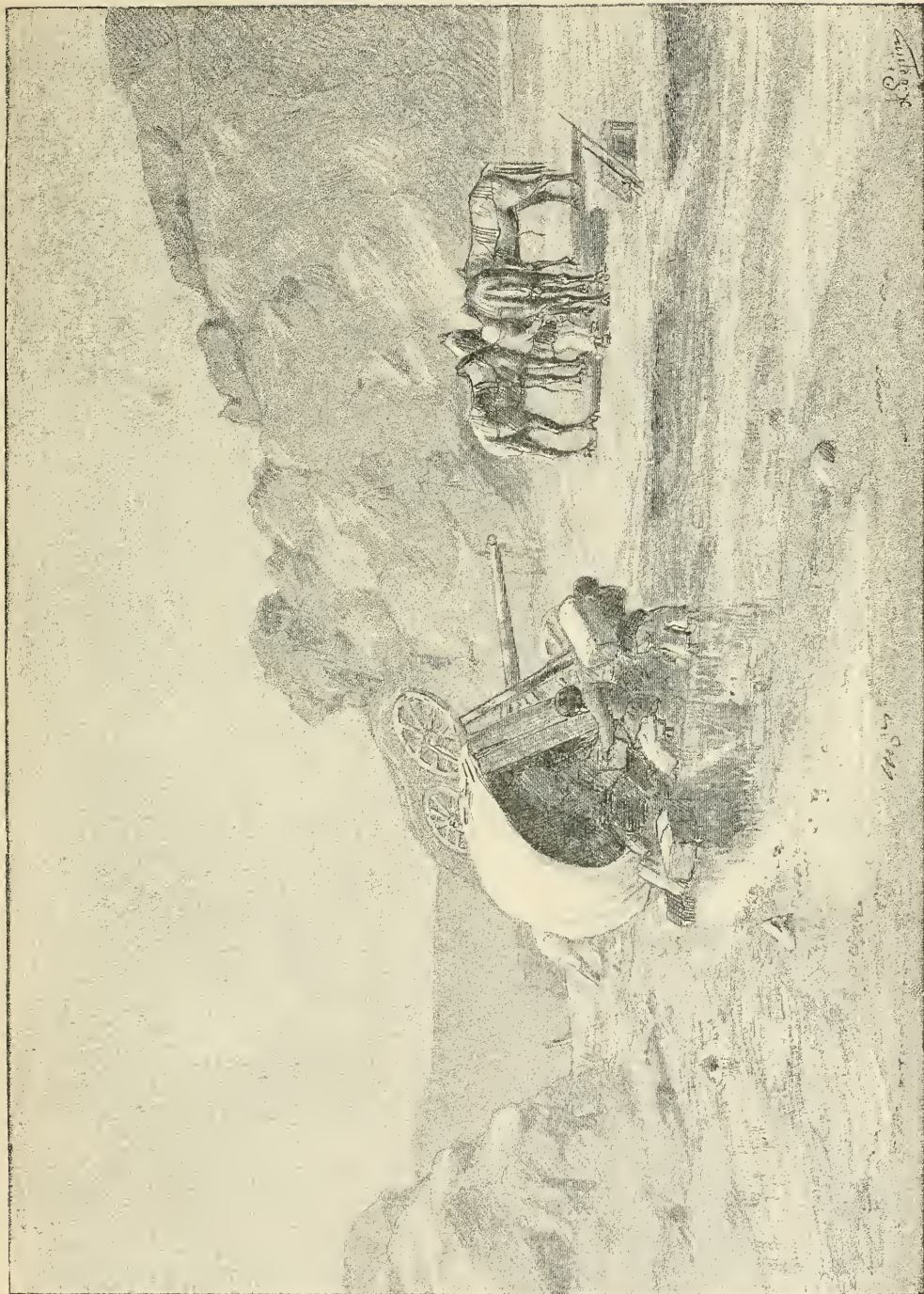
I never could understand this peculiar fondness for lying, so characteristic of Persians and many other Eastern races. It is, perhaps, inherent in the nature of man, to whom the naked truth is distasteful, owing to an aberration of mind analogous to those aberrations of taste peculiar to stomachs which have been upset by over-indulgence, or which are naturally weak or susceptible of singular appetites, as in the case of many children.

Upon the 19th, after being jolted along the rough steppe, which was powdered over with a sprinkling of salt or saline growths, we reached some hills preceded by a ravine, which is not particularly steep, and along which trickles a rivulet of brackish water. The first van passes without any difficulty, but as ours, which is the second, climbs up the hill, with Sadik quietly smoking his pipe and holding the reins very loosely, I notice that we are going too much to the right. I observe this to Sadik, but he tells me that it is "all right." No sooner has he said so than the van sways over, with Sadik and a heavy chest toppling on to me. I find myself thrown against the side of the van, which has turned over, and a counter-shock forces me back under the pole, between the horses' legs, from which I extricate myself with remarkable rapidity. Turning round I find that Capus has disappeared beneath the baggage, while Pepin is caught hand and foot; the

servants perched up behind had had time to jump off. We extricate the others as quickly as possible, but while Pepin was a good deal bruised, Capus was intact, and Sadik had not even smashed his pipe. The baggage is picked up out of the mud, the bruises are washed, and, after drinking a cup of tea, we make a fresh start. Sadik gets so well lectured, that he appeals to the devil, to Mahomet, and to the Imam Riza, and declares he will be more careful.

But at the next ravine we come to the same thing happens, the only difference being that Pepin, despite his bruises, manages to jump off in time, while I feel a good deal bruised about the thigh and the chest. However, we continue our journey in the direction of Churab, which is only twelve or fourteen miles off. I have as one of my travelling companions a tall young man from Hamadan, who is full of life and spirits, and who is delighted at leaving his native country, as he tells me on the way. We go up and down some very sandy hills, and when the easterly wind does not blind us with dust we chat together.

The young man from Hamadan is very loquacious, and he informs me that he is a mason and bricklayer by trade, that chance had taken him to Tiflis, where he was not long in discovering that Russia was a nice country to live in, and that when he returned home with some small savings he determined to start off again as soon as possible. So he sold a small property which belonged to him, and left home one fine morning under the pretext of going to pray at the tomb of the Imam Riza at Meshed. In reality he intends going into the Transcaspian district, where he is sure of obtaining work, as a great deal of building is going on since the Russians came into the country, and he is an excellent workman. He carries all his fortune in Russian notes, in a small pocket sewn into his shirt. He remarks with a laugh that it is not heavy to carry and much handier than the krans.



THE FIRST UPSET BEFORE REACHING CHURAE.

“Why,” I ask him, “is there no paper money in Persia?”

“The Persians are too stupid.”

“You are a Persian; why do you speak ill of your country?”

“I am not a Persian; I am from Hamadan. Those who govern are at Teheran.”

The poor fellow does not understand the idea of nationality which is current in Europe. He is from Hamadan, and he does not get beyond that; and he does not see that he is of Persian nationality because he speaks the Persian language. What has he in common with the people of Teheran? Why, nothing at all. His interest lies outside the frontier, and he has no hesitation in going across it.

“Can you sing like this?” he says. And thereupon he howls loud enough to deafen one, and asks if he sings nicely.

I reply, “Barek Allah! You sing like a *bulbul* (nightingale).”

“Russki. I understand Russian.”

“Yes; Russki; that is it.”

“Da (yes), khleb (bread), vada (water), dienghi (money). A very good thing, money.”

“But you could make money in Persia.”

“Here? (with an air of disdain). Look at the earth, it is salt; taste the water, it is salt; the roads are so bad that the vehicles upset; wages are low; the soldiers are thieves; the valis (governors) are thieves.”

“And his majesty the shah?”

“He is no good either.” And he jumps about with an agility which shows that, if no respecter of persons, he is very active on the leg.

Green fields of wheat in the bottom of the valley indicate our approach to Churab (salt water). There must be inhabitants close by, as we see that there is food growing to feed them.

A very remarkable trait in the Persian character, which I again have an opportunity of noticing at Churab, while we are consoling ourselves for the day's mishaps with an incalculable quantity of tea and milk, is indifference—for others, of course—or particularism, as it is called. Mutual help is not a maxim which regulates the conduct of the people in this country. They witness the misfortunes of others with the utmost tranquillity; they never take any one's part unless they are directly interested, for in their eyes to be weak is to be ridiculous. A muleteer overwhelms with insults an unfortunate woman who is returning from Meshed, where she has been to bury her son in holy ground, refusing to take her any further, despite his bargain, unless she gives him as much extra, upon the plea that it is very hot and that the dust is intolerable. This woman is all alone, but not one of the thirty people in all the caravan thinks of taking her part. She is in the right, but she is weak; so they only laugh at her. Several consequential persons seated beside her go on smoking their ghalyan stolidly, and let the muleteer make off without saying a word to him. The woman remains in the caravansary, and she will get away as best she can. One can understand, by the light of facts like these, that there can be no such thing as a *res publica*, where people never concern themselves about others.

From Churab, where, despite its name, excellent drinking water is to be had, we start with the intention of sleeping at Nichapur. After three hours' march, we reach Zumanabad by an undulating steppe dotted with hillocks. This miserable village is, like all the others in this region, surrounded by walls, and it is built after the same plan as the hamlet-fortresses of the Khorassan, that is to say, almost in a square, with turrets at each corner and upon both sides of the gateway. Cavities underground serve as a courtyard for the stock, the ground floor of the houses built against the walls as a stable, and the first floor as a residence for

the poverty-stricken people who cultivate the poor land outside the walls.

I go on in advance in company with a young fellow from Teheran, who has been employed to help Ali the groom. We settle down in the shade under the wall of the guard-room, just in front of the gate, and after having got a stoop of sour milk to quench my burning thirst, no water being obtainable, I have some talk with my young companion. He is about fifteen, and cannot remember having had any parents; he has always lived in the bazaar, begging and stealing, and in appearance he is lanky, badly marked with smallpox, and full of vermin.

“Why are you going to Meshed?”

“To pray at the tomb of the Imam Riza.”

“You are a good Mussulman, then?”

“Yes, a very good Mussulman, Vallah!”

“But I have never seen you say a *namaz* (prayer); how is that?”

He begins to laugh, and when I press him further for his reasons, he admits that he does not know, but that he is anxious for a change of air.

The few inhabitants of Zumanabad form a circle around me, and my young companion very complacently explains to them all about me.

Beyond Zumanabad, we come to a bridge, and upon examining its condition, we arrive at the conclusion that the chances of upsetting or getting safe across are about even. Our reckless driver, Sadik, determines to chance it, and, by a piece of good luck, gets safe across. This does not induce his companion to do the same, so he unloads his waggon, and half of the villagers are employed for quite an hour in taking the goods, some of which are very heavy, to the other side. After punishment has been administered to two of the men who have stolen clothes belonging to the

mollahs, the waggons are loaded again, and we resume our tiresome route.

At nightfall, we get to Nazerabad, where we encounter two travellers from Europe, one a very tall man, the other of middle height. The former is a correspondent of the *Standard*, the second an American bicyclist. Both of them have attempted to enter Afghanistan, and they are both returning, anything but pleased, to Europe, by Asterabad and the Caucasus. Raleigh, the correspondent of the *Standard*, says that he shall await the declaration of war by Greece, which, he observes with a smile, is imminent, and Stevens, the bicyclist, is going to embark for Bombay, whence he will travel on his machine across India. Our two new companions have come on foot from Nichapur, whence they had started in the evening with their waggon. It is quite dark, and there is no sign of the waggon, so we give them a share of our dinner and blankets, and the next morning they start for Asterabad and we for Meshed. The American is on his bicycle, but he will have to carry it on his back very frequently, for the canals and watercourses intersect the road in so many places.

From Nazerabad to Nichapur, the country is well cultivated, and upon approaching the town, the wind brings us the odour of the poppies which we can see swaying to and fro like velvet cloths with brilliant tints on them. There is plenty of water, that in the streams being salt, while that in the karys is excellent. Nichapur is surrounded, like Sabzevar, by ruined walls, and protected by a broad ditch. The bazaar is full of life, like all those beyond Shahrud, the merchants in it having a large stock of English and Russian cotton stuffs, Russian and English needles, Russian and French sugar, and Angoulême writing-paper, these being the only French goods I came across, and Russian sugar is gradually pushing the French out of the market. The mercery goods are either Persian, German, or Austrian, with French trade marks.

The matches are of Austrian make. There is a native supply of felts, neither very well made or substantial, with printed stuffs of a very common pattern. There are a great many druggists, whose wares are of various origin: from Europe, India, and Turkestan. There is also a great demand for talismans. The natives manufacture objects of daily use or sell products of the country, such as rice, corn, opium, barley, and tobacco. Add to this a great number of Arab pilgrims in the streets, assailed by loquacious Persian shopkeepers, and you will get a fair idea of what this and other bazaars are like.



THE ENTRANCE TO NICHAPUR.

We go to lodge at a caravansary situated to the east of the town. It is very large and very dirty, but we are given the state rooms, on the first floor above the shops, well out of the sun and fairly free of vermin. From noon to two o'clock, we enjoy the pleasure of a siesta, and we are not the only ones who do the same.

The caravansary, just before so noisy, is now very quiet. Under the porch a number of people are stretched out at full length in various postures, all of them asleep, except a child of about ten, a deformed being, naked to the skin, who is lying on

his back, with his dropsical stomach baking in the sun. The shopkeeper opposite takes advantage of the lull in business to dye his beard black, and his next door neighbour, a vendor of wood and barley, combs his scanty locks, waters his vegetables, mops his forehead with his sleeve, and retires to the back of his premises ; the vendor of tea, seated beside his extinguished urn, goes off to



A PILGRIM DRINKING TEA.

sleep, with his head between his legs ; close beside him, his son, lying upon his stomach, is asleep on the bricks, feeling every now and then—in his dreams, let us hope !—for a flea, or worse. The animals imitate the human beings : donkeys, mules, and horses are asleep, either lying down or standing up, and flick the flies off with their tails in a mechanical sort of way. The only sound is the buzzing of the flies, an occasional tinkling of the bells on the animals' necks

when they turn in their sleep, the twitter of a swallow as it flits through the air, or the flapping of the cloth velarium suspended over the doorway as a protection from the sun.

In course of time, every one wakes up again ; the Arabs come to make their purchases, gliding into the shops like phantoms clad in a dirty shroud ; but they are phantoms who make a terrible din. There is a medley of harsh and guttural voices ; the discussion waxes very warm, and is accompanied by gestures made by long bony arms which emerge from the burnouses, and the fingers at the extremity of which are black with dirt. The question in dispute is a halfpenny worth of barley or a few bits of

wood, the purchaser declaring that he has not got his money's worth, and the vendor that he has given too much. At last, the bargain is struck. The phantom pulls out his purse and slowly takes from it some bad coins which the shopkeeper strikes against the ground and refuses to accept. The purchaser pretends to examine them, and to be much surprised to find that they are not good ones. Then he puts them back and takes out some good money, which is duly accepted. As soon as he has gone, another customer arrives, and the same scene is enacted.

It is true that the Persians sell barley mixed with earth and stones, and that after they have weighed it, their customer is obliged to weigh it again, as they put their feet upon the bottom of the scales to bring them down. It is true that the wood is green and will emit only smoke; the bread is generally swollen out with water, and made of bad flour. But these Arabs are never satisfied, they are always complaining of the quality of the goods, and think the prices are too high; they insist upon choosing for themselves, and cleaning their barley themselves.

Here, for instance, I notice an old man who is discussing for ten minutes about twopennyworth of barley, who gives it back, and has his money returned to him; as he goes off, muttering between his teeth, when passing in front of the tea-vendor's shop, with a swoop rapid as that of a hawk, he seizes, with his hooked fingers, a bit of sugar and walks away, dignified for all his rags. His wife comes up to resume negotiations about the barley. She is very tall, very angular and thin, the bones of her chin, nose, and cheeks seem to be coming through her skin, which is parched like that of a mummy, while her shoulder-blades protrude under the dark frieze of her dress like the extremities of a gibbet. She reminds one of the witch of Endor.

When she gets in front of the sacks of barley, she suddenly

subsides into a recumbent position, reminding one of a frog upon the brink of a pool. She plunges her hands, which are like hayforks, into the barley, turns it over and tastes it. Her toothless jaws munch it, and her cheeks swell out like those of a toad. What a horrible old woman! However, she strikes a bargain with the dealer, and taking out the coins, one by one, she hands them to him as if they were pastilles, as much as to say, "What a lucky man you are to receive so much money." Then she gets up like a wading-bird or a dromedary, and stalks majestically off.

By three o'clock all is astir in the caravansary. Tartars, Arabs, and Persians are getting ready to start at sunset. They groom down the mules, and there is a constant coming and going; the muleteers are singing, the dervishes are bawling, and the itinerant vendors are drawing out the contents of the baskets which they carry on their heads.

The saucepans of the cooks in the open air, near the principal gateway, are steaming, and they fish out of the broth for their customers, principally Arabs, fragments of entrails and other refuse, which they sell for a farthing or so.

Then come the jugglers: men with performing monkeys and snake-charmers, who exhibit the reptiles captured in the neighbouring mountains, and tell their story with great volubility, nearly all of them in a sing-song tone. They are accompanied by a grave-looking mollah, who sells bits of paper which serve as a charm against snake-bites, and even against bullets. While all this is going on a mule comes back from the water-trough, kicking up his heels in the air and putting all the onlookers to flight. Then comes a mulatto who performs feats of agility by keeping a piece of broken glass upon his forehead which he strikes in tune with another piece of glass resting on his thick lips, while behind him is a bandurra player who forms the orchestra. After this the

mulatto makes a boy climb on to his back and ties his feet tightly together, going through a mimic dance, the obscene character of which seems to delight the Persians.

Night sets in, and the caravansary is once more quiet, after the departure of the travellers who have been anxious to avoid the heat of the day. We hear the mules' bells tinkle, the gates open and close, and the pilgrims depart upon their donkeys. Every now and then there is a clatter of mules and fresh travellers entering, and once more silence is re-established, broken now and again by the loud braying of a donkey.



THE CEMETERY OF NICHAPUR.

For more than an hour I hear the mumbling of prayers, which vibrate along the vaulted roof as in a chapel. Are they the prayers of a devout Mussulman or only of some sick man who is endeavouring in this way to vanquish an enervating attack of insomnia?

From Nichapur we go to Chahabad, where we halt near the mouth of a karys, under the arch of which we take a bolt out of the sun. Our horses being tired, we make rather a long stay, and a number of pilgrims pass us. From time to time a cloud of dust, which disappears as it reaches the rivulet, announces the

approach of a band of chattering Arabs. They are always disputing with one another about something, and, not being troubled with any superfluous flesh, they go at a good pace, men, women and children, following their donkeys on foot. They are nearly all very thin, and half naked ; but many of them have handsome and regular features.

From Chahabad the eye embraces a well-cultivated country, very green and fertile. The plain extends east and south, while to the north, bare mountains, in the crevices of which patches of snow are still visible, shut in the horizon.

Our stage is a short one, ending at Kadamga, which, with its plane trees and a fine avenue of pines, is a delightful place to stop at, though the crowd of pilgrims, encamped pell-mell in the open, rather detracts from the charm. Kadamga owes its prosperity to a legend scarcely two centuries old. It is the vestibule of Meshed, where the faithful spend a certain time in retreat, so to speak, before entering the holy city.

The legend runs that the Imam Riza enjoined the Shiites not to pass Kadamga without halting there.

When the Imam was on his way to Meshed, he was overcome with fatigue when he reached the site of what is now Kadamga. Seeing a stone handy, he sat down upon it, and this stone being, like many human beings, discontented with its lot, confided its troubles to the holy man as follows :—

“No one is more to be pitied than I am. I receive no shade, the sun scorches me, and does not give the rain from heaven time to cool me. In winter I am frozen, I am alone and deserted. Every one passes me by without vouchsafing me a look.”

In short, it confided to the Imam all its troubles, in illustration of the French saying, “Wretched as any stone,” and so moved him to compassion that he said—

“Be of good cheer ; you will have more honour paid to you

than I have to myself. Two prayers shall be said to you, while only one is offered me."

Having thus spoken, the Imam put his feet upon the stone, which took the imprint of them like wax and has kept it ever since. The Shah Suleiman afterwards had a mosque built for the reception of this stone, and the pilgrims, going to and returning from Meshed, come and rub their faces against it.

We could not do this, for we were infidels.

Upon leaving Kadamga—which, as may be guessed, means the "imprint of the feet,"—our route lay parallel with some low hills, the spurs of which are intersected by the road, and at the foot of which is a well-cultivated plain. To the south extends the grey steppe. We are struck by the large number of towers which stand about in the fields, and we find that they are towers of refuge, built of stones and earth, eighteen or twenty feet high, with small doors at their base. It is here that the natives took refuge, like rabbits at the approach of a fox, when they saw any Turkomans coming. They barricaded themselves in, and remained quiet there till the storm had passed over. I pointed them out to a man from Urmiah, who was travelling with us, and asked him what they were used for.

"For nothing."

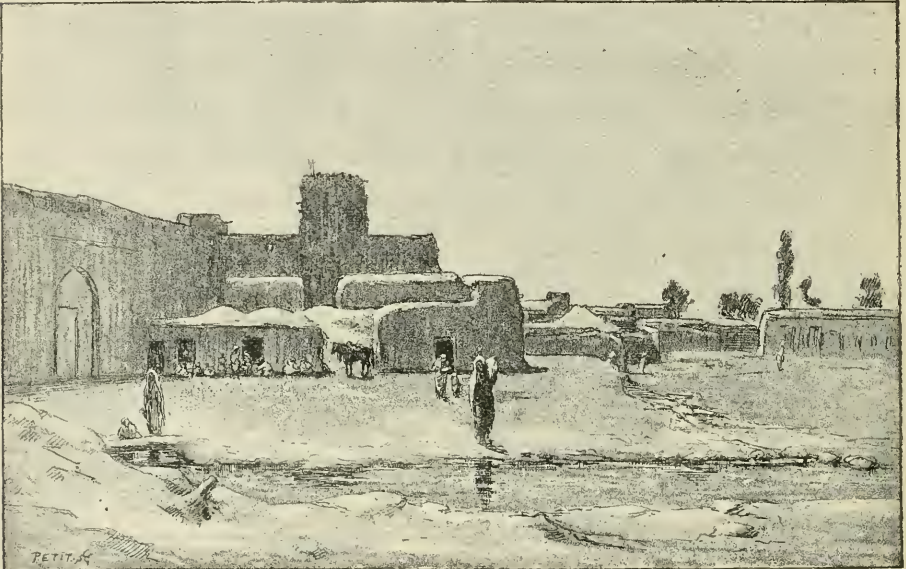
"How do you mean for nothing?"

"Yes, for the last three years; since the Russians have been at Merv. You see that they are being allowed to go to ruin, and that they are not repaired."

As a matter of fact, I can see that one or two have been pulled down to make a dam; a falcon is pluming itself on the piece of wall which remains standing. Peace reigns supreme, and a child, the sole keeper of a flock of sheep, is lying down in the shade. The sense of security is evidently complete.

Having halted at Faker-Daout, we start with the intention of

sleeping at Sherifabad. Plenty of karys and rivulets of excellent water supply the fortified villages which we see to the south of the plain. The heights are covered by turrets, which from a distance resemble the shafts of broken columns. These are the sentry-boxes from which the inhabitants of neighbouring villages mounted guard in turn, scanning the horizon from this vantage ground. As soon as the black helmeted horsemen appeared, mounted upon horses high on the leg like greyhounds, the sentinel



SHERIFABAD.

discharged his gun, and the other turrets repeated the signal. The watchmen rushed down into the plain, with loud shouts; there was a panic in the whole district, every man flying for refuge, one with his sheep and another with his goats; while, if time pressed, the whole of the stock was abandoned, for the Turkomans preferred a brawny Persian to a sheep, as the former would fetch a much better price.

According to our acquaintance from Urmiah, who spoke without the slightest reserve about the cowardice of the Persians, more

than one clean sweep had been made of pilgrims in this region. He said that he should never forget having hidden himself in a karys many years ago when the Turkomans attacked the caravan to which he was attached.

Pointing to a pass in the chain of mountains which rose to the south-east, he said—

“It was from there that they swept down upon us at full gallop, shouting, brandishing their swords over our heads, the blades flashing in the sunlight. Their horses’ hoofs made a terrible clatter. All the caravan immediately broke up and fled.”

“Were there many of you?”

“About three hundred.”

“And how many Turkomans were there?”

“About fifty.”

“Why did you not stand upon the defensive? Were you not armed?”

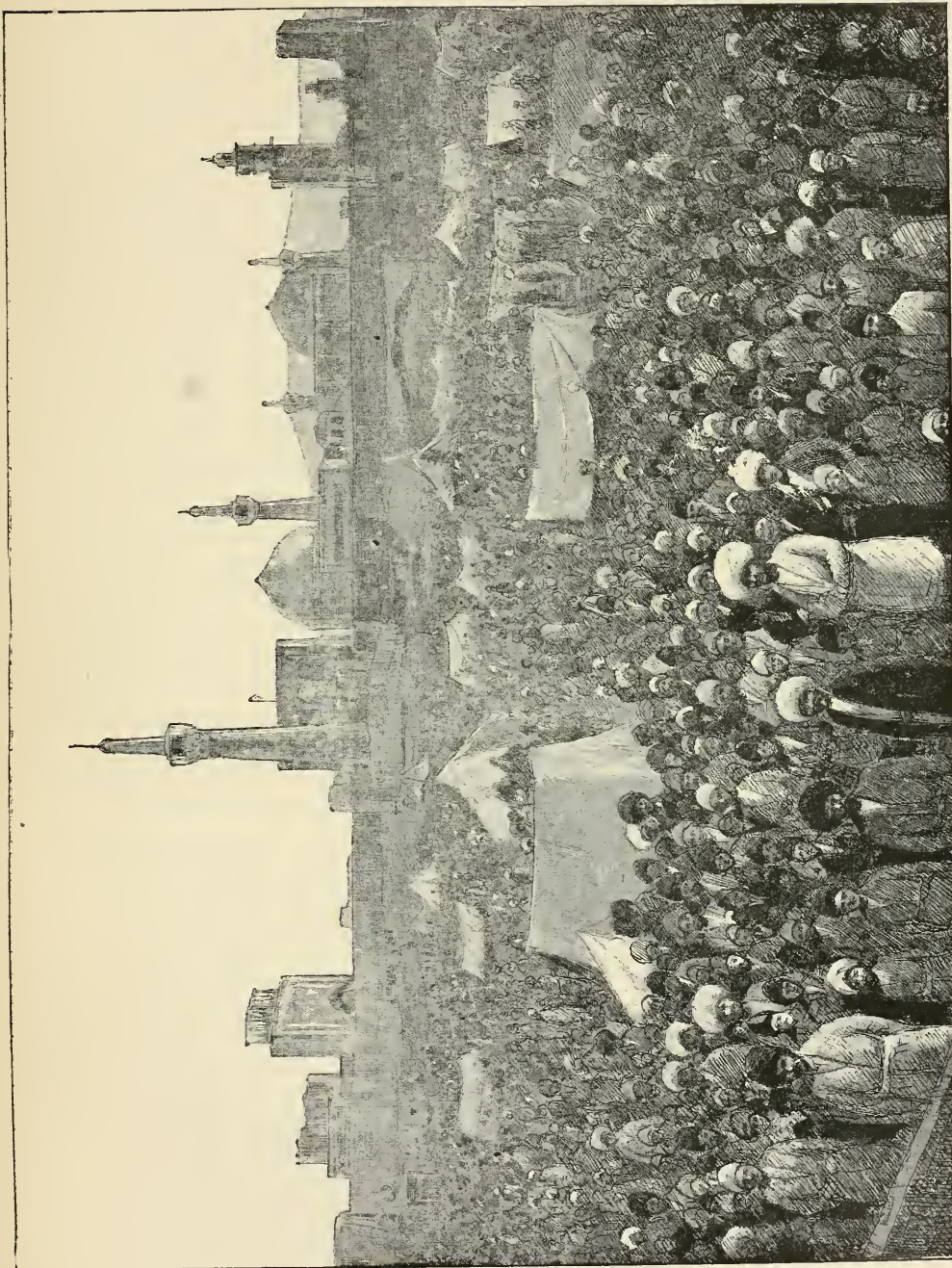
“No one thought of resisting. More than half the caravan was captured, and all the most valuable baggage. When the Turkomans had disappeared, I came out of the karys, where several others had also taken refuge. We gradually collected together again, and when we got back to the waggons, we found the donkeys grazing peaceably, while on the ground were the dead bodies sewn up in skins, which the pilgrims were conveying for burial in holy ground, as well as a number of old men whom the Turkomans had not thought it worth while to carry off.”

We leave Sherifabad about seven o’clock, the heat being intense, and we perspire in the company of a great number of pilgrims, who mount the steep paths with the assured hope which we unfortunately do not possess, that the fatigue of their body will be compensated for by something tending to the salvation of the soul. After many ascents and descents we at last reach a sort of platform, from which may be dimly seen, amid the dust below, the

hollow of a deep valley, with a wall of grey mountains in the distance. The holy city is looked for in this direction, but it conceals itself from the gaze like the divinities of Olympus.

The van drivers slacken the pace of their horses. Sadik puts his pipe in his pocket, and sets his kalpak straight on his head; he looks very serious. The mollahs assume an air of additional piety; and the numerous travellers on foot form into a compact group. Suddenly the south-easterly wind tears asunder the veil which has enveloped Meshed, carrying it off in a sudden gust, and the domes of the mosques stand out, glittering like golden helmets; the minarets flank them on either side, like arrows; while beneath them is the mass of small square buildings in which the population dwells, overtopped by wide-branching trees.

Our Tartars stop their vehicles. Abbas, who was in the first one, bends his head in an attitude of deep devotion; Sadik, whip in hand, mumbles a prayer with his usual volubility, mixing up the names of Allah and Ali. His prayer does not take him a minute, and then he blows his nose with his fingers and fills his pipe. Abbas is still bent in prayer, while the young mollahs jump off the van to kneel down. Our man Animan does not get down so quickly as they do, but, like them, he places several stones one upon the top of the other as an *ex-voto*; but his devotion does not go beyond that, and he leaves the crowd of pilgrims in white turbans, who have gathered behind a *seïd* in a green turban, to invoke Allah, climbing back again to his waggon. The troop of pilgrims, after having made great demonstrations of piety, begin to move again, following the *seïd* down the hill, marching with very brisk steps and praying in a loud tone. Some of them apparently are singing—out of joy, no doubt, at being in sight of the holy city; others raise their voices in plaintive accents—sobs of grief accompanying their lamentations, excited probably at the thought of the martyrdom of Ali. His name, repeated a thousand



THE "BEST" OF THE IMAM RIZA AT MESHEH.

times over, punctuates this confused but noisy psalmody. Dervishes dance about like men possessed, one of them, who is now all in rags, having been very well dressed when we first saw him at Shahroud.

Despite all this noise, the Osmanli Hadji is asleep on the boxes, and he must be tired out, for no one was so busy as he was during the day in helping the vans out of the ruts, where the road was bad, hanging on to the horses' heads when there was a steep descent, and putting a shoulder to the wheel uphill. We do not go beyond walking pace, the mollahs climbing up to the van again, while on each side are numbers of pilgrims who make quite a din in saying their prayers. Further on, the road becomes very much better, and the horses are put into a gallop, but that does not prevent the fleet-footed dervishes from keeping up with us to beg for alms, entreating the Mussulmans to give them something. But Sadik, just before so contrite, has his kalpak set jauntily on one ear, and while the young mollahs pretend not to see the dervishes, he gives them a piece of his mind and threatens them with his whip, speaking to two of the poor pilgrims, who nearly get run over, in such impolite terms about their mothers that the people perched at the back of our van go into fits of laughter.

We are not long in reaching the walls of Meshed, which from a distance looked rather well, but which, as is so often the case in this world, did not come up to our expectations when we came close to it. The first thing we see are a number of tombs, amid which the road winds, and some of them are open, bones being visible among fragments of shrouds. Cisterns have been sunk in the middle of the cemetery, or more probably interments have taken place around a cistern, and the inhabitants have continued drinking the dirty and putrid water. The faces of the first people we meet are very unhealthy looking, and no wonder, while the passers-by generally do not look well.

We make a considerable detour in order to reach the principal street. When we have passed through the gate, after having satisfied the police of our identity, we traverse the courtyard of the palace occupied by the governor of the Khorassan, and meet a string of prisoners with chains round their neck, among them being several Turkomans, to be recognized by their head-dress. We then come to a filthy and dark bazaar, the shop-keepers in which have a sallow and underhand mien. We all come to the conclusion that we were much better off in the steppe, and how many a time afterwards did we repeat this opinion, first formed on May 26, 1886.

We do not intend to remain long at Meshed. Pepin has not yet recovered from his fall. Capus has only one arm cured, and he cannot bend the other properly, so a few days' rest are indispensable. In the meanwhile we organize our caravan and collect the necessary information for the execution of our scheme, which is to pass into Afghanistan by way of Guriane; to descend to Herat by the country of the Hazares; to examine these peoples; to make some botanical collections; and to reach Merv by the Kuchk.

Unfortunately we have to do with diplomatists, who put every kind of obstacle in our way. In one direction we meet with a point-blank refusal, while in another we are put off with half-and-half promises, which, I fear, are only intended to get rid of us.

We had leave to visit Meshed in detail, but the place has often been described before. All I need say is that Meshed is a holy city, which has been built around the tomb of Imam Riza, the fifth descendant of Ali. From his sepulchre there diverge three main streets, two of which are shaded by fine trees, planted at the side of a ditch filled with dirty and unhealthy water, which runs through the "best." The "best" at Meshed consists of a mass of monuments, built in honour of the Imam Riza, and of shops and

other establishments required for the sustenance of the pilgrims, mollahs, refugees, and other people living within the enclosure. No one has the right to enter unless he is a Shiite—an arrangement which is very convenient for Shiite debtors, and very inconvenient for Sunnite or European creditors. The finest mosque in Meshed was built by Gohar-Shah, a descendant of Timour, and not by a Persian prince.

The houses are built of mud, and are generally below the level of the street. A great part of the town belongs to the keepers of the sepulchre, the chief of whom is the most important personage in the town. The pilgrimage is a pretext for trade, as in the West during the Middle Ages, and the holy city is also a great commercial depôt. There are a great number of Russian Tartars, and they sell a great many goods from their own country, which come by way of the Caspian and Asterabad. The population of Meshed has not a very high character for morality, and did not strike us as being very favourably disposed towards infidels, though one cannot look for much tolerance in cities of this kind.



LEAVING MESHED.

CHAPTER VI.

FROM MESHED TO SAMARCAND.

Departure from Meshed—The Kchef—Vakouf and Shiite fanaticism—The scenery more and more like Central Asia—A dream at Muzderane—The desert—Daybreak—The heat—Persian Sarakhs—Russian Sarakhs—A modern Cecrops—We engage Menas—Night stages in the desert—Nothing to drink—The oasis—Merv—Meeting of two peoples—A nascent town—Still the desert—The railway—What is thought of the Turkomans—The Russians—At Samarcand for the sixth time—Projects.

WE hired mules yesterday, and engaged as an attendant, in addition to Amman, one of our late travelling companions, a native of Urmiah, all being now ready for a start. By daybreak we are all prepared, but our muleteers do not turn up, so we have to put it off till the next day.

At last we got off, the mules, well loaded, being under the charge of the men of Koum, who thoroughly understand their business. Pepin is carried in a litter in order that he may have time to get perfectly strong. When he gets to Merv, he will ride,

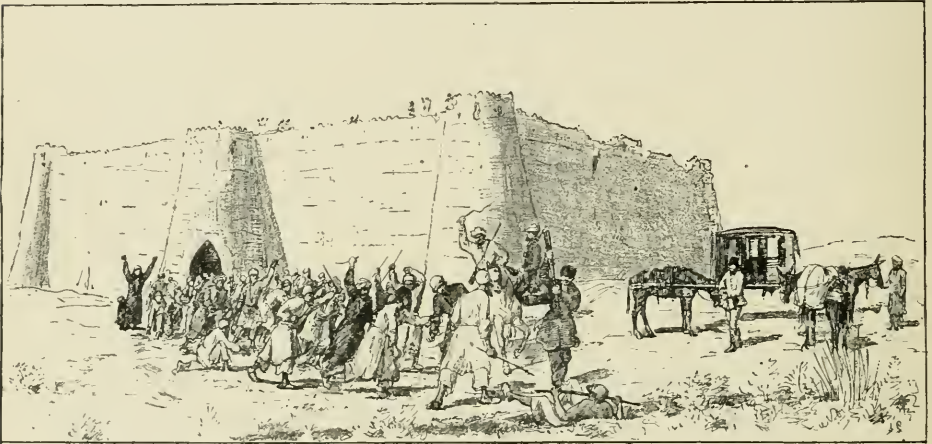
or at Sarakhs if he feels well enough. Capus and I amble along upon animals which we bought at Meshed. With what pleasure we march out of the holy city! When we get on to the caravan road and look back, the golden domes again glitter in the sunlight, and this dirty city has once more assumed its imposing aspect in the distance. We see it, of course, from the east, inasmuch as we are travelling in that direction. The dust is very deep, and we have to swallow a certain quantity of it, thanks to a troop of gipsies, who, mounted upon fine horses, are driving a number of mules, donkeys, and goats, before them. They have bright, burnished arms, but their clothes are extraordinarily dirty, while their wives, old before their time, very ugly and impudent, march along at a rapid pace, chattering in shrill tones all the time. The rear is brought up by a rather pretty girl, decently clad, and she smiles graciously to a hideous Tartar, who is paying her compliments.

The plain is cultivated, especially in the lower parts to the north-east; all the villages are fortified, and they belong, as we are told, to the guardians of the sepulchre in Meshed.

The cultivated tract ends, and we are again in the steppe when the road diverts from the Kchef, the ancient beds of which are almost the only bits of cultivation. Our stage is a short one, as first stages always are, and we halt at Karabuga, a vakouf.

Before reaching this village, our attention is attracted by a village in ruins, which is round in shape, like a dovecot, built of brick, and completely abandoned. In a niche there are some leaves of an old book, while a few butterflies are fluttering around an owl perched upon the end of a cornice, which one would imagine to be stuffed if his eyes did not blink now and then. The owner of the place appears to be a ventriloquist, who excites the public curiosity by his way of snoring from the inside of the underground cell which he has had made, and in which he leads the life of an anchorite.

Karabuga is a vakouf of the Imam Riza, as we soon find out, for Amman is expelled from the village, inside the gates of which he had penetrated. He tells us that he was loaded with insults when he asked if we could have a lodging; and reproached for taking service with infidels, which is regarded as an act of infamy all round Meshed. While he is explaining all this to us, a number of men swarm out of the fortress, like wasps which have been disturbed come out of their nest; and then a stream of people began to bear down upon us, howling, gesticulating, brandishing cudgels and making for Amman, who at once put a cartridge into



ALTERCATION AT KARABUGA.

his rifle. This precaution appeared to have its effect upon the vanguard, for there was a brief halt, and this gave time for an enormous young man, bare to the waist, to push his way to the front. Amman brought his rifle to bear on this man, who was armed with an enormous club, and whose face was convulsed with the fury characteristic of the raging madman. But he had not lost his head entirely, for he first hesitated and then drew back to the edge of a ditch in his rear. Amman pushed him into it with the muzzle of his rifle, and the man, though less furious in his gestures, began to howl louder than before. As the crowd continued to show great excitement and to proffer threats and insults,

we come forward in order to rescue Amman and to distribute a volley of blows with our whips among the crowd. The women, who are behind, squall and dance about more than the men. Our intervention brings about that of the mollahs of Karabuga, who come forward in their white turbans and pronounce words of peace. The populace disperses, but not without a great many shouts and gestures of defiance. The scene is a very remarkable one, and it is witnessed by a great many spectators grouped upon the walls above.

We encamp near the river, the water of which is not perceptibly salt, despite the saline efflorescences on the bank. We are close to the path by which the men and women come down to the river to fetch water, and we are masters of the situation, as this will enable us to obtain from these fanatics the indispensable provisions which they might otherwise refuse us. What a fuss they make over a few pints of milk, which we only obtain after half an hour's negotiation, and finally by using threats. And when Amman hands to the vendor the few coins representing the value of the milk, the latter says—

“Put them on the ground.”

“Why?”

“Because I cannot touch the money which has been sullied by the hand of an unclean man. And you are impure, for you serve the infidels.”

Thereupon the Persian put his foot on the coins and rubbed them in the dust in order to remove their impurity; after which he picked them up. The same scene was enacted every time we made a purchase. All this valley of the Kchef appears fertile, and quite capable of feeding Meshed, as, in fact, it does.

After leaving Karabuga, the road follows the Kchef, and upon reaching the point where the river has not room to spread itself out, and has just managed to find its way between steep banks,

there is a sudden cessation of cultivation. To the right and left of that portion which can easily be irrigated extends the barren steppe, and to fertilize the soil, which is very much above the level of the water, would demand an amount of industry which is not to be expected of people who have no great or pressing needs.

Upon the left bank, to the north-east, are fortified villages, with watch-towers on the summits. Capus and myself, having lost our way, meet some Tamuri men who are pasturing a large flock of goats and sheep, with a great number of horses. They speak Persian, and live beneath shelters consisting of pieces of felt placed upon stakes driven into the ground. Upon returning westward towards the Kchef, which we ought not to have quitted, we meet several more of these Tamuri, and their dogs fly at our horses and bite them in the hind legs. We reprimand their owners, who only call them off when they see us beginning to beat them. The excuse which one of them makes is a very good one—

“Why should he not bite you? He is a dog.”

Evidently, in his opinion, dogs were made to bite.

We reach the village of Keïchidar very thirsty, after nine hours on horseback. Our baggage has not arrived. We see a number of idlers collected under the porch, and after having duly saluted them, we ask for some skim milk, which we offer to pay for. They tell us that we shall have it at once, but after waiting a quarter of an hour, we see no signs of it. We ask again, and are assured that “it is coming;” but as, after waiting another ten minutes, we do not get any, I take out my watch and explain to the three principal men in the band that unless we have the milk in less time than it takes to walk round the fortress they will be punished. They at once give orders to that effect, and there is a stir like that of an ant-heap upon which one has trodden, the women shouting, the children swarming upon the

housetops. But the time appointed has lapsed, so the three men whom we had picked out are flogged, and they at once bring us such large bowls of milk that Capus and myself cannot empty them, though our carriers who came up just at this moment, are not long in doing so for us. We encamp in a field near the village, and as our baggage no doubt raises us in the esteem of the inhabitants, we are beset by the very same men who would just before have left us to die of thirst, while the one who got the worst beating comes to beg for presents and for medical remedies, endeavouring to secure our sympathies.



A BUTCHER AT KEICHIDAR.

At Keichidar, we pass the night under too abundant a dew to please us, for we sleep in the open air, leaving on the 11th of June for Muzderane. At first we follow the Kchef, and we are at once struck by the similarity of aspect between this valley and that of Tchotkal, which we had visited five years previously, to the east of Tashkend and to the north of the Ferghana. We feel that we are in Central Asia. We see the same terraces at the foot of the hills streaked with sandy granite, the same schistose soil crumbling away and peeling off in thin layers. Near the water's edge are bushy rose-trees, while in the centre of the

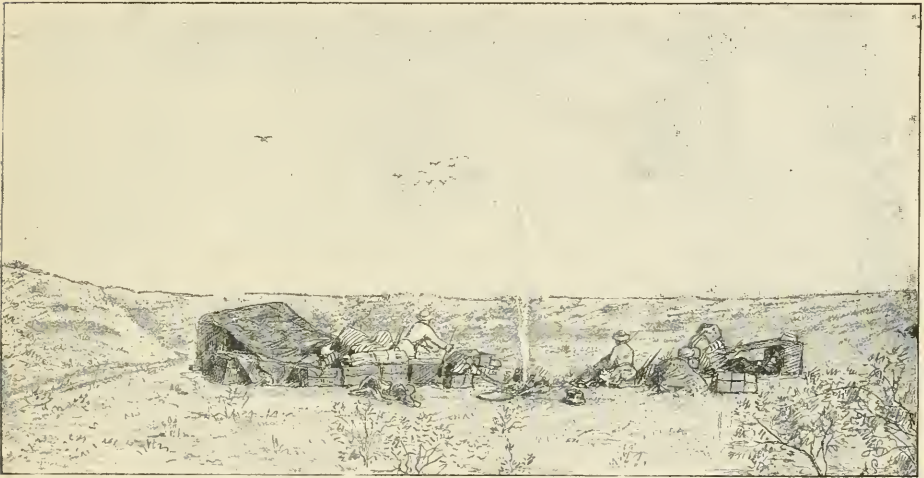
stream are islands with an abundance of thickets, willows, poplars, and larches. There can be no doubt about this being the Arabo-Caspian plain. There is geographical unity, but not that of the people. The physiognomy of the ground and its nature do not suffice to make up all these aggregates. A greater force of agglutination is required; and, moreover, these great deserts do not form a bond of union between agglomerations of men.

We cross the Kchef near an abandoned fortress. It is quite in ruins, and is no longer inhabited by warriors, but by pigeons and partridges, which fly out of it at our approach. Having followed for some distance the left bank of the Kchef, we bend to the north, being still in the steppe, which is bounded by denuded hills. We meet Turkomans, on their way to Meshed, driving horses before them instead of Persians, as upon a previous occasion. Suddenly we come in sight of green slopes, trees, and a ruined castle; and this is Muzderane, which is romantically situated close to a fountain of excellent water. We sit down beneath a willow-tree, and the mules enjoy the grass, while we appreciate a cup of tea made with water which has not the salt taste so noticeable since we left Meshed. A heavy storm of thunder and lightning then comes on, accompanied by torrents of rain, which swells our stream to a torrent in a trice and inundates us in no time. But the sun soon shines out again, and the wind drives the clouds over the mountains. I go up to the castle, which was formerly closed by a thick door. This has now disappeared, and nothing is left standing but the walls. The fortress seems to me to have always been short of water. It is commanded from the east, and must always have been easy to capture.

It is built upon a promontory surrounded by ravines, except to the east, where a narrow pathway winds between the stones. From the top of the ramparts the view is, after the heavy storm has left pools of water which glitter in the light, a very grand one.

It seems as if a sea had been transformed into an undulating desert, and had left pools of water in the depressions of the ground. The horizon is bounded on all sides by lofty mountains. There is no sign of life, though to the west a line of thick mist just above the level of the soil, like the breath of an invisible being lying outstretched, is faintly perceptible. This is the moisture rising from the Kchef.

On descending from the fortress, I feel a sensation of expanding and of softening, as a tow-line does when exposed to the sun.



ENCAMPMENT AT MUZDERANE.

Everything here seems so pleasant. Under my feet there is abundance of grass for the animals, and the perspective of sour milk ; the water is fresh, not salt ; the fortress is falling into ruin, so that there is no fear of war, and life seems worth living. I hum a tune as I approach the camp, my head full of these benevolent fancies, and my eyes looking into vacancy.

I am called back to the realities of life by the imprecations of one of our muleteers, who has suddenly gone off his head, and has been biting a recalcitrant mule by the nose.

We had a very heavy dew to-night, and we were not sorry to

warm ourselves by a good walk. So we started at daybreak, and, after climbing the stony road leading to the pass of Muzderane and casting a last look at its wild scenery, descend towards the valley of the Tedjene. We are still in a desert intersected by hills, upon the highest of which herds of antelopes and gazelles keep watch. At sight of us, they give the alarm, and the whole troop of them trot off along the summits. Sometimes we come upon them feeding in the valley, at a turn in the road, and it is curious to see them bound off, disappearing in an instant. The route is a monotonous one, with hills or crumbling rocks on each side. Whole blocks have rolled down from the summit; the crests are jagged, and embankments have been formed by the continual crumbling away of the soil. After a long march in the sun, we halt at the foot of some rocks half-way down. Further below us runs a river, which is almost lost amid the quantity of rose-trees on its bank, in the branches of which thousands of birds are chattering. The water is salt, but about an hour further on we come to a tiny stream, the water of which is very passable, so we fill our leathern bottles and flagons, water our mules and horses and drink a good stoop ourselves, lying flat on our stomachs, with the water laving our noses.

We were very thirsty, not having found a bit of shade except that of the blocks of rock or the surface of the horses' bodies. We shall send to fetch some more of this water at night, and our men will not grumble at the job.

Three Turkomans then come and encamp near us, and they are on their way to sell leather at Merv. For merchants, they are very poorly clad, wearing a shirt and cotton drawers and a frieze cloak full of holes. I had forgotten the tall head-gear, and the coarse heavy boots with no heels. They water their horses, and eat their evening meal, taking the precaution first to make their horses sweat by galloping them for a short time. Their

meal is extremely frugal, consisting solely of inferior tea, which they sip out of a cup, each man taking the cup by turns. Seeing me look at them, they ask me to join their banquet; so I taste the tea, which is made of half putrid water which has been shaken about in a new leathern bottle which has not lost the taste of grease. The Turkomans have stomachs like dromedaries, and can digest anything.

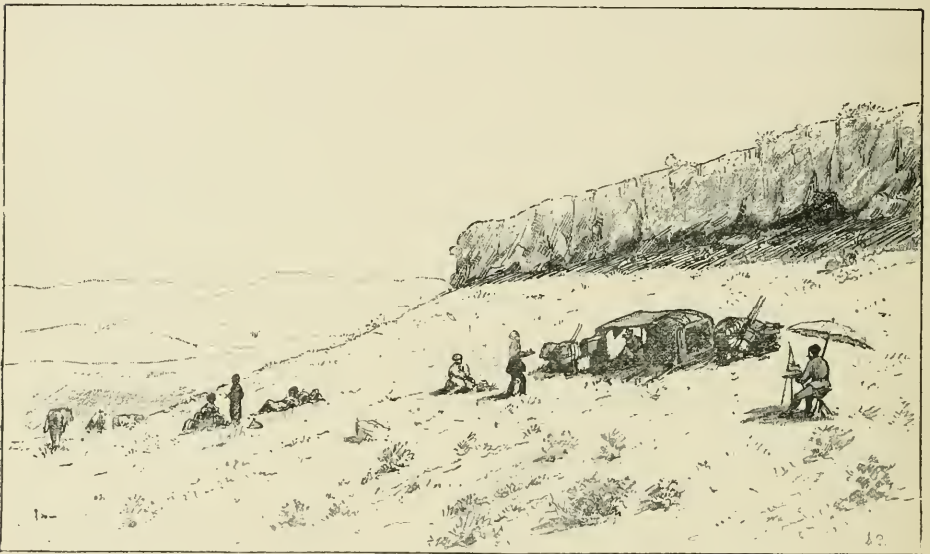
By the time they have finished their tea it is seven o'clock, when they stretch themselves out to sleep on the ground, so as to be ready for a start at ten. They reckon upon travelling all night, and arriving at Sarakhs at three o'clock—that is, just when the sun is hottest. They will do all this long stage without eating; and their last meal, consisting of bread and rice, was partaken of at Muzderane at eight in the morning. They show us their empty wallets, so there can be no mistake about it. We give them a little rice and some scraps of meat, which they seem thoroughly to enjoy.

Is it not wonderful to find men going nearly thirty hours without food? and what fine soldiers they would make! It is true that we are in the middle of summer, which to a certain extent accounts for their sobriety.

We start in the morning, following the stream beside which we had encamped. The damp banks bear the footprints of some feline animal like a panther, which has been attracted, no doubt, by the antelopes and gazelles. Our stage comes to an end when the river has ceased to be anything more than a pool of stagnant and muddy water; and as it is the last we shall encounter before reaching the Tedjene, we take advantage of the circumstance to let our horses graze and to water them while the heat is still intense. The plain is not far off, and the steppe or desert will extend all the way to Bokhara, beyond the Oxus, “like a true carpet of gratitude,” to use the favourite Persian phrase.

We pass the afternoon under the shade of a tent improvised with our wraps, and the thermometer marks, about two o'clock, 95° F. in the shade, but there is a refreshing wind blowing from the north.

Before nightfall, we resume our journey. The herds of gazelles are numerous, and some of them, comprising several hundred head, stop a long way off, look at us, and then gallop off over the hills, raising a cloud of dust in their flight, more rapid than that of the wind. Then the night sets in very dark, and



AN ENCAMPMENT.

we advance silently in the steppe, no other sound being audible save that of the crickets. Every now and again a shadow flits by, with a sound of branches brushed aside. This is a gazelle which we have startled from its sleep, and which crushes the tamaris under its feet as it jumps up. After midnight we stretch ourselves out for a short time on the soil, but we soon jump up with a start, fearing that we have overslept ourselves, and on we go again. At last the pale dawn glides from beneath the sable hangings of the night, and gradually rolls them up before us.

The plants on the steppe stand out like trees, then the horizon lights up, the sky is tinged with silver, and we revel in the pure light of the first hour of the day, announcing the coming of the sun, which suddenly shines out and effaces the deep obscurity above more rapidly than fire consumes the thinnest gauze.

Things around us gradually recover their true proportions, and as we proceed, we see cultivated land, straw huts, water in the ditches, with men, women, and children moving about around their dwellings. Near the Tedjene are a number of ruined towers; they are all about the same distance apart, and they were at one time connected with the square fortress, with gaping walls, from which emerges a white house, above which floats proudly the Persian flag. We go through the fortress under the shadow of the hovels clinging to it. A few soldiers are sitting about, and they present anything but a brilliant appearance; some of them are cutting up a sheep, another is digging, while another is coming in with a handful of grass. At the exit gate a sentinel is whiling away the time, out of the sun, behind the shade of the large gate made of thick planks. The other men on duty are asleep, in their shirt sleeves, under the porch.

Upon the banks of the Tedjene we await the arrival of our baggage, which is some way behind us. The waters of the stream are turbulent and muddy, with a very rapid current. There is an island in the middle of the stream, and on the opposite bank we can see men in white blouses, who do not look any bigger than children. The baggage is transferred to camels, on account of the depth of the water. As it will take some time to get it all off, I start upon a reconnoitring expedition, and I notice on the Russian side the straw roofs of the hospital. Close to the bank, further up the stream, to the south, are the tents of the Cossacks, with their horses picketed close to the river. A soldier tells me that the *gorod* (town) of Sarakhs is at the

extremity of a dusty road going east. I follow this road, thinking, as I go, of the route we have just travelled over, of Persia, so devoid of unity, with her deserts and oases, and her population devoid of all national spirit; and I cannot help reflecting that the Russians, whose empire begins again here, close to Herat, must have said to themselves, after visiting this country, that it was like a body without any soul, with neither the resolution nor the power to offer any resistance to any one, and that it was at the mercy of the first who chose to strike a decided blow.

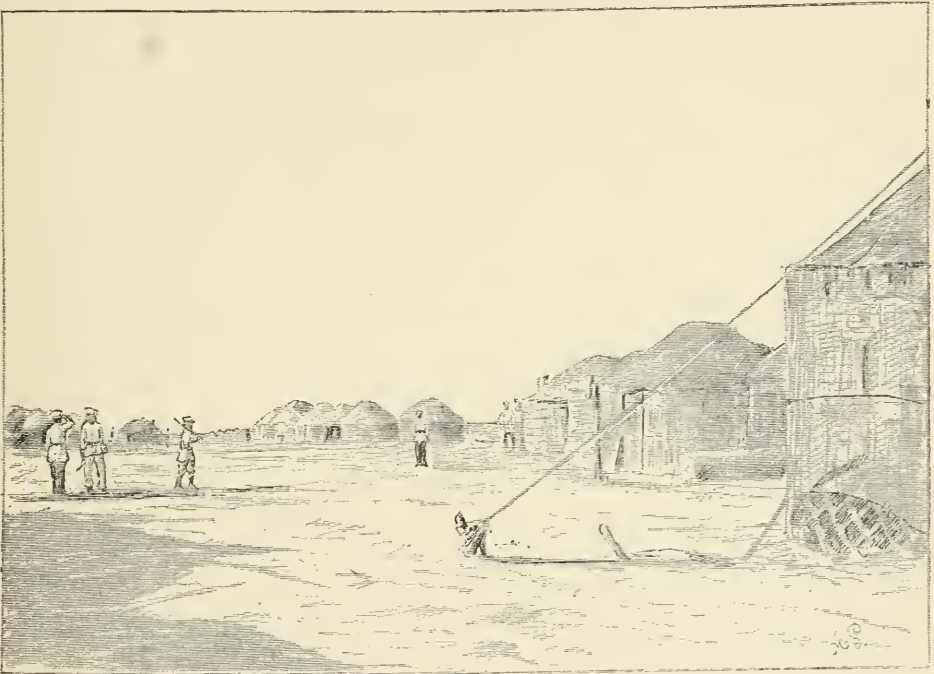
About twenty minutes' walk from the hospital, to my left, is a very large white tent, surmounted by a cross. This is the temporary church, and outside stands a soldier on guard. Then I come to the long row of huts, with a continual coming and going of soldiers, from one of whom I inquire for the commander of the garrison. He points out to me a white house to the right of the road, at the corner of the principal street, which will soon be lined with houses if the building goes on at the present rapid rate. Turkomans are making bricks, pounding mortar, and doing masonry work, in company with the Russian workmen, despite the heat of the sun.

The commander of the garrison is Colonel Salza, who at once offers us hospitality with a Russian cordiality all the more charming after the Persian obsequiousness or fawning, just as sweet water is all the more acceptable after the brackish water of the pools in the steppe. It is arranged that we shall make a brief halt at Sarakhs, and that to-morrow, after visiting an interesting mosque on the right bank, we shall start for Merv.

The new town consists, at present, of two parallel streets, the principal of which is named after its founder, Baron Salza, with whom we have a very pleasant breakfast. While in Turkestan, we have more than once found ourselves at table with the founders of cities, and we have never had any reason to complain of these

modern Cecrops. We had got it into our heads somehow that the man who taught the Athenians how to cultivate the olive, after having bestowed a city upon them, was a rather disagreeable sort of person, and concluding from the particular to the general, we were inclined to take the same view of his imitators. This is what often happens to people who pore over books, and it is one of the reasons why travel does one good.

At the end of this first main street, near the soldiers' huts, are



SARAKHS.

a number of shops below ground, half cellar half hut, which seem to command plenty of custom. The articles sold there are those which soldiers require for repairing their uniforms and keeping them in order, as well as "vodka" and wine from the Caucasus. The second street, which is newer and narrower, is inhabited principally by Armenians and officers. Here the shops are numerous, but small, and among their contents are pyramids of tinned meats

and sardine boxes, together with bottles of very curious shapes, representing wild beasts, etc., and filled with liqueurs of various strange kinds. There are no milliners' shops, but then there are so few women. There are a few tailors sewing, by the aid of machines in the doorway of their shanties. Thus it will be seen that in newly founded towns, the first of things to be sold are articles of food, drink, and clothing, and those which follow immediately after are not articles of common use. When once he has procured what is indispensable, man hankers after what will amuse him as a rule, and this is easy to be obtained in most cases.

From Sarakhs, we send a telegram to Askhabad to inform General Kamaroff of our arrival and present our compliments to him. While awaiting the reply, which will be equivalent to permission to continue our journey, we go to see a mausoleum which is said to be that of Cain, upon the right bank of the Tedjene. It is a monument presenting very few features of interest, and it is in a very dilapidated condition. We spend the whole day (the 13th) at Sarakhs, and have an opportunity of seeing the troops at our leisure. They are a fine set of men, the battalion of our host being particularly good. If they are as good at bottom as their external appearance would lead one to suppose, they would be capable of achieving great things under the command of such officers as Baron Salza.

We engage a Turkoman who is to carry upon a camel two barrels which the major of the hospital has lent us for storing our water. We at the same time engage a man named Menas at the suggestion of our host; and Menas, though an Armenian, cares more for adventure than for commerce, and does not set much store by money, spending it as fast as he earns it. He comes with us, without quite knowing where he is going, and promises to follow us to the last. It seems that he has taken

a fancy to us, for he makes up his mind at noon, at one o'clock he sells his shop to a friend, and hands the deed of sale to the baron, asking him to receive the money for him and give it to him upon his return. An hour later, he comes to us with his big Turkoman horse and at once begins to assist in the preparations for a start. Amman is to remain behind and go to Askhabad; we do not keep him because he does not suit us. The man from Urmiah, who is a pretty good cook, but desperately lazy, will accompany us as far as Merv.

Upon the evening of June 16th we start for Rukhabad, the old Turkoman Sarakhs, where we are to get a supply of water from the Tedjene, as there is none to be had between there and Merv, a distance of eighty-five miles, and the heat is very great. At Sarakhs, the thermometer had been as much as 123° F, in the shade, and to-day it is 115° F. It is easy to imagine how parched with thirst the most temperate of men must feel in such heat as this. In addition to the two barrels, we fill a number of leathern bottles and several gourds covered with felt which are suspended to the saddle.

The chief of the town who has received us with the greatest possible affability, joins Baron Salza and accompanies us a little way. Before parting, we halt in the steppe and drink, to our own health and that of our respective countries, a few bottles of wine which the colonel's cossacks produce from their knapsacks. While we are drinking these toasts, a horseman, whose figure looms very large in the mist, comes up at a trot. It is the aged pope (or priest) of the battalion, who is returning from his usual evening ride, being in the habit of taking a ten or twelve mile ride before going to bed. He says that it is good both for his horse and himself.

Upon the colonel asking him to drink to the health of the Frenchman, he says: "The French and myself are very old

acquaintances. I saw some of them in the Crimea, and very good fellows they are."

The old priest carries his three score years and ten right gallantly. His tall figure is not the least bent, though for the last forty years he has seen many a battlefield. He wishes us a pleasant journey and a safe return, and so we mount our horses and, with many a God speed exchanged, ride off in the darkness.

At Rukhabad, we halt near the stream. The Russians had originally made it their head-quarters, but the water is so bad that they lost a great many soldiers. They accordingly moved their camp and town to its present site.

Yesterday we lost our cook, and he was only brought back to us at ten o'clock this morning. We shall not start till sunset, as it is impossible to travel during the heat of the day, the thermometer standing at 115° F. about two o'clock.

After a final cup of tea, we start about six p.m. The wind is blowing from the N.W., the north wind coming from the chain of the Kopet-Dagh. What thirsty work it is, even now that the sun has gone down, and to make matters worse, the wind brings to us—half asleep as we are—the murmur as of a waterfall. We dream of fresh springs, and upon opening our eyes find ourselves in the most arid of deserts. Rodents of various kinds dart across the road like so many balls, and the crickets keep up their constant cry, never seeming to get hoarse, though they have nothing to drink.

At one o'clock we are obliged to halt. Men and horses stretch themselves out on the sand, being alike eager to sleep. The water in the gourds is boiled, and then the tea is got ready. Menas and Pepin, who have not yet laid down, cannot drink it, and I am the only one who does not throw up the cup he has taken, but I cannot manage a second. I hear some one calling, and about two hundred yards back I find our Turkoman standing

beside his camel and the two barrels of water. One of the ropes has broken, and the whole load has fallen to the ground. I hail Menas, and the three of us manage, with great difficulty, to lift up the two barrels, each of which holds nearly seventy gallons of water. To-morrow, we shall not find a drop anywhere. The Turkoman tells us our muleteers would not lend him any assistance, and he indignantly denounces "those dogs of Persians." At four o'clock we make a fresh start, and again we see the field mice and other rodents, hear the joyful notes of the cricket, and feel the scorching wind. When the sun rises, the rodents disappear and the crickets are silent, while the larks greet the dawn with a hymn shorter than usual, being displeased with the sun which burns like a furnace as soon as it has got above the horizon. About nine o'clock, we reach the smooth surface of a takir, which would make a splendid course for velocipede races. A mirage bars the way, and we fancy that we can see a numerous caravan moving along. It is in reality our muleteers unloading the baggage. It is just nine o'clock, and the wind has gone down as the sun rises higher.

We eat, and drink, and sleep till five p.m. under the shade of our baggage. At two o'clock the thermometer stood at 104° F., at six o'clock only at 95° F. So, feeling comparatively cool, we made an immediate start. We had been encamped near the ruins of Kus-Khan, which consists of the remains of a cistern, with a cupola, which has fallen in.

It was amusing to see the muleteers, who had refused to help the Turkoman load the barrels, crying *peccavi* and entreating us to give them water, which we could not refuse to do, for though they did not deserve any, their mules would have been the sufferers. At eleven p.m. we meet a flock of sheep, and get a drink of milk. Then we meet some horsemen, who hail us in French. They are headed by Lieutenant Dennisoff, who stops and drinks tea with us, and talks to us about Teheran and Paris, where we find that

we have mutual acquaintances. We are treated to some excellent water, and part company at midnight, the lieutenant kindly offering us the use of his lodgings at Merv, where he tells us that we shall not find many. He tells us that at Tachrabad we shall find that the waters of the Murgab have overflowed the road.

About seven a.m. flocks of ducks, pigeons, eagles, falcons, and partridges pass over our heads, and we see them alight in the



TURKOMAN AND HIS DONKEY.

low ground, where the water is, and we soon come to the ruins of a caravansary near a pond covered with waterfowl, which were drinking and washing themselves. We encamp upon the bank of the *aryk* (canal) through which the water comes into this pond, and having had a copious breakfast, we drink and then bathe. The wind blows from the north-east, the birds disappear, the dust rises in clouds, and the sand strikes us full in the face. This lasts till five p.m., and the thermometer, in the shade and exposed to the wind, stood at 105° F. about midday, and never fell below

100° F. We sleep with our heads under our cloaks, but still, thanks to the excellent water, the day passes tolerably well.

About six we start for Merv, and at one a.m. we hear the dogs of the aouls barking. The air is laden with fever, and we are upon the edge of the oasis in the marshes formed by the inundation of the Murgab. We fill our kumgane with an evil-smelling water; we light a fire with pieces of wood taken from a partially demolished bridge, and take a brief rest, our horses browsing on next to nothing. We wait the break of day before resuming our journey, as we have been marching by guesswork since Tachrabad, Menas not being able to remember the direction.

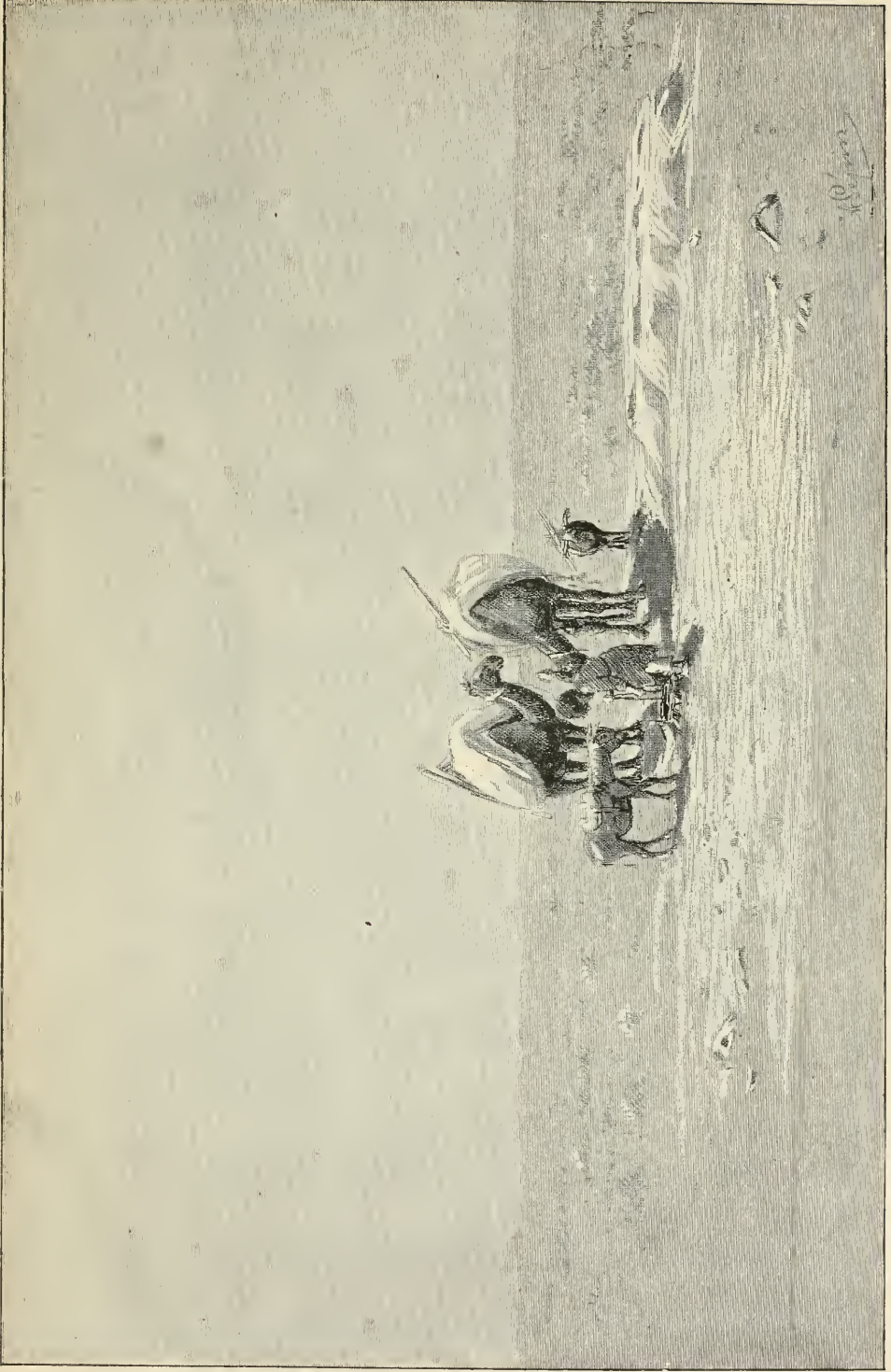
At daybreak we can see a great many tents and plenty of water. The oasis is well cultivated. The tents are erected in rows upon the embankments raised above the canals. The inhabitants wake up, and all of them—men, women, and children—bathe, as do the cattle and horses. We see a great number of them bent in prayer as we go along the dusty road. The sun is again very fierce, and the air is heavy and moist. We pass a great many arbas, camels loaded with bricks and forage; while, upon approaching the town, we see Turkomans busy brickmaking. The men are tall, bony, and thin; they have a large straight nose, thick lips, small eyes, the proud and leisurely carriage of warriors, of men who do not regard work as an honourable thing. They do not walk with a quick nervous tread, like labourers going out to their day's work. We enter the city, which was concealed from our view by a belt of trees. It is enveloped in dust, and almost burnt up by the sun, and nothing but the smell of sulphur is wanting to make one fancy that one is close to the mouth of a solfatara.

In this burning whirlwind one encounters an activity which is quite bewildering when one has just emerged from the absolute

solitude of the desert. One hears shouts and calls, orders being given, and disputes of every kind, while all around waggons are being loaded and unloaded, and building is going on; Russian masons, with their long hair, having as helpmates Turkomans in linen drawers, or Tartars with their hair flattened over the temples. In one place a zinc roof is being put up, in another foundations are being dug out, and the men who are digging have a layer of mud, diversified by streaks of sweat, upon their almost naked bodies. There is quite a din of carpenters' hammers and pick-axes, and building materials are being conveyed in all directions. We pass a number of Turkomans, with sandals on their feet and the *pil* (shovel) over their shoulder, while others are riding a donkey or a horse, with the shovel thrust into their waistbelt like a sword. These were men employed upon the railway. We recognize Cossacks, Persians, Armenians, natives of Bokhara, and well-dressed Jews with corkscrew ringlets down their cheeks and fur-trimmed caps on their heads. Wherever we go we see people drinking out of flagons or gourds, and everybody is in a sweat. We are brought to a momentary stop by a block of vehicles, a fact which seems very strange after so many miles travel in the open. When one reflects that there were not, a dozen years ago, ten tents on this spot, it is clear how great has been the inroad of one people upon another. It seems as if there was a determination to have a town built in spite of all obstacles and without a moment's delay.

Two streets have been finished, and our lodgings are in one of them, the servant of Lieutenant Dennisoff taking us in directly he sees his master's letter; for, though he cannot read, he recognizes the hand, and that is enough for him.

These two streets run from east to west, starting from the Murgab, the inundations of which have already demolished all the houses built close to the left bank. The houses have only one



A THIRSTY GROUP.

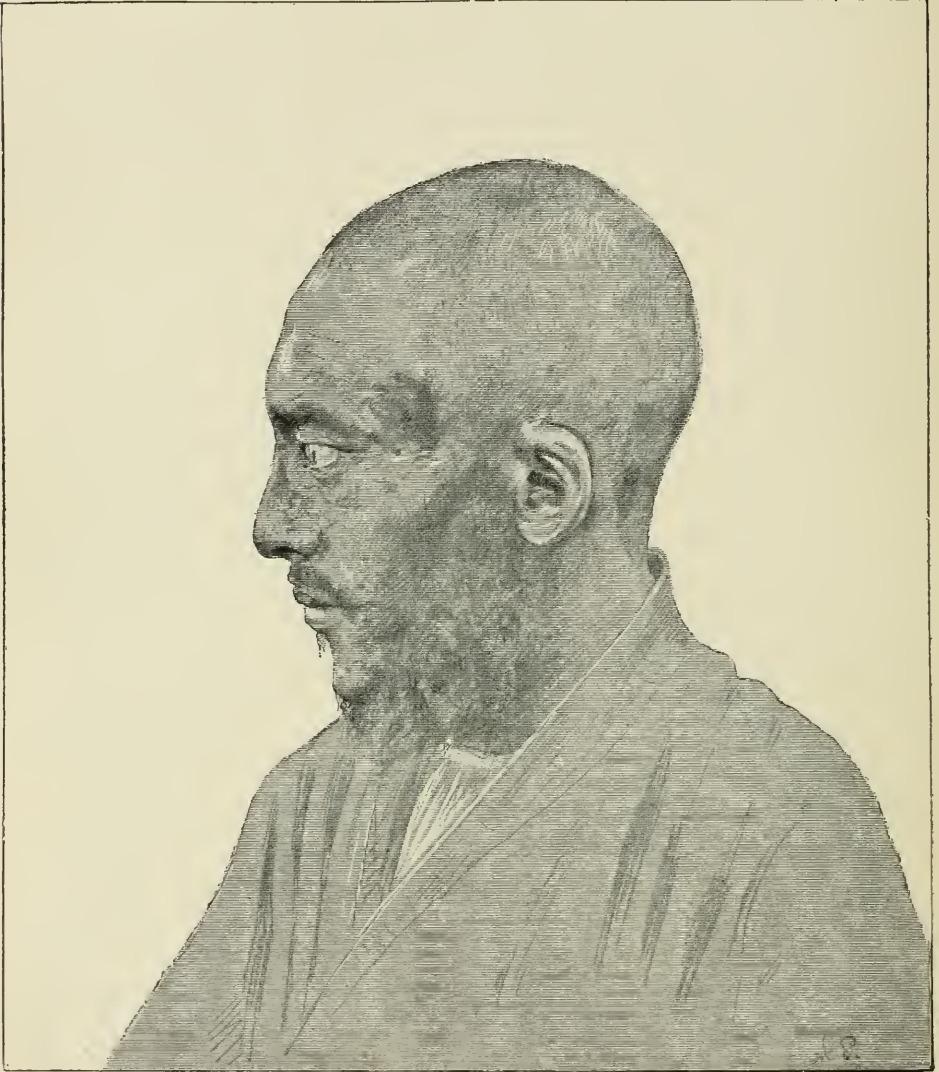
story, with flat roofs, built of clay, and bricks from the old town of Merv. They nearly all belong to Jews, who alone of the natives accepted without hesitation the Russian dominion, and set themselves to build without delay. They were, moreover, almost the only men with any capital.

The dwellings are very hot, for we notice in the "old" part of the town that the inhabitants are asleep on the footpath, in the shade of the houses. A fat tailor, of Germanic aspect, has just been woke up by the sun. He has nothing on but a pair of drawers, and knocks with quite comical hurry at the closed door of his house. A ferry leads to the right bank of the river, where are built the barracks, and the church, with its sheet-iron roof and its tower, much broader at the base than summit. Large houses, intended for the heads of the army and the chief civil officials, are in the course of construction. They are Russian in style, and are built of bricks baked in the kilns, of which the smoke is seen rising on the banks of the Murgab, upon which the combustible used—brushwood and reeds—is floated on rafts. The conquerors are evidently settling themselves in for good.

We think of making our way into Afghanistan by the valley of Kuchk. Hearing that a Russian scientific mission is about to start in the same direction, we let it go on in front of us, and we soon learn that it has been unable to pass the frontier. We then endeavour to obtain information as to the possibility of going by Andkhai direct, but we are unable to organize this expedition. In the meanwhile, and with the heat still very great, we visit Askhabad, where General Kamaroff receives us very cordially, and shows us his recent numismatic and archæological collections, which we should much like to see in our museums.

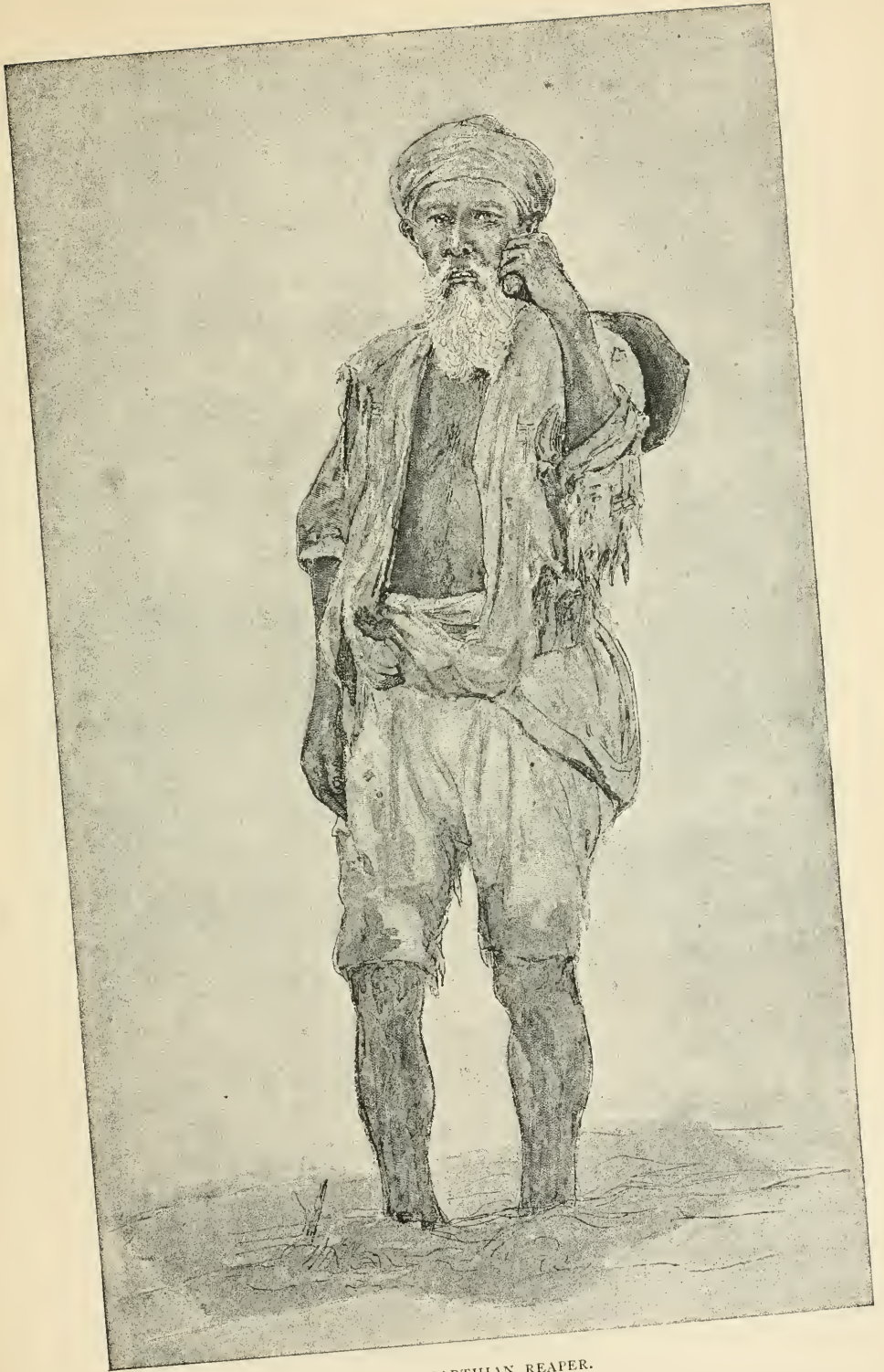
We saw the Russians at work upon their railway, under the energetic superintendence of the indefatigable General Annenkoff, aided by engineers, among whom we find a compatriot in M.

Lebrun. All my readers know by the newspapers how rapidly this railway was made, and, after seeing the Russians at work, we were surprised at their great endurance. Upon the 14th of July,



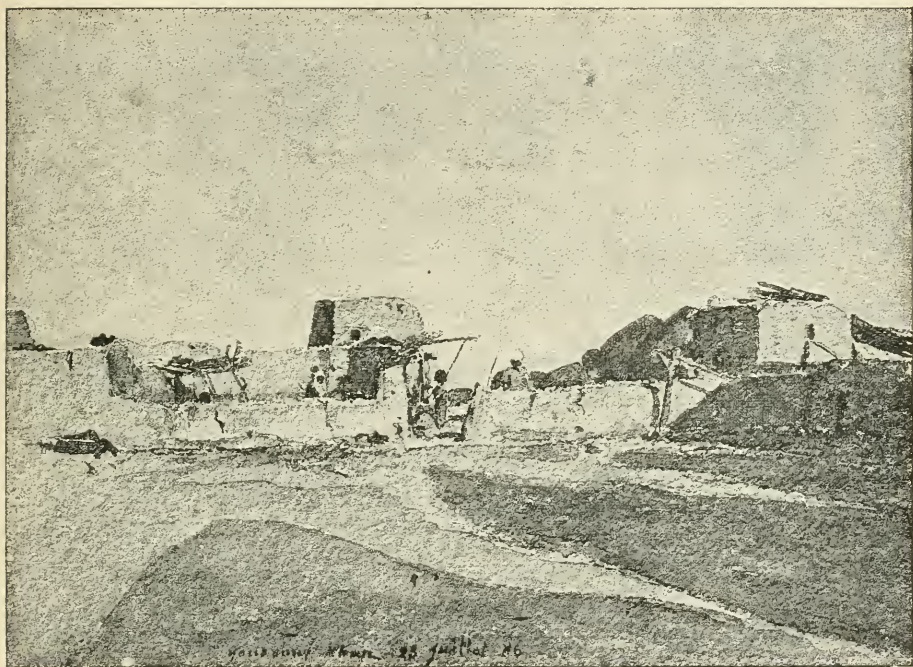
TEKKE TURKOMAN KHAN.

the first train entered Merv station. The town had increased wonderfully in a month, and a music-hall was already opened. The inauguration of the railway was celebrated by banquets and



A SARTHIAN REAPER.

horse races, and all the Turkoman tribes had sent representatives to take part in the rejoicings to which Alikhanoff had invited them. He had first of all called upon them to submit to him, and now he was acting as their administrator and riding at the head of their troops. We joined in the rejoicings, and drank to the continuation of the enterprise at the same table as our friends of the previous day.

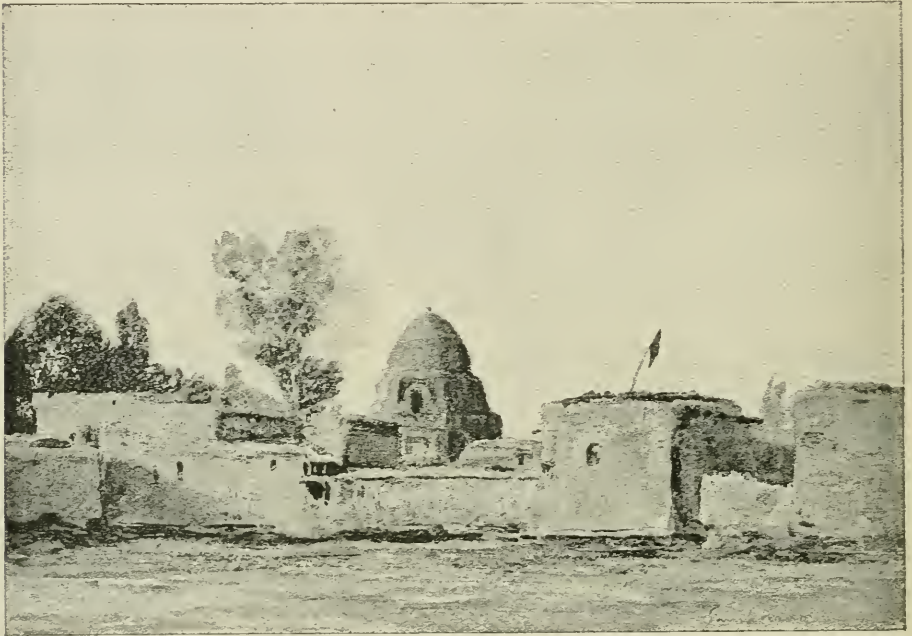


YUSUF KHAN.

We will not attempt to give their names, as we might omit some, and that would seem invidious. All we can say is, that we received universal kindness at Merv, which we left on the evening of July 22nd, after visiting the ruins of the ancient Mervs.

When these lines see the print, the railway will be open to Samarcand, by way of Tchardjui and Bokhara. We went on horseback, carrying our baggage on camels, in the heat of summer. The journey was a most trying one, for we were obliged to travel

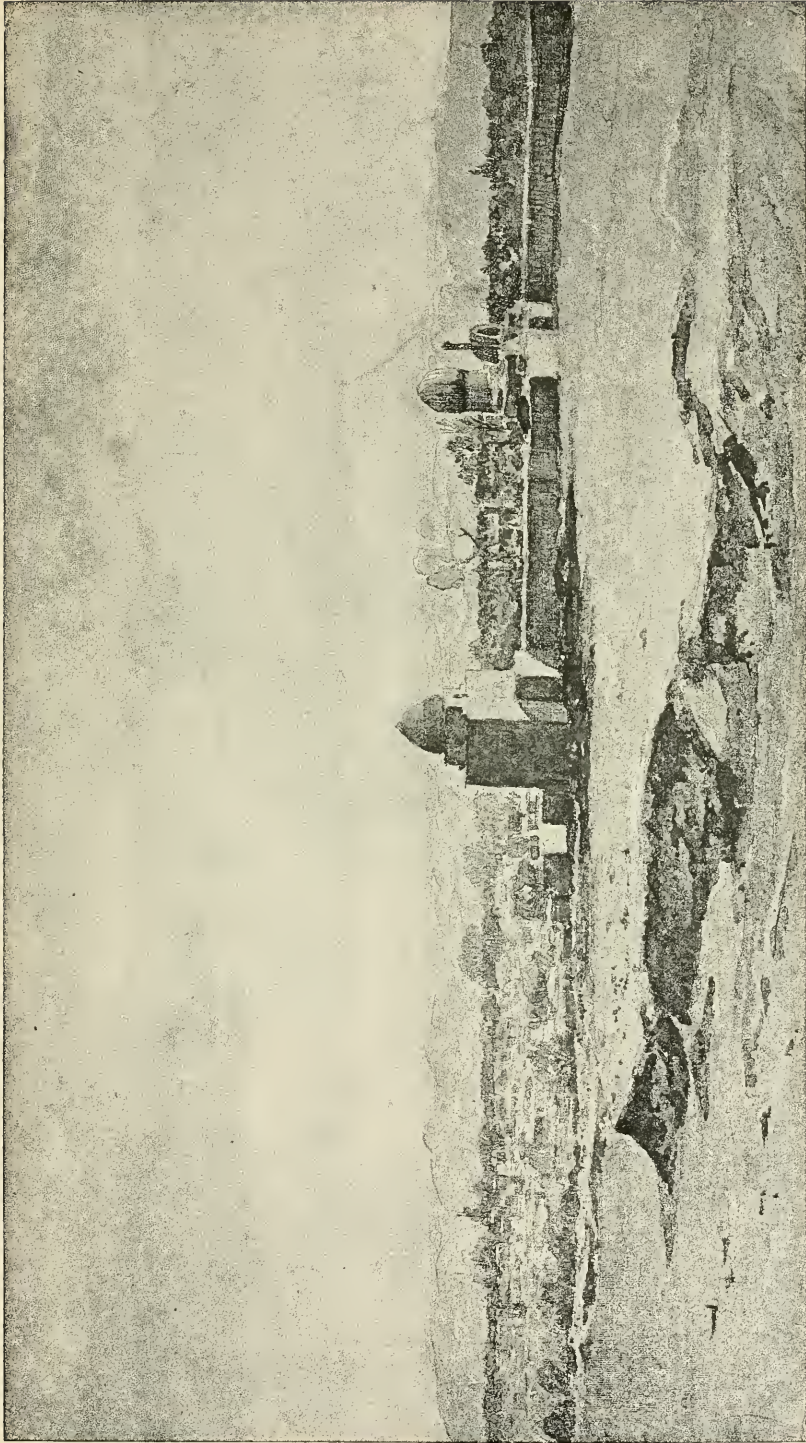
part of the day and all night. It was only when within a day's march of Tchardjui that we found any water fit to drink, at a place called Repetek. Upon the 25th of July, the thermometer reached nearly 115° F. in the shade, and the whole time we were scorched by a burning wind from the north. Several natives had died of thirst in this district, and work had to be suspended. In the night of July 26th, we lost ourselves in the sands, despite our



HOUSE AND TOMB AT SAMARCAND.

Turkoman guides, who were very well qualified for this work. It is almost impossible to form an idea of the difficulty of crossing a desert like this in the month of July, and no one can tell better than we how invaluable the new railway will be. Upon the night of August 13th, we reached Samarcand, after a halt at Tchardjui and another at Bokhara.

I need not describe the route from Merv to Samarcand, as all one has to do is to take a railway ticket at Merv and get into the train. If you are thirsty, you go to the restaurant car and



SAMARCAAND.

order what you want. There is no need, now, for leathern bottles, barrels, camels, and guides. This is better than it was in our time, though I should be sorry to accept the situation of station-master at the well of Utch-Hadji, even with the salary of a prime minister, nor would Capus or Pepin be any the more ready to take it. Our first stage finished at Samarcand, and we are once more in Russia.

The Russians have established order in Turkestan first of all,



SARTHIAN WOMAN.

then in the Ferghana, and finally in Turkomania. Merv was captured without a blow being struck, thanks to the strategy of the chiefs of the province of Akkal. The Tekkes were made to understand the might of the Russian empire; they were won over by good treatment and by presents opportunely distributed, their khans being propitiated in this way. The troops of the Czar took possession of the Maour of the ancients, and since their arrival there have been no more Alamans, no more slaves sold,

and the Turkomans are gradually accustoming themselves to the novel situation. The more turbulent among them form a sort of militia, and those who were noted for their plundering propensities are employed as guides and messengers. Many of them took part in the struggles of Kuchk and Pendeh, and they now find that they are treated like brave men, as they are led out to fight side by side with their adversaries of yesterday, and against



A SARTHIAN THEATRE MANAGER.

whom? Why, against their hereditary foes, the Afghans. It did not take them long to see that of all the peoples surrounding them, the Russian people is the best and most honest; and as it is also the strongest, and as it respects customs and prejudices, and gives offence to no man, the Tekkes have taken the hand which was held out to them, and do not look back with overmuch regret to the past. The poor, however, of whom there are a



STREET DERVISH.

great many, are discontented, as the raids of the Persians were a means for them of balancing their budget, while now they are reduced to profound distress, and are obliged to till the ground. They want water, which the Russians will provide for them, as they have already done seed when it ran short. As long as they can get water, toleration, speedy, stern and equitable justice, and have their taxes levied fairly, the people of Central Asia do not, as a rule, ask for anything more than this, and the Turkomans, it is to be hoped, will get what they so well deserve.

My readers will perhaps be surprised to hear me speaking of men who traffic in human flesh as being worthy of esteem. But such is nevertheless the truth. The European who leads a sedate life, in the midst of a well-ordered society, in which there is no lack of policemen and laws, who reads his newspaper after breakfast, takes a long time deciding upon a coat with his tailor, and who has been brought up in the idea that man is a highly respectable being whose happiness ought to be the aim of all his fellow-men, naturally imagines that a Turkoman is of necessity ferocious, sanguinary, and vile, that he is a wolf, and that the human beings he sells are as inoffensive as sheep.

But the Russians will tell you that, with rare exceptions, the Turkoman is gentle, affable, and hospitable, very frank, and true to his word, while his victims are the most lying of men. They can only be compared to the negroes of Senegal, who either serve or combat the French troops so loyally. I could say much more in favour of the Turkomans, who have been given a bad name, which they do not deserve. They have the sterling qualities of the Turkish race, than which none has been more calumniated, and which merits better treatment.

The Turkomans are very much liked by all who know them, and I hope that the Russians will set them a good example. This is, I think, our fifth visit to Samarcand, and after sending off

our collections made *en route*, and some letters, we shall endeavour to make our way into Afghanistan and Kafiristan, and so to India. The reader, who has accompanied me so far, may at once be told that our great wish is to reach India overland, and I will do my best to interest him during the remainder of the journey.





A BAZAAR SCENE IN SAMARCAND.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM SAMARCAND TO THE AMU.

Arrival at Samarcand—Projects as to Afghanistan—The departure—Story about the fever at Yakabag—By the Sanguirdak to Hissar—Nomads at the close of summer—The Lullis—Karatag, a story of the past—Cabulis becoming land-owners—A new era—Agitation in the public mind—A claimant to the throne ; his residence ; his fate—The valley of Kafirnagane.

WE reached Samarcand this morning (August 12th).

We left Katti-Kurgane at midnight yesterday in a telega, into which we all three managed to squeeze. Throughout the whole night we were jolting over the deserted and dusty region which precedes the rich oasis of Samarcand. And as true pleasure is always the reward for some discomfort, before enjoying a cool temperature while lolling in the shade by the brink of babbling waters, we swallowed an enormous quantity of dust.

It is true that we had some compensation, the night being so fine and so luminous, almost like day, that it did not demand a great effort of imagination to fancy that the moon was gradually becoming a sun. The dust which did not find its way into our

throat, blocking it as sand does a river's mouth, undulated behind us in immense columns and shone like silver. The landscape was very grandiose but simple, with the plain, the moon, the vault of heaven, and a profound calm brooding over the vast solitude through which our telega took us.

By daybreak we had passed the first village, fed by the waters of the Zerabchane, and, with the sun already scorching hot, met on the dusty roads among the canals of the oasis, its rice fields and its trees, the battalions of Russian sharpshooters returning from the grand manœuvres. They were marching with the supple and measured tread of men accustomed to travel long distances. Then Samarcand appeared to us enveloped in mist; we passed through the suburbs and were lost beneath the thick arcades of verdure in the Russian quarter.

We found comfortable quarters in a straw hut, in the Botanical Gardens, which are under the direction of one of our old acquaintances. We remain at Samarcand just long enough to pack up our numerous ethnographical collections, to complete them, and to write our letters, then getting ready to continue our route—that is to say, we long to discover some way of getting into Afghanistan.

The report of our arrival has got abroad in the city, and at the hour of the siesta we received a visit from our former followers. First of all there was that worthy fellow Klitch, neat as usual, active and black-bearded, despite his advancing years; then came Abdu-Zaïr, obsequious as ever, and Rachmed, who had accompanied us during our last journey as far as Tiflis. He is delighted to see us again, and kisses our hands with much emotion. When I ask him if he will come with us, he says that he will send one of his brothers to fetch a horse which he had left in the mountain, and which will be just the thing for such a journey. He does not ask what his wages are to be; he has retained a pleasant recollection of his masters and will accompany them anywhere.

We tell him that we propose to go to India by way of Afghanistan, Kafiristan, and other inhospitable countries.

He says that he does not mind that as long as there are *tamacha* (festivals or amusing sights), and that his brother shall go and fetch the horse. After having drunk some tea with Menas, he makes off.

Rachmed is known at Samarcand and enjoys a certain reputation in the djiguite circles. We commission him to recruit two or three of them who have already crossed the Amu and who will be able to act as guides in Afghanistan-Turkestan.

Several come to see us, and we offer them very high wages, quite five times what they are in the habit of getting. They hesitate, and ask for time to consider the matter, finally refusing on the ground that they will be risking their lives, that they know of many who have been into the Afghan country during the last few months, but that they do not know of any who have come back. "It is nice," they say, "to earn a good round sum of money; but it is not so nice to lose one's head."

So we shall have to be content with Menas and Rachmed in the way of a regular army, and we shall recruit some irregulars on the way for the conveyance of the baggage. In Asia, there is never any lack of loafers and men with no occupation, who are ready for anything, in the bazaars, and we shall be able to attach them to our persons all the more easily because they are often on point of starvation. Hunger draws the wolves out of the wood.



OUR SERVANT MENAS MAKING UP HIS MIND.

On the 13th of September we leave Samarcand in the evening, and go to spend the night at Amman-Kutan, in the midst of splendid plantations, due to the energy and perseverance of General Karalkoff. This work, commenced during the lifetime of General Kauffmann, and warmly encouraged by him, was interrupted during the sway of the governor-generals who succeeded him, and it is a great pity that such should have been the case. There are now superb clumps of trees on the slopes where nothing but rank grass formerly grew, and the flanks of the mountains, before bared and denuded by streams which were not regulated in their course, are now fertilized by fresh springs which the roots of the trees so judiciously planted keep chiefly underground. The site would be a delightful one for a sanatorium, which the Russians might easily erect at the gates of Samarcand.

The next day we cross the pass of Tachka-Karatcha, with which we are so familiar, and it is dark when we descend towards Bokhara, the frontier of which is marked by the sky-line of the chain of mountains. It is very difficult to advance in the dark, for the steep path is full of loose stones or else crosses very slippery rocks. Capus, who is trembling with ague, will not soon forget this bit of road. On the 15th, we change horses at Chahr-Sabz.

To-day (the 16th), we start for Yakabag, on the sides of the mountain. Entering a valley, we see to the north, on our left, the remains of a ruined fortress upon some knolls which compel the river to make a bend at this point. The walls of the fortress wound round the sides of the knoll which they formerly enclosed and the extremity of which is now visible in the distance. A flock of goats was browsing there, one of them being perched on the top of the wall like a sentinel. Upon the left bank of the river, facing this knoll, the village of Yakabag is built upon the slope of a higher hill, and from the bottom of the ravine, the top

of a minaret, which glitters as if covered with enamel, rises into the sky. In the further distance, the mountains, shrouded in a slight mist, lift their heads, and Yakabag is very like Granada in its way.

The water of the river is abundant and cool, and as our baggage is a long way behind, we wait for it on the banks, ladling out the water with our hands, and drinking as much to pass the time as because we are thirsty. The more I see of Yakabag, the more I think it like Granada, the plain we have crossed being as fertile as the huerta of the Spaniards.

We see a horseman coming out from the town, and upon his



IN SIGHT OF YAKABAG.

getting up to us, he says that he has been sent to meet us by the beg, who is confined to his bed. He is very old and wrinkled, and is riding a very poor horse. He asks us to follow him, and goes on in front without saying a word. Another horseman is waiting for us on the opposite side of the river. He salutes us, extends a bony hand, bows, and without opening his lips, puts himself at the head of the troop, stooping very much over his horse's neck. The new-comer is yellower and more decrepit than the first horseman.

As we approach the village, we see cows, without any one to look after them, grazing upon the slopes, and in the bazaar all the shops are shut. Beneath a porch, a number of men crouching

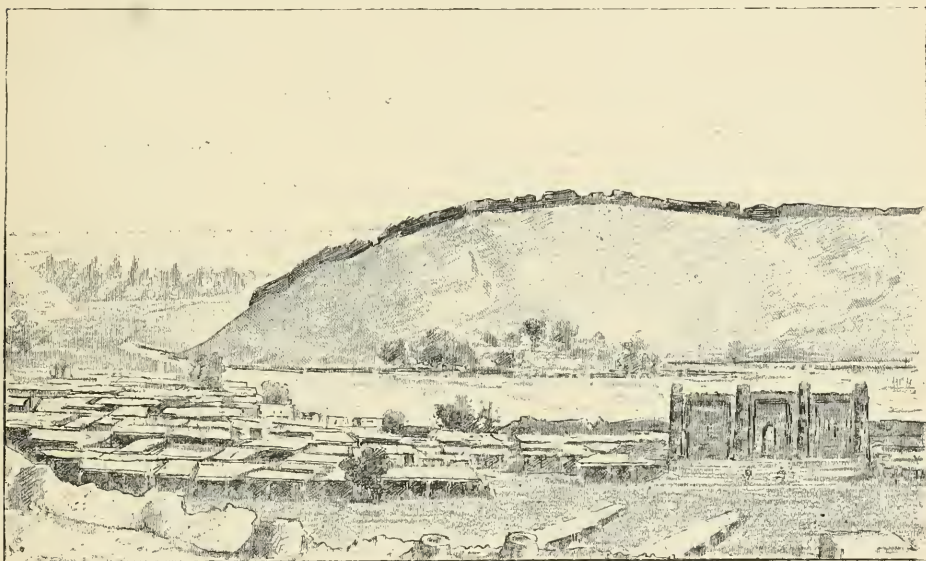
like animals on their haunches, with sallow and apathetic faces, just cast up their eyes as we pass, but do not move. There is no one in the streets, and no women peep through the half-open doors, nor are there any children on the roofs. As the path ascends, we see a medressé, but it has neither roof nor windows; there are no students in its courtyards, nor is the sonorous voice of any mollah to be heard there. Pigeons are flying to and fro above it, and a number of jackdaws have their home among its walls.

On reaching the platform in front of the fortress, we see no sentinel at the gate, which is open, though two or three men, with sombre and sunken faces, are standing about. There is evidently a lack of soldiers, for there are more arms hanging from the walls than there is any use for. The guns have no fuses, and the pointed lances of the *caraouls* (watchmen) are covered with rust.

In the grand courtyard, the beg is standing upon a terrace, supported by two of his servants, having left his bed in order to greet his guests. He does so in a weak voice, and looks as if his chin had scarcely the strength to bear his long white beard; his fingers are as thin as claws, and the skin is quite transparent. He has a hooked nose, his skin is more wrinkled than that of a mummy, and his cheeks as hollow as those of a corpse. His frame trembles under his long pelisse, and the men who are holding him up do not look to be much better. After giving us a welcome, he is carried back to bed.

From the top of the ramparts the eye rests upon the delightfully verdant plain, winding among bare hills, which form a circle around the fortress. This circle opens in a south-westerly direction towards the plain where Chahr-Sabz develops the sombre mass of its oases, preceded by green plantations dotted here and there like outposts about a camp. The sky is purple, the mountains in the horizon assume a violet hue, and the river at our feet runs red, like blood.

There is no smoke to be seen issuing from the roofs of the houses upon which we look down, and the only living beings to be seen are a woman unloading a donkey, a picketed horse lying down, and a man upon a housetop saying his prayers, as rigid as a statue. No sound of life is audible. The walls of the fortress have cracks which make it appear as if they might collapse at any moment, while the nests of the storks, whose droppings have spattered against the wall, are all deserted. Upon a level with the eye, there is nothing visible but bare hills.



YAKABAG.

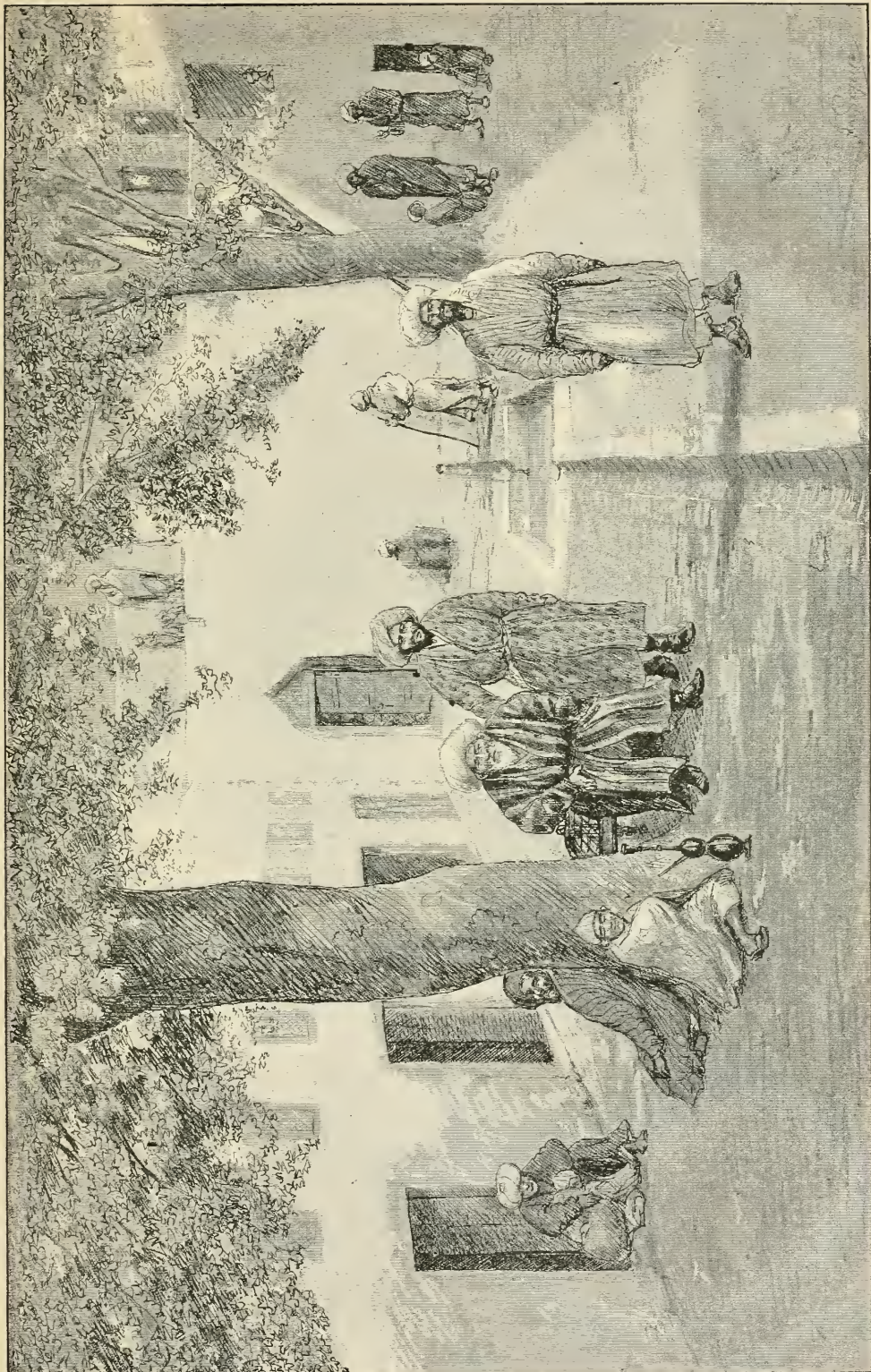
We return to our chamber, situated between the main courtyard and the garden, where some large plane-trees overhang the stagnant water of the cistern. The *mirakor* (master of the stables) comes to see us, and he has only one eye and trembles all over; then comes the *mirza* (scribe), who complains of pains as he puts his hands upon his stomach, his back, and his legs. He is accompanied by the youngest son of the beg, who takes a watch out of his pocket, and asks us if its time corresponds with ours. There is a very great difference, as we find. He explains to us how he

puts on or puts back the hands, for he has some notions of astronomy, and a table showing the rising and setting of the sun, compiled by Ulug-Beg, the great khan. We ask ourselves whether perchance, we have fallen upon some enchanted palace, or whether we have suddenly awakened the contemporaries of Ulug-Beg out of their long sleep.

Every one asks us for some remedy, for every one is ailing. An invisible mollah breaks the silence by a call to prayer—a brief call, without an echo, mournful as a death song. Where can we be? It occurs to us to inspect the fortress, and we find that it is inhabited. In the rooms which we thought to be empty, we see lying about in odd corners, rolled up in pelisses or frieze cloaks, human beings who are evidently alive, for the cloaks heave. Near the kitchen, under a sort of shed, about twenty individuals of various ages are stretched out full length or are crouched down, gazing into vacancy. I come back into the room, and there is no sound to be heard in the fortress, nothing but the falling of the dead leaves from the plane-trees. Nothing can well be more lugubrious. All of a sudden, there is a sound of slippers flopping along the brick floor, and these slippers belong to a ragged and ill-kempt boy, who has got a tray of bread-cakes on his head. He is the baker to these corpse-like beings. One might fancy that some evil deity had breathed corruption into the blood, and had frozen the marrow of the inhabitants of an accursed palace.

Night comes on, and the tom-tom of the watchman resounding at long intervals sounds like a funeral bell.

Is this all a dream? Not so—the fact is, that during the summer the village is evacuated. But an epidemic of fever has occurred at Yakabag, and the sufferers from it have assembled in the fortress, while the rest of the inhabitants have fled with their flocks to the mountain. The fields are not cultivated, and the town is as deserted and silent as a cemetery.



COURTYARD OF A PALACE AT YAKABAG.

This morning, with the sun shining brightly, flocks of crows are croaking above the fortress, and below, a few human beings are moving about near their dwellings, like insects attracted out of their holes by the heat of the day. We are glad to leave Yakabag, guided by the same old Uzbek who had come out to meet us yesterday. He is more communicative, perhaps because we are going uphill, and so getting further away from the fever.

After leaving the gardens where the apricot-trees are very numerous and the djedda fruit nearly ripe, we gossip together as we ascend the valley. I question the aged Uzbek.

“Do you belong to Yakabag?”

“No; it is a miserable place.”

“Where do you come from?”

“From Baissonne, with the beg, in whose service I have been all my life.”

“Why did he leave Baissonne?”

“Because the new emir sent thither his eldest brother, the Toura of Kissar.”

“Is that the toura who, according to custom, should have been the emir?”

“Yes.”

“Is it right that his younger brother should have taken his place?”

“No; the custom handed down by one’s ancestors ought to be respected.”

“Who helped the present emir?”

“The Russians, it is said. Moreover, his father, before his death, selected him as his successor.”

“What do you think of the Russians interfering in the matter?”

“I think that the Russians have done a service to the country, for at the death of an emir there are always a great many

competitors, the different sons are never agreed, and Bokhara, distracted by many pretenders, is always more or less convulsed."

Then the old man, who has had enough of questioning, cuts the conversation short by saying that what God has done is well done.

In the evening we arrive at Kalta-Kul, situated to the north of the valley, which runs east. We passed through several villages inhabited by Uzbegs. The bed of the river, which is more than half a mile broad, is partly cultivated, and there are rice-fields, clover-fields, poplars and willows, with large herds of cattle in the meadows. There are a great many walnut-trees along the roadway or around the cottages, while at Kalta-Kul, where the fertility and the fever alike cease, at an altitude of about 4900 feet, there is a large growth of grapes with very long berries, much inferior, of course, to the Fontainebleau Chasselas.

The population is Uzbeg, and it is miserably poor, living in much the same manner as the Tadjiks of Kohistan, to whom we paid a visit when we were travelling in this region before. Like the latter, they spend the summer in making preparations for the winter. A similar state of things has imposed upon people of a different race the same conditions of existence. It is in the mountain more especially that one finds this to be the case; it would seem as if mountain-life shaped men in one mould.

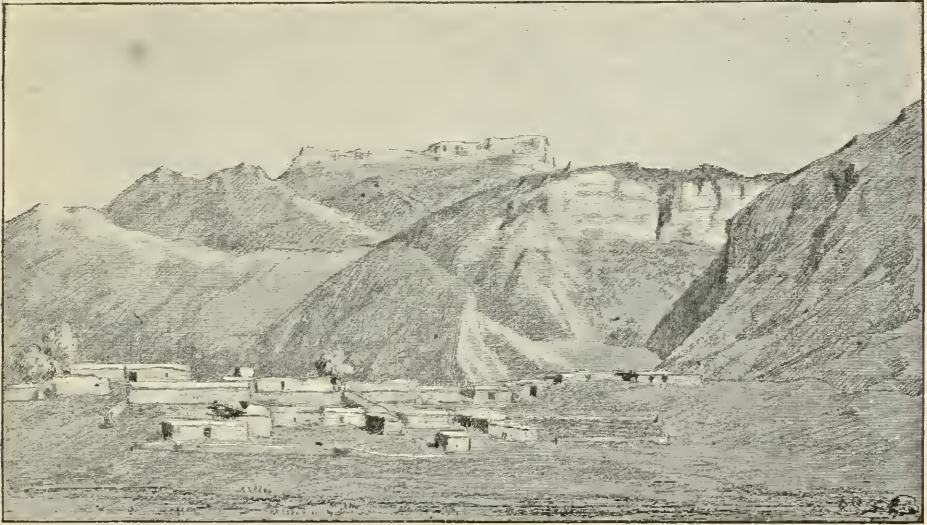
Upon the 18th, we sleep at Tashkhurgan, at an altitude of 6550 feet, remarking that barley was grown almost up to this altitude, though it was very short and thin.

Upon the 19th, after going over a pass about 13,000 feet high, we arrive by very steep paths in the narrow valley of Sanguirdak, the waters of which flow down into the Surkhane, and thus we have crossed the Hissar chain.

Upon the 20th, after a rather colder night in the open than we had bargained for, we rest in the village of Baktcka, which lies hidden in a gorge and is inhabited by Tadjiks, who take fright at

our appearance and fly in all directions, leaving their dogs to receive us with anything but hospitality. In the afternoon, we go to encamp under the superb plane-trees of the village of Sanguirdak, on the public square, and while we are putting up our tents, some gipsies who are encamped close by come to watch us, Pepin's camp-stool exciting great merriment. Sanguirdak is a village partly Uzbek, partly Tadjik, a proof that the plain is not far off.

Upon the 21st, we descend to Dahana, an Uzbek village con-



TASHKHURGAN.

taining a few Tadjiks. We wade the river several times, and we notice smoke issuing from the flanks of the mountains, a number of people inhabiting the grottoes, of which they have made their summer dwellings.

On the 22nd, by way of the broadening valley of the Sanguirdak-Darya, we reach the valley of the Surkhane, the approach to which is indicated by the tall columns of smoke caused by the grass that is being burnt. At Saridjui, we halt near the residence of the chief, under a plane-tree which is about thirty-seven feet diameter at six feet above the ground, and upon the banks of the river

Tufalanque, the sonorous name of which signifies that it is wont to swell suddenly and rush violently into the plain. Delicious trout are caught in it.

Upon the 23rd, we quit this delightful spot and cross to the left bank, where we find ourselves upon an elevated steppe. To the north, the mountains are hidden in the clouds, with heavy rain falling. As we come out into the plain we meet Uzbegs who are following the same route as ourselves, but more slowly. They are coming down from the *lailag* (summer encampments) on the mountain, and are about to settle into the *kichlak* (winter encampments) of the valley, where they put up their tents between four walls, as much sheltered from the wind as possible. They travel in sets, each family forming a group, and some are poorer than others, so that social inequalities exist even among the pastors.

The men ride on in front, driving the cattle, cows, and horses before them. The eldest of their sons accompany them, and they are all mounted, the poorer upon oxen, which have had a ring run through their muzzle, with a cord passed through it to guide them with.

The lambs, the goats, and the calves are under the charge of the younger children, who are Mogul in appearance, like their fathers, and whose cheeks are blue with the cold of these September nights. They are armed with long poles and shod with loose boots or leather abarcas with the hair left on them. They wear the cast-off clothes of their fathers, and these clothes, if clothes they can be called, do not fit them, the sleeves, when any remain, being tucked up, and the skirts doubled up and tied with horsehair to the waist. Some go bareheaded and others wear a *tepe* (conical cap) or turban which has never been washed.

But they have regular teeth, as white as ivory, and their dark chests stand out, looking sound and strong beneath their rags. If

they have not fine worldly prospects, Allah has vouchsafed them the best of health.

They go quietly along, though they look rather startled when they see our eyes fixed upon them, giving a cut of the whip to the animals which lag behind, and whistling incessantly to their flock.

Further behind come the women, mounted on donkeys, the oldest first, with the aspect of the dread Persicaa. A young mother on foot, with an infant child, is holding on to an ox,



ENCAMPMENT AT SARIDJUL.

which has a wounded goat tied on to its back, while the goat's kid is in a bag placed on the back of a donkey, which a pretty little girl about eight years old, with a wild and shy look, is riding. Her mother is giving suck to a new-born child as she walks along.

We pass other Uzbegs who are better off, whose wives, nicely dressed, are riding handsome horses and chatter like magpies. Horsemen are driving before them troops of stallions, while rough-haired dogs are keeping flocks of sheep together. They raise a cloud of dust, and though the sky is overcast, the heat

is very torrid. One would never think that it was the dread of winter which was driving these people down into the plain.

But the swallows have been gone for some time, the storks have deserted their nests and are no longer to be heard snapping their beaks from the summit of the mosques, and summer is drawing to a close. The autumn in these countries is very short, and the pasturages where they encamped for the summer are used up. This is the best proof that it is time to prepare for winter. Moreover, the eagles are hovering over the valley and preparing to start, though they need be less in a hurry to do so than the other birds, for they are sure to light upon a dead horse, a wounded kid, or a stray lamb bleating after its mother.

We turn to the left and skirt the spurs of the mountain, having to our right the cultivated valley, with rice-fields watered by the Surkhane, and we pass through an encampment of gipsies, who are to be seen wherever one goes, and who all seem to have the same occupations. These dwell beneath a very primitive shelter of reeds and tents—two poles bearing up a piece of cord tied to stakes, over which is stretched a piece of cloth. A number of brown-skinned children, quite naked, are playing about. They have a great many horses, which they clog, by putting an iron chain round their forelegs, and they adopt this precaution because the natives regard them as intruders and would not hesitate to steal their horses if they wandered too far from the encampment. The women, with their breasts wobbling as they go, are running about to keep the cattle from straying, tapping them with poles which they carry over their shoulders like rifles. They are dressed without any regard for elegance, wearing a long linen chemise, loose drawers, and a handkerchief tied at the back of the head, with bare feet. This is the dress of the women of the country, but in a very *negligé* style.

These Lullis make sieves and cradles, which they trim in very

bright colours. They are not at all unlike the natives, especially the Tadjiks, and many of them have the same kind of eye, the cornea touched with pigment, as among the Hindoos, while a few have the small Uzbeg eye. Here, as in other places, the women are not notable for their conjugal fidelity.

Upon approaching Rigar, the rice-fields are very numerous, and the country is very rich, owing to an abundance of water. Here we see painted thatch roofs, as in the Talich, upon the



LULLIS.

shores of the Caspian Sea. We question the inhabitants as under—

“Does it rain in this country?”

“Yes.”

“Much?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t suffer from fever?”

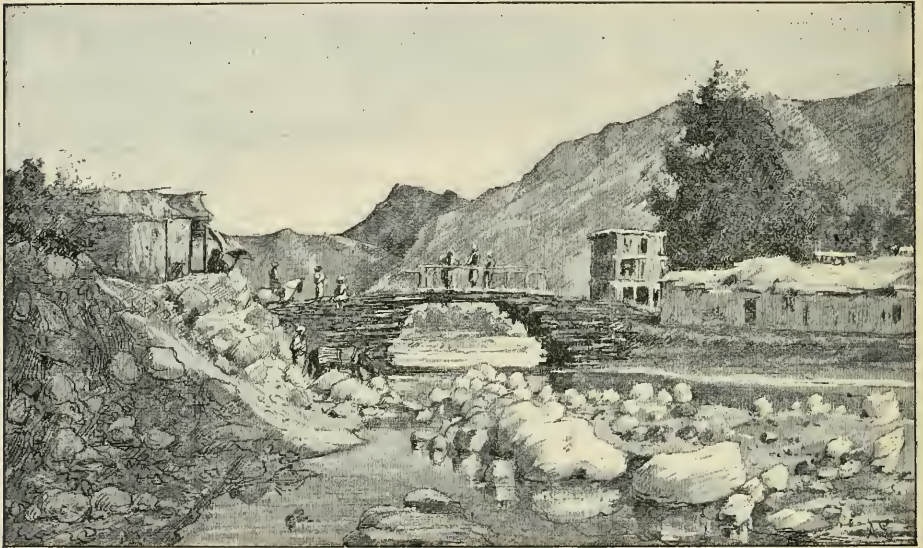
“Yes we do; very much.”

In Central Asia, as elsewhere, when one comes to a region where the rainfall is heavy, the roofs are very steep; here, moreover, the rain, while contributing to the richness of the soil and of

the inhabitants, also entails fever, which is the reverse of the medal.

After a halt at Rigar, a large village peopled by Uzbegs and Tadjiks, we trot along, as soon as we have left the cultivated district behind us, upon a winding road which threads its way among the chalk hills and reminds me of several deep roads in Champagne.

Karatag being at the entrance of a gorge in a valley, we pass through a narrow defile which reminds Menas of a certain spot



KARATAG.

near Zulficar, if not Zulficar itself, where the Russians had a skirmish with the Afghans. And, by an association of ideas, Menas begins to talk about fighting with Rachmed, both of them being quite in harmony on this subject. They regard war as the best thing in the world. But when they come to discuss courage, they cease to be of one accord, for one has the ideas peculiar to the Caucasus, the other those of the steppe. One has all the dash of a western desperado; the other the wariness of an eastern adventurer.

Menas thinks a man ought never to run away, while Rachmed is of opinion that, under certain circumstances, it may be the best thing to do. A man should act in accordance with the object he has in view and the forces at his disposal; but, if he is compelled to fight, he should exclaim "Allah Akbar!" and die with sword in hand.

They are agreed as to an incident in the campaign of Geok Tepe related by Menas. It appears that the Turkomans would try to steal the rifles of the Russian soldiers, and that sometimes they would creep up to the place where they were piled and take them from right under the noses of the sentinels. An old Turkoman, worn out by age, ill and unable to fight, succeeded several times in this difficult enterprise. Without any arms, dragging himself along like a feeble old dog, he made his way into the encampment, and waiting his opportunity with the patience of a savage, motionless for hours at a time, he would secure the object of his expedition, and, under cover of the darkness, glide noiselessly away. Whereupon, Menas remarks to his friend—

"Is that a *batir* (hero)?"

"Vallah, he is one."

So we reach the wooden bridge of Karatag, leading to the left bank, where the village is built, partly in the valley, partly on the side of the mountain.

At Karatag, we meet the Beg of Hissar, who has within the last few days, succeeded the eldest brother of the present emir, who has just made his submission and has retired to Bâissonne. From time immemorial, the Hissar district was, as it were, the dauphiny of Bokhara, and it was there that the heir presumptive to his father's throne learnt how to govern. Thus the beg, whose guest we are, is the most powerful pasha in the country. He has just returned from St. Petersburg, whither his master has sent him to do homage to the new emperor and offer presents. He said

that he took part in all the *fêtes* there, and felt none the worse for it, adding that they loaded him with gifts. But since his return,



THE BEG OF HISSAR AND TARTAR BOY.

he has felt very unwell, and has suffered from pains in the stomach, which Capus promises to relieve.

The beg tells us that he was present at the coronation of the czar, and that the *fêtes* were indescribably splendid. He had

seen the large bell at Moscow, as well as the palaces of St. Petersburg, and the opinion of one of his servitors is that the true shah in shah is not the Persian sovereign, but the Russian czar—the real king of kings. The beg, who has the reputation of being a consummate diplomatist, takes care not to tell us his opinion about Russia.

He is a very handsome man, with a beard dyed black, his features are regular and delicate, and with his soft hand, on one finger of which he wears a costly diamond, he makes just such gestures as a cardinal would do, while his manners are most dignified. He seems quite overcome with sorrow, and the high post to which his master has elevated him does not console him for the cruel blows which fate has dealt out to him. He was proud of his numerous family, but a contagious disease has carried off all his children.

In three years he has lost twenty-two relatives. All he has left is a boy four years old, upon whom he has concentrated all his affection. He has brought back with him from St. Petersburg a young Tartar, who had been page-boy in an hotel, and, dressing him in Eastern attire, he has made him his interpreter and familiar. This youth is very sharp and advanced for his age (13), like most boys bred in large towns; he has rather a poor opinion of Bokhara, and a sovereign contempt for the natives. He says that you must use the stick to them, and he accompanies us in all our excursions, with a cudgel in his hand, which he lays freely about him. He is very anxious that we should prolong our stay at Karatag, and he says—

“Do stay on, and I will tell the beg to get up *fêtes* in your honour.”

“It is quite impossible.”

“What a pity you have to go! I saw a good many French at St. Petersburg, and I know a few words of your language. I

shall learn more ; and if you were to remain, I should soon write French."

"But will you not forget your Russian?"

"No fear! I copy out two pages every day, and I read aloud. When I have had enough of it here, I shall leave. If any attempt is made to keep me, I shall write to Samarcand. Come and see the fortress. We will go through the bazaar."

"Do you mean the fortress on the right bank? It is not inhabited. What is there interesting there?"

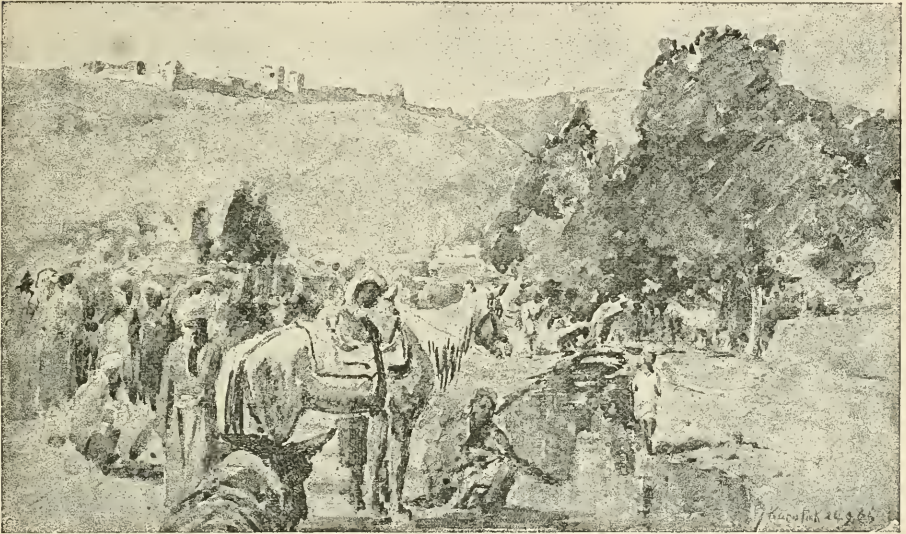
"What! Don't you know that it was built in a night, by the will of Allah, at the urgent entreaty of a saint?"

So we go to have a look at this miraculous fortress, passing through the bazaar, which is crowded with Uzbeg horsemen of the Kungrad, Turuk, and Lakaï tribes. We also meet several Tadjiks there. The trade done does not seem to be large, the principal articles sold being Indian cotton stuffs, which the natives say are very fast colours, though rather dear; Russian soap and cottons, English needles and thimbles, leaden toys bought at Moscow, as well as small mills, which revolve when you blow into them. The only French goods are small boxes containing percussion caps, which appear to be of German make. Among the products of the country sold in the bazaar are rice, barley, wheat, sorghum, djiddas, grapes, and dried apricots. There are several saddlers and blacksmiths, and a few potters, who make dishes and vases of very pretty shape, and tastefully coloured and enamelled. But there are more druggists than anything else, among them being an Afghan and an inhabitant of the Punjab, who has come by way of Cabul, the Khulm, the Kulab, and Duchambe. This latter has not made a fortune by wandering about, for he is miserably clad, and is only too eager to return home.

Passing a wooden bridge, and turning to the right, the path is

steep, rocky, and winding, finally leading to the main gate, flanked by tall towers and facing east.

The fortress is rectangular in shape, upon the border of a ravine, with walls built of a mixture of clay and stone, the river flowing below. At the angles rise square towers, slight in construction as in Tuscany, and from these towers issue poles, which look like emaciated arms, and beams which would be very handy for hanging a man from. The tower in the left corner commands



BAZAAR AND FORTRESS OF KARATAG.

the converging routes and the bridge which leads to the bazaar. A large stone thrown down from the top would crush ten or twelve of the shopkeepers in its progress. Above the porches there are embrasures for the culverins and rifles, while on each side of the entry are the guard-rooms, which are merely galleries having in front of them a colonnade formed of split trunks of trees, which bend beneath the weight and are cracked by age.

Passing over the ruins of a wall, we find on our right the state rooms, looking on to a garden with a vast basin, formerly full of water. The rooms are large, and they still have a few stucco

decorations, with paintings of flowers and fruit in bright colours ; upon the doors and in the panels are inscriptions forming very elaborate arabesques, there being, in fact, all the traces of the luxury of a great potentate. Contiguous to these rooms are the more unpretending dwellings of the male servants, the coach-houses, the sheds, the stables, and shelters large enough to lodge a considerable number of warriors.

There are numerous signs of a violent and rapid destruction having taken place, but of one which was interrupted and incomplete. The garden, being no longer watered, has lost all beauty and freshness. The kitchen garden is choked with weeds and thorns. The trees have been very badly used, for the branches have been lopped off and the bark stripped from them. They are quite dead, and their roots are sticking out of the ground.

To the left of the principal entrance, upon the southern side, a narrow door leads from the garden to a corridor opening on to the private residence of the potentate, which is separated from the guard room by a passage between two high walls. The principal room, the walls of which are still white, with a decorated ceiling, is on the first floor. It overlooks all the southern part of the fortress, having been so built as to afford an easy view of all that was going on in the plain, upon the neighbouring heights, in the village, and more especially in the harem.

The harem itself is formed of a garden and a number of small courtyards connected with one another, around which are buildings with balconies to them. The rooms were very numerous and varied in size, and there were special rooms for the ablutions, fumigations, preparation of ointments, and the thousand occupations which the keeping in order of the attire and ornaments of rich and unemployed women in the East entail.

All this is falling into ruin, and no repairs are made. The castle is accursed, and will never again be inhabited. It was the

theatre of bloody scenes which recall the bad days of our Middle Ages, when the petty nobles fought against the king, whose equal they had long been, and endeavoured, by means of the antagonism of the provinces, to preserve their independence or to wring from the suzerain new rights or dignities in exchange for a feigned submission.

Thirty years ago, when the soldiers of the White Czar were advancing slowly towards the east, through the Kirghiz steppe, supplying the banks of the Sir-Darya with redoubts which marked the route towards the rich oases, there lived at Karatag a chief who was famous among the Uzbegs, named Abdul-Kerim. He had illustrious ancestors, great renown among the tribes of his race, a taste for adventure, and a strong desire to amass a fortune. He knew how to work upon a feeling of discontent; he pointed out how the emir despised the Uzbegs, though one himself, inasmuch as he conferred the high dignities upon Persians and slaves bought from the Turkomans, and how, instead of surrounding himself with valorous and wise chiefs, he took counsel of his worst enemies, the dogs of Iran.

When Abdul-Kerim found himself at the head of a considerable group of partisans, and had collected arms and ammunition in the fortress, of which he had repaired the walls and raised the towers, he refused to pay the emir his taxes.

War soon commenced. First of all there were skirmishes and razzias, with the burning of villages. Then the emir, exasperated by this resistance, assembled a numerous army, won over the Tadjiks in Karatag, and besieged the fortress. It was taken, after a desperate resistance, and those who were able to escape took refuge in the fastnesses of the Karateguin and the Darvasse.

The beg, covered with wounds, was captured and beheaded, with a number of his followers. The native who accompanied us said, "The emir, in order to strike terror into his enemies, had a

thousand heads chopped off. The walls were thick with them, and there was one in every embrasure. My father had his cut off, and it was stuck up above the main gate. These heads attracted the birds of prey, which fought for the pieces of flesh torn from them, and the people of the valley trembled as they heard their cries. The fortress was partially destroyed, and no one was allowed to inhabit it. Moreover, the dyke which had been erected higher up the stream to bring the water on to the plateau was demolished.

“The beg appointed by the emir took up his abode on the left bank of the river, very low down, where he resides among his troops. No one has followed Abdul-Kerim’s example since this exemplary punishment, and Karatag is entirely subject to the emir.”

We descend towards the village, above which rises the smoke of the fires which have been lighted to cook the evening meal. There is a barking of dogs, a crowing of cocks, a braying of donkeys, and a sound of hammers on the anvil, while the river courses rapidly over the big stones, forming, as it were, demi-globes of crystal. The landscape is quite idyllic, with nature so perfectly calm, and the distance is full of soft tints, while the outline of the mountains is very grand. These are not the stage properties of a drama. The descendant of the rebel walks behind us, with his hands at his back, taking care not to put his naked feet on any pointed stones. He seems to be reflecting.

“You must know,” he says, “that storks never build in the ancient castle of Abdul-Kerim. They do not like sad scenes.”

September 26th.

By the hollow road going south-east through the chalk of the furthest spurs of the mountain, we arrive at the valley where the tents of the Lakaï Uzbegs are dotted about. The harvest is

being completed, and they are threshing the corn close to open silos, dug out in the upper part of the hills. The horses and oxen are pacing round upon the threshing floor, and close beside the grain is being winnowed by the simple process of throwing handfuls of it into the air, the grain falling one way and the chaff another. A little way further on, the straw is being piled up and put into sacks for the cattle.

Upon arriving near Dchangab-Darya, the rice-fields begin again. The natives have been late in harvesting, and the birds in starting for a warmer country. As the table is a bountiful one, they are in no hurry to leave it, and so they are enjoying themselves to their hearts' content, in spite of the stones which are being thrown at them. We can hear, too, the whizzing of stones from catapults which are aimed at them.

A small stream which crosses the road is salt, and we notice a group of men ascending its course with very rapid steps. They are carrying something on a stretcher, but, instead of going as slowly as they can, like bearers of a dead body in the West, they march at full speed, as if they were conveying some one, who was very ill or had met with an accident, to the doctor's. They go across the fields, and stumble in their hurry. They talk loudly, as if they were quarrelling, and there is not the least trace of sadness upon their faces. There are about ten of them, and they are dressed as plainly as usual. The wind blows up the shroud which covers the corpse, and the dead man's face is visible, with a look of great calm upon it. In advance are several men with poles, which will be used for forming a vault over the grave, and behind comes an aged mollah, leaning upon a stick. He is either less in a hurry or less alert, but he will arrive in time for the prayer.

I am surprised at the careless way in which these men perform an act for which with us the most indifferent display a semblance

of grief, or at all events a respectful air of gravity. I ask Rachmed how this is, and his answer is—

“With certain tribes of the Uzbeks—in his among others—it is the custom for the men not to lament when they lose one of their kin. He is buried without delay, and with no show of sorrow, for death is a thing to be taken joyfully. None the less, the good are regretted, though upon the day of their interment it is not advisable to let this be seen.”

“Why?”

“It is the custom.”

“I think, nevertheless, that you would have shed tears if you had been present when your mother was buried. You were fond of her; for, before leaving her, when you started upon your previous journey, you, who are the most careless of beings, gave her some money, and sent her some after you had started. You often speak to me of her.”

“Yes, that is true. I like to speak of her, but I should not have shed tears. That is all very well for women. Do men cry in your country?”

“Sometimes.”

“Ah! You have not the same customs. Each tribe has its own ways. Here is Hissar. My brother has told me that from a distance this fortress resembles Cabul.”

Upon a double hill, rising out of the plain by itself, with denuded slopes, stands a white fortress, girt by lofty crenulated walls, and flanked with towers. The left part is higher than the other, and the whole of it is of a very varied and picturesque aspect, with a certain appearance of grandeur about it.

We were speaking of Cabul just now, and here to the left is a regular encampment of Cabulis. There are about a hundred of them—men, women, and children—living beneath some shelters made of reeds, inside a network of trenches, which are crossed by

means of embankments. These poor people have been in the country for five and twenty years. After having wandered about like gipsies, for whom they might easily be taken, they have made up their minds to settle down somewhere. The different families scattered about in the country have come together in this free spot, which the Toura of Hissar has given them. They began by digging out an irrigating canal, which they sowed with rice and melons. In course of time they surrounded their land with a ditch, until they were able to enclose it with walls; and, apportioning out the land, they have cultivated it to the best of their ability. Those who are the most energetic, or who have the largest families, are already cultivating the land outside the trench. These are the richer and the more active members of the tribe, over which



UZBEG.

they exercise the authority which is derived from wealth and resolution. They are far more advanced than the others, and we find them busily at work erecting rectangular mud walls, in which they have left an opening for a door. When a man has a door which can be opened and shut at will, he has the feeling of being a property owner. As soon as the walls of the enclosure are higher, it will be easy for the owner to insert into the corners poles which will be joined to other poles thrust into the ground, and so the roof will be formed. An opening will be made in it for the smoke, and the owner of the house will be able to warm himself at his own fireside.

The Cabulis are quite cheerful over their work, and display

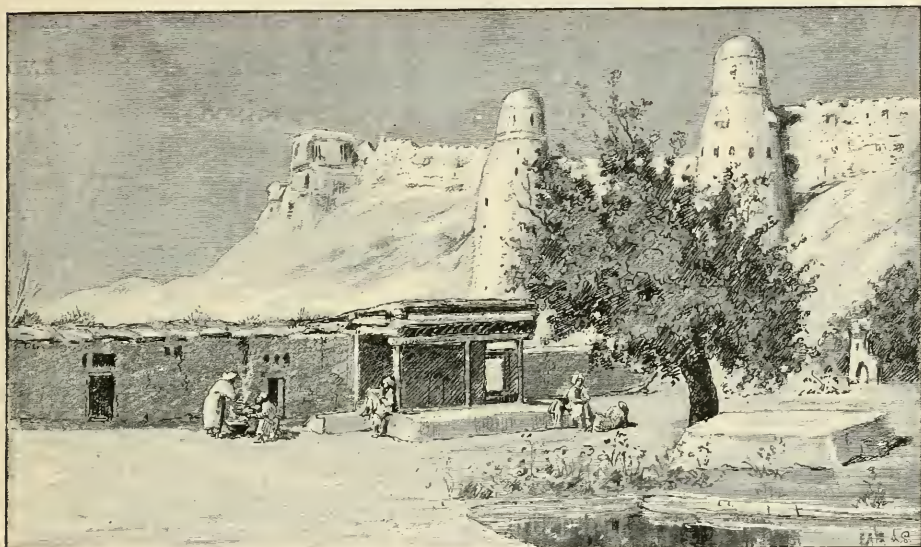
a great deal of activity. They are, perhaps, making a shelter to protect themselves from the winds of winter. The tribe will, no doubt, crowd into it during the cold season, and the workmen are cheered and stimulated in their task by the thought of the snug quarters they are preparing for themselves. And this is how the indolent acquire a taste for work, and how great cities have been begun.

Some of the Cabulis come out to see us go by. They are of the Afghan type, lean and tall, with very black eyes. The best-dressed wear on their heads a turban, rolled Afghan fashion, forming an angle in the middle of the forehead and coming down very low over the ears on each side. They tell us that distress has compelled them to leave their country, and with their exotic appearance they give us the impression of being an advance guard of India, the object of our dreams. They say that they have not the least wish to cross the Amu again and go back to Afghanistan.

The natives regard them as gipsies, and call them sometimes Cabuli, sometimes Moltani. In two or three generations these immigrants will have Uzbek blood in their veins; they will have undergone a complete change of habits, mode of dress, wants and ideas, and their type will have become modified by contact with the men and things about them. In course of time, perhaps, nothing will remain but some nickname as a souvenir of their origin.

Before reaching Hissar, we meet some fat Uzbeks, mounted on strong horses. They are short, and resemble not a little the Kirghiz of Tian-Chan. Like them, they are very big-boned, have large faces and prominent cheekbones; but they are bigger limbed, and have, perhaps, eyes which are not quite so small. Altogether, they have much the same Turko-Mongol or Mongol-Turkish appearance.

The approach to Hissar is through some marshes teeming with excellent snipe and woodcock. The first thing which strikes us is the appearance of the dwellings. They do not look as if they belonged to Central Asia, for they have steep thatch roofs, instead of the flat roofs seen on the other side of the mountains, and on the banks of the Amu. This gives you the impression of quite a different kind of civilization. There is a good deal of rain in this region, and that is the cause of the marked



FORTRESS OF HISSAR, AS SEEN FROM THE SUMMER GARDEN.

change which may be observed on reaching Rigar. This is yet another incident of the journey which reminds us of rainy India.

The inhabitants of the town, or of the village, as it should rather be called, are none the better for this, as they are very yellow and sickly looking, being eaten up by fever.

We find quarters at the foot of the fortress, in a beautiful garden, watered by a stream, and possessing the tomb of a saint, hidden in the foliage of willows and poplars on the side of the hill.

We are told—what, as a matter of fact, we knew before—that the fortress is empty; that the toura who inhabited it had gone to Baïssonne, which his brother the emir had assigned him as a residence. There are a few men in charge of the dwelling, where the beg, now at Karatag, will shortly take up his residence. We ask if we may visit the fortress, and the gardener promises to show us over the whole of it to-morrow.

September 27th.

On waking up, we find the village in a very animated state, for this is bazaar day. Although there are not more than two thousand people here, the population is very mixed indeed. We recognize the heavy type of the thickset Uzbek, the lithe Afghan, the hatchet-faced Arab; and, among the Lullis, who sell snuff and tobacco, the eye overcharged with pigment of the inhabitants of the hot plains of India.

This is because Hissar is situated at the head of two valleys, so to speak—that of Surkhane and that of Kafirnagane—and at the junction of the road taken by those who, for reasons of their own, cross the northern mountains, either by the Sanguirdak, or by Fan, or who are flying from Afghanistan or India. The latter reach Hissar, after having crossed the Amu, by the valleys of the Surkhane and of Kafirnagane, or by making a wide circuit over the mountains of Badakshan or Kulab. For at Hissar, up to the present time, fugitives were almost sure of finding an asylum, with help and a kindly greeting, from the second personage of Bokhara, the heir-presumptive to the dominions of the emir. He was in opposition to his father, whom he accused of having ruined his dominions by not leaning for support upon the sympathies of the men of his race. These views won for him the attachment of the neighbouring Uzbek tribes, which clung to the ancient traditions, took pride in the great deeds done by their

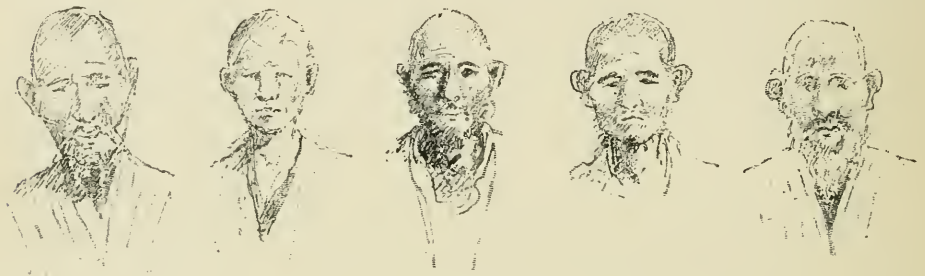
forefathers, and nourished a hope, perhaps, that a struggle against Russia might have a chance of succeeding. These worthy people, quite ignorant as to modern military science, imagined that courage and devotion might overcome the discipline and strategy of the West. Some of them at Hissar refused to accept as an accomplished fact what at Bokhara was now regarded as a matter of course. The toura was not on good terms with the court, and gave a cordial greeting to the discontented of all countries, as long as they were outspoken in their approval of him, and flattered him to the top of his bent. The fact of people putting themselves under his protection gave him an exaggerated idea of his power and flattered his vanity.

Many touras have played a similar part at Hissar, which has a very interesting past. It has seen all the different conquerors of Central Asia; and the Arabs seized it as a preliminary to bringing Turkestan into regular subjection. Conquerors, refugees, and slaves have, one after another, shed some of their blood there; and the inhabitants of the hovels at the foot of the fortress have no marked type. Crossing has not improved them, and the common people are decrepit.

Apart from the cereals and the native products, there are few goods to be found at the stalls; the customers consisting of Uzbegs, who are not at all accustomed to luxury. We see, however, percussion caps from Linden, near Hanover; handkerchiefs, calico, needles, and matches, from Russia; English calico from India, and buttons from I don't know where, with a French trade-mark on them. Some hadjis have brought back from Stamboul a number of small bits of copper like medals, with which ornaments for women are made. There does not, at first sight, seem to be much business done. The Uzbegs have come to spend a few minutes at the bazaar, and they gossip as they kneel before some mutton or horseflesh on the spit. They

discuss recent events, the departure of the toura, the new emir, the Russians, and more especially the English, who are just now in the neighbourhood of Andkhoï, with brown-skinned soldiers, riding very small horses. They are said by the dervishes, who have seen them, to be countless in numbers, so there can be no doubt about it, and these troops must foreshadow war.

This refers to the British Boundary Commission, the escort of which consists, in reality, of from seventy to eighty soldiers. People exaggerate in the East beyond all conception, out of sheer laziness, the mind not feeling any craving for exactitude. The railway which the Russians are making, which has been opened



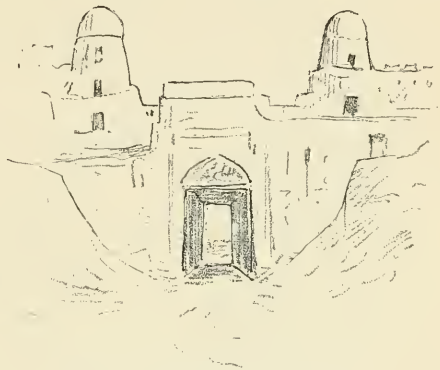
UZBEGS.

at Merv, and which will cross the Amu, is the subject of much conversation, and more than one of them shakes his head with an air of doubt when he is told that the Russians will throw a bridge over the Amu, and that "the devil's carriages" will go as far as Samarcand. The old men, who have passed all their lives in Hissar, and who have never crossed the mountains, will return to their tents with the conviction that the end of the world is at hand. It is the end of the Uzbeg world, and it will be the beginning of its transformation, or rather of its modification. Peoples change but little in reality; but when they are placed in novel circumstances, they make a different use of their race qualities. Because they act differently, it is erroneously concluded that they have been transformed. We French have changed very

little, despite centuries of defeats, victories and upheavals—despite centuries of action in brief.

Thus, the inhabitants of Central Asia were for a long time asleep; those of the oases found an employment for their aptitudes for petty commerce, cultivation of small holdings, and hoarding; those of the steppe, the nomads of Turkish blood, the descendants of those who had caused the West to tremble, no longer had any outlet for their courage and their spirit of discipline, as there was no chief to lead or marshal them. The cannon of Russia and the whistle of her engines have roused them from this torpor.

At the present moment their brains are as agitated as those of our forefathers may have been by the discovery of America. They feel that a new era is opening for them. They are surprised at finding that this mass,



GATE OF THE INNER FORTRESS.

which they had seen for some time hanging over their heads, has at last fallen to the ground. They feel themselves hemmed in and cornered by an invincible force, and, taking a correct measure of their weakness, they wonder what is going to happen next. They are not over-anxious as to the future which the Russians have in store for them, as the Russians are the masters, and their engineers do as they please with the lands of the emir, who is powerless to prevent them. Moreover, they have for some time regarded themselves as having no emir, nor have they made common cause with him, because he has not followed the advice of the Uzbek chiefs, but has submitted to the influence of foreign servitors, and especially of Persians. And then the Russians have by no means a bad reputation. It is said

that they are affable and full of courage, and that they do not molest any one; so the Uzbegs have resigned themselves to the position, and are ready to pay their tribute to the "White Pasha." Henceforth, they will gravitate in the orbit of Russia, who will perhaps utilize their good qualities and common sense. Whatever happens, they will not be inactive, for the planet, whose satellites they have become, is not on the point of extinction, and is far from having completed its course.

We pay a visit to the fortress. An old servant of the toura acts as guide, and explains what he is showing us. We ask him if he has served long, and he replies—

"Yes; fourteen years."

"Why did you leave him? Why did you not share his fortunes?"

"Some retainers of the new beg came to see me and advised me to stay here. They said, 'Do not go to Baïssonne; the toura has not paid you your wages for many years, whereas the beg will let you have them regularly. By following the toura, you risk being arrested like him and having your head cut off!' That is why I have remained here."

"Is it true that he meditated making war on the Emir of Bokhara?"

"Yes, it is. This room where we are was full of rifles; he had over two thousand, with a lot of powder and bullets."

"Was he a kind man?"

"Yes; but his advisers were the ruin of him."

The Touradjane of Hissar is the second son of the Emir Mozaffer-Eddin, who at his death selected as his successor his third son, the reigning emir. According to the usual custom, the chief of the Hissar, being the eldest, should have succeeded his father. But the deceased ruler had willed it otherwise and had taken measures for the Russians to ensure the execution of his

will. It is said that his favourite son has more intelligence than the eldest one, and that he gave proof in several circumstances of great tact in governing his principality. But his brother was not at all pleased at being passed over, and the latter's *entourage*, which had been reckoning upon his accession to power, urged him to let his discontent take active shape.

The touradjane had remained upon intimate terms with another brother called the Katta-toura, who was the firstborn, and who had attempted to dethrone his father fifteen years before, taking refuge in India upon the failure of his attempt. The Katta-toura had written to his brother urging him to raise the standard of revolt and making him promises which he has only very partially kept. The assistance of the English was probably promised the Toura of Hissar, not perhaps very distinctly, but enough to confirm a



THE EMIR OF BOKHARA.

discontented man in his intentions. So he collected arms and ammunition, assembled troops and excited the Uzbek tribes to war, preparing for a rising.

But in the meanwhile the emir was kept informed of all these goings-on, and sent emissaries to his brother, urging him to abate

his anger and accept compensation. The negotiations went on for some time, and the toura held out as long as he based any hopes upon the Government of India sending black-bearded warriors to fight for him. But when he was tired of scanning the diplomatic horizon in vain, he bowed his head before his brother, came to as amicable an arrangement as is possible in these countries, disbanded his troops and pacified his followers, thinking only of securing his treasures, his family, and his person.

It is said that he is very rich, so rich that he would have got away already but for the countless bags of tangas which he has stored up in a vast room near the harem. His wealth kept him back, and the love of money proved stronger than that of tranquillity. It seems that in attempting to preserve one, he ran a great risk of losing both.

He has ten wives and a great many children, but of the large body of servants and retainers which he had about him only a few devoted followers remain, and he left for Baïssonne without any pomp or ceremony, taking with him his treasures as well as a chain riveted to his foot. He has not had all his arms taken from him, as no fear is felt of any one being tempted to brandish them in his cause; while he himself has lost all ambition.

I can say nothing as to what sort of a place Baïssonne is, but the residence of Hissar is not unworthy of a great Bokhara prince. We spent the day making a sketch, which we cannot give here. We went through all the rooms, and inspected every portion of the harem. The house bore the mark of having been recently inhabited, preserving the odour of its master, so to speak. In all directions were signs of a recent move, and this was a great piece of luck for us, as the houses of Asiatic potentates are closed to every one, especially to infidels.

Thanks to the explanations of the toura's old servants, our imagination was enabled to people the dwelling with its former inhabitants.

“ This,” we were told, “ was where the toura liked to sit ; from this gallery he could see without being seen.

“ Close by is the table at which he entertained his intimate friends and transacted his business. You see below towers on each side of the large gateway ; they were used as prisons. The towers are connected by a platform above the porch, with a balustrade against which the toura leant to watch the wrestlers on the bazaar square.

“ This is the room in which he performed his ablutions before the prayers which he recited in this small chapel. Here is the



ENTRANCE OF PALACE.

passage through which he went to the harem, and this door leads to the grand reception room adjoining the chancellery, which is contiguous to the mosque and the treasury.

“ Here is the bath ; after taking it, he rested in this room upon a divan, sometimes in very pleasant company.

“ All this square block of buildings was occupied by the women ; the seamstresses on this side, and the servants on the other. This large room decorated with paintings was last week rich with carpets and cushions. This was where the toura’s wives assembled when they were expecting a visit from the master ; they were arrayed in their finest dresses, loaded with

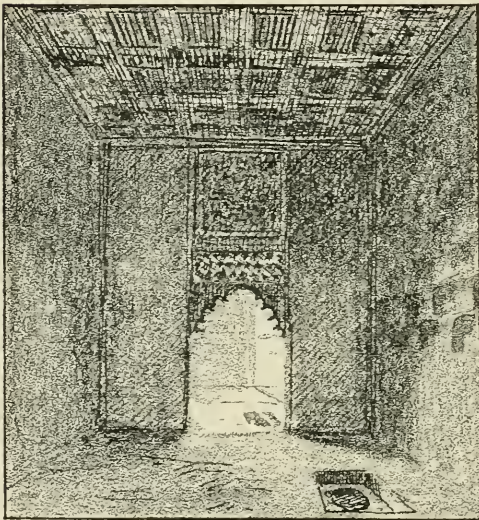
glittering jewellery, their faces painted and their bodies cunningly perfumed. A passage leads from there to a room of which you can see the door made of double trellis-work; it was reserved for the toura's favourite."

"Did he ever change favourites?"

"Sometimes. And as the toura liked to have a quiet home, he inflicted severe punishment upon the wives who were disobedient."

"How were they punished?"

"He had them flogged, and then confined in the narrow cell which you see between the kitchens and the fine room we are in now."

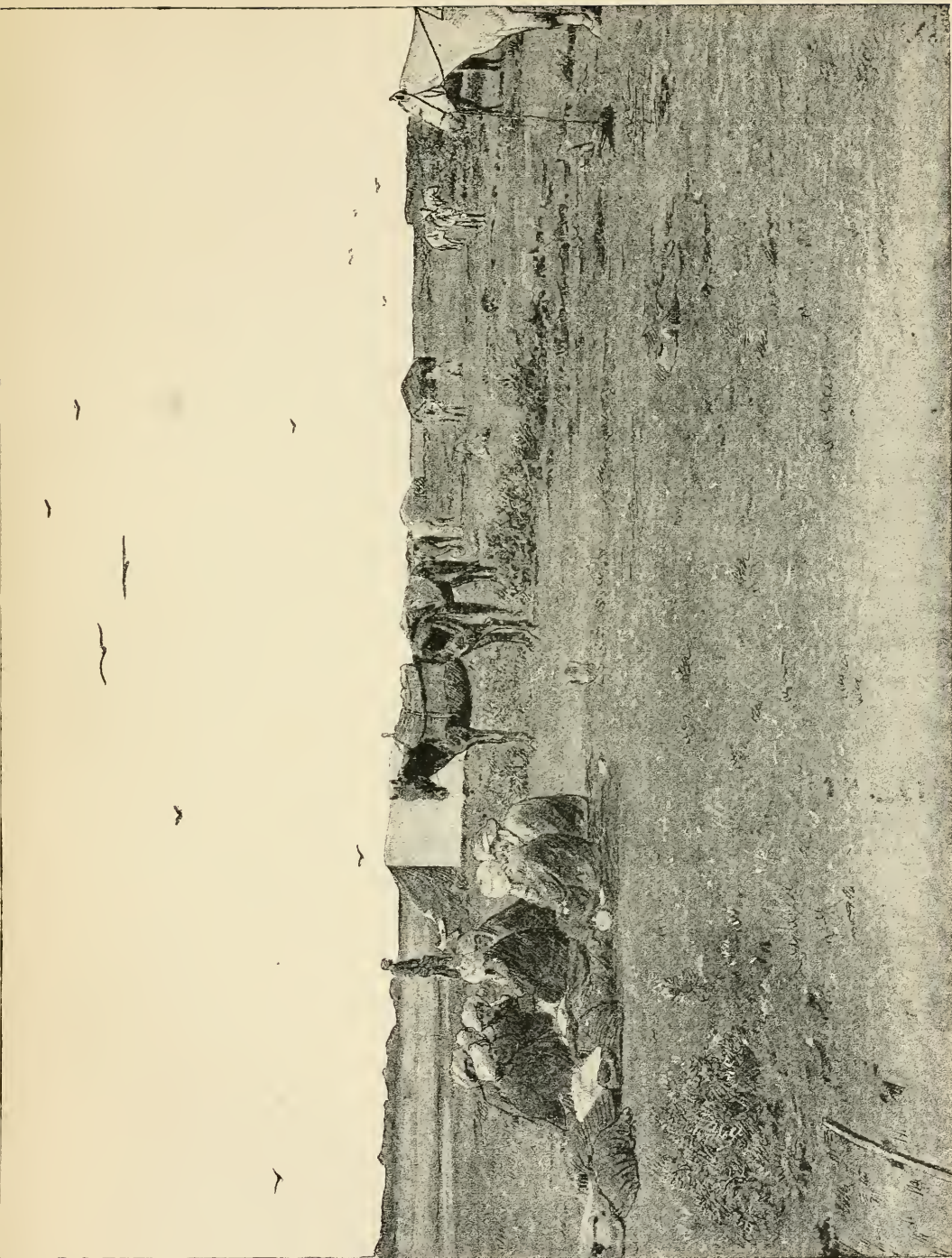


INTERIOR OF A ROOM IN THE HAREM.

The ladies' prison is close to the favourite's boudoir, just as the Tarpeian Rock is to the Capitol.

Questioning first one and then the other, we had a good look at the palace, which comprises a school, workshops of every kind, and all the buildings to be found in a small Asiatic

town, for the fortress was a regular town. It was also a strong fortress, and below, opposite the dwelling of the chief, to the left of the principal entrance, there are buildings which serve as barracks, arsenal, and bakehouse. There is, besides, a whole village within the walls, which seem to have been added during some period of war or intestine troubles. These walls embrace an immense space of ground to the west, the whole gentle slope of the hill, which is very steep on the other side. A good many huts are still



ENCAMPMENT UPON THE BANKS OF THE KAIFR NAGANE.

standing, there are a good many meadows with cisterns in the middle, and a small stream of water trickles out from a spring. This piece of ground was available for the accommodation of auxiliary troops, and for picketing many horses, while from the higher ground an eye could be kept upon these troops in case of there being any doubts as to their proving true. It was here, also, that the wives of the soldiers in the garrison lived, and they could, if they felt so inclined, cultivate some of the patches of ground and grow melons for their husbands.

I have said more about this curious group of dwellings than I had intended, and I shall recur to this very interesting subject, for we were so fortunate as to be able to examine very closely what is perhaps the most perfect type of feudal residences in Central Asia. They served to explain to us many points in the history of this country, and at the same time, by a comparison which naturally suggested itself, various epochs of the past were evoked, and appeared to us as clear and palpable as things of the past can do in the present. Men follow pretty much the same road to arrive at the same goal; viz. the exhaustion of the race after it has reached its zenith. Some races go a quicker pace than others, which are tired out by a long march upon the toilsome paths of progress, which have started late, or which have been checked by insurmountable difficulties. By going to see the inhabitants of Central Asia, we can judge how many stages we have recently travelled. What are three or four centuries in advance?

September 28th.

We leave Hissar, with the intention of descending the valley of the Kafirnagane as far as the Amu, and, if possible, of crossing it near the confluence, where we are told that we shall find boats.

In the upper part of the valley, several villages are inhabited by the Tadjiks, who cultivate the most fertile part of it. At a

distance of two hours from Hissar, the only inhabitants are Durman Uzbeks, who are very poor, and the few kichlaks we see are very insignificant as far as Akmetchet, where we arrive on the evening of the 29th. Upon the banks of the river we saw several gold-finders, who were washing the sand on the banks, and obtaining a few grains of gold dust.

The narrow valley has a very desolate appearance. In the valley of Tuskane, an important salt-mine, placed under the protection of a saint, is worked by the natives. The salt is obtained from a very salt spring, each drop of water as it dries leaving a white powder upon the clothes. In the mountain we see a few small herds of cattle grazing.

At Akmetchet, we follow the right bank, the valley widening out, and being no longer the steppe. The kichlaks become more numerous, and the Darya multiplies its branches, forming ponds and marshy pools and irrigating rice-fields. There is more room to move about. The river bends about, and contains in its folds many islets, with thick growths of reeds, willows, tamaris, djiddas, and mulberry-trees.

There is a greater depth of soil as we get lower down. In the morning the mist was very dense, hiding the steep summits, and dimming the outlines of the lower parts of the mountain chain.

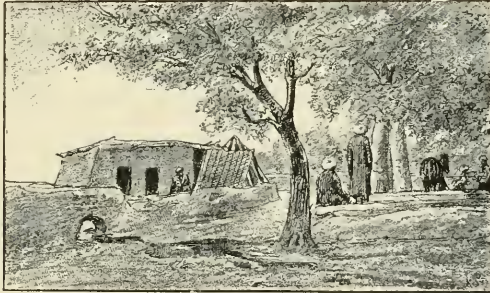
Akmetchet consists of twenty-four huts or tents; it is the "second town" in the valley after Kabadiane.

Before reaching Bachkala, we meet upon the banks of the river two or three Turkmen families, living in reed huts, which is a sign that we are approaching the Amu. They formerly inhabited Kerki, they tell us, and they left that country two years ago because they did not like it. They belong to the tribe of the Kuramas. The wretched Uzbeks, who wander about in the surrounding mountains, are Kungrads.

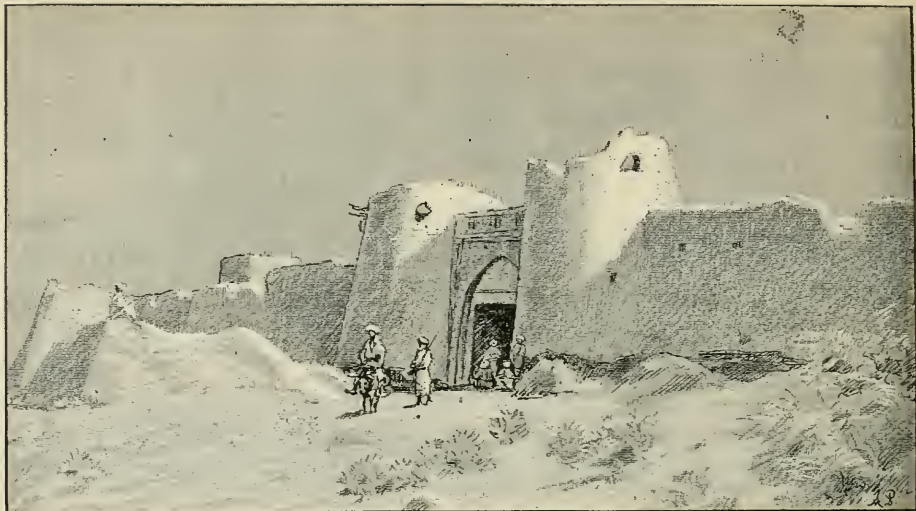
In the hamlet of Bachkala, near Kabadiane, there are many

mulberry trees, as the natives rear silkworms. Kabadiane is about an hour and a half from this village, upon the left bank of the Kafirnagane. We arrive there on the evening of October 1st. This town, or, to be more correct, this enormous village, is made up of farmhouses, standing amid islets formed by numerous canals. Their banks are planted with large or small plane-trees, which are pollarded. A great many silkworms are bred in this district.

The fortress, at the foot of which we lodge, is built upon a mound which commands the valley, here about five miles wide.



AN ENCAMPMENT AT KABADIANE.



FORTRESS OF KABADIANE.

CHAPTER VIII.

AMONG THE AFGHANS.

Our recruits—Tempest upon the Amu—Camels at the watering-place—Passage of the Amu—Stopped at Chur-Tepe—Negotiations—The authorities—The Ersaris—Traits of Afghan character—The chief of the posts at the frontier—Profession of faith—About the English—We are detained—Instructions asked for from Mazari-Cherif, then from Cabul—The “vagrants;” Jacob and Eleazar Turkomans—Escape—Philtre, exorcism—The cyanide of potassium—We are turned back—Our return to Samarcand.

At Kabadiane we take the precaution of hiring a mirza—that is to say, a man who knows how to write—while we engage as *kiraketches* (muleteers), three Arabs, who are descendants of the conquerors of Bactriana. They say that they are of the Arab tribe of Balkhi. They formerly inhabited Afghan Turkestan, which they quitted several years ago. One of them was recently a soldier in the employ of the Toura of Hissar, and he has been idle since the latter disbanded his army. The ex-soldier and one

of the muleteers, with faces like satyrs, are afflicted with a slight limp. This is due to their having been for a long time in prison, with one foot chained to a beam, by way of punishment for some peccadillo. The mirza and two of the Arabs consent to cross the



PRISONERS AT KABADIANE.

Amu with us, and accompany us as far as Mazari-Cherif, as they know the road very well. As to the soldier, he will not upon any conditions set foot on Afghan soil, as it was not long ago that he ran away from Andkhoj, because "he was not happy at home."

The good man, who, with his swarthy complexion, pointed beard, and way of showing the whites of his eyes, reminds us of one of our fashionable painters, tells us what is generally known in the country, viz. that he chopped his wife's head off to punish her for



ARAB OF BALKH, OUR MULETEER.

being unfaithful to him, "which," he added, "there was the less excuse for her being, because I fed her well; we used to eat palao nearly every day."

From Kabadiane we reach Bishkent, by way of the jungle

and the steppe, expecting to find interesting ruins there; but the information we had received was incorrect.

Upon the 5th of October we proceeded through a sandy desert, and encamped in the jungle of the Amu, near the mouth of the Kafirnagane, a south-westerly tempest bursting upon us in the evening, and lasting all night. The howling wind bent down the reeds, making them undulate like a horse's mane, and crackle like thorns. The dust darkened the air, through which fluttered flocks of geese and swans, uttering short cries of terror.



JUNCTION OF THE KAFIRNAGANE AND THE AMU.

The banks of the river were rendered invisible by the washing up of the water, while, after a fire lighted in a hole quickly dug in the ground had gone out, the darkness was very intense. The din of the river was terrific, like that of an angry sea, and the canvas of the tent flapped up like a sail upon the top of a mast. Fortunately we were upon dry land.

In the morning the sky is clear, and we see upon the left bank of the Amu horsemen and armed men. These are the Afghan guardians of the ferry. To the south-east, the summits

of the Hindu-Kush stand out distinctly; upon the other side is Kafiristan. What a pity we cannot cleave through the air to it, like the swans, whose discordant notes we can hear over our heads!

A pilgrim, who is on his way to Khulm, will tell the Afghans that we are going to return by way of Shirrabad to Samarcand, and that we have given up the intention of crossing the stream, contrary to what had been reported. We intend to go along the river bank.

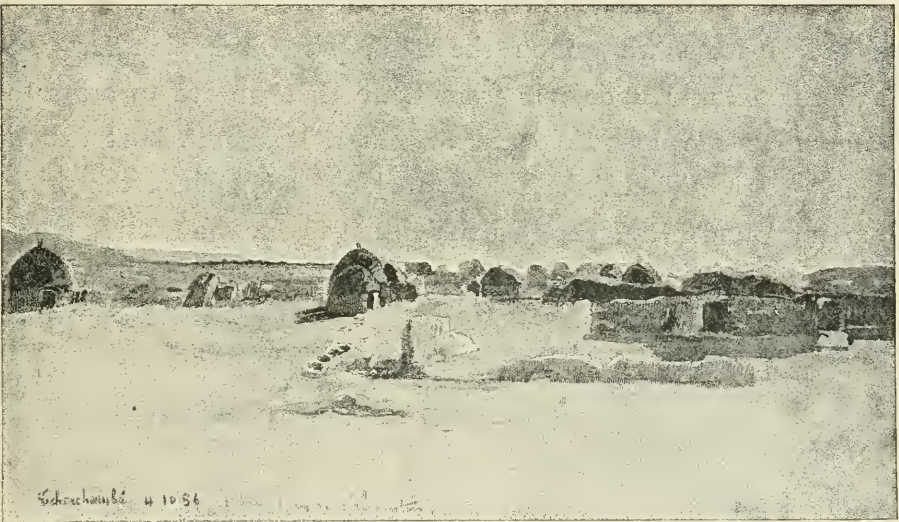
We encamp at Katun-Rabad, which was inhabited by Kara Turkmenes, who have been succeeded by Dali Turkmenes. The Kara pillaged their nomad neighbours, behaving so badly that the Beg of Kabadiane, upon an order from the emir, compelled them to decamp.

At Tuslak we halt near an aoul of wealthy Uzbeg Kungrads. We are still in the jungle, which teems with beautiful pheasants and wild boar. There are plenty of hares and tigers, for the path shows the fresh traces of one with a foot as large as a young camel. In the course of the night, the tiger has killed two camels; but the natives do not seem to be much alarmed at his presence, as this is his yearly custom. They will only set a snare for him when he has eaten an Uzbeg. It is not worth while bothering about two camels, for there are plenty of them.

Before sunset, at least a thousand of these animals are taken to drink of the divine water of the best of rivers. It is a strange sight to see these dromedaries coming out of the reeds, majestically shaking their heads, then collecting upon the bank and drinking in turn: those which are too impatient being kept in their place by the drivers armed with long poles.

The male camels go first, grunting and occasionally kicking out at some rival, with much more agility than might be expected from such clumsy animals. They all drink with outstretched

necks, putting their heads down and making a gurgling sound in different keys, according to their age and sex. The young camels, with scarcely any hair upon them and an almost invisible hump, are so weak on the legs that they can scarcely stand upright, and as they kneel down to drink, they remind one of little children who have a difficulty in getting upstairs. The females about to bear young are so distended that their stomachs look like the flanks of a lighter, though, upon the other hand, their humps do not seem so large. They walk along with the saliva dropping



TCHARÉHAMBÉ.

from their mouths, filthy and malodorous, despite their "interesting condition."

The camels as they drink never stop wagging their tiny tails, and they sometimes lose at one end what they take in at the other, like so many badly corked casks. Those which wait show their impatience as the others do their pleasure, by wagging their tails, and when it is their turn to drink, they jostle one another like sheep in their hurry to be first.

Those which have with difficulty been torn away from the pleasures of the bath are driven off by the horsemen, who whistle

to them and deal them blows, the dromedaries making a most uncanny noise as they shuffle along. There is very little to inspire poesy about these strange and ugly animals.

The same evening we sleep at Yangiarik, not far from the Surkhane.

Upon the 9th of October, we cross the Surkhane and sleep at Salavate, a village inhabited by the Tchagataï Uzbegs, some of whom are gigantic men. They say that they have lived there since the days of Timour.

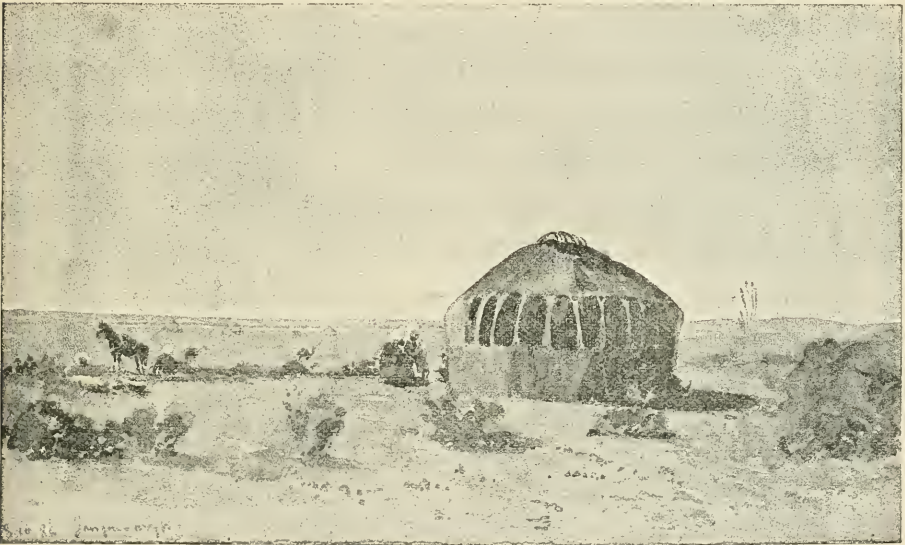
Having remained until the 13th in the ruins of the Termis of the ancients, we go on the 14th, past Turkoman farms, to Tchochka-Guzar, and it is from there that we are to cross the Amu upon the following morning in a Bokharan boat, leaving upon the right bank the baggage which is not absolutely indispensable, under the care of the deceived husband, and, taking with us only our instruments and our tent, proceed toward Bactrias.

The mirza seems always resigned to follow us, but his face does not express any great pleasure. The Arabs are gloomy, and in the evening they ask for payment of what is due to them, upon the ground that they want to send the money back to their families by a pilgrim. So we pay them. As for Menas, he gets ready for the passage of the Rubicon by breaking up sugar, while Rachmed puts the saddles in order, shoes the horses, and, with his friend, smokes innumerable ghalyans. Seïde—the name of the Arab who fed his wife too well—occupies his spare time in thrumming the domburak and humming tunes with the contented air of a man whose mind is easy.

October 19th.

We make over some letters to the Bokhara authorities, asking that they may be sent on to the chief of the Samarcand district, who will forward them to their addresses. We ask them if the boat

is ready, as was agreed upon the day before. They say that all is ready, but they beg us not to carry out our project, telling us that "the Afghans are the most treacherous of men; they are inhospitable and deceitful, promising you honey and giving you poison. The subjects of our emir are constantly having to complain, first because one of them has been unjustly held to ransom, then because others have been imprisoned without a cause, beaten and stripped of all their belongings. The other day, three mer-



AT YANGARIAK.

chants were killed on their way to Mazari-Cherif, and we cannot obtain any justice for this offence. Do not go there, for you will do so at the risk of your lives."

The mirza has met two friends, who strongly dissuade him from accompanying us, telling him that as soon as he has passed the Amu he will be arrested, and that the Afghans, when they have got tired of keeping him in prison, will kill him.

The mirza is as pale as death, and looks quite haggard, but he says nothing. His beg has ordered him to accompany us, and

he is terribly afraid of the Afghans. So that he finds himself between the devil and the deep sea.

The Arabs, who yesterday seemed quite decided to follow us, are less so at present. They are crouching under the wall, with their heads between their knees, with the obstinate look in their eyes of animals which refuse to advance.

We have their horses loaded, as our own are to remain here, and we leave Rachmed to bring them round to a better way of thinking. He begins by making them tempting promises, by pointing out to them that they ought not to be worse than their word, and attempts to wheedle them. Finding these efforts useless, he seizes a stick as a decisive argument, threatens them, and finally gives them a good drubbing, whereupon they bestride their horses without a word, and come on with us to the ferry, the road to which is lined by bushy rose-trees.

We have some difficulty in getting our horses on board, for there is no pier, and the side of the boat is very upright. Rachmed's horse falls into the water, which is regarded as a good sign by some, as a bad one by others. The horse is eventually brought to shore again, and his master escapes with a wetting of his baggage. The Bokhara men have very long faces as they wish us good-bye, just as if they were laying us in our coffins.

We land upon the other side of the river, in a small creek surrounded by tanks supplied by the stream, the waters of which are gradually getting lower. We land amid a small caravan of ragged Afghans, with faces like savages, armed with bucklers, swords, and lances. They are taking a load of salt, and one of them, who loses his temper with a disobedient camel, has his face convulsed with fury. They are evidently not at all of an accommodating disposition.

We load our horses as quickly as we can, jump into the saddle and start. But we are accosted by a mounted soldier who emerges

from the thicket. He wears a uniform we have never seen before, and our appearance seems to take him by surprise. He asks us where we are going.

“To Balkh.”

“What for?”

“To see the ruins.”

“What country do you come from?”

“From Fherangistan.”

“I am at your orders.”

He takes us perhaps for Englishmen. He makes a military salute and goes his way.

It turns out that he is an officer in the Afghan army. He is armed with a revolver and an English cavalry sword. His headdress is a cap lined with fur and surmounted by a short and rather dirty turban. His vest is of black cloth with a red collar, his breeches are baggy, but tied in at the ankle, after the Afghan



AFGHAN OFFICER.

fashion, while on his feet he wears Peshawur shooting boots. All this is more or less of a uniform, and he is in a great measure a soldier, as may be seen by the Anglo-Indian cut of his beard, by his whiskers reaching to the moustache, and his stiff seat on horseback, which, by the way, does not denote a born horseman. We are in the thicket by the time that he has galloped up to us on his big Afghan horse. He puts himself at the head of our troop, and offers to show us the way.

Upon emerging from the rose-banks, which are intersected by marshy pools, we find ourselves in a stretch of country where the

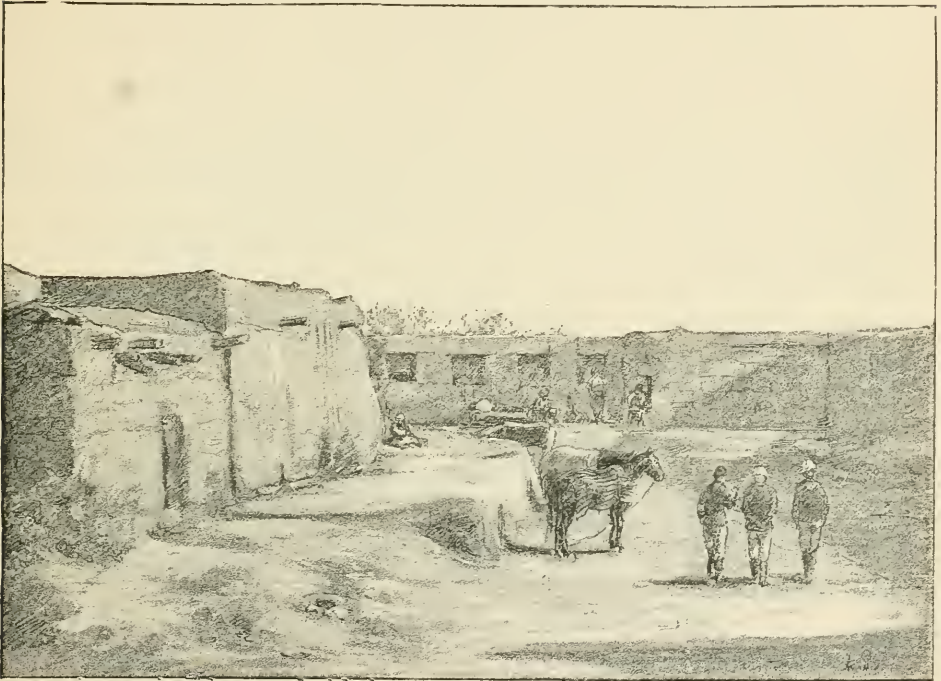
abodes of the Ersari Turkomans are scattered about in the fields surrounded by deep *aryks* (ditches), the ground being white with salt in many places. We pass through the cultivated fields of Chour Tepe, which have been formed out of reed beds, several of which still remain, and as we ride along we catch a glimpse of a canal, a horseman with pointed headdress, or a man on foot armed with a long rifle.

Upon coming close to a caravansary, we notice a few huts made of rushes, with a rough coating of mud. These are the empty shops of the bazaar, the only occupant of which is a starved-looking idiot, wrapped up in tattered rags. The officer asks us to come into the caravansary, which is protected by high walls and a ditch, and he offers us hospitality in his own room, which he hastens to clear out. This invitation to rest ourselves is significant, being a polite way of acquainting us not to go any further until orders have been received on the subject.

Without having proper papers, it is impossible to travel into Afghanistan. Authority from the emir is absolutely necessary, as is explained to us by a gigantic one-eyed Turkoman, who happens to be an acquaintance of Rachmed. He formerly served an Uzbek chief at Urgut, whom the Russians packed off to Siberia for murder. When his master was arrested, he crossed the Amu into Afghanistan. He also informs us that there is, among the reeds, near the river bank, a post of Afghan soldiers, who have received orders to refuse the use of the ferry to any one who has not a paper with the mirza's visa, and that he has been sent for to see about us. He soon arrives, followed by three or four Afghans of a more or less hang-dog appearance and armed to the teeth, which he is not. He is very decently dressed, in wide pantaloons of white cotton and a sort of open tunic, with Peshawur slippers turning up at the toes, and an Afghan bonnet on his head. He is thickset, swarthy, and covered with hair; his bushy beard

covers nearly the whole of his face, the hair extending almost up to his eyes, which are black and very brilliant. He speaks shortly, but expresses himself in very elegant Russian, which astonishes Rachmed, who whispers to me that he must be anything but pleasant to do with when he is angry.

The mirza puts a lot of questions to us, and we endeavour to explain to him the scientific object of our journey, such as the

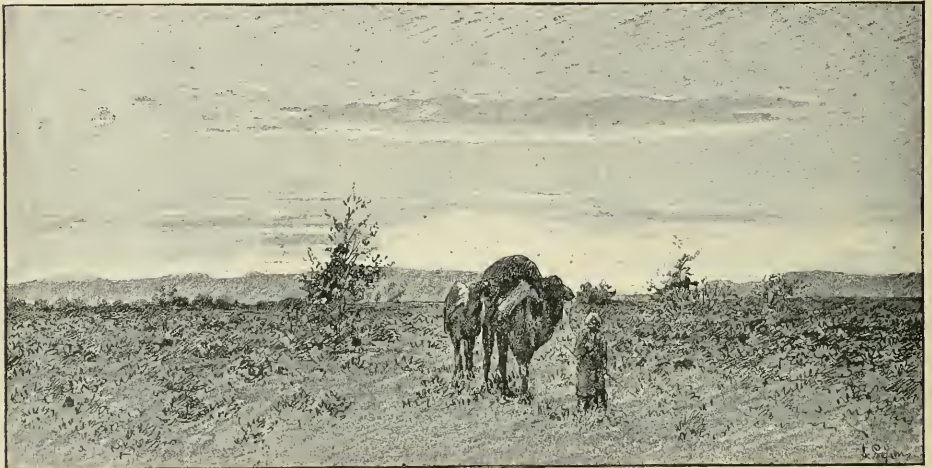


INTERIOR OF THE CARAVANSARY AT CHOUR-TEPE.

examination of the ruins of the ancient Bactra, visited by Alexander, the Arabs and the Moguls; the exploring of Kafiristan, which is inhabited by enemies of the Afghans, and supplies them with such fine slaves, which can be bought cheap at Chost. He knows about France, and seems to understand to what nationality we belong; he understands that we have no evil motives. He knows that our people is a powerful one, and that the Afghans have no reason to dislike the French. So he bids us welcome,

and advises us to await here the decision of the frontier chief, whom he will inform of our arrival. We tell him that we have only papers in French, which his chiefs do not understand. He reads the Persian visa and seems satisfied. The mirza assures us that to-morrow morning we shall have an answer; he believes that we shall be allowed to travel through Afghanistan.

As we do not wish to carry matters with a high hand, relying upon our diplomacy to pull us through, we settle down in the officer's room, and wonder whether we shall be allowed to pass, despite the diplomatists who want to keep the Afghans isolated.



OUTLINE OF THE BACTRA MOUNTAINS.

The important point is to establish the fact that we are French, and this is no easy matter with people who are the embodiment of suspicion, and who put no belief in the word spoken or the word written. For, as a matter of fact, if they are ready to believe in our nationality, our coming here will seem very extraordinary, and they will be inclined to think that we have a mission from our government. Their imaginations will be excited, and they will think that we are persons of importance. We must tell a convenient falsehood, and we shall see much that is interesting; in the first place, the city of Bactra, which has been in our thoughts

for so many years, probably to a much greater extent than it deserves to be.

The repast offered us by the mirza is a copious one. At night-fall, thanks to the obscurity, we receive letters from Europe, sent on to us from Samarcand by a courier, whom we instruct to remain on the other side of the stream, and we go to sleep happy in the receipt of news from our relations and friends.

October 15th.

Upon awaking, we hear a noise in the street, horsemen and people on foot passing on their way to the bazaar, this being market day. Butchers, with stalls in the open air, are cutting up carcasses of cattle, of which we secure the undercuts. The Ersaris do not eat horseflesh, this custom being chiefly an Uzbeg and Kirghiz one. The chief food of the Turkomans in this region is the sorghum, of which they either roast the berries and eat them as they are cooked, wearing their teeth down to the level of the gums, or else grind them into flour and make a sort of polenta with it. Despite this very plain kind of food, they are generally very tall, with such strong limbs and frames, that they may be compared to the massive and gigantic Patagonians.

This puzzles the mirza, who says that the Afghans could not live on such fare; and he is surprised that, though better fed than these Ersaris, they are much smaller men.

“But,” I said, “you are more courageous.”

“Yes, that is true. There are not more than a dozen of us in the caravansary, and we have the whole country in subjection to us.”

The day is spent in waiting for the reply, and watching the natives come and go. There are some Afghans mixed up in the crowd; they do not appear to be very rich, but they do not fraternize with the Turkomans. An aged Hindoo, with enormous

black-rimmed spectacles, accompanied by a little boy nearly naked, rides up with two ponies loaded with drugs. He soon has plenty of customers.

The mirza tells us that to-morrow we shall certainly have a reply. The caravansary is full of new faces.

October 16th.

“ Iskandar Zulcarnein conquered the seven parts of the world. He first defeated Dara, who took to flight. Dara was killed by his own men, but Iskandar arrived in time to receive the last wishes of the dying man. He took Dara’s head upon his knees, and the latter said to him: ‘ Treat my family well, and, I pray of thee, kill them which have killed me.’

“ Iskandar promised Dara to avenge him, and he conquered the five other parts of the world. The all-powerful Emperor of Tsin bestowed his daughter upon him ; he subjected nations which lived in the entrails of the earth ; he killed with his lance fishes which had bars of gold in their stomachs ; he captured the most beautiful mares and the best stallions of Arabia.”

This story of the mirza’s was cut short by the arrival of three cavaliers, who halted near the door. One of them, with blue spectacles, riding a handsome horse, is accosted by Menas, who shows him to our room, several armed men standing close to the low doorway. The conversation takes place in Persian, and after the customary exchange of polite greetings, he begins to question us as to the object of our journey and our nationality, our replies being written down as they are made. We are in presence of the chief who has the surveillance of the Amu. His watch is not a very strict one, for if we had liked we could have gone to Balkh without stopping, but this march inland would not have done us any good, and would have irritated the Afghan authorities.

Our interlocutor does not in the least resemble the men he

commands, for he has a round face, a small nose slightly turned up, a large stomach, though he is not over thirty, and the big limbs of a Turk. He wears the uniform of his rank, as he tells us. He has a headdress similar to that of the Turkomans, but which looks as if it had had the hair shaved off it; and he wears a grey frieze tunic, with large brass buttons, tied in at the waist with a belt of English origin, as is the sword hanging from it. He has big boots like those of a French gendarme, whose duties he may be said to be discharging, and he has also a large knife stuck into his belt, cartridge boxes slung across his chest, and an enormous breech-loading rifle similar to that carried by sergeants of Sepoys in the Anglo-Indian army. He also carries a revolver, and there is no saying what he has in his pockets, if he has got any.

When this young officer, with his intelligent face, has completed his interrogatories, we take the liberty of asking him where he was born and to what tribe he belongs. His reply was as follows—

“I am of Kurdish origin. It is just 127 years since Nadir-Shah the conqueror removed our tribe to the neighbourhood of Cabul. It was a numerous one, comprising nearly a thousand warriors, but to-day it is a small one, having scarcely a third as many.”



AFGHAN OFFICER.

“How do you account for that?”

“A great many have been killed in battle. We have no other calling but that of arms. You may know that I have written what you told me to Issa Khan Bey, at Masari-Cherif. He will reply to my letter to-morrow, and give orders for the journey through Afghanistan to be made easy for you. Consider this country as your own, ask me for whatever you like; I will procure it for you immediately, as I am your slave.”

He made a low bow as he uttered these words, and then withdrew, returning almost at once to ask us who were the men that accompanied us. I then noticed that he had a ring of antimony round his eyes, and I could easily see from his strut that he was deeply impressed with the dignity of his office and that he had a very good opinion of his own person. He then went to a room on the other side of the courtyard, through a crevice in the closed shutters of which he watched us with close attention. But our rugs had need of being exposed in the sun, so we hung them to dry on cords which concealed us from his view and enabled one of our Arabs to hand us, without being seen, fresh letters which had come in from Samarcand.

In the evening, the Kurd paid us a visit in another dress, having taken off his boots and put on slippers with turned-up toes. We converse in Persian, and I lead the conversation on to the English and the Afghans. He praises the latter, vaunting their courage, their contempt for death, their spirit of independence. He says—

“When the Afghans are anywhere, there they remain, and they will die in their country rather than leave it. Their house is not much of it, but if they were offered a very beautiful one in exchange, one more beautiful than a star, they would not accept it.”

“Have you lived in India?”

“Yes, a long time ; it is the most beautiful and the richest of countries. Without India the English would be poor.”

“Why do you say that ?”

“I know it. I have seen the great things which they have made—the canals, the roads, the bridges. They have been of great benefit to the country. They have covered it with useful buildings.”

“Do the Afghans like the English ?”

“No.”

“At the present time, the two peoples are friendly ; you have some English as guests, you have stood in defence of common interests.”

“We do not deceive ourselves as to English friendship, and rely only upon ourselves. They are very rich. I was with their Commission, a colonel got six thousand rupees a month, and you know what a large sum that is.”

“Yes, that is fine pay.”

“The Russians, upon the contrary, are poor. They have no money. Their generals are badly paid. Have they got many soldiers ?”

“Yes.”

“I had heard so. But for them the Afghans would have taken Bokhara long ago ; they would have conquered the whole country up to Siberia ?”

Rachmed protests and tells the Kurd that the people of Turkestan formerly captured Afghanistan, and that, well commanded, they might beat the Afghans. As to the Russians, they will seize whatever they please. With one blow of the hand they knocked down the Turkomans.

The Kurd shrugged his shoulders, and said—

“The Bokhara men are not soldiers ; nor are the Turkomans. They are thieves whom it is easy to put to flight.”

This brought Menas to have his say.

“I know the Turkomans; I know how they of Akkal fought at Geok-Tepe, and they have many *batirs* (heroes). The Afghans would never have got the upper hand of them, nor would the Persians.”

This annoyed the chief very much, and made him exclaim—

“What do you mean by comparing the Persians to Afghans? The Persians are *heivane* (animals), not men. But for the Russians we should have captured Persia a long time ago.”

“But for the Russians!” put in Menas ironically.

I am obliged to make him hold his tongue, for he is very insolent, and he would soon be insulting the Kurd, whom it is our interest to make friendly, and who would soon lose his temper too.

“We are not afraid of either the Russians or the English,” added the Kurd, looking straight at Menas, who smiled; “and we would fight to the last man rather than submit. The English know of what stuff we are made, and we have killed a good many of them. Eight years ago, a doctor who resembled you (pointing to Capus), with 150 of his men, perished at our hands.”

“Did he and his men resist?”

“They fought like brave men, like heroes. They had barricaded themselves in a house and refused to surrender, our regiments surrounded the house, and they fired through the embrasures and from the roof. Our soldiers made a breach in the wall, and set fire to the house, but the Englishmen fought as long as there was any breath left in their bodies. One of them was a splendid shot; by Allah! he killed more than a hundred Afghans to his own gun. A bullet shattered his arm; he did not fall, but loading his rifle with one hand, he continued firing until a second bullet struck him in the flank. He then sank down, and one of our men went up and hacked him to pieces with his sword.



DADALI.

He never uttered a groan, merely opening his eyes occasionally. He was a hero.

“The Afghans are heroic, too, but in another way, and more courageous than the English, for they are not so well armed, and yet they do not hesitate to attack them. Where will you find a Russian or an Englishman who will go up to a tiger with a sword in his hand? There are not many men like Yakoob-Khan, and this is why he is carefully kept in durance. The Afghans are not chary in risking their lives, and if they are not agreed as to the conquests to be made, they will be as one man when it becomes a question of defending their country, and will die fighting to the last without asking for quarter.”

Having finished this tirade, the speaker asked for a ghalyan, which his subordinate, the hideous Dadali, presented to him with a grin like a hyæna.

In answer to our approving observation that he “had spoken like a man,” he said—

“Yes, I am a man; we are all of us men, but as to these Bokhara fellows. . . . Look at your mirza, he was trembling all over while I was questioning him. He was in such a fright that he was seized with fever, and you had to give him a remedy.”

He only spoke the truth, for the mirza had fallen ill out of sheer fright, and had lost his appetite since he came here, while after the interrogatory administered to him, he had an attack of fever.

“And your Arabs, too,” he added. “What do they look like? People are afraid of us in Asia.”

We have him poured out one, two, several cups of tea, and he smokes our cigarettes at a rate which drives Menas, who is very economical by nature, to despair. The Kurd tells us that he has received a good education, that he speaks Hindustani, Turkish, Persian, and Pushti; that he has an atlas with maps of all the

countries in the world ; that he knows India better than any one ; that at Bombay he spent his time in the society of very pretty women, who lightened his purse for him ; that his master, Issa-Khan, is a brave and courageous man, deep in the confidence of Abdurrhaman-Khan, who does not readily bestow his confidence.

“ Is he a good emir ? ”

“ Yes ; he is just, but severe. At the present time he is having about thirty men beheaded daily, at Cabul alone.”

“ It is said that the Ghilzis have revolted against him. Is this true ? Who fomented this disturbance ? ”

“ Some discontented persons, who asserted that the emir showed too much partiality for foreigners. The importance of this rising was much exaggerated, and it was speedily put down.”

The Kurd got up, in order to put an end to our questioning, which he no doubt considered very indiscreet.

As to the fact he stated, there can be no doubt about it—the Afghans are the foremost people in Asia as regards courage and aptitude for war. They are restless, violent, and of indomitable energy ; they are fond of adventure, and, by comparison with their neighbours, they display great activity. Through contact with the English, in their struggles with native armies organized after European fashion, they have acquired a certain amount of military instruction, and if they had expended, to the north and to the west, the amount of effort required to protect their independence threatened from the east, there can be no doubt that they would have considerably increased their dominions during the last half-century. They would have extended their frontiers beyond the Oxus, doubtless to the foot of the Elburz, and the Russians would have had to fight them instead of the khans of Khiva and the emirs of Bokhara. The struggle would have lasted longer, but the results would have been more important and more decisive. The question of Central Asia would have been settled out of

hand, or would, at all events, have been wonderfully simplified by the suppression of one of its most important factors—the Afghan power and prestige. But history has its fatalities, finding a pleasure in spinning out its dramas, so that one often has the spectacle of a small people, very resolute and energetic, placed geographically beside large nations, which it keeps on the *qui vive*, biting them at the heel, just as an ant does a man with a gun who is taking aim at a pigeon, causing him to turn his head and miss his mark. Afghanistan is a large ant, and she will be of service to the more able of her two neighbours, to the one for whose benefit she will bite the other.

This was the view we took of things as we went off to sleep. We made some reflections also upon our own situation, and drew horoscopes as to the future, if this name can be given to the conjectures based upon the direction of the wind. The breeze comes from the east, and drives us westward. Is this not an unfavourable sign?

October 17th.

We receive a visit from the Kurd and the Afghan mirza, who, by the way, do not seem to get on very well. Their dispositions do not harmonize. One is a regular Afghan, and he has a civil appointment, being entrusted with the collection of taxes and the administration of justice; whereas the other is a military man, or considers himself such, for he likes to play at soldiers, and to relate his campaigns. We turn this antagonism to our profit, on the principle *divide et impera*.

I tell the Kurd that we are willing to await the reply of the governor Issa-Khan, but upon the condition that we are allowed to take a certain amount of exercise each day, this being essential to health. I inquire if there is not any game in the neighbourhood, and we are told that there are plenty of pheasants in the

bush. So it is settled that we are to go out after them this afternoon.

As we are jumping into the saddle, we see the fat Kurd coming up, armed from head to foot, with his cartridge-cases filled, his revolver loaded, and all the pomp and panoply of war. We compliment him upon his warlike appearance, and then, in order to let me see that he is quite up to his work, he executes with his enormous gun—an Enfield, if I am not mistaken—the various movements of rifle drill, calling out the word of command in English, and in stentorian tones: “Shoulder arms.” “Present arms.” He handles his weapon very well, having formerly served in the Anglo-Indian army in the Punjab.

When he has wheeled half-round, after the Prussian fashion, and stamped his foot on the ground before pivoting upon one leg, I cease to approve, and I tell him that an elegant soldier—this is very far-fetched—like him should execute the movement with more grace. I endeavour to prove to him that the half-turn round, *à la Française*, is very much better; and the mirza, who contradicts the officer at every opportunity, repeats with me that the first movement is heavy, and that it is suitable for a “fil;” that is, for an elephant.

The officer condescends to smile at the comparison, bestrides his horse with much dignity, and off we go.

Before we enter the thicket, two men, mounted upon one horse, come up with us, followed by an armed Afghan. I recognize the ferryman, who is in the saddle; but I do not know the man who is riding behind, though I assume from his accoutrements that he comes from Samarcand. Perhaps it is a man sent us from the other side, possibly a courier, who has brought us our letters, regardless of the strict injunctions we gave that they were not to be brought over.

The officer had gone on in front while I was making these

reflections, and exchanged a few words with the new-comers; then questioning Rachmed, who was behind, I continued to go forward, the others proceeding towards Chour-Tepe.

The officer rejoined me and said nothing, appearing to be much preoccupied.

I asked Rachmed what he had questioned him about.

“Whether I knew who it was that the ferryman had up behind.”

“What did you answer?”

“That I did not know.”

“Did you not guess, then, that he was a man from Samarcand?”



RETURNING FROM THE CHASE.

“No. I think you are right.”

We wandered about in the wood after the pheasants, but though we saw several, we could not get within shot of them, the vicinity of human beings making them very wild. The officer did not get off his horse. We returned before sunset, setting our horses at full gallop, to see which would get in first. The officer thinks that I am trying to reach Chour-Tepe before him, so he whips his horse. But Pepin urges on his, which is much faster than either of ours, and soon passes us, much to the discomfiture of the poor man. He feels that he cannot come in first, and he is unwilling to leave me, being convinced that we have humbugged him.

Upon entering the courtyard of our residence, we find everybody on the move. The man whom we had met is there, and he presents us his compliments. It is he who has brought the letters. Menas, who had remained behind, saw at once who he had to deal with; and he backed up what the courier had said, declaring that he knew him, that we had left him behind, and that he was about to rejoin us.

These declarations being in contradiction with what Rachmed had said, the Afghans' suspicions were roused, and they were persuaded that we were in connivance with the Russians. This accounts for their surly looks, and for the lugubrious aspect of the Arabs, who did not know what was going to happen.

We resolve to tell the khan the truth, though that will not mend matters much, for truth is not current in this country, where a liar has as much chance of being believed as the most straightforward of men. I endeavour to dissipate the suspicions of the officer, by explaining to him that we had told a friend at Samarcand to forward any letters which might arrive for us from Europe after our departure. This friend was to look out for a man who would undertake to bring them to us, as we had not time to make this arrangement ourselves. Rachmed was quite right, therefore, in saying he did not know the man, and it was true; but Menas did not tell an untruth when he said that this man was in our service.

The officer appears to share our view, and to regard our explanation as very plausible. He protests his friendship for us, and calls us *bahadour* (valiant), loading us with flatteries. He is extremely amiable, and assures us that he is at our disposal, adding—

“The proof of the affection I feel for you is that I allowed you to go shooting to-day without any order from my chiefs. I run the risk of being severely punished, for the Emir Abdurrha-

man is one of those who exact unquestioning obedience, and he punishes the slightest peccadillo with death. Ask what you will of me ; I will procure it for you at once."

He then withdraws, upon the ground that he is fatigued. The main door is closed and bolted with great care. We learn, through our men, who are on the watch, that the incident of the day is the subject of a lively discussion ; that two long letters have been written, and that two horsemen have been despatched with them, despite the night being so dark. The Afghans are talking in whispers, and in their own tongue. It is evident that our affairs do not look very well ; but we shall see what the morrow will bring forth. Moreover, the wind is blowing from the east.

October 18th.

We are assured that we shall have a letter from Mazari-Cherif in the evening. Several soldiers have come in from neighbouring posts. The garrison has been reinforced, and our slightest movements are watched. Rachmed having gone to sleep upon the sort of mud pulpit in the open air, from which the muezzin calls to prayer, he is looked for in all directions, and we are questioned as to his whereabouts with manifest anxiety. There is a regular alert, and some of the men look very gloomy. At last he is found, and the Afghans feel reassured.

We go to bed without any fresh news. It is a fine, starry night, and the wind is still in the east.

October 19th.

A Turkoman horseman arrives with a letter from Mazari-Cherif, late in the day. Orders are sent out to detain us—to prevent us from holding any communication with the right bank. We are forbidden to despatch any letters, to fetch any linen, sugar, or tea, at Tchochka-Guzar. I banter the officer upon this aimless severity, and give him to understand that if we were so

inclined we should soon be gone. I tell him this while he is seated with a cup of tea before him in our room, smoking our cigarettes without the least scruple. I explain to him in joke, accompanying my remark with a gesture to the same effect, that



AFGHAN NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICER.

it would be easy for me to take him prisoner while he was within our reach.

“I should take you by the neck, and in five minutes Rachmed would have bound you with strong cords. With our arms, we could kill you all in a trice; but we have no evil intentions, and we regard you as friends, though you treat us as prisoners.”

“But you are not so,” said the officer, with a forced smile. “You are our friends; the land of Afghanistan is yours. We are treating you in the usual way; similar measures are always taken with foreigners. You need not be under any uneasiness.”

“How long will it last?”

“Barely twelve days!” he added with a pleasant smile; “only long enough to admit of a messenger going to Cabul and returning. The emir, you may rest assured, will at once come to a decision on your affair. He transacts business very rapidly. He will read my report, and he will at once send orders to show you

the curiosities of the district, of which there are not a few. But I doubt his permitting you to go to the Cafirs, as they are savages. You are our guests ; your life is precious to us, and we could not allow you to risk it."

" Really ! "

" The Afghan is the most hospitable of men, and I will guarantee you that you shall want for nothing. "

" I am afraid that you are asking for the opinion of your friends the English ; in which case we shall be kept waiting a long time. "

" Do not think that. The emir is master in his own house, and he asks no one's advice. "

Thus the situation becomes much clearer. We are overdone with compliments, but we are not to be allowed to leave. So we have no choice but to await the reply from Cabul, keeping our eyes and ears open, ready for any eventuality. And, above all, we must not go out to meet trouble, and must pass our time as pleasantly as possible.

This is what we did until the 6th of November, upon which day we received orders to turn back, and were escorted to the ferry.

The Afghans, particularly the mirza, with whom we had become close friends, soon became convinced that we were neither Russians nor English, thanks to our sprightliness, which was quite a novelty to them, and when their brains were not fuddled by the haschisch, which they were constantly smoking, they took part in our gambols, and laughed heartily with us. We had tamed nearly all of them, except the Hazaré Dadali, who was the best pattern of the brute in human form I ever saw. But we made even him dance, and then everybody was agreed that he looked just like a bear. We had succeeded in undermining the authority of the officer, whom we had finally nicknamed " the lawyer's clerk. "

By dint of gaiety, we had won many sympathies. People are always grateful to you for dispelling their *ennui*, and the Afghans admitted that they had never laughed so much. Pepin took advantage of this to make some water-colour sketches of the most interesting of the troop, but others would not let themselves be taken at all.

We had a good deal to amuse us. As the pilgrims and traders on the march had to seek an interview with the authorities, in order to obtain leave to cross the ferry, we learnt some interesting news from these men. We walked up and down the courtyard, we climbed upon the roof to get a good view, and we made the Afghans relate stories to us.



PILGRIMS.

In some cases, travellers were compelled to pay a small "silao;" that is to say, to make a present before being allowed to cross the frontier without let or hindrance. Some who proved recalcitrant were beaten. We saw a certain number of Hindoos, which told us that the mountain road was a good one, that the emir was at war, that they had encountered the English Commission at such and such a place; in short, they gave us the news which at home would appear in the newspapers. Some of the pilgrims were going to Kashgar by the Ferghana; they had landed at Bombay, passed through Cabul and the Bamiane Pass, choosing this route in order to avoid the toilsome crossing of the Himalayas and of the Karakorum. We had noticed among their number a shrunken Arab, speaking a few words of Turkish, who had left his own country and followed a Kashgarian, in the hope of seeing China, which, he had been told, was a marvellous country. He had primed himself with information, and knew that he would have to pass by Aksu and Hami.

In the East, there are not the variety of amusements which

are to be found in Europe. Idle men in the West can easily fill up their time, thanks to many trifling occupations, and not find it hang heavy on their hands. They have fishing, novels from the circulating library, political gossip, the mania for collecting pipes, keys, or butterflies, excursions at cheap rates, with all the thousand inventions for preventing people from boring themselves to death, and satisfying the unquenchable thirst for novelty.

Whereas, in the East, the man who is consumed by the desire for action, who dreams of distant things, who for hours together



POWDER MAGAZINE AT CHOUR-TEPE.

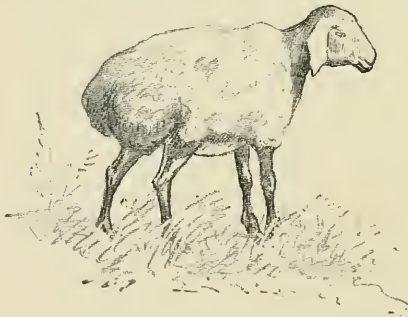
listens to the flowery narratives of the story-tellers and the pilgrims, is seized all of a sudden with profound melancholy, and goes off to visit the holy places, as we should go to Switzerland. He spends years together on the high-road, exposed to unfavourable winds, detained in one place by want, in another by comfort, in a third by some complaint. He grows grey with staff in hand, and upon returning to his own country is surprised not to find it as his memory depicted it to him, for experience has opened his eyes. He will not in future be happy except when on the move, and he starts off again with the first caravan passing through the country, just as the migratory birds, which have been carried by a

hurricane upon some distant shore, live there, until they can see in the air a flock of emigrants, to which they attach themselves without knowing where they are going. All they want to do is to make a change. In the same way, these wanderers get to think, if the abuse of haschisch or opium does not nail them down to one spot, that what is new is best; and they spend all their lives in "going to see," like this lean Arab.

I must come back to Chour-Tepe, where, as I said, we were not without amusement.

Upon one occasion, we extracted a good deal of fun out of the discomfited appearance of our Bokhara mirza, who had been told by the "lawyer's clerk" that he had just received orders to send him off to Mazari-Cherif, and that he must put his traps together at once. The poor devil had merely made a submissive obeisance, and had begun to put his scanty wardrobe together with trembling hands. And as man is inclined to laugh at the misfortunes of others, we laughed fit to split our sides. We were not so un-

feeling as the reader may fancy, for we knew that no such order was in existence, and that the in-offensive scribe had nothing to fear.



DADALI SHEEP.

We spent a short time in killing the innumerable flies which were buzzing about in our room. The pranks of the sheep

belonging to Dadali, the Hazaré, also amused us very much. He followed his master like a dog, sniffed at the dishes, and made his droppings into them. He was always at loggerheads with the horses, eating the straw from one manger, and the barley from another. In short, he was a most amusing companion for three or four days.

Upon the morning of October 25th, we see in the courtyard a young Turkoman, who is busy sweeping it under the supervision of Daḍali, who, perched upon the terrace, with his hands behind his back, vouchsafes him an occasional "Barik, Allah," uttered in a very dignified tone. The Turkoman's feet are chained, and he can only move about with great difficulty. They tell us his history, which is very like that of Eleazar and Jacob, the Turkoman playing the part of Jacob.

Two years before, he had arrived from Kerki, his only fortune being his spade, his fur cap, his clothes, and his sword. He went to the house of one of the wealthy Turkomans of Chour-Tepe, and offered his services. He soon won the good graces of his new master, who was the brother of his mother. A few weeks after his arrival, he concluded the following bargain with his uncle. He undertook to serve him for three years, upon condition that at the end of two years he should be given one of his cousins in marriage.



AMU TURKOMAN.

The future son-in-law, seeing that his position was well assured, sent for his mother, his sister, and his younger brother. He settled them into a *kappa* (shelter made of reeds), and took his younger brother to work with him. He recently had his cousin given him in marriage, or in payment, I ought rather to say. But as soon as the wedding was celebrated, he refused to do any more work for his father-in-law, upon the ground that he did not owe him anything more, though he had only served him two years. He argued that as his brother had

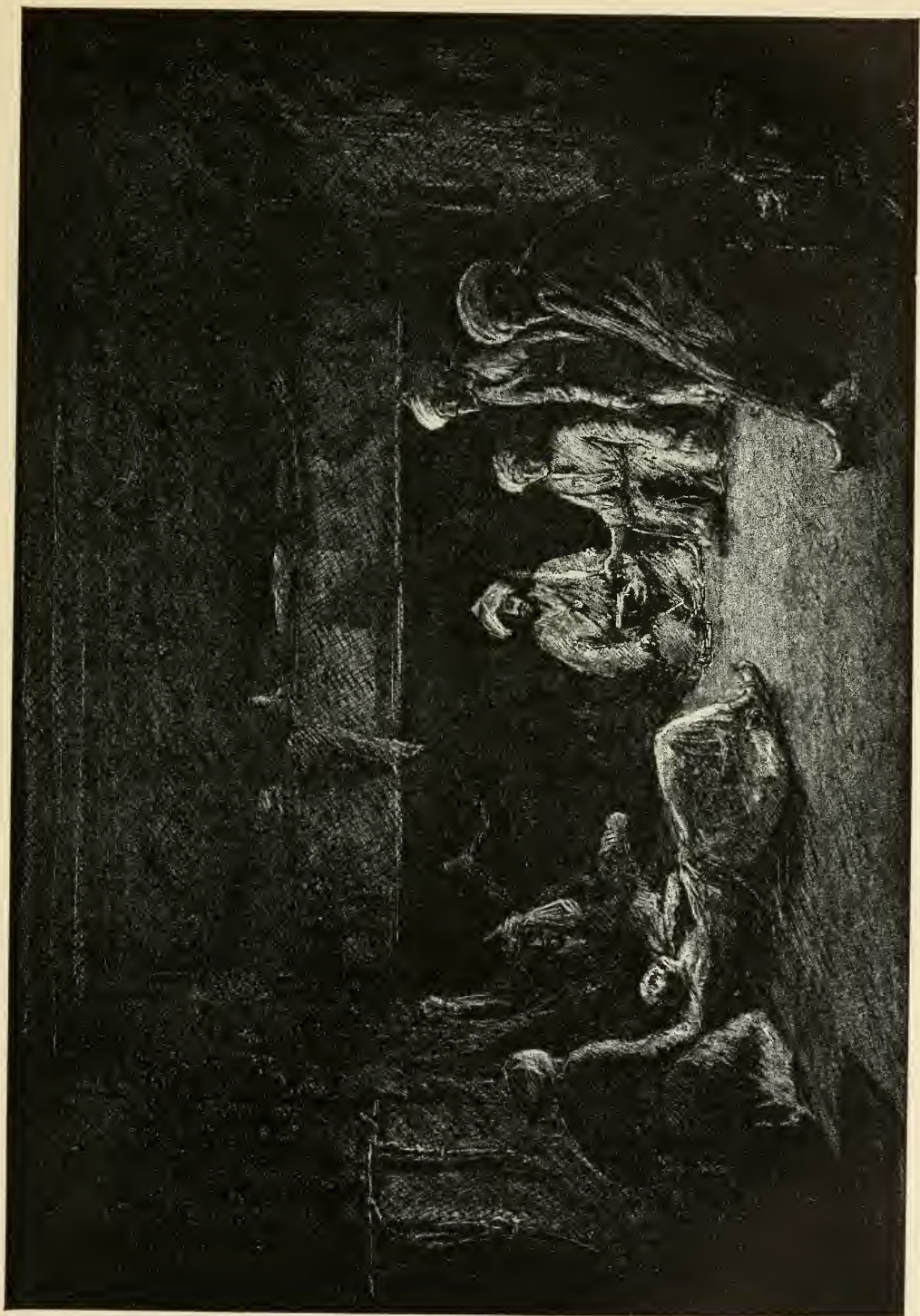
worked with him, he had in reality given his uncle four years' service instead of three. "Moreover," he added, "I am ready to give him his daughter back again, but he does not want her. He came to complain about me to the Afghan mirza, saying that I owed him 380 tengas (about £8) for his daughter. He had witnesses, and got me arrested, but I will not give way."

The next morning, being market-day, the father-in-law came to see his son-in-law, and advise him to compromise matters. But the son-in-law is obstinate, and won't have anything to do with his wife. In the afternoon, the contracting parties had a long discussion with some Turkomans, who wanted to buy the rejected woman, but after a lot of chaffering, the bargain fell through, owing to the hard terms demanded by the father.

It appears that the prisoner has been in trouble, and that the reason why he came over to Afghan territory was that he had already been in difficulties with the Bokhara authorities and the people of his own tribe. He is said to have committed several murders. These antecedents at once secure him the sympathy of our men, who ask him to take his meals with them, and cram him with food to such an extent that he "swells visibly before our very eyes." They have also suggested that they should help him to escape by striking off his irons. The Turkoman declines, saying that the time has not yet come, but that when it does arrive, he shall have no difficulty in getting away.

His brother comes to see him occasionally, and brings him some bread scones; he sweeps out the courtyard for him, and they then sit down and converse together in an undertone.

Upon the evening of October 29th, there is a violent north-west wind; the air is full of dust, the river roars, and a regular tempest sweeps along the valley of the Oxus. We shut ourselves up in our rooms and are trying to go to sleep, when Rachmed, who



THE EXORCISM.

sleeps outside the door, gets up and goes off. He comes back to tell us that the Afghans were looking just now for Dadali, who had disappeared while the Turkoman who was told off to keep guard over him was asleep in the mosque. He had been called for and hunted for in every corner, being finally discovered, sound asleep, in a ditch. They had shaken and beaten him, but had failed to wake him up. He was carried to the mirza's room, where, with his eyes still shut, he was quite delirious, and Rachmed asked us to come and see him.

As we got close to the door, we witnessed a very curious scene. A number of Afghans were sitting cross-legged all round the room. Three of them were holding the unfortunate man, who was talking all sorts of nonsense. The "lawyer's clerk" had taken up his Koran, and read with a nasal twang, amid the deep attention of the others, verses from "the book," at the same time laying on his hands. Then he struck the possessed man several blows on the face, threatening the evil spirit with great dignity. In the meanwhile, the sick man's sheep had sniffed its way to him, and was bleating in a most plaintive way, like a child at the death-bed of its parents. The exorcism does not produce the slightest effect; and despite the shower of blows directed against the djime, despite the rubbing of an onion over his nose, he does not recover.

He is delirious all the time; he sees enemies before him; he insults the emir, the Khan of Badakshan. And in this way we learn that Dadali has had to fly the country for rape, and his judicial antecedents are very bad. He speaks disparagingly of the wife of the Sirdar of Mazari-Cherif, and we then ascertain that this governor had resided for a long time at Samarcand, whence he brought back a wife chosen from among the women of bad character. Rachmed knows all about matters of this kind.

The demented man invokes Ali and Mahomet. The passage

of the English through Afghanistan has made a great impression upon him, "for," he howls, "the emir sent them five camels of melons, five camels of water melons, five camels of water, five camels of forage, etc., and this every day. But they sent the emir ten camels of gold, ten camels of rupees, ten camels of bricks, which will do to build a fine mosque in the middle of the desert, and ten more camels of bricks for the fountain to be built near the mosque."

Abandoning this strain of ideas, and talking about us, he went on to say, "We have taken men who do not belong to our country; we will send two of them over the water without doing them any harm; we will send back two more after having beaten them. We will keep the mirza; and as to the three Cafirs (infidels), we will kill them, after having administered a sound flogging to them. We will cut their heads off and carry them to the Emir Abdurrhaman-Khan, who will give us many rupees, for we shall have engaged in a holy war (*gaza*)."

This was quite enough for us to hear, so we went back to bed, and the next morning we learnt that the prisoner had fled, and that all his family had crossed over to the other side on a raft, which his friends had secretly built with reeds. He left his wife, of course, behind him; and the Turkoman who had lived at Urgut asserts that the fugitive will have his revenge, and very easily too, for he is familiar with the dogs and horses of his father-in-law and knows what his habits are.

Dadali was for three days plunged in a sort of lethargy, from which he only aroused himself to proffer threats, to be delirious, and to writhe in convulsions. His chief, being afraid that he would assault some of his companions, sent him into the jungle, where he was placed in a hut, bound hand and foot, until he regained consciousness, without knowing what had happened to him.

Some people attributed this access of insanity to a philtre, the prescription for making which they gave us ; the others maintained that he had simply been possessed of an evil spirit (djime).

Speaking of philtres, it may be interesting to mention how the natives wanted to use some cyanide of potassium which we had in a phial, in which we placed the insects we wanted to kill. The



RAFT UPON THE AMU.

“lawyer’s clerk” had been much struck by the rapid death of a large spider which he had seen us put into this phial, and he at once asked us the name of this drug, telling us that we should give great pleasure to the Beg of Chahimardan (Mazari-Cherif) if we would present him with the contents of the phial.

“You see,” he said, “that would kill a man without leaving any trace behind it. When one employs a sword, a knife, or a gun, there are also wounds to be seen, or traces of blood ; when you strangle or hang a man, the face becomes livid, or the rope

leaves a mark. Whereas with this you kill your man, and no one can see how it is done. The relatives believe that he has died a natural death, and do not attempt to avenge him. It is very handy. What do you call the poison, as I want to write the name of it down?"

"Cyanide of potassium."

"Canour potasiou. I will send this to the beg, as he will have some of this poison bought in India, and he will find it very useful!"

How nice!

Thereupon we cross the Amu again, for yesterday we were given to understand that we were forbidden access to Afghanistan.



A HALT.

Our good friends had, it appears, sent spies to Samarcand, and they had come back with the tidings that two of us were Russians and the third French, this being Pepin, who does not speak Russian. They had got their information in the bazaar, where we went very often; and the natives, judging us by our dress and language, had taken us for Russians. So much for public rumours. The official reason given is that the emir cannot let us travel through his country until the Boundary Commission has completed its work; which reminds me of what Méry said about commissions: "If a commission had been appointed to create the world, all would still be chaos."

We are escorted back to the stream with much ceremony.

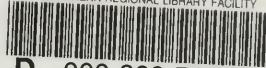
Our mirza is overjoyed; the courier, who had been afraid that we should get into trouble, and who often made me significant gestures, putting up his hand to the back of his neck, is also very pleased. Before we embark, the Afghans tell Rachmed that if we cross the river a second time, without a written permit, they will hack us to pieces and throw our bodies into the stream. They want to frighten us, and apply to us the terrorising system which, according to the latest news, answers well with their emir at Cabul.

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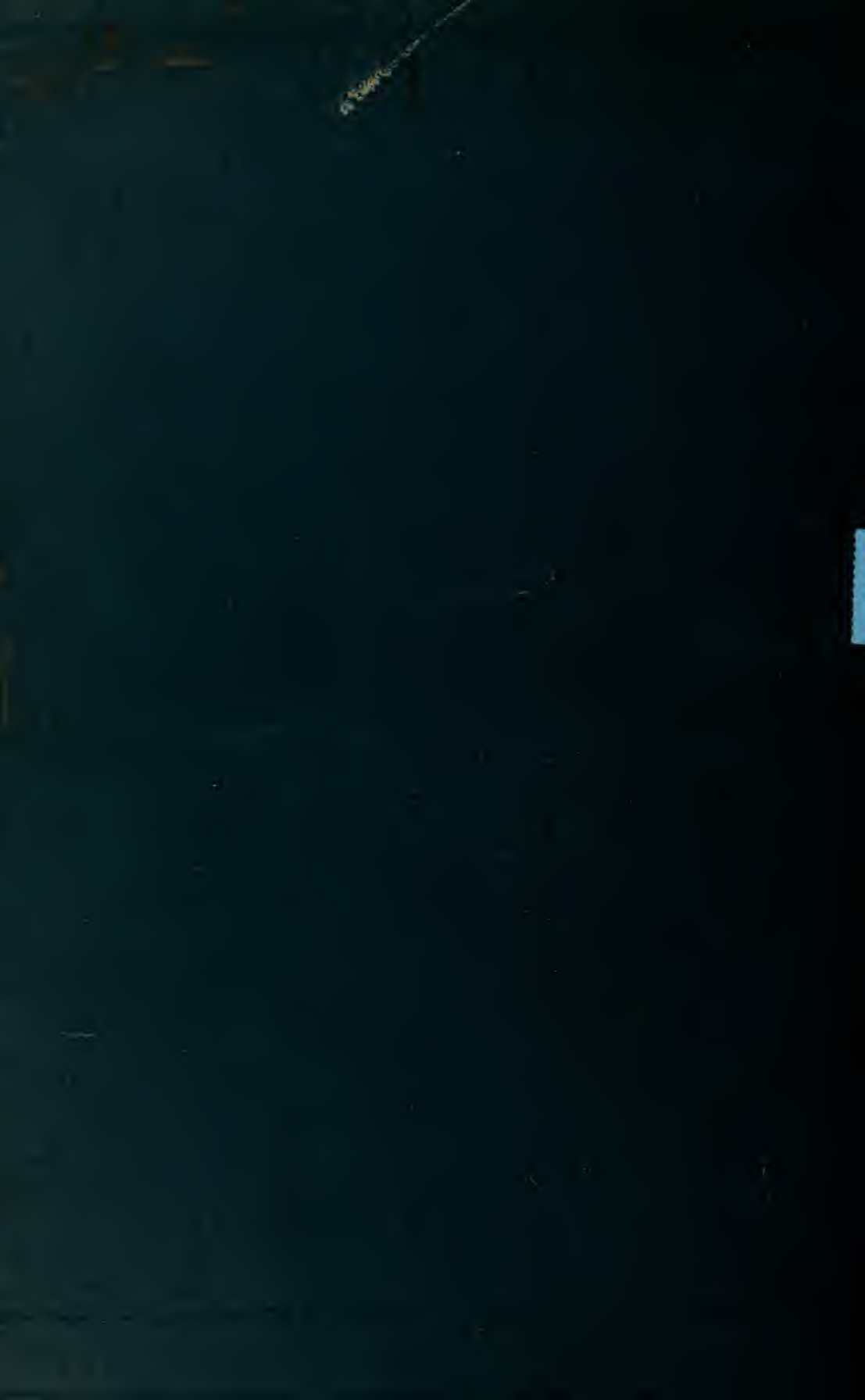
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THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA

THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA

OVER THE PAMİR TO INDIA.

By GABRIEL BONVALOT.

WITH 250 ILLUSTRATIONS BY
ALBERT PÉPIN.



TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY C. B. PITMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL, LIMITED.

1889.

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THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA.

(*OVER THE PAMİR TO INDIA.*)

CHAPTER IX.

FROM THE AMU TO SAMARCAND.

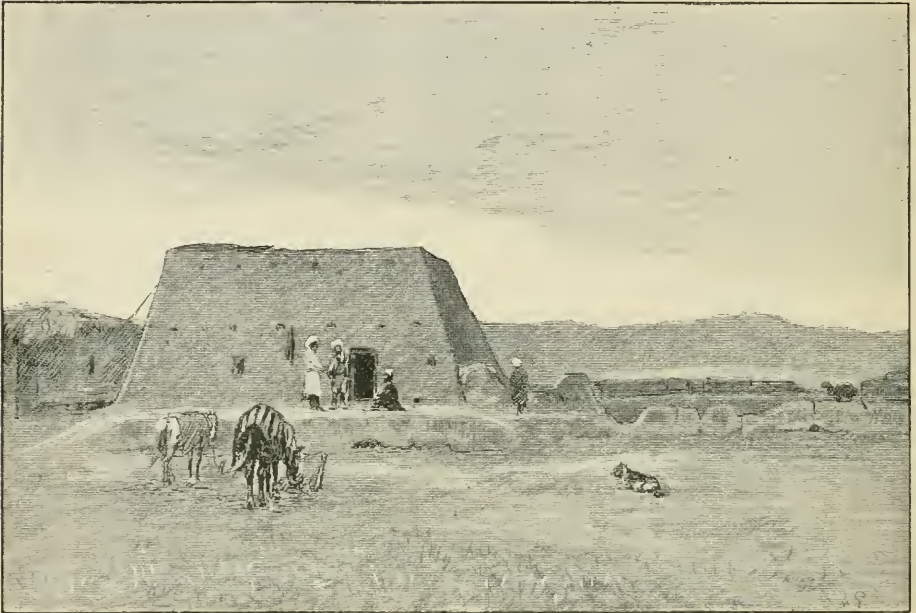
The ruins—Patta-Kissar—Tents of the nomad and of the sedentary Turkoman—Kakaïti, training—The Kazaks—Remains of an aqueduct—Straw tent—In sight of the mountains—A quarrel—Sorcery—The court of a baffled pretender—Baïssounne—At Tchiraktchi—A justiciary—Hope.

November 7th.

WE are at Tchochka-Guzar, where we find our baggage and horses, with Seïd, the Arab whose domestic troubles I have already described. Seïd has got fat, and is delighted to see us. We are not best pleased at having to retrace our steps just as we are reaching the goal. We can but take things as they come, and direct our steps elsewhere. There is no mistake about the pleasure which our mirza feels at being back again on the soil of Bokhara. He walks with a figure far more erect, giving his orders in short, sharp tones, while his turban is stuck jauntily upon his head, instead of being rolled in a half-hearted sort of way, and looking as woebegone as the face of its wearer. He is girt in at the waist, and puts his hand upon his sword, which he

would draw from its sheath, had it not been for years stuck fast to the scabbard, which is worn out at the bottom, but not on the battle-field.

We spend the day writing letters, and looking across the river at the chain of hills at the foot of which stands Balkh, just to the north of Tchochka-Guzar. We look and look again, heaping curses on the head of the Afghans, but at the same time we try to make the best we can of the new situation in which we find our-



TCHOCHKA-GUZAR.

selves placed. The ruins of Termiz are close at hand, so we intend to inspect them carefully and make a few excavations. Allah alone knows what the future has in store for us, and it may be that the check will be but temporary. To morrow we intend going to Patta-Kissar.

November 8th.

We pass through a country the aspect of which is the same as upon the left bank of the river. It is also inhabited by Turko-

mans scattered among the fields which they cultivate. They possess small patches of ground, intersected or skirted by irrigating canals, with a *sakli* (mud hut), having a flat roof, in the centre. Near the hut is a vast felt tent for the rich, while the poor have a smaller tent, or perhaps only a straw hut. With these dwellings dotted about over the landscape, now grey with autumn, the country is not a very cheerful one; while, as there is no agglomeration of houses, or anything which resembles a European village, one does not get the impression of anything like a solidly organized society. There is, in short, a want of cohesion.



GHURAB.

We find a lodging at Patta-Kissar, with an acquaintance of Rachmed's, a one-eyed man, with whom he exchanges vigorous embraces. He is one of the principal men in the district, being entrusted with the collection of taxes, and his fellow-citizens treat him with great respect. He formerly lived in the neighbourhood of Samarcand, but having got into trouble, he fled to Bokhara territory upon the arrival of the Russians. The father of the reigning emir received him very well and confided various posts to him; so he has at last settled down right upon the frontier, where he has become a wealthy landowner and the husband of

several wives. He has also some splendid horses. He is what we should call a "very respectable" person. He has only got one bad habit, but every one overlooks that on account of his amiability.

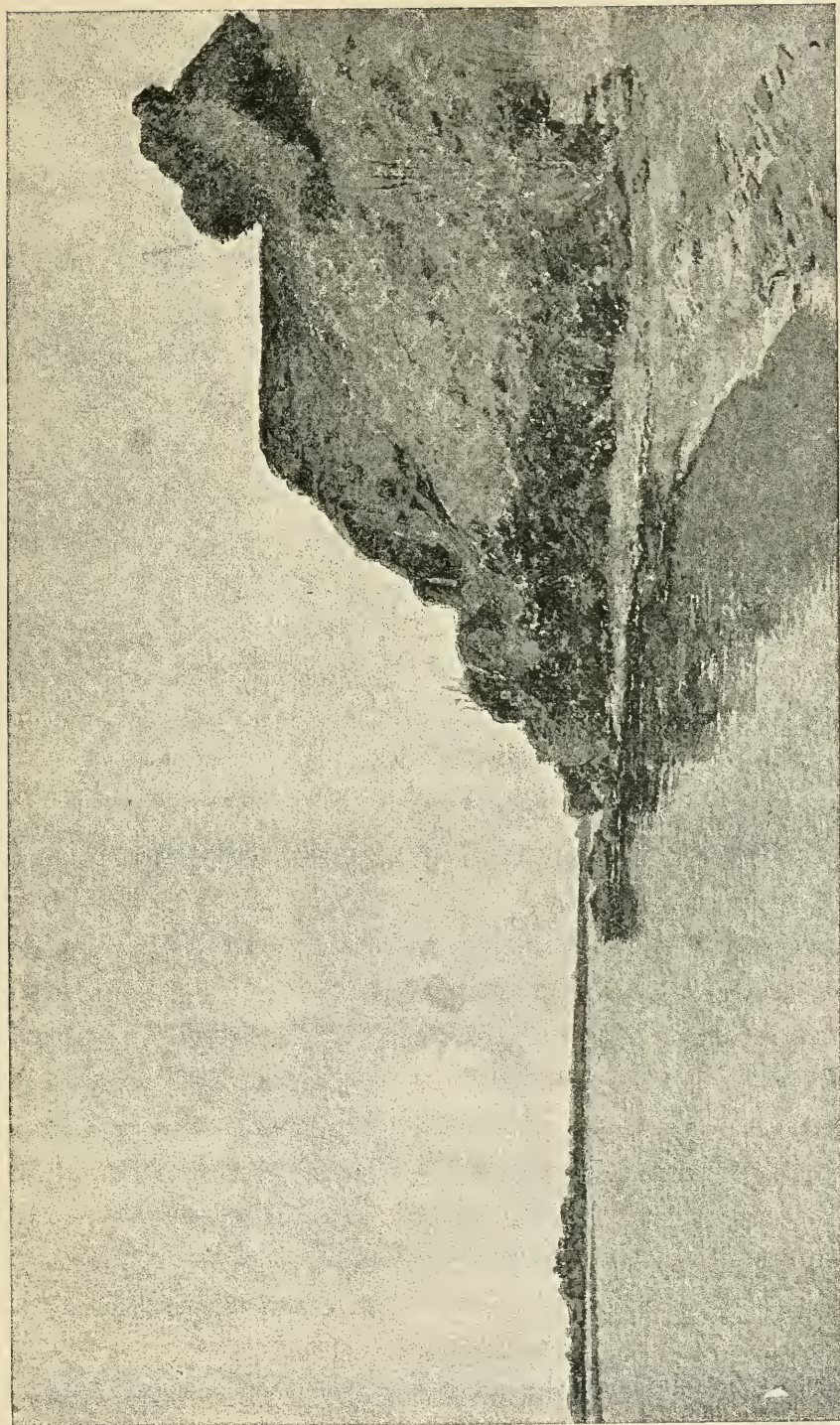
From Patta-Kissar to the remains of the fortress of Termiz, destroyed by Gengis-Khan, is a good hour's ride. Up to the 20th of November we spent all our days among the ruins, and came back to sleep at Patta-Kissar. We worked away as long as the



THE AMU AT TERMIZ.

temperature would allow us, and so far as was possible with a few workmen provided with very indifferent tools.

I will not say more here about Termiz than that we believe it clearly demonstrable that it was abandoned for want of water; that it was inhabited by men of Turkish race who were influenced by the neighbouring populations, and whose habits differed but little from those of the inhabitants of the valley of the Zerafchane, whose history they shared. In fact, we found at Termiz very much the same objects as have recently been exhumed from the



RUINS OF THE FORTRESS OF TERMIZ.

ruins of Aphrosiab, as it is called, which are enfolded in modern Samarcand.

November 20th.

We re-ascend the valley, following the right bank of the Surkhane. At a distance of about a mile and a half we come to the commencement of the Aryk, which feeds the small oasis of Patta-Kissar. The population of this village has increased very considerably since our previous journey. The Turkomans who were the first to reclaim the reed-beds along the Amu have been reinforced by Uzbegs. The hamlet has become a small town, and a bazaar, which is very animated on market-days, has been built. A mosque will soon follow, and with a few more houses there will be a regular street.

The tents of the Uzbegs are very numerous along the river bank. They are smaller than those of the Turkomans, stronger and more pointed at the top, being regular nomad dwellings, easy to take down, to put up, and to move, the rain running off them very quickly, and the wind having little hold upon their sides. The Turkomans in this region are, as a rule, too poor to be nomad; they have not enough cattle to have any need to move from place to place, and their tents, put up between four walls, are chiefly used by them during the summer months. This is their way of going into the country.

At a day's march we came to Djar-Kurgane. The next day we crossed the Surkhane, and in another hour and a half we reached Kakaiti.



TURKOMAN.

November 21st.

The village has a fortress perched upon the edge of tall and steep cliffs, and it is inhabited by a beg. The houses below have

painted thatched roofs, which is a sign of damp. The bulk of the population is composed of Torkulik Uzbegs; others call themselves Nogāi, and when one questions them as to their origin, they say—

“ We come from Arka.”

“ Where is Arka ? ”

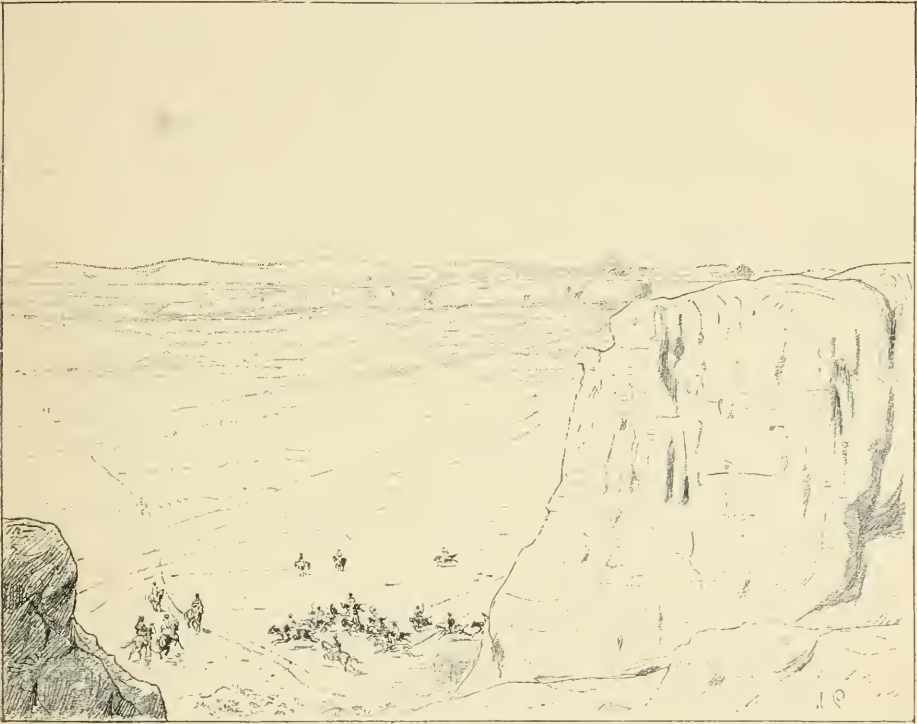
“ We cannot tell you.”

An old man asserts that Arka is beyond Aulie-Ata, upon the other side of the river of the Talas, not far from the land of Kuldja, where one meets people of Tsin (China).

At the foot of the Kakaïti cliffs, which form a semicircle, is a large meadow skirted by the river, with rose-bushes growing on its banks. The grass is green, amid which the cows are browsing, and there is but little blue in the cloudy sky; the scene being one which reminds one of Normandy or England. But it is suddenly animated by a troop of horsemen, who gallop up from the hollow road with shouts of joy. We see them suddenly throw a goat-skin to the ground, pick it up, gallop off, throw it down again, fight for it, jostle one another, and pursue the one who has galloped off with it. They frequently break off their game to talk, and the thing to do is to pick up the skin while at full gallop without dismounting. There is shortly to be a grand fête given by a rich man of the country to celebrate a marriage. Several goat-skins will be competed for, and the young men of Kakaïti are preparing for the jousts by training their horses and themselves.

This gathering at our feet coincides with another over our heads. A flock of rooks has assembled, no doubt in the hope that what they take for a kid will be left for them. They are resolved to have it, for they attack with warlike croaking a number of eagles which have been attracted by the same bait, the rooks being assisted by a number of magpies. The eagles are first of all driven off, and then comes the turn of some hawks, which cleave rapidly

through the air, but are driven off by the magpies and rooks, which then fight among themselves. At last the rooks begin to fight each other, and they enter into the struggle with great determination. Not one of them flies away, and when they are tired with the combat they go to rest upon the cliff or upon a tree, returning with renewed vigour to the battle-field.



KAKAÏTI.

But the horsemen ride off, taking the goat-skin with them, thus illustrating the truth of the proverb about catching your hare before you cook him.

Beyond the Surkhane are visible the steppe and the mountains of Shirabad, and one of the natives says, "This is where the Naimans live, Uzbegs who are not up to much."

November 22nd.

We start under a cloudy sky, following the river, the banks of which are well cultivated.

As far as Min-Tout, at the extremity of the large and small aryks, we see large or small villages, which are like fruit hanging at the extremity of the branches and sprigs which diverge from the trunk of the Surkhane.

Before reaching Min-Tout, where we cross to the right bank, we notice some two-humped camels, which we had not seen for a long time. Their presence in this country of dromedaries surprises us not a little, for they make us feel as if we had left the warm countries. They are smaller than the dromedaries, with longer hair and smaller heads. But they have two humps, two "silos" in which they store a double reserve of fat in order to be able to resist the severe winters and endless snow-storms (*bouranes*).

"To whom do they belong?"

"To the Kazaks" (Khirgiz).

"Where do these Kazaks live?"

"In the Kulab. Wherever you see white camels, you may be sure they belong to Kazaks."

The Kulab is a mountainous region to the east, near Pamir; it is very cold there, for the altitude is very great, and only northern animals can live there. In mountainous countries, one finds northern climates as one ascends; altitude is latitude converted into height.

At Min-Tout (the thousand mulberry-trees, probably so named because mulberry-trees formerly abounded there), we cross the Surkhane, with its steep cliffs full of crevices, and we are again in the barren steppe, in a regular Central Asian country. One might fancy one's self near the Ablatum or the Tedjene, in the neighbourhood of Sarakhs.

Rose-bushes wave about in the bed of the stream, which eddies

around them. They fill up the ancient beds, some of which are a mile and a quarter broad.

Then we come upon the ruins of the tomb of a saint, near a mound on which are fragments of the wall of an ancient fort. In the river are visible the remains of a dyke, over which the garrison of the fortress doubtless had to keep watch.

Near the river, in a bay of the bank, we see Tachtugāi, and then at Kich-Kupruk, about four miles and a half before reaching Kum-Kurghane, the remains of an aqueduct going southward, about



KUM-KURGHANE.

eighty paces long, so constructed as to intersect a torrent coming from the west, and used, as we are told, to serve as a conduit for the water taken from the Surkhane, further up stream, near Dinau.

Beside the aqueduct made of burnt bricks, are the ruins of houses built of the same kind of bricks. These are traces of the grand canal which brought water to Termiz, and which had formerly made a great city of it. The artery was severed, and it dried up, life fading out of the body which it animated. In the absence of water, the city could not exist. It died of hydroragia,

to use a medical term, and it is not the only city in Asia which has had the same fate.

In these latter days, the administration of Bokhara has shown a certain amount of activity in utilizing the water of the Surkhane, fresh aryks having been cut and villages having formed very rapidly.

We halt at Kum-Kurghane, where we take shelter from the rain under a reed hut, or rather under a tent which is round in shape like one. At about a level with the head, hurdles have been erected, and resting on them are four stout hoops connected by horizontal hoops, which are themselves bound together by smaller hoops, like the iron frame of the roof of the Paris Corn Market. This is the framework that bears up the roof, which has a hole pierced through it. Inside, the leaves of the reeds hang down like so much hair, while outside they are tied together with creepers, so as to resist the fierce gusts of wind. By way of pegs, we have the stems of the bamboos, which are intertwined into the hurdles, our dwelling having the style and shape of the Pantheon at Rome, but with more elegance.

We do not have at all a bad night on the matting, near the fire which has been lighted in the hole dug in the centre of the floor.

November 23rd.

We must have four horses this morning. They were asked for yesterday from the chief of the village, who was told that we would pay whatever was necessary for them, and he promised that everything should be ready at daybreak. I could not hear them being loaded, and the *aksakal* (white beard), raising the curtain of the doorway, said, with an air of consternation—

“The Uzbegs are a savage people, and they will not obey. They say that the route you have to travel to-day is a bad one, and none of them will give you any horses.”



FROM KUM-KURGHANE TO BAÏSSOUNNE.

I tell this to Rachmed, who is getting the tea ready, and he says—

“Do not be alarmed. Before you have drunk your tea, we shall have the horses.”

He goes out, and I hear a lot of loud talking, followed by a howl, and Rachmed returns.

“What have you been doing?”

“I have beaten the aksakal.”

“Why?”

“To get the horses.”

“Are you sure of this?”

“Vallah! You will see the horses arrive in a very short time. Moreover, my father has often told me the same thing, and I have repeated it to you. If you are kind to the people of this country, and if they are not afraid of you, they will at once think that you are a donkey, and they will try and find a pack-saddle to fit your back. But beat them, and they will cringe to you at once. My father told me this, and I have had a score of opportunities for proving that he was right.”

The horses are brought up and loaded, and we march away from the Surkhane in a westerly direction towards the mountains. The mist clears off, and we can see that we are in the plain, that the road leads to a sort of *cul-de-sac*, the two sides of which are represented by two parallel spurs of the chain which rears its wall opposite to us, and the flanks of which are festooned in the filmy clouds. Higher up, in the far distance, we can distinguish long lines of snow near the summit.

We trot forward upon the level, along a path which winds among the fallows, where the grey partridges are searching for food. We come upon the bed, nearly filled up, of a canal running from north to south, and the steppe begins again. Our attention is attracted to some large birds, with enormously long necks and

unsteady gait; they are a flock of black swans which have just alighted, tired out by a long flight, and half famished. They are on the look-out for their morning meal, which will be a meagre one, I warrant.

Then we pass between some bare hills, but in the ravines below there are a great many flocks. In three hours' time we reach the further end of the *cul-de-sac*, and we begin to climb. Having made the circuit of several hills, we find, in a small valley, wells, cattle, and tents—a winter encampment of Uzbeg Kungrads.



RACHMED.

The water is salt, and we have brought to us in the mosque some koumiss made of camel's milk. It is not equal to mare's milk.

We continue our journey, and two of the horses fall lame, being all of a sweat and trembling from head to foot. Rachmed goes to an aoul situated in the bottom, to the right of the path, with the intention of hiring some horses and confiding the others to the Uzbegs, who will bring them on to us by slow stages to Baïssounne.

We wait with Pepin, who has had to borrow Rachmed's horse.

All of a sudden, I see a number of arms raised in the air, a medley of people, and hear dogs barking. There must be a quarrel of some kind going on, so I gallop to the spot, where I find Rachmed, with his turban knocked off, and his garments in disorder, surrounded by men armed with cudgels, while a tall fellow comes out of his tent sword in hand.

In answer to my inquiry as to what is the matter, Rachmed says that they have been beating him. But if he has received

blows, he has given some as well, for several of the men let me see that they are bleeding. All around me are men howling, cursing, and threatening. All of a sudden, Menas makes for these men, but Caucasus fashion, with his kindjal in his hand. This unexpected reinforcement puts them to flight, some making for the mountain and others for their tents, one of them being slightly wounded in the back. I have the greatest difficulty in keeping back Menas, who had not seen the whole affair, and who thought that we were in danger. I calm down the two devoted fellows, and then the women folk and the old men intervene. A grandfather, who leans upon a staff, bent double, remonstrates with the men of his tribe, reproaches them with having transgressed the laws of hospitality, and orders them to provide two horses. He endeavours to palliate the conduct of these "lunatics," as he calls them, and he gives us his word that our horses shall be brought back to Baïssounne. I make him a present, and everything calms down.

Rachmed rolls up his turban, Menas puts back his knife, and we pursue our journey along the bank of the stream of salt water. I reproach Menas with using his knife without my permission, and his explanation is—

"From the distance, I could not see very well. I thought they had attacked you, and I hurried to your assistance. You know the custom, that when one has drawn his knife, it is a disgrace to sheath it without having used it. I thought that they had struck you."

The valley was dotted here and there with fragments of rock, which had fallen from the heights above; and these landslips were of recent occurrence, for we heard several fragments fall with a loud crash as we went along. The bed of the river will in time be choked with them, and it seems as if some hidden force was bent upon levelling this corner of the earth,

that some genius of the mountains had sworn to grind the stone to powder.

In a few more centuries the colossal strata of grey chalk which alternate with white marble, and which Pepin compares to slices of ham, will have crumbled away. They will no longer threaten the passer-by with their alarming crevices, and the immense grey slabs flecked with green lichen will become the very fine sand of the brackish stream upon which they now frown down. Where the strata end, the slabs are in a slanting direction, and seem to prop up the mountain itself.

We make north-north-west. Right and left of us are gorges through which trickle tiny streams of salt water. More than one of them is already dried up, leaving as the sole vestiges of its passage and as the proof of its ephemeral existence a few small pools in the hollow parts of its bed. Numberless grey partridges come to drink at them, and these birds are excellent to eat.

The paths are very steep. At nightfall, Menas and I, who form the rear-guard, find Seïd driving Menas's horse before him. This is a Turkoman colt, to which his owner is greatly attached, and which he calls by the Russian name of Maltchik (little boy). Seïd explains that the horse cannot move, and we find, in effect, that this is the case, and that he is bathed in sweat, with his tail drooping, his ears down, and his eye very dim. Just as we are preparing to go forward, Maltchik falls, his limbs stiffen, and he breathes heavily. Menas is in despair, and exclaims, "He is going to die; I know he is. It is better that I should die myself!"

I do my best to console him, and say, "Your horse is not so bad as you think. He is young, and will recover. And if he dies, I will buy you another. He is but a horse after all."

At the bottom of the path, a few hundred yards below, we

can see the fires of an aoul, with figures passing before the flames in the open air. We can hear the hum of voices and the barking of the dogs, which have no doubt smelt us. Seïd hails the grey beard in the name of the Tura of Baïssounne, upon whose territory we are. The aksakal arrives with three of his men, wielding large cudgels, which are the favourite weapons of these people.



MENAS AND HIS HORSE.

Seïd introduces us, and Menas relates his story and lights a candle, which he places in one of those Venetian lanterns which he never has out of his possession. The old man looks at him and shakes his head. Menas follows his gestures with anxiety, and asks his advice. He says, "The horse is very bad, but my ancestors have transmitted to me the means of curing him ; I am about to recite a prayer."

He removes the cloth from the horse, which has been set on his legs, pulls his tail, pinches his nostrils, and then, removing his

turban while he murmurs a prayer, which Menas mumbles after him, he rubs the back and quarters of the sick animal ; and when, finally, the Mussulman puts his hand up to his beard and exclaims, "Allah, Akbar" (Allah is great), the Christian follows his example. For Menas, though an Armenian and a Christian, has been brought up in the East among Mahometans, and he has the same habits and ways of thoughts, and, if he has not their beliefs, he has a good share of their superstitions.

Maltchik is whipped to make him move, but he will not budge an inch. He is soaped over with water brought from the aoul, but this does not produce the least effect. He again sinks on to his side and begins to blow. With his long beard, his ascetic spare frame, his sheepskin, and his greasy cap, the old man, as seen by the light of the lantern, looks quite like a sorcerer. He must inspire Menas with the utmost confidence, for when he abruptly says—

"How much would you give to see your horse cured?"

Menas replies, "Whatever you like."

He then asks for five *soum* (roubles).

I do my best to stop this piece of foolery, and urge Menas not to listen to the nonsense of this haphazard enchanter. But it is all to no purpose. He unloosens his purse and begs me to let him pay the money. So he hands over the five roubles to the old man, who says—

"You must strip yourself quite naked, take your horse by the tail, kick him three times on the quarters, and I, during that time, will recite a prayer taught me by my grandfather, and which I am the only Kungrad who knows."

I point out that we are in November, that all this so-called sorcery is idiotic, that his horse will not be cured by it, and that Menas runs a risk of getting inflammation of the lungs. But the obstinate fellow will not listen to me.

“I would rather die than my horse. I beseech of you to move away. Let me do as he tells me.”

“Why are you so obstinate? Why not believe me?”

“When all hope seems gone, and when one has already listened to the advice of intelligent people, it is well to listen to the advice of a silly person, if only for once.”

Thereupon he begins to cry; so I can only leave him to himself. I ask for an Uzbek who will show me the way, for the night is very dark; and I leave the poor wretch to the tender mercies of the magician. After having crossed several streams and canals, which indicate that the valley must be rather a wide one; and having met several kichlahs, whose dogs bark at us, I arrive, half-frozen, at Dachtighaz (the plain of geese). We pass the night in a tent.

Menas came in at four a.m. His horse is better, and he relates to me with much amusement that he undressed, but not to the skin, as the old man was pleased to let him keep on his leather breeches (*tchalvar*).

Upon November 24th, we arrive by the hills at Baïssounne, which extends from north to south, picturesquely situated upon a plateau and upon the gentle slopes of the mountain, which to the left of the road is very steep.

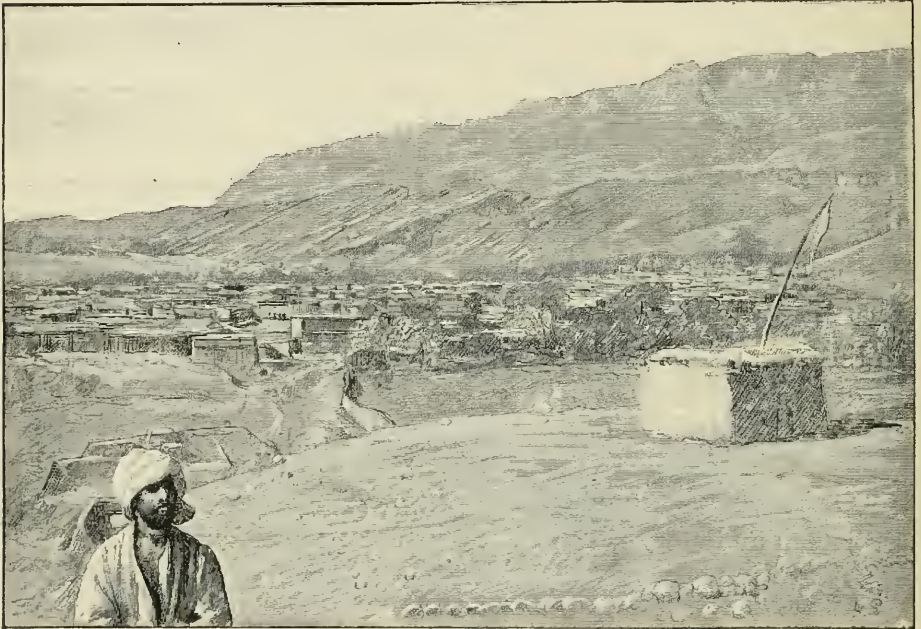
November 25th.

We receive a visit from the chief of the tura's police, a very handsome man, richly attired, with a steel axe in his belt, who asks, with no end of bowing and scraping, after our health, and inquires at what hour we desire to see the man who was so near being Emir of Bokhara. Such is the custom, and we conform to it. The kourbache advises us to select one p.m.; and at that hour he comes and fetches us, in order to introduce us. He goes on in front, with a long staff in his hand. We have left our horses at the entrance to the fortress, just in front of the guard-room, in

accordance with etiquette, which appears to be very strictly observed.

The palace has not the imposing appearance of that at Hissar, nor is there anything picturesque about it, being a congeries of mean-looking buildings surrounded by a dilapidated wall.

Under the first portico are drawn up a number of men very brilliantly dressed and with very long faces. One of them speaks in an undertone to the kourbache, who asks us to wait. None of



BAÏSSOUNNE.

the people here seem to have very cheerful looks. Our introducer, who has disappeared down a passage, comes back, and he appears to be uneasy and much upset. Can it be that his master is in a bad humour?

We go down a long passage. A door to the right leads into a large courtyard, it appears, and then there is a fresh halt. We are asked to wait a few minutes, and I look at Rachmed, as much as to say, "What does this mean?"

He said that he expected the chief of police did not like to let us into the grand courtyard until he was sure that the tura was ready to receive us.

The man with the staff came back soon after, and said, "Pass along," bowing almost to the ground. We enter the room, where the master of the palace, very simply dressed, was standing up with a few of his followers about him. He shook hands with us, pointed to some stools and sat down, we following his example.

Rachmed acted as interpreter, and we first asked after his health. His answers were short, and he merely said that he was very well. I endeavoured to draw him out, explaining to him the object of our voyage, whence we have come, where we wish to go, and so forth. But he merely bows his head, without opening his lips.

While Rachmed is translating what I have said into more flowery phrases, I have a good look at him. He is tall and rather inclined to *embonpoint*; his beard, which is very black, is not thick; he has a hooked nose, the eyes large, compared to those of the Kirghiz, elevated at the corners, and very black, very brilliant, and full of motion. His head had little character about it, being that of an Uzbek, with prominent cheek bones, and rather clumsy.

What a lugubrious-looking individual! He is yellow and bloodless. His hand is devoid of character, short, thick, regular in shape, and white—the hand of a strong race which had for generations done no work. But for his eyes he might pass for a wax figure.

He had the anxious look of a man apprehensive of misfortune, and the sad look of one who has just lost a dear friend. He is mourning for the loss of a throne, and his regrets are easy to understand. We take leave of him after a few minutes' conversation, or rather monologue. He asks us, however, one question as

we are leaving, and that is, how long it is since we left our country, but this is all. We again shake the hand which was so near wielding the sceptre and withdraw.



DERVISH.

The kourbache, who is waiting for us at the door, says that he has been instructed by his master to tell us that "Baïssounne

does not belong to him, but to the Russians, and that we may do as we please there." As soon as we are alone, Rachmed puts his hand up to his face, which is equivalent to saying that he can with difficulty restrain himself from laughing. After he has had his laugh, he sobers down, and, referring to the painful situation of the tura, he says—

"One can understand his not being very cheerful. Do you notice that he looked like an ox which has been driven out of a fat pasture by another ox. He has taken refuge in the midst of an aoul, and he is surrounded by men with cudgels, ready to strike, while his eyes are nearly starting out of his head."

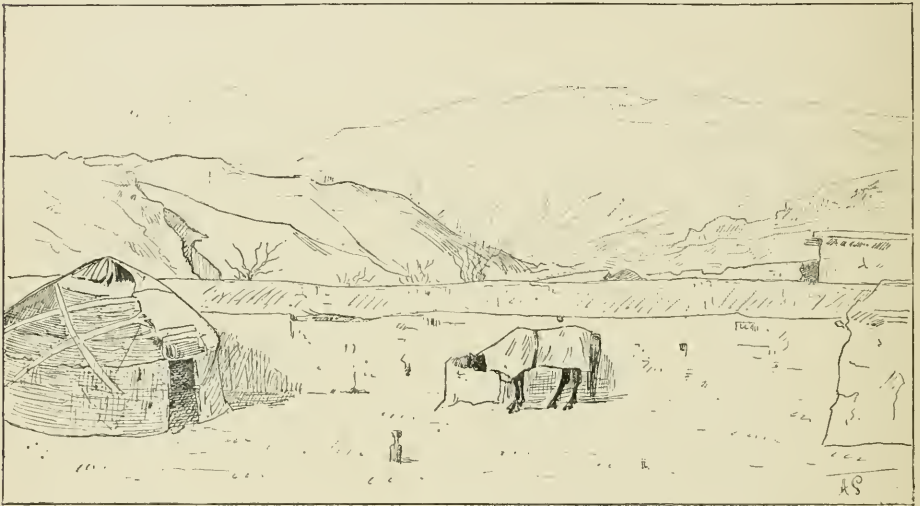
The bazaar at Baïssounne is full of animation, being the rendezvous of the Uzbegs, who come there to dispose of their barley and stock. We see no sign of any Russian goods, and the shops are of anything but a luxurious kind, the gallows alone being in good order.

In the courtyards of the houses stand a number of tents made of felt. For Baïssounne, which, with its five or six thousand inhabitants, might be taken for a town, is no more than a very large kichlak, the inhabitants of which have preserved the customs of the aoul. At each step one meets cows and donkeys; there is an abundance of stock in the fields, trusses of hay upon the roofs, huts, and vine-clad gardens. Upon the large square, beyond the ravine-like river of Basrikun, with its narrow and pebbly bed, a number of horsemen are amusing themselves with the goat-skin, as described above, while the women look on from the roofs above, with their hands over their eyes, bent forward, and clad in long, dark dresses. The stock is allowed to browse in the cemetery, and the place is a regular winter encampment.

From Baïssounne we proceed to Derbend by a picturesque and very wild road through a mountainous desert. Derbend is pleasantly situated in a bottom, upon the banks of a stream, at the

meeting of several valleys. It is a very peaceful corner of the world, and would suit a Trappist. The inhabitants of three or four scattered hamlets, including about fifty tents, claim to be Tchagataï, and they speak Tadjik. An Uzbek contemptuously describes them to us as "Ietiuruk;" and the nickname of those whose genealogy is very mixed is "the people of seven kinds." In Central Asia, the people of Turkish blood despise those who have "lost their race."

From Derbend, going back to north-north-west, and then



DERBEND.

taking a north-west course, we arrive, by the celebrated pass of the Tchaktchak, first at Karakaval, which is at the bottom of a regular well, and then at Kalta Minor. This mountainous region is very desolate and lonely, the only signs of life being a few kichlaks of Uzbek Kungrads in the recesses of the valleys.

From Kalta Minor we go to Guzar, which we had already visited during our previous journey, and thence to Tchiraktchi by Karabag.

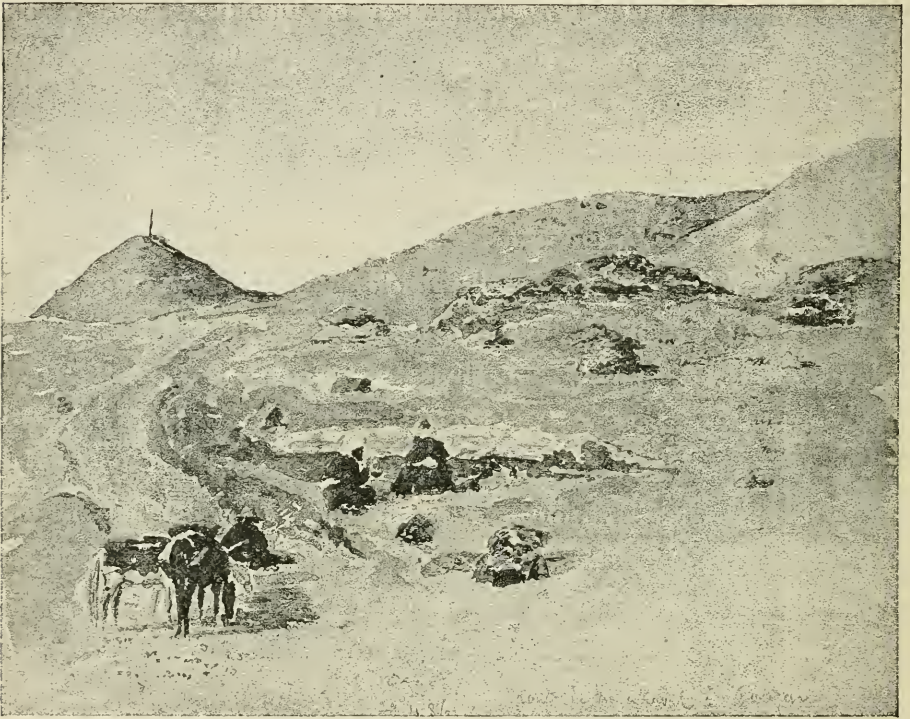
Wherever we stop, we are questioned about the railway, and are told about the war which is about to break out, there being

a general feeling of uneasiness. At Tchiraktchi we notice the absence from the fortress of the turadjane, the brother of the emir, who used to reside there, and we are told that he has gone clean out of his mind, and that it has been necessary to take him to Bokhara, where his brother has had him put into close confinement.

Others say that he had taken the part of the Tura of Hissar, for he was surrounded by a number of ambitious and discontented men, who exercised a very pernicious influence upon him. It was in order to reduce him to reason that he was lured to Bokhara by specious promises, and to repair the mischief done by this weak-minded ruler, the emir had sent to Tchiraktchi the energetic beg who receives us.

He is a tall and very taciturn old man, with a white beard, arrayed in a rich fur robe from Karakaval, and constantly moving about in his residence. He has the reputation of being very rich and very near. He keeps a close supervision over the workmen employed in repairing the fortress, which was in a very dilapidated condition. He is having the walls rebuilt, and closing up all the issues to the river Aksu, whose shallow waters flow at the foot of the cliff, and form one or two islets in mid-stream. There is a fine view from the windows, but this does not interest the beg, who cares little for the sight of the rice-fields, the tents in the steppe, the white summit of the Hazret-Sultan, the giant of the mountain chain on which the Uzbegs graze their mares. He takes no heed of the majestic herons by the foot, the lowing of the oxen as they are led to drink, or of the camels with their tinkling bells, who grunt angrily because they are not allowed to drink as they cross the ferry; but he likes to question travellers, and to examine the goods of passing traders. He is not averse to having a specimen offered him, and he is very hard upon all about him.

His master has sent him here to put the finances and the administration in order, and has bidden him punish severely the slightest attempt at rebellion. Without losing any time, the beg had the most guilty cast into prison, and it is said that he had a few of them executed. We can see through a half-open door four personages of importance crouched down in a corner, under



FROM KARAKAVAL TO GUZAR.

the strict guardianship of four men armed with lances. They are dignitaries, amlakdars, mirakhors, etc., accused of jobbery.

During the day, the prisoners' feet are chained together, but at night-time one of their legs is tied to a beam. Their food is supplied them by their families. Rachmed had seen one of them at Samarcand, and put some questions to him, which the latter does not dare to answer before the warders.

The prisoner expects that they will all be put to death; but he, like his companions, is resigned to his fate. But they will not be executed publicly; they will be taken to Bokhara, and there they will be made away with, their death being kept secret.

We ask the relentless beg who they are. His reply is—

“They are bad men, and there were many more of them when I came into the country, but they fled and took refuge



DJAME.

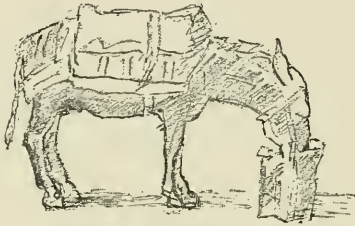
upon the territory of the Russians, who ought to have had them arrested and handed over to us.”

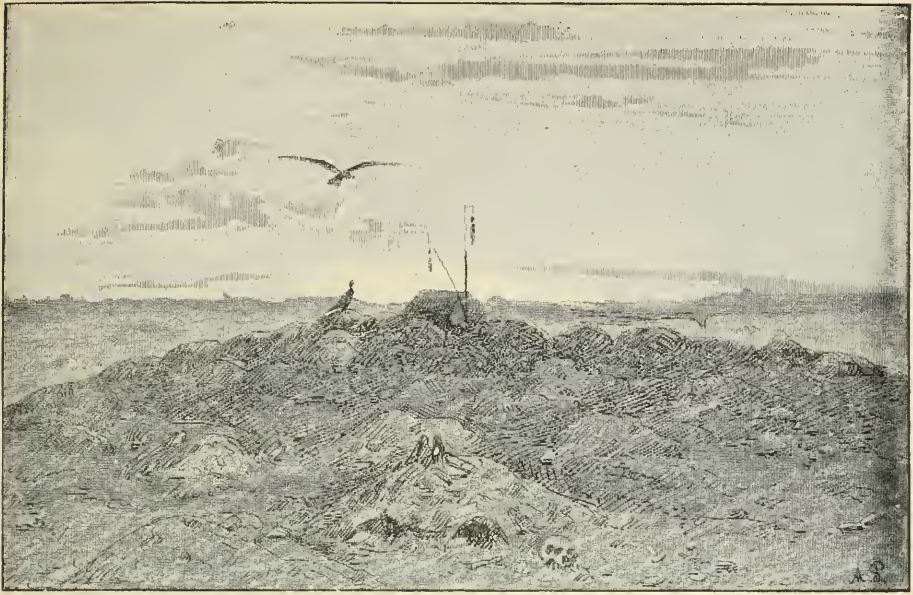
“What would you have done with them?”

“We should have punished them as they deserve; and they would have been a great example to others.”

From Tchiraktchi we went to Djame by the undulating steppe, along the slopes of the Samarcand-Tau mountains, and the next day we were at Samarcand. We returned with a

feeling of annoyance at our failure, but not altogether disheartened; and we said to ourselves that perhaps circumstances would favour us another time. In short, we preserved a vague and ill-defined hope, but still sufficient to induce us not to lose patience, and to watch for the first opportunity.





CEMETERY OF APROSIAB, AT SAMARCAND.

CHAPTER X.

THE PAMIR.

General Karalkoff—Project of crossing the plateau of Pamir—We start for Marguilane—No one gives us any encouragement—Choice of a pass—Precautions against cold—The encampment, lights, candles—Fire, and no delay about it—The commissariat department—Kitchen utensils—A pharmacy—The presents—Weapons—Payment in kind, etc.—Minute preparations—Apprehensions—Passes closed—How we prepare to cross the Taldik—Hope.

DECEMBER, and here we are back in Samarcand. We put our collections in order, pack them up, and write as many letters as we can. We are by no means satisfied, and are undecided as to what we shall do. My readers know that one does not readily abandon a project which one has caressed for years. Checks, in a case of this kind, accentuate the desire to succeed rather than kill it, and, even when in a sinking boat upon an angry sea, one does not lose hope, saying to one's self that the

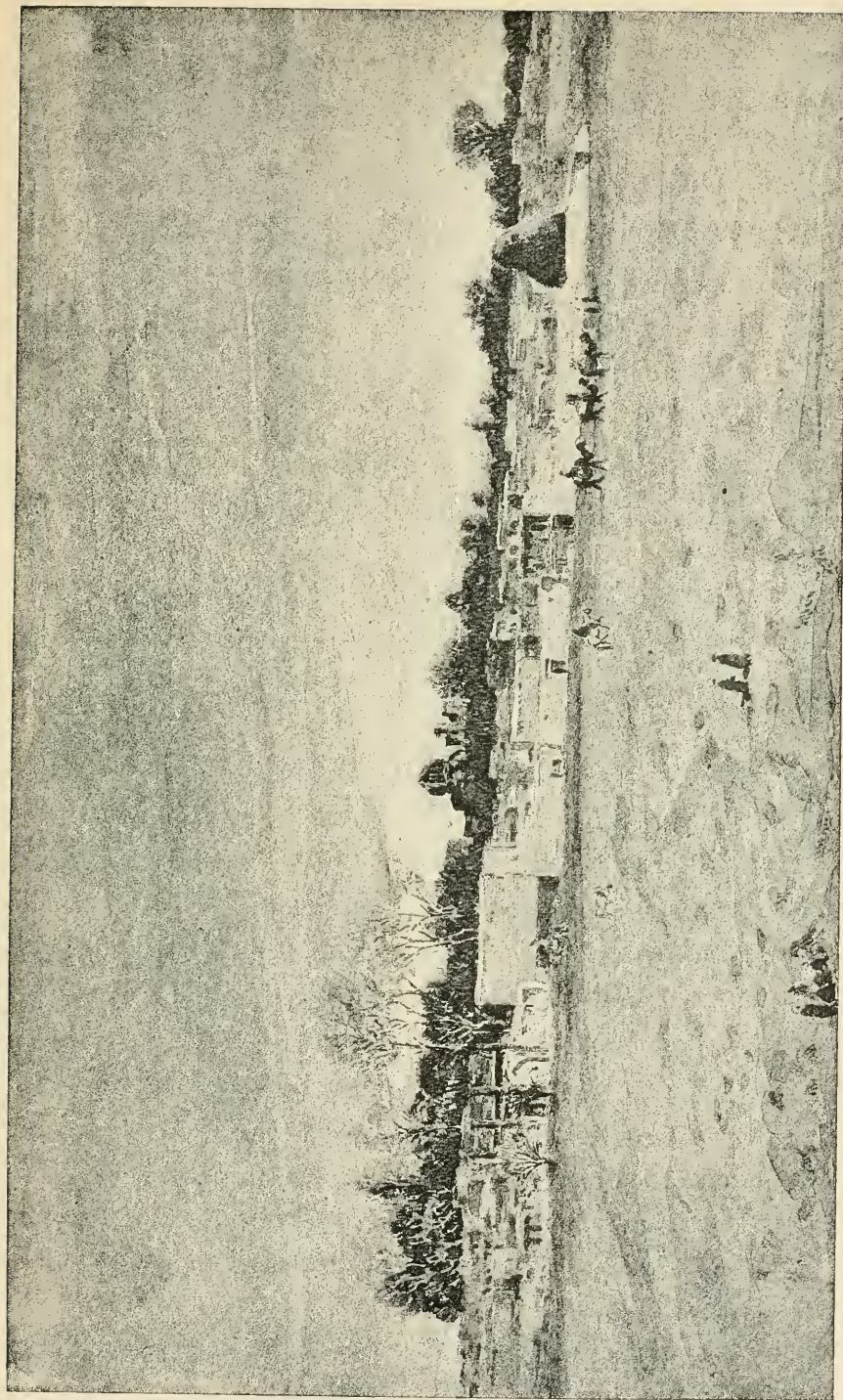
wind will perhaps drop, the sky clear, and a gentle breeze take one safe into port.

So we have one eye fixed upon France and the other upon India, and we are bewailing our luck, when we learn of the arrival of General Karalkoff, who has shown so many proofs of sympathy with France, and who, during our previous journey, gave us so many proofs of friendship and so much assistance. This piece of news is like a ray of light in a dark sky, and we say to ourselves that something will assuredly happen. General Karalkoff is one of those who know Central Asia better than any one; he is a general, an administrator, and a man of very large ideas, such as France so urgently needs. His arrival is sure to make a modification in our plans; and he will tell us what he thinks of the other roads leading to India.

After a long conversation with him about the Pamir, Kashgaria, and the recent journeys undertaken in this region, the general says to us—

“Why should you not try to enter India by Kashgaria, or even by the Pamir? No attempt has ever been made to explore it in winter, and the enterprise is regarded as hopeless. But who can tell? It might be worth trying.”

These words were like the breeze so anxiously desired by the mariner, like the puff of wind which causes the fire smouldering beneath the ashes to burst out again. So we go back to our maps, cross-question the hunters and the natives, read the travels of Forsyth, Putiata, Ivanoff, Regel, etc., and speedily decide to go to Marguilane, where we shall be better able to collect information, prepare for our journey with the assistance of General Karalkoff, who offers us his hospitality, and start, if it should be decided, either for Kashgaria or the Pamir. We have no doubt as to the first route, for the information of the caravan men is



SAMARCAND, SEEN FROM THE FORTRESS.

positive that it can be taken in winter, going to Ladak by the Terek-Davan, Kashgar, Yarkand, Kargalik and the passes of Karakurum. This will be a *pis-aller* in case the Pamir should be totally impracticable, for we have but very vague information as to what winter is like upon "the roof of the world."

When we speak of our intention of passing over it in February or March, people smile, and our acquaintances look at us with amazement, give us to understand that we are mad, and urge us to give up this project. In fact, no one thinks we are serious when we speak of the Pamir. We are not very decided upon the point, and make no attempt to confute the objections raised, waiting until we get to Marguilane.

We send Rachmed and a few men on in advance with our baggage and horses, and as the road is bad, they will take about twenty-five days to reach Marguilane. Having settled our affairs, we say good-bye to our friends, and upon the 14th of January, our old acquaintance Barchefski accompanies us as far as the Zerafchane. After a parting hug, we cross the "gold-rolling stream," which has less water now than in summer, and we make for Djizak in a sleigh, travelling by way of Zaamin, Ura-Tepe, etc., by the seven cities which Alexander captured. At last we reach Khodjend, built upon the Sir-Darya, which the famous conqueror no doubt crossed at about the spot where the Russians have built a bridge. Upon this occasion, we merely walk along the banks of the river, and start for Kastakos on wheels.

Kastakos is in the midst of an arid steppe, exposed to easterly winds which blow nearly all the year round, while the Sir-Darya drifts ice almost ceaselessly. Still, even this motion gives a little life to the motionless plain. We again see Khokand, with its vast bazaar and countless victims of goitre.

Early one morning, we come within sight of the barracks of Russian Marguilane, then of the church in the principal square,

and we go to stay with General Karalkoff, whom we find suffering from indisposition, but kindly disposed as usual.

The Governor of Ferghana, who inhabits Marguilane, the capital of the province, is also an old acquaintance, and he is very ready to do what he can for us. We thank him very heartily for this. At Marguilane, we are not quite at the foot of the wall, but we are not very far off.

In clear weather, we can easily distinguish the chain of the Alaï, from its lowest spurs to its summits. At times the highest peaks disappear, and then we feel uneasy, for we know that snow is falling. When the mist clears off the horizon, the mountains stand out whiter than they did before. We are always going outside the town to "see how they are getting on." If the passes of the Alaï were impassable, we should have to give up our project of crossing the Pamir. For I ought to have said that, after collecting all the information we can get, we have resolved to make the attempt. We have discovered two persons who think we are sure to succeed, General Karalkoff and Captain Gromb-tchefski, a very hardy young officer who has travelled in the north of the Pamir during the summer. According to him and to the Kirghiz chiefs whom we have questioned, there is very little snow on the plateau of the Alaï, which precedes that of the Pamir; the pass of Kizil-Art, situated beyond that plateau, is still open, and we should have little difficulty in reaching the "roof of the world." Once upon this roof, there would not be much difficulty, the snow not lying to any depth. Beyond that point, they are not able to say much, but they think we might go straight to the Kanjut, and so reach India. According to the Kirghiz khans, the difficulties would be at the beginning of the journey, not at the end. The main part, they say, is to get through the passes of the Alaï, and carry enough provisions to last a month.

According to the persons who are opposed to our making the

journey, and who reason after their own experience of the Pamir, or what they have been told, not only shall we be unable to cross the Alaï, but we shall be buried beneath avalanches of snow. As to the plateau of the Alaï, it is unquestionably a mass of snow, and so, too, is the Pamir. According to the great majority of the pessimists, we are marching to certain death. But upon one point every one is agreed, and that is that the Pamir is almost entirely uninhabited, and that we are certain not to encounter many of the plundering Kara-Kirghiz, who would arrest our march in the



MILKMEN AT KHODJEND.

summer. If the region is not free of snow, it will be of men for the best part of the way, thanks to the winter.

The cold, we are told, will take all energy out of us, and the great altitude will so rarefy the air, that we shall be unable to make the slightest muscular exertion, while the constant high wind will raise terrible tempests of snow. Such are some of the reasons given us for abandoning the enterprise, but we are obstinate, and make ready for a start.

We have three roads for approaching the Pamir, the pass of Tengez-Beï, to the south-east of Marguilane; the Terek-Davan, to the east of Osch, and the Taldik, to the south of Osch.

The only route at the present time taken by the caravans passed by the Terek-Davan. We decide not to select it, because it is the longest of the three, and as soon as we had reached Irkestame, a Russian post situated on the Chinese frontier, we should have, so to speak, to retrace our steps westward by the valley of the Alai, until we turned southward by the Kizil-Art. Before reaching the Kizil-Art, we should find a pass about a few



BANK OF THE RIVER AT MARGUILANE.

days' march from Irkestame, that of Tuyun-Murun; but it might be snow-blocked, and with no one to aid us in getting over it, we should be exposed to one more risk of failure. Upon the other hand, the Chinese might be informed of our presence very rapidly by means of their mounted messengers, who convey to the chief of Kashgar any interesting news from the frontier, and they would send troops to stop us as soon as we set foot upon their territory beyond the lake of Kara-Kul.

So that if we went by the Terek-Davan, we should spend more

time and money, and we should risk being stopped by the warriors of the celestial empire or by the spring, which is very much to be dreaded on the Pamir plateau.

The pass of Tengiz-Beï is not far from Marguilane, and is visible from the outskirts of the town. We are told that it is always practicable, but it leads to the desert of the Alaï, which we should have to traverse for at least a week with beasts of burden. Now we have to take with us wood, forage, barley, provisions, etc., and the longer the route the more animals we shall require, and men as well. We are, in fact, in a vicious circle, for a greater number of stages means a greater quantity of provisions, to carry which there must be horses, while with more horses there must be more men to look after them, and so on. This would be a great expense, even if our means admit of organizing such a caravan, while as the route would be longer, we should reach the foot of the Kizil-Art fatigued, just when we most needed all our strength.

It is above all things necessary that those who are going right through with the enterprise should husband all their energy, and I refer to animals as well as to men.

Our base of operations must, therefore, be carried as far forward as possible; that is to say, that we must follow the shortest route and one upon which we are the best assured of finding co-operation from the inhabitants as long as there are any. But in the vicinity of the pass of Tengez-Beï, the only persons to be met with are a few Kirghiz with a very bad reputation, who would probably make off at our approach. Moreover, they are very poor and could not supply us with the forty beasts of burden we require.

There remains the Taldik route, and though it is said to be the most beset with difficulties, it is nearly opposite the pass of Kizil-Art, which is the second gate of the Pamir, and at the foot

of the Taldik—to the north, of course—the Kara-Kirghiz of the Alai have numerous winter encampments. Two of the principal khans of these tribes have come to pay a visit to the governor.



A FERGHANA WOMAN.

We have seen them, and they say that they can find us as many men and horses as we require, while one of them, Kamtchi-Beg, who inhabits Gultcha, assures us that there is not much snow in the Taldik at present. He adds, as indeed we were aware, that

once we have crossed the Kara-Kul, we shall be able to follow the streams and cross the lakes upon the ice. They both advise us to avoid a certain Nazir-Sahib, a pillaging dweller in the Pamir, who will be sure to inform the Afghans if he is afraid to attack us himself. Nor must we let the Chinese post, which is probably wintering near the Rang-Kul, know of our approach, and the same with the Afghan post told off to guard the road to the Wakhan, which is wintering in the valley of the Ak-Su (Oxus).

Taking note of these warnings, we prepare to start, the first thing we do being to sell our horses, though we know that they are very sure-footed. We intend to replace them by horses of the Alaï, bred on the mountain and accustomed to its severe winters. The snow will be familiar to them, they will not be daunted by the steepest paths, and they will be easy to feed. The Alaï will have given them a foretaste of the Pamir, so to speak. We shall purchase them at Osch, where they will be brought in to us from neighbouring aouls. From Osch to the Taldik, we shall see which of them are the least likely to suit, and we shall be able to exchange these at the last moment for others.

Then, we shall arm ourselves against cold and hunger. At Marguilane we shall purchase "civilized" articles, and what we cannot get there, we shall send for to Taskhend, where we have a devoted friend in M. Müller, a Frenchman such as one would like to see many more of abroad.

Certain parts of the Pamir are uninhabitable owing to the extreme cold, and there is a scarcity of fuel. We shall have to encounter a Siberian temperature, and as in Siberia people wear felt boots over their ordinary ones, we have some made of double felt, with leather soles; the seams protected by strips of skin. We have immense stockings, reaching up to the thigh, made out of the light and supple felt of Kashgar, with trousers lined in the Kirghiz fashion, and over them a *tchalvar* (leather trousers) to

protect the legs. The feet we shall protect with strips of wool, though some people advise us to use paper.

For the upper part of the body we shall have two pelisses, one of them of Kashgar sheepskin, with long wool, worn like the "bechmet" of the natives. Upon the head, a sheepskin cap coming down over the ears, and above that a "malakāi," which is like a hood of sheepskin, falling over the shoulders and fastening in front, so as to cover the whole face with the exception of the eyes, which have loopholes through the wool.

The hands will be covered with long sleeves fastened on to the end of the very ample cloak which comes down to the heels, and is called a "touloup." If with all these things on we are cold, it will be cold indeed!

For protection at night, we shall also have some thick wadded blankets, and a very close woollen blanket of European make, as a protection from the wind, with skins stretched like mattresses upon the felt which will serve as a floor.

Our house will be the double tent which we have used since the beginning of our journey, and in which five people can sleep at a push, while there is plenty of room in it for three. We shall have some iron and wooden pegs made for this tent. Rachmed and Menas do not want any tent for themselves, preferring to settle down each night among the baggage, with felt coverlets and oil-cloth in the event of bad weather. They are dressed just like us, and we all laugh heartily when we try on the many pieces of our armour.

Then we have to think about light. We shall want to be able to see well, so as to take down our notes at night, and we determine not to change our previous system, but to buy lanterns of the country, which we can protect with wooden cases. When they are broken, we can replace them with Persian lanterns made of stout oilcloth, using Russian candles in them. These lanterns

will be hung from the crossbars of the tent. We do not intend to use either oil or petroleum, or to have any lamps, as in the event of a fall, the lamp is broken and the oil gets spilt, whereas if a candle is broken, the pieces can still be used.

Then we have to consider how we are to get a good fire. The only combustibles to be obtained on the plateau are roots, rough grass, and the *kisiak* (droppings of the cattle and horses), and that only at certain places. At Ak-Basoga, near the Taldik, there are a few juniper-trees along the slopes, and several of our horses will be loaded with a good provision of these, which will have to be used very carefully. But it will be necessary to be able to light a fire with speed and ease. After a hard day, the men are tired, and they are anxious to see a little fire, to warm themselves and get a cup of tea. But



A LITTLE GIRL OF THE COUNTRY.

upon the snow, with a strong wind blowing, it takes some time, even after digging a hole in the hard ground, to get a good fire. So that we must take, in addition to the tinder-boxes, the tinder, and the boxes of matches, some petroleum and spirits of wine, as well as a "hearth," or a plate of sheet iron upon which the fuel will be placed and soaked with spirits of wine before applying the match to it.

And the food, which is the capital point in every expedition, which is to the other preparations as the sun is to the

planets, the base of long strategical operations, the coal of the engine, the sails of the brig, the wings of the bird! People may think me very material, and idealists may accuse me of erecting an altar to the stomach; but in reality I am erecting one to the source of all action. Readers must excuse the outspokenness of one who has often led the hard life of a traveller, and forgive his enthusiasm about the commissariat; for he has a hundred times over had occasion to mark the inevitable ill-humour, apathy and negligence of men who have been unable to restore their forces after hard work. The cistern gets empty when you keep on drawing water out and putting none in. So when we come to discuss the quantity of provisions and calculate the number of days' march, I say, when it is proposed to take food for thirty days at a pound a day, "No, let us take for forty-five days at two pounds."

But the Kirghiz assert that one does not eat nearly so much upon the Pamir as lower down, but my answer to that is, "If the provisions are in our way, we can throw them away."

And, starting from this principle, we buy sugar, salt, tea, sweetmeats, rice, smoked meat, smoked goose, smoked mutton, smoked fish from the Aral and the Ural, cheese, preserves, etc., taking double or treble the quantity considered necessary.

We have the cooking utensils repaired, and few as we have in ordinary times, we reduce our stock to the narrowest possible limits, taking only two or three saucepans of various sizes, and dishes which will do for plates as well; no forks, and only a few wooden spoons. We shall be able to get some light wooden bowls from the Kirghiz. We must not lose sight of the fact, in purchasing our material, that we shall have to carry it with us, and of two articles which can answer the same purpose, we select the one less likely to break and lighter to

carry. So we take wooden shovels to clear away the snow. We also take pickaxes of various sizes, and hatchets to use upon the snow and ice.

Our medicine-chest is not a large one, but Capus, who has charge of it, fills up the gaps in it, and, thanks to the military pharmacy of the Ferghana province, we are able to get what we want. There remain the few trifling articles which we have brought from Europe to distribute among the natives whom we want to conciliate. But we have not many of them left, so we purchase at Tashkend a fine plated Winchester rifle, which we intend to give to the Khan of Kunjut, who guards the road to India upon the other side of the Pamir. A weapon so bright as this will mollify him. He is said to be cruel and barbarous,



KARA-KIRGHIZ GIRL.

and in any case he is a bad son, for he has recently had his father made away with. We shall have to get on the soft side of this young potentate. We purchase, too, some of the silk sashes of brilliant colours and picturesque patterns, which are made at Marguilane, and which are sure to be appreciated. We have also a lot of looking-glasses, rings, earrings, and other ornaments in silver and gold to give away; and we are resolved to be as polite and affable as possible all round, though it may be indispensable to show one's teeth, and have them as sharp as those of a wolf. We are, therefore, well armed, for when travelling it is advisable to hold the olive-branch in one's hand,

while having a revolver in one's pocket, so as to be able to hold out the one or the other, as the occasion may require.

So we overhaul all our arms, and take a good supply of cartridges. Menas and Rachmed sharpen their swords. *Si vis pacem, etc.*

But we must be in a position to pay for any purchases we may make, or for any services which may be rendered us, and as the savages do not care much for money, of which they do not know the precise value, and which they cannot always exchange for goods, we take plenty of Turkestan khalats, with tea and sugar, of which the Kirghiz are so fond. We shall also be able to pay them with crystallized salt, which we shall get at Osch, and with powder and shot, though Rachmed says that one ought never to give that to a possible enemy.

At Osch we shall also purchase cotton stuffs made at Kashgar and bearing the Chinese customs' stamp, which is said to be the best medium of exchange. In default of cloth, the people of the Hindu-Kush, the Pamir, and the Wakhan, will also accept the silver bars called iamba, bearing the Chinese stamp. These bars, which are conical in shape, weigh one or at the most two pounds; they are cut off as one would a stick of liquorice, and when you want to pay for anything, you chop off a bit and weigh it. The natives exchange this silver in the bazaars for goods, or have it made into trinkets, this being a mode of investing one's money which is much in favour with the savages now, as it was in the Middle Ages, when so many large monuments were profusely decorated with precious stones and minerals, while even now the wives of African chiefs often wear twenty pounds' weight of silver on them.

But it is time for me to come back to the Pamir, which is not yet crossed, and to-day (February 19th) we are still at Marguilane, waiting for a money remittance which is on the

way. We soon receive the money, and at the same time comes a telegram from the chief of the Osch district, to say that snow is falling much more heavily than usual, and that the Alai passes are blocked.



KARA-KIRGHIZ LITTLE GIRL.

We are advised to go by Tengiz-Beï, which, we are assured, will be easy to cross. But I have an instinctive mistrust of this valley of the Alai, which we should have to pass through from end to end. I am ready to believe that it is clear of snow, when

we have only got to cross it, for that is an encouragement to attempt the passage of the Pamir, the more so as in the event of the snow obstructing the route, there would be a chance of our overcoming that obstacle by a superhuman effort, but to travel from one end to the other, from Tengiz-Beï to the Kizil-Art would be to face certain failure. So to-morrow I shall make a start with Captain Grombtchefski, who has kindly offered to accompany me, and we shall see what can be done. At Osch, we shall get definite information, and I shall decide accordingly. For the matter of that, our minds are pretty well made up that we must go by the Taldik if we are to succeed, our finances scarcely admitting of our taking any other route. With enough money one can, in my opinion, go anywhere, and we have but little, so must cut our coats according to our cloth.

So we will go to Osch, and if there is one chance in ten of crossing the Taldik, we shall try our luck. The main point is to reach the Pamir quickly and without undue fatigue. Once up there, we shall travel south without looking back, just as the swimmer keeps his eyes fixed on the distant shore where he wishes to land. The first thing for us to do is to jump into the water, though the bank from which we must take off is a steep one.

We reach Osch in a tarantasse, amid a heavy fall of snow, and lose no time in getting to work. Thanks to Captain Grombtchefski, who speaks Turkish fluently and who is known to all the natives, we shall soon know all about it. The Kara-Kirghiz of the Alaï are governed by four elected chiefs, who are brothers, and whose mother is very highly esteemed by them. The election of these four chiefs has received the sanction of the Russian authorities, who entrust them with the imposition and collection of taxes. They exercise great influence over the men of their tribe, and they are very useful to us, when they come in to Osch

at the summons of the Russians, who bid them procure us a guide if possible.

The four khans, who are followed by their retinue, are introduced to us, and we remark that they are all tall, with small eyes and bullet heads planted upon short necks with broad shoulders. They are dressed in pelisses and tan-coloured boots, and carry a whip in their hands. Flakes of snow are hanging about their beards and the fur of their caps, for only one of



OSCH, FROM THE THRONE OF SOLOMON.

them wears a turban, this being Batir-Beg, the eldest, who is able to read and write very easily, and who resides at Osch.

After shaking hands with them, they are provided with chairs, sitting each according to his rank, and we hold a sort of divan while cups of tea are handed round. We expound our plan for crossing the Taldik, to which they listen in silence and with a quite impassive air. Batir-Beg then points to the man sitting next to him whose eyes are almost lost in his enormous red face, and says—

“Makmud lives near the Taldik. He has seen men who

have come from there, and he will be able to tell you whether it is possible to cross it despite the *sari-barb* (yellow snow), which has been falling for the last week."

Makmud, who is above the average height, seems quite short on account of his corpulency. He speaks with a hoarse and guttural voice, though the phrases of the vigorous and manly



MAKMUD.

Turkish language sound clear and distinct as they come from his lips.

"There is a great deal of snow on the mountain. The Taldik is blocked, but a road could be cleared and the touras taken to the other side. Only it would be necessary to wait a few days while the men were being collected, and it would take a little time

to do the work. If the snow lasts we shall have a great deal of difficulty."

"Say frankly whether you think the thing is possible."

"Yes; I think so."

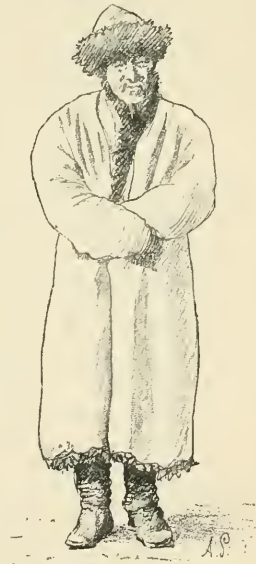
He then turned round to an intelligent looking man that was sitting on the fourth chair, the youngest of the party, and added—

"Mollah-Baïas is of my opinion. He knows better than I do what can be done, for he has tents at the foot of the Taldik, at Ak-Basoga."

Mollah-Baïas replied that he was of Makmud's opinion, but, he added, "we shall have great difficulty, because we are in the yellow snow season. There has been a good deal already, and there will be more. But I think that an attempt might be made."

I was overjoyed at this, as it seemed to me like opening the gate of the Pamir. We shall probably be able to cross the Taldik.

We at once began to inquire about the valley of the Alai. No one had visited it during the winter, but they all thought that there would be some snow in it, though not very much. Batir-Beg says that it will be as well to ask the djiguite of his eldest brother, Abdullah-Khan, who fought against Skobeloff, and died in the land of Cabul, to which he had fled. Sadik, as his faithful retainer is called, accompanied him through the Pamir, Wakhan, and Badakshan; he knows the Pamir route, where he has often made baranlas in the summer. Since the death of his master, he has lived in the aoul of the second brother, Batir-Beg, and is very devoted to him.



SADIK.

Sadik, who then comes into the room, is a man with a weather-beaten face, wearing the usual sheepskin pelisse and headdress. He is a regular Kara-Kirghiz, and there is a look of suspicion in his small eyes. He kneels, without saying a word, close to Makmud till his opinion is asked, when he says that he has never seen the Alaï in winter, but he presumes that it can be traversed.

“And how about the pass of Kizil-Art, which is to the south-east of the Taldik, and which leads to the Pamir?”

“I have heard it said by Kirghiz from the Pamir that it is always open.”

“And on the Pamir?”

“I am told that there is not much snow.”

If all this is true, things look very promising. The conversation then continues.

“How long will it take, should you imagine, to reach a spot where we shall find a little brushwood and last year’s grass?”

“You are speaking of Basaï-Gumbaz, at the source of the Ak-Su (the Oxus).”

“Yes.”

“In twelve days, from the foot of the Taldik, from the Alaï.”

“And you, Batir-Beg?”

“A fortnight.”

“And you, Makmud?”

“Three weeks, for you have baggage, and the season is very much against you.”

The captain takes Batir-Beg’s view, while I agree with Makmud, and in my inmost heart I believe that, making allowances for the incidents of the route, we shall be a good month before we reach a village, and perhaps longer. So we must take our precautions accordingly.

Sadik having consented to show us the way, I ask him how far he knows the road. He says—

“As far as the Wakhan. You wish to go by the Kunjut. I have never been in that country. When you reach the Wakhan after travelling westward for several days, you turn to the left about noon in order to get to the Kunjut.”

“Have you heard talk of the people of that country?”

“I know that they come on to the Pamir during the summer to steal the flocks and to carry off the men.”

This ends the conference, and Batir-Beg promises to bring us the next day a memorandum of what he considers indispensable for crossing the Pamir as far as Basai-Gumbaz, calculated for eight persons.

For it is best to reckon upon everything going badly, and upon our encountering almost insurmountable difficulties until we are upon the Pamir, beyond the Kizil-Art. Further on, these difficulties will diminish, at least so far as regards the snow. For we are told that there is no snow upon the Pamir, and if this is not quite accurate, at all events there cannot be much. As to the Alai, we are told that there is “only a little,” and we will call that “a good deal.” It is evident, therefore, that the early stages will be the most difficult, so that we must, as far as possible, lighten the task then.

Batir-Beg thinks that the passage of the Taldik will necessitate the employment of a hundred men on horse and on foot. We shall let them do the rough part of the work, and then send them back, directing our efforts mainly to not fatiguing the men and horses which have got to go the whole way. They must travel in comfort as far as the Alai, and this category comprises Sadik and two Kirghiz whom he is going to employ, Menas, Rachmed, and ourselves. Till we get beyond the Kizil-Art, on the other side of the Alai, we shall employ another band of about forty Kirghiz with their horses which will convey our baggage, so that our own horses, with no load to carry, will arrive comparatively

fresh upon the Pamir. Upon reaching the lake of Kara-Kul, we shall send back the second squad of the Kirghiz, and shall then be left to our own resources. It will also be after leaving Kara-Kul that we shall begin to use our provisions, unless anything unforeseen occurs, so that this lake will be practically our starting-point. Such, at least, are our plans, though they may, of course, be subject to alteration when we reach the scene of operations.

In the meanwhile we continue our purchases of horses, and I telegraph to my companions, who have stayed behind at Marguilane with Rachmed, to come on as soon as they have all ready.

Two days after this, our whole party was assembled at the house of Colonel Deibner, who offered us the most cordial hospitality, with the exception of Rachmed, who was following on with the baggage. When he arrives all will be ready and we shall start.

We have an immense number of small slabs of bread mixed with fat and baked twice over. Then we have mutton boiled down and salted and placed in bladders, where it will keep for a long time owing to the cold. We shall only use it in critical circumstances, or when we are unable to light a fire, either from want of fuel, or want of time, or from the violence of the wind. At Ak-Basoga we shall find some sheep, and it will be easy to freeze their flesh, which, if kept away from the light, will not go bad.

Then we prepare flour and bread-cakes without any fat, while we have some millet seed roasted which we shall be able either to have cooked or to take in our pocket and munch as we go along. For our stages will be lengthy ones, making it impossible for us to halt except for the night, and at great altitudes one wants to eat not much at a time, but frequently. This is why the corpulent Makmud advises us to add to our cargo about sixty pounds of dried

apricots, which we can suck *en route* if we feel a sinking at the stomach. Moreover, the Kirghiz are very partial to dried apricots, as, for the matter of that, we are.

We buy some oil which will be a substitute occasionally for mutton fat, which will serve us instead of butter, and which we have salted before starting. The bread, too, has rather more than the ordinary quantity of salt in it, for the success of the expedition, which necessitates a great physical effort, depends upon the state of the stomach. Every now and then sweetmeats will be distributed among the eight men of the regular army, so we shall have our little luxuries.

The horses will have a pack-saddle, and clothing of double felt, which will cover them from head to tail at night, and which will be folded up during the day time. The shoes, nails, hammers, rasps, and all the other blacksmith's tools, together with the needles for sewing the felt, and the string, are carefully packed up. We buy, too, some Russian ropes made of flax, as they are much stronger than the natives' ropes, though we also take a lot of woollen and horsehair ropes made by the Kirghiz, as they are more supple to handle in frosty weather, and are more readily cut, which is very important when horses step in the snow and one's hands are too numbed to untie a knot. I will not mention the minor articles, for the reader may think that I have entered too much into detail, though I have mentioned all these points to show how complicated our preparations were, and that there is this in common between a journey of this kind and war, that both must be undertaken with prudence and boldly executed.

To-day (March 5th) all is ready except the barley, which Makmud has undertaken to deliver to us at Ak-Basoga, at the foot of the Taldik. As we proceed, Sadik will secure the assistance of one of his friends, who belongs to the tribe of Makmud. The eighth person will be an individual who has inhabited the

Pamir, and who is expected at once. Captain Grombtchefski has gone back to Marguilane, after having lent us all the assistance in his power; for which we are very grateful to him. The sub-commander of the district, Captain Gluchanovski, will accompany us as far as Ak-Basoga, and his presence will facilitate our passage of the Taldik, by securing for us the genuine assistance of the Kara-Kirghiz, who are not the most obedient men in the world.

We start to-morrow, and we send a farewell telegram of thanks to our good friend Müller at Tashkend, to the Governor-General, and to Generals Ivanoff and Karalkoff, who reply to wish us "God-speed." Why should we not succeed, after all? We have quite made up our minds to persevere to the end. We hope that in case of failure our compatriots will not be the first to cast stones at us, and that if we succeed they will not blame us for our hardihood.

March 6th.

At last we are in the saddle. We lose sight of Osch, and are in the mountain, glad to be really off and with the sensation of being about to realize a project long contemplated. If only the cup does not slip from our lips just as we are beginning to taste it.

We pass along parallel with the spurs of the Alaï as far as Madi, and the road reminds us of the environs of Saridjuï, with its bare hills so characteristic of Central Asia. At Madi we sleep under the tent, and so resume the camping-out life, with the fires, the picketing of horses, and the coming and going of our men.

On the 7th of March, we reach Kaflan-Kul, which lies in a hollow shut in by mountains. As we ascend, the snow is thicker, and on the following day we descend by a pass which is slippery with melting snow into another and much larger depression, where there is green grass, upon which the flocks and herds are feeding, close beneath the walls of the small fort of Gultcha.

To the east we see the tents of the portly Makmud, who is to join our troop. The fort is commanded by Captain Galberg, who lives there with his wife and two children. He has a charming family, and does not in the least mind the solitude.

At Gultcha, Sadik presents to us a man named Abdu-Rasoul, who will be quite willing to follow us. He is a handsome and brawny Kara-Kirghiz, very tall and about thirty years of age. This is the last point at which we shall be in contact with the



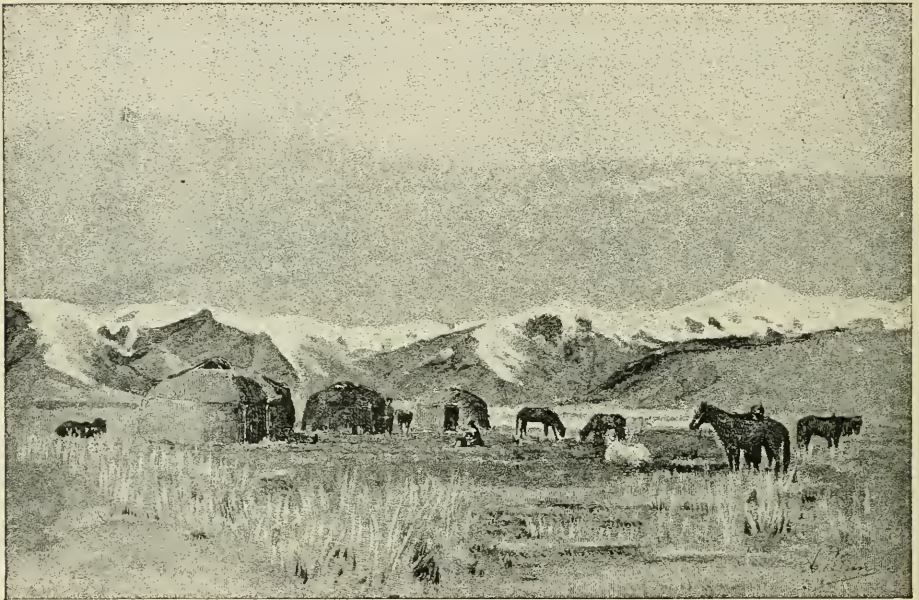
MADI.

Russians, so we overhaul our equipment, to see that we are not short of anything. The horses rest all day on the 9th, and we give them plenty of sound hay and oats. This is their last good meal, and we, too, take advantage for the last time of the excellent Russian hospitality extended to us by Captain Galberg. These are incidents in life not readily forgotten. A Kashgar man who is out of employment offers us his services, and tells Rachmed, who takes a great fancy to him, that he knows how to load horses, and will follow us to the end of the world. Our volunteer, it may be added, plays the *domburak* (a stringed instrument) very well,

has a good voice and can tell a number of interesting stories. He is full of ardour, but he must either be a humbug or cannot realize what he is undertaking to do. To-morrow will show, as a single stage will suffice to prove of what stuff he is made.

March 10th.

In the rain and the snow we arrive by a fairly good road, passing through scenery which reminds us of Ablatum and the Caucasus,



GULTCHA.

at Kizelkurgane, which is a reduced likeness of Gultcha. It takes its name from the red fragments of the walls of a ruined fortress, which the ancient khans of the Ferghana had built as a residence for a squad of *zekketches* (custom-house men), who were kept there to collect dues from the caravans, and for soldiers who were told off to look out for the horse-stealers (*barantachis*).

In the evening, Rachmed comes to us with a long face to say that the Kashgar singer has disappeared.

March 11th.

The cold commences. At 8 a.m., the thermometer is two or three degrees below freezing point, and the snow is falling, with a light breeze from the north-north-west.

We pass through the narrow defile of Djangrik, which is very wild and picturesque, with steep overhanging rocks, and we are shown upon a plateau just in front of it the ruins of a fortress supposed to have been built by the Chinese.

Following the river, we arrive at Sufi-Kurgane, where we meet Batir-Beg, who has just come back from the Taldik. He tells us that the snow is very deep, that it will take at least three days to clear a path, and that there is considerable danger of avalanches. The snow is still falling, and in the Terek-Davan Pass ten horses have been swept away by an avalanche. This is bad news, and we wonder whether it will be possible to get through, though perhaps Batir-Beg wants to make us pay more for the service of the Kirghiz.



ABDU-RASOUL.

At Sufi-Kurgane, the road branches off towards the Terek-Davane and Kashgar, where the Chinese are waiting for us, as we have given notice of our coming.

March 12th.

The weather is bad, a strong south wind driving in our faces, and the snow falling in blinding storms. When it stops we find that there is so much that our horses sink up to the stirrups. The sun comes out, and the wind does not drop; so, nearly blinded by

the reflection and the cold air, we make a bend by the kichlak of Tchulakbuz, passing close by a well-worn path without seeing it, and finally reaching the tents which have been put up for us at Ak-Basoga, at the foot of the Taldik. Batir-Beg informs us that he has collected a number of men, and that they will begin to clear the pass in the morning, as soon as the scouts return.

Every one is agreed, and we can quite believe them, that the pass is blocked with an enormous quantity of snow.

We are at an altitude of about ten thousand feet, and the cold begins to be very severe, while at Marguilane the heat is quite trying.

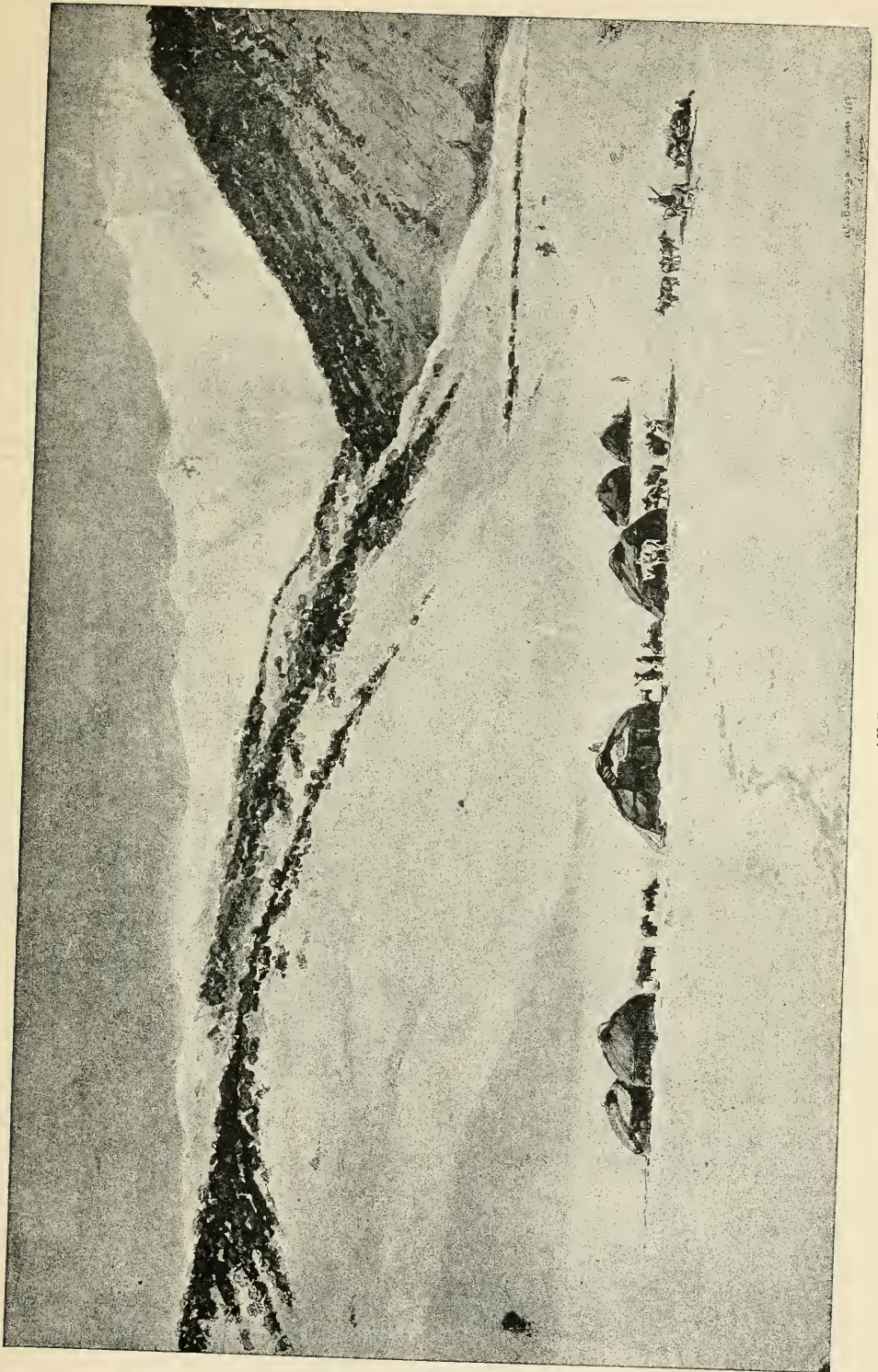
We do not so much mind the cold, but the snow! It is the one subject of conversation with us, and we more than ever regret that the slow rate at which our preparations were made prevented us starting in February, as we had wished to do.

March 13th.

We get the barley delivered to us, and the Kirghiz advance into the defile of the Taldik. Some men who came back at night say that they will be through the pass to-morrow. The sky is clear, and there is no wind. If this weather lasts five or six days, it will be possible to work, and we shall get through, if only the wind does not get up. The variations of temperature are very great, for at 9 a.m. the thermometer marks 75° F. in the sun and 10° F. below freezing in the shade, while at 2 p.m. it is nearly 100° F. in the sun and three degrees below freezing in the shade; at 6 p.m. there are eighteen degrees of frost, while at 9.20 p.m. the glass is several degrees below zero.

There is no wind, and the sky is cloudy eastward.

We ask for fifteen horses to be sent from Sufi-Kurgane, for at Tchulakbuz we shall only have fifteen for carrying the baggage



AK-BASOGA, 12 miles (1911)

AK-BASOGA.

to the Kara-Kul, all the rest being employed to trample down the snow.

March 14th.

When I wake up at daybreak, I look through the opening in the curtain of the tent, and I see a dazzling white space before me. It will be a very serious matter if this is snow, but as my eyes get accustomed to the light, I see that the surface of the ground is lighted up by the radiation, so when Sadik enters to light the fire, I have quite a cheerful face.

At 7 a.m., the temperature is not much above zero, with very little wind; at noon there are several degrees of frost in the shade, while the thermometer is about sixty in the sun.

Makmud tells us that among the men at work in the Taldik pass is one whose tribe lives on the Pamir, and who has his wife and children here. He is willing to accompany us, and will get us guides up there if possible.

We kill three sheep, and buy about sixty-five pounds more flour for gruel, and four hundred pounds for our attendants as far as the Kara-Kul. We have nearly a ton of barley. We reckon upon losing several horses, and we shall feed the others better.

At night, there is no wind, but the sky is clear. This is just what we want, and at 8.15 p.m. there are nearly thirty degrees of frost, which will be our salvation.

At that hour, Batir-Beg says that to-morrow we shall be able to send the luggage on upon thirty horses. At a distance of about twelve miles, there are three avalanches which threaten danger, so that it will be necessary to encamp beyond them, therefore we shall have to start to-morrow before daylight. We are told that the Kirghiz of the Pamir who is to accompany us says that he formerly inhabited the Kunjut, and traded there, so that we could not have a better guide. In answer to our questions about the Alai, the natives can only say that it looks very white in the

distance, but it will be time enough to think of that after we have crossed the Taldik.

The barometer is rising, the sky is of an azure blue, and we are all sanguine, while I am personally very pleased at having selected this route. Going out of the tent to look at the thermometer, I find, at 9.30 p.m., that it is four degrees below zero, with no wind. By Allah! I believe that we shall get through, though it is well not to be too certain.

We are encamped at the extreme end of a *cul-de-sac* formed by mountains with sharp peaks covered with snow; the stars are shining, and the light which filters through the tent is very poetical,

while poetical, too, are the barkings of the dogs, the sound of the horses feeding in their mangers, the crackling of the wood under the bellows, the white expanse beyond, and even the deep bass voice of Menas singing a Turkish war song as he mends a hood.

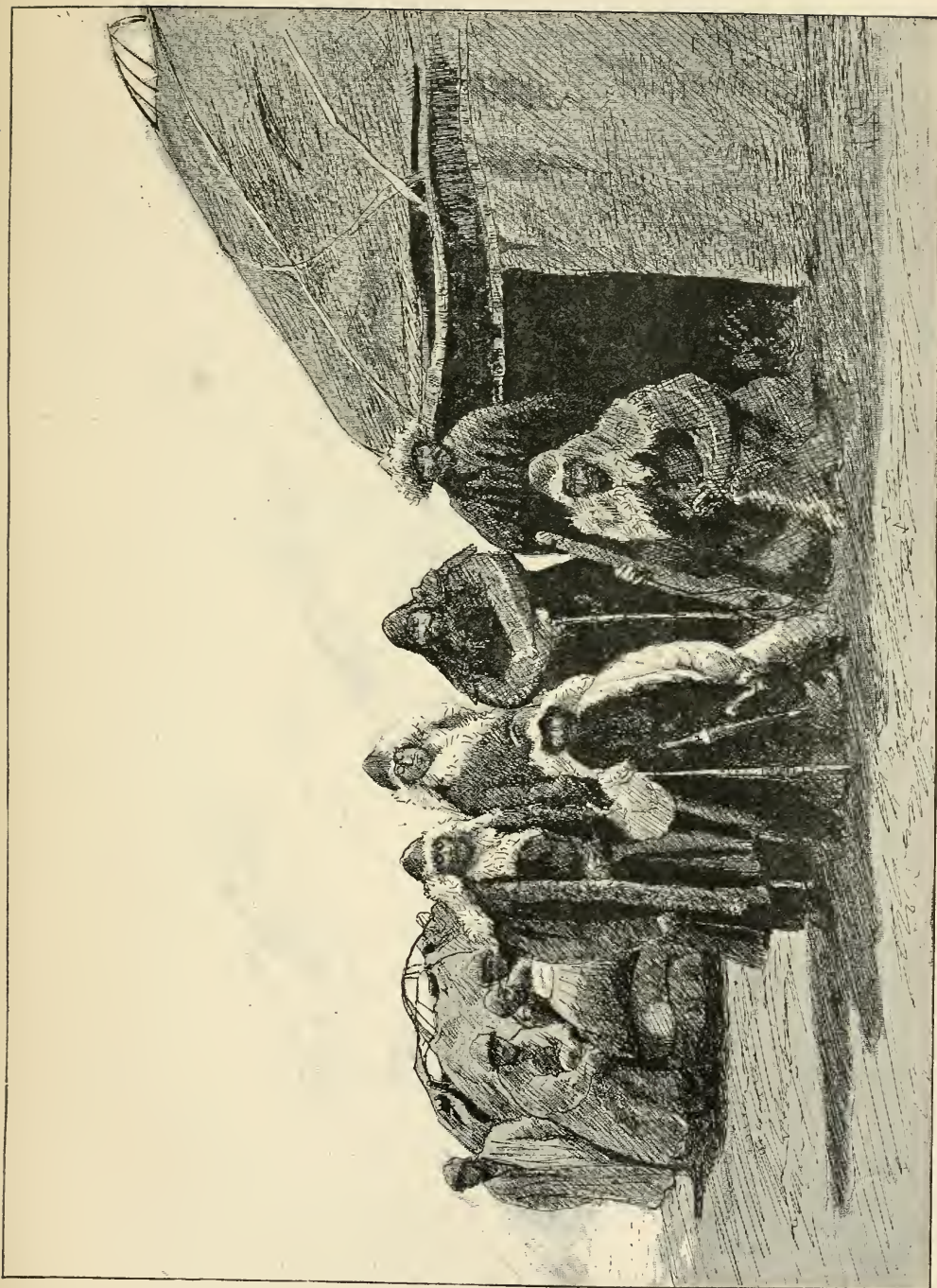


SATTI-KUL.

March 15th.

The man who is supposed to have been a trader in the Kunjut is brought for us to see. He is a curious sort of trader—a short little man, very broad and fat, with an enormous face, suffering from anastomosis and unable to look at the fire, and very dirty. He is willing to go with us if we will pay him well. He belongs to the Teit horde of the Ichkilik tribe, who live near the Rang-Kul. He does not quite know why he has come to the Alai, but he has been very well treated there, for he belongs to the great family of the Kara-Kirghiz.

We put several questions to him, and his answers show that



DRESS FOR CROSSING THE PAMIR.

he knows the road very well. We ask him if there is much snow up there, and he says that God alone knows. He evidently will not commit himself. He will go on foot and remain among his people for the rest of the winter, returning in the summer to Ak-Basoga.

The fine weather continues, so we put on the Pamir dress to be photographed in, and very queer we look with the enormous cloaks and boots, which give us the appearance of so many antediluvians. With our spectacles and the hoods drawn down over our noses, our heads look as if they were in a diving dress, while there are so many arms in our tent that Rachmed says it is like a barrack.



KUMGANE AND TCHILIM.

Before sunset, the baggage is sent off, and an effort will be made to get it to Taldik without a halt, the workmen who have been trampling down the snow assisting the *kiraketches* (mule-teers). At the hour when the mollah calls to prayer, Makmud will come and call us, so we settle our accounts, give away some presents, and have a long conversation with Captain Gluchanovski as we sip our tea. Then we write a few letters, and so to bed.

There is a fall of snow, but it is not heavy. Up till nearly midnight, I can hear Rachmed telling stories to our men and those of the Russian captain, with intervals of song accompanied by the *domburak*. The men are smoking and drinking, and I can hear the gurgle of the *tchilim* (water-pipe). Then the anecdotes begin afresh, broken by the mocking laugh of Menas, who is a sceptic, while Rachmed can draw the long-bow. Menas stops laughing, having doubtless gone off to sleep, and I follow his example.

It would be as well if our men would do the same, but it is customary to enjoy one's self with friends before undertaking a long journey. I wonder whether ours will be a prosperous one! Allah alone can tell, as the hideously ugly guide named Satti-Kul would say.



EQUIPPED FOR THE ROUTE.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PAMIR (*continued*).

The start for the Taldik—Saying good-bye—Going through the pass—The valley of the Taldik—Bad news from the Alaï—No more assistants—Preparing for the combat—Another world—Where are we?—In the snow—The struggle—The “White Sea”—Polar scenery—On the way to Urtak—Shepherds hemmed in by snow—The troop loses heart—A rest—Scaling the Kizil-Art—Upon “the roof of the world”—At last!

“ALLAH is great!” draws the mollah, as he announces the hour of prayer. It is time to get up, and, upon looking at my watch and finding that it is a quarter to three, I call out to Rachmed and Menas, and tell them to light the fire and make some tea. This is soon done, and my companions awake in their turn, while I go out to consult the weather. The sky is clouding over, and there is no wind, with about twenty-six

degrees of frost. Let us hope that this fine weather will last. I see a very burly figure coming towards me along the path traced in the snow, and this proves to be Makmud, who is very much wrapped up, and who has come to wake us. Captain Gluchanovski, Batir-Beg, and Mollah-Paius, the nephew, come up soon afterwards, and, seated on the felt, we drink our tea while waiting for the rising of the moon. The horses are eating a final wisp or two of hay, and some are being loaded with wood, and will be sent on under the supervision of Sadik, who will have Abdur-Rasul and Satti-Kul under his orders. The others are the horses without a load, which are to be sent on ahead of us, so that there may be no risk of any delay, while they will also make it better travelling for us by treading down the snow.

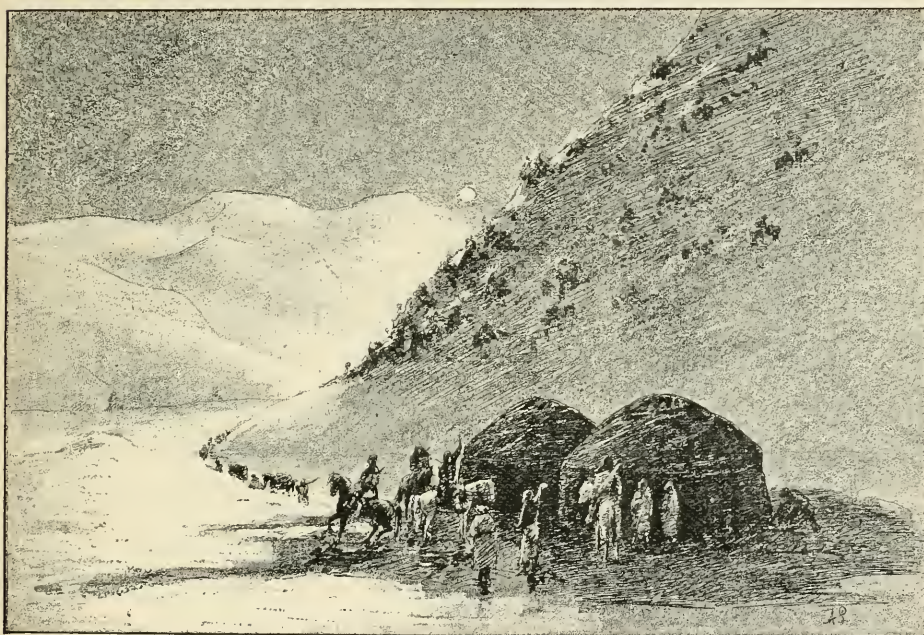
They are ready about 4.30 a.m, and we go out of the tent to see them start. How lovely the moon looks, and how gracefully she stands out in the firmament, not seeming nearly so far off as the astronomers calculate her to be.

Satti-Kul, who is not at all expansive, is the first to start, and he does so without saying a word, with a stick in his hand and leading a horse, which half the others will follow of their own accord. We have purposely left them at liberty, as they will not lose themselves so much, and the fall of one will not entail that of the horse in front of or behind him. This first batch will be followed by Abdur-Rasul, who will stimulate the lazy horses by his shouts.

Abdur-Rasul has several acquaintances among the people present, and he says good-bye to Makmud, his khan, before starting. His adieu is a very brief one, consisting of stroking his beard with his hand, and exclaiming, "God is great!" Sadik is more loquacious. He reproaches Batir-Beg for having drawn him into this expedition. "You know that I had not sown

my barley. Why do you send me up into the snow? How can you tell if I shall come back? You will look after my business during my absence?"

Batir-Beg smiles and tells him to make his mind easy. Sadik has girthed his last horse while he has been talking. He repeats his favourite phrase of "Allah is great!" whistles and strokes each horse on the quarter as it goes by, the whole of them going along in Indian file, with Sadik bringing up the rear.



STARTING FOR THE TALDIK.

We return to the tent in order to breakfast with the captain, and then we don our harness and get on our horses, preceded by Mollah-Païas. The khans raise their hands to their beards, and the captain exclaims, "God be with you! God bless you! *Au revoir!* Good health and good luck!"

We return the compliment, and then start, turning back in the saddle to have a last look, and waving our whips until we come to the defile which leads to the pass of Taldik.

At first there is not more than three feet of snow, and it is pretty hard, owing to the frost. Then the ascent begins, and we clamber over the rocks. There is no snow on the slopes, and the frost, which down below had been a help, here becomes an obstacle, for it has made the rock very slippery, and our horses, sure-footed as they are, fall about. Their falls are not very dangerous, however, as there is a thick covering of moss on the rock. We have to make frequent stoppages to let the horses gain breath, and then the ascent begins again, the horses, with heads down and dilated nostrils, clinging to the asperities of the soil. The soil in many places gives beneath their feet, the hard crust breaks through, or a stone slips from under their hoofs, and so they mount to the ascent nervously, as if stricken with fear at the void which their eye can take in, and which they feel to be behind them. They stop short for want of breath, with their legs stretched out and quite stiff, their flanks heaving with fatigue. What stout, good beasts!

At eight o'clock, we eat a crust of bread upon the summit of the Taldik, at an altitude of about twelve thousand feet, and the next thing is to find a way out of the narrow valley of the same name which leads to the plateau of the Alaï.

We follow a ridge, for the valley is narrow and buried beneath masses of snow, amid which a horseman would disappear. Quartz rocks are seen emerging from this mass of snow, as well as the summits of buildings buried beneath it. We then leave this ridge which divides the valley, descending as it were a steep roof, and at the bottom we come upon a succession of regular wells, the site of which is marked by groups of Kirghiz at rest, who hoist the baggage on to the horses, and wade through the snow with heavy trunks on their backs, one of them pulling the carrier in front and another pushing him from behind. We have several falls. When one

man falls into the snow, the others set to hauling him out, and when that is done they extricate his horse. We pass the pack-horses one after the other, and it is a question when they will overtake us. They have been on the march since 4 a.m., and yesterday they did not halt till midnight. In places there are over six feet of snow, and nowhere have the horses less than up to their necks.

At ten o'clock, we take refuge upon a stony ridge which has been swept by the wind. We shall feel the cold very much, but we shall be free from the avalanches. We clear away the snow, and settle down as best we can. As the men arrive, they take their places above or below us, and the poultry are placed upon perches, out of the way of the foxes. The sun comes out strong and begins to scorch us, there being ninety-five degrees at eleven o'clock. The first pack-horse arrives at 1.20 p.m., and the snow begins to fall, the rest of the muleteers coming in soon after. They leave the baggage on the pathway, so that it looks like the *débris* of a routed army, this being done so that it may be easier to reload, and there are no robbers to be feared in this desolate country. The horses are got together to take them down to drink at the stream, where a hole has been made in the ice, and also for fear of wolves at night.

At four o'clock, the snow is falling fast, but it stops at 5.30 p.m., and there is no wind, with about twenty degrees of frost. At nightfall, a part of the footmen, who had been sent on in front, came and encamped above us, grouped around Mollah-Paius, their chief. At midnight, there were about thirty-eight degrees of frost.

March 17th.

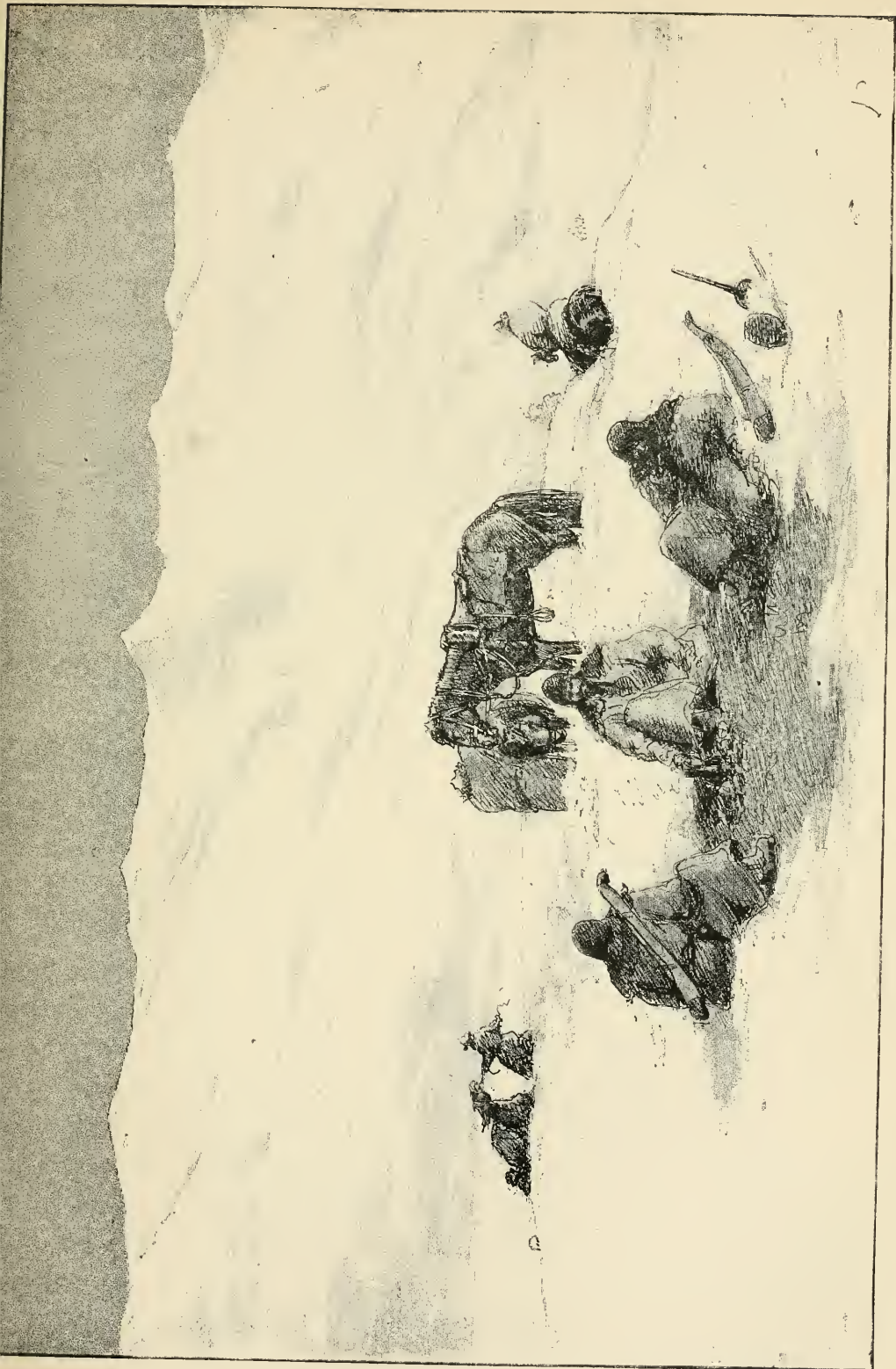
During the night, an easterly wind began to blow with great violence, and at 5 a.m. there were thirty-eight degrees of frost in the tent, and rather more outside. Our men, worn out with

fatigue, are asleep, and it is useless to wake them up and hurry the departure. We cannot take advantage of the snow being frozen, for the ropes cannot be handled in the dark, and it is impossible to load the iouks or to secure them. We must wait for the sun to thaw the ropes and the limbs of the men, which are numbed by the cold and bitter east wind.

The sun will melt the snow, but what is to be done then? Rachmed has been bleeding from the nose, and he had a violent headache all day yesterday.

We all have spangles of ice upon our hair and beards; and from our noses, which are very red, issues a sort of vapour, which at once condenses and drops on to my pocket-book, punctuating what I write with small bits of ice. These stops of a new kind are quite useless, for I write in hieroglyphics, which will have to be deciphered afterwards.

To the east, above the pass of the Taldik, we see two white peaks, behind which is concealed a sun which shines for some other world, no doubt, as he bestows upon us only a very pale sort of light, and I wonder whether he is not going out altogether. That would be a very striking contrast with the previous twenty-four hours. But in due course his rays shine above the mountains, and we are delighted to put on our spectacles, and to descend into the valley, where we march along under the shade of the mountain. At seven o'clock, we make a start, and resolve to encamp this evening at the end of the hollow of the Taldik. We descend one steep path and ascend another, finally coming down into a broader valley and marching upon the ice of the winding stream. We choose the places where there is not much snow, and take care to keep clear of the avalanches. We often leave the river, where in some places there is not more than eighteen inches of snow, which reassures the horses, who have not forgotten their experience of the day before.



THE FIRST ENCAMPMENT UPON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TALDIK PASS.

It is to our left that the snow is dangerous, for it has accumulated in the ravines and gorges, and the rocks have caught immense balls of snow, which hang over the road and present a most alarming appearance. So we do not talk much, but keep our eyes fixed on them as we ride along. We come upon a troop of fifty Kirghiz squatting upon the side of a rock, munching a bit of bread and resting before going back to Ak-Basoga. They are the rear-guard of the band of labourers who have prepared the road for us. Their leader tells us that it is ready as far as the Alai. I ask him if there is much snow in the Alai, and he stretches out his hand first in the direction of the pass and then in that of the Alai, saying, "Barabar! barabar!" which means that it is the same. This is a bad piece of news.

Mirza-Paias takes us to encamp in a well-sheltered gorge situated to the right of the road, where we are to wait for our iouks. The wind has cleared away the snow, and the spot is a pleasant one, the sun shining, and the thermometer marking eighty-four degrees.

Rachmed is in a good humour and begins to sing, whereas last night he was lugubrious and said that we should all perish. He has regained courage, and said to me in a very serious tone, "I feel that we shan't die." And then he began to sing a song of victory over the Taldik, while to-morrow we shall enter upon the valley of the Alai. I send Sadik and five or six Kirghiz to reconnoitre the "positions of the enemy," for some of our men have said that from this point the snow will not be so deep. Our scouts will bring us in word about this before sunset.

Sadik comes back first, and is followed by the others, all of them using the same Turkish expression, which I do not believe that I shall ever forget: "Barabar! barabar!" ("It is the same thing"). They say this in a most doleful tone and shake their heads.

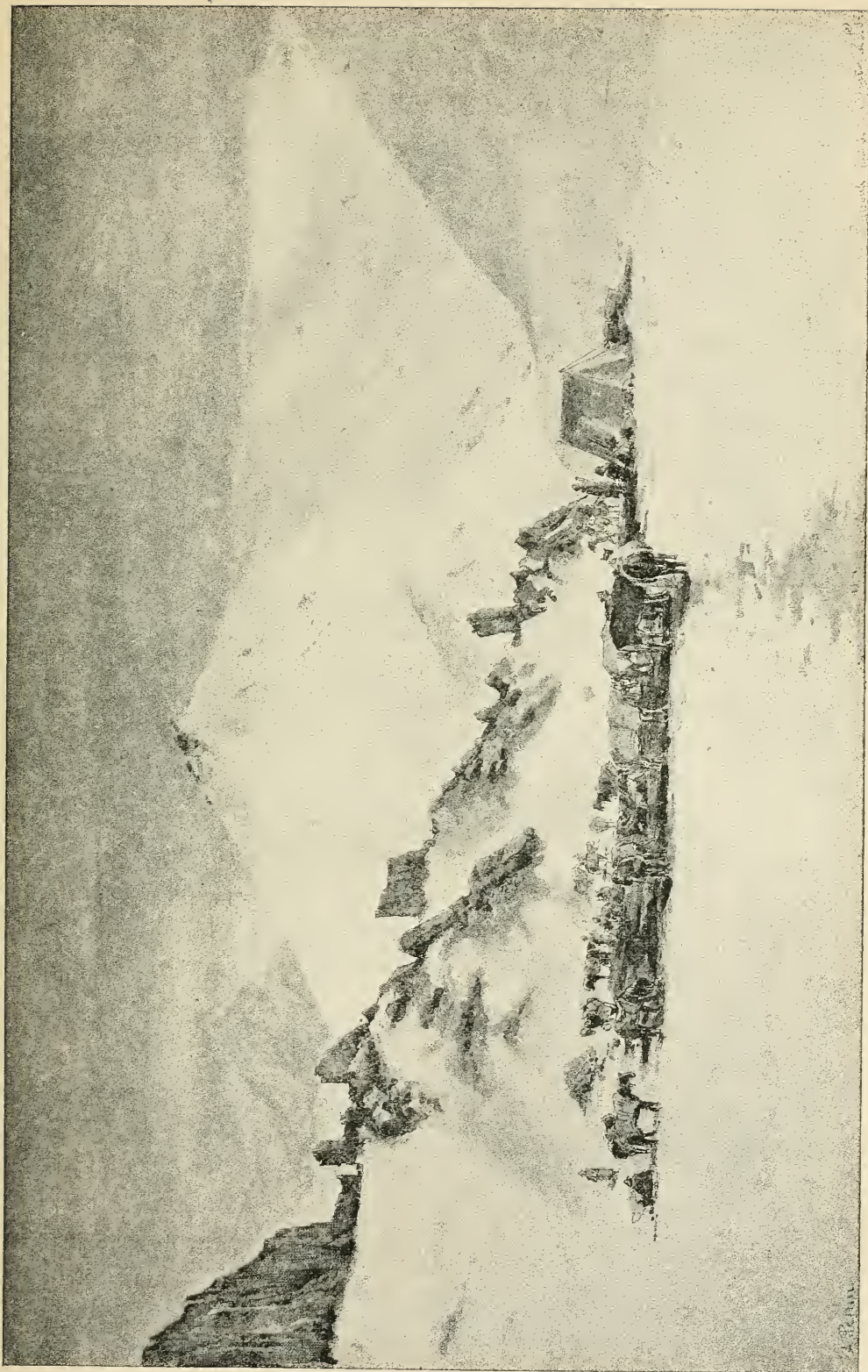
They look straight at us, watching the impression which this may make on us, and as much as to say, "What will you decide to do?" They no doubt hope that we shall turn back. In truth, the news is very serious, for we shall not have the help of the natives. Who will trace out our route for us? And we shall have no one to feel the way for us. We shall have to sound our way, like a navigator in unknown waters.

Some of the Kirghiz who have been working in the trenches of the Taldik are already on the way to their tents, and we are going to send back the others, as they are very fatigued. I see that they are lying outstretched in the sun, so fast asleep that it is almost impossible to wake them. We make presents to their chiefs, cordially thank Mollah-Païas, give him the remainder of the sum out of which he had received half in advance, and entrust him with a friendly message for General Karalkoff. He and his followers disappear down the gorge just as the last of the pack-horses come up, so tired that they drop before they are unloaded.

I mount upon a rock close to our encampment, and from the summit of it I can overlook the ridges which shelter us and can make out the chains of the Alai and the Trans-Alai like two fragments of chaos. Before my eyes, I can see nothing but white, and feel like one cast upon some other planet. I can make out, too, the hills of the valley of the Alai, intertwined like the white shields of warriors at the foot of the immense and impassable peaks of the Trans-Alai, the second rampart of the Pamir.

In whatever direction the eye looks, all is white; there is, as it were, an immaculate shroud spread over this lifeless nature. One might fancy one's self in some accursed land, abandoned by its inhabitants, who had quitted it for some better world.

To-morrow, we shall make a plunge into this unknown world, the gloomy landscapes of which seem to be quietly making game of us.



ENCAMPMENT AT TALBUK.

We have left about fifty horses and twenty men, who must go with us to the Pamir. They will carry our baggage and our provisions, which we shall then put on to the twenty reserve horses confided to the five men of our regular forces which are specially told off to look after them.

We have had two most trying days, and we can foresee that to-morrow will be not less so, and each one of us is preparing for the trial.

Several already have chapped lips, sore eyes, and frost-bitten cheeks. The natives adopt the following precautions; they apply to their skin the leaves of a cactus which is only found in the Alaï during the summer, and they have a bag full of these leaves with them. They also make themselves a special kind of spectacle with horsehair, placing a wad of it under their sheep-skin cap, and letting it drop down over their eyes, which it protects from the reflection. As to their cheeks, they just smear them over with mud or horse-dung. Thus these Kirghiz, who are not at the best of times very handsome, present the appearance of demons, or of Mongol figure-heads which have designedly been made very ugly.



KARA-KIRGHIZ.

What a pity we cannot leave our encampment to-morrow before sunset, and utilize the frost which makes the snow so hard! But this is impossible, owing to the ropes getting frozen during the night and being as hard as wood in the morning. The horses will not be loaded until late, and they will reach the valley of the Alaï when it has already got warm and the snow is becoming soft, so the difficulties will be very great, perhaps insurmountable.

March 19th.

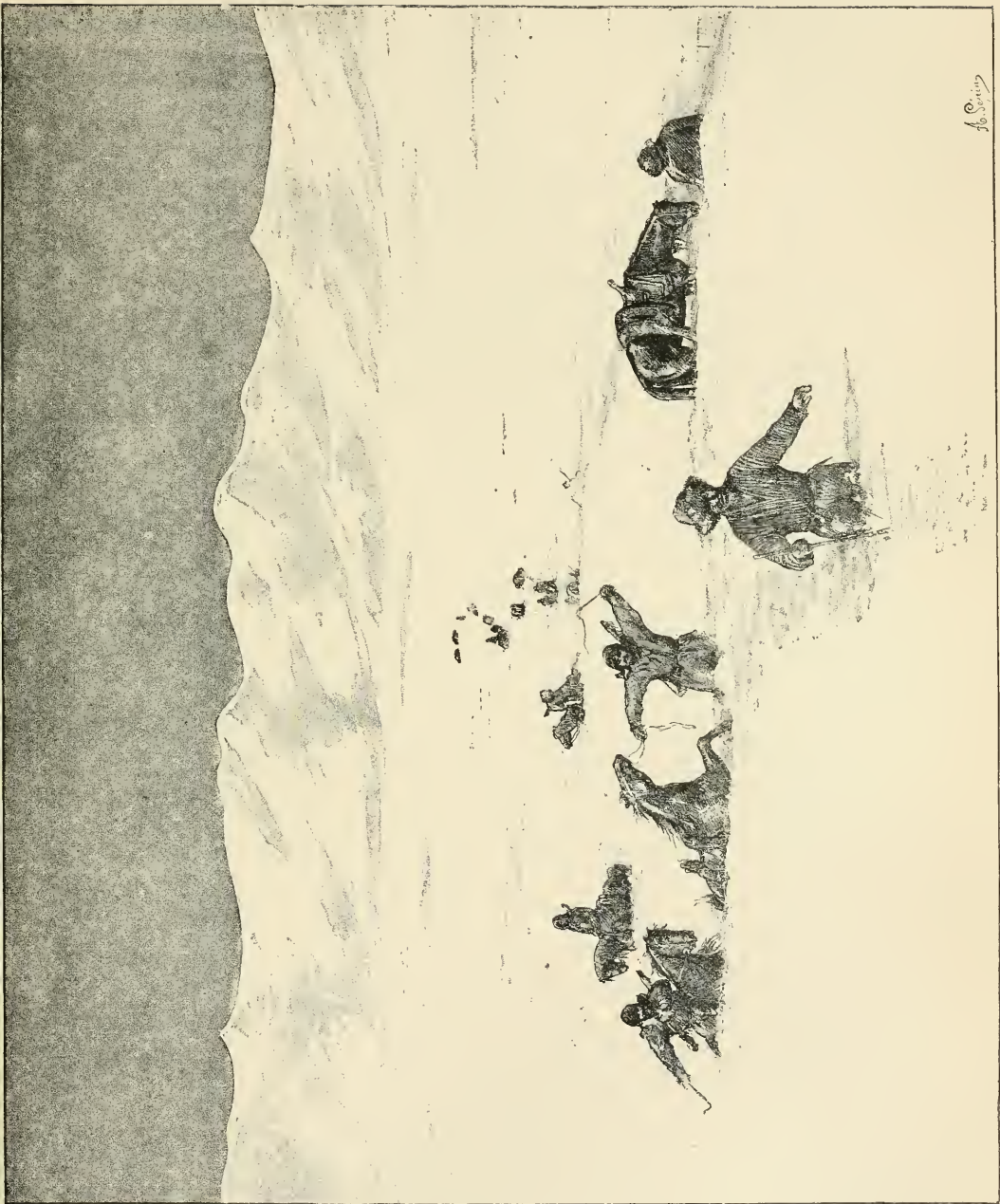
We start with Sadik and two very active Kirghiz, who are well acquainted with the Alaï. Menas also forms part of the

advance guard. Abdur-Rasul, Rachmed, and Satti-Kul follow, with twenty horses not loaded, behind them coming the thirty loaded horses and their conductors.

We follow the course of the river, which is so frozen that we can travel over the ice, and we make our way without much difficulty out of the valley of the Taldik. We are then upon the plateau of the Alaï, which extends from west to east, and our eyes have been so tried by the heat and cold that we cannot distinguish the end of it.

Before us is the grandest or at all events the most dazzling of spectacles. To the north is the barrier of the Alaï; to the south, the Kauffman peak (22,000 feet) and the Kizil-Aguin (21,400 feet) emerge from the chain of the Trans-Alaï. Snow covers everything except the smooth sides of the rocks, upon which it has no hold. The day is a very fine one, and the plain extends like a river between two very steep banks, while it is so dazzlingly bright, owing to the radiation, that the sky seems dull by comparison. At our feet, the snow sparkles so that it seems as if there was a flood of light running along the surface of the soil, and as if the stars, after having been by some magical process reduced to diamond dust, with flashes of gold, had been sprinkled about upon this stream of light.

It is through this radiation of fiery heat in the sun, and of ice in the shade, that we have to make our way. As long as we are marching parallel with the spurs of the Alaï, things are not so bad, as there is little more than three feet of snow. But at length we are obliged to strike due south, through the valley, where there is not, of course, a single path to be seen. We discuss a moment, and decide to make straight for the river of Kizil-Art; it flows into the Alaï, not far from the pass which leads up to the Pamir. We shall have to feel our way, picking out the places where there is the least snow, so that the horses which have a load on their backs may be able to proceed.



A. S. 1872

CROSSING THE ALAI.

So we advance along the snow, Sadik, with his instinct of a savage, leading the way. For half an hour we get on all right, but the horse ridden by Sadik suddenly sinks into the soft snow, and despite the skill of the rider and the free use of the whip, he cannot find his legs. Sadik is unable to extricate himself till we come to his help, and to that of his mount. This is a recommencement of the series of falls and mishaps of the previous days.

The lead is then assumed alternately by Sadik and the two Kirghiz, and the leader takes his pelisse off, throws it over his horse, which he leads by the bridle, and with his long staff feels his way like a blind man. This does not prevent us from following him in full confidence, and we have to go a round-about way, which lengthens the journey very much, for we scarcely seem to get any nearer to the Trans-Alaï, which we expected to reach in no time. We advance at the rate of twenty or perhaps only ten paces a minute, though when upon a ridge we may perhaps accomplish sixty. We are frequently compelled to come to a dead stop.

We are all of us exhausted and out of breath, devoid of all strength, and nearly blind. We have splitting headaches and a feeling of suffocation. One man is stretched out on his back, close beside his horse, which is lying on its side; another man is asleep as he stands with his head resting against the saddle; a third is whipping his poor horse, to the tail of which he clings like a drowning man to a buoy. Some of the men were bleeding from the nose, and so were the horses, the blood freezing as it trickled down their muzzles, and looking like ruby stones. They also had clots of frozen blood on their bodies.

One horse nearly fell into a hole, and he had to be pulled out as if he was dead, with ropes passed under his belly. Then two or three girths snapped and had to be mended. If a pack-horse

falls, he has to be unloaded, and it is no easy matter to untie the knots in the shade (there were nine degrees of frost at noon), for they are covered with ice and our hands are numbed. So the ropes have to be cut, the horse is got on to his legs, and the boxes or bales are again placed on his back. Sometimes they have to be carried on the men's backs, after a way has been cleared for them with shovels, as the snow is more than six feet deep everywhere. Poles higher than any of us are pushed in and disappear.

After having got through this difficult bit of ground, we rest awhile. We hardly know which direction to take, for there is nothing to show that one is better than another, the snow being literally trackless and almost exasperating in its inert and, as it were, indifferent expanse. It seems to irritate the very animals, and if perchance a wolf has left any trace, we follow it as long as we can, like a thread of Ariadne, in a labyrinth of our own tracing. This track leads us to some dead wall, or rather to some hole, and so we have to beat back again. At last we determine to go in the direction of the Kizil-Art, and have to drag along in the crumbling snow.

Our caravan is dotted about over the plain like the beads of a broken chaplet. The black beads agglomerate wherever a horse or his rider have fallen and stopped the progress of those who follow in his track.

And this goes on from 8 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. without any rest. We had no place to halt at, and so we go on till we are fairly spun out. On the way, we share a little bread with our mounts, eat a dried apricot, and munch some roasted millet, which gives us stamina to go on till we reach the declivity upon which we intend to encamp.

With a shovel or two we clear away the snow, and then the felt is spread out, the tent put up, and the fire lighted with spirits

of wine. The tea and the millet porridge are got ready for us and for the hungry men who drop in one by one. The poor horses, tethered near the tent after their girths have been loosed, paw up the snow with their hoofs to try and get at the wretched grass and roots buried beneath it.

The whole caravan will not be got together before night-time. The sun has just sunk behind the mountains, a long way off, in the direction of France, that is, to the west of us. We are still



ENCAMPMENT ON THE ALAÏ, OPPOSITE PEAK KAUFFMANN.

waiting for two or three horses, which are now within a hundred paces of us, and it is seven o'clock before we have all had our porridge and tea, and the horses their small allowance of barley. They are now ranging around the three small mounds where we are encamped, or rather they are swimming, so to speak, around the islets upon which we have taken refuge from the inundation.

The breeze is from the south-south-east. The summits of the Trans-Alaï become wrinkled with clouds, the peaks display their plumes, and the firmament shines over our heads with the

splendour of one which had just been turned brand-new out of chaos. The snow has disappeared from our gaze with the sun, and the blue vault seems to soar higher than heaven itself above this polar desert, amid which our three small fires flicker like so many rush candles in an immense banqueting hall.

At 8 p.m., there are sixty-eight degrees of frost.

At six in the morning, there were seventy-five, and we have all slept badly—have felt as if we were being suffocated; our bedclothes have seemed to weigh us down, we have felt pains in our heads, a singing in our ears, a smarting of the lips and eyes, etc.

We could not get to sleep at all. If we heaped the clothing on our bodies we were warm, but had a feeling of oppression; while if we threw them off, we were all of a shiver. If so much as the nose was exposed to the air, it was at once frost-bitten. So we passed the night, alternately burying ourselves beneath the clothes and putting our heads out to breathe, just like a duck which sees a gunner coming and plunges beneath the surface, bobbing up its head every now and again.

Before sunrise, all is still in the camp. The men, huddled one against the other, are as motionless as so many bales. The horses, coated with ice and standing motionless, look as if they were petrified. The stars are no longer visible, and the whole landscape looks as if it had been hewn out of an immense block of camphor. Can it be that we have got stranded, like some Robinson of the ice, at the entrance of a "White Sea," of which the plateau forms the channel?

The sun rises, and his warm rays thaw men and horses alike. The horses begin to move, and the men emerge from beneath their rugs, the warmth unloosing their tongues just as it makes the ropes more supple and enables us to prepare for a fresh start. We must try and reach the river of Kizil-Aguin as quickly as

possible, in the hope that its frozen floor will not have too thick a carpet of snow. We shall follow the ridges as much as possible, for the surface undulates a good deal near the river, which has very high banks.

After eating some meat, we leave at 9.15 a.m. As far as the Kizil-Aguin there is a repetition of the falls, etc., which occurred the previous day, and it is 3 p.m. when we descend a ravine which brings us to the level of the river. Sadik, who is leading the way, puts his horse into a trot to show us that the road is good, there being only two feet of loose snow upon a hard bottom, so we might fancy ourselves in a riding-school. Abdur-Rasul, who is with us to-day, calls out to those who have not come down, "Ioul iakche!" ("Good road!"), and then sets up a song of triumph.

All goes well for three parts of an hour, but at a bend of the river the wind has drifted the snow to such a height that we have to bear to the left, parallel with the hills. It is absolutely necessary that we should leave the Kizil-Aguin. We fail at our first attempt, but we go on a little further, and quit the bed and banks of the river after herculean efforts. It is five o'clock, and there is a piercing wind from the west. Our exertions have bathed us in sweat, and when I say "we," I include the horses. This nasty wind appears to be a speciality of the Pamir, and it is a sign that we are getting close to it.

We climb up and down the hills, following the ridges as much as possible. At 6.15 p.m., we halt in a hollow, where we find two saddled horses grazing, and we are much puzzled at their presence, which, however, inspires us somewhat. Sadik and a Kirghiz take hold of these horses and mount them, giving us their own to hold while they go in search of the owners. They have discovered, by certain peculiar marks, that these horses do not belong to the Kara-Kirghiz of the Alaï. The find is an excellent

one, just as we are entering upon the river of Kizil-Art, for these men will be of great help to us.

After our two scouts have been gone about twenty minutes, one of them comes galloping up and tells us that he has descried men and sheep in the direction of the river. As he is telling us this, Sadik arrives, driving two Kirghiz before him. They do not seem very well at ease, and make low bows, which express their sense of disquiet. They had seen us coming, and their first impulse had been to hide themselves. They did not show themselves until they saw strangers riding their horses. They invite us to their bivouac, which, they tell us, is in a "snug place,"



CHINESE KARA-KIRGHIZ.

and they show us the way to a ravine which is sheltered from the night wind, where a flock of sheep and goats is assembled. A thin column of smoke is curling up from a fire made of the droppings with which the soil is covered, and the Kirghiz heap it up and sleep on it, covered with arkar skins. This place is called Urtak.

The master of the shelter spreads out some skins for us and offers us a supper which consists of mutton boiled in water with a pronounced flavour of dung, either because the melted snow in which the mutton had been boiled contained some, or because the smoke from the fire had got into the coffee pot. For it is in a coffee-pot (*kumgane*) that these people cook their food. They have no other cooking vessel. They tear off pieces of meat with their fingers, and all drink the gravy in turns out of the coffee pot. There is no salt in it. While we are partaking of this delicious dish, our host tells us his story.

"I had gone to sell some sheep at Kashgar, where, I was told, they would fetch a good price, but I soon found the contrary. I

bought a few others, and I retraced my steps by the Markan-Su. I was overtaken by the winter, and the snow began to fall. I had very great difficulty in crossing the Kizil-Art, where I lost two horses and all my baggage. I have halted here, where my sheep and goats can find a little of last year's grass still left. I had determined to await the return of fine weather with my servant, for we could not attempt to cross the Alaï and the Taldik. We have been living on our sheep and goats. We have not a grain of salt left, and this coffee pot is our sole cooking utensil, while we have very little flint left to light our fire with. But as there is abundance of dung, we keep it constantly alight so as not to be obliged to make a fresh fire every day. I don't know what would have become of us but for your arrival. If you will allow us, we will start to-morrow, following the path you have traced, and we shall reach the Ferghana. I have some acquaintances in the neighbourhood of Osch, for I am an Uzbek from the banks of the Syr, and my servant is from Sarikol."

"When did you cross the Kizil-Art?"

"Several weeks ago."

"Do you think we shall be able to get across it?"

"I don't think so. The snow is very deep, and horses with loads on their backs will never get over it."

This is a bad piece of news, and after a harassing march of nine hours, we deserved a better fate. But the site is a good one, there are plenty of sheep, and enough grass to keep the fire going. We must take a day's rest and regale our men with mutton, resuming our march with renewed strength. As to the shepherd, he must not start until we do, so that we may get as much information as possible out of him. Our men will converse with him, and this will give them more pluck to go on. He does not seem to object to remaining, as he asks us when we shall allow him to start.

But our baggage does not arrive, and this is not surprising. We have no tent, and must sleep in the open air. My horse's quarters will make me an excellent pillow, and Menas, no doubt, has in his bag something to eat and some tea. Unfortunately, he has entrusted it to a Kirghiz who has not yet come in, and he has neither teapot, sugar, nor tea. This makes me very angry, for I have told him over and over again always to keep a day's provisions and enough tea to last several days on his person. But he is hopelessly careless in this respect.

We make the best of it all, and the wind howls over our heads with such fury that I determine to take refuge among the sheep and goats. A he-goat, whom I remark the next morning as having a very intelligent countenance, rests his head against mine, and I take care not to move. A ewe lies down at my feet, another licks the ice off my clothes and then lies full length upon me. A delicious sense of warmth pervades my body, and I go to sleep dreaming pleasantly. But my dreams do not last long, for I am awoke by part of the flock, which has been seized by one of those panics to which sheep are prone, passing over my body. It is in vain that I attempt to resume my place among them, for they have taken fright and make off when I come near them. My only resource is to crouch down before a low fire which just prevents me from freezing. My companions as well as myself endeavour to shake off the numbing sensation which comes over us. There are only about twelve degrees below zero, but the wind is incessant, and any one who has been upon an exposed place in winter, when a cold wind is blowing, knows what that is like. Upon the other hand, the stars seem to be larger and to show more light than they do in Europe.

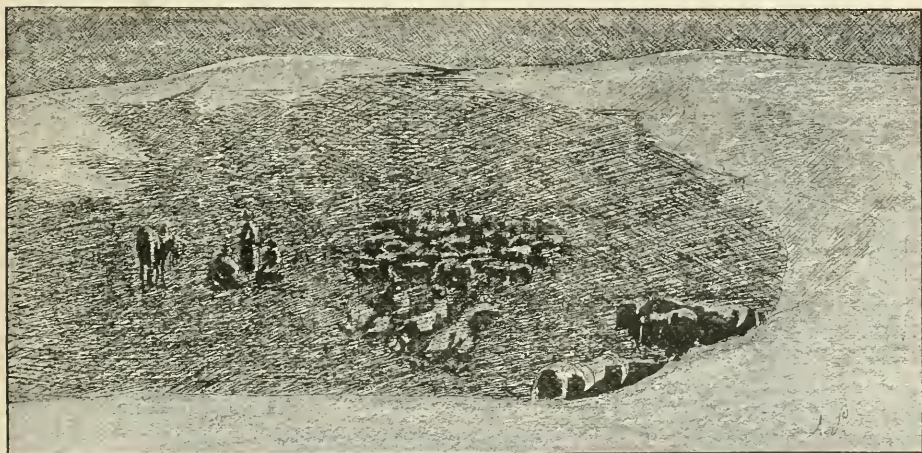
March 20th.

At 6 a.m., the cold is almost as intense.

Pepin's face is terrible to look at, being all swollen, with his

lips an enormous size, and blood oozing from the chaps. He cannot open his eyes or see a yard in front of him. Capus also has his face very much swollen, his nose is streaked like that of a leper, and his best friends would scarcely recognize him. It appears that I am not quite such an object, and this is because I have a thicker skin, according to Menas, who is also in a very sorry state.

We send to meet the pack-horses, which arrive about nine o'clock. The tent is put up, and the sun warms us a little. We



NIGHT TIME AT URTAK.

shall take a much needed rest to-day and to-morrow. Moreover, the owner of the flock sticks to his pessimist views, and according to him the Kizil-Art would be impassable, while as to passing by way of the Akbaïtal it is no use thinking about it. If we go by the Rang-Kul we risk meeting the Chinese outposts which would stop us. Sadik himself takes this view, and yet only yesterday he was very sanguine, though it is true that he then thought the Kizil-Art was open. To judge by the whiteness of the peaks which adjoin that pass it is not so.

All our Kirghiz men have their eyes affected; they complain of a bad headache and the horses are nearly done for. Four or

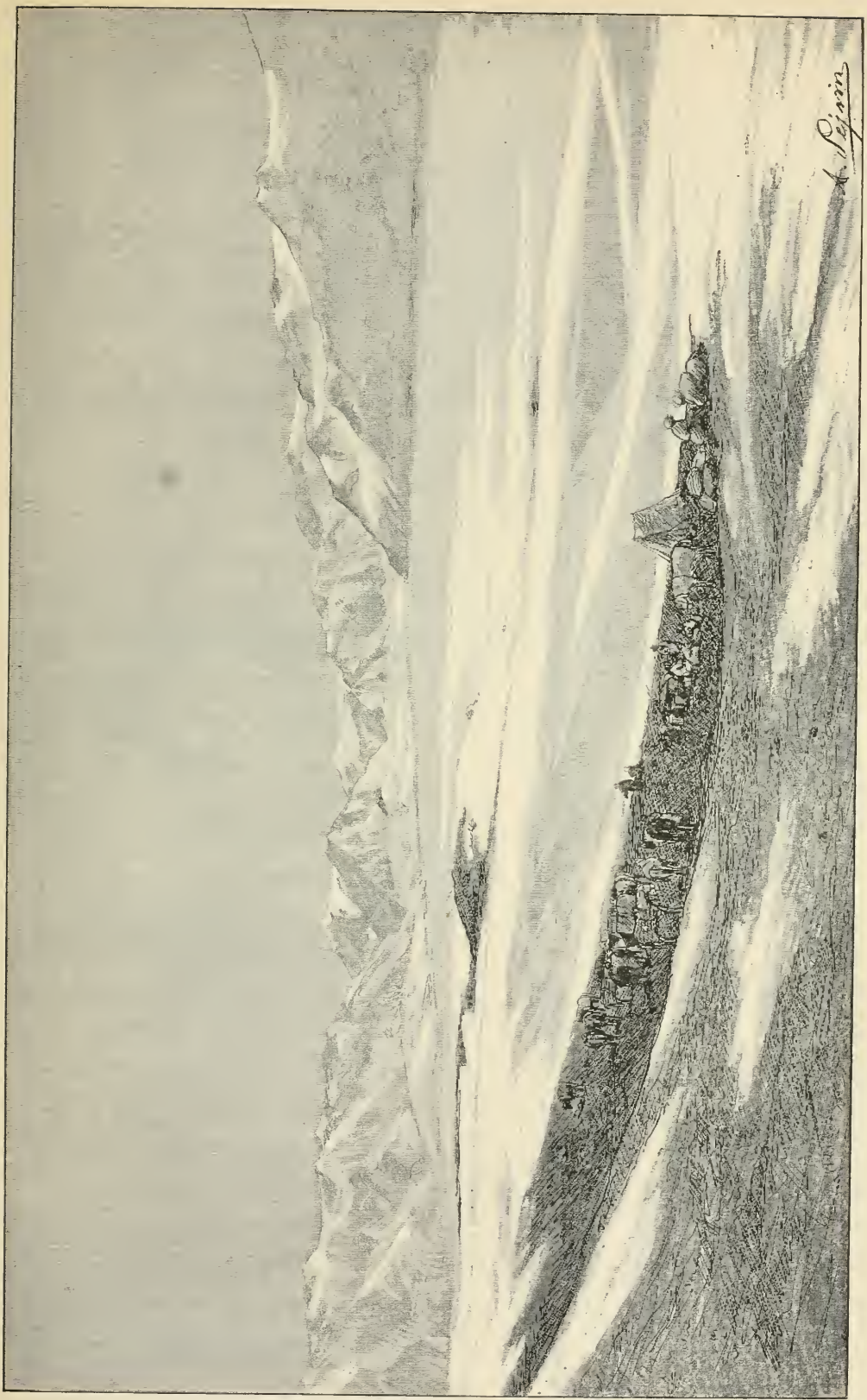
five more such days, and there would be an end to the whole expedition. The first thing we have to do is to line our stomachs well. We purchase two sheep from the Uzbeg, and we give a treat to our men, infusing courage into them by way of their stomachs. The sun aids us, for at 2 p.m. we have ninety-five degrees and only seven degrees of frost in the shade. The day is a beautiful one and makes us forget the previous one. All our men are as active and brisk as a family of peasants when they kill a fatted pig. Abdur-Rasul, the poet, makes us a delicious sausage out of the liver, kidneys, and fat of the sheep, and we enjoy it exceedingly.

We grease our boots, dry our clothes, furbish up our arms, groom our horses, and repair the saddles and girths. The Kirghiz shave their heads, and we are glad to hear sounds of laughter and even singing. Rachmed cracks jokes which evidently amuse the Kirghiz, for they grin and show their teeth. He has got rid of his pelisse, and drawing in his belt he shows me that he is three inches thinner in less than six days. He looks quite unhappy at his shrinking figure, and deplures it in the most comical way imaginable.

The men who are ill from the cold rub their cheeks with tallow and bathe their eyes with warm water. Satti-Kul, the guide, is very lazy, but it is true that his eyes are much swollen, and he keeps his head down as if he was looking for something. But in reality, it is because he does not want to exert himself. When questioned as to the nature of the route we have before us, his invariable reply is "God alone can tell!"

Two men and two horses are missing, and we don't know what has become of them. We have twenty-two left.

As the sun goes down, so do our spirits. Before nightfall, we get the horses together, and they are attached by the feet with a long rope stretched along the ground and held down by iron



A. Reppin

ENCAMPMENT FACING THE KIZIL-ART.

clamps ; and the men collect around the fires lighted close to the baggage, and they converse for some time, seated upon their heels, with folded arms and the body bent forward to catch the warmth of the fire. Some of them, more fatigued than the rest, lie down at once and go to sleep, with their legs curled well up under them so as to be warmer. This is just what vagabonds in Europe do when they sleep in the open air.

In the group of which Sadik forms part, the conversation is being carried on in a low tone, and I send Menas to listen. He crawls along noiselessly, and gets within hearing without having



THE PLOT.

been heard or seen. When he comes back, he has a very interesting story to tell me.

The "master of the flock," Sadik and the principal men of our convoy were debating as to what course should be pursued. They were all agreed that the journey could not be continued, that it was madness to attempt to get through this snow, and that the best plan would be for us to retrace our steps. Before doing so, pits would be dug at this place, and all the barley and baggage we did not require buried in them, while we went to Gultcha, or Osch, to await the fine weather. In the month of July, we should return to the Alaï, and cross the Kizil-Art without any trouble. This was a very prudent plan, no doubt, and testified to the

interest which these men took in us ; but it did not suit our views. However, let us go to sleep now, and we can see what had best be done to-morrow.

March 21st.

We intend to rest all day again ; but to-morrow we shall attempt to get over the Kizil-Art without a halt, at any cost. We had better leave the Kirghiz in the hope that we shall perhaps turn back. They spend the day in mending their equipment ; and for their breakfast they eat the head, feet, and entrails of the sheep, cooked in an improvised oven excavated in the soil. No doubt they make an excellent meal.

Our encampment is very picturesque in the bright sunshine, and we look for all the world like a troop of brigands who have taken refuge, with their booty, in some safe spot, and are preparing for a fresh expedition. Our faces look as forbidding as you could wish.



SATTI-KUL.

To-day, the hideously ugly Satti-Kul is inclined to do a little work, and he splits some wood in very easy-going fashion, stopping now and then to suck a bone, which he then splits open with his hatchet in order to extract the marrow, grinning like some horrible gorilla.



SATTI-KUL HELPING TO COOK.

Then he comes up to the fire and looks to the coffee-pots, all of a row, which are filled with snow. I ought to have already explained by what a very simple process we obtain our water. The fire is lighted and the saucepan filled with snow, which is melted by the heat. The water is drawn off, when it congeals upon reaching freezing point, and it is put into a coffee-pot,

where it becomes water. This water is poured into another coffee-pot, where it becomes lukewarm; and then into a third, where it gets hot, and so into another, till it reaches the special kumgane in which boiling water is made for the tea. Satti-Kul is very fond of ladling out this hot water with a wooden spoon, but he does not like going to fetch clean snow in a bag.

Owing to the altitude—we are about 7800 feet above the level of the sea—the meat cooks badly, and the tea has not the flavour it possesses upon low ground. The water boils too quickly.

To-morrow will be a momentous day for us. We shall know if the gate of the Pamir is open or closed.

The night will be a fine one, with a clear sky and no wind. At 7 p.m., the thermometer is not much below zero.

Several of the horses are blind, that of Pepin among others, and so, too, is his owner. Menas remarks during the evening that some of our barley had been stolen. The Kirghiz must have given some to their horses, and thrown away more on the road, with the intention of picking it up as they return. They have also thrown away some wood. Once through the Kizil-Art, we will make them suffer for this.

March 22nd.

At 7 a.m., nearly forty degrees of frost, with a little wind from the east.

The shepherds are told they may go their way, and they are overjoyed. We have the horses loaded, and then we intimate to Sadik that we are starting for the Kizil-Art, that the other Kirghiz must help us to get through the pass, otherwise there will be some heads broken—his first of all. We are determined not to go back to Ak-Basoga before having ascertained that the Kizil-Art is impassable, and that the Pamir is not “fordable.”

If this plateau resembles that of the Alaï, the enterprise is not more than we can manage. Sadik and the others listen in silence,

without making a gesture or moving a muscle. A slight contraction of the eyelids is the only sign of emotion.

"Iakchi!" ("Very good!") says Sadik. And they all get up and make their horses ready.

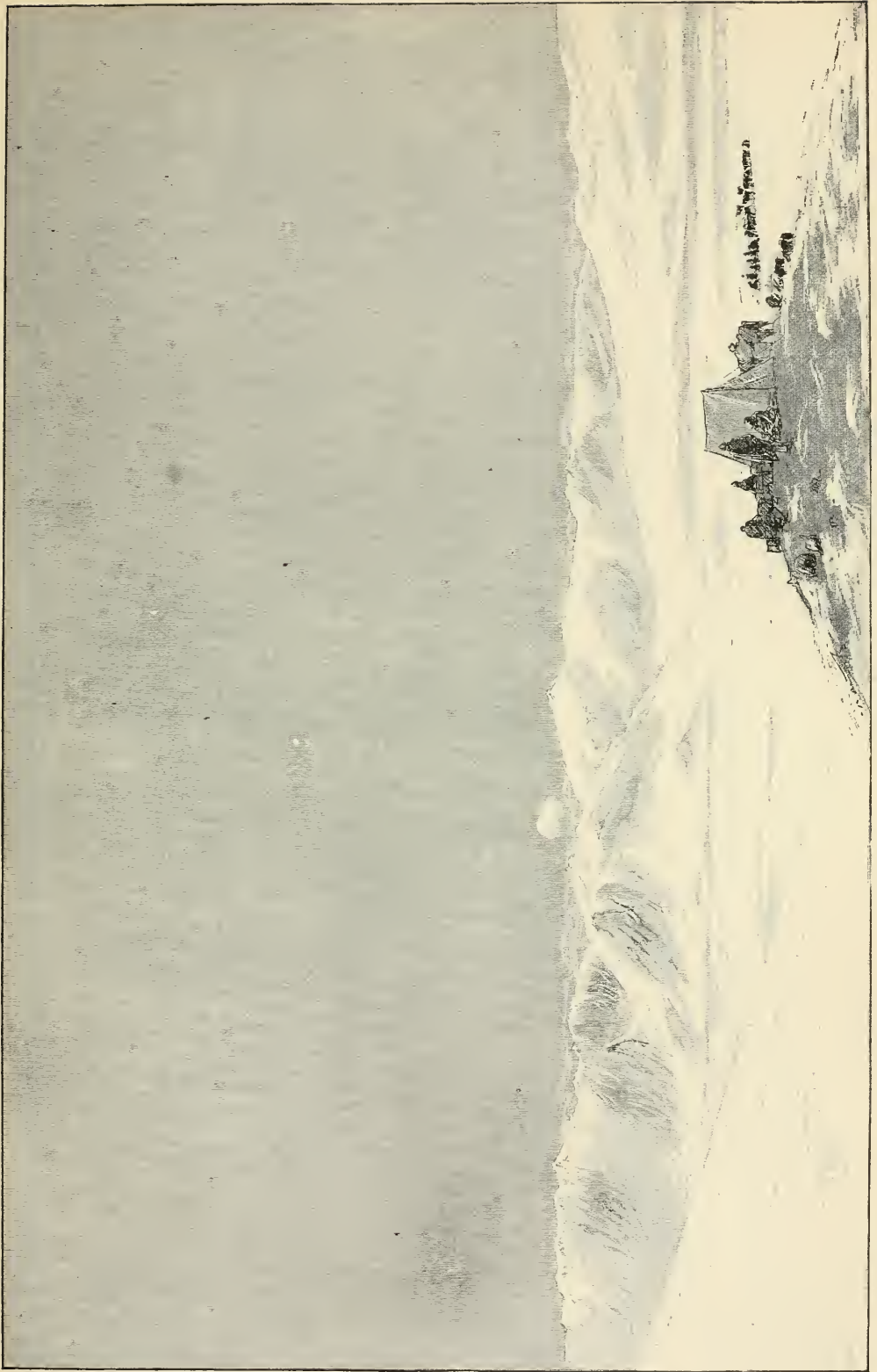
Rachmed will bring up the rear, and, revolver in hand, will compel any one who attempts to turn back to go on. Menas will follow the first squad, and he has received similar orders. We ourselves start at once with Sadik and the three men whom the



THE ASCENT OF THE KIZIL-ART.

Kirghiz obey. The caravan gets into motion under our eyes, and then we take the lead, for we have to trace the route.

At the confluence of the Kizil-Aguin and Kizil-Art rivers, there are very deep drifts of snow, and at more than one place we have to climb on to the hills which skirt the banks. Below, we should be buried in over six feet of loose snow. At last we light upon a clear track, and we reach the Kizil-Art, feeling beneath our feet the ice upon its surface, the north-east wind having swept off all the snow.



ENCAMPMENT FACING THE KARA-KUL PASS. I

So far the route is a good one; but as soon as we turn to the left, towards the pass, we find ourselves in a narrow defile, with enormous quantities of snow. It is, of course, impossible to follow the ordinary route along the thalweg, and so we pick out upon the sides of the valley the places where there is the least snow, sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left bank, and advance as best we can.

After six hours' marching—severe ascents and descents, interspersed with plenty of falls—we arrive at a spot where the valley becomes a gorge. We cannot yet see the summit of the pass, and men and horses alike are stretched out like so many dying forms upon a flat rock. We are bathed in sweat, and can scarcely open our eyes. We have violent headaches, and are parched with thirst, putting handfuls of snow into our mouths.

Sadik points with his finger to the white mass which bars the way, and with a motion of the head asks if we are to go on.

I look at the white masses of rock, which the sun is tinting with the rosy hues on a virgin's cheek, and virgin they are. "Aida, Sadik!" ("Forward!") Sadik puts his hand up to his beard, and turning towards Mecca, says—

"Bismallah! in the name of God!" in the tone of a man who is submitting to an inexorable fate. And off he starts, sounding the snow with his staff. Then he drops, picks himself up again, falls a second time and struggles in vain to extricate himself. However, we pull him out of the hole into which he has floundered, and as soon as he has recovered his breath, he sets off again. The three Kirghiz take the lead in turn, and every now and then one of them goes off to look for a passage. And one follows the other, puffing and blowing, and floundering about.

Above us we can see flocks of *arkars* (wild sheep), which gaze down upon us. Our presence surprises but does not apparently alarm them. We do not bestow so much as a chance shot upon

them. Then we observe a heap of horns placed upon a *mazar* (tomb) which marks the summit of the thalweg. We cannot pass that way, so we bend to the left over the ridges and we descend upon the other side, on to the Pamir. After ten hours' march, at 6.15 p.m., we are encamped upon the dividing line, at an altitude of about fifteen thousand feet, with the valley of Markan-Su at our feet.

This is another day which those who have gone through it will never forget. We are all of us fatigued to death, but we are satisfied with the result, and the country seems a pleasant one, even to Rachmed, who would like it better, however, if it was more thickly populated, for he is fond of company. We experience



SADIK COOKING.

the satisfaction of those who have found what they have been seeking, and while the horses one after another are returning to the bivouac, to which they are attracted by showing them their *tourba* (wooden bowl) full of barley, I cast a glance at the south, in the direction of Lake Kara-Kul. Above the heights which surround the small plain of Markan-Su, which lies at our feet, is visible an immense gap, above which floats slowly in the sky a single cloud, round and white, like a snowball which has been hurled into the air, and which, having suddenly become deprived of its gravity, is arrested in its fall.

As far as the eye can reach, there is nothing to be seen but undulating mountains, with peaks rearing their heads aloft like proud sultans amid a prostrate crowd.

We made a copious meal of rice, millet, and meat, and having written out our diary by a candle which we have some difficulty in lighting, as it is frozen, we talk of home, and are quite cheerful.

If only it does not snow to-morrow! The plain looks well, and I am hopeful. But let us get some sleep, and leave to-morrow to take care of itself. We have scaled the last rampart which protects the "roof of the world."



STARTING FOR THE KARA-KUL.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PAMIR (*continued*).

At Lake Kara-Kul—Some of the men follow, the others are sent back—We remain eight in all—A track—A find—Satti-Kul as a nurse—Numberless wild sheep—The wind—Mount Kol—Tempest in the Kizil-Djek—Abandoned—The Rang-Kul; Kirghiz and Kutasses—Scenery—Negotiations—The mercury freezes—A polar night—Caprices of the temperature—Attempt to stop us—We are on Chinese territory—We do not wait for permission from Kashgar—All aid refused us—How we procure what we absolutely require.

March 23rd.

WHEN we awake, at 6 a.m., there are $15\frac{1}{2}$ degrees below zero and no wind, at seven o'clock $11\frac{1}{5}$ degrees, and at half-past seven eight degrees.

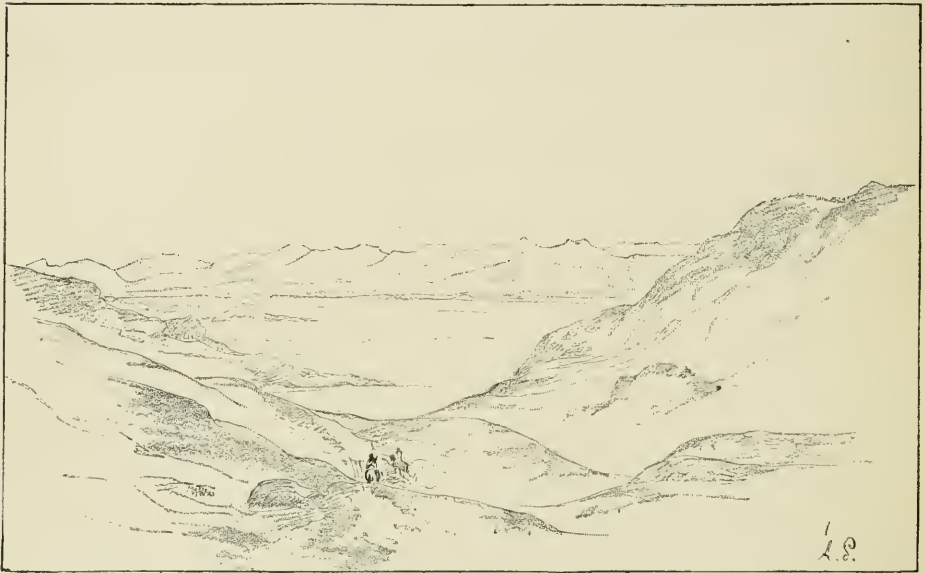
The sun shines very brightly and warms us, the day being a magnificent one. The troop which comprises the barley-stealers is got together, and Rachmed, after duly reproaching them with their conduct, says that half of them will be sent back, but will not

be given the certificate which they have to produce to their chiefs as evidence of good behaviour. The rest are to carry to the Kara-Kul the barley which remains, and this will relieve in some measure our horses, to which we shall not be able to give such large rations as we had intended doing when they were loaded. The men do not say anything, as they know that they are in the wrong and that resistance would be useless. Rachmed and Menas are to keep a sharp look-out on them. We descend into the valley with the hesitation of persons who get into the water without knowing its depth, and who are afraid of putting their feet into a hole.

We go forward, and as we advance we gradually gain assurance, for there is little more than two feet of loose snow, as fine as powdered sugar and not unlike the dust which one sees upon the road in summer time upon a frozen foundation. The faces of our men expand into a smile, and they sit their horses with more confidence. We arrive by a defile at a small lake which Sadik calls Kizil-Kul. It is thawing at the surface, and there is a thin stream of water which is scarcely salt at all and of which we drink several stoops with great gusto. All around us are hills still white with snow, with the sand visible on some of the lower slopes, and flocks of *arkars* (wild sheep) skipping about on them. The leaders of the flock see us and halt upon the summit, looking at us with a good deal of suspicion. The rams, with their drooping dewlaps and long twisted horns, are noble-looking animals. A shot fired at them sends them flying, and they scale the steepest slopes at a wonderful pace. At each turn, we come upon flocks of these fine animals, feeding in groups of ten, fifteen, or twenty, and scraping up the snow with their feet to get at the roots. We emerge from the region of Kizil-Kul, which is so undulating that one would never fancy one was in a mountainous country.

Beyond Kizil-Kul, the snow is again rather deep, being up to

the horses' chests. We have several falls while traversing the *davan* (pass) which leads to the basin of Lake Kara-Kul. From the top of the pass, we can descry a corner of the lake, at the extremity of the valley, through which the river of Guk-Sei flows when the snow melts. We pass by blocks of rock amid which several hares are scuttling off, just to remind us that we are upon the Pamir-Kargoch (Pamir of the hares). Gradually we get in



THE KARA-KUL, AS SEEN FROM THE PASS.

sight of the whole lake, the surface of which glitters with ice, while it is shut in by snow-clad mountains.

The north-east of the lake is skirted by a plain about a mile broad. We can see something moving upon the surface of the lake and wonder whether it can be a flock or herd. Sadik and Satti-Kul assert that they are sheep, and that further on they can see some *ouï* (felt tents). They ask to be allowed to go on in advance and ascertain whether this is so. The prospect of coming upon tents puts us all in a good humour, for there are no tents without men being with them, and if there are men, we shall find

flocks, milk, beasts of burden, and helpers. Moreover, man is a sociable being, and we shall be glad of a little company.

At last we get close to the level of the lake, and what we took for a rather flat plain is dotted with hillocks and intersected by the sandy beds of streams, which are at present dry.

Sadik identified just now the course of the Kara-Art. There are footprints upon the sand, and we can tell that arkars and hares have been by here during the day; while further on there are traces of birds hopping about, and of rodents having nibbled at the roots. But most of these marks are not recent, and the place must be the site of a *laïlag* (temporary summer encampment) of the Kara-Kirghiz. We have been marching for eight hours and a half, and it being now 6.30 p.m., it is time to encamp.

We look out for some creek at the edge of the lake, where we shall be protected from the wind. I go forward in search of a good bivouac, and find one which will suit us. Just then I catch sight of a flock of arkars, and they see me; so while I gallop forward to try and cut them off, they scuttle off in the direction of the mountain. It is no use trying to overtake them, though a fat arkar would, no doubt, be a very toothsome morsel, besides giving us a change of diet. To appease our great hunger, we munch some wheaten cakes, which are so hard that they have to be broken with a hammer. Our baggage and cooking utensils have not yet arrived, so I don't know at what time we shall get our supper. Sadik and his companion return without having been able to see anything of flocks or tents, and they have been the victims of a not uncommon delusion. At nine o'clock the baggage horses arrive at the bivouac, to which they have been guided by the fire we have made with the droppings collected round the encampment. At 11.30 p.m., "supper is on the table," and we eat our boiled mutton and rice with a hearty appetite, despite our being at an altitude of 12,800 feet.

March 24th.

At 8 a.m., there are thirty-six degrees of frost.

The Kirghiz who had stolen the barley are missing, and they must have turned back before reaching the pass which leads to the lake. Several sacks of barley are missing; and as we suppose that they must have been thrown down into the snow, we send Rachmed, two Kirghiz, and the horses which are the least fatigued, to gather up all the fragments.

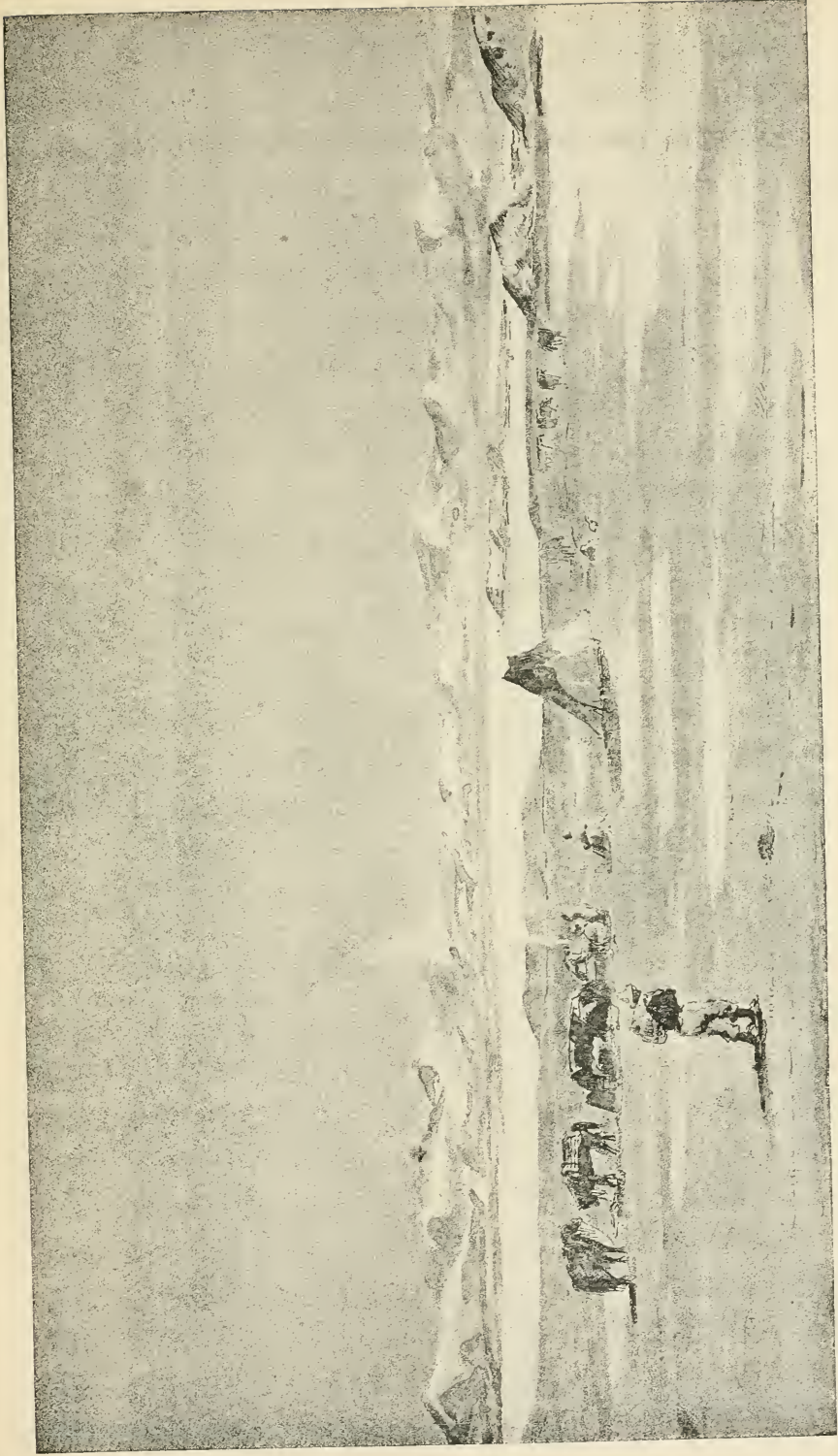
The Kirghiz of Mollah-Baïas, who have served us well, will be sent back this evening with a handsome *douceur* apiece, after we have treated them to a good meal. We employ them all day to pick up the droppings of the stock, and to dig up roots for our fire, and they get several bags full. Satti-Kul has told us that we shall find nothing of the kind further on; and he calls these roots "kiskenne."

We have a good encampment, and it is quite warm in the sun, which is not reflected by the snow, the wind having fortunately cleared it away. At noon, there are only six degrees of frost in the shade, while in the sun the thermometer marks fifty.

We take advantage of this exceptional temperature to "clean ourselves" a little. Our horses have been put out to feed, and they have taken possession of the pasturages vacated by the arkars, not one of which is visible in the plain.

At three o'clock, our men return with four sacks of barley; and after careful calculation we find that we have enough left to last us ten days. We must go by the Rang-Kul, where we are certain to find beasts of burden. But instead of avoiding inhabited places, we shall endeavour to find them. We must, at any cost, relieve our horses, and only utilize them at the last extremity. This will create a good deal of difficulty, but we shall get out of it somehow.

In the afternoon, we remark flocks of larks and starlings flying



ENCAMPMENT UPON THE KARA-KUL.

in the direction of the wind (south-west). They alight, but soon rise again. We receive a visit from a chaffinch, which is either very confiding or very hungry, for he comes to look for a few crumbs at the entrance to our tent. We receive him with great cordiality, and for an hour or more he amuses us by the way in which he hops about, half at his ease, half afraid; but as soon as he has satisfied his appetite, he flies off with an impudent twitter.

A number of birds fly over our heads at a great height, uttering cries which we cannot at all recognize. We ask Satti-Kul what they are, and all the answer we can get is that they are "birds" (*dournas*). Sadik explains to us that they are birds which have the plumage of a duck, and the head of a cormorant. They are not to be found in the plain of the Ferghana, and like cold countries. During the summer, they frequent the pools of the Pamir. He adds, that when they are fat they make very good eating.

Thereupon, the chief of the Kirghiz who are remaining with us, and with whom we are very well satisfied, asks us if we will give him a *kaghaz* (paper), as he wants to take advantage of the fine weather and start at once. He is afraid that a snowstorm may block the path to the Alaï, and that he and his men will be unable to get through.

We hand him the certificate which testifies to his good service, with a short letter for our host and friend, General Karalkoff. We distribute some presents to these brave fellows; and Baich, their young leader, who had gone on his knees like the others, gets up and, stooping forward, puts his hand to his beard. The others do the same, and exclaim, "Amin! amin! Allah Akbar."

We shake hands with them, Kirghiz fashion, and off they start, soon disappearing out of our sight. Their departure makes a deep impression upon our troop, and the sudden silence shows that those who remain behind are heavy at heart. We are now only eight in all, and there is still a long way to go, and many

risks to encounter. As long as there was a large number of men, there was not the feeling of isolation which now supervenes and makes them look so gloomy. Rachmed, who is fond of company, is the most sombre of all. I remark that he remains for a few moments motionless, watching the last glimmer of sunlight, and pulling the hairs out of his beard and biting them with his teeth, which is with him an unmistakable sign of his being pre-occupied. Then he goes to the bag in which the bread is kept, breaks off a bit and munches it, picks up the nosebags of the horses and gives them some barley, singing at the top of his voice as if to drive away dull care.

After supper, Rachmed, who no doubt is anxious to divert his thoughts into another channel, relates to his listening companions the story of "the merchant's son," to the great dismay of Abdur-Rasul, and to the great delight of Sadik, who listens open-mouthed and with sparkling eyes. Menas, who, as usual, is in fits of laughter when his friend draws the long-bow, eventually begins to snooze; while Satti-Kul is fast asleep, with his legs crossed and his head in his chest. He has eaten too much millet.

March 25th.

At 5 a.m., there are eighteen degrees below zero.

At 7.15 a.m., we prepare for a start, the thermometer marking eleven below zero, and about forty degrees in the sun.

We intend to encamp to the south-east of the Kara-Kul, where the horses will find a little grass. Our men have great difficulty in dividing the iouks and loading them. The bales have to be made according to the strength of the horses, and well balanced, which is not to be done in moment. It is only upon the march that any error which may have been made can be detected; and as Rachmed is the only one who, thanks to a lengthy experience, is really clever at doing this—a package is continually falling off or

a saddle turning round, so that we have to be constantly stopping to put things straight. We advance but slowly, and the stoppages are so frequent that Menas will have it that the devil has something to do with it.

Some birds settle down near to us, and, owing to the undulation of the ground, I get a shot at them and kill three. They are lagopedes, with an orange-coloured head and ash-coloured backs. We shall have them roasted for this evening.



LAGOPEDE.

But the guide, Satti-Kul, whom I have overtaken, stops his horse, and pointing to marks in the snow, says that they are recent. As a matter of fact, the wind has not had time to blow back the blades of grass which emerge from the snow. The footsteps are in the direction of the lake, coming from the mountain. After we have established our encampment, we will try and discover the "leather stocking" who has made these footprints.

We pass a number of small pools which are the frozen lagoons of the Kara-Kul. Close to the lake there are hills composed of a sort of peat, which Satti-Kul calls "pachta-kattin," and which he says that we shall use for our fire to-night. There are some hills which glitter like large glass balls, with a coat of slippery ice from which trickle small rivulets of water more or less salt. These rivulets trickle over the ice and disappear as soon as the sun has gone down, freezing before one's very eyes, so to speak.

We fix our bivouac at the extreme south-east end of the lake, upon the sand, close to the peat. We go to have a look at the Kara-Kul, and find that it would bear thousands of guns, and

that millions of skaters could assemble upon it without the least danger.

Pepin tries to make a water-colour drawing of a lagopede, but he has to give it up; although he uses hot water, the paper gets crusted with ice wherever it is shaded by his hand.

We tether our horses and keep a sharp look-out on them; as also upon the horizon, for the footprints we have seen keep us on the *qui-vive*. Sadik goes forward to reconnoitre.

In the meanwhile, Satti-Kul tells us that he has spent eight summers at the Kara-Kul, and that one of his sisters is married to a Kirghiz of the Rang-Kul. I ask him what he thinks of the tracks we have seen during the day, and what this man can be doing here. He will not say more than "I don't know."

As the sun goes down, we see Sadik coming towards us, and close beside him a large object which has not the outline of a man on horseback. We all strain our eyes to see what it can be, and Abdur-Rasul, who has very good sight, says that it is a camel. So it proves to be; but what, we ask one another, can it be that he has got slung across the saddle. All we can tell is that it is not a sheep. At last we see that he is leading a she camel with a piece of rope, and that what he is carrying is her offspring, only a few days old. Satti-Kul takes it into his arms and at once constitutes himself its nurse. The little camel begins to bleat, and we all laugh very much.

Rachmed declares that Providence has sent us this camel to carry our baggage.

Sadik reports to us the result of his search. He followed the footsteps, which put him on the fresh track of the camels, and as he thought that the camel would be easier to catch than the man, especially as the mother would not abandon her young, he went after it. So he brought it back, believing that its owner will come in to claim it, and that we shall be able to obtain some service

from him in exchange. So we shall have to sleep with one eye open to-night. No doubt he has gone to tell some of his friends, who are hidden in the gorge. He must have seen Sadik and got out of his way.

The lagopedes are delicious, eaten with mutton and roasted in the pan.

The temperature varies very much, for at 7.15 a.m. the thermometer was eleven degrees below zero in the shade, while in the sun it was about thirty-eight degrees. At 7.40 a.m., it was eight



SADIK'S CAPTURE.

degrees below zero, and thirty-eight; at 8 a.m., it was five below zero, and fifty-five; at 9 a.m., there were twenty-seven degrees of frost in the shade, while in the sun the thermometer was at seventy-two.

About 3 p.m., a breeze sprang up from the south-west, and there are eighteen degrees of frost in the shade, while in the sun the thermometer is at forty-eight. At 4 p.m., the thermometer is nearly at zero; while at 8.40 p.m., there are only fourteen degrees of frost, so we keep well wrapped up to guard against these sudden changes.

March 26th.

At 5.20 a.m., the thermometer is just below zero.

During the night, the horses have been put out to graze in the marshy fields, carefully watched by the men, while the new-born camel, well wrapped up in felt, has passed the night at his mother's side. Now that the sun has come out, he has been uncovered, and he evidently enjoys it, wagging his almost invisible little tail with pleasure. With his head down, and his legs bent under his stomach, he looks something like a seal sunning itself. The mother looks at him tenderly, and then raises her head, as if proud of having brought so splendid an animal into the world. She gets on to her feet, and opens her legs in order that her little one may, with the help of Satti-Kul, get at her udder and suck to the full.

The horses are loaded, and we start with them, and we do not intend to take the camel with us, nor even to eat the young camel, as Rachmed, who would, I believe, devour human flesh, proposed that we should. We have given the subject great consideration, but have finally rallied to the opinion of Sadik, who thinks that we ought not to make enemies if we can possibly avoid it. The Kirghiz would regard the use of the camel as a robbery, and they would take their revenge for it if possible. Sadik says that he and Abdur-Rasul would certainly be made to suffer for it on their way back.

We soon saw that he was right, for we had scarcely raised the camp, when two mounted Kirghiz, followed by dogs, came to fetch the stray camel, and recognized Abdur-Rasul.

We pass over a red and stony steppe, with very little snow. As we get further away from the Kara-Kul, which is so soon no more than a thin white streak, the plain closes in like a gulf, and we shall get out of it through a narrow gap which we can just discern in the mountain. This desert region is dotted here and there with large drifts of snow, upon which numerous flocks of

arkars may be seen standing. They have got their heads down into the snow, seeing what they can grub out; but one of them stands sentinel. He sees us coming and gives the alarm, and the whole flock, after standing still for a moment to look at us, is off to the mountain.

These patches of snow and the arkars do not extend beyond the plain of Kara-Kul. The east wind blows with great violence off the bare mountain chain, and freezes us to the marrow. Upon reaching the mazar of Ak-Salir, a very ancient saint according to Sadik, upon whose tomb are piled an endless number of horns, we reach the confluence of several open valleys. We do not select that of Mus-Kul, but we mount towards the north-east, and making the circuit of an arid ridge of rocks, we arrive by a fairly good road at the lake of Mus-Kul (Lake of Ice), so-called, according to Satti-Kul, because it never thaws. The level of the lake is very high, and the summer path lies hidden beneath the ice. So we are obliged to climb higher, to the slope of some hills, which do not form a very convenient bivouac. We encamp at the broadest part of the valley, to the south of that of Ak-Baital, upon the edge of the ice which surrounds the meadows where we put our horses to graze. We cannot contrive to shelter ourselves from the wind, which has been the means of clearing away all the snow here, whereas the passes of Kizil-Djek and of Ak-Baital, the approaches to which we can descry, are white with snow, as well as the heights overlooking them.

The Kizil-Djek is clear, but the neighbouring Ak-Baital is gloomy, and a snowstorm, descending from it, gathers additional force on the way, and very nearly suffocates us. The wind hampers our breathing, and the descending storm seems as if about to crush us, but the wind suddenly veers round, a strong gust bursts in upon us from the north-west, and descends like a cold douche upon our shoulders, clearing the valley and routing

the tempest from the Ak-Baïtal. Not that we are much better off, for we are all of us shivering, and feel half suffocated. About 6 p.m., the wind shifts, and goes round again to the east, blowing more fiercely than ever.

Eating our supper as quickly as possible, and huddling ourselves beneath our sheepskin, we sleep, thanks to our seven hours' march, despite the howlings of the tempest. Every now and



KIZIL-DJEK.

then we are awakened by a choking sensation, which compels us to raise ourselves for an instant to a sitting posture.

March 27th.

At 6.30 a.m., the thermometer marks about twenty-three degrees of frost, and it is lucky there is no more, for with this east wind, we might not be able to proceed if the cold was more severe.

We make a start at nine, marching eastward. We are obliged to march over ice, which forms the flooring of a narrow passage, along which a tremendous draught is blowing. Our horses, which

step very cautiously, cannot help falling, however, and it is rather difficult to load them again, for they are very unsteady on their legs. We march for more than an hour over this ice, ascending all the time till we reach some cliffs, and at each step we come upon snow-drifts in the hollow places and along the sides of the rock, with arkar horns and salt lying on the grass. In many places we see dried-up watercourses, with sandy beds. The valley gradually opens out, and about noon the snow begins again, covering everything with its mantle of white. Valleys and gorges extend right and left of us, and facing us we see the saddle-backed pass of Kizil-Djek. We keep climbing up amid the pitiless wind and snow, with occasional falls, and halting every now and then to get breath.

At three o'clock, we reach the summit of the pass, about 15,700 feet, and the wind, incensed no doubt at our presumption, redoubles its efforts, and, as Rachmed says, brings one's heart into one's mouth. We are literally suffocating, and there is a noise in our ears as if a million *bayadères* were drumming into them with their tambourines. And then this abominable wind—which takes us for dead, no doubt, in which it is mistaken—envelops us in whirlwinds of snow as in a winding-sheet, and drives handfuls of it in our faces, just as a grave-digger hastily buries the dead the night after the battle. But this is a battle we intend to win. We take advantage of a slight lull to descend some very steep ridges as far as Uzun-Djilga, where we halt after a tramp of seven hours and fifty minutes which at times was little short of a funeral march. Our horses have their heads down almost to the ground, and it is the gamest which suffer the most, for, as a French general once said of his men, "it is always the same men who get themselves killed."

The snowstorm continues, and our alarms are not appeased until Rachmed and Abdur-Rasul make their appearance amid

the thick flakes. We were afraid that they might pass clean by without seeing us.

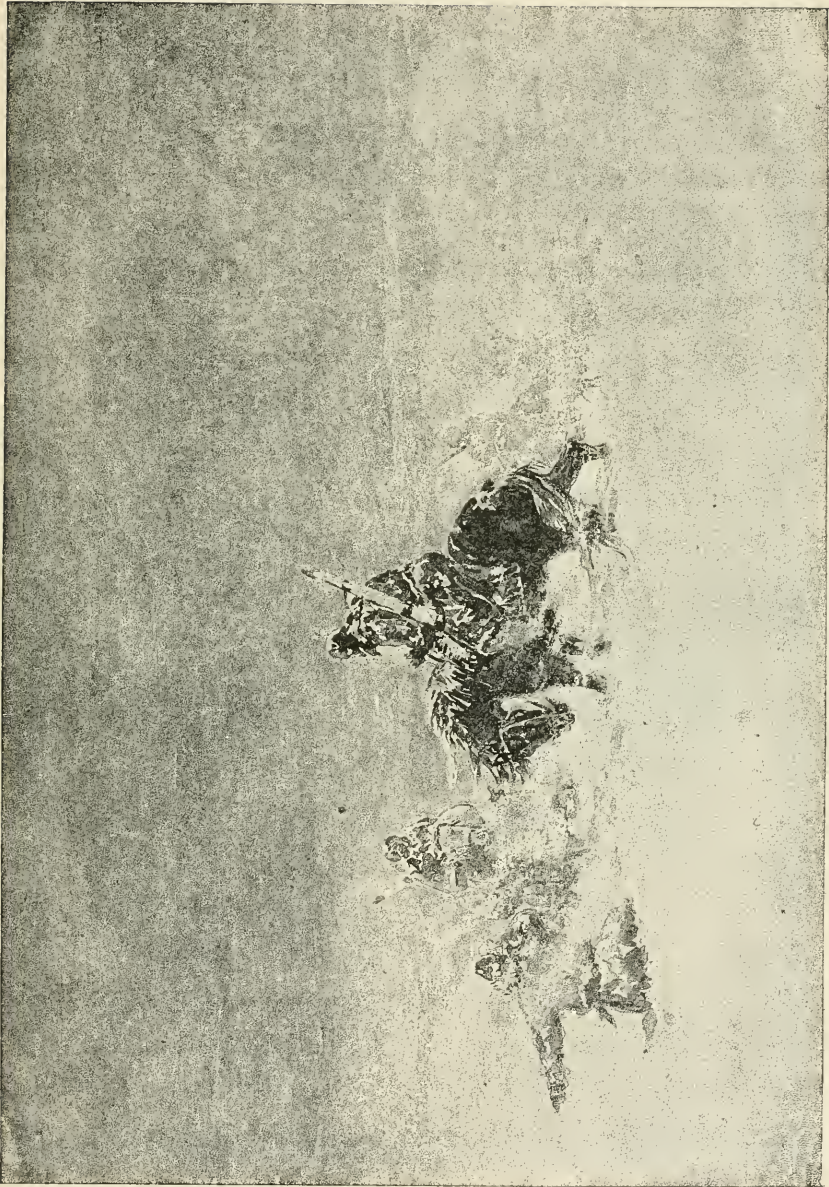
Abdur-Rasul has a violent headache, but he has bled from the nose, and this has relieved him. All the men complain of severe pains on the chest. Poor old Sadik lies down without waiting for his supper, the millet porridge of which he is so fond, and which will not be ready just yet, for it has taken half an hour to light a fire in a hole dug in the ground, the soil being frozen as hard as the meat, which is like a piece of wood.

We go to sleep amid the howling of the tempest. Now and then we are awakened by a suffocating feeling, but we gradually get used to it, for we generally have a heavy sensation in the head. Looking through the aperture of the tent, I can see that the snow is still falling. Man, isolated and lost to sight amid this majestic disorder of nature, is lucky in being so small, for he is thus better able to elude its destructive action, and, like an insect, he is tenacious of life.

March 28th

The morning opens unfavourably. The men complain, when they awake, that they suffer very much in the head, and that they were cold all night. They are dispirited and devoid of all energy; but I am obliged to tell them to prepare some tea and light the fire. At seven o'clock, there are still thirty degrees of frost, with a westerly wind, a cloudy sky, and a few flakes still falling. We must wait till the sun comes out, as that will cheer them up, and our stage to-day must be only a short one.

The horses have not much vigour left, for they are all bleeding from the nose, and do not attempt to snort. Two or three of them stand with their backs to the wind, and another of them will not advance to have the nosebag thrown over his neck, though he can hear the barley being shaken up in it. This is a



IN THE PASS OF KIZIL-DJEK,

bad sign, and he, like one or two of the others, will never get the whole stage.

The preparations for a start are made without the usual interchange of jokes, and as the sun does not deign to show himself, we start with a west wind blowing at our backs. Having come down from the plateau upon which we had encamped into the valley which winds away eastward, we are once more in the trackless snow. Satti-Kul goes on in front, and as he is suffering a good deal with his eyes, he leads us into some very queer places, so Sadik takes his place and acquits himself much better.

To the east-south-east, which is about the course we are taking, we can make out a white peak which we assume to be the Tagharma (Moustagata), the highest peak in the Pamir. It is thanks to the wind, which for a moment or so clears away the mist, that we are able to see it. But this bitter, cutting wind makes our march a very gloomy one, and not a word is exchanged.



A HORSE ABANDONED TO HIS FATE.

The horse which had suffered the most was not loaded, but he had followed us a little way, with drooping head and ears; but at length he stops, unable to go any further. We thought that he would go to Rang-Kul, where there is grass, it appears, and where he might have lived till the fine weather returned, and have regained strength. But he is fairly worn out, and lets his companions all go by in front. His poor legs cannot carry him any further; they are stiff from exposure, exhaustion, and cold, and

he neighs feebly as we abandon him, just as a man at sea is abandoned when one cannot throw a life-belt to him, and whose death, certain though it be, one cannot well hasten. The poor brute is soon no more than a black speck, far in our rear, upon the white sheet of snow which will soon envelop him in its folds, when he sinks exhausted to the ground.

We go single file through the valley, which narrows and then opens again, where several gorges branch out to the left. All is rigid and white, with horns of dead arkars protruding here and there, while a number of live arkars appear in the distance, too wild to let us get near them, and flitting about like phantoms in a cemetery. There is no motion save that of the fine snow driven before the tempestuous wind. Snow, nothing but snow; no vegetation, not enough wood to make a match with. Our only distraction is when a horse falls, or loses his load, or steps out of the path; but at last, after five and a half hours' march, we reach the valley of Ichki, in the basin of the Rang-Kul, and we make for the south-east.

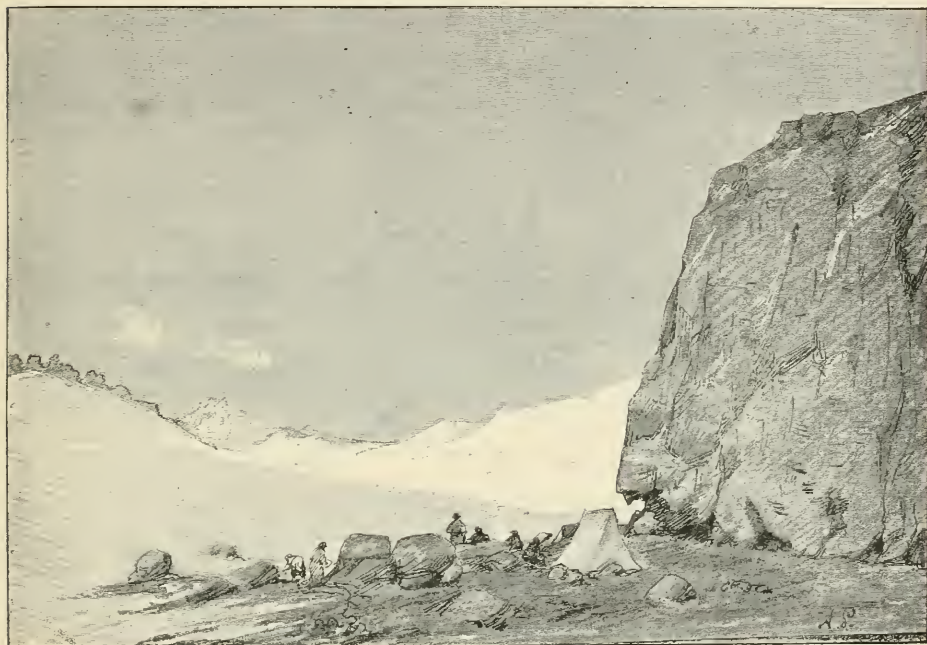
At a place called Kamara-Tag by Satti-Kul, who spent his childhood in this region, we take shelter in a grotto at the foot of an overhanging rock; and we are at the extreme end of a valley which descends in a straight line from the north—a perfect desert, as may well be imagined, and quite white.

While we are settling into our encampment upon the droppings accumulated by the flocks which have come to this natural shelter, we see to the right an eagle, which has scarcely the strength to fly; and to our left an emaciated crow, which perches above us and begins to croak. Like people who have been for a long time condemned to silence, he is very anxious to enter into conversation with some one; but he can scarcely emit a sound from his throat, which is hoarse from hunger.

Satti-Kul is delighted to see the land of his forefathers, who

bear the name of the tribe of Ichk, borrowed from this valley, and he vaunts the charms of this grotto. It is the first shelter we have come across for a fortnight, and it will perhaps be the last until we have reached the other slope of the "roof of the world."

Satti-Kul smiles, and he is in a very good humour, for he points in the direction of Rang-Kul and says that it is quite close. Thereupon, he begins to fill the lappets of his pelisse with drop-



ENCAMPMENT AT KAMARA-TAG, BEFORE REACHING THE RANG-KUL.

pings, and endeavours to get near the saucepan, of which Sadik has the management as senior. But Sadik pushes him off, and mumbles something about not liking lazy fellows.

March 29th.

We treat ourselves to an hour or two's extra rest this morning, as the Rang-Kul is near, and we count upon finding there tents and some one to lend us a hand. At eight o'clock, there are twenty-five degrees of frost, but there is no wind, a cloudy sky, and a delicious temperature.

At ten o'clock, the mist clears away and the sun comes out, imparting a little courage to our men, who have been slowly loading the horses. When the sun disappears we are melancholy, but we do not suffer from the radiation and heat; but when he reappears we forget the pleasure he has given us, and mutter imprecations upon his dazzling force. People are never content with what they have got.

After two and a half hours' march, we reach the entrance to the basin of the Rang-Kul, with the valley of Ak-Baïtal, shrouded in white, to our right. We do not see the lake, which is hidden in a depression of the ground and covered with ice. But in summer, according to Satti-Kul, its level rises, and its waters cover a considerable part of the plain.

We keep our eyes open; and Satti-Kul, who has been scanning the horizon, exclaims, "Koutasse; it is good!"

Koutasse means yak, and where there are yaks there are also men. This is not a bad piece of news, for the *morale* of our little troop wants being worked up; and we shall all be glad to see fresh faces. Our horses can hardly get along; and mine, which has done a great deal of work in the Alai, is quite *hors de combat*. But we shall rest at Rang-Kul, and we shall ease our horses, thanks to the yaks which Satti-Kul has just seen, and to the camels which we encounter. It is true that they do not appear to be very flourishing, for their humps, protruding from a felt covering, are small and thin.

We pick our way amid ruts, past pools, on the banks of which are reed-beds, like those adjoining the lake of Kara-Kul. And after two hours' march we halt in the middle of the plain, a few hundred yards from the glaciers of the Rang-Kul. Arkar horns, droppings, and congealed footprints, some quite fresh, tell us that this place is frequented in summer by numerous flocks, and that even now a few are wandering about and finding a meagre

pittance among the roots, with which we hope presently to make a good fire.

I measure several horns which are over four feet four inches long.

No one comes near our tent, though there must be several arkars prowling about in the neighbourhood, but they keep themselves in hiding until they are sure who we are. To-morrow we must send Sadik and Satti-Kul in search of a guide who can show us the road to Kunjut, of beasts of burden for the baggage, and, above all, of a sheep or a goat. It is pleasant occasionally to make a meal off an animal one has seen killed.

The sun is with us all day; but at 7.30 p.m. the thermometer marks thirty-one degrees of frost, while an hour or two later the sky clouds over, with a westerly breeze, and there are not more than twenty-three degrees. We must be prepared for snow.

March 30th.

It has snowed during the night. Sadik and Satti-Kul go, as soon as they are awake, in search of the owners of the animals which are wandering along the shores of the lake. They will try and find some one who has been to Kunjut recently, and who is able to give us some information. We don't know anything about this country which Satti-Kul tells us that we shall reach in ten days; whether it is independent, or whether it is subject to the Chinese, the people of Kashmir, the English, or the Afghans. The question is whether we can get there without passing by Ak-Tach, where we expect to have difficulties with the Chinese authorities. That is the point we have to ascertain. We should like, also, to avoid the province of Wakhan, where the Afghans have posts which would turn us back.

Yesterday, Sadik thought that we had better make for Tagharma, where we should find an abundance of everything, and

whence we should easily get to the Kunjut by the Tag-Dumbach-Pamir in a week. But we should be in an inhabited region, and the beg might possibly assemble a force large enough to capture us without any chance of our resisting. He would send us to Kashgar, and there would be an end of our expedition.

The situation is a rather puzzling one. We are eager for our scouts to come back and bring with them some native of the Rang-Kul, who will tell us what is best to be done.

We are at an altitude of about 12,750 feet, the wind has gone



ENCAMPMENT UPON THE RANG-KUL, FACING THE TAGHARMA.

down, and we are able to breathe more freely than we have done for the last few days. Roots and dung abound, so we can boil plenty of water, having first melted the snow, and wash to our heart's content, which is all the more necessary that we have not had a chance of doing so for a fortnight. I say nothing about the vermin, for they are the least of our troubles. Let me speak rather of the view.

We see that the mountains form a circle around the steppes, and, as Rachmed observes, there is no visible outlet. To the south-east, opposite our tent, are jagged rocks of quartz, streaked

with snow. Eastward are snowy mountains, with others behind them, and in another direction an arm of the Rang-Kul, to the right of which the Mustagata rears its lofty head to the sky. Behind us the mountains are seen dimly through the mist, while to the west are gigantic cones, upon the summit of which float clouds resembling smoke issuing from volcanoes. When the sun goes down, it lights up this wild scene and lends it an air of tenderness which seemed incompatible with such savage grandeur.



COUTASSES (YAKS).

In an easterly direction, we descry two black spots on the steppe, and these prove to be our two men returning, and none too soon, for night is falling fast.

Abdur-Rasul has been examining the yaks which I had been looking at in the morning and which had made a very favourable impression upon me. They are like large, lazy oxen, but as square and sturdy as a hippopotamus, with long hair trailing almost to the ground and a bushy tail like that of a horse. There is little intelligence in their eye, and they are constantly feeding and ruminating, their rapid digestion showing that they are cattle

and not horses. They make a sort of grunting sound, but they seem very strong on their legs.

According to Abdur-Rasul, the flesh of the yak is good, better than that of the cow, and its milk is very nutritive. It can carry a heavier load than a pack-horse and can go a greater pace, but it must be well fed. In hot weather, the yak is useless. It is very vicious too, and those which are used for work always have the ends of their horns sawn off. He adds that they are very stupid animals.

“Do you think these can be of any use to us?” we ask him.

“I don't think so. They have scarcely anything to eat, and they are very weakly.”

“Then they can never be of any use; in summer on account of the heat, in the winter because they are short of food.”

“You are quite right. They make bad beasts of burden, but as they stand cold well in severe weather, when all other animals die, the Kirghiz is very glad to have them to keep him from starvation.”

In fine, the yak might be employed in this country as a sort of living preserved meat which does not need tinning.

Abdur-Rasul arrives at the conclusion that we shall do best to make use of horses or camels, and he adds that the Pamir horses are very small.

While we are talking, the two men whom we had seen in the distance come up, and one of them has some one in the saddle behind him.

The new-comer gets off without saying a word, shakes hands with Abdur-Rasul, and then goes to kneel down by himself, away from the fire. He is a small man with a large Mongol face, much flatter than that of our Kirghiz. The nose is flat and the eyes so sunk as to be almost invisible, while the hands and feet are very short. He is an unmistakable Chinaman.

I ask Sadik who he is, and he answers, "Djuma-Bi," with something like a wink of the eye; a man who has had to leave the Alai country, and because of some difficulty he has got into.

I ask him to draw up to our men's fire, and get him into conversation. He speaks in very unfavourable terms about the route, saying that all the passes, whether by the Ak-Baïtal or the Ak-Su are closed.

There is a great deal of snow, both this side and the other side of Ak-Tach, where we shall encounter Teïts, of the same blood as Satti-Kul, who, by the way, has, I think, washed his face. Neither he nor Sadik put in a word, and I suspect them of having schooled Djuma-Bi how to answer my questions. They do not say a word about the Karauls who have been posted by the Chinese.

Djuma-Bi knows the route very well, and the tracings which he makes on the ground with a piece of wood are quite correct.

He says, "On getting near to the Kunjut, we shall come upon some Karauls; they will go and tell the Kunjutis, who will come to meet us and bar the way."

"But you say that it is impossible to pass by way of the Ak-Baïtal or the Ak-Su?"

"That is why I think you should wait a fortnight here for fine weather."

"Then you know no other route except by the Ak-Baïtal or the Ak-Su?"



DJUMA-BI.

“ No.”

“ You will be able to get us camels, or yaks, or horses ? ”

“ Not now, they could not get along ; in a fortnight they will be strong, and you will be able to start.”

“ We would only use them for one stage, and that would not tire them. We will pay you with *iambas* (bars of silver) which bear the Kashgar stamp.”

Djuma-Bi does not make any answer.

“ And how about the Kunjutis ? ” we ask him. “ To whom do they pay tribute—to the Chinese or to the Kashgari ? ”

“ I don't know at all. They are our enemies. Two years ago, they sought to make war upon us. But we had a great many yaks ; and when they saw these animals, they thought that we were very numerous, and they were afraid to attack us. Our tribe had many yaks, but we lost nearly all our stock this last moon. We are poor.”

But it is quite dark. To-morrow we shall know more. It is strange that no one alludes to a Chinese post, which must be somewhere near to where we are.

The cold will be terrific, for the thermometer, which at 7.10 p.m. marked thirty degrees of frost, stood at 8 p.m. at six degrees below zero, and at 8.30 p.m. at eight degrees below zero ; at 9.45 p.m. the record is eighteen degrees below zero.

Our men cannot make up their minds to come away from the fire, and amuse one another with relating stories. The night is extraordinarily clear, and there is the most perfect calm in the atmosphere. The stars are very brilliant indeed, and our weak eyes can scarcely stand the unprecedented brightness of the crescent moon, which illuminates a cupola even more arrayed in gold than that of the Tillah Kari mosque at Samarcand.

I never saw the celestial vault loom so large as it did upon the Pamir, for the mountains seemed no more than slight elevations

upon the surface of the earth, while the men grouped around our large fire, itself no more than a rushlight, looked like so many pigmies.

At 2.20 a.m., with the moon still so luminous that I could distinguish objects inside the tent, I go out to look at the thermometer, and find that the mercury has vanished. It has evidently been frozen. Thinking that I may be mistaken, I show the instrument to Capus ; and we light a candle, the result being that we find the mercury really has frozen up, and is no bigger than a leaden pellet.

March 31st.

We never slept so soundly ; and our sleep might be compared to the lethargy of an Alpine marmot. We cannot make up our minds to move, and it is ten o'clock when we get out from among our wraps.

At 10 a.m., there are fifty-five degrees in the sun, and four degrees below zero in the shade.

The following table, moreover, will show how capricious the climate of the Pamir is :—

Hour.		In the Shade.		In the Sun.
10.15 a.m.	2 degrees below zero	61 degrees.
10.30 "	$\frac{1}{2}$ " "	60 "
10.45 "	$\frac{1}{2}$ degree above zero	62 "
11.15 "	4 " "	68 "
11.25 "	4 " "	63 "
11.30 "	3 " "	50 "
1.0 p.m.	11 " "	46 "
4.30 "	26 " "	35 "
5.15 "	30 " "	36 "
6.20 "	21 " "		
6.35 "	14 " "		
8.45 "	5 " "		
9.0 "	4 " "		

During the night, Djuma-Bi has had a long conversation with Satti-Kul, who has given him all the news from the Alaï, while

the former has told him about things in the Pamir. They had not met for a long time, both being of the Ichki family, and of the tribe of Teits. Djuma-Bi has drunk large quantities of tea, and partaken freely of millet porridge. Perhaps he may be inclined to help us, and I sound him on the subject.

“Have you got any camels or yaks?”

“Yes.”

“Will you let them to us?”

“Yes.”



KIRGHIZ OF THE RANG-KUL.

“How much a day for each?”

“The fact is they are a long way off, and it would take a week to fetch them. I have only got sheep handy.”

“Sell us some sheep.”

“I can sell you one.”

“Go and fetch it, and bring us at the same time some Kirghiz who will let us have camels.”

“Camels are the best in the snow, because their legs are longer.”

Djuma-Bi and Satti-Kul were about to start, when we saw what looked like three horsemen riding up, but they turned out to be men on foot, whose figures had been magnified by the mirage.

The nearer they get, the smaller they appear, and Pepin thought that they must be lads. But it turned out that two were full-grown men, one somewhat advanced in years, and the third a young man of twenty. All of them were nearly beardless, very wizened and undersized, with a few stray hairs falling from their

upper lip by way of apology for a moustache. We receive them very politely, and press them to take plenty of tea and porridge. In answer to our inquiries, one of them asserts that we can pass by the Ak-Su, and that we shall find some Kirghiz there.

He will let us have three camels and a horse, but only as far as Kizil-Djilgua, because his animals have grown weak from their winter fast.

They are very amiable and ready with their offer of services. What can it all mean? for Djuma-Bi declared that we could not get over the Ak-Su.

At this moment other Kirghiz arrive, one of them riding a native Pamir horse no bigger than a donkey, and just the size for such diminutive riders.

They remain till nightfall beside our fire, the younger ones bringing roots and kisiak in bags to make it burn better. They will be able to keep warm all night, and we shall have a provision which will last us several days. We leave the Rang-Kul tomorrow, and shall have plenty more snow further on. Rachmed is still amusing the men with his stories when I go off to sleep.

April 1st.

We sleep like tops, and I believe that if we did not struggle to shake off this torpor, we should await fine weather at the Rang-Kul rolled up in our sheepskins.

Fortunately we have a clear object in view, and I bid Rachmed get the iouks ready. At 7 a.m., the thermometer is fifteen degrees below zero, which will show how cold the night was. For want of a minimum thermometer, it is impossible to say what the temperature was. So many of our instruments have got broken.

At 8 a.m., it is $9\frac{1}{2}$ degrees below zero in the shade, and only seven above it in the sun.

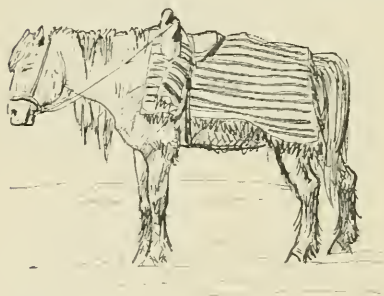
At 8.25 a.m., it is four degrees below zero in the shade, and only sixteen above it in the sun.

At 9 a.m., it is $9\frac{1}{2}$ degrees above zero in the shade, and four degrees of frost in the sun; while at 9.40 a.m., just as we start, the cold, for some peculiar reason, increases.

The camels having been heavily loaded, despite the remonstrances of their owners, who assert that their animals are scarcely capable of carrying the iouk of a horse, we make our way towards the eastern extremity of the basin.

We pass over the frozen surface of the lake, the edges of which have a great many cracks, and in some of the hollows there is ice, and in others salt, which might be mistaken for hoar-frost. Then we get into the steppe, and further on the sand begins again; this sand being at the bed of a watercourse which is formed by the melting of the snow.

But our caravan proceeds so slowly that the tardiness must be intentional. From the moment that they saw their beasts of burden being loaded, the Kirghiz had shown manifest signs of ill-humour, and Menas asks me what is to be done; whether he is to let them have the whip. As he is speaking to me, they come to a full stop, and a man, who has ridden up to them on a camel, has an animated conversation with them.



PAMIR HORSE.

This man then comes up to us, and, getting off his camel, kneels down a few paces in front of us and gazes earnestly in our faces.

We ask him what he wants, and he replies—

“I have come to tell you that you cannot go any further until you have received the authorization of the Governor of Kashgar.”

“Why?”

“Because I am the chief of the Karauls, and such is the order given me. A few years ago, my predecessor facilitated the journey of some Russians, and he was severely punished, being banished with all his family.”

“But we are not Russians.”

“What are you, then?”

“We are Feringhis, who are travelling to gain instruction. If we were soldiers, we could understand your opposing our passage, but we are men of peace, and you have no more right to stop us than you have to stop the traders. Moreover, to set you at ease, we may tell you that the *Daotai* (governor) of Kashgar knows who we are and what we want. The *daotai* has not given you any orders about us, so that we are not doing any harm. Moreover, we are not attempting to hide ourselves. We have too much baggage for you to imagine that we are dishonest men. Have we not sent to hire camels? Have we stolen anything? Who complains of us? We do not know anything about you. Where are your papers?”

As he made no reply, we went on to say—

“Accompany us to the end of our stage. You will take some tea with us, and eat sugar. We will show you our papers with Mussulman seals, and if that does not satisfy you, we will await the orders of the *daotai*, and you will see that he will send soldiers to cut your head off for having stopped us without a motive.”

He still made no answer, and just then our caravan came up, Rachmed abusing the Kirghiz in the strongest language because they will not quicken the pace of their camels, asserting that they will unload them and that they are not fit to travel. Rachmed is eager to know whether he may not beat them, but I urge him to forbear, at all events till this evening. We march along at a desperately slow pace, Sadik being very gloomy, while Satti-Kul

still has that jaunty look which has already excited my suspicion, nor has his cousin Djuma-Bi the modest air he had yesterday. After three hours' march, Djuma-Bi wants us to encamp among five or six tents inhabited by the Karauls, upon the ground that there is no grass further on. We refuse his offered hospitality, and select a place on the plain, about a mile off, whence we can see in all directions. Although the road is perfectly clear, the wind having swept away all the snow, the Kirghiz take an hour to do this mile. They take too great an advantage of our good nature, and our men are furious.

The tent has scarcely been put up, and the felt laid down, when the chief of the Karauls arrives in the company of Djuma-Bi and ten hang-dog looking individuals, one of whom is smaller than the rest—doubtless bent by study, for he is presented to us as a mollah—and it is to him that we show our papers. The unloaded animals are at once driven off in the direction of the mountain, and will be found again when they are required.

We offer tea to the principal men, including the malbâti, and the same conversation ensues. Some of them are inclined to be insolent, seeing that we are so very forbearing. They are very anxious to see our papers, so we unfold a passport, and show to the mollah the Persian visa, and then a letter from Muchir-Daoulet (the shah's prime minister), which we found answer its purpose in Khorassan. It is written in Persian, but after conning over it for a long time, he at last came on the word Khorassan, and said—

“This is a Mussulman document.”

“Now are you satisfied?” I said to the chief. “You won't stand in the way of our hiring camels now! You must be convinced that we are honourable men.”

The Karaul-Begi seems to be convinced, and promises us some camels for to-morrow. We discuss the price with Djuma-

Bi, and come to an understanding, so that everything seems to be going very smoothly. Some friends of Satti-Kul come to see him, and when they leave, they take with them a bundle containing his clothes. This looks a bad sign, and the fellow seems unusually lively. He undertakes to get us some beasts of burden, and we send him to take a turn round by the tents, where some of these animals are lying under cover. He says that he shall be able to get some there, and we send Sadik with him, impressing upon the latter that he must keep his weather-eye open. We then go to bed.

April 2nd.

Early in the morning, we find Djuma-Bi, with the owners of the camels which we used yesterday, the Karaul chief, and his men. Satti-Kul and Sadik come in and tell us that they have only been able to find two camels, which will be brought to us almost immediately.

We remind the Karaul chief of his promise made yesterday, that everything should be ready. He must have told us an untruth therefore. We ask him why the camels have not arrived, and, after a little hesitation, he replies—

“I cannot order the Kirghiz to supply you with camels until I have myself received orders to do so from the Daotai of Kashgar. I can only advise you to wait for a fortnight, when the weather will be better, and all your wishes will be attended to at once.”

I then ask the Kirghiz and Djuma-Bi whether they will let us have their camels. They reply—

“We cannot do so without an order of the Karaul chief. Moreover, you ought to pay us. How can you expect us to serve you when you have not paid us the money you owe us since yesterday.”

I explain that I had intended to pay the whole at the same time, as I had reckoned upon Djumbi still serving us.

We take the iambas out of the stocking which we use as a purse, and weigh out the silver bars in some scales. The men put this in their belts which they tie in a knot, and then they get up and go off laughing at us. Menas calls them back and invites them to drink a cup of tea, which they do with a grin.

I then address myself to the Karaul chief, and beg of him to procure us the camels he has promised us. He says nothing, and gets up to go away with the rest of his men. Thereupon, I tell



THE PAYMENT.

Menas to seize one of them by the collar and drive him off with the butt-end of his musket towards the mountain, where the camels are, and bring them in at any cost.

I snatch the chief's cudgel out of his hand and belabour him as well as Djuma-Bi with it, while the rest of our men point their revolvers and rifles at them to quell any attempt at resistance. They are told that the first who attempts to fly will have a bullet put into him. Menas goes off, driving one of the men before him, and Sadik follows on horseback, for we must strike while the iron is hot. In the meanwhile, we get the baggage ready, but the

tent must not be struck till the last minute, for as long as they see it standing, those who are watching us from a distance will think that we are not starting, and that nothing abnormal is going on.

Half an hour later, Menas and Sadik come in with some camels.

I need hardly say that our would-be captors, finding that the tables have been turned on them, look very foolish. They do not even think of finishing their tea. We shall not soon forget the faces of the two who got the worst beating, with their heads



ORNAMENTS AND ARKAR HORNS.

hung down, making small sand-heaps, like children playing by the sea-shore.

Once the camels have come in, we load them as quickly as possible, and when the baggage has got on some way ahead, we wish them good-bye, and trot off after our caravan as quickly as possible.

Satti-Kul has gone off with a very long face, and when we overtake him, he tells us that he has sent a man to Tashkurgan—the traces of this man's camel are still visible in the snow—and that an attempt will be made to stop us in the valley of Ak-Su. We shall see.

On looking back, we see some men going to talk with the

chief of the Karauls. We then ascend the valley of the Kara-Su, following a southerly course, passing several *barkhanes* (sand hills), which are driven before the wind from place to place. At five o'clock, we encamp at Chattput, in a well-sheltered hollow, at a point where several valleys meet. Before reaching the end of this stage, I have to abandon my horse.



CHATTPUT.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PAMIR (*continued*).

Hostility of the natives—A friend of Sadik—Upon the banks of the Ak-Su, or the Oxus—News from Kunjut—The Kirghiz make off—A funereal monument—An apparition—A derelict—The debts of Satti-Kul, our guide—His flight—Refusal to assist us or sell us any provisions—Our “brother” Abdullah-Khan—The white slave—An excess of obedience—Abandoned tents—A friend—Enemies—Requisitions—The further end of the Ak-Su valley.

I WILL now hurry my narrative to a more rapid conclusion, abridging the account of days which did not bring any novel feature with them, and putting a curb upon my recollections which might risk being prolix.

April 3rd.

Last evening, our camp-fire attracted a dozen or so of Kirghiz, whose tents are raised behind some sheltering hills. They had shown great affability, and several of them had recognized the ill-favoured Satti-Kul. We had offered them some tea, and they

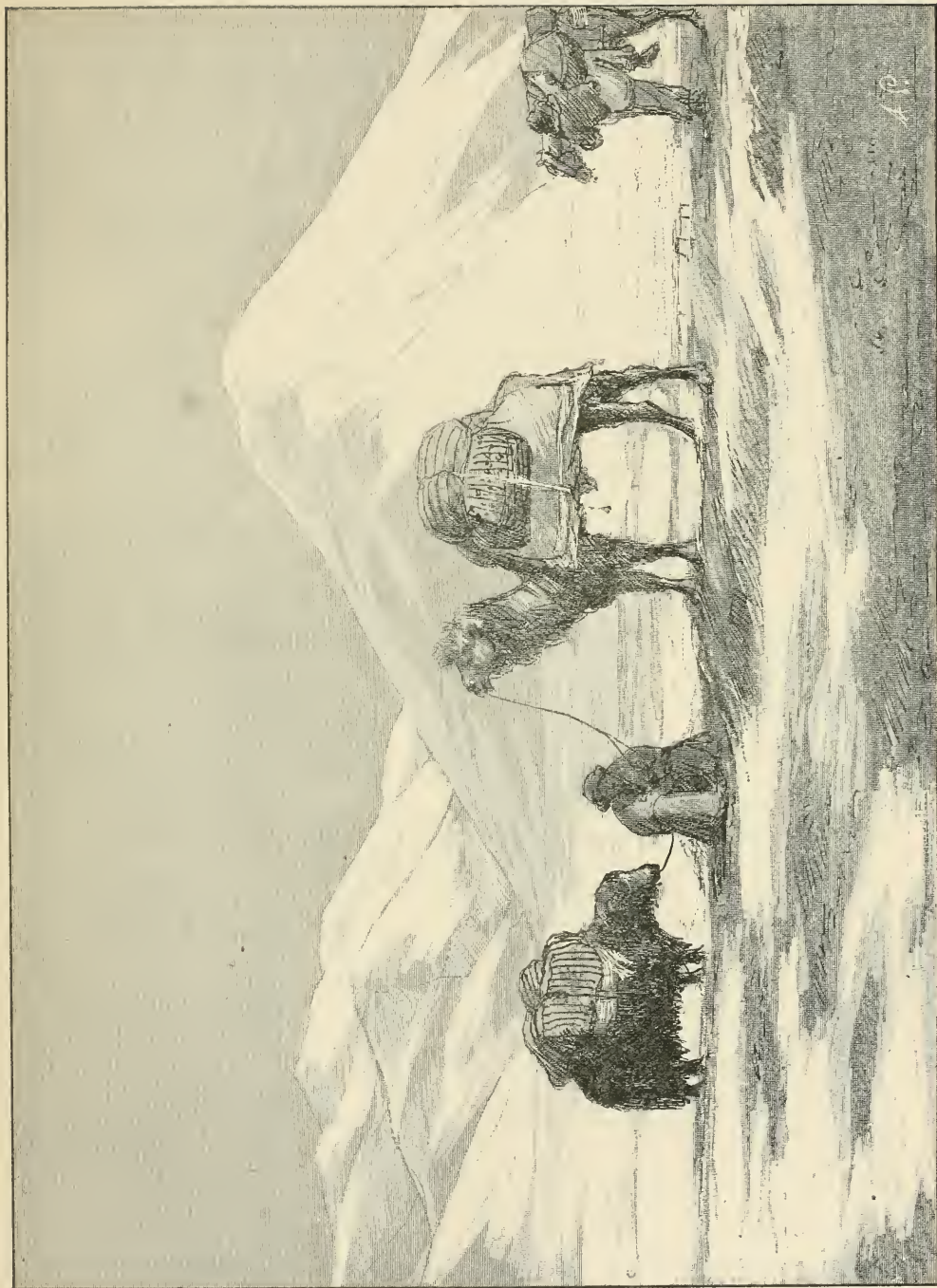
had told us that the Kunjut had for some little time been Feringhi, that is to say, English. We hope that such may prove to be the case. Moreover, the bi (chief) promised us some camels for to-morrow, without fail.

Upon waking, I find that not only have these camels not come, but those of the day before have also disappeared, and all of the Kirghiz with them.

During the night they have made a clean sweep of it, and the bi, who has promised so much, has gone too. I then send Menas in search of Satti-Kul, who had asked permission to go and see some of his relatives, from whom he would be able to get all the beasts of burden we require. He has now been gone two hours, and when he went he was riding one of our horses, while a friend was on the back of another. Perhaps we shall see nothing more of one or the other.

Menas returns with a yak, which he says that he found grazing, and adds that Satti-Kul is following with a fresh horse. I then take a turn with Menas to the adjoining tents, all the occupants of which say, in reply to our inquiries about the bi, that they do not know where he is, and that, moreover, they do not belong to the district. We find a camel, and a brother of the camel-drivers we had yesterday brings us two yaks. The owners of the camel and the yak which we had taken possession of come to claim their animals, whereupon we insist upon their loading them and driving them for us, giving them the choice between a ball from a revolver or a beating, and money in return for their services. We shall henceforth be obliged to requisition all we want, as the natives will neither sell nor hire us anything. These people first try to get all they can out of us and then refuse to render us the slightest service.

Satti-Kul, who is unquestionably very sulky and ill-disposed, arrives after keeping us waiting three hours. Rachmed and his



THE START FROM CHATPUT.

three companions are anxious to give him a beating, but I prevent this, as he is the only one who knows the road, and until we reach the valley of the Oxus, we must humour him. It is evident that he is watching for an opportunity of making off, so we must keep a sharp look-out on him.

We start at once, crossing the creek to the west of which we have bivouacked, and make south by the valley of Chattput, which is about one thousand yards wide and very sandy, the tips of mica-schiste rock protruding just above the sand. From the outset, we come upon barkhanes of sand moving north, though the varying of the wind prevents them travelling very fast.

After three hours' march, we descend into an amphitheatre by way of some sandhills buried beneath the snow, and we shape our course to the south-west.

This valley is also sandy, of about the same width as the previous one, with very little snow. We follow it for three hours, as far as the point at which it narrows and takes the name of Koch-Aguil. The westerly wind interferes with our progress not a little. In the valley there is a great accumulation of sand, especially to the left, that is to the west, and one might imagine that it was about to scale the mountain slopes, whereas in reality it is tumbling down from them.

Before sunset, Rachmed comes up with us, grumbling about the yaks, which he says are all hair and no legs. They move very slowly.

I tell him that we ought to be satisfied, as we have got safely down.

He answers, "Yes, about two feet," and points out the place where we had better bivouac. Shaking his fist at the wind and cursing it fearfully, he says, "I have still got my stomach full of it, and if I had not kept my teeth closed, the soul would have been blown out of my body. What a sweet spot! No grass! No

water! Sand, and plenty of snow. What a fine laïlag!" Being thirsty, he puts some snow into his mouth, and adds, "And to think that at Bei-Kongur" (the residence of his tribe), "there is now abundance of everything—grass for the stock, plenty of water, and on the mountain enough garlic to keep a man for six weeks without eating anything else. That is the country to live in."

Sadik feels himself at home; he has come here once before from the Ak-Su, and he has a friend in the neighbourhood who has rendered him a great service, and who knows how to make gun barrels. Upon the Pamir every Kirghiz has his matchlock.

"What service did he do you, Sadik?"

"One day, when I had gone to the neighbourhood of the Kara-Kul with the intention of making a baranta, I came upon some sheep belonging to men of his tribe, and, to tell you the truth, I seized some of them. I was returning, driving about twenty of these sheep before me, when I was caught by the men to whom they belonged. They seized me and took me back to their aoul, meaning to despatch me, when the Teit who is near here—there are none but Teits in this country—recognized me. We had made barantas together in the direction of the Wakhan, at the time that I had gone off with the brother of Batir-Beg, and we had preserved pleasant recollections of each other. He accordingly intervened in my favour and had me released. I am going to pay him a visit, and when I tell him that you will pay him well, he will come. I shall sleep at his place, and I warrant you that I shall return to-morrow with the yaks we require."

We give Sadik a few pinches of tea for his friend, and two or three lumps of sugar, and I call out to him, as he starts, not to come back without the yaks, and that if he fails, after all his fine promises, he had better not come back at all.

When it is quite dark, at nine o'clock, the wind drops and the

thermometer marks only sixteen degrees of frost, so we think the temperature is delightful and stand at the entrance to our tent to enjoy the cool evening air. At the bivouac this morning (8 a.m.) we had twenty-five degrees of frost. Summer is evidently coming.

April 4th.

Sadik arrives about 7.30 a.m. with two camels, a yak, and two Kirghiz, father and son. These two friends of his are little men, with very hooked noses protruding from a regular Mongol face. We loadⁿ the beasts and pack off the camel-drivers of the day before, whom we had taken care to keep for fear Sadik should not succeed.

We travel in a southerly direction, following the small stream which passes to the west of this valley, suddenly becoming very narrow. In an hour and a half, having climbed a stony hill, we descend into the snow-covered valley of the Ak-Su, reaching a plain about six miles in diameter, shut in by a belt of snow-capped mountains. The horizon is rather broader. We make our way through the snow, still travelling south. Approaching the river, the snow almost disappears, and we descend a very stony piece of ground to the edge of the frozen river, which we cross over, and encamp at the further end of one of the bends which it makes on its course through the plain. The Ak-Su, when frozen, is from thirty to sixty feet broad, while its bed, distinctly marked by the lofty banks, is from three hundred and fifty to seven hundred feet wide. Satti-Kul says, that when the river is swollen by the rains, the whole of this bed is filled.

Upon the other side of the river we see two shepherds, armed with muskets, keeping watch over some sheep. We are always glad to catch sight of anything which will make mutton, and we send Satti-Kul to speak to them.

We inform Menas and Rachmed that this river is the Amu-Darya, which they have already seen at Chardjui, Chur-Tepe, and Khiva, and this piece of news delights them, and they salute the Ak-Su. Rachmed is anxious to break the ice where it is thinnest, and to throw into the water two branches of trees, a coin, two dried apricots, etc., and to pronounce a few words by way of a charm.

We, too, are glad to be upon the banks of the Ak-Su, or the



ENCAMPMENT UPON THE OXUS.

Oxus. For the first time we feel as if we were on a main-road. We are isolated, it is true, but we could, if necessary, descend into Bokhara. At the Kara-Kul and Rang-Kul we were in the plain, too, but one had the feeling of being shut in and of having fallen into some profound abyss.

So, without losing a minute, we sent to draw some water at the watering-place which has been cut out near the bank for the sheep, and we drink it with relish.

To the south-east, we saw the defile of Ak-Tach, and that is

whence the wind comes of a night. Opposite the entrance to our tent, to the north-west, is the pass of Ak-Djilgua, whence starts the summer road to the Rang-Kul. Around us is plenty of grass—last year's grass—for our horses, and roots of one kind and another. We give our horses very little barley, and at the ordinary feeding time, one of them comes up to the camp-fire and neighs very plaintively, as much as to say, "Are you going to deprive us of our nosebag while you yourselves are enjoying the delicious water of the Ak-Su." The truth is, that we must husband the excellent Ferghana barley until we have to load our horses heavily. So we drive the poor brute off.

April 5th.

To the north-east I can see the back of the Tagharma, I say the back, because from this date we shall be turning our backs on him, and very glad we are that it is so. We are gradually making our way to warmer countries; yesterday, at eight o'clock, there were twenty-five degrees of frost; to-day, at the same hour there are only twelve.

At ten o'clock, we start, with snow nearly two feet deep, and we encamp at Ustik-Dalasu, a place which has been visited by some English, as we are told by an old man with a hooked nose, who gives himself out as the bi of the district. This chief comes to pay us a visit with a bag full of plants and roots on his back, and he makes a seat of it while he is talking to us. He at once recognizes Satti-Kul, and this puts him at his ease with us. He tells us that a little further on the road is a bad one, that all the stock has died this season, and that they have not a camel or a yak capable of going fifty yards.

He adds that the Kunjut is independent, and gives us the following account of what has occurred in that region. The young khan, having killed his father, sent ambassadors to the

Daotai of Kashgar to say, "If I have killed my father, it is because he wanted to hand over our country to the Inglis (English), and because I wish to be friends with the Emperor of Tsin (China)." The envoys then asked the Daotai whether their master had done right, and he replied, of course, in the affirmative. Thereupon, he gave orders that the men from the Kunjut should be received with great hospitality, and sent them home with many bars of silver and valuable stuffs as presents. Thus the Kunjut



AK-TACH (WHITE STONE).

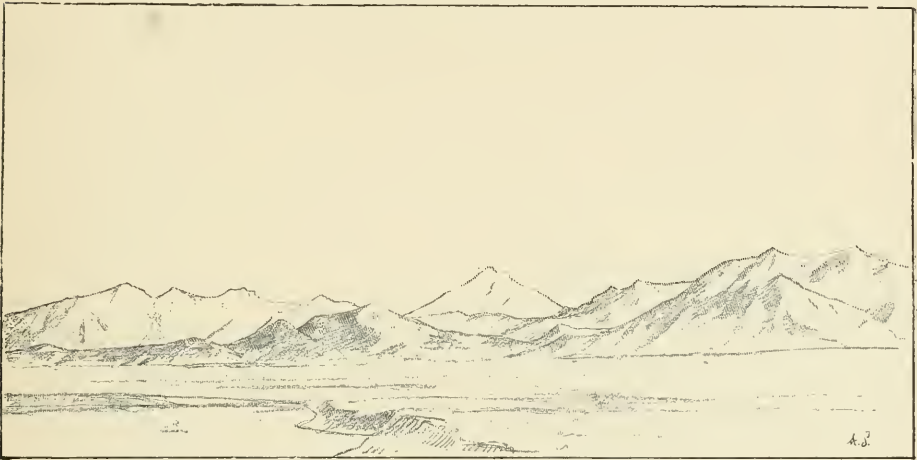
is still independent. Last year, the English passed by way of Basai-Gumbaz with Indian soldiers and men from the Kunjut.

At the present moment there are some Afghans at Ak-Tach. They have come from Kashgar, and have lost about forty horses on their way by Nisa-Tach. They are waiting for fine weather before continuing their journey to Badakshan. This is a significant piece of news for us.

The bi winds up his gossip by telling us that the Teit are very badly off this year, that they have lost nearly all their stock, and that the situation of their tents is so bad that they will have

to shift. They have accordingly sent one of their number to Tashkurgan to complain to the beg of their distress. The beg has taken their prayer into favourable consideration, and he is expected to-morrow, or the day after, with an escort of sixty or eighty men, to examine into the justice of their demands. This is said with a view to intimidating us.

Thereupon the bi whispers for a little to his cousin, Satti-Kul, and then makes off. We do not see a single camel anywhere near, and the two or three yaks which are roaming about near



THE TAGHARMA, SEEN FROM THE OXUS.

the bi's tent seem to be devoid of all strength. Probably the animals which are in good condition have been hidden away somewhere. Two of the bi's children come to see us, a boy and a girl, and the latter, whose brother follows her with manifest hesitation, says that she saw the canvas of our tent, which was so different from that of her father's, that she had come to see what it could be.

Menas is busy breaking sugar, and our little visitors watch him with great interest, and after they have tasted a few grains and made sure that it is not white stone, they ask for a lump. Menas pretends not to hear, and asks the girl if there are any

camels about. She seems very wide-awake, and makes an evasive answer, saying she does not know. Then, having got tired of watching Menas breaking the sugar, she makes a sign to her brother, who is not nearly so bold as she is, but quite as dirty, and off they go. These children are washed the day of their birth, but not afterwards. They were as much interested in the sugar as any European child would be in seeing an Esquimaux eating whale, or an African swallowing grasshoppers.

Upon the 6th of April, we leave Ustik without any assistance,



MENAS AND THE KIRGHIZ CHILDREN.

and we have discharged Sadik's friend. All the Kirghiz are in hiding, and their animals have disappeared, with the exception of two or three female yaks big with young. We encounter a great deal of snow and a lot of arkars, all out of range; but upon the ice of the Ak-Su we see the traces of a recent tragedy, a good deal of blood and remnants of skin, where some wolves had devoured an arkar.

We encamp at a place where there is no snow, a pasturage which Satti-Kul calls Dja, and we spend the next day (the 7th) there to rest the horses.

April 8th.

We start for Ak-Tach, winding about in the deep snow along the high banks of the Ak-Su, keeping as near as possible to the mountain spurs on the right bank, our guiding-star being the rock of Ak-Tach, which keeps appearing and disappearing, gradually growing in size each time we see it. Suddenly, in a corner of the valley, in the direction which we are following, an extraordinary sight greets our eyes, viz. a number of walls and cupolas in course of construction. We ask Satti-Kul what they are, and he replies, not without a certain amount of pride, that they are monuments erected in the grand cemetery of the Teits, to the memory of members belonging to illustrious and powerful families. They are meghuils in the Kirghiz style, cones erected upon four walls.

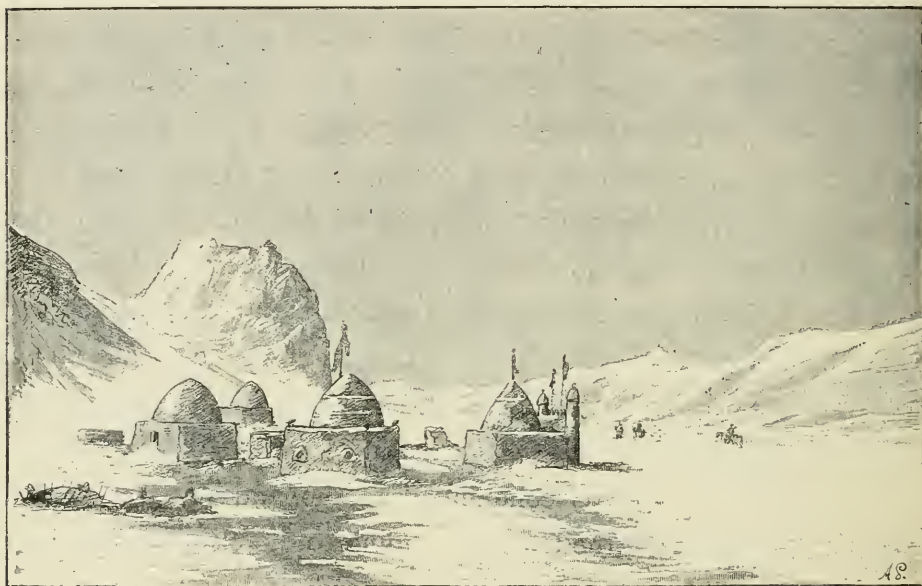
The only building which man has had the energy to construct here is one to commemorate death, and this, as it should be, in a country where life is a strange and almost inexplicable exception, where man only manages to vegetate because he is an animal strenuously resolved to live. Or perhaps the inhabitants of the Pamir, crushed by the forces of nature, understand better than any one else that he is condemned to die, and says to himself, "Why should I take the trouble of going to die elsewhere?"

The tumuli are built south-west to north-east, so that the dead may have their faces turned towards the holy city. They extend around four mausoleums made of earth, about double the height of an *ouï* (felt tent), and with a frontage of about thirty feet. The cupolas are pointed, and the architecture very simple, as there are no materials handy to attempt anything ambitious. Moreover, if a higher building had been erected, the wind, which is the terror of the Pamir, would soon have brought it to the ground.

At the four corners of the largest of the mausoleums, a rude attempt has been made to carve pigeons; but still one can see that they are meant for pigeons. The snow, driving in through the

door, has covered the tomb upon which the horns of arkars have been placed, these being the only "flowers" which can be had for weaving into wreaths.

Two tugs are swinging to and fro like the wooden carvings meant to represent grapes which one sees hanging over the doorway of inns. These tugs, made out of the tails of yaks and rags, are encrusted in snow, which has melted and frozen again, and they look as if they had been carved out of marble.



CEMETERY OF KARA-KIRGHIZ.

At the end of the humbler tombs are some stones sunk into the earth. Some of them have a sort of railing round them, formed of stakes bound together by woollen cords.

As the snow is deep and it is difficult to advance, we make for the Ak-Su, which is close by, and continue our journey over the ice. To our right, the sides of the steep banks are almost clear of snow, and thin streams of water, trickling from the crevices, find their way on to the surface, and get frozen as soon as the sun has gone down. Passing over this ice of recent formation, it cracked

beneath our feet, for there were only thin layers of it, but there was no risk of getting a cold bath, for the stratum beneath was thick enough to bear almost any weight. As the river bends about a good deal, we again climb the bank to our right, and then we find ourselves amid the rocks which are scattered along the stone wall known as the Ak-Tach (White Stone).

Just as my horse is picking his way over the rough ground, with a bitterly cold wind blowing, I see a woman, like an old witch, roaming about among the large stones. She stops short and looks stolidly at me. She must be the sorceress of the Pamir. My sight is very weak, and I cannot at first make out her features, with or without my spectacles. She is very upright, though of short stature, and she wears, with her sheepskins, a white head-dress to distinguish her sex. There are two holes where her eyes should be, and her nose is not visible. Around her lie the carcasses of horses, the gaping skeletons of camels, and heads of sheep, with the teeth set and grinning.



KIRGHIZ WOMAN OF THE PAMIR.

She looks like some mummified minister of death, but for all that she is a living old woman of the Kirghiz tribe.

We come to a number of tents erected on the sheltered ground, with men, women, children, dogs and horses, perhaps about thirty in all. Satti-Kul wants us to encamp among the charnel-houses which form the gardens to these tents. But I propose that we

should go further along the valley, to the bottom of the Ak-Tach, to some peat bogs, where there is not so much snow. I had scarcely told Satti-Kul to proceed and not get into conversation with the inquisitive people, who had come trooping round us, when I heard some one calling to me "Bradar!" ("Brother!") in Persian.

Looking round, I see a man wearing, like us, the *malakai* (sheepskin headdress), but with a handsome Afghan face and regular features. After an exchange of salutations, he says—

"Where are you going?"

"To Hindostan; and where do you come from?"

"From Kashgar, by Tagharma, where I lost all my horses in the snow, with the exception of the six you see, and they are not fit for anything."

"Where are you going?"

"To Cabul, by the Badakshan. I am taking *khame* (a rough cotton stuff) from Kashgar, and *bang* (hachisch). I have twenty iouks of cotton and five of haschisch left. I have a companion who is conveying Thibet goats' wool for the making of costly shawls."

"How comes it that you have taken this road?"

"It is the first time we have passed this way in winter. When we left Kashgar, we did not know that the route was such a difficult one, but as soon as we had got into the mountain the snow got deeper and deeper, and when we reached Ak-Tach, we had six horses left and all our merchandise was littered along the route. We asked the Kirghiz of Ak-Tach to go and fetch them. They refused at first, and then we bargained with them for three days, when——"

But the place is not a suitable one for conversation, as the wind is bitterly cold, and then I don't know who this man may be. He comes running after us and asks if we have any tea, to which Rachmed of course replies in the negative.

We pitch our tent far enough from the "White Stone" not to be crushed by any fragments which may fall from it.

The inhabitants of Ak-Tach come and examine us in turns, and many of them recognize Satti-Kul, who does not seem particularly overjoyed at seeing them again, as several are his creditors or his enemies. An old man from the neighbourhood of Andamane, who appears at the head of five or six men of his tribe and acts as their spokesman, reminds Satti-Kul of several disagreeable matters, and the latter appears to have dropped into a regular wasps' nest.

"Did you not formerly steal two camels from so and so. You never paid for the mares you bought of the other. You went off with a third's stallion and sold him at Rang-Kul. You are credited with having made off with the daughter of the man at Basai-Gumbaz, and so on."

Satti-Kul listened to the enumeration of his misdeeds with the impassibility of the most hardened offender, and sipped quietly his cup of tea while his judicial antecedents were being set before him. He hardly deigned to make a reply, and only gave an underhand look now and again.

Then the old man pointed to one of his companions and said—

"Can you deny that you owe this man an iamba?"

Satti-Kul at length opened his mouth and replied—

"I don't deny that I have an account to settle. But the question is which of us is indebted to the other. To-day, I am very busy, but if you will come to-morrow, we will take some stones to count. We shall see which of us has some stones left."

I ought to have explained how these savages count, and you will see that in the west of Europe we started from the same principle, and that the calculating tables recently employed in France are not dissimilar as to method. Calculation is derived from calculus (small stone), and it was with stones that sums in addition and subtraction were made before the use of figures.

Thus, when two Kirghiz have an account to settle, they meet in the presence of witnesses, and according as one of them acknowledges his indebtedness, he places before his creditor a stone representing a fixed sum, or rather quantity—a sheep or a camel, for instance. Then the same individual removes alternately a stone from each heap, and the one who has any stones left before him, is the one to whom a balance is owing. Sometimes the stones are set out in rows, instead of in heaps, and it can be seen at a glance that the one with the longest row is the one who has a balance in his favour. This is what Satti-Kul proposes to do with his creditors.

Just then, a flock of sheep passes close to our encampment, and Satti-Kul is told to bargain with the owner, but, after a lengthy argument, it turns out that he has got hold of the wrong man, and when the real owner comes up, he declines to sell. But in the meanwhile, Rachmed has killed one of the sheep, much to his disgust, for he declines to receive any money for it. But Rachmed says that he is safe to come and fetch it to-morrow morning.

We have a long talk with Abdullah-Khan, the merchant whom we had met just before, and he completes his story of how the Kirghiz, after refusing to go and fetch his goods, had only consented to do so upon payment of a most exorbitant sum. Having made a reconnoissance for himself, and seen that the valley was buried beneath the snow, he had determined to await finer weather before continuing his journey into the Wakhan, which is in the power of the Afghans, and where he is sure of finding beasts of burden. "Though the men of this land," he adds, "are not very pleasant to deal with."

We give him a little tea, as he has been out of it for a week, and we question him as to the Kunjut route, but he does not know much about it, except that a pass near Basai-Gumbaz leads to it, and that there is another road further on.

For the matter of that, there is no lack of passes, but they are closed. Not far from where we are, is that of Bik-Bel, but we should require good animals and good guides to recommence the struggles of the Alaï and the Kizil-Art, and these we have not got. The bis of Ak-Tach have already forbidden the natives to supply us with anything, and there is no faith to be placed upon their promises to supply us with the barley and flour we are quite prepared to pay for.

If the people of Ak-Tach were at all reasonable, it would not be by any means a bad place to stay at, for there is water to be had in the peat bogs, and if the grass is not very good, there is plenty of it. Moreover, the cold has suddenly become much less intense, and at 7.25 p.m. there are only two or three degrees of frost.

April 9th.

In spite of, or rather because of, the promises made the day before, we see no sign of any camel or yak. Satti-Kul started off last evening upon the pretext that he was going to pass the night at an aoul where he had been promised two camels, and it so happened that he was riding our best horse. There is no sign of him or the horse the next morning, when the weather is fine but much colder (fourteen degrees of frost at 8 a.m.), with a south-east wind which blows down from the sources of the Oxus.

We send Sadik to the bis, more as a matter of form than anything else, to ask what they have decided to do, and to request them to pay us a visit. They do not come themselves, merely telling Sadik that they are about to send out some horsemen to ascertain the depth of the snow. We had better wait, they say, till these men come back, and when we know what the route is like, they will provide us with camels, horses, provisions, etc. They add that it will be a great pity if our lordships do not wait at Ak-Tach for fine weather, instead of risking the loss of our horses.

Abdu-Rasoul comes into the camp at about the same time, and says that he can glean no tidings of Satti-Kul. Menas and Sadik then mount their horses and go off in quest of him, but they return about noon, saying that they have discovered the tracks of his horse near the Ak-Su. These tracks, however, were made yesterday, and they conclude that he has taken to flight from his creditors.

We now remain only seven. The route is an easy one to follow up to the Wakhan frontier, where we shall be able to get a



THE HANGING WALL AT AK-TACH.

guide if necessary, so the loss would not be a very great one if he had not taken the best of our horses.

The Afghan trader comes to see us, accompanied by two of his muleteers, who are Andidjanis, as the people of the Ferghana are styled in Kashgar. They are natives of Osch, and we have a talk to them about their native place. If the horses they have left were in better condition, they would accompany us as far as the Wakhan. These men advise us to make for Andaman, which is the name given to the region where the Oxus takes its source, and where the Kirghiz have a winter encampment. There

we shall be better able to get means of transport. They also advise us to be on our guard against the people of the Pamir, who are the biggest thieves they ever met.

Abdullah-Khan quite coincides in their views, and he believes that we shall get barley at Andaman ; at all events, we are sure to do so in Wakhan. We speak to him about the khan of the Kunjut, whom he describes as a beggar and a brigand, who robs and



TYPES OF KIRGHIZ KHANS.

murders the weak, and goes whining for alms to the powerful. To the Afghans, he says, " I am Afghan, make me a present," and the same to the Chinese, the English, or the men of Kashmir, as the case may be.

We purchase from Abdullah-Khan some cotton stuffs which will be useful to us on the road, and we pay him in imperial polls, for he is familiar with Russian gold. He gets us a man who is going to Andaman to see a sick relative, and he will show us the way. Abdullah-Khan, after wishing us good-bye, spends part of the night beside the camp-fire, talking with Menas about Afghan-

istan, Hindostan, the Caucasus, Persia and Stamboul. While they are talking, the other men come in, and say that they have passed a charming evening in ladies' society and eaten a lot of wild goats' flesh, which was excellent.

April 10th.

At 8 a.m., there are fourteen degrees of frost, with a south-east wind. One of the bis has come to see us, being attracted by the loading of the horses. He is a former Karaul chief at Ak-Tach, and he says that if he had his way, he would let us have what we require, but that he is not master. But, polite as he is, we request him to begone. We would have taken what we wanted by force, were we not afraid that Sadik and Abdu-Rasoul, whom we shall be sending back when we reach the Kunjut frontier, would be made to suffer for it. When we have got further on, we shall not stand on any ceremony.

We start at ten o'clock, following the left bank of the Ak-Su. The snow is very deep, quite filling the bed of the river. In places, there is a stream of water from the glaciers, where the current is very deep, and as there is of course no snow here, we can measure its depth in other places, there being at least eighteen feet. These pools of water are haunted by water-fowl named dournas, a sort of cross between the duck and the cormorant, which we found very palatable.

We do a good part of the journey on foot, and unload the horses, so as to rest them. Our guide can hardly drag himself along, and, after stopping several times, takes off his belt and pushes it down his throat to make himself sick. This appears to relieve him, though he is still as pale as death. Menas gets him to tell his story, which is a very simple one.

"Before starting this morning, a good deal of millet porridge remained in the pot, and Sadik told me that I had better finish it. I had too much, and that made me ill. Now I am better."

We laugh to death at this ; but the guide, who cannot understand why we laugh, says, " But as Sadik," (the father, as he calls him), " told me to eat it, what was I to do ?"

Soon after this, some arkars appeared on the hills, about two hundred and fifty yards away. We wounded two, and thanks to our dogs, we got one of them. I had to run about three hundred yards to try and prevent the dogs from tearing its skin, when I



YOUNG ARKAR KILLED NEAR AK-TACH.

suddenly felt a sharp pain in the chest. I have always been very strong there, so I hope that this is nothing.

After crossing the Ak-Su, which is visible in places, but in others is hidden by the snow, we halt on the banks of the river, at Kizil-Rabat. It is just three o'clock, and we are prostrated by the torrid and blinding heat. At 3.30 p.m., the thermometer marks ninety-nine degrees in the sun, and forty-one degrees in the shade, so that there would soon be a thaw if this weather lasted. But at seven o'clock, there are five and a half degrees of frost, and at ten o'clock, nine degrees, with a clear sky and no wind.

April 11th.

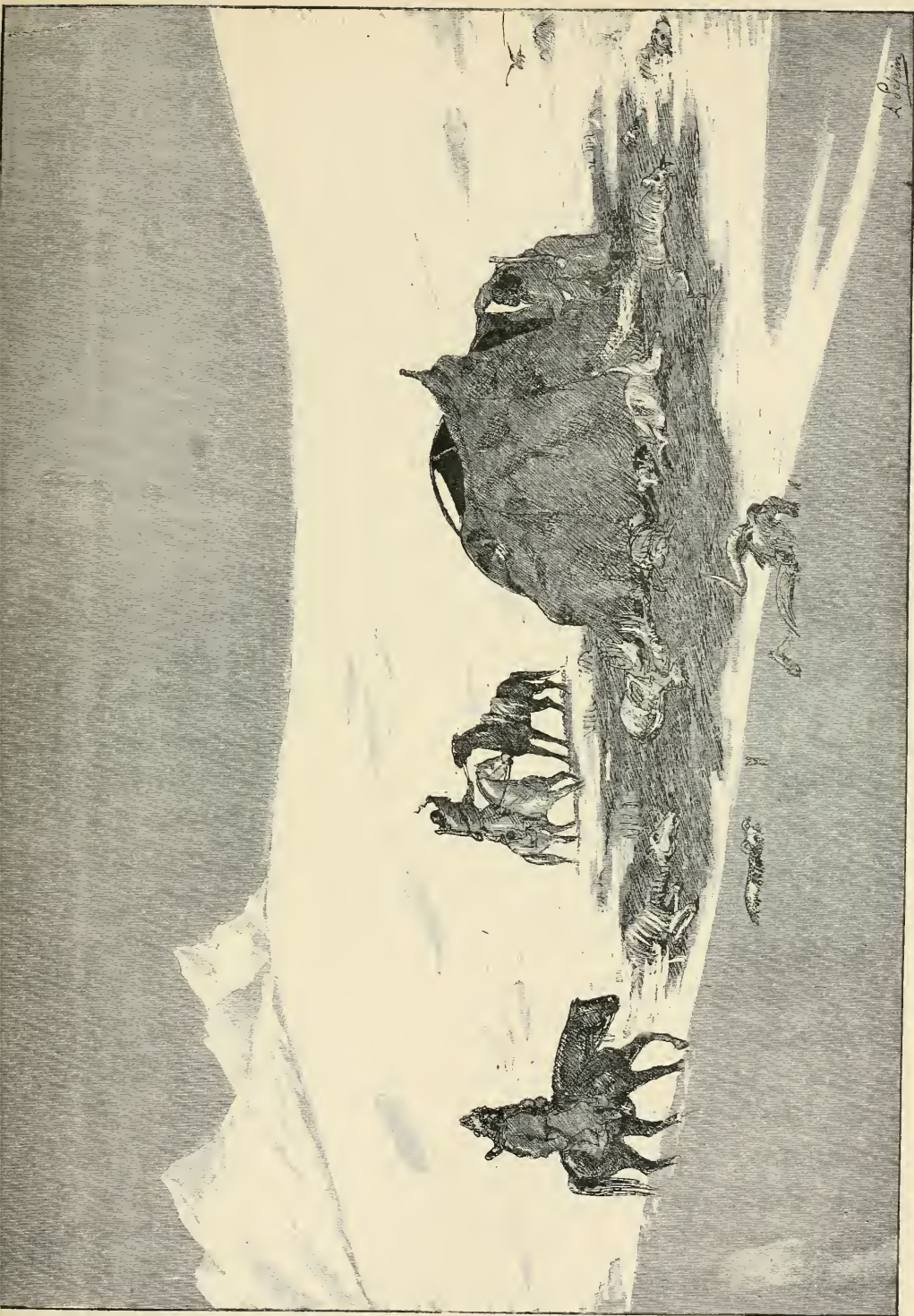
At 7.35 a.m., there are twenty-two degrees of frost; at 8 a.m., thirteen degrees; and at 10.15 a.m., fourteen degrees, with a north-east breeze. The night has been very cold, and we all complain of having slept very badly and of violent headaches.

We start at 10.15 a.m., the snow being very deep, and the horses slipping up at every turn. We see no sign of any inhabitants, and have to come down from the heights into the valley, because the snow is so deep. Our guide endeavours to make off, but when I bring my rifle to bear on him, he comes back fast enough.

At the foot of the hills, we come upon several abandoned tents with a number of dead animals all around them. Riding up to one of these tents, my horse starts back in terror, and I cannot get him to advance again. So handing him to Pepin, who has just been making a sketch, I go up to the tents, and find that their owners, before going off, have tied up to the pegs a number of dead goats, which have been reduced to mummies by the frost, and grin in a most diabolical manner. They appear to have been hideous enough to frighten the very birds of prey, which have not attempted to touch them.

Raising a flap of the tent, which is white with the droppings of the birds of prey, a couple of flies come out with a buzz, and these are the first insects we have seen for a long time. Inside the tent are saddles, rolls of felt, skins, and all the utensils of a nomad. The only trace on the ground is that of wolves, but there are a few stones which have evidently been used for domestic purposes, for crushing bones, corn, etc.

Some of the dead animals have evidently been killed by the hand of man, for they have been skinned and their heads cut off. But others have died of cold and hunger, and those which have died of congestion have their stomachs full, while the remainder



COMING UPON AN ABANDONED OUI.

look quite pinched and starved. A crow comes and perches upon the rock above, ready for his meal, and the sun shines over this lugubrious scene as over all else.

We continue our course westward, following the Ak-Su, which enters by a narrow channel into a gradually broadening valley where there is a lake more than half a mile wide. We cross it upon the ice, and as we are doing so, one of our horses drops, never to rise again. Capus also has to leave his behind. We encamp at the extremity of the lake, upon the summit of some stony ridges, which we only reach after great difficulty, owing to the accumulation of snow. We have been six hours on the march.

We are upon the edge of one of the great reservoirs of the Ak-Su, and have ascended nearly seven hundred feet since our last bivouac. This evening we feel shut in, as it were, for the mountains close the horizon, though here and there are gaps through which the stars can be seen like fires lighted on the mountain sides in Switzerland the evening before a festival. The scenery is less polar than what we have been accustomed to.

April 12th.

We left Irmenatag at eleven, amid sleet and snow, and we separate from one another after having crossed the Ak-Su and climbed some hills. The snow is still coming down so thick that we cannot see the road, and I follow Menas and the guide. The road is so bad, and the snowstorm so blinding, that the horses cannot keep their legs, and we have to halt and unload them. Menas is furious because he cannot keep his legs and stumbles about, but at last we get down again on to the frozen Ak-Su, where there is less snow, and eventually reach Ghuzalane and encamp upon an elevated piece of ground.

We are all in a sad plight, with noses bleeding, heads aching, and ears singing. I hear the cry of some suksurs overhead, and

shoot at them, but they are out of range. Nothing could be grander, however, than the sunset, after this sunless day, and there is a gleam of gold over the mountain tops as night sets in.

The early part of the night is cloudy, but about eleven the sky clears. We sleep badly, feeling half suffocated.

April 13th.

The snow, which had melted on the surface yesterday, has frozen again, and it shines like a looking-glass.



CAMP OF KIZIL-KORUM.

With a south-west breeze, there are sixty-seven degrees at 9.30 a.m. in the sun, and seven degrees of frost in the shade; while at eleven, there are seventy-seven degrees in the sun, and about thirty-five in the shade.

All the men complain of having been so cold during the night, and this is because the droppings and roots which we have to burn are damp from the half thaw of the day before.

We march for about five and a half hours, and encamp at Kizil-Korum, where we meet with some yourtes. A man named

Sarik-Makmed sells us a sheep. He formerly inhabited the Alaï, and we have no difficulty in getting provisions through him. He promises also to let us have two camels and a horse, which are all that the winter has left him with. He declares that he will never pass another winter here, and he invites our men to sup with him. He is living on the left bank of the Ak-Su, with four or five men of his tribe, and is at daggers drawn with some men on the right bank. We give a little present to his son, to whom he seems to be much attached, for he kisses him as he fastens his pelisse and says—

“You see, it is my youngest. Return to your tent, my dear child. The sun is setting, and you will be cold.”

April 14th.

A day of rest and high feeding. Abdur-Rasul makes a sausage, and he is quite an artist.

To-morrow, we shall make a start with Sarik-Mahmed's camels. He says—

“I am not afraid of the Chinese. If I had any barley, I would let you have some. My brother will show you the way. When the Chinese come, I shall be off. I have a friend at Ak-Tach who will let me know in time.”

We send back Mirza-Beï, our guide, giving him several pieces of cloth and a little sugar. He is quite happy; and when we remind him of his attack of indigestion, he smiles, and again says—

“How could it be helped? The father (Sadik) told me to eat it all.”

April 15th.

Thanks to Sarik-Mahmed, five yaks and a camel are placed at our disposal, and we proceed, amid another fall of snow, to Mus-Kalé, about two hours from here. There is a Kirghiz aoul at

this place, and the men assemble and take counsel of their chief, an aged man, who will not interfere, and retires to his tent upon the right bank of the Ak-Su.

I make several proposals to the assembled Kirghiz, but we cannot come to any agreement. We ask for information about the Kunjut route, and a woman, who has been five years a slave in that country, advises us to go by way of Tach-Kupruk.

We have only been able to procure a guide and two camels by threatening to use our rifles and revolvers.

April 16th.

We start at 11.30 a.m. in the snow, and with more falling. Descending into the plain, I follow our old guide, who says that he will take me to a tent where we shall find men and yaks. After two hours' march, he wants us to halt at this tent, which is in a marsh; but we have paid for the stage in advance, and by dint of threats I make him go on. My horse being very tired, I compel him to mount it, and I take his, which is fresher; so he cannot ride off. Then I belabour him with my whip, and regularly drive him up to rejoin the caravan, which has remained on the hillside, where the road is better. Menas, who is with me, seizes two strong-looking yaks, whose owners come running after them. But the latter will have to follow us to our encampment, and then we can arrange with them.

The old guide is very alarmed, and speaks in a whining tone to Sadik, who looks at me and winks, while Abdur-Rasul banters him, and calls him "your lordship," because he is riding my horse.

We bivouac upon the side of the hill, at Tchitab, near the first source of the Oxus, and the owner of one of the yaks soon overtakes us. We ask him to provide us with three yaks and two sheep, and show us the way to the Kunjut. He is quite willing

to supply the animals, but as to the Kunjut, he says, "The men of the Kunjut are brigands and thieves. You may as well cut my head off at once. I will go as far as Langar, if you like, and there we shall encounter some Wakhi looking after their flocks."

We agree to this, and pay him in advance for the sheep and for half the hire of the yaks, warning him that if he does not keep



AT THE SOURCES OF THE OXUS.

his word, he had better make off with his tents and flocks, unless he wishes to have a bullet put into him.

Moreover, we put clogs on the legs of the animals we have hired, and we intend to take good care not to let our men get away till we have others in their place, though we treat them as liberally as possible while with us.

The baba receives a nice present; and, after we have given him a good dinner, he feels more at home; a subsequent gift of sugar making him feel so happy, that he promises us a guide—a

“divana”—as dervishes are called. Before going home to bed, he salutes us with an “Allah akbar!” of relief, as if not sorry to be off; and with him go the vendor of the sheep and Menas, who, astride a yak, and with his pelisse and Turkoman bonnet, hardly distinguishable from his mount, looks like a centaur.

Menas takes with him a cup to drink the milk which has been promised him, and which he is longing to get, for his stomach is much out of order, and he has a nausea of rice, millet, and even of meat, which, as a rule, he likes so much.

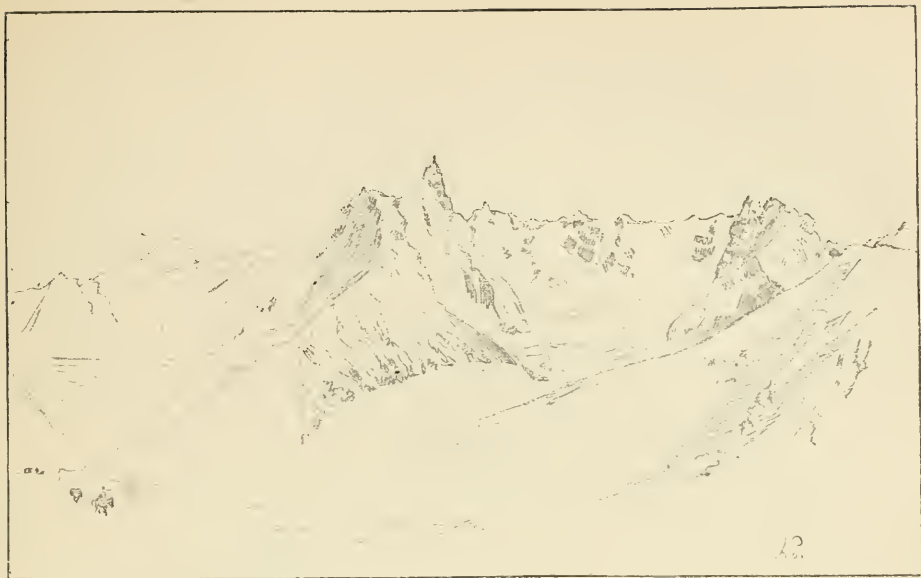
From our tent, pitched at an altitude of thirteen thousand feet, we can see below us the extremity of the frozen lake Tchakmatin-Kul, and beyond the glaciers overhanging it. We are at the extreme west of the Little Pamir, and at the end of the valley where the Ak-Su is fed by an immense reservoir of ice, as it will be later by the snow which is accumulated upon “the roof of the world.”



MENAS ON THE YAK.

Part of our task is done. The snow seems less dense westward, and we encamp upon a ledge of rock where there is none. We sniff the odour of the artemisia, that true plant of the steppe, which our horses feed upon greedily, and which reminds us of many another bivouac. In the steppe, we thought they “smelt horrid,” but now we think that there is a perfume about them, because they bring us nearer to the goal.

Rachmed, whom that odour has put in a good humour, observes that “it is now six weeks since we left Osch.” He feels that it is “the beginning of the end.” Let us hope so. In any event, it is the end of the valley of the Ak-Su, with its depressing monotony, of which we have all had enough.



THE GLACIER OF TCHILAB.

CHAPTER XIV.

TOWARDS THE KUNJUT.

The outlaws—An exile—Wakhan-Darya—Langar—Wakhan types—The Kirghiz want to leave us—Diplomacy—We start for the Kunjut with Wakhis—Difficulties; provisions run short; the Wakhis make off—An unsuccessful reconnoissance—We have to return to Langar—Abdullah-Khan turns up again—We send to fetch the abandoned baggage and Menas, who was looking after them—Exactng attitude of the Kirghiz—The Chinese at our heels, but they are too late—A saint.

April 17th.

SNOW is falling at nine o'clock, when there are about two degrees of frost. At ten o'clock, Menas arrives, driving a yak before him, and behind him follow several Kirghiz, with sheep and some more yaks.

The Kirghiz have kept their word, but "not without difficulty," as Menas puts it, for the one whom we had treated with yesterday wanted to give back the money he had received,

and not sell or let us anything. We had to resort to promises and threats, undertaking to give him two khames extra to overcome his obstinacy. It appeared afterwards that his wife served our cause, as she was very anxious to have some cloth, and abused her husband in unmeasured terms for letting slip such a good opportunity.

“Was she good-looking, Menas?”

“Good-looking? Ugly as the very devil. No teeth, no hair, wrinkled, dirty, and a scold.”

“She received you well, I suppose?”

“She gave me two arkar skins to sleep upon.”

“And how about dinner?”

“That was a very simple matter. She kneaded some flour and made it into balls, and then she plunged them into a cauldron of hot water. The water boiled, and then she took out the balls, which we ate with a little salt. This morning she emptied some flour into the same cauldron, added some water, and took a stick to mix it up with. That was all, but fortunately I had already had some curded milk.”

“Do you know where this flour comes from?”

“From the Wakhan, where they send to fetch it. I heard them say that their stock was exhausted. They pretended to be very reluctant to carry our baggage, but this was to get us to pay them more, as they are obliged to follow the same road as far as Langar.”

“And how about the guide?”

“He is coming on horseback. He will be here directly.”

The sheep come in, and they are at once cut up by the vendor himself, who uses the knife with extraordinary skill. He is a small beardless man, with hardly a sound tooth in his head, and a snub nose. One of his assistants is tall and fair, with a rather large eye. A third, although dressed in

Kirghiz fashion, has not at all the Kirghiz type. He speaks to me in Persian, and I look very closely at him, though there is nothing extraordinary in the inhabitants of this corner of the Pamir speaking that language. Many of them even understand the Wakhi dialect. That is easy of explanation, as they are in communication with the caravan men who go in summer from the Kashgar to the Badakshan, most of them being Afghans who can speak Persian. Upon the other hand, they are completely dependent upon the Wakhan, which is their granary, as they do not themselves cultivate the soil. This



KARA-KIRGHIZ CHINESE (MALE AND FEMALE).

country provides them flour and wheat, which they pay for with felts, skins, and sometimes with the cloth which they receive in payment for the yaks or camels which they let out to merchants. As the Wakhis are not very rich, and they sell their daughters very cheap, the Kirghiz marry them, and learn their language. From these cross-marriages are born a fair race of men, tall, with comparatively large eyes, and small men who have sometimes a long nose like the stem of a jug, not at all of the Mongol shape.

And, as we have often remarked, one need really have committed some great crime to be compelled to remain upon the Pamir, while, as a matter of fact, many of those who in-

habit it have committed a murder or some other misdeed in the neighbouring countries. Compelled to fly, they come straight to the Pamir, where no one is very particular, and they spend the winter in the remote corners of the valley of Ak-Su. When the summer arrives, bringing with it the Chinese agents upon one side, and the Kunjuti upon the other, the Afghans or the Kirghiz belonging to the powerful tribes of the valley who have compromised themselves the most, make for the heights of the Alitchur, or the centre of the "roof of the world," like arkars, who live as much as they can upon inaccessible heights, out of fear of gunners, and who climb higher and higher as the snow melts at lower altitudes.

It is a motive of this kind, no doubt, an "accident" as the Corsicans put it, which has brought into the Andaman country this young man with determined features, who is not like a Kirghiz, because he is Afghan. We speak to him of Abdur-Rahman, of Ayub, of Yakoob, etc., and he knows them all. He speaks well of Yakoob, whom he will never forget, for he has broken bread with him. For his own part, his one desire is to leave this country, although he has married here and has got a child. He offers us a cup full of cream (*kaimak*), and the comparative cleanliness of the cup would suffice to show that he is not a native of this district. His long fingers also indicate his origin, as well as his razor-shaped face. We make him a small present, and he tells us that our guide will be his father-in-law, who, he adds, is an "ichan," that is to say, a personage whose piety and honourable mode of life give him the reputation of saintliness.

The becoming manner of this Afghan, his nice way of speaking, and the gratitude which he says that he feels for his former chief, his anxiety to live elsewhere and better his condition, all go to prove his superiority over those around him, and we are not shocked at his calling us "brothers;" while we find the

same pleasure in meeting him that you do when you are away from home, and get some fellow-countryman to talk to.

The man with two sheep, who also lends us three yaks, knows the ugly Satti-Kul, and would have much liked to see him to ask for the money due for four sheep sold to him some time ago. The fellow has so many debts that it is no wonder he decamped.

April 18th.

From Tchilab, we go along a path cut on the side of the rocky mountain, and leaving to our right the Bir-Kutdja (the eagle's nest), an overhanging rock with caves in which one can take shelter, we descend on to the ice of a reservoir formed by an arm of the Ak-Su, which flows westward. The watershed, at an altitude of 13,750 feet, is crossed.

We go through the snow, putting to flight wolves which do not seem very much afraid of us, and having got beyond Rabut, the site of which is marked by four mud walls, still floundering about in the melted snow, we arrive at Basai-Gumbaz, which the Kirghiz call Basai-Bi. It is a *méguil* (mausoleum) of the ordinary shape—four square walls surmounted by a cone. There are a few tombs in the lower part, rectangular constructions, with a stone at each corner. At the further end is the white steep road which leads to the pass of Akjir. Our guide, the "ichan," or pir, gets off his horse and recites a prayer before the tombs. Having finished his prayer, he tells us that this monument was erected in memory of some Kirghiz killed by the Kunjuti in a fight.

"When did this occur?"

"A long time ago."

This is about the date you are given for any crime in this country, or most other parts of Asia.

The valley of Ak-Su narrows in, and brushwood is seen

peeping above the snow. The soil undergoes a change of aspect; the left bank, facing north, is white, but the right bank is steep, and one can distinguish loess, granite, red sandstone, and schist. The scenery is bright, for though the hollow places are full of snow, you can see the earth, which has shaken off her shroud as for a resurrection.

At times, we go on to the ice of the river, and at others we



VALLEY OF THE WESTERN OXUS (NORTH-EAST).

pick our way over the rocks until we halt at the bottom of a ravine in the gorge of Ak-Beles.

The south-west wind is blowing a gale, and we shave ourselves as best we can.

We discover a good many roots and stems, with which we make a flaming fire, thanks to the gusts of wind. The yaks do not come in till six o'clock. The encampment is an excellent one, with the water running below us, and a tiny stream of it trickling over the ice and snow. It is a pleasure to see the limpid stream and watch it sparkle.

So thinks Abdur-Rasul, as he sings a ballad in a loud tone of voice, the babble of the river being his accompaniment. The tall, fair Kirghiz, who is also an artist, sings in his turn a song to celebrate the exploits of a thief famous for his barantas. The melody is melancholy and monotonous, and the short phrases terminate in a modulation which sounds like a man out of breath or trying to hide a hiccough. These Andaman men live at such an altitude that one can understand their being short of breath, nor can one wonder at their songs being melancholy, for they inhabit a very melancholy country, and one cannot expect much gaiety from them.

April 19th.

We follow the right bank of the Wakhan-Darya, of the western Ak-Su (Oxus), and it is not without some difficulty and risk of breaking our necks that we scale the rocks and descend into the valley of Mirza-Murad, where we lose sight of the Ak-Su, which is hidden from our view by hills to the left.

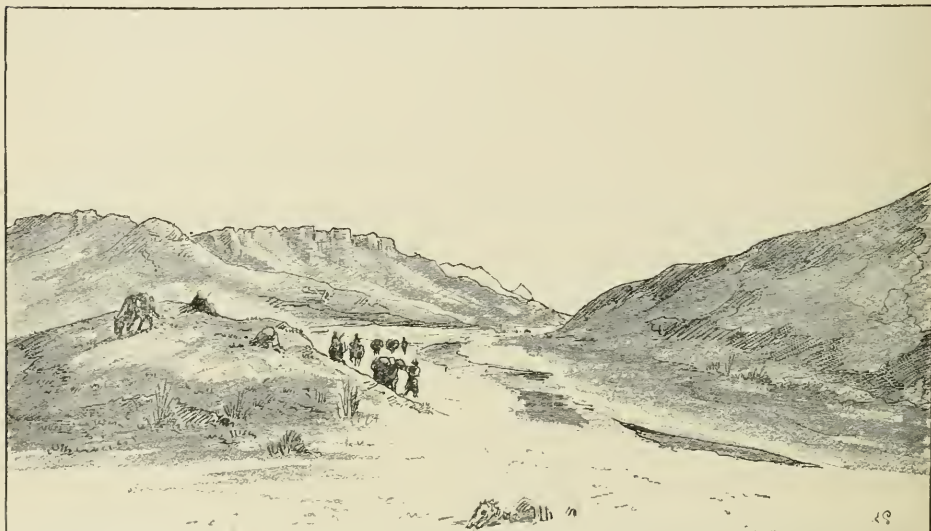
We emerge from the spongy and boggy valley of Mirza-Murad by way of a defile which leads into the valley of Langar-Su. An enormous stone stands in the bed of the river, which our guide calls the Tchatir-tach (tent-stone) ; and, as a proof that it deserves this name, we find at the foot of it traces of an encampment, and a good deal of dung. Parties of travellers had sheltered themselves behind it, and had lighted fires which had left streaky black marks upon its sides. Close to it there is some grass in the broken ground of a sort of turf-bog, with snow in the hollow places and watered by intermingling streams which trickle out in large numbers from the side of the bank.

On the islets formed by the river, which are approached by numberless small bridges of snow and ice, beneath which water can be heard bubbling, there is a good deal of brushwood ; more

than brushwood, a regular vegetation in fact, with shrubs over six feet in height. And as everything in this world is relative, Pepin, who is very fond of forests, exclaims, "At last we can see some woods!"

We ascend the right bank, and upon the upper part of the plateau we see at least two hundred yaks, under the keeping of dogs and about ten shepherds.

We come down again to encamp in the delta of a gorge,



VALLEY OF THE WESTERN OXUS (EAST).

through which the path runs, and we send the "pir" on as ambassador. He is first to ask for milk and butter, and then to announce our presence with great care and caution. The great thing is to avoid frightening these people, and not ask anything of them, so that they may not disappoint us by making off during the night. We are on Afghan territory, the Wakhan having recently been annexed by Abdur-Rahman-Khan. We have not yet seen anything of the Afghan post, which they told us was established, if not at Ak-Beles, certainly at Langar.

The Kirghiz arrive and settle down beside our tent. The

same evening they tell us that they will not go any further, their excuse being that the yaks are exhausted. One of them was paid in advance for three days' march, and he has been only two. He, of course, does not talk of refunding the money, and wants to go back like the rest.

They have been paid in advance, and mean going off during the night, but we will keep a look-out on them. We will hobble



LANGAR.

their horses like our own, for the snow is falling, and they might stray and be devoured by wolves, or else stolen.

The pir comes back and tells us that he can see no one in the shelters inhabited by the shepherds the day before, for they are all upon the plateau. Their chief will come, for the pir has told him that we have khames, or pieces of cloth.

Over the top of the bank appears a small man, clad in sheepskins, with a rough, bushy red beard. We salute him, and ask him to draw up to the fire, but he understands neither Turkish

or Persian, and the intervention of the *pir* is required to tell him that he can come and drink a cup of tea. He does not seem quite convinced, but he comes down and seats himself near the *pir*.

The new-comer has regular features, a smaller face than the Kirghiz, and light eyes, so far as can be seen through the dense eyebrows and cap drawn down so low. He wears goatskin boots. None of us can make out a word he says, though Rached says that his language is something like that spoken by the Yagnaous, who inhabit, to the west of the Pamir, the mountains of Kohistan.

This short, squat old man, who might almost be taken for a shepherd of the Ardennes, is soon joined by several others of different types. One is tall and slight, with a small head, a straight nose, a thick black beard, black eyes of European shape, and long hands, reminding me of certain Roumanians that I know.

They are all small and thin, with very low foreheads and delicate features, the wild bearing of wolves, but more full of nerve and muscle than the men of the Pamir.

The youngest of them, about eighteen years old, and with a perfectly smooth face, has long hair of a light red colour, which falls from under his cap on to his shoulders. He has small blue eyes, a long and straight nose, the short upper lip displaying small teeth in pretty good condition. He has a round chin, and his profile is that of a Roman—one of those who tended the flocks in the Roman *campagna* in the time of Hadrian. He would not have seemed out of place among the companions of Romulus and Remus.

Among these Wakhis, flat cheekbones and large eyes are the exception. We are glad to see them, for they indicate the vicinity of the Hindu-Kush, and of India.

I pass over the interminable discussion, interlarded by threats, promises, gestures, and worse, which went on for two days before we could get the Wakhis to provide us with the yaks we required, and all this in five different languages. It was like the tower of Babel.

You need a strong dose of patience to traffic with the Wakhis, or the Pamir Kirghiz; and the early Greeks would be as well able to drive a bargain with the men of Gascony, or the Carthaginians with the original inhabitants of Marseilles.

At last the bargain is struck, and they agree to convey our baggage in the direction of the Kunjut, by way of the Tash-Kupruk, and we pay them in advance for three days' march, half in silver bars, half in cloth. At first, I thought that we should not succeed in coming to terms, for they had moved away their herds of yaks, and had prepared apparently for a start. But, thanks to the pir, who speaks their language very well, and who inspires them with confidence, they became tamer; and then the Kirghiz of Andaman, whom we had hired, had made a vain attempt to fly during the night. We kept a sharp look-out on them by day, and gave them distinct notice that we should shoot them down at the first attempt they made to escape. We added, that the only way in which they could regain their liberty, as they would not go any further, was to induce the Wakhis to take their place. They soon saw that we were in earnest, and, finding this to be the case, they at once accepted the proposal we made them of winning over the Wakhis. It was really curious to watch the faces of the Kirghiz as they sang our praises, and declared that they would go to the end of the world with us if they had better animals, and were not obliged to go and fetch flour for their famishing families.

According to both Kirghiz and Wakhis, three days' march will suffice to bring us to the frontier of the Kunjut. Then we shall

have to go over a pass, and in three days more we shall be at Miskar, a village where we shall find an abundance of everything.

As soon as the Kirghiz are paid off, we start, despite the snow and the lateness of the hour, it being past one when we begin to climb the left bank of the Langar-Su. By a rapid descent on the other side, we reach the valley of the Ak-Su, and at this very moment the snow stops, the sky is azure blue, and the sun quite warm. At our feet, the new grass is just shooting out of the earth, and our horses cannot resist the temptation of nibbling at it. If we let them have their way, they would not go any further.



THE VALLEY OF TASH-KUPRUK.

It is so hot that we roll up our cloaks and tie them on to the saddle-bow, and we remark with pleasure the presence of tall willows in the valley, some of them fully eighteen feet high; our road taking us through quite a forest of wild rose bushes.

Crossing the river several times, we halt at Beikara, near some huts made of dry stone, our course having been first east, and then south-east. We can just distinguish the point at which the valley narrows, about an hour away, and it is at this point that it takes the name of Tash-Kupruk and that the snow begins again, for everything is quite white.

From Beikara, we arrived, in an hour, at the gorge from which the Siah-Ab (black water) of the Wakhis takes its source. It is impossible to cross it, there being places where a horse could not swim over. Upon the right bank, the route is broken at several places by deep crevices and ravines, and though the left bank is not so steep, there is much more snow. Though melting, it was still over six feet deep, and I really do not know how we got through it. It took us more than six hours to reach the Tash-



TASH-KUPRUK.

Kupruk, with its bridge of stones, which is very solid and which owes nothing to the hand of man. An enormous block of stone, which had rolled down from above, had fallen right into the crevice, and been caught there, as in a cleft stick, where it has remained, and now forms a bridge, beneath which the dark waters of the Siah-Ab seethe and roar, attempting to force a broader passage for themselves.

The day has been a very severe one ; the men are worn out,

and the Wakhis, as well as the single Kirghiz who has accompanied us with a yak, seem very dissatisfied.

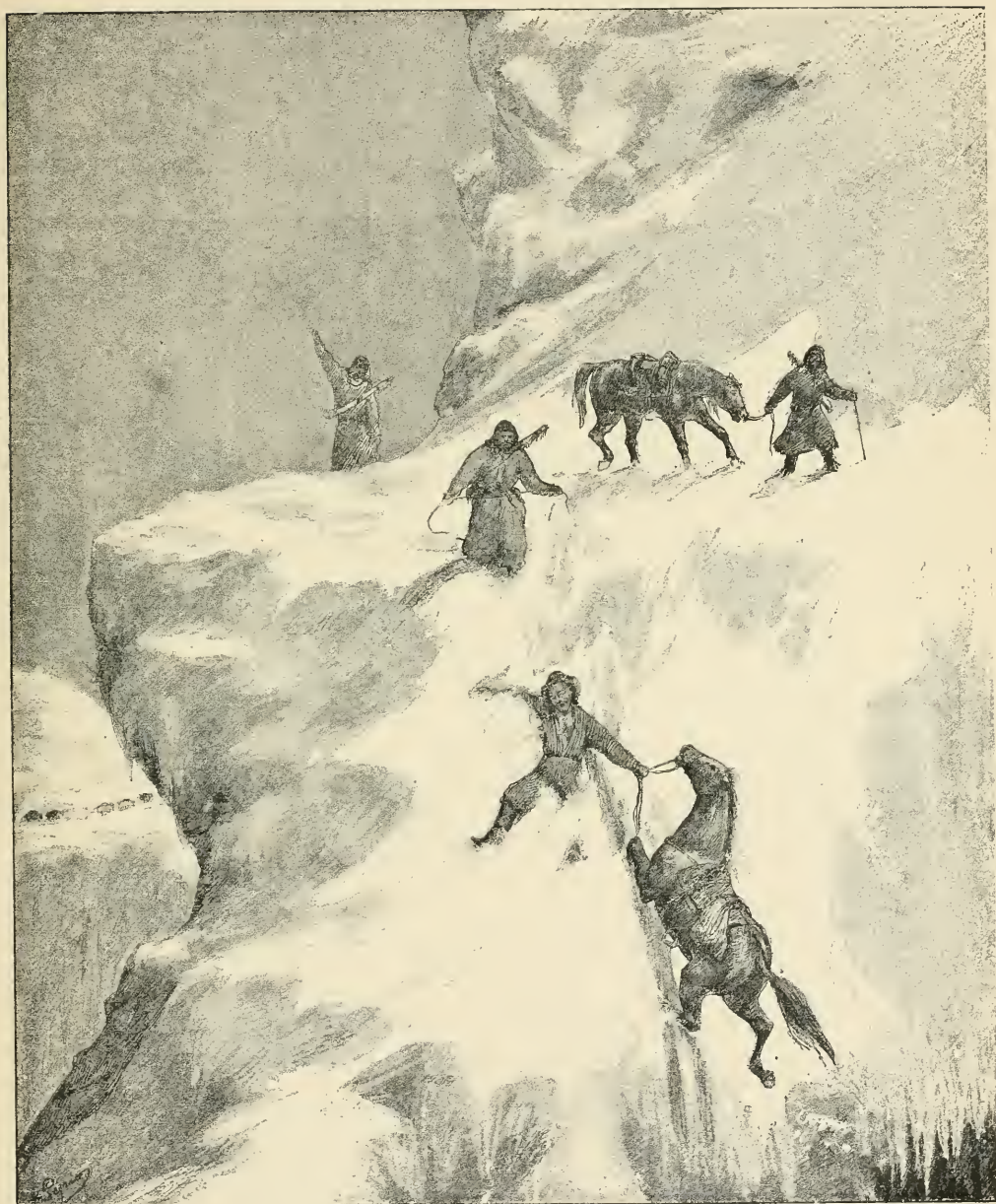
The night is a splendid one, the three stars which form the Balance (Tarasun) shining just on the sky-line of the mountain, Venus being as it were a picturesque dot to the *i* represented by a peak over which she was visible.

April 22nd.

The remaining Kirghiz made off during the night. The Wakhis refuse to go any further, and we have to beat them, as promises are of no avail. One of them has laid down, and has declared that he will kill himself if we touch him. This is the first allusion I have heard to suicide in this part of the world. Finding that we do not give way to them, they make up their minds to go on, after loading the pir with curses for getting them into such a mess. The pir says nothing in reply, and goes on in advance to look for a path.

We do not get more than four miles or so in over ten hours, the men being obliged to carry the baggage on their backs the best part of the way. The marvel is that we do not break our necks a hundred times over.

At 7 p.m., we encamp upon a spur where there is some tchi-baque, a grass of which the horses are very fond, and which is also used for fuel, while close by we have some willows as thick round as your arm. We march towards the south-east, now along the crest, now descending into the bed of a torrent, now hacking steps for the horses to put their feet into over the ice which covers the smooth snow. In order to get a horse over, one man holds him by the rope—not by the bridle, as that would interfere with his movements—a second by the tail, and a third by his stirrups or pack-saddle, while a fourth helps to steady him, steadying himself with his stick. The yaks go on alone, being extraordinarily sure-footed.



SADIK HAS A FALL.

It is not very cold, for at nine this morning there are only sixteen degrees of frost, while at the same hour in the evening there are only nine.

April 23rd.

Our first thought, on waking, is as to the Wakhis, and as to whether they have made off during the night. We were not much afraid of it, for they were quite done up, and, wild as they are, they could not well travel by night the road which they had so much difficulty in getting over by day.

Upon the contrary, this morning they are very pliable, and are quite willing to go another day, if we will pay them in advance, which we do.

We continue to follow the right bank, amid the jagged fragments of rock, making the best progress we can. The left bank is still very steep.

We descend into a ravine, ascend again to the crest, our horses falling and picking themselves up again. Every now and then, we see some wild goats, with a wolf on the watch for them. Fall succeeds fall, and the heat gets so great, that at 4 p.m. there are eighty-five degrees, while at 8 a.m. there had been sixteen degrees of frost. The yaks begin to pant and show symptoms of viciousness.

While trying to hold up a horse which was slipping slowly back, Sadik himself slips and glides down to the bottom like a thunderbolt, rolling over and over three or four times, and being stopped only by the accumulated snow at the bottom. He does not hurt himself in the least, and picks himself up with a laugh. The *pir*, who is looking on, laughs and says in a very funny way, "Avoua, Sadik! Avoua, Sadik!"

These are about the only comic incidents we have.

At last we arrive at some stony and round hills, and we encamp at Bala-Guizine, at the foot of a gorge descending from

the east. To the south, we have some peaks of snowy whiteness, like a bridal veil, and then our course is towards the south-east.

The provision of bread we laid in at Osch is exhausted, having lasted just fifty days, and Sadik makes some large cakes to last several days. Beasts and men alike are worn out with fatigue, and the Wakhis manifest their intention of turning back.



CROSSING THE BALA-GUIZINE.

April 24th.

We advance in a south-west direction, passing over the ice, and the valley opens out, being no more than a gorge when within an hour's march of Bala-Guizine.

We have a daran, or a very easy sort of pass, in front of us, but this pass proves to be deceptive, as when we have got over it, we find ourselves back in the same valley. In front of us is a ravine which stops the progress of the horses, and it is not without some difficulty that we hit upon a means of getting them across.

Towards evening, the pir and Sadik, whom we had sent on to reconnoitre, return and tell us that the valley ends in a *cul-de-sac*, where the snow has accumulated in such quantities that we shall never get over it. This is a very serious matter, for the animals are quite exhausted, and so, too, are the men. I must go and see to-morrow, and perhaps we shall have to decide upon retracing our steps. We encamp at a place which the pir calls Zarsotte.

The Wakhis have shown a lot of temper all day, and our meat is beginning to go bad, our staple food being *terek* (millet).

April 25th.

Snow fell during the night. The north-west wind is blowing a hurricane. The Wakhis have made off during the night, taking their yaks with them and leaving two dogs behind. We send Abdur-Rasul and Menas after them; but they soon return, and report that the Wakhis have five or six hours' start and cannot be overtaken.

The pir, Rachmed, and myself go to reconnoitre the road in the direction of the Kunjut. If we cannot possibly get through, we shall leave our baggage at Zarsotte with Menas, to whom we shall give a week's provision of millet-flour and one horse. We shall go on to Langar and see what can be done towards securing provisions and beasts of burden. If a caravan comes by we shall borrow from it what we require, or, in the event of refusal, take it by force, paying a fair price for it.

If we succeed in getting through, we shall leave our baggage behind, to shift for itself, go on foot to the Kunjut and get together carriers and yaks who will return to Zarsotte and fetch the baggage. If things turn out badly, we shall have no further need for baggage.

We take the indispensable tools with us—an axe to cut out the ice, a pickaxe, a wooden shovel, two horses, and a few handfuls of barley for them, and so we start, staff in hand.

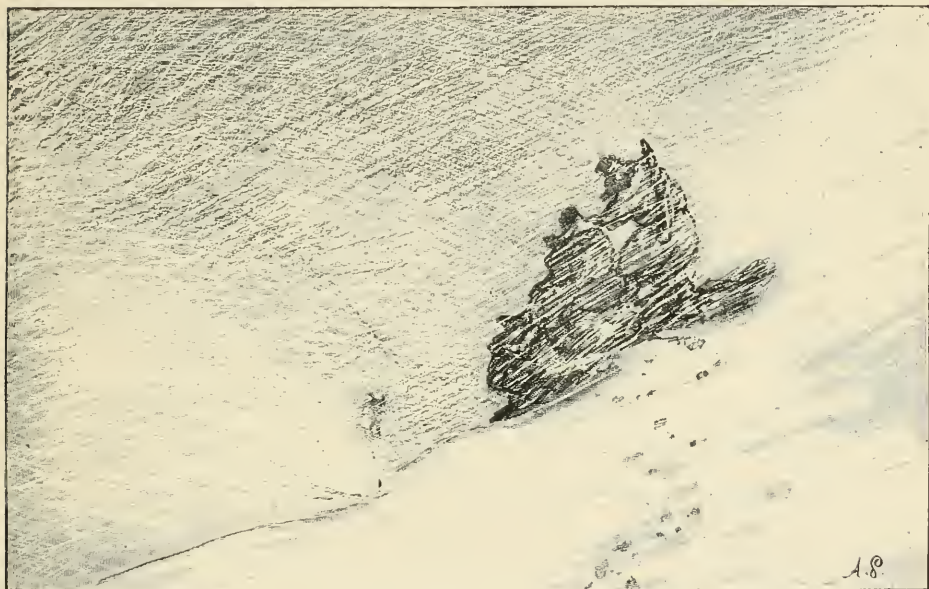
Following alternately the ice along the banks, or the ridge of the overhanging hills, we march for three hours and a half to a point where two streams meet and form the river. One comes down from the north-east through a very narrow valley which becomes a mere gorge, the other from the south-east.

We arrive, by a steep ascent and with six feet of snow in places, at a hill which divides the two gorges, near which are columns about thirty-three feet high, with blocks of stone upon their tops ; a very curious phenomenon of erosion. Upon the top we find the snow so deep that the horses cannot get through it. We take them to a sheltered spot where they will find a little grass, and we go on our route, or rather pick it out as we proceed. It is impossible to venture below, as the snow is too deep, except upon the very edge of the precipice, and we climb on to a sort of table-land, with pieces of rock dotted all over it, but here, again, the route is an impracticable one. We are on the left bank of the river which comes down from the south-east, and we remark that on the right bank there is but little snow. The question is, however, how to get there, for we cannot fly over the gorge, in the bottom of which we can see the water through the holes in the ice.

A little higher up we can see the wrinkles of a glacier between the steep sides of a rock coming down sheer. That is where the pass will be found, according to the *pir*, and it makes a bend E.S.E., as far as can be judged by the snow, which begins to fall. The *pir*, who is as light in his movements as a bird, goes on in front, and, halting for a moment on the edge of a rock, he turns round, and says to us—

“ I shall go on as long as my strength lasts. If I do not come back, you will know that the road is good. Put a little bread in my bag and leave it where the horses are. Put my cloak under cover, so that the wind will not blow it away.”

Rachmed just manages to reach the pir, giving him some apricots and a little bread, and he comes back with the cloak, which the worthy fellow has thrown off so as to be able to walk better in the snow. The pir is soon out of sight, and the snowflakes get thicker and the wind higher. The indefatigable walker then reappears on the other side of the gorge, and we watch him falling in the snow, getting up again, and finally disappearing for good. The wind blows more fiercely until it has reached a perfect



UPON THE ROAD TO THE KUNJUT.

hurricane, and Rachmed is persuaded that we shall never see the pir again, that he is buried in the snow, and that he is lost. He mutters a prayer over him, in which we can just make out the words Allah and Mahomet, and as we sit crouching in our cloaks from the storm, we fervently hope that the plucky old man has not come to any harm.

At five o'clock, seeing no signs of him, we determine to retrace our steps, and the wind is so strong that it prevents us from breathing or hearing. At last we get to our horses, give

them the last few handfuls of barley, mixed with a little grass which we had cut at the encampment and put into a bag, and retrace our steps, Rachmed calling out every few minutes in Kirghiz fashion, "Pir O-ó-ó! Pir O-ó-ó!" As soon as we get to the valley of Zarsotte, we have the wind straight in our teeth, and we cannot go ten paces without stopping to turn our backs to it and catch breath. We are almost suffocated, and quite exhausted. Upon the crest of the hill we put up some "emperor partridges," as they are named in Turkestan, and we can hear them calling. Whereupon Rachmed remarks, "Those birds are stronger than we are; they have not lost their voice."

At several places we have to cut out steps for our horses and ourselves. The ice has got in under our boots, and we slip about as we go on. It is, in truth, a most trying wind.

At nightfall, the plucky pir comes up with us, and we make him wrap a good cloak around his body, for he is very hot. He tells us that we cannot get over the snow, as it is melting, and will not bear us. He thought several times that he should never extricate himself; but, by God's help, he had succeeded in doing so. He had seen no sign of any path for beasts of burden, and according to him it is either too late or too soon to get through. It will be best, he says, to wait till the snow melts.

We reach the end of our stage at 9 p.m., all three very tired. The tempest lasts all night, and having secured the tent-pegs, we go off to sleep convinced that we must give up the Kunjut. To-morrow we shall start for Langar.

After having destroyed the objects which were not strictly indispensable, keeping only three canteens, the provisions, and the bedding, we start for Langar on the 26th of April. Menas remains with the canteens, and he will have to sustain himself on flour and millet. For the last three days we have had neither meat nor salt. As the salted fish forms part of our reserve with

the smoked meat, we shall not touch it until all the flour is eaten and we cannot possibly get any more provisions. In the meanwhile, we eat some flour mixed with fat.

In the evening of the 28th, we reach Langar, where we see no signs of any smoke, nor a single yak. The Wakhis have taken to their heels.

On the way, we found the dead bodies of the horses which we had abandoned on the way, and the wolves had eaten two, while close to a third we saw traces of an animal like a panther. We lost two more horses, that of Pepin breaking its back. Pepin then put a bullet through its head, and Rachmed partially skinned it, so as to have some leather to make us slippers, such as are worn in his country.

While we are putting up our tent, we send the pir, Sadik, and Rachmed to reconnoitre. The pir will endeavour to get the Wakhis back by persuasion; while the two others will use money or force, as they think best. But they return without having been able to catch a sight of the fugitives.

Early to-morrow morning, the pir will start for Andaman, and endeavour to bring back the Kirghiz, with some yaks; in any case, he will bring us the carcasses of two sheep and a little salt, if he can find any. We shall wait for his return, stopping the first caravan that comes this way.

April 29th.

The snow is still falling, with a strong westerly wind. While we are resting in our tent, the dogs begin to bark, and Abdur-Rasul declares that he can see a camel on the top of the ridge. I tell Rachmed to take his revolver and sword, and go and see what it all means, enjoining upon him to say, if the caravan is one of traders, that we want to buy some *khames* (Kashgar cloth). He soon comes back, falling rather than walking down the hill, in order to tell us with breathless haste—

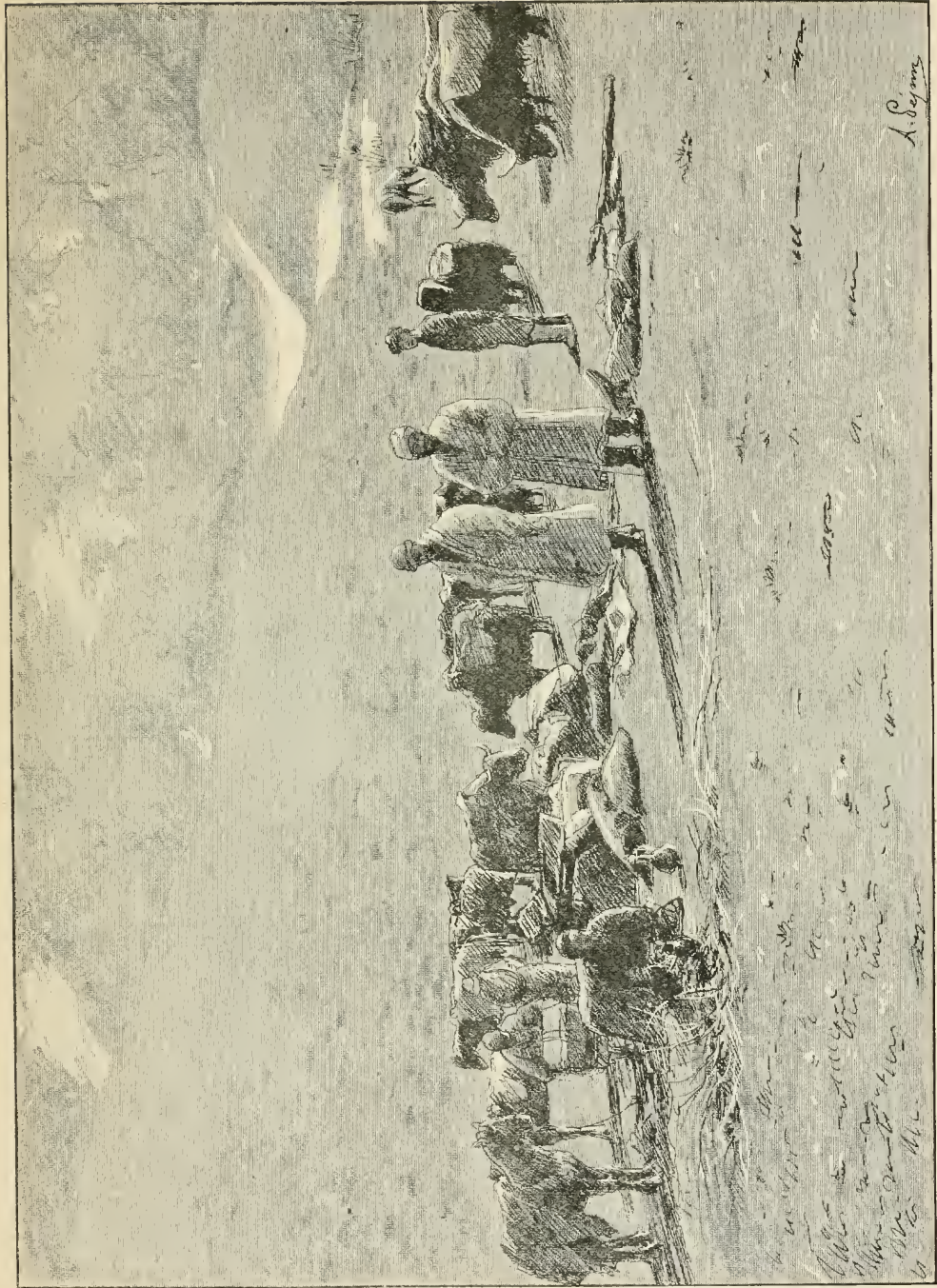
“It is the Afghan Abdullah-Khan, whom Allah has sent to us. He is coming to see us.”

It is wonderful how everything has fitted in nicely during our journey. Had we arrived a day later at Langar, Abdullah-Khan would have been gone. And then to what a pass we should have been brought! For Abdullah-Khan, who comes up a few minutes after Rachmed, gave us information which shows us that the pir will fail to bring back any Kirghiz or yaks.

After having said his prayer, broken bread, and drunk the cup of tea we are still able to offer him, the Afghan says—

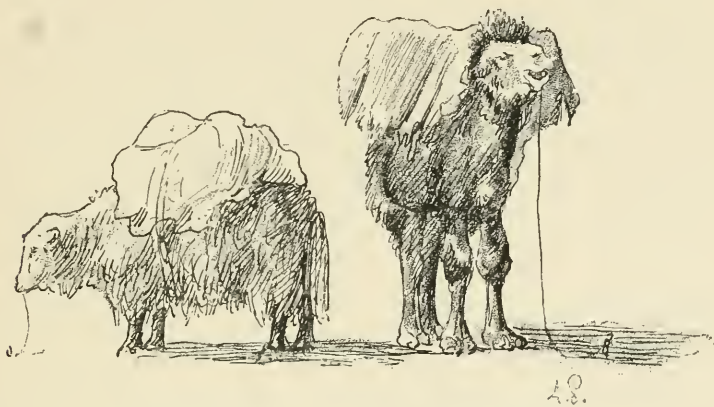
“As soon as you had left Ak-Tach, the Kirghiz met and held council. They were anxious to attack you, kill you, and strip you of all you possessed. They thought to be making themselves agreeable to the Chinese, and to be ensuring a good booty; they were all agreed as to that, but when it came to the ways and means, there was a great difference of opinion. The young men were full of ardour; but an old man who had seen your arms made very sensible objections to this course, saying, ‘These men have formidable weapons; they are upon their guard, and we must not attack them openly, or by day. At night, they will perhaps hear you, and will at once fire. It is an easy matter to seize their horses, but they will come back to fetch them, and you will be obliged to fight. They are *bahadours* (brave men), and before you have killed them all, they will have done for more than one of you. Am I not right.’ They said that he was, and so the project for attacking you was abandoned.

“The same day that it was known at Ak-Tach that you had left Kizil-Khorum and that you must be at the source of the Oxus or upon Afghan territory, two pig-tailed Chinese, representatives of the daotai, arrived with an armed escort of horsemen. They called together the bis and reproached them with having let you pass; but the latter excused themselves upon the ground



ENCAMPMENT BEYOND BALA-GUIZINE.

of your having many large and small guns, which contain innumerable cartridges, and that you had only passed through the district. The Chinese then sent for the Kirghiz of Andaman, who had assisted you, but they did not come. At first, the Chinese were inclined to go in pursuit of you, but they were told that you were already on Afghan territory, and that the Emir of Cabul would be dissatisfied if his frontier was violated. So they remained at Ak-Tach. There then came a great chief, who sent letters, with an order for horsemen to be despatched



HORNLESS YAK AND CAMEL OF THE PAMIR.

from Tashkurgan. He took down the names of those who helped you and intends to punish them.

“As I came along, I saw the dead bodies of the horses you had abandoned, and I learned that Sarik-Mahmed had taken to flight as soon as he heard of the Chinese being on the way.”

We asked Abdullah if he has met the pir, and he says no, but he is sure the pir had seen him and concealed himself.

We tell him what our position is, and ask him if he cannot lend us some of his animals to go and fetch our baggage and Menas. We shall like to conclude the bargain to-day, so that to-morrow the yaks may start for Tash-Kupruk.

He says that as he is intending to discharge the Kirghiz, who

take advantage of him, this can be easily arranged, and he undertakes to have our baggage taken to Sarhad, whither he will despatch a man on foot to fetch beasts and carriers, so that we may start together.

We at once send Menas and Sadik to the Kirghiz, with Abdullah-Khan, and, after an interminable discussion, the Kirghiz agree to go to Tash-Kupruk with five yaks, on condition that they are paid £4 for each yak. It is useless telling them that two yaks will be enough, and we have to submit to their terms.

They take the three extra yaks, because they want to fetch some willow wood for their tents, and they know that they are masters of the situation and can make us pay well for "the pleasure of being useful to those whom they like so well." Such is the answer I get from a rascal whom I ask why he bleeds us so. He adds that if we were not who we are, their price would be much higher. How kind!

They go off with Sadik on the 30th of April, and we wait for them until the 3rd of May, passing our time talking, watching the snow fall, and digesting our "tchousma," that is to say, the porridge made of flour cooked in fat, for which we have not, unfortunately, any salt. Our stomachs feel the want of it, and our gums are very sore.

May 3rd.

The barking of our dogs tells us that we may expect a visitor, and up comes the pir on foot, leading his horse. The worthy fellow drops rather than sits down by the fire.

He gets a hearty welcome from us all, and we unload his horse, which is a mere bag of bones. From one bag, we take two sheep cut up into joints, and a small leathern bottle containing sour milk, while the pir produces half a pound of salt from his waistband. He then explains why he has not got any yaks.

“As soon as the Kirghiz heard of my return, they assembled in large numbers outside my tent. Some of them wanted to know what had become of you, while others, whom fear of the Chinese had made vindictive, wanted to maltreat me. The old bi whom you saw at Mulkali, bitterly upbraided me for having shown you the way, and he told his men to tie my hands and feet, put me on to a yak, and hand me over to the Chinese. I told him that I was Nur-Djane the *divana* (dervish), that it was my duty to lend aid to any one who asked me for it, and that in labouring for you, I was labouring for Allah.

“One man exclaimed angrily that I had received money from you, and that I had betrayed them, and cared more for you than for them. I replied that I had never asked for any pay from the Feringhis, and that what they gave me I had accepted for the sake of my children. I had several people on my side. My son-in-law came up; he is an Afghan, as you know, and he took my part courageously, whereupon my enemies, seeing that they were the weaker, withdrew. We killed two of my sheep, and here I am with them. You will let me go back at once, for the Chinese are close at hand, my horses are very poor, my cattle are weak, and it will perhaps be difficult for me to get away. The position is a very awkward one, the Chinese are cruel, and my presence among my own people is indispensable. I am in a hurry to get away. By God’s help, all difficulties will be got over.”

We give him the present he has so well earned, and Rachmed has a little meat cooked for him, while Abdur-Rasul pours him out a cup of tea. He eats as fast as his almost toothless jaws will permit; gets up, tightens his belt, puts his bag upon his horse, and, coming close up to us after listening to our thanks with an unconcerned air, raises his hand to his beard and exclaims, “Allah is great!” Our men shake hands with him, and he bestrides his horse and makes off.

At the same moment, some yaks make their appearance upon the opposite bank, and we soon see Menas scuttling down the incline with all speed, and he falls like a famished man upon the bowl of sour milk presented to him by his friend Rachmed, and between two pulls at it, he tells us that he has got on very well, that he has brought back a horse which we had abandoned, that his own has fallen into a precipice, and that he has been obliged to kill it. He is very pleased to see us again. He asks about the pir, and we point out to him the latter, who is riding off with his



THE PIR.

legs dangling from his horse, which he is doing his best to urge into a feeble trot. Menas shouts to wish him good-bye, and the pir turns round to wave his hand to him and soon disappears behind the Tchatir-Tach (stone-tent).

What a curious physiognomy is his among such a collection of ruffians! What an ugly but honest face he has! We shall long remember his head, shaped like a top, broad at the top, with bulging forehead and prominent cheekbones, narrow at the lower end, with sunken cheeks and small square chin, and the tiny grey eyes which glitter with such an air of shrewdness in their deep orbits, and his narrow nose, like the beak of a bird of prey, bent down towards his pursed-up mouth. How he walks, too, for a man of over sixty, and with what a light step! Where we sink into the snow, he seems to glide over it. He is not troubled with superfluous flesh, for though he is of a fair height, he does not weigh eight stone.

He never asked for a piece of bread, never asked to come near the fire, never proffered a complaint. The fact is that Nur-Djane

had many youthful misdeeds to atone for. He had not always had the fear of God before his eyes. He is credited with having committed every species of crime, with endless raids (*barantas*), and with having been the terror of the Pamir. He appeared and disappeared as if by enchantment, being as intangible as the wind. His revenges were terrible, and his threats were never made in vain. In short, if rumour is to be believed, Nur-Djane must have been the greatest of criminals until the date of his startling conversion.

This occurred twenty years ago, and followed upon a dream, during which he saw himself in a swollen river, being beaten about by the torrent. When he tried to swim to the bank, the raging waters drove him down to the bottom of the abyss, and each time that he rose to the surface, he seemed to be further from shore. For a long time, he was tossed about in this way, and when the banks had faded out of sight, he felt himself hopelessly lost, for the torrent had opened out into a raging sea, the waves were mighty, and the night was dark.

Nur-Djane regarded this dream as a warning from heaven, and he determined to spend the rest of his days in doing good. He said the five prayers regularly, took up the staff of the dervish, and went off to Khojend, where he sought the counsel of famous mollahs and illustrious "pirs." He goes to Khojend every year to listen to extracts from holy books. The people of the Pamir, of the Alaï, and of the Wakhan know him, and he acts as their go-between when they are at variance, conveying proposals from one aoul to another, praying at the bedside of the new-born babe and of the dead. He is universally respected, for his sole thought is to do good. And he is called Nur-Djane-Divana, the dervish, the lunatic, as so much kindness of heart can only be the mark of a disordered brain. Others call him Nur-Djane-Kalifa, the caliph, this being an honourable epithet. In the eyes of the great

majority, he is a saint. So he is in ours, and my readers will probably be of the same opinion.

We never caught him in a lie, for he always kept his word, and helped his companions to the utmost of his power.

When I arrived with him close to Langar, we were rejoined by the Kirghiz. One of them asked him if we had a letter from the daotai, that he dared to show us the way without an order from Kashgar. He replied at once that he had not, and when the Kirghiz said that he was risking his life, he replied, "I am not afraid of the Chinese, I am only afraid of doing what is wrong. Allah!"

One meets with honest people everywhere, but not with many, and that is why I have spoken at some length of this one.



RAHMED.



ENCAMPMENT NEAR LANGAR.

CHAPTER XV.

STOPPED IN THE TCHATRAL.

We start for the Wakhan—Carthaginian traders—Sadik and Abdur-Rasul leaves us—The Afghans try to detain us at Sarhad—We cross the Hindu-Kush without a guide—Meeting the Tchatralis—This time we are stopped—Our resources exhausted—The Tchatralis—Negotiations—The Anglo-Indian Government intervenes—Forty-nine days at Mastudj—We are released—Hayward—Speedy return.

THE men and beasts of burden that Abdullah-Khan has asked for have arrived from Sarhad at Langar. We are about to start for the Afghan frontier, we shall reach the pass of Baroguil and enter the Tchatral. If possible, we shall go by the glacier of Darcot, in order to reach first Yassin and then Kashmir. We hope that we have seen the last of the snow, and the thought that, further on, we shall find wood, water, and a warm climate, gives us good heart. We pay little heed to the men we may meet, for we are determined not to flinch; while those we may encounter will be

astonished to see us arrive, as was the case with the men of the Pamir, and we shall hurry through their midst, just as wolves, with their coats bristling and their fangs displayed, make their way through a pack of hounds.

We have conveyed our baggage on the horses of the Wakhis to the encampment of Abdullah-Khan, which is pitched at the entrance to a gorge. This encampment is very animated, and the fires are visible above the bushes, where the swarm of Wakhis is clustered below us; horses and yaks being tethered in such a way that they can browse on the grass around the encampment. These people, with a European cast of countenance and dressed in frieze, are very talkative and noisy. They are preparing to start to-morrow, and we have not heard any noise for so long that their uproar is quite a pleasant sensation to us.

We are naturally the object of much curiosity upon the part of these natives, who are under the escort of tall old men, with white beards and long robes; these chiefs, with their judicial air, as if they were the most dignified of men, are about the most cunning. It is extraordinary how deceitful they are; oaths fall from their mouths as readily as good morning, and five minutes afterwards they boldly deny what they had said five minutes before, when invoking the names of God and of the Prophet. They play the most contradictory parts, passing without transition from tragic to comic, from comic to pathetic. Around the greybeards are some fifty individuals howling, gesticulating and chattering. One of them joins in the conversation, apostrophizing the speaker, reproaching him with sacrificing the interests of his own people, with not thinking of the families to be fed, the difficulties of the route, and so forth. Every kind of falsehood, in fact, was put forward with the utmost coolness, in order to make us pay more dearly for their services, and perhaps in part as a mere pastime. The opportunity was a favourable one for unloosing their tongues after the

long winter's sleep, and so they talk like the heroes of Homer. They have a gifted imagination, and are not chary of their words.

Add to this that they are not blind to their interests, and knowing the Afghans as well as the Feringhis to be at their mercy, they shear them very close.

Amid all these excitable people, Abdullah-Khan, seated upon his heels, is as calm as a martyr exposed to the insults of a furious populace. He replies to all of them in the same tranquil manner, rarely losing his temper, refuting all their arguments, and this for hours together. He only resolves to withdraw when his adversaries cut short all discussion by exorbitant demands, and begin to quarrel among themselves. He then gets up, comes towards us and says, "They are savages. What is the use of trying to do anything," with a shrug of the shoulders.

The only companion of Abdullah-Khan, a man named Achmet-Khan, is of quite a different temperament. He does not seem born for debate, and he avoids it altogether, leaving it to his friend to try and persuade the Wakhis. While all this talk is going on, he holds aloof, remaining leaning on his bales, with his cap pulled down over his eyes. His eyes glitter, his hooked nose dilates, he shakes his broad shoulders, shows his white teeth in his access of temper, and, with his lips constantly moving, mutters insults and threats in his own tongue. He, at all events, regrets not being the master, and if he had the Wakhis at his mercy, he would make them smart. He strikes me as being the type of the primitive traders of antiquity, the pushing Carthaginians; of those who made the circuit of Africa, or plunged into the deserts, compelling men, with the point of their swords, to buy their goods. While leading a life of this kind, they learnt the art of struggling with men, as well as the art of persuading them, and there were no limits to their audacity. Having often been at the mercy of their savage customers, who sometimes plundered them without

mercy, they were in turn merciless, when they could be so without detriment to their interests. Carrying back to their country the qualities developed by their traffic with barbarians, they made use of them for directing the course of public affairs, and sometimes compromised their fellow-countrymen, but the habit of making a profit, and their anxiety about the strong box, prevented them



WAKHIS.

from anything like far-seeing views and paralyzed their energies, whereas the Romans had higher views or less paltry ways.

I had forgotten to mention that Sadik and Abdur-Rasul left us on the 3rd of May; taking with them on horseback millet and flour, with bread enough to last several days. They cut some enormous sticks, which are better than a sword in their hands.

We are somewhat anxious about them, as they will find it no easy matter to get safe through the Pamir.

Sadik had at one time some little difficulty with the Wakhis, and this is a good reason why he should not return home by the Wakhan and the Badakshan. These two men have served us loyally and well, and their conduct is above all praise.*

In the afternoon of May 4th, after a discussion which has been going on since sunrise, the Wakhis load the goods and merchandise and make a start, and we reach Sarhad on the afternoon of May 7th, snow falling and melting as it fell.

The route we followed is a delightful one, by comparison with the Pamir and Tash-Kupruk. Yet many a traveller would regard it as a terrible one, for it is all up and down hill, while some of the paths, winding from rock to rock, are no wider than one's hand, with a sheer precipice on one side. But the heights have an air of life given to them by the willows, the birch-trees and the junipers, the last time that we saw any of these latter having been at Ak-Basoga, in the Ferghana. Sparrows with very bright plumage were singing in the branches. We then crossed the Wakhan-Darya, or western Ak-Su, twelve times, and nothing could have been more picturesque than the crossing of the ferry, with the yaks swimming, and the naked men urging them on; while we got a very pleasant and fresh bath. We were first on the right and then on the left bank, and as the valley narrowed into a gorge we made our way to the summit. The weather was fine on the 4th, but snow fell on the other days. We had, however, plenty of wood.

The Afghans and the Wakhis were at loggerheads every day, the latter refusing to go any further, and in the end they obtained a few extra *karbasses* (pieces of cloth). Even Abdullah-Khan at

* Sadik and Abdur-Rasul were stopped by the Chinese Kirghiz, and it was not until the end of July, after they had been stripped of everything, that they reached the first tents of the Ferghana.

last got out of temper with them, and as to Achmet-Khan, he would have killed them if he could have had his way.

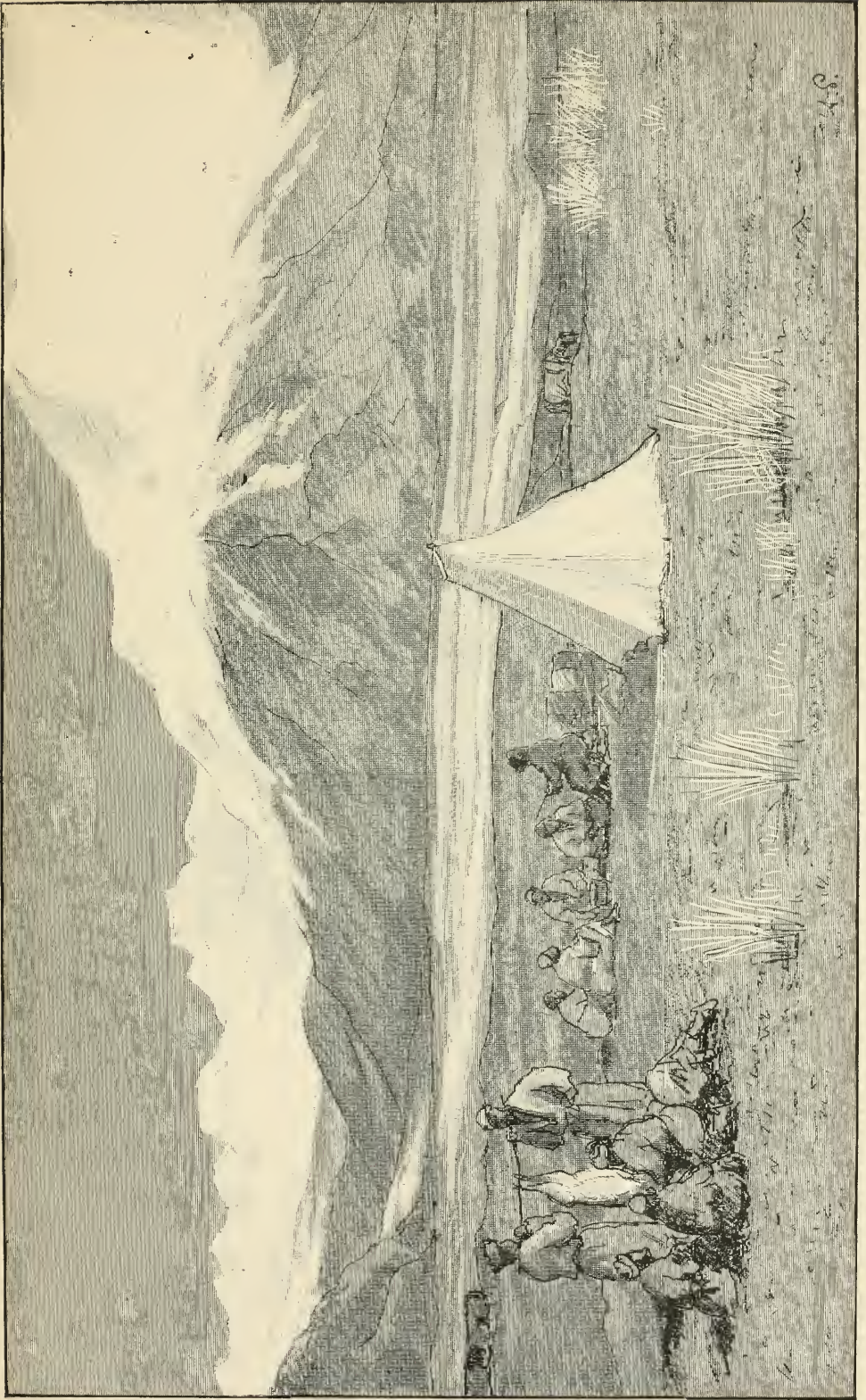
We did not come upon any villages, and our encampments are at Sang-Kuk, Iochkh, upon the edge of a torrent.

Before coming to Sarhad, the valley of Wakhan-Darya gets broader, the mountain undulates as if the plain was close, and we find a good road over the hills, though, in order to make a short cut, we come down the sides, our horses slipping so much that we get off and follow the bed of the river on foot, only remounting them to get over any deep pool of water.

The Wakhis, who speak Persian, are much amused when I tell them that the fifty pieces of cloth which they had wrung out of us this morning had shortened the route by a day. They swore by Allah and Mahomet that it would take two days' march to go from the last encampment to Sarhad. They then point to a small plain, which to us looks like a mere blotch upon the horizon, and say that this is Sarhad.

As we proceed, we see stone cottages like those of the Kohistan, with square walls, flat roofs, and cattle lairs in the court-yards, many women, dark and thin, with regular and rather fine features, being seated in front of the doors. The air is filled with the hum and stir of village life, with the crying of children, the lowing of cattle, and the barking of dogs. Here and there are square bits of cultivated land, surrounded by brushwood which formed a fence. Narrow channels are cut for irrigation. The few houses to be met with are built up against a rock, which thus serves not only as a wall but as a roof.

The stones are very dark in colour, and the soil quite black, and as the inhabitants wear grey frieze, they are not easily to be picked out, so that from a distance the houses seem to be abandoned. Those which stand upon a hill, with their sharp angles, look like so many fortresses in the snow. A few



AT SARHAD.

white willows above intercept the light, and render the picture less sombre. There are but few patches of snow about.

We encamp in a moist meadow, where the grass, green and fresh, is a great treat for our horses. We have eight horses left, and they will stand a lot of work if we give them plenty of barley. The Wakhis sell it to us at an exorbitant price, a horse costing eight shillings a day to feed.

We are very pleased to be at Sarhad, to the south of which we see the mountains opening upon the left bank of the Wakhan-Darya. This road leads to the Baraguil, and upon the other side the waters flow down into India. As the proverb has it, "Hindustan Gulistan, Turkestan Guristan;" "Hindustan is a flower-bed, Turkestan is a cemetery."

If the snow ceased falling, we should be in the grass-land of Sarhad. There is good water in the marsh, and plenty of capital snipe.



WAKHIS.

Abdullah-Khan comes to encamp near us. Achmet-Khan will arrive to-morrow with the rest of the baggage. The yaks have fallen into the water, and it has been necessary to pull out their loads, and the Wakhis refuse to go any further till they are paid extra for this.

Upon the 8th of May, when we wake up, we find a little snow falling, and it melts very fast. There is not much frost, though we are at an altitude of over ten thousand feet. At ten o'clock, the thermometer marks forty-one degrees, and it seems as if spring had come.

The reader may say to himself that we are now at the end of our troubles, that, after we and our horses are nicely rested, we shall be able quietly to cross the Hindu-Kush, and as

quietly to descend into the Hindustan-Gulistan. But this is not to be. Rachmed comes to tell us that there is an Indian chief in this village, and that this chief, a *dahbachi* (chief of ten), has sent for him to cross-examine him. We forbid Rachmed to go, and tell the messenger to inform his chief that he must come and see us.

We find him to be a very small man, wearing the Afghan uniform, and followed by an escort armed with an enormous musket, the old men of Sarhad also accompanying them. After the customary greetings, we ask the *dahbachi* to seat himself upon a strip of felt laid down in front of our tent, and Abdullah-Khan sits down beside him. Then comes a string of questions as to where we are going and what we are doing. The conversation takes place in Persian, and as Rachmed acts interpreter, I have plenty of time to think what I shall reply. We appear to satisfy the *dahbachi*, who shows his sense of approval in a very dignified manner. We explain to him that we have found the passes of Akdjir and Tash-Kupruk closed, and that we have been obliged to come to Sarhad, whence we shall go to the Tchatral by way of the Baraguil.

He says that he is at our service, that we may ask for anything we require, and that he will take steps to see that nothing is left undone. We are at once to be supplied with provisions, horses, yaks, and a guide. The chief smokes his *ghalyan*, and slowly sips his tea, his sword dangling upon his knee in a very warlike attitude. He is a handsome young man, with a hooked nose, blue eyes, with a ring of antimony round them, and the long Afghan head. After drinking a cup of tea, he gets up and repeats that he is our slave, then going off.

Of course, they send us nothing, and when we seek to lay in a stock of provisions, they refuse to sell us any. The inhabitants have been expressly forbidden to supply us with any-

thing. A courier is sent to Kila-Pandj to ask for reinforcements, the idea being to make us wait and eventually compel us to turn back when the soldiers have arrived.

Achmet-Khan advises us to start, but the advice is useless, as we know what to think about the Afghans. We do not want a repetition of Chour-Tepe. We will let our horses rest, purchase flour at any price, secretly, during the night, and when we have got enough to last us a week, we shall make a start, doing without a guide.

We get rid of all superfluous objects, and give a few extra feeds to two of our horses which will carry the chests. We only retain a quarter of a load for each of the other horses, and we keep upon our guard. Abdullah-Khan and Achmet do not venture to compromise themselves, for they fear being punished. They have been told that we are the same people who have been arrested at Chour-Tepe, though we repudiated all knowledge of these persons. The emir has to be considered, so they have to be very circumspect.

We wait until the 11th of May for orders from Kila-Pandj, which the dahbachi said that he must have before he could act, though in reality we have been waiting for our horses to gain a little strength. We have flour enough to last us a week, which will be as much as we shall require. Abdullah-Khan has explained to us what road we must take, saying, "You will go straight on. You will turn to the right, then take the path to the left, and afterwards look for the way."

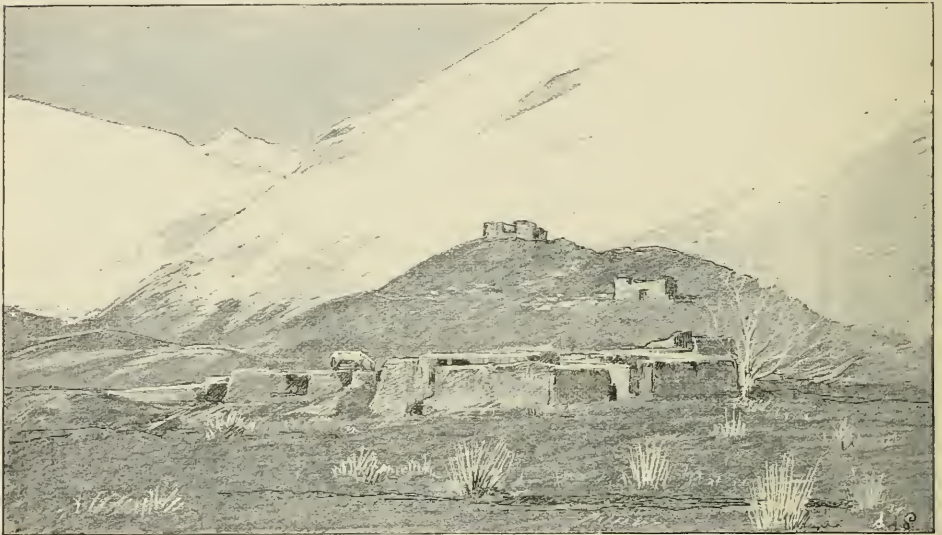
We start at twelve precisely, and do not see a single Wakhi. The Afghan merchants help us to load our horses, and when all is ready, the tent is struck and rolled up, and on we go. The dahbachi comes and begs us to wait, but we will not listen to a word he says.

Abdullah-Khan accompanies us as far as the ferry, which

we cross on the back of a horse, which comes and goes till we are all over. We say a last good-bye to our friends, and off we go.

We marched on for six days before reaching the first village of the Tchatral. The first day the road was good, the valley rising first to the south and then to the south-west.

Upon the second day, the valley began to narrow, our course being still south-west, along paths on the sides of the rocks.



CEMETERY AND HOUSES AT SARHAD.

The snow begins falling again, and we have to feel our way through the deep snow which lies in the pass. At the same time I see some wolves, which fly at our approach. Finally we reach the watershed, at an altitude of about twelve thousand feet. I shout out the good news to those who are following behind, and we descend a little way and encamp upon a shoulder of the mountain, which is clear of snow and of quagmires.

The third day, we mistake our road, having taken the right bank of the Arkhun, which flows from east to west, and we come

against a solid mass of rock, so that we are obliged to retrace our steps.

The fourth day we wade across the Arkhun, and pass by a magnificent glacier. Again crossing the Arkhun, and following the same circle which the river describes over hills covered with juniper-trees, we again come out upon the valley, which is half a mile broad, at a point where the river breaks up into several branches. This might be termed the valley of glaciers, for we can see three all at once.

Having crossed the various arms of the river several times, we encamp in a small wood, where we find plenty of grass for our horses and wood for our fires. There is also an abundance of good water, of which we drink freely, for our flour without salt is very unappetizing. We are all as poor as scarecrows, besides being dirty and in rags, with scarcely a sole to our boots. Pepin and Menas are very sick, and all the others except myself complain of nausea and pains in the stomach.

Our encampment is a charming one, and we can hear a mosquito, the first for a long time. A caterpillar falls on my face, so this is real summer at last. Yet yesterday it was still freezing, and at 11 p.m. the thermometer was several degrees below freezing point.

Upon the fifth day, after having counted seven glaciers and crossed the river seven or eight times, we take a path on the right bank which brings us to a virgin forest, where we encamp. The wind is blowing very strong, and the branches of the trees rustle and sway about so much that we half expect to hear a weather-cock creak upon the roof of our next-door neighbour.

We have only enough flour to last one day, and that is bad, but no doubt we shall reach a village to-morrow, for yesterday we saw the print of a naked foot on the sand in the river bed. Going on in advance to reconnoitre, I saw some traces of a recent bivouac,

and the natives have been to cut wood in the forest. They have been squaring some beams for their dwellings, and we wake upon the sixth day with the pleasant feeling that we are about to see human beings again. All nature smiles, and the weather is delightful. So we start in good spirits.

After going a little way, I hear shouts, and can distinguish the forms of men among the stones some way below. One of them jumps down from a rock, followed by a boy, and with a gun upon his shoulder. He calls out to me, but I go on as if I had not heard him. He then comes up to meet me, and he



THE FIRST TCHATRALIS.

is a curious specimen of humanity, being of middle height, with a Tzigane head, a dyed beard, black eyes made to appear larger by the use of antimony, long hair gathered up into a Neapolitan fisherman's cap made of grey frieze,

a sword at the end of his shoulder belt, like the soldiers of the first French Republic, a flintlock gun, a knife stuck into his waistband, and his feet bound up with strips of leather.

The boy is twelve or thirteen, with fair hair and blue eyes; his hair, which is cut short in front, falling over his shoulders. His only clothing is a cloak of white wool, and he is barefooted. He acts as interpreter for the man, translating what he says into indifferent Persian.

He asks me whence I came, who I am, and if I am not Ourousse (Russian), as he has been told by the Wakhis whom the Afghans have sent to him. I say that we are not Russians, but Feringhis.

“ If you are, then you may proceed on your journey, for the Feringhis are *kheilé doust* (very friendly) to Aman el Mulk, our *metar* (prince). But we are not friendly with the Russians, Chinese, or Afghans, and we have orders not to let them pass, even if we have to use force.”

“ We are neither Russians, Afghans, or Chinese, but Feringhis.”

“ Feringhi-Ingliš ?”

“ No ; Feringhis pure and simple, but very friendly to the English, in proof of which you see that we are making for Hindustan. Our great wish is to reach Guilguit and to see the English. We have lost our horses and their burdens in the snow. The Chinese are not our friends, for they wanted to kill us, nor are the Afghans, for they tried to stop us, and we fled from them without being able to get anything we required. As a general rule, people do not venture into a hostile country unless they are more numerous than we are. Besides myself, there are two Feringhis and two followers, or five in all. We must have felt convinced that we should be well received and be animated by the best intentions to come and see you with so small an escort.”

This man seems struck by what I say, and after discussing for a few moments with the boy, who also appears to favour us, he determines to go on in advance and announce our arrival to his master, who is at a few days' march. He calls out to some men who are higher up the mountain, and they come down to show us the way.

Our little band has collected, and we go on all together to Top-Khana, the first hamlet upon the right bank of the Arkhun, arriving there in the evening, having met on the way a Karaul chief, who puts the same questions to us and to whom we make the same replies.

Upon May 17th, we leave Top-Khana, inhabited by Wakhis, who fled from their country when it was seized by the Afghans.

The inhabitants let us six donkeys to carry our baggage, which is reduced to a very small quantity. We start in good spirits, after having regaled ourselves on an omelette, some very diminutive chickens, and sour milk. We see some sheep which weigh about ten pounds, with cattle in proportion, the cows being about the size of an average calf, and the donkeys small but sturdy. The few horses in the country are imported from the Badakshan.

We go along the left bank of the river and reach a delightful wood, in the glades of which is plenty of grass. We stop to let our horses feed, and, stretched out upon the grass, we say to ourselves that our troubles are over and that in another month we shall be at Kashmir. Our troubles and difficulties are over, if the Tchatralis do not give us annoyance.

Suddenly a horse comes close up to us showing signs of fear, so that there must be a man or a wild animal close, for our horses are so wild that they prick their ears at the least sound, and are as good as watch-dogs to us. In a few moments, a number of men come in sight, and with their cross-belts, their plaited hair and smooth faces, they look like so many brown owls, or would do so but for their shields studded with bright nails and their profusion of arms. As it is, they remind one rather of characters in a comic opera, or Tziganes dressed as brigands and showing their white teeth. Their chief, who is on horseback, carries a rifle and a revolver. He says that he is the son of a very important personage, and that he has orders not to let us pass. We ask him if he has any one in his party who can speak Persian, and when he replies in the negative, we say that this is a great pity, as we have some very interesting papers to show him, but that we will go on and see his father, whom we shall have no difficulty in persuading that we are honest men. We give him a host of reasons in support of our allegation, and after consulting with his followers, he consents. We have not a boot to our feet, but though our dress

was not calculated to inspire any one with a great idea of us, our arms and our defiant attitude may have caused respect. Certainly, we were not very taking in appearance, with our chapped hands and faces, the skin peeling off in places and making us look like lepers.

The worst of it was that we had no rupees, and only a little gold; and the young man argued, not without some show of reason, that if we were Feringhis we should be able to give him rupees. This is the ethnological sign by which the Tchatralis recognize the Feringhis-Inglis, as we found out afterwards. We encamped that evening at Dibarga, in a glade, the Tchatralis bivouacking quite close. The Wakhis of Top-Khana advised us to be on our guard, as the Tchatralis were deceitful and dishonest.



TCHATRALI.

The next day (May 18), still following the left bank, now in the bed of the river, now upon the bank, we reached a hippodrome just outside Derbend, where we found the father of the young man, seated amid a circle of warriors. He had a parasol over his head, and his large moustaches came right across his face, from the chin of which hung a pointed beard. With much dignity, he asked us the same questions which his son had put to us the day before, and we answered them in the same way. He gave us to understand that he expected presents of rupees, and we gave *him* to understand that we were only in the habit of giving presents to our friends, and that we did not yet know with whom we had to do.

We then went to the foot of the fortress, where we shared, myself and my four companions, a frugal meal served in the hollow

of a shield, consisting of excellent bread and apricots, the kernels serving as a separate dish. While we were enjoying this, we were being plied with the most outlandish questions, to which we replied without contradicting ourselves at all. The curious part of the business was that the chief's interpreter spoke Turkish very well, having learnt it at Samarcand, where he had been for fifteen years as a slave, having been sold when quite a boy to a pilgrim, who had taken him to Kashgar and resold him to a man from Khokand, who had in turn sold him to an inhabitant of Samarcand. This man had regained his liberty when the Russians came into the country. He knew several acquaintances of Rachmed, but that did not help us, as the interpreter who had acted as intermediary for us when we made purchases had shown his regard for us by stealing several pieces of cloth.

In the evening, we encamp at Paour, upon the right bank, and we are in an enclosure upon the bank of a winding stream which flows over small sharp pebbles. The tiny squares of cultivated land are bordered by trim paths, at the edges of which are willows and small walls made of stones. There are small cuttings made at various points for the purposes of irrigation, and everything is kept as neat and tidy as a Dutch farm. The inhabitants, however, only do just enough work to keep themselves going, for they are of a lazy disposition.

Their principal occupations are to comb their long hair, dye the corners of their eyes, pull the hairs out of their nostrils, and look at themselves in small mirrors. They seem to be very gentle and polite in their manners to one another, and there does not appear to be any distinct demarcation of rank—not, at all events, among the men who escort us.

They are fairly civil to us, as soon as they have unbosomed themselves of their threats, which they appear to have learnt by heart. One of them having said something rude to Menas, I

advise the latter to give him a good hiding, which he does with a will, much to the astonishment of the others, who after this treat us with no little respect.

Despite the messengers sent by the Metar of Tchatral and his son, we have pursued our journey. Every now and again, a horseman came up and enjoined us to proceed no further, and our body of carriers stopped at least twenty times and put down our baggage, in compliance with superior instructions. But each time



MASTUDJ.

I got them to go on by recourse to the same arguments. Our superiority over these barbarians was due to the fact that we knew what we wanted, and they were vacillating.

Once at Mastudj, we pitched our tent in the sort of hippodrome or racecourse which extends along the cultivated ground on the river's bank and at the foot of several stone walls. This was a very large meadow, at the entrance to which stands out prominently the fortress inhabited by the second son of the prince who rules the country. This fortress, built of stones without

mortar, separated by timber beams, is protected upon the side of the river by a ravine, at the foot of which are some marsh meadows, with pools of water all over them.

We halted here on May 22nd, and Rachmed, who is very fond of counting the days, reminds us that it is the 78th since we left Osch and the 143rd since we started from Samarcand, which he wonders whether he will ever see again. Rachmed wishes himself anywhere but where he is, for his stomach is quite upset, and he has a longing to eat kourouk, that is, the fat of sheeps' tails.

Our little band is worn out, and the six horses left are so many bags of bones. We have scarcely any money left to pay for the conveyance of what little baggage we possess as far as Kashmir. We have to pay exorbitant prices, bread costing us nearly one shilling per pound, while our carriers insist upon eight shillings a day, and then five of them do not carry more than what one could fairly take on his back.

According to the information given us by the natives, we learn that there is an agent of the Anglo-Indian Government accredited to the Metar of Tchatral, and it is to him that we propose to apply and ask him to send a line from us to the Viceroy of India, who, we are sure, will help us out of the difficulty.

We rest for four days, collecting, during that period, a few provisions from the subject portion of the population. The Metar of Tchatral, who has committed almost every crime, has taken the place of the ruler of Mastudj, after having put him to death. There remain some few friends of the former order of things, and they are well inclined to us, or at all events they do not obey so blindly the orders of the new ruler. So they bring us some flour secretly.

At the end of four days, we load our horses as if we were going to start, and some men sent by the young prince come and beg us to wait a little, as their master is about to come and try to arrange

something with us. He soon comes, followed by an escort armed with flintlocks, English sporting guns, and a few rifles. He is dressed in a robe of white cotton, and rides a white horse, his servitors making a great fuss over him as he gets off. He is about twenty-two or twenty-three, short, very dark, and with a black beard. He resembles a native of Bokhara, with his wandering look, thick lips, and stuttering utterance. He has on his feet some heavy Peshawur boots.

After an exchange of compliments, he plies us with the same questions as to our identity and plans, and when we persist in wishing to start, he overwhelms us with assurances of his affection for us, but does not want us to leave until he has received orders from his father. He says that if he lets us go, it will cost him his head, and he entreats us to wait a week till he has been to consult with his father at Tchatral. When he has been there, he will be able to provide us with plenty of men and beasts of burden, and he will himself carry us on his back, if necessary. But a visit must first be paid to the Metar at Tchatral, for it is the custom of the country, and the English have never failed to observe it.



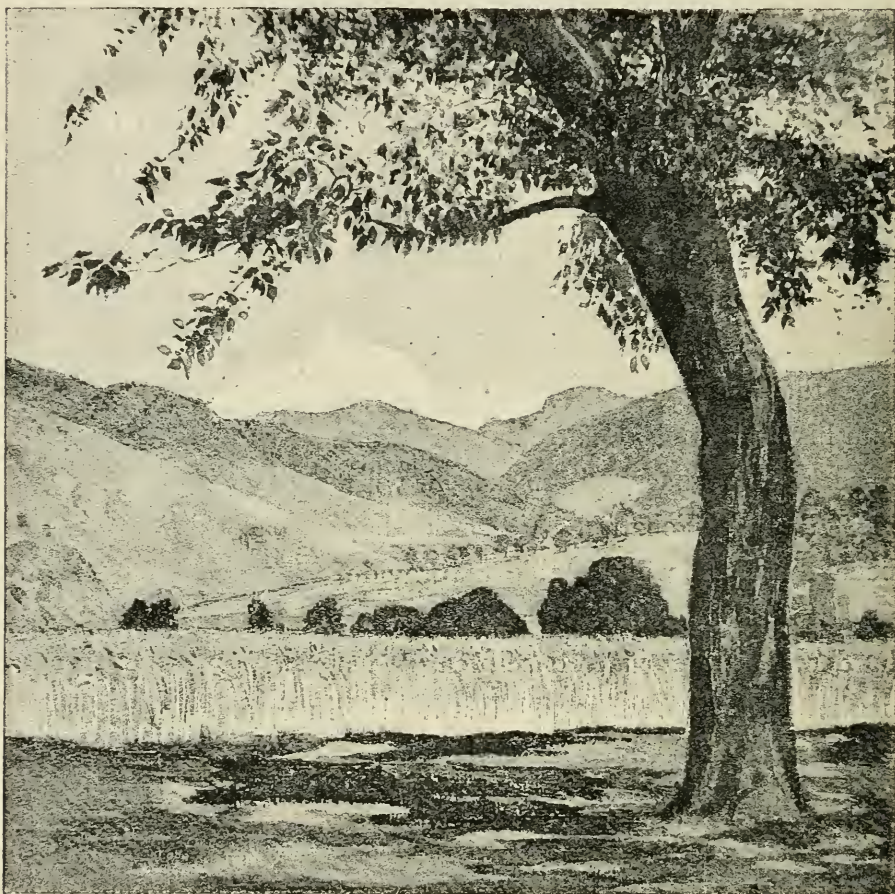
THE METAR.

After a sitting which lasted several hours and exhausted the patience of Rashmed and Menas, we give way, the young prince declaring that we had better cut his head off at once if we persist in starting. The only condition we make is that we shall be well fed in the interval, and to this he readily assents, thanking us very profusely for having saved him any unpleasantness.

We know too well the value of Oriental promises to expect much, but the situation is at all events clearer than ever before,

for it is evident that the Tchatralis, deny it as they may, take their orders from India, nor can they be altogether blamed for their denial, as it is well understood that they only execute the orders which they judge to be to their advantage.

We have nothing to do but wait for a reply to the letter we



VIEW IN THE VALLEY OF TCHATRAL.

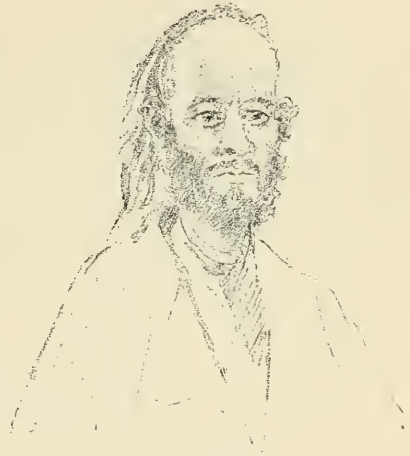
have sent to the English agent. I do not tell him all the reasons we have for wishing to go forward, the first and most urgent being that the snow is melting, that the Mastudj river is no longer fordable, nor is the Wakhan-Darya. We have no longer the necessary strength to enter upon a fresh struggle against man and

against nature, nor the money to buy the Tchatral—which is for sale.

My conviction is that nothing will be settled for weeks, as the letter we have sent will pass through several hands, and who can tell if it will ever reach its destination, for the Peshawur road is not very safe.

The Anglo-Indian Government can have no interest that we know of to bar the way for us, or to get the Tchatralis to cut our throats. And even if, for some stupid political reason, there is a reluctance to hold out a helping hand, we need not give up hope, for we would make some desperate attempt; and if we perished in it, well, we should have seen a good deal of the world.

So far luck has been with us, and now we must look back upon the various difficulties we have surmounted, and await with confidence the decision of the Anglo-Indian Government.



SIAPUCH KAFIR.

On May 26th, Capus, Pepin, and Menas, start for Tchatral, Rachmed and myself remaining behind with our baggage and our worn-out horses. The young prince having opined that our baggage must not be conveyed there, it was easy to see that we should go in the direction, not of Peshawur, but of Laspour, whenever we were allowed to leave at all. We could not leave our baggage and horses with the natives, nor could we leave Rachmed alone, for if he took to smoking haschisch, or if he fell ill, what would become of him? Pepin cannot remain here, because he does not speak Russian, nor can Capus, as he dislikes being alone, and is anxious to see Tchatral. So it is settled that I shall stay behind.

The worthy Rachmed and myself, with our two dogs, remained at Mastudj forty-five days, and I did not find the time long, for, apart from the various incidents which broke the monotony of existence, there is no little interest in studying the manners and customs of a savage horde in such an out-of-the-way part of the world.

Upon May 28th, I receive a letter from the English agent at Tchattral, saying that he cannot let me start without an order from the English Government. This agent is a scribe of Afghan origin, who writes English more or less imperfectly. So there is nothing for it but to wait patiently.



TCHATRALI WOMAN AND WARRIOR.

These people do not live, but vegetate, the women doing all the work. They are lean and bony, with regular features, very dark-skinned, and they wear drawers and long loose coats of frieze. It is only the rich of both sexes who

wear under garments of cotton, made after the Turkestan fashion, a loose garment with two wide sleeves and an opening in front.

They are fond of flowers, and wear them in their hair, and pay great attention to their heads, this being about the only part of their body which they do wash. Not but what there is plenty of good water, only they are content to drink it and watch it flow.

There is little or nothing in their empty heads, and once they have satisfied their modest animal tastes, they are quite content. They are as happy as possible when once they have appeased their hunger, and I often wonder whether our Western mania for

“civilizing” other races, is calculated to improve the lot of the savages, as we call them.

The natives belong to a special sect, being neither Shiites nor Sunnis. They are, however, something like the latter, as they detest the Shiites of Guilguit and Yassin, who carry about the image of the Caliph Omar on a donkey. These people are “maoulani,” that is to say, they shave their faces and foreheads, wear long hair and pray in a particular way.

The young prince goes occasionally to play polo, and his appearance is accompanied with considerable pomp. He comes from the fortress, which is about a mile and a quarter from my tent, surrounded by armed men, with a drummer preceding the party. When he plays with his horsemen and makes a good stroke, the gallery applauds to the echo. The polo ground is in the corner of the valley, about three hundred yards from my tent, and it is over a quarter of a mile long.



TCHATRALI.

He has paid me three visits, which I have not returned. In the short conversations which we have had in Persian, upon the felt stretched in front of the tent, I have been able to see how ignorant he is. He cannot even read correctly, or write, and he knows nothing about any books except the Koran, which is occasionally read to him, and the Shah-Nameh of Firdousi. He has not read it, but he has been told that there is such a book, and that it is a very interesting one.

He knows the names of neighbouring princes, such as Nadir-Shah, and though he does not know Baber, he puts his hand up to his mouth as if to reflect, and says that Baber must be the man

who brought his family into the Tchatral, and must be of his line. He knows that Tchinguiz-Khan was a Mogul, and as to Iskander (Alexander), he supposes him to have been a good Mussulman.

This young man with five wives is not rich, so he is not able to keep his family in much affluence: bread, rice, and mutton once a week, such is the food of the garrison, as it appears.

So we have some difficulty in obtaining what is strictly necessary for ourselves. We have to complain every day, and ask for more wood, more flour, and more meat. We cannot get any salt, and the head cook, to whom Rachmed complains, thinks that we eat a great deal too much. We have refused an old goat, whose teeth are loose in his head, and we insist upon sheep. After long discussion, they agree to give us one every other day. This will enable us to have meat once a day, a sheep weighing from five to seven pounds.



TCHATRALI.

Rachmed says that these sheep are not so good as the goats in his own country, and that an Uzbek would not eat them.

We obtain what we require by resorting to two threats, one to the young prince, whom I tell that we are going to start for Guilguit, and that before doing so we shall make a good meal upon the first cow we come across, for if we are to be treated as malefactors, the best way is to go the whole hog. Then, whenever any promise is made us, we bring our influence to bear upon the slave who comes with the provisions each evening at sunset, and who is very afraid of our two dogs, which we have trained to go for the legs of any visitors who have not announced their

coming. We tell him that if he does not bring the promised sheep in the morning, we will have him eaten up by the two dogs, and the slave, who is not a marvel of intelligence, quite believes it.

As we treated this poor fellow very kindly, in reality, he became our fast friend.

The days passed very monotonously, and in the morning we let out the horses, except two stallions, whom the vicinity of a number of mares rendered very intractable and prevented from feeding. In the evening, the horses returned of their own accord, and we gave them a little chopped straw, which was all we had to give them. We then hobbled them, and saw to the wounds on their backs. When the natives did not bring us any straw, we tethered them in the grass, and the next morning the owners of the pastures complained, coming to us and getting their calves bitten by our dogs. We then told them that they must go and complain to their master, whose fault it was that our horses had no provender, and in this way we obtained the respect of these men, who were convinced that we must be important personages.

A month of fasting among the natives was followed by festivals, in the course of which the children ate coloured eggs, and one of the exiles enabled us to take part in these rejoicings by sending us a pound or two of a sort of pasty made of butter and sour milk.

On the ground where polo is played, the people assembled to witness several wrestling matches. The prince was present, and



TCHATRALI.



TCHATRALI SOLDIER.

distributed the prizes to the winners, these prizes consisting of pieces of cotton stuff from Manchester or the Punjab.

One of the wrestlers, who had shown great power, was detected two days later in a flagrant act of adultery and was stabbed to death by the angry husband. The wife escaped with a beating, her lord and master's reason for showing mercy being that she did all the work of the house. When angry, a man may kill his neighbour's dog that has stolen a piece of his meat; but if it is his own dog, he is content with giving him a good kick.

This occurrence created no little sensation, and we saw people climbing up to the roofs of the houses and looking down upon the place where the tragedy had taken place, while in the open air were groups collected to exchange their ideas on the subject.



TCHATRALI DANCER.

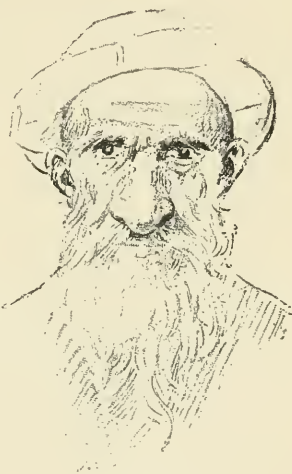
The cemetery of Mastudj is situated upon the right bank, upon a platform overlooking the stream, and at the foot of the steep mountain. It is surrounded by a wall, the top of which is surmounted by sharp spikes, and it was there that the dead man

was interred, stark naked, and with his face turned towards the Kebla. The dead at Mastudj are always stripped of their garments, because this country is so poor that a pair of cotton drawers or a frieze coat are often about all the dead man has left. I saw that the friends of the defunct fetched some stones from the nearest spot and placed them upon his tomb.

The man who had slain him went to tell the prince what had occurred, and came back to eat a dish of mulberries under the

shade of his father-in-law's apricot tree. And so the matter ended, according to the custom of the country.*

We obtain some information as to what is going on in the fortress, thanks to a Swat vendor, who has come to sell cotton goods in this part of the Tchatral. He comes every year at the same period, with goods from Manchester and the Punjab, and as money is almost an unknown commodity in this country he exchanges his goods for woollen cloaks very well woven, and donkeys upon which he loads them, selling both the cloaks and the donkeys in the north of the Punjab and the Swat. He is a tall and thin old man, with a long beard, quite of the Afghan type and speaking Persian fluently. He is very happy in Rachmed's society, and the latter is very fond of a good gossip. Being himself a foreigner, he makes friends all the more readily with us, who are strangers as well, especially as we receive him very kindly and give him a present of some value; while he is very dissatisfied with the young prince who has purchased a large part of his goods and keeps putting him off for the payment of them.



TCHATRALI.

The trader, finding time hang heavy on his hands in the fortress, went out from time to time under the pretext of feeding his two donkeys, and made his way by a roundabout route to our tent. As soon as we saw him coming, we chained up the dogs, so that they might not bark and warn the natives that he was coming to see us.

* NOTE OF THE TRANSLATOR.—Very much the same ending as such affairs have in France, where a form of trial is gone through, I am well aware; but it ends in an acquittal, as a matter of course.

One day, just as Rachmed made the thirty-fifth notch on the tent pole, the old man came to tell us that messengers on foot had arrived from Kashmir, with letters for the Metar of Tchatral. These letters contained orders that we were to be treated kindly and our journey into India facilitated. This was good news, and the truth of it was confirmed the same evening, when a servitor of the young prince brought us two pounds of excellent butter, wrapped up in the bark of a birch-tree, from the fat pasturages of the upper valley of Arkhun.



TCHATRALI MOLLAH.



MIGANE AT TCHATRAL.

This pat of butter seemed to us a sign of the times, presaging, like a comet in the sky, events of great importance.

The next day I sent Rachmed to the fortress, to ask the young prince for a cup, under the pretext that we had broken our last and that we had to drink with our hands.

He was very politely received, not by the prince himself, who, as he was told, was having his reading lesson from the mollah who was completing his much-neglected education, but by the courtiers. After waiting an hour to no purpose, he came back and said—

“ I have been all this time squatted upon the reeds (which are

the carpet of the country). I was among the chief personages of the court, who plied me with questions. They were all picking out fleas from under their clothes, and as I had managed to get a cup, and do not like these insects, I came away."



KAFIR.

The cup which he had brought was made of Kashgar porcelain, but it was too small, so Rachmed mended ours a second time, using paper and apricot sap for cement.

On the same day, a man from Asmar, who had been sent by his khan on a mission to the young prince of Mastudj, came to

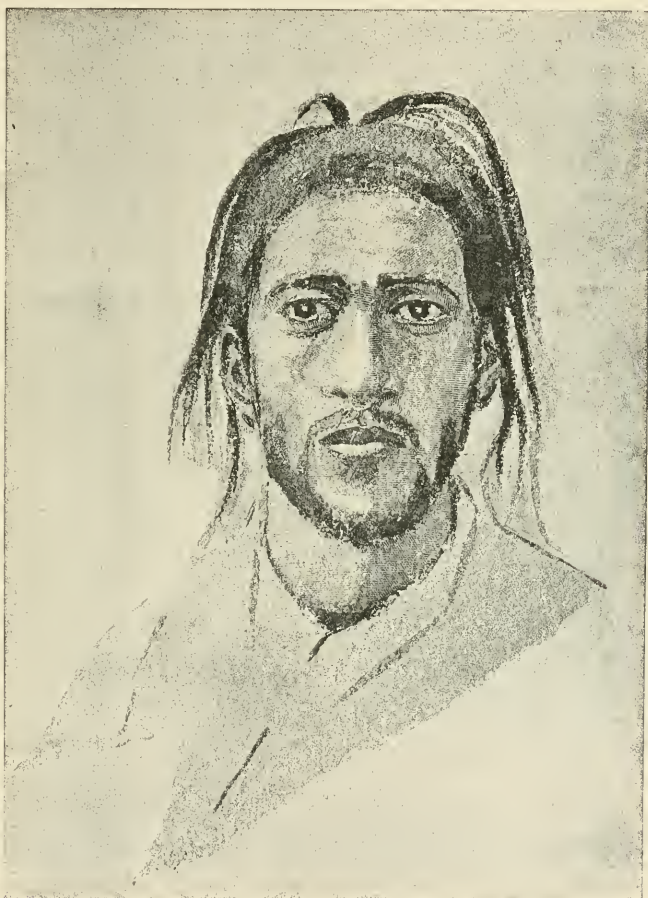
wish us good-bye and ask for a remedy for toothache. The Swat trader, who had acted as interpreter to him, and who had been blind in one eye for fifteen years, took advantage of the same opportunity to ask us if we had not some ointment which would restore his sight. We explained to him that there were certain ailments which could only be cured by Allah, that man has to learn to bear his burden, and that when death comes to deliver him of it, it seems a light one.

The Asmari thought that I had spoken wisely, and when I had given him a letter for our companions at Tchatral—which he delivered safely—he went striding off, his hands gripping the ends of his sword, which he had placed at the back of his neck. This man, with his tall figure, oval head, hooked nose, and shaven forehead, was more like an Arab chief, and had all the dignity of one. He was dressed in a short white cotton shirt and a pair of drawers, each leg as loose as a skirt, these latter being very pleasant wear in summer, as I can testify. He wore Peshawur slippers, and professed the utmost contempt for the Tchatralis, calling them shameless beggars.

Rachmed was very tired of waiting, and at times I had great difficulty in preventing him from going off. When he was in this state of exasperation, so often found in people who are accustomed to great activity, and who are suddenly reduced to absolute inaction, he came to me and gave expression to his complaints. I listened patiently to the advice he gave me that I should kill a Tchatrali chief, steal his horses, and ride off at full speed, changing horses whenever an opportunity offered, hamstringing those which might be used to pursue us, and so forth. Then I turned the conversation into some other channel, and I invariably calmed him down by telling him some story from La Fontaine (whose fables interested him very much) or some other author.

Rachmed had just cut the forty-second notch in the pole of

our tent, and was lamenting our ill-luck, when he saw behind the hedge, about fifty yards off, the head of the trader, who was making signs to him to fasten up the dogs, which were asleep beside us. He then came up and told us that three men had arrived from Guilguit by forced marches, and that they brought



KAFIR.

with them letters from the Viceroy, which were to be delivered into our own hands, that we had been expected for the last fortnight at Guilguit, and that these messengers were going to Tchatral to fetch our companions as soon as they had rested

themselves a little, for they had come in five days, and their feet were all to pieces.

The dove bearing this olive-branch soon appeared, in the form of a little Afghan, dressed in a white cotton robe, very sunburnt, and, as we thought, full of energy and intelligence. He hands us letters dated from Simla, and gives various information to Rachmed, who literally drinks in his words. He tells us that



MAN OF YAGUISTAN.

he is at our service, and that if we wish it, he will start off at once for Tchatral, but that he is scarcely in a condition to walk far, as we may see by his feet. We tell him to take a little breathing-space, kill a sheep in his honour, and do the best we can for him. He tells us that the road is very bad, very stony, and very trying, but that he shall travel it with pleasure upon the return to Kashmir, for this country is a nest of thieves, and if he had to spend a week at Mastudj he should fall ill.

This is quite true, for the place we have inhabited for the last six weeks has, owing to the heavy rains, become a pestilential marsh. It is a regular hot-bed of fever, and it is a miracle that I have not been attacked at all, and Rachmed only slightly, while the teeth of the natives are chattering and their bodies shivering all around us.

The Viceroy sends us a very polite letter, written by his secretary, Sir D. Mackenzie Wallace, and Mr. Durand sends us another, written in English, in which he says that general orders

have been issued to facilitate our journey and save us all discomfort. Nothing could possibly be better.

Two days later, the little Afghan starts for Tchatral, and I then have an altercation with the prince's prime minister, who persists in refusing us horses and guides upon the pretext that he cannot act without orders from his father. We are tired of this aping of discipline and omnipotence, and we formally call upon him, on behalf of the Viceroy, whose seal is familiar to him, to have a caravan ready by the 9th of July, that is to say, the forty-ninth day after our arrival at Mastudj. After much fencing, he eventually gives way, when I have explained to him by a regular Oriental comparison that "the Tchatral is to India what a *magiac* (fly) is under a horse's belly. As long as the fly does not sting much, the horse pays no heed to it. But if it gets troublesome, the horse crushes it with a stamp of the foot."

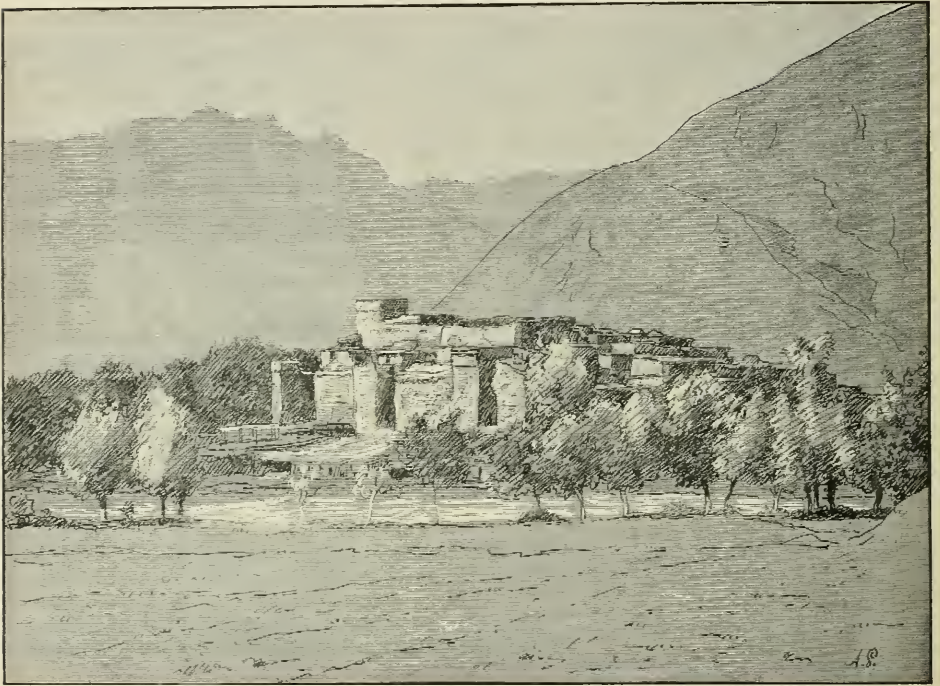
So, on the 9th of July, having been seized with an attack of sciatica the day before, I make Rachmed draw on some boots made of a horse's skin, which he had manufactured for me the previous day. He sets me upright, helps me on to a horse, and off we start. Two days later, my back was quite well again, so true is it that motion is the best of doctors, at all events for travellers, and we had plenty of it up to the end of September.

We reached the other side of the Laspour pass without any great difficulty in procuring donkeys and carriers. Once in the



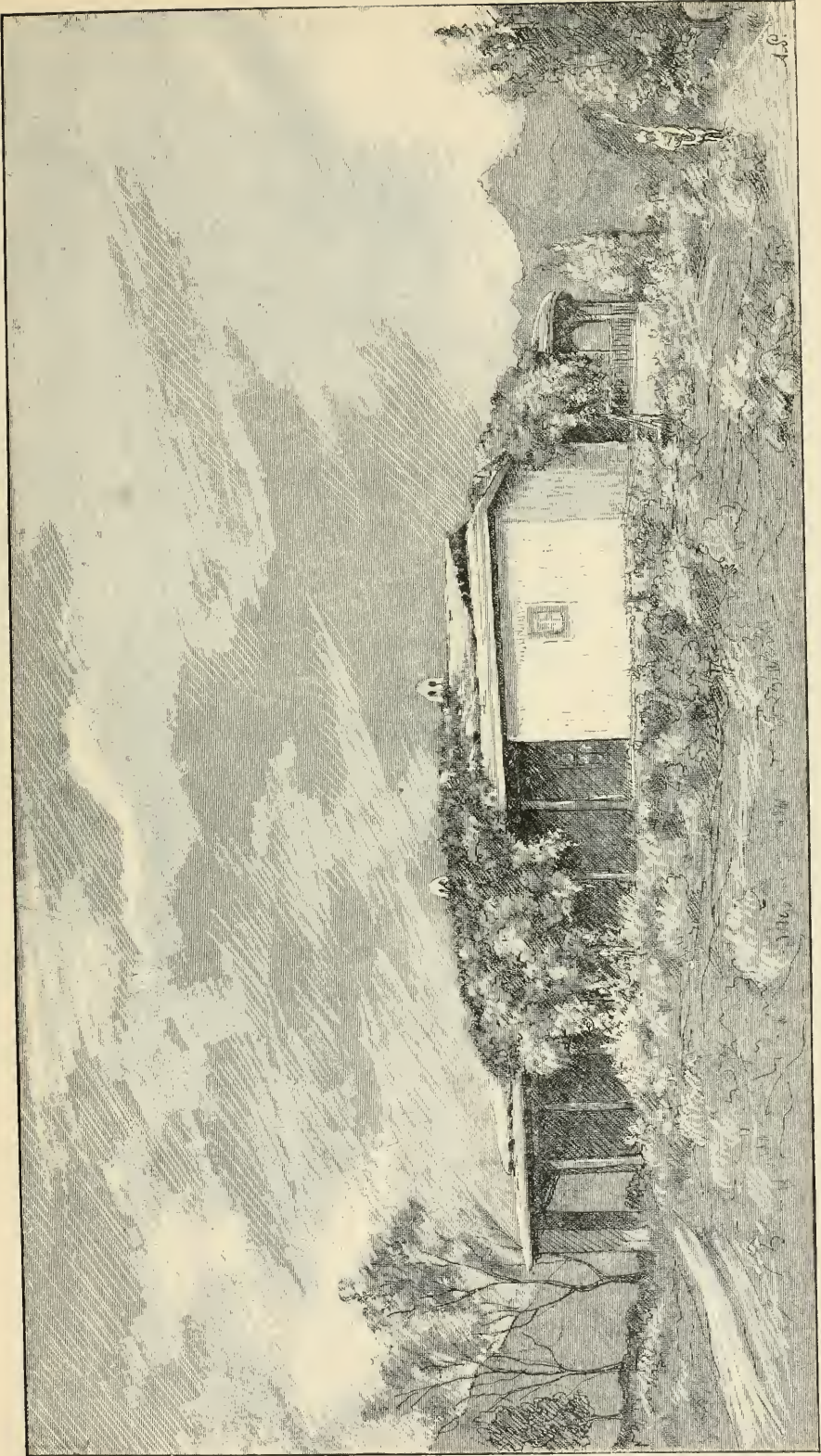
KASHMIR SCRIBE.

ill-defined region which is called the Punial, and on which the Khan of Yassin is said to exercise a certain amount of influence, we met some Kashmir soldiers escorting a bag of rupees, sent us by the Anglo-Indian Government. After getting beyond the hamlet of Teru, we had to skirmish with some very barbarian and talkative people, of whom our Kashmir escort stood in great fear. They said that we were in the Yaguistan, and they



FORTRESS OF GARKUCH.

pronounced the word with fear and trembling, as much as to tell us we must be on our guard. The name of Yaguistan is given to the whole country inhabited by independent tribes. I need not describe in detail the incidents of the journey. At one time, the carriers would throw their loads on the ground; at another, the villagers, with whom we had held a long discussion as to the price we were to pay them for their services, eventually promising them two or three times what they were



BUNGALOW OF MAJOR BIDDULPH AT GUILGUIT.

worth, refused the next morning to have anything to do with us. They assembled around us, fully armed, gesticulating and uttering threats. I picked out in the crowd the chiefs, whose beards were dyed with henna, the most venerable of the whole group, and in a trice I got them together, with the help of Rachmed. With a revolver ready to fire, and by the application of a few blows with a stick, we got them to order their men to obey us, under fear of having their noses taken off. The men of Kashmir, emboldened by our example, helped to keep the others in order, and the elders, seeing that we were in earnest, adopted the wisest course, and made their men reload the baggage and go on to the next stage, where the same scene was re-enacted.

The winter route, which is the easier of the two, had disappeared, for the ice over which one passes in cold weather had melted when the warm weather first set in, and before the rivers have risen, travellers go along their beds, but now that the rainy season had set in, we were obliged to scramble along goat-paths.

It is in this way that we arrived, by Gupis, in Kashmir territory, awaiting at Gahkuch our travelling companions. The junction was effected on the 20th of July, and, after our joyful meeting, we went by double stages to Guilguit, where we were lodged in the bungalow of Major Biddulph, by the order of the native governor.

After five days spent in repose and in letter writing, we left Guilguit on the 29th of July, having paid a visit to the modest tomb of Hayward, which is overshadowed by willows and vines, the overlapping foliage of which forms a very charming canopy for the "gallant officer and accomplished traveller," as the inscription upon it designates him. All around the tomb, there is a babble of water trickling upon a meadow as green as

those in England, and it murmurs so gently that there is no fear of its awakening the plucky traveller who fell a victim to brigands. It is better that he should not be disturbed in his sleep, for thus he will not hear what the Geographical Society of London says about him, in fulfilment of the proverb that "the absent are always in the wrong."

On the 11th of August, we embarked upon Lake Srinagar, in a boat rowed by men who resembled the Sarthians of Turkestan, and by women who remind one of certain Italian types.

We remained at Kashmir just long enough to get a fresh



WOMAN OF KASHMIR.

outfit; we had abandoned our two last horses at three days' march from there, but we had all our men with us, very poor in condition, but in comparative good health, and glad at having succeeded.

M. Dauvergne, who had sent us some provisions which we had received a few stages before reaching Kashmir, offered us a generous hospitality, and, thanks to the kindness of other fellow-countrymen, such as MM. Peychaud, Fabre and Bouley, we could fancy ourselves back in France. The delusion was a pardonable one, for M. Peychaud gave us some excellent Bur-

gundy, the produce of some Bordeaux vines which the climate had transformed. Having said good-bye to these kind friends, as soon as we had got our outfits, we started for Rawul-Pindi, and so by rail and coach to Simla, where we went to thank Lord Dufferin, whose family and staff received us most kindly. It was there that we learnt that M. de Balachoff, a generously disposed Russian residing in Paris, had interested himself in our fate, and had sent a sum of £240 for us to draw upon.

From Simla, we went to embark at Kurrachee on the 1st of September, escaping the cholera, so that we were fortunate to the end. At Port Saïd, we parted company with Menas and Rachmed, who went home by way of Constantinople and Batum.

By the end of September, we had got back to our homes, having completed this last part of our journey as I have said before, "with the rapidity of a bird returning to its nest."



INDIAN OF KURRACHEE.

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